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058-02/2020EN

ISSN 2688-2949 (online)

ISSN 2688-2965 (print)

George Ticknor (1791 - 1871), his Contributions to Hispanism, and a Special Friendship

1

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Abstract: This study is dedicated to George Ticknor (1791-1871), a pioneer of Hispanism in the United States who laid the foundations for Harvard University's modern languages program. Over the course of two articles, the study examines Ticknor's intellectual, academic and pedagogical career—which culminated with the publication of his seminal *History of Spanish Literature* (1849)—, as well as his friendship with Thomas Jefferson, with whom Ticknor shared a passion for books and learning, for academic reform, as well as for Spanish letters and their introduction to American universities.

Keywords: Ticknor, Hispanism, Spanish literature, modern languages, pedagogy, Harvard University

George Ticknor: The Journey toward *History of Spanish Literature* (1849)¹

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Abstract

This article examines the intellectual career of George Ticknor (1791-1871), including his early education at Dartmouth College and in Boston, his studies at the University of Göttingen, his European travels, and his appointment as the first professor of romance languages in the U.S. During his years as a Harvard professor (1819-35), Ticknor laid the foundations for the university's modern languages program, and dedicated himself, with limited success, to reforming the university's structure and curricula. His academic career culminated with the publication of the three-volume *History of Spanish Literature* (1849), which, together with the creation of the era's best private library of Spanish and Portuguese literature, established him as a pioneer of Hispanism in the U.S.

Keywords

Ticknor, Hispanism, modern languages, Spanish literature, pedagogy

[¹ Editors' note: This is an English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the Spanish original submitted by the author. See study 058-02/2020SP.]

Prominent Hispanist George Ticknor was born in Boston in 1791, in the recently independent United States of America. His father, Elisha Ticknor, was a man of some fortune, with connections in Boston's most influential circles. Elisha had been raised in the New Hampshire woodlands, very close to the recently founded Dartmouth College (1769), where he studied. This enabled him to form a strong friendship with the college's first president, Eleazar Wheelock, a Congregationalist minister who played a critical role in the institution's early years. He had coined Dartmouth's motto, *Vox clamantis in deserto* ("A calling voice in the wilderness"), which typifies the college's original evangelical spirit: it was created to educate the sons of colonial farmers and small-scale traders, and, if possible, to Christianize the indigenous Abenaki people. Young George was a precocious, intelligent child, whose parents took great care in his upbringing, as did several private tutors, including Francis Sales, who gave him a basic introduction to French and Spanish, and who would reemerge later in his life. At fourteen, Ticknor entered Dartmouth as a junior; he graduated two years later in 1807. Recalling his time at the college, which then was little more than a small secondary school, he later confessed that he studied little and excelled thanks only to his classmates' low academic performance, but he enjoyed his walks through the near-virgin woods, on the banks of the Connecticut River.

4

I had a good room, and led a very pleasant life [...] The instructors generally were not as good teachers as my father had been, and I knew it; so I took no great interest in study. I remember liking to read Horace, and I enjoyed calculating the great eclipse of 1806, and making a projection of it, which turned out nearly right [...] I was idle in college, and learnt little; but led a happy life, and ran into no wildness or excesses. Indeed, in that village life, there was small opportunity for such things, and those with whom I lived and associated, both in college and in the society of the place, were excellent people. (Ticknor, 1876, p. 7)

After receiving this imperfect formal education, he returned to Boston, where he studied classical languages with John Sylvester Gardiner, rector of Trinity Church and distinguished scholar of Greek and Latin. In 1810, Ticknor began a course of study in law, which he completed three years later. Gardiner, who was president of the influential Anthology Club and a member of the Boston Athenaeum, introduced him to

the city's intellectual circles, where, at just over twenty, Ticknor was highly esteemed by his elders. As David B. Tyack notes in *George Ticknor and the Boston Brahmins* (1967), during those formative years, Ticknor became a member of Boston's best "Unitarian" society, to which such influential men as Harvard President (1810-28) John Thornton Kirkland belonged. Dissatisfied with a career in law and resolved to continue studying letters in Europe—given the precariousness of education in the young republic and its ill-stocked libraries—and with his father's blessing, he decided to travel to Virginia with his friend Francis Calley Gray to visit the sage of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States. Besides interest in meeting one of the nation's most learned men, Ticknor also hoped to attain letters of recommendation that would give him access to more exclusive circles in London, Paris, and the major German cities; Ticknor aspired to eventually deepen his literary studies at a renowned German university. He brought Jefferson a letter from the country's second president, John Adams, as proof of his mettle. After a horrible mid-winter journey, he reached Jefferson's house on Saturday, February 4, 1815. Despite staying only three days, he made a strong impression on Jefferson.² This meeting was the first in a fruitful personal relationship between the young Boston intellectual and the great Virginian statesman and man of letters. Beginning with that visit, Ticknor undertook to purchase books for Jefferson, as he would continue to do for the next ten years. As is clear from the correspondence between the men (a correspondence insightfully and thoroughly examined for this publication by Rolena Adorno), both took a great interest in the study of modern languages and the establishment of American universities on par with Europe's best.

5

Madame de Staël's work *De l'Allemagne* (1968 [1813]), and specifically its observations on German universities (chapter 28), doubtless had a strong impact on Ticknor. Besides these universities (Göttingen, Halle, Jena, etc.) being "les plus

² The Ticknor Society has published a pamphlet on this visit, which includes the correspondence between Ticknor and his father on the journey, notes from Gray's journal, and letters between Jefferson and Adams in which they discuss young Ticknor: "The best bibliograph I have met with" - *George Ticknor Visits Monticello, 1815*," edited by Jeremy B. Dibbell (2016).

savantes de l'Europe" (De Staël, 1968 [1813], p. 137), they also operated almost as a "free body within the state," where rich and poor students were distinguished only according to their personal merit, and foreigners from around the world gladly submitted themselves to a form of equality that could only be altered by natural superiority (De Staël, 1968 [1813], p. 138). Ticknor found this notion of social equality and academic ascent through personal effort highly enticing. The University of Göttingen, which at the time was the most innovative and advanced in literary and philological studies, became his objective. Ticknor had heard of the university's extensive library, which only heightened his attraction. Equipped with letters of recommendation, he departed for Europe at the age of twenty-four. After a few weeks in London and a trip through the Netherlands, he reached Göttingen in August 1815, accompanied by his friend Edward Everett (future secretary of state, governor of Massachusetts, and President of Harvard from 1846 to 1849). In his edition of *Life, Letters, and Journals*, George Stillman Hillard writes that "on arriving at Göttingen, which was to be Mr. Ticknor's home for twenty months, he felt like the pilgrim who had reached the shrine of his faith; here he found the means and instruments of knowledge in an abundance and excellence such as he had never before even imagined" (Ticknor, 1876, p. 70).

6

At the university, Ticknor was something of an oddity: a learned, well-mannered American who clashed with the prevailing European stereotype of the recently founded republic's new citizens, who were considered uncouth and undereducated. Ticknor's course of study was extremely rigorous: he spent between fourteen and sixteen hours a day in classes, with tutors, or studying privately, with short breaks to eat, practice fencing, and take the occasional walk. To improve his German, he translated Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* into English. He studied German, Greek, history, and some science and took classes with philologist and historian Friedrich Bouterwek, author of the great twelve-volume history of European literature, published between 1801 and 1819, whose third volume covers Spanish and Portuguese literature (1804). Bouterwek's teachings, recorded in the precise notes Ticknor took during his classes,

would have a major effect on his view of literary history. J. G. Herder and the Schlegel brothers' ideas on the spirit of the people—the famous principle of *Volksgeist*—as applied to literature, as well as the emergence of national literatures, were key aspects of his academic work. In a November 1816 letter to his friend Edward T. Channing, reacting to the moment's literary polemics, Ticknor spoke broadly of German literature (Jaksić, 2007, p. 84):

I mean to show you by foreign proof that the German literature is a peculiar national literature, which, like the miraculous creation of Deucalion, has sprung directly from their own soil, and is so intimately connected with their character, that it is very difficult for a stranger to understand it. (Ticknor, 1876, p. 119)

Around that same time, Ticknor received an offer from Kirkland to take the recently created Abiel Smith Professorship in Romance Languages and lead Harvard's first French and Spanish program. The details of this episode—which is of paramount significance to the founding of U.S. Hispanism—can be found in Tyack's groundbreaking study (1967, pp. 62-63, pp. 85-90) and in subsequent studies by Hart, Kagan, Jaksić, Fernández Cifuentes, and Martín Ezpeleta. The issue, in short, was this: before accepting the position, Ticknor asked for advice and economic support from his parents, as the salary (in fact, he was not offered a salary, but a fee for each class taught) would not allow him to live decently in Boston while also making plans for a future family life.³ As his knowledge of Spanish language and literature was precarious, he proposed, to his parents and to Kirkland, to extend his stay in Europe by several months so that he might travel to Spain with the aim of improving his Spanish, experiencing the country's reality *in situ*, and contacting several bibliophiles and booksellers to purchase what he would need to prepare for his classes and lectures at Harvard (at the time, books of Spanish and Portuguese literature were extremely

³ Section 6 of the official contract, voted on and approved by the Board of Overseers and the Corporation on July 17, 1817, and sent to Ticknor, reads: "The first Smith Professor shall be Professor of Belles Lettres with authority to give instruction in public and private Lectures in this department to such members of the University as may be determined but with no regular salary stipulated by the College, except that the College will insert and collect in the Quarter Bills the dues to the professor from his pupils, and the attendants on his lectures." Harvard University Archives, UA 115 1038.

scarce in Boston). After deciding to accept the position, he spent most of 1817 and some of 1818 traveling through France, Switzerland, and Italy, with productive stays in Paris, Geneva, and Rome, where he made good use of Jefferson's letters of introduction. From Rome he traveled through France and into Spain—grudgingly, according to his journal entries—on April 30, 1818. By then, he had already met such prestigious and influential figures as Lafayette, Alexander von Humboldt, Madame de Staël, Augustus Schlegel, and Chateaubriand. The night before crossing from Perpignan into Spain, he purchased a copy of *Don Quixote* from a bookshop. This was a significant moment in Ticknor's bibliographic vocation, as that copy of *Don Quixote* could be considered the origin of what would become, at the time, the world's best private collection of Spanish literature, which Ticknor would amass over the course of the next fifty years. As Homero Serís points out:

