Thomas W. Gilmer

by

Rebekah Virginia Lawson

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THOMAS WALKER GILMER

It often happens that the names of some men, who had a large part in shaping the past policies of our country, are not now current in the thoughts of the average student of history. It is left to biographical monographs of this nature to review the lives of these men. With this ever increasing group of names may be placed that of Thomas Walker Gilmer. He was influential in the affairs of his native state, Virginia, during the decade from 1830 to 1840. This was the period when Southern leaders really dominated national affairs and Virginia was not lacking in leaders to represent her, though they did not attain the dominating position of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe - the old Virginia Dynasty. Thomas Walker Gilmer was an ardent State-rights man and a believer in the compact theory of government which was put forward in this decade by one of the South's greatest leaders. He took a decided stand on all the important questions of the day. When the question of the annexation of Texas came up he stood out boldly as a champion of annexation. In fact a letter written by Gilmer caused considerable agitation of the question and doubtless aided in the success of the issue. This will be treated in greater detail later after a brief sketch of his early life has been given.

In order to understand the man fully and to appreciate what he accomplished in his brief but interesting career it is perhaps
not out of place to give something of his ancestry. Thomas Walker Gilmer came of a sturdy line of Scotch-English ancestors, one of whom, Gr. George Gilmer, founder of the well known Gilmer family of Virginia, left England in 1731 and joined the colonists at Williamsburg. Here Dr. Gilmer practiced medicine and managed the affairs of a land company. On the death of his first wife he married in 1732 Mary Peachy, daughter of Thomas Walker of Albemarle. By her he had two sons - Peachy Ridgway and George. In 1745 he married again, his third wife being Harrison Blair, a member of the well known Blair family of Virginia. Dr. Gilmer died in Williamsburg January 13, 1757. His son, Peachy Ridgway Gilmer, was the grandfather of George R. Gilmer who became governor of Georgia, and the other son, Dr. George Gilmer was the grandfather of Thomas Walker Gilmer. This Gr. George Gilmer was born in Williamsburg, January 19, 1743. He was a student at William and Mary College, also studied medicine under his uncle, Dr. Thomas Walker, the celebrated traveler and explorer. Having completed his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh he returned to Williamsburg to practice medicine. Later he moved to Albemarle County and during the Revolutionary War was very active in military affairs. He was well acquainted with the leaders of his day, being an intimate friend of Thomas Jefferson. Dr. George Gilmer married his cousin, Lucy Walker, daughter of Dr. Thomas Walker, and had ten children, three of these were quite prominent in Virginia. One, Mildred Gilmer, married the well known William
Wirt, another, Francis Walker Gilmer, was a very brilliant man and personal friend of Jefferson; and the third, George R. Gilmer was the father of the subject of this sketch.

George R. Gilmer was also a doctor and married Elizabeth Hudson, daughter of Captain Christopher Hudson, a soldier of the Revolution. Dr. Gilmer had nine children of whom Thomas Walker Gilmer born April 6, 1802 at Gilmerton, Albemarle County, near Mount Vernon was the eldest. He was a precocious boy, fond of books and very ambitious. When only a youth he showed deep interest in history and biography, and read a great deal of both. One of his friends and teachers said of him: "In social intercourse his temper was eminently cheerful and gay. Convivial without verging to excess; he took his theme in whatever might contribute to amuse and entertain. His wit and humor sparkled and gave zest to his conversational powers which would have distinguished him in any company, and which recommended his companionship to all who were favored with his society." He was generous, candid and kind. Brave and fearless his heart was free from every stain of malignity and peevish resentment. These qualities made him the favorite of his companions and he was always the leader in all the enterprises of boyish mischief in which youths are so prone to engage.