Upon crossing the Pyrenees in 1818, he already possessed what could be considered the cornerstone of the library he planned to create: a copy of *Don Quixote*, purchased in Perpignan on April 29 of that same year. Subsequently, during his four months in Madrid, followed by travels throughout southern Spain and, finally, Portugal, he acquired a large number of books, with the efficient and smart support of José Antonio Conde, his tutor in Madrid. (Serís, 1964, p. xv)⁴

8

It is worth noting a few significant passages on his first impressions of Spain, as these would have a profound impact on his view of the country and alter his entire historiographic project. Minutes after passing through the Col de Perthus mountain pass he noted: "I saw before me two fallen columns and broken crowns which marked the separation of the two kingdoms. I felt that I was in Spain, and so deep and sad a feeling I have not had in all my absence when only myself was concerned" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 9). In Figueres, where a festival was taking place, Ticknor rallied and felt better, writing that "I felt that it was well to be among such a people" (Ticknor, 1913,

⁴ As Clara Louisa Penney describes it in the introduction to her edition of the correspondence between Ticknor and Pascual de Gayangos: "Although as early as 1806, James Freeman of King's Chapel had presented to him a copy of the Antwerp, 1672-73 edition of *Don Quixote*, it is probable that the cornerstone of the Ticknor Spanish library, so deservedly famous, was the copy bought at Perpignan on April 29, 1818 as Ticknor was entering Spain. (It might be surmised also that this was the copy which enlivened the diligence journey from Barcelona to Madrid)." (Penney, 1927, pp. xxx-xxxi).

p. 10). Upon reaching Girona, he was astonished to see the ravages of war on the cityscape and marveled at the Gironans' resistance against Napoleonic troops. Admiring their patriotism, he wrote: "It is the first time I have been on a genuine field of Spanish heroism" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 10); even so, he notices that "Gerona, too, gave me the first glimpse of another less favourable side to the Spanish character; I mean its religious slavery" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 10). Surprised, he acknowledged that it was the first time he fully understood the meaning of living in a Catholic country. With regard to Barcelona and its character, he proclaimed that "if their fanaticism in religion is great, their fanaticism in pleasure is greater" (Ticknor, 1913, pp. 15-16); he was dazzled by the diversity of the city's public dances and the "coquetry" of the women. He spent thirteen days traveling from Barcelona to Madrid, an exhausting journey, and crossed through impoverished villages in a country decimated by war. On the valor of Zaragoza against the reviled Napoleon, he wrote: "And how is it possible that human nature can have such force and resolution?" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 21). Here he turned to the romantic concept of the *Volksgeist*, in which he was so deeply immersed while studying in Germany: "I do all honour to the spirit that defended Zaragoza" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 21). Ticknor linked the present and past histories and established a connection between Sagunto, Numancia, Girona, and Zaragoza. He declared: "And it is a spirit, too, which I am satisfied has always existed in Spain, and never existed anywhere else" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 21). Becoming even more emotional, he continued: "I do honour to the Spanish character, and especially to the Aragonese, for to an Aragonese of the lower class I would trust my purse or my life without hesitation" (Ticknor, 1913, p. 22). Thus, Ticknor's first impressions of Spain were of an impoverished country that is no more than the shadow of its glorious past (hence the relevance of the fallen columns trope, the remains of the temple that was once a powerful nation). Despite what he considered the reigning religious fanaticism (the young Bostonian was horrified, as a Unitarian Protestant, by the tremendous influence of Catholicism in its most conservative form), Ticknor admiringly described what he identified as the genuine, purely Spanish national character that emanated from its enduring spirit, something he had not found to the same degree in any of the other

European nations he had visited. For the young Ticknor, it was in the working classes, and not in aristocratic circles, where the most unalloyed national virtues could be found. Traveling at an uncomfortable speed through the ancient kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, with his copy of *Don Quixote* as vademecum and in the company of the painter José de Madrazo—who returned to the Spanish Court from Italy to catalogue the Royal Collection—he contemplated the country’s social reality through a deeply Cervantine lens. The discovery of Spain’s common people and their ancestral culture would be a source of fascination for the rest of his life.

In addition to his personal journal, we also have access to Ticknor’s opinions as he shared them in his abundant correspondence. One particularly significant item is a letter to Elisha Ticknor penned in Madrid on May 23, 1818, in which he told his father about the journey to the capital, highlighting, as he did in his journal, the poor condition of the roads, the deplorable lodging, and the difficulty of finding food: “twice I have dined in the very place with the mules; and it is but twice that I have slept on a bedstead, and the rest of the time on their stone floors” (Ticknor, 1876, p. 185). He also complained about the lack of cleanliness at the country’s inns, which prevented him from changing clothes. But here, too, his first impression shifted, and he conveyed a sense of discovery and enlightenment:

. . . . And yet, will you believe me when I add to all this that I never made a gayer journey in my life. It is, notwithstanding, very true. My companions were excellent; and, with that genuine, unpretending courtesy and hearty, dignified kindness for which their nation has always been famous, did everything they could to make me feel as few of the inconveniences of the journey as they could, even at the expense of taking them upon themselves. (Ticknor, 1876, p. 186)

His criticisms of the country’s precarious material conditions were followed by a semantic correction in which he affirmed that despite its flaws, Spain was a unique country within Europe, an affirmation that would become a cliché of nineteenth-century travel literature.

Ticknor remained in Madrid from May to September. In his journal and letters, he described the city and its buildings, public institutions, libraries, academies, and museums; he documented festivals and theatrical performances; he admired, and was frightened by, bullfighting, to which he dedicated numerous pages and special attention. With regard to King Ferdinand VII, with whom he met and conversed, he wrote: “Of the government there is very little good to say. The king, personally, is a vulgar blackguard. The obscenity, the low, brutal obscenity of his conversation, and the rudeness of his manners, are matters of notoriety” (Ticknor, 1913, p. 27). He regularly attended elegant social gatherings in the capital, where he met with the Duchess of Osuna, Madrid’s high society, and a select group of foreign diplomats. He received private lessons on Spanish and literature from the erudite bibliophile José Antonio Conde, whom Ticknor described as “unquestionably among the most distinguished men in Spain for his knowledge of Spanish literature and its antiquities” (Ticknor, 1913, p. 37). From his contact with that society, to his own surprise, he confirmed that the Spanish common folk were among the finest people to be found in all of Europe. From this perspective, rooted in Romantic philosophy, Ticknor compared the character of the people with the character of the nation, and concluded early on that this imbrication was most manifest in Spanish literature, from its origins until the present moment, though he viewed contemporary writing to be overly influenced by foreign models.

11

His journey to Andalusia in search of Arab influence left him dazzled, like so many Anglo-American and French travelers after him. In Cordoba he met the Duke of Rivas and his younger brother Don Ángel de Saavedra, the future Duke of Rivas and Romantic man of letters. From there he traveled to Granada, for his obligatory visit to the Alhambra. He contemplated the incredible Nasrid palace, whose precarious conservation prompted him to reflect with melancholy: “The ruins that remain are worthy monuments of the glory and splendor that once inhabited them” (Ticknor, 1876, p. 230). Ticknor’s friend Washington Irving would express a similar feeling in his famous work *The Alhambra: A Series of Tales and Sketches of the Moors and*

Spaniards (1902 [1832]), in which he describes his experiences during an 1829 visit. This work made the Alhambra Palace a pilgrimage site for all learned travelers visiting Andalusia in the nineteenth century, and, for that matter, today.

After traveling through Málaga, Gibraltar, Cádiz, and Seville—where he visited the General Archive of the Indies—he began the journey to Lisbon in the company of smugglers, for lack of a safer way to travel. His experience could have been taken from a ballad or a romance novel, and he immensely enjoyed the adventuresome atmosphere. The future historian of Spanish literature left the country on October 15, 1818 (five and a half months after his arrival), and he would never return. He had already established his notion of the country, its people, and its literature, a notion that would remain virtually unaltered for the rest of his life. He viewed Spain as a place where religiosity, patriotism, and economic sluggishness all converged; to these characteristics he added a genuinely picturesque landscape and the presence of a few educated minorities amidst a sea of ignorant but dignified masses. With philosophical projections rooted in German romanticism, Ticknor reached the conclusion that it was common villagers who evinced the immutable virtues of the Spanish race, despite their squalor; it was their hardy, admirable national character that shone through in the national literature.

With his judgments and prejudices, and after making a few good friends, Ticknor left the Iberian Peninsula for England. From there, he went to Paris to purchase Spanish and Portuguese books for the Harvard library and his own collection that he had been unable to find even in Spain and Portugal. There, he met the exiled Leandro Fernández de Moratín. Before returning to the U.S., he traveled to Scotland and met Sir Walter Scott, whom he admired, and by June 1819 he was back in Boston, ready to become the first Smith Professor of Romance Languages. Ticknor threw himself whole-heartedly into his academic responsibilities and married shortly after his return, in 1821, to an educated woman named Anna Eliot, the youngest daughter of tradesman and banker Samuel Eliot. With his newly minted professorship and his

learned wife, he established himself as one of the most distinguished representatives of the Boston Brahmins, spending the rest of his life in the city and in New England playing the role of an extraordinary intellectual leader. In witness of the high social status he achieved in less than a decade, famous painter Thomas Sully—who did the portraits of Presidents Jefferson, Jackson, and John Quincy Adams, as well as the Marquis de Lafayette and several of the era’s other influential personages—painted Ticknor’s portrait in 1828 (it can now be found in the permanent collection of the Hood Museum at Dartmouth).

At Harvard, Ticknor was tasked with creating a French and Spanish program from virtually nothing. Using his extensive notes from Göttingen, and after his exhaustive study of the books he found in European libraries, as well as the numerous works by Spanish authors and critical works he purchased for his personal library and the university’s, he developed the U.S.’s first complete course on Spanish literature. It was published as *Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on the History and Criticism of Spanish Literature* (1823). Based on that program of study, which Thomas R. Hart Jr. and other Ticknor experts have studied in detail (including, most recently, Taylor Leigh in his doctoral thesis), Ticknor developed what would become his most important work, *History of Spanish Literature* (1849). The *Syllabus* constitutes an initial systematic plan for teaching Spanish literature at the university level, based on a rigorous philological methodology. The central thesis of the program is linked to the main ideas Ticknor brought back from Europe, which would guide his entire literary-historiographic project. With his *Syllabus* and later with the *History of Spanish Literature*, Ticknor became the leading authority in the discipline, overtaking the reputation of Bouterwek and Sismondi, over whom he had two key advantages: he had visited Spain and he had studied Spanish literature from original sources. Ticknor expressed this critical difference between himself and his predecessors in the “Advertisement” to his *Syllabus*, dated May 1, 1823:

13

[B]oth Bouterwek and Sismondi complain of the want of access to a sufficient collection of Spanish books, and their respective histories have certainly suffered much from it. This want, I have not felt. Accidental circumstances have placed within my control a collection of works in Spanish literature nearly complete for that purpose. (Ticknor, 1823, pp. iii-iv)

These “circumstances” were merely sufficient economic funds to acquire a unique collection of books that was unmatched in number; to that, Ticknor added expert knowledge of the material that enabled him to acquire copies of the works that were most relevant to his purposes, including incunabula and first editions. Ticknor announced that the topic of his publication was something novel, important, and interesting, by which he suggested that this other national literature—less known and less cherished than English, French, German, and Italian literatures—was a field of study worthy of exploration, and on which he would establish himself as an authority within his academic and intellectual community. Nevertheless, despite his exceptional interest and scholarship on Spanish literature, his public reputation during his Harvard years, until the publication of his *History*, rested on the other specialty that fell within the scope of his professorship, French literature.

14

Ticknor, for whom philological rigor was essential, divided the study of Spanish literature into three eras or periods: a) from 1155 to 1555 (with the death of Charles V), an era that was free from the influence of foreign literature; “untouched” was the word he used; b) from 1555 to 1700, and c) from 1700 to Ticknor’s era (the least impressive period). He created a total of 251 entries or schemata dedicated to specific topics and authors, which formed the basis for the classes or lectures that Ticknor gave to his students. The fourth entry (“*Syllabus 4*”), for example, is dedicated to *El Cid*, which Ticknor honors as the foundational literary text of the Spanish national literature. His entire program follows the following methodology: first, he notes the date during which the text was written (1150) and its author, based on original sources or copies in his possession: “MSS. of it purporting to be a copy dated 1207”; there is a brief assessment of the work: “—earliest tendency of an epic in Modern Europe—author unknown—notice of the Cid b. 1026, died 1099”; followed by scholarly references to

the work: “J.v. Müller in Herder’s Lit. Werke III, xviii-lviii” and “Review of it by Sir W. Scott, Quarterly Rev I, 123”; he concludes with a bibliographic reference: “The whole poem with notes &c. in Sanchez, Colección de Poesias Anteriores (sic) al Siglo xv. 8vo. 1779-1790. Tom. I, 231-373.” Other significant entries include the nineteenth: “Beauty of the Spanish Ballads, in general—a part of the national character—and filled with the poetical spirit of the times and country that produced them” (Ticknor, 1823, p. 9). Cervantes is the topic of entries 96 to 112; Ticknor concludes his assessment of *Don Quixote* by writing: “It is the oldest classical specimen of romantic fiction” (Ticknor, 1823, p. 42). The second period is organized by author and genre, with special attention to the “leading masters,” who are headed by Lope de Vega (entries 115-132)—whom Ticknor considers to be the creator and greatest exponent of Spanish national drama, as he states in entry 131—Pedro Calderón de la Barca (entries 152-154), and, to a lesser degree, Góngora and Quevedo. The third era is broken down into monarchs. Entry 241 (within the section on Charles IV) covers Leandro Fernández de Moratín, whose *El sí de las niñas* Ticknor highlights as the best of his comedies (Ticknor, 1823, p. 83). He concludes with only four entries on the contemporary period, the era of Ferdinand VII, with forlorn reflections on the devastating consequences on the national literature’s trajectory during that convulsive and destructive era. Leigh succinctly summarizes the *Syllabus* as follows:

15

The *Syllabus* remains a noteworthy document due to its novelty, ambition, and combination of forms, consisting of brief critical remarks, historical and biographical notes, and, of course, a proto-canon of Spanish literature. It also serves as a window into the young Ticknor’s understanding of literature, an understanding founded upon the predominant ideas of the Boston interpretive community, the writings of influential thinkers from abroad, and, of course, his formative experiences in Europe. (Leigh, 2018, p. 96)

On that model, Ticknor built a broad historiographic project that would come to its full fruition three decades later, when his study was aimed at a wider audience. Both publications form the foundation of Hispanism as an independent academic discipline in the U.S.

Ticknor aspired to revamp not only the study of modern languages, but also the structure of the university. In 1825, he published his *Remarks on Changes Lately Proposed or Adopted at Harvard University*, in which he summarized his ideas on how to invigorate the university's curricula, the way it organized different disciplines, and even student life on campus. Some of Ticknor's specific complaints were the university's undemanding academics (made worse by long vacation periods), malaise among resident instructors who felt they were doing work beyond their compensation, and the way students were grouped into subjects based on their year at the university rather than their knowledge of the field. Ticknor also opposed the "recitations" method, in which students had to learn their lessons by heart and recite them in front of the class. His innovative proposals failed after meeting with resistance from students, other professors, and much of the administration; most resented that Ticknor (who was exempted from living on campus thanks to his social status) would attempt to modernize Harvard according to a model that, though prestigious, was foreign. After all, practically no one else had spent two years studying at an illustrious German university, followed by another two traveling across Europe and mingling with major writers, aristocrats, and heads of state. President Kirkland, however, made an effort to placate his former protégé—whom he suspected was plotting to replace him as the head of the university—by allowing Ticknor to make some reforms, but only within his department, over which he was given wide autonomy. These academic confrontations triggered a serious crisis at Harvard, which, during those years, was still only a regional institution deeply rooted in New England; the administration managed to calm the waters by forcing Kirkland to resign in 1828. Ticknor himself would resign a few years later, leaving his position to the famous poet and Hispanist Henry W. Longfellow (1807-82). With regard to Ticknor's reforms, James Russell Lowell (1819-91), the third Smith professor, declared:

The force of the new impulse did not last long. It was premature. The students were really school boys, and the college was not yet capable of the larger university life. The conditions of American life, too, were such that young men looked upon scholarship neither as an end nor as a means, but simply as an accomplishment." (cited in Tyack, 1967, p. 127)

These controversies, amply documented by Tyack (in the third chapter, titled “The Cause of Sound Learning” [1967, pp. 85-129]), resonated throughout the region, as was reflected in the contemporary press. Newspapers such as *The National Gazette* (October 11, 1825), *The Boston Courier* (October 27, 1825), *The Portland Advertiser* (November 1, 1825), *The American Journal of Letters, Christianity, and Cultural Affairs* (November 19, 1825), and *The Boston Recorder & Telegraph* (November 25, 1825) echoed the conflict.⁵ These publications’ articles offer a window not only into the academic questions with which Ticknor was so concerned, but also into contemporary Boston social life as a whole, the battlefield on which this “academic war” was fought. Over half a century later, Harvard made major reforms under the direction of innovative president Charles William Eliot—Anna Eliot Ticknor’s nephew—who led the institution from 1869 to 1909. After George Ticknor’s death, Eliot recognized the value of his uncle’s thwarted, pioneering labor, with ambitious plans to model American colleges after major European universities. In this respect, historian Mark Peterson’s recent book *The City-State of Boston* (chapter ten, “On the German Road to Athens” [2019, pp. 486-539]) helps us better understand the admiration Ticknor, Edward Everett, and other Boston-area professors and intellectuals held for the German education system, which the University of Göttingen fully embodied in those early decades of the nineteenth century. One of Ticknor’s most noteworthy undertakings during his Harvard years, which must be mentioned, albeit briefly, was his excellent mentorship of the generation that came after him. The most successful of his young colleagues was William H. Prescott (1796-1859), author of major studies on Ferdinand and Isabella, Charles V, and Phillip II, as well as works on the conquests of Mexico and Peru; like Ticknor, Prescott based his research on numerous original sources.⁶

⁵ Material accessed at the Harvard University Archives, UA 115.1038.

⁶ After Prescott’s death, Ticknor wrote his final work: an intellectual biography of his dear friend, *Life of William Hickling Prescott* (1864). In his “Prefatory Notice,” Ticknor wrote: “But, if after all, this Memoir should fail to set the author of the ‘Ferdinand and Isabella’ before those who had not the happiness to know him personally, as a man whose life for more than forty years was one of almost constant struggle, —of an almost constant sacrifice of impulse to duty, of the present to the future, —it will have failed to teach its true lesson, or to present my friend to others as he stood before the very few who knew him as he was” (pp. iii-iv).