Another teacher, under whom he studied Latin, French also Greek in 1817 and 1818 said: "His habits of study were respectable, stimulated I think rather by his ambition to excel than by his

2. The South in the Building of a Nation vol. xi - Southern Biography
3. From a sketch of B. as a student found with the Gilmer Papers.
love of study or by the flavor of the fruit he might gather from the tree of knowledge. His lessons were always well prepared; more from a desire to stand well in his class, which he always did, than from a wish to master the philologies of the languages in which he studied then. His predominating tastes and dispositions were turned to action rather than to contemplation. He therefore made all his industry and all his pursuits subservient to the purposes of active life.... Within the domains of the objects and pursuits of active life his mind was always busy and its operations were singularly acute, rapid, eager and clear."¹

Even as a lad of fourteen his precociousness was very marked. This is particularly noticeable in a letter written to his Uncle, Francis Walker Gilmer in 1816 in which he said: "I received your letter about a week ago, and I assure you it was dearer to me than I could have supposed the language or blessings of man could have been, it consoled the heart of one who is about to embark into the sea of the troubles, miseries, and misfortunes of the world, it pointed out a track by the pursuing of which, man by his own exertions may obtain glory, honor and happiness, and may stand on the firm basis and be covered and protected by the endeavor to act according to it, or as near as possible, but it is beyond the power of the human race for one to distribute justice to his fellow men."² Is it probable that a boy of today just fourteen would begin a letter like this? He was educated by private instruction. Then he studied law, and was admitted to the Virginia bar and began to practice law in Charlottesville.³

¹. The remainder of this letter will be found in the Appendix of this paper along with letters from his Uncle.
². Sketchy of his characteristics by a teacher found with Gilmer papers.
³. The exact date could not be found.
Speedily he won much reputation at the bar of his county, entering politics in 1825 as a strong State-rights man. 1

On May 23, 1826 he married Ann Elizabeth Baker, daughter of Ann Mark and John Baker of Shepherdstown, Virginia. His Cousin, George R. Gilmer, said of his wife: "He sought a wife, who could think, feel and act with him and for him. He found her without fortune, but above all price." 2 Indeed she must have been a very very beautiful and charming woman judging from his opinion of her as expressed in his numerous letters to her , and he the most devoted of husbands. 3

In reading or writing the life of a person it is a pleasure to be able to form a true image of his personal appearances. In this instance, although a picture is not available, the following newspaper description will give a clearer conception of his personality: "At the period of which we write Mr. Gilmer was very little turned thirty. He was a small man, of very handsome figure, with hair as black as the wing of a raven, and black eyes of intense brilliancy. His address was open, easy, and appeared to invite confidence. His conversational powers were of such a description, as to render him exceedingly engaging. In addition, it may be said that he was a man of strong impulses, and a temper rather too quick, perhaps, yet generous and forgiving in the extreme. With regard to his mental faculties, we may mention that he possessed an uncommon quickness of perception by nature, and this natural gift has been greatly improved by an almost uninter-

2. Gilmer, Geo. R. First Settlers of Upper Georgia p. 27.
3. Letters to his wife in the Appendix
rupted series of struggles, either forensic or legislative, running through at least eight years of his life. To back this, he had a vehement strain of oratory, which, though occasionally disfigured by flowers of rhetoric which were not exactly in good taste, were powerfully effective. His voice was full, round and powerful, his manner vehement, yet graceful, and the matter of his addresses was always full in quantity and in weight." 1

In 1825 Gilmer was elected a member of the Staunton Convention.2

The decade from 1829 to 1839 was especially marked in the various eastern states by a revision of State Constitutions. During the period from 1816 to 1829 the year the Virginia Constitutional Convention assembled many party conventions were held in the state and the discussions were characterized by vehemence, ability and eloquent addresses. The agitation thus incited resulted in the legislation which ushered in the Convention of 1829 into life.3 The Staunton Convention is numbered among these party conventions. The people of Shenandoah County and the surrounding territory voted in April for a convention to be held at Staunton July 2t, 1825.4 Although previous to this a bill had been considered and passed in the House of Delegates, February 5, 1825, concerning a constitutional convention, but was defeated in the Senate5 On July 25, 1825 citizens of various parts of the commonwealth, representative of the western part of the state only, assembled at Staunton. The debate was spirited and animated. A mutual feeling prevailed among all the delegates in favor of a constitutional convention. A memorial was drawn up and sent to the General Assembly in which they stated that the defects of the constitution could only be redressed by