In addition to his dedication to philological and literary-historiographic studies, Ticknor was also concerned with the pedagogical aspects of his profession. In 1833, he published the short work *Lecture on the Best Methods of Teaching the Living Languages*, based on a talk he gave before the American Institute of Boston on August 24, 1832. In this pioneering work, Ticknor proposes learning modern languages based on their oral dimension, as he viewed speaking as the natural mode of language acquisition and as the essential link between various individuals within a community. Language, he asserts, is the human tool *par excellence* for the expression of desires, feelings, and passions:

The most important characteristic of a living language, —the attribute in which resides its essential power and value,—is, that it is a spoken one; that it serves for that constant and principal bond of union between the different individuals of a whole nation, without which they could not, for a moment, be kept together as a community. (Ticknor, 1833, p. 11)⁷

In the lecture, Ticknor stresses the need to begin teaching *living languages* (his preferred term) using a communicative approach based on exposing students to the spoken language from the outset. This must be the approach, he argues, as language is the greatest exponent of a (national) community of speakers. Springboarding from this premise, Ticknor argues that, for children, the teaching method must be inductive, whereas for adults, given the added difficulty of learning a language later in life, it must be deductive (Ticknor, 1833, p. 27). After initial immersion in the spoken language, students must transition to a rigorous study of grammar, paying special attention to pronunciation and idiomatic phrases; all of this ought to be supported with small exercises designed by the instructor to facilitate learning of verbs, articles, nouns, pronouns, and other elements of grammar. Students should then go on to translate excerpts from “pleasant” books by notable authors so that they can later read complete narrative works. The readings Ticknor recommended before his distinguished audience (Harvard professors, the Boston elite, society women, and

18

⁷ I led a symposium at Dartmouth on November 1, 2019, entitled “From George Ticknor’s *The Best Methods of Teaching the Living Languages* (1832) to Best Methods in 2019,” which, in addition to acting as an introduction to Ticknor’s Hispanist legacy, paid special attention to his *Methods*. Participants highlighted Ticknor’s contributions in the field of methodology and “experiential learning.”

interested members of the public) included Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* (1751), Schiller's *History of the Thirty Years' War* (1790), and Moratín's comedies. Unsurprisingly, Ticknor, being a scholar, praised the communicative approach as a key aspect of interpersonal relationships, but stressed that the ultimate purpose of learning living languages, beyond conversation and personal interaction, was facilitating access to the great works of national literature, in which the people's living character resided. Even so, it is worth noting that after praising the great masters of literature (Goethe, Molière, Cervantes) and emphasizing the need to read and learn from books, which he loved so dearly, he decided to conclude his lecture with an elegy to interpersonal communication between professors and students as the best way to teach a language. If reading the masters is essential to forming an in-depth knowledge of national literature, then learning the language—with the goal of acquiring a level of competency that makes it possible to understand and enjoy the great works, as an educated native speaker could—must begin with the natural model by which people learn their mother tongues:

The success of those teachers, who rely not merely upon the dead letter of books, but also upon the living knowledge which is imparted only by living explanation; —nay, which is communicated by the very tones of the voice and the expression of the countenance with a vivacity and effect never found or felt by the most eager lover of acquisition in a cold and silent page. (Ticknor, 1833, p. 31)

19

In short, the most noteworthy aspects of this early document in defense of the communicative approach are: a) teaching languages as living entities, b) special attention to idiomatic expressions and specific phrases that may harbor hallmarks of a people's character, c) selecting the best approach, out of many, for each particular group of individuals, d) seeking out a pleasant way to learn the spoken language and become acquainted with the best works of the national literature.

It is important to note, in any case, that as a professor, Ticknor hardly ever taught elementary or intermediate levels (as is still the case today in most language departments), leaving that essential but hard-going task to instructors who had

experience wrangling with young Harvard men, the progeny of New England's commercial elite, who at that time were more interested in having fun and preparing for lucrative professions, like their fathers', than they were in studying a difficult subject for which they saw no immediate practical use. Ticknor's early reforms enjoyed invaluable support from professors of grammar and introductory literature courses, including the distinguished Francis Sales, who translated Auguste-Louis Josse's *Éléments de la grammaire espagnole* (1799), which was published in 1822, in an edition that was revised, improved, and adapted for the English.⁸

In 1835, disheartened with his struggle against an obsolete academic structure and shaken by his only son's early death at the age of five, Ticknor resigned the Smith professorship, which he ceded to Longfellow, who, like Ticknor, had traveled to Europe in 1829; Longfellow had published a version of his journal entitled *Outre-mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea* as a pamphlet in 1830 and as a book in 1835, drawing on his knowledge of Spanish literature in his romantic descriptions of the land's beauty and the vivacity of its backwards inhabitants:

20

My recollections of Spain are of the most lively and delightful kind. The character of the soil and its inhabitants, —the stormy mountains and free spirits of the North,— the prodigal luxuriance and gay voluptuousness of the South, —the history and traditions of the past, resembling more the fables of romance than the solemn chronicle of events, —a soft and yet majestic language that falls like martial music on the ear, a literature rich in the attractive lore of poetry and fiction,— these, but not these alone, are my reminiscences of Spain [...] As I write these words, a shade of sadness steals over me [...] My mind instinctively reverts from the degradation of the present to the glory of the past; or looking forward with strong misgivings, but with yet stronger hopes, interrogates the future". (Longfellow, 1850 [1835], pp. 180-181)

As is clear from this excerpt, the young poet's sensations were very similar to those experienced by Ticknor and Irving: he, too, admired the sublime history, literature, and art of Spain and its glorious past, which he viewed as mired in the present state of decline that only the character and vivacious spirit of the people could correct.

⁸ Iván Jaksic (2012 [2007]) dedicates a few pages (228-232) to studying the figure of Sales—whose original name was François Sala—who taught French and Spanish at Harvard between 1816 and 1854. His published editions included Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas*, a selection of Golden Age dramatic works, *Fábulas literarias de Tomas de Iriarte* and an edition of *Don Quixote* (1832).

The Ticknors went to Europe, where they spent four years (1835-38); in every country they visited (England, France, Germany, Austria, and Italy), they were welcomed by the cream of society, which viewed them as representatives of a new aristocracy, built not on lineage but on money and culture. The individual diaries in which George and Anna describe the same events are exceptional documents that offer direct knowledge of European society at the time, in particular its most important writers and public figures.⁹ Although they did not travel to Spain, Ticknor continued to grow his collection of Spanish and Portuguese books with the assistance of specialized booksellers and through his relationship with the Arabist and scholar Pascual de Gayangos, who—from London, Paris, and Madrid—kept Ticknor up-to-date on old and new bibliographic developments.¹⁰ On this second voyage, Ticknor also promoted William Prescott's historiographic studies on Spain, including *The History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic* (1837), which was published during Ticknor's time in Europe. Upon his return to Boston, now free of burdensome academic responsibilities, Ticknor spent ten years writing his magnum opus, which was finally published in Boston and London in 1849, and had an immediate impact on the field of Hispanism. The work cleaved to the same structure Ticknor had developed for his *Syllabus*:

[First Period:] "The literature that existed in Spain between the first appearance of the present written language and the early part of the Reign of the Emperor Charles the Fifth; or from the end of the Twelfth Century to the beginning of the Sixteenth."

[Second Period:] "The literature that existed in Spain from the accession of the Austrian family to its extinction; or from the beginning of the Sixteenth century to the end of the Seventeenth."

[Third Period:] "The literature that existed in Spain between the accession of the Bourbon family and the invasion of Bonaparte; or from the beginning of the Eighteenth century to the early part of the Nineteenth." (Ticknor, 1863 [1849])

⁹ The manuscripts of George and Anna Ticknor's diaries are held at the Rauner Library at Dartmouth. They can also be accessed in the *Microfilm Edition of the Travel Journals of George & Anna Ticknor: In the Years 1816-1819 and 1835-1838*, Dartmouth Library Depository (2337r).

¹⁰ The relationship between the two scholars was recently studied in Santiago Santiño's exhaustive biography of Gayangos (Chapter IV. 5, "Haciendo amigos," 2018, pp. 280-291).

Martín Ezpeleta summarizes the contributions of Ticknor's *History* as follows:

His criterion for selection and explanation of works was based on his representation of the Spanish national character, which consisted of expressing the popular reality of the Spanish people, free from foreign contamination. Thus, he developed not only a major catalogue of Spanish works, but also an essay on the Spanish spirit, which covered, in the manner of a biography, its origin and trajectory over history, cleaving to the then-current theories on the Volksgeist of the abovementioned idealist philosophy. (Martín Ezpeleta, 2012, p. xxi)

Thomas Hart demonstrates that, contrary to Ticknor's claims, the *History* is not a profound revision of his *Syllabus*; it is largely an expansion of the earlier project that covers many more authors and books (Hart, 2002, p. 108). At the same time, Hart poses other key questions to guide a fuller understanding of the project. He highlights the importance Ticknor places on a national literature's formative period, before it is overly influenced by external elements. These popular origins were what led him to dedicate himself to Spanish, rather than French literature, which had been his initial plan. He imputed to French literature a courtly spirit that he viewed as uncongenial and artificial. He also believed that Castilian literature possessed a higher morality than French: as a Unitarian educated under sound Christian principles imbued with the prevailing Calvinism of the colonial and subsequent periods, he believed that the notion of *belles-lettres* must dominate in literary studies. With this moral weight at the heart of all artistic expression, literary history had to be useful for readers; beyond scholarship, a project as broad as the *History* had to teach a lesson: it had to serve as a model. Here, Ticknor owes a debt not so much to German idealism as to the principles that can be found in the neoclassic poetics of eighteenth-century British writers, such as Lord Kames and Hugh Blair, whose works were widely used as textbooks in New England schools and colleges during Ticknor's youth (Hart, 2002, p. 114). According to these critics, literature is communication, and its primordial function is instruction: "The writer is a moral teacher, and the critic's task is to judge him on moral grounds" (Hart, 2002, p. 115). Just as Ticknor believed that modern languages had to be taught as living systems of communication, he believed that literary history had to stress the native character of a people. In his *History*, Ticknor aspired to convey the living spirit of a people to a reading public that was largely unable

22

to read masterpieces in their original language; Spain's most notable authors had captured that spirit in their greatest works, and Ticknor's goal was to educate and elevate the English-reading public for whom he wrote the work. Ticknor placed significant emphasis on this issue, and his correspondence confirms that his intention was to make his book accessible to as broad a public as possible. This principle would also guide the early years of the Boston Public Library, of which he was a founder; it was established in 1848 with the goal of making humanity's great literary, historic, and scientific works accessible to the general public. It is important to note that safeguarding social stability was another of the cultural and political elite's goals in the establishment of such public institutions.

To Ticknor's satisfaction, *History of Spanish Literature* was very well received not just in the U.S., but also in British literary circles, whose esteem Ticknor needed as a guarantor of his intellectual legitimacy. Fernández Cifuentes also mentions the fact that the *History* was published in four separate U.S. editions in the nineteenth century as proof of its success among the non-specialized public; an additional three abridged editions were also released for non-specialized readers (Fernández Cifuentes, 2004, p. 256). Iván Jaksic, who dedicates two insightful chapters of his book to studying Ticknor's *History* and its impact on the Hispanic world,¹¹ focuses on its reception among Spanish critics (as well as Andrés Bello and other Latin-American intellectuals), from the moment in which it appeared in a translation by Pascual de Gayangos and Enrique de Vedia, who published the three volumes of Ticknor's work in Madrid between 1851 and 1856, as well as a fourth, additional volume that consisted of a lengthy anthology of texts, additions, and critical notes. The translated *History* was very present in the most important nineteenth-century work on the topic published in Spain, José Amador de los Ríos's *Historia crítica de la Literatura Española*, which appeared between 1861 and 1866. Amador de los Ríos admits to having Ticknor's book on his mind as he wrote his own, though he declares that, despite admiring the American's

23

¹¹ Jaksic (2007), chapter 2, "*Labor Ipse Voluptas: George Ticknor y la Historia de la Literatura Española*," pp. 79-132; chapter 3, "El extranjero ilustrado: la recepción de la obra de Ticknor en el mundo hispano."

broad scholarship, he charges that Ticknor's *History* wants for transcendental guiding principles, foremost among which is a "patriotic" sensibility, which is central to Amador de los Ríos's own historiographic work (Jaksić, 2007, pp. 150-154). This criticism stemmed primarily from the bitterness Ticknor's work had provoked among many Spanish and Latin-American scholars, who resented him for completing a work of that nature and scope before they did. Despite these sensitivities, the *History* acquired tremendous prestige among Spanish speakers and spurred the advancement of philological and literary-historical studies in the Hispanosphere.

With all its shortcoming and lacunas—imputable to Ticknor's methodology and ideology, as well as the unavoidable lack of primary sources, despite the completeness of Ticknor's private library—the *History* was unrivaled in the English-speaking world until James Fitzmaurice-Kelly published *A History of Spanish Literature* in 1898. It was also quite influential in Europe, in a German translation by the renowned Austrian Romanist Ferdinand Wolf (*Geschichte der spanischen Literatur*, Leipzig, 1865).

24

To conclude this study, which chronicles Ticknor's trajectory from his early years as a student of Spanish through his enshrinement as a leading authority in literary history, it is worth highlighting two significant passages that evince the methodological and ideological nucleus of his project. The first is from Volume I of his *History*: "In the first division of the first period, we are to consider the origin and character of that literature which sprang, as it were, from the very soil of Spain, and was almost entirely untouched by foreign influence" (Ticknor, 1864 [1849], p. 6).¹² National literature, Ticknor affirms, emerges pristine from the Spanish earth, as if it were something organic and not a cultural construction. Recall that in his 1816 letter, cited above, he used the same language to refer to his other great love, German literature.

¹² This citation is from the 1864 edition, which Ticknor himself corrected and expanded after fruitful correspondence with Gayangos.

The second significant passage is from the final volume of the *History*, where it appears as a conclusion to Chapter VII, under the heading “Hopes for the Future,” and constitutes a kind of warning and moral admonition, which I will quote at length. Here again, Ticknor turns to the allegory of the nation in decline by invoking the image of collapsed walls, which accompanied him from the day he set foot on the Iberian Peninsula:

And, while they [Spanish people] preserve the sense of honor, the sincerity, and the contempt for what is sordid and base, that have so long distinguished their national character, they cannot be ruined.

Nor, I trust, will such a people —still proud and faithful in its less favored masses, if not in those portions whose names dimly shadow forth the glory they have inherited — fail to create a literature appropriate to a character in its nature so poetical. The old ballads will not indeed return; for the feelings that produced them are with bygone things. The old drama will not be revived: —society, even in Spain, would not now endure its excesses. The old chroniclers themselves, if they should come back, would find no miracles of valor and superstition to record, and no credulity fond enough to believe them [...] But the Spanish people — that old Castilian race, that came from the mountains and filled the whole land with their spirit — have, I trust, a future before them not unworthy of their ancient fortunes and fame [...] happy if they have been taught, by the experience of the past, that, while reverence for whatever is noble and worthy is of the essence of poetical inspiration, and, while religious faith and feeling constitute its true and sure foundations, there is yet a loyalty to mere rank and place, which degrades alike its possessor and him it would honor, and a blind submission to priestly authority, which narrows and debases the nobler faculties of the soul more than any other, because it sends its poison deeper. But if they have failed to learn this solemn lesson, inscribed everywhere, as by the hand of Heaven, on the crumbling walls of their ancient institutions, then is their honorable history, both in civilization and letters, closed forever. (Ticknor, 1864 [1849], pp. 371-372)

25

For Ticknor, a great national literature, which emanates from the immanent spirit of the people that creates it, must have a moral dimension to survive. Otherwise, it will fall into decay like so many other artistic works from the civilizations of the past. It is precisely this postulate that informs the most intriguing thesis in Jakšić’s study, which concludes its second chapter as follows:

George Ticknor had been describing the decay and collapse of Spain for his entire adult life. In his old age, he contemplated a dismal future for another country, his own, that he almost did not recognize [...] George Ticknor died on January 26, 1871, leaving a monumental legacy to scholarship on Spanish literature and history, but anguished that the story of the emergence and collapse of Spain could be replicated in his own country. (Jakšić, 2012 [2007], p. 51)

Thanks to his profound knowledge of Spanish literary historiography, Ticknor was able to bring his vocation as a researcher and an academic to its pinnacle by penning a truly singular work; after its publication, he arose as an undisputed authority in an area of study that had hardly been touched in the U.S., and which was still incipient in Spain and Latin America. But despite his genuine love for Hispanic letters, he was also driven to undertake such an ambitious project by concern over his own homeland's future. For Ticknor, the old Spanish empire, and, more recently, the French empire under Napoleon, were fallen temples that offered a moral lesson for U.S. readers: a negative example that ought to be avoided, especially with regard to the corrosive effect that submission to religious institutions and a despotic government, or both, can have on an ancient and noble people. This notion of developing a literary history of Spain as a model for the literary history of the U.S. (which was still fledgling in the mid-nineteenth century) is particularly useful for understanding the scope of Ticknor's work and the work of the era's other prominent American Hispanists, including Irving, Prescott, Longfellow, and Lowell.¹³

¹³ Of particular interest in this regard is Richard Kagan's article "From Noah to Moses: The Genesis of Historical Scholarship on Spain in the United States," in *Spain in America*, 2002, pp. 21-48. Kagan would go on to expand this study in his brilliant book *The Spanish Craze*, which covers not just the scholars and historians who created the field of U.S. Hispanism, but also the ways in which U.S. pop culture has touches of *Spanish flare*, including in fashion, architecture, music, and film.

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The Friendship of George Ticknor and Thomas Jefferson: the Birth of North American Hispanism¹

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Abstract

George Ticknor (1791-1871), like Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), was a bibliophile; this is what brought them together for the first time. Young Ticknor had the great good fortune of being presented to the third President of the United States by the second, John Adams. Ticknor and Jefferson had a lot in common: both are known for the notable, historic libraries that each of them created. And both had a deep interest in the culture of Spain: Jefferson, in its history, especially that of Spain in the Americas; Ticknor, in Spanish literature. They also shared a profound respect for the progress of learning in Europe at the same time as they aspired to institute and extend the best of its achievements in the United States. Thus their collaboration emerged on the field of higher education: one to make it possible; the other, to practice it. They shared with one another their projects as they developed: Jefferson founded the University of Virginia in 1825, and Ticknor culminated his academic career upon publishing in 1849 his comprehensive and influential History of Spanish Literature. Theirs was a respectful, intense, and sustained friendship. From mentor and disciple they became, in the words of Jefferson, “fellow-laborers in the same field, where the harvest is great, and the laborers few.” When he was a young man, Ticknor had characterized Jefferson for his “love of old books and young society.” The same can be said of Ticknor himself, since he lived and labored in the service of teaching and scholarship to nearly the same age that Jefferson was at the time of his death.

31

Keywords

George Ticknor, Thomas Jefferson, Higher education, Harvard University, University of Virginia, Modern languages: Spanish

¹ This is a revised version of my oral presentation for “George Ticknor and his Contribution to Hispanism,” Instituto Cervantes of Harvard University, Thursday, November 7, 2019. I thank my colleague, José Manuel del Pino of Dartmouth College, who suggested that I participate in the event and the Instituto’s executive director, Dra. Marta Mateo, for that invitation and the opportunity to appear in *Estudios del Observatorio/Observatorio Studies*.

George Ticknor, like Thomas Jefferson, was a bookman; this is what first brought them together. Ticknor had the great good fortune to be introduced to the former third President of the United States by the second. Some three months after John Adams introduced Ticknor to Jefferson by letter, Ticknor made his first of two visits to Monticello. They had a lot in common. Both are known for the remarkable, historic libraries they assembled. And both developed a deep interest in the worlds of Spain: Jefferson, in its history, especially in the Americas; Ticknor, in its literature, specifically that of Spain. They shared an interest in the learning of the past and a vision for learning in the future. They had in common a deep respect for the current advancement of knowledge in Europe while hoping to institute the best of its approaches in this country. Both made plans to execute those goals, one in the South, in the state of Virginia, the other in the North, in Massachusetts. This was no “North/South” divide but rather a meeting of minds about the historical legacy of one and the personal future of the other. Their enduring partnership thus emerged on the field of higher education: one to practice it, the other to make its practice possible. From mentor and mentee they became, in Jefferson’s words, “fellow-laborers in the same field, where the harvest is great, and the laborers few.” Recounting here that decade-long, mostly epistolary relationship, I cite liberally from the letters of these two correspondents in the conviction that they deserve to be appreciated in their own words.

32

Jefferson (b. 1743) was close to fifty years old when Ticknor (b. 1791) was born, and Ticknor lived nearly as long a life as Jefferson did; one deceased in 1826, the other, about half a century later, in 1871, each in his own time an octogenarian. “I cannot live without books.” This most famous quotation of Thomas Jefferson can be found in many places, not least the book shop at the Library of Congress where it is emblazoned on baseball caps and tee shirts. The sentence comes from Jefferson’s

letter to John Adams, written on June 10, 1815,² shortly after the wagons carrying the 6700 books of his personal library, sold to Congress for \$23,950, had departed for Washington, D.C. There Jefferson's books would become the new "cornerstone" of Congress's library, which had been decimated when the British burned the U.S. capitol in 1814.

In his letter to Adams, Jefferson continued contemplating his desire to replace his lost books: "fewer will suffice where amusement, and not use, is the only future object." As one of the great historians of Jefferson's library, Douglas L. Wilson observed, Jefferson

had already taken steps to acquire a good many replacements by this time, and Adams was to render valuable assistance by introducing him to George Ticknor, a precocious graduate of Dartmouth who was on his way to Europe. Jefferson was greatly impressed with Ticknor's learning and knowledge of books and quickly engaged him as a book-buying agent abroad. (1986, pp. 175-176)

This was the beginning of a remarkable relationship, and the story was first told by Orie William Long in *Thomas Jefferson and George Ticknor: A Chapter in American Scholarship* (1933). Long scoured the Jefferson Papers in the Library of Congress, the Coolidge Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Ticknor Papers at Harvard, and, to great advantage, the manuscript materials in the possession of Ticknor's grandchildren, Rose Dexter and Philip Dexter, who generously made them available to him (Long, 1933, p. 8).

While I have been guided by the general contours of Long's account, what newly emerges here is the intensity of the earliest years, from 1815 through 1818, of Jefferson and Ticknor's relationship. Jefferson's projects and Ticknor's interests converged in the period extremely fruitful for them both: Jefferson anxiously sought to rebuild his lost library while Ticknor, in Europe and hoping for an academic future, was equally eager to build his own. (Any book lover "of a certain age" who is forced to

² "Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 10 June 1815," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

reduce his or her own personal library will understand Jefferson's plight, and any young bibliophile ready to build his or her own future, along with a respectable library, understands the aim.)

What the relationship between these two "bookmen" reveals is at least twofold: It shows Jefferson's deep appreciation of the promise of youth for this country—for extending current fields of knowledge and for guaranteeing the nation's democratic future. On Ticknor's side, it reveals his enormous respect for the judgment of the elder statesman. The qualities that made the young Ticknor an outstanding student would be the same virtues that later made him an outstanding teacher. Learning and teaching were the twin passions—avocation in Jefferson, vocation in Ticknor—of both of them.

Ticknor graduated from Dartmouth College at the age of sixteen, and John Adams sent his letter introducing Ticknor to Jefferson on December 20, 1814: "As you are all *Heluones Librorum* [gluttons for books] I think you ought to have a Sympathy for each other".³ Jefferson received the young Mr. Ticknor at Monticello the following February; Ticknor was about twenty-four years old and Jefferson, a very mature (given the era and its life expectancies) seventy-two, a fact which Jefferson pointed out to the young Ticknor in the course of this initial visit (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, p. 36). When Ticknor saw Jefferson's library at Monticello in February 1815, he knew that it was about to be packed up and delivered to Washington. He estimated its size to be some seven thousand volumes, and he remarked that during his brief visit he could not estimate its value, even if he had been competent to do so (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, p. 35).

Ticknor characterized Jefferson for his "love of old books and young society" (1876, v. 1, p. 35). In a letter to his father, he compared Jefferson to an old Ticknor family friend, the Reverend Doctor James Freeman, who for four decades preached at

³ "John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 20 December 1814," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

King's Chapel, Boston, and is today known as the first clergyman in the U.S. to identify himself as a Unitarian. Ticknor described Jefferson to his father Elisha in this manner:

I shall probably surprise you by saying that, in conversation, he reminded me of Dr. Freeman. He has the same discursive manner and love of paradox, with the same appearance of sobriety and cool reason. He seems equally fond of American antiquities, and especially the antiquities of his native State, and talks of them with freedom, and, I suppose, accuracy. He has, too, the appearance of that fairness and simplicity which Dr. Freeman has; and, if the parallel holds no further here, they will again meet on the ground of their love of old books and young society. (1876, v. 1, p. 35)

“A love of old books and young society”: these are the twin traits that allowed Ticknor and Jefferson to develop and deepen their relationship over the decade of their friendship.

Ticknor offered to help Jefferson rebuild his library when in Europe, including: “any commands in relation to collecting a library or any other business, wh. it may suit your convenience to entrust to me. . . . I cannot suffer this opportunity to pass, without repeating my acknowledgements, for the advice & instruction I received from you in relation to my projected voyage & visit to Europe.”⁴ Jefferson was equally pleased. After Ticknor was settled in Europe, and Jefferson had endured the anxious months of April and May when the sale of his library to Congress was finalized and he saw the last wagonload of his precious books leave Monticello for Washington and into the uncertain hands of the Librarian of Congress, George Watterson, Jefferson wrote to Adams to thank him for the introduction of Ticknor:

Mr. Ticknor is particularly the best bibliograph I have met with, and very kindly and opportunely offered me the means of reprocurring some part of the literary treasures which I have ceded to Congress to replace the devastations of British Vandalism at Washington. I cannot live without books.⁵

Two years later, in 1817, Jefferson again would use the same phrase in reference to Ticknor — “the best bibliograph of my acquaintance” — in writing to his Paris booksellers,

⁴ “George Ticknor to Thomas Jefferson, 6 March 1815,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁵ See note 2.

the De Bure Frères, urging them to consult Ticknor and “consider his advice as absolutely controuling [sic] my own choice, & giving me the benefit of his knolege [sic], so much more recent & extensive than mine.”⁶ There can be no doubt about Jefferson’s complete trust in the bibliographic judgment of his young friend.

Jefferson was eager to obtain not the most luxurious editions, but rather those that conformed best to his reading habits. In the early months of Ticknor’s sojourn abroad, Jefferson made plain his bibliographic criteria. On July 4, 1815, Jefferson wrote to Ticknor:

Availing myself of the kind offer of your aid in replacing some of the literary treasures which I furnished to Congress, I have made out a catalogue which I now inclose [sic]. It is confined principally to those books of which the edition adds sensibly to the value of the matter. This as to translations, notes Etc [sic] other accompaniments, chiefly respects the classics: but size and type respect all. I am attached to the 8^{vo} because not too heavy for the hand, and yet large enough to open on the table according to convenience.⁷

Let’s hear it for the octavo! “Not too heavy for the hand, and yet large enough to open on the table according to convenience.”

36

Jefferson entrusted to Ticknor the choice of editions, as mentioned in his later letter to the De Bure Brothers booksellers in Paris. Relying on Ticknor’s judgement in making selections, Jefferson reminded him of that single proviso: “Only be so good as to remember my aversion to folios and 4^{tos} & that it overweighs a good deal of merit in the edition. The nerveless hand of a more than Septuagenaire wields a folio or 4^{to} with fatigue, and a fixed position to read it on a table is equally fatiguing.”⁸ Ticknor should not forget that “size and type respect all,” because legibility for our aged but youthful reader’s eyes weakened by time was also a top criterion. These remarks make clear, more than any others in Jefferson’s vast, mostly epistolary writings, or in the equally vast scholarship devoted to him, that Jefferson was not merely a collector of books but

⁶ “Thomas Jefferson to de Bure Frères, 6 June 1817,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁷ “Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 4 July 1815,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁸ “Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 8 February 1816,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

also an assiduous reader. And he intended, with Ticknor's help (and that of others), to be—as we will see—a reader to the last.

In one of his early letters to Ticknor's father Elisha, Jefferson sent along a letter to be forwarded to the young Ticknor, which contained a list of books for purchase in Europe. Written only a couple of months after Ticknor had arrived abroad, Jefferson explained to the father his reliance on the son for his “perfect” bibliographic knowledge, which made his offer of help to Jefferson too advantageous to pass up. Something else emerges here: Jefferson added an accolade of a higher order, predicting that young men such as Ticknor would be the country's future:

I cannot pass over the occasion of congratulating you on the possession of such a son. His talents, his science, and excellent dispositions must be the comfort of his parents, as they are the hope of his friends & country; and to those especially who are retiring from the world & it's [sic] business the virtues and talents of those who are coming after them, are a subject of peculiar gratification.⁹

That future would be grounded in education, in this case, higher education. On this topic, Jefferson and Ticknor found their second common cause to match their bibliographic endeavors.

37

It was in 1816, the second year of their acquaintance, when Ticknor and Jefferson began their conversations about higher education in the United States. Ticknor opened the discussion on March 15, 1816, nearly a year after he had departed for Europe on April 16, 1815. Ticknor lauded the advancement of the German universities, noting that “they have more learned professors and authors at this moment, than England & France put together,” and he sought Jefferson's views on higher learning in America: “I shall, also, feel it as a great favour, if you will give me your opinion on the prospects of learning in the U.S. and the best means of promoting it—a subject which now occupies much of my attention.”¹⁰ The subject occupied much

⁹ “Peculiar” in this instance has the force of “particular” or “special,” not “odd.” “Thomas Jefferson to Elisha Ticknor, 5 July 1815,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹⁰ “George Ticknor to Thomas Jefferson, 15 March 1816,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

of Ticknor's attention because his prospective appointment at Harvard was already weighing on his mind. It was only a few months later, on July 26, 1816, that Harvard's President John Thornton Kirkland wrote to inform Ticknor that the Harvard Corporation had voted to approve the offer of an appointment to him as "Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages and Literature, and of Belles Lettres" (Long, 1933, p 20).

On Jefferson's side, he had worked for decades on a comprehensive plan for public education in Virginia, including higher education, which he argued was one of the essential means by which "every fibre would be eradicated of ancient and feudal aristocracy; and a foundation laid for a government truly republican" (Jefferson, 1972 [1821], p. 51). But the Virginia House of Delegates twice, in 1779 and 1780, had "flatly rejected his Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, which he came to think more important than any other for the future of freedom and self-government" (Peterson, 1976, p. 23).

38

Ticknor continued to press the issue of higher education with Jefferson when on April 23, 1816, he wrote, inspired, as he said, by "the state & spirit of learning in Germany": "I am exceedingly anxious to have this spirit of pursuing all literary studies philosophically—and of making scholarship as little of drudgery & mechanism as possible transplanted into the U. States, in whose free and liberal soil I think it would, at once, find congenial nourishment."¹¹

After the July offer from Harvard, Ticknor found himself in a dilemma. Seeking the advice of his father, he wrote to Elisha some months later, on November 9, 1816. He had three concerns: first, that the salary offered was insufficient. If he were to marry (as he intended, but with no candidate in mind at the time), he would need to supplement the Harvard income to be able to support a family. Second was the matter,

¹¹ "George Ticknor to Thomas Jefferson, 23 April 1816," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

as the young Ticknor called it, of “the Spanish part.” This was for him “a new subject of study” to which he had paid “no attention” since he’d been in Europe. He would need to spend another six months abroad at the intended conclusion of his stay, because six months would be the shortest amount of time, he estimated, in which he could acquire a respectable knowledge of Spanish literature. Third and finally, would the “office and occupation” of being a professor please his parents? Placing an additional burden on their shoulders, the young Ticknor enclosed drafts of two letters, one accepting the Harvard post, the other, declining it. He left it to his parents, on whose financial and moral support he depended, to choose “dear father and mother, whichever you please, and be assured your choice will make me happy” (Ticknor, v. 1, 1876, pp. 116-118).

It was during this year of uncertainty for Ticknor that he received Jefferson’s educational plan for the state of Virginia, which included his provisions for a new university. Jefferson wrote to Ticknor on June 6, 1817, announcing that Virginia

has applied itself to establishments for education, by taking up the plan I proposed to them 40 years ago, which you will see explained in the *Notes on Virginia*. [...] They propose an elementary school in every ward or township, for reading, writing and common arithmetic; a college in every district, suppose of 80. or 100. miles square, for laying the foundations of the sciences in general, to wit, languages geography & the higher branches of Arithmetic; and a single university embracing every science deemed useful in the present state of the world. This last may very possibly be placed near Charlottesville, which you know is under view from Monticello.

39

Jefferson had in mind the modern languages, Spanish among them.

Earlier, in 1779, as an elected member of the Board of Visitors of the College of William and Mary and resident in Williamsburg as governor of Virginia, Jefferson had proposed a curricular change to substitute the modern languages for instruction in Latin and Greek, and it had been accepted. In a letter to Joseph Cabell decades later, on February 22, 1821, Jefferson recalled those changes: “When I was a Visitor, in 1779, I got the two professorships of Divinity and grammar school put down, and others of law and police, of medicine, anatomy, and chemistry, and of modern

languages substituted” (Cabell, ed., 1856, p. 207; Honeywell, ed., 2019 [1931], pp. 55-56).

Similarly, in the “Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia, &c” of August 4, 1818, Jefferson and his colleagues incorporated Spanish into the modern language curriculum alongside French, Italian, German, and Anglo-Saxon (the latter for its philological value to modern English). They observed: “[T]he Spanish is highly interesting to us, as the language spoken by so great a portion of the inhabitants of our Continents, with whom we shall probably have great intercourse ere long; and is that also in which is written the greater part of the early history of America” (Cabell, ed., 1856, p. 440; Honeywell, ed., 2019 [1931], pp. 254-255).¹² These are without a doubt Jefferson’s words as they repeat and paraphrase letters he wrote to the young men of his circle in the same years.

After Jefferson sent his prospective educational scheme for the University of Virginia to Ticknor in June, 1817, five months later, on November 6, 1817, Ticknor dispatched from Rome his letter of acceptance of the Harvard appointment (Ticknor, 1876, v. I, p. 120). His parents had obviously approved, given that they would have to give their son financial support. Three weeks later, on November [25th], 1817, Jefferson again took up with Ticknor his plan for the university:

This last establishment will probably be within a mile of Charlottesville, and four from Monticello, if the system should be adopted at all by our legislature, who meet within a week from this time. My hopes however are kept in check by the ordinary character of our state legislatures, the members of which do not generally possess information enough to perceive [sic] the important truths, that knolege [sic] is power, that knolege is safety, and that knolege is happiness.¹³

“Knowledge is power”: this quotation reveals one of the firmest of Jefferson’s convictions, and he also acknowledges his hard-earned understanding of the

¹² “Rockfish Gap Report of the University of Virginia Commissioners, 4 August 1818,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹³ “Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 25 November 1817,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

slowness, and the forward-and-backward movement, of the workings of the democratic process which he had helped to create.

Still in Europe, Ticknor wrote to Jefferson, reviewing his objectives and wondering about future prospects, as his thoughts turned homeward. (He had accepted the Harvard appointment nearly a year earlier.) What begins to emerge is Ticknor's uncertainty about the position he had accepted and his reliance on Jefferson for advice about the kind of institutional arrangements that should prevail in the academy. In this frame of mind, Ticknor wrote to Jefferson from Madrid on August 10, 1818:

When I came to Europe, I proposed to myself to acquire a good knowledge of all the literatures of ancient & modern Europe. [...] My object in all has been to get general, philosophical notions on the genius & history of each of these literatures & to send home good collections of books relating to the history of their languages & representing the whole series of their elegant literatures. [...] All this time thus spent in Europe, I consider a sacrifice of the present to the future & what I most desire is, to make the sacrifice useful to my country. [...] And now the question is— what I shall do with the knowledge that has cost me four of the best years of my life?

For political distinction, I have no ambition—no *thought* even & never have had. – If there were a department in the general Government, that was devoted to Publick [sic] Instruction, I might seek a place in it—but there is none,—& there is none even in my State Government. All that remains for me, therefore, seems to be to go home & exert what influence I may be able to acquire in favour of the cause of good letters &, perhaps, if a proper occasion offers, which is probable, give some years to instruction by courses of publick [sic] lectures at our University.¹⁴

41

That occasion, as we know, had appeared, and Ticknor had accepted the Harvard appointment. (A question remains as to why Ticknor was not forthcoming with that information.) Ticknor continues and closes his letter as follows:

You see, Sir, that I have spoken to you with great freedom—perhaps, with too much: but the reason is, that I desire extremely, to have you know my situation exactly as it is, & to ask your advice & opinion on the course of life best for me to pursue when I reach my home & begin the world as it were for a second time at the age of twenty seven, with a moderate fortune, which makes me independent; because my wants are few. [...] If there be any thing in all this in the least inconvenient to you, I pray it may be as if I had never spoken of it.— [...] Remember me, I beg of you, to Colo. Randolph & Mrs. Randolph with their family, whom I hope to see at

¹⁴ "George Ticknor to Thomas Jefferson, 10 August 1818," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Monticello, if you will permit me to pay you a visit there soon after my return home. Farewell—my dear Sir—and in the idiom of the country where I am, I pray heaven to preserve you many years, since all your years are years of usefulness.¹⁵

Almost as a postscript, he hastens to add: “I had almost forgotten to say, how much I am interested in the noble plan you have formed for education in your native State. I trust and believe it will succeed, & already foresee the pleasure of witnessing your happiness in its success—.”¹⁶

Two months later (but only two days after he had received Ticknor’s aforementioned letter), Jefferson replied on October 25, 1818, and “with stronger wishes than expectations,” offered Ticknor a professorship at his prospective institution, “liberally endowed under the name of ‘the University of Virginia.’” Passing over the modern languages, Jefferson suggests that Ticknor would be ideally suited for an appointment in “Ideology, Ethics, Belles lettres & Fine arts” and that he would find the weather of Virginia more agreeable than that of Massachusetts. Despite his hopes of attracting Ticknor to Virginia, he admitted that he thought such an outcome improbable. Jefferson excused himself for having “indulged in this reverie the more credulously” because of Ticknor’s own daydreaming about a hypothetical department in the federal government devoted to public instruction. Jefferson assured him that such did not and could not exist without “an Amendment of the Constitution, and for that, and the necessary laws and measures of execution, long years must pass away.” But he added: “In the mean while we consider the institution of our University as supplying it’s [sic] place, and perhaps superceding [sic] it’s necessity.”¹⁷

42

How did Jefferson conceive Ticknor’s potential appointment as professor of “Ideology, Ethics, Belles lettres & Fine arts”? In the recently submitted “Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia, &c”, Jefferson

¹⁵ See note 14.

¹⁶ See again note 14.

¹⁷ “Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 25 October 1818,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

and the other twenty commissioners, James Madison among them, had devised ten branches of learning, and the tenth of these was called “Ideology,” which they defined as “the doctrine of thought;” it included the disciplines of General Grammar, which explained “the construction of language;” ethics, “the proofs of the being of a god, the creator, preserver, & supreme ruler of the universe, the author of all the relations of morality, & of the laws & obligations these infer”, and the fine arts.¹⁸

From Edinburgh four months later, on February 13, 1819, Ticknor penned his reply to Jefferson regarding the offer of a professorship, citing the needs of his aged father at home in Boston and mentioning, apparently for the first time, his commitment to offer lectures at Harvard. At the same time he offered Jefferson his services to contribute in any other way to the success of the new University of Virginia, the existence of which, he believed, would have a salutary effect as “the means of exciting by powerful and dangerous rivalry the emulation of our College of the North, which has so long been itself first in reputation, that this excitement will not be without a good effect on its indolence” (cited in Long, 1933, pp. 25-26). Ticknor arrived home in June and, on August 10, 1819, formally took up his duties at Harvard, offering the required inaugural address (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, p. 319).

43

Not surprised by Ticknor’s decision, and now seeing him as a young academic at a “kindred institution,” Jefferson wrote reassuringly to Ticknor on Christmas Eve, 1819:

The liberality with which you view our kindred institution is what I expected from you. It could not be imagined that the single University of Cambridge, and that so near the North Eastern corner of our Union, could suffice for a country so extensive as ours. We are not therefore rivals, but fellow-laborers in the same field, where the harvest is great, and the laborers few” (cited in Long, 1933, p. 28).

¹⁸ See note 12: “Rockfish Gap Report of the University of Virginia Commissioners, 4 August 1818,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-13-02-0197-0006>.

“Fellow-laborers in the same field, where the harvest is great, and the laborers few”: Here, Jefferson and Ticknor fully emerge as colleagues, no longer as mentor and mentee. Over the course of the next few years, these fellow-laborers shared with one another their projects as they unfolded. On June 16, 1823, Ticknor dispatched to Jefferson his freshly published *Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on the History and Criticism of Spanish Literature*, citing in the accompanying letter his great desire to have Jefferson’s reaction to it:

Nobody in this country, within my acquaintance, has so much knowledge of this particular subject as you have—nobody has such wide and liberal views of the general principles on which an university should be established and its teaching conducted—and I am, therefore, very anxious to know how you will regard my efforts in the cause, which I know you have so much at heart. (cited in Long, 1933, p. 31)

A month later (on July 16, 1823), Jefferson sent Ticknor a print of the ground plan of the University of Virginia, which he said would give an idea of the campus’s layout but not of its architecture. The engraving in question may be the one drawn by Jefferson and shaded by his granddaughter, Cornelia J. Randolph, according to Honeywell (2019 [1931], p. 78). Jefferson also expressed the hope that Ticknor’s syllabus would become a model for instruction at his own university. Regarding the character of the curriculum, Jefferson informed Ticknor that the University of Virginia’s, with respect to that of Harvard, would

44

certainly vary. That is, the holding the students all to one prescribed course of reading, and disallowing exclusive application to those branches only which are to qualify them for the particular vocations to which they are destined. We shall, on the contrary, allow them uncontrolled choice in the lectures they shall choose to attend, and require elementary qualifications only, and sufficient age. . . . The insubordination of our youth is now the greatest obstacle to their education. We may lessen the difficulty, perhaps, by avoiding too much government, by requiring no useless observances, none which shall merely multiply occasions for dissatisfaction, disobedience and revolt by referring to the more discreet of themselves the minor discipline, the graver to the civil magistrates, as in Edinburgh. On this head I am anxious for information of the practices of other places, having myself had little experience of the government of youth. (cited in Long, 1933, pp. 31-32)

Jefferson asked Ticknor to send him Harvard’s program of academic regulations, but in a letter of December 25, 1823, Ticknor refrained from doing so, suggesting instead to send his own outline of a general plan of academic reforms on which he had been

working, against the opposition of his Harvard colleagues, since the summer of 1821. It included a revision of academic regulations and their administration, the “organization of departments, more freedom in the choice of studies, especially for students not wishing a degree, separation of students into divisions according to proficiency, improvement in the quality of instruction, and a general expansion of the scope and function of the institution” (cited in Long, 1933, pp. 32-33).

In harmony with Ticknor’s thinking, several months later Jefferson (on August 15, 1824) wrote:

I am sorry to hear of the schism within the walls of Harvard, yet I do not wonder at it. You have a good deal among you of ecclesiastical leaven. The spirit of that order is to fear and oppose all change stigmatizing it under the name of innovation, and that without innovation we should still have been inhabitants of the forest, brutes among brutes. Patience, pressure, as unremitting as gravity itself can alone urge man on to the happiness of which he is capable. (cited in Long, 1933, p. 33)

If uninitiated in the “experience of the government of youth,” Jefferson’s decades of public life served him well in recognizing the “ecclesiastical leaven” that colored the outlook of generations of his peers and successors. And he also knew that the problem was not New England Puritans because he’d seen it in Virginia and in all “our State legislatures, the members of which do not generally possess information enough to perceive [sic] the important truths, that knolege [sic] is power, that knolege is safety, and that knolege is happiness.”¹⁹ As is evident, the battleground that Jefferson and Ticknor now shared as comrades and equals, at the end of Jefferson’s life and in the full maturity of Ticknor’s, was that of education. Nearly a half century apart in age, they had common cause in pursuing the timeless values of education in the firm belief that learning was a necessary condition for liberty.

In December 1824, Ticknor made his second and final visit to Monticello, nearly a decade after the first, which had occurred in February 1815. Ticknor and his wife,

¹⁹ See note 13.

Anna Eliot, went from Boston to Washington, from whence they were accompanied by Daniel Webster, to spend two days with James Madison at Montpelier, and five days with Jefferson at Monticello (Long, 1933, p. 34). At that point in time, Ticknor has been five years on the faculty of Harvard, while Jefferson has been fully engrossed in the preparations for the opening of the University of Virginia, one of the three life achievements by which he hoped to be remembered.²⁰

Writing to his friend William Hickling Prescott from Monticello on December 16, 1824, Ticknor described the current state of the University of Virginia's campus: "They have, to begin it, a mass of buildings more beautiful than anything architectural in New England, and more appropriate to an [sic] university than can be found, perhaps, in the world." But "Of the details of the [curricular] system I shall discourse much when I see you. It is more practical than I feared, but not so practical that I feel satisfied of its success. It is, however, an experiment worth trying, to which I earnestly desire the happiest results" (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, p. 348). What Ticknor is saying here is that he feared that the academic plan would be less practical than it actually was, but that he found it is insufficiently practical to assure its success.

46

In a touching portrait in the same letter, Ticknor described Jefferson with great affection, noting the now-octogenarian's absorption in the university, the success of which "would make a *beau finale* indeed to his life. He is now eighty-two years old, very little altered from what he was ten years ago, very active, lively, and happy, riding from ten to fifteen miles every day, and talking without the least restraint, very pleasantly, upon all subjects" (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, pp. 348-349). Ticknor also observed that Jefferson had little interest in politics, taking only the *Richmond Enquirer* and then reading it only reluctantly. On the other hand, "on all matters of literature, philosophy,

²⁰ The epitaph that Jefferson composed for his tombstone—an obelisk which he insisted be made of rough stone so that thieves would not be tempted to steal it for the worth of its materials—reads: "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson/Author of the Declaration of Independence/of the Statute of Virginia for religion freedom/& Father of the University of Virginia." ("Thomas Jefferson: Design for Tombstone and Inscription, before 4 July 1826, 4 July 1826," *Founders Online*.)

and general interest, he is prompt and even eager. He reads much Greek and Saxon. I saw his Greek Lexicon, printed in 1817; it was much worn with use, and contained many curious notes” (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, p. 349). On closing his letter to Prescott, Ticknor summed up his impressions of Jefferson: “Mr. Jefferson seems to enjoy life highly, and very rationally; but he said well of himself the other evening, ‘When I can neither read nor ride, I shall desire very much to make my bow.’ I think he bids fair to enjoy both, yet nine or ten years” (Ticknor, 1876, v. 1, p. 349).

“When I can neither read nor ride, I shall desire very much to make my bow.” This remark must have shaken Ticknor—which, I think, is why he refused to entertain it when he remarked, “I think he bids fair to enjoy both, yet nine or ten years.” He had seen Jefferson as a mentor, but now, no longer on matters of guidance about his own professional future, he shared with Jefferson a deep concern for progress in higher education, each laboring in the field of his respective institution, one in Cambridge, the other at Charlottesville. The formal opening of the University of Virginia occurred on March 7, 1825, and on March 28, Ticknor wrote to Jefferson expressing frustration about the lack of progress of curricular reform at Harvard (cited in Long, 1933, pp. 36-37).

47

Ticknor and Jefferson’s last exchange seems to be occurred on May 10, 1825, with a letter from Ticknor to Jefferson, and it is on the topic of the liberal academic programs they both sought to establish:

I received duly your favour of April 12 with a copy of the Exactments for your new University. It is a matter of great congratulation that you begin your Establishment under such favourable auspices, and we can now only hope that all things will succeed according to your present prospects. I shall be very anxious for further and constant information and very grateful for any it may be in your power to afford me. In return, I hope I shall soon be able to send you good accounts of beneficial changes and arrangements at our college in Cambridge. (cited in Long, 1933, p. 37)

Unfortunately, Ticknor received persistent opposition from the Harvard faculty, as his *Remarks on Changes Lately Proposed or Adopted in Harvard University*, a 48-page

imprint signed by him on September 23, 1825, reveals. Ticknor concluded this short monograph by observing that “our high places for education may easily accommodate themselves more wisely to the spirit and wants of the times in which we live” but he warns that, with new institutions springing up, the older universities will fall behind if they grow “harder and harder in their ancient habits and systems” with the result that “instead of being able to place themselves at the head of the coming changes and directing their course, they will only be the first victims of the spirit of improvement” (Ticknor, 1825, p. 46). Soon afterward, in 1827 (this was a year after Jefferson’s death), Ticknor’s proposals were modified and nearly abandoned; only in Ticknor’s own department would they remain in effect (Long, 1933, p. 38).

Ticknor had suffered two great losses: the death of his esteemed friend and “fellow-laborer” and his failure to secure broad educational reform at Harvard. He continued at Harvard until 1835, when he resigned and turned to writing his comprehensive and influential *History of Spanish Literature*, which appeared in 1849, published by Harpers in New York and John Murray in London (Ticknor, 1876, v. 2, p. 255).

48

Almost a half century after Ticknor resigned his Harvard post and a decade after his death, which occurred in 1871, Harvard’s President Charles William Eliot (1834-1926), who is remembered for transforming the provincial New England university into a pre-eminent research institution, paid tribute to Ticknor in his report for the academic year 1883-84, describing Ticknor as an academic “reformer fifty years in advance of his time” (Long, 1933, p. 38).

From Ticknor’s doubts about taking the Harvard position, his efforts to reformulate the university’s curriculum, and his devotion to the cause of higher education for its benefit to the country, Ticknor looked to Jefferson for advice and the affirmation of their shared convictions. In turn, Jefferson looked to Ticknor for help in renewing his personal library as Ticknor created his own, as well as for inspiration in

assembling an enlightened university faculty with Ticknor as its preferred model if not as its prized recruit. It was indeed a meeting of minds, and it was sustained. As a young postgraduate, Ticknor had characterized Jefferson by his “love of old books and young society”; the same could be said of Ticknor himself, as he lived and labored in the service of learning nearly to the age that Jefferson had been on his passing.

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52

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54

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56

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