1. From newspaper clipping filed with Gilmer papers without date or name
2. Southern Biography.
4. Richmond Enquirer, April 26, 1825, p.64.
5. Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 8, 10, 1825.
a convention deputed to revise and amend the constitution—the main defect being the basis of representation. They further asked that the sense of the people be taken at the ensuing spring elections on the question of assembling in convention to amend the constitution, and if the majority of people favored the calling of convention there should be a convention without delay.  

Besides passing a resolution favoring an equalization of representation, this Staunton Convention resolved that the privilege of suffrage should be extended to all white male citizens twenty-one years of age, that the local and state administrations should be reformed and the membership of the Assembly should be reduced.

The agitation for reform continued until 1828 a popular vote on the call of a constitutional convention was taken, which resulted in a majority favoring it, the voters in the Valley being unanimous for it. The entire struggle for reform was between the east and the west over representation and suffrage. The people west of the Blue Ridge were in favor of a white basis of representation exclusively. The people east of the Blue Ridge favored a mixed or compound basis. The former wanted manhood suffrage, while the latter clung to the requirement then in vogue of freehold suffrage. When the Constitutional Convention assembled October 5, 1829 in Richmond, this was the paramount issue. The leaders in Eastern Virginia thought that the minority holding slaves should govern the majority of non-slave holders. The slave holding planters argued that if they paid the most taxes, and held

1. Richmond Enquirer Aug. 9, 1825.
3. Ibid.
the most property they should be the ruling force in the State.
The Convention was filled with heated discussions between Up country and Low country factions. Quite as much time was given to the consideration of suffrage as was given to the basis of representation. After several months of discussion, a revised constitution having been drawn up to be submitted to the people for their approval or disapproval, the Convention adjourned January 15, 1830.

While the agitation was going on in the Convention, Gilmer though not a member of this body was deeply interested in the question of reform. In a speech to the people of Albemarle he voiced his opinions: he implores the people to deliberate calmly in this crisis of their affairs. He appeals to them not to forget that they are Virginians and not to limit their attachment to the East or West. He then summarized the views of the East and said: "I do not propose to argue this question or to enlist your judgement or your sympathies on behalf of the East or the West. I would appeal to you as Virginians - as freemen, whose patriotism is not circumscribed by mountains, nor chilled by the sordid love of self-interest, and I would have you interpose as arbiters to save your country." Then he advised them to instruct their representatives to vote for a compromise. He says: "Let me entreat you, then to pause and reflect, whether all that you desire with regard to our own peculiar interests may not be attained, and tranquility restored to the Commonwealth by a compromise of this question. Instead of sticking for every jot and tittle of rights which are so directly in

conflict with those claimed by our fellow-citizens of the West, let us exercise the glorious perogative of saving our country, and securing its interests in perfect harmony. If you resolve to instruct your delegates on this question, tell them to vote for the white basis in the House of Delegates and for the compound basis in the Senate."

"...no means should be spared to enable the Convention to submit such a plan of government as will be acceptable to a large majority of the people." \(^1\)

In spite of much agitation of the question of reform neither the Convention of 1829 nor the Constitution of 1830, although the latter was ratified by the majority of the people, was able to settle the difficulty between the East and the West. The people of the West were opposed to the Constitution because they did not secure the white basis of representation.\(^2\) The center of discontent and reform was merely transferred from the large populous counties of North Piedmont and the Shenandoah Valley to the trans Alleghany region. From then, sectionalism was more largely a contest between the areas which are now Virginia and West Virginia.\(^3\)

Rapidly Gilmer's abilities were being recognized, while continuing his law profession he edited a newspaper, the Virginia Advocate for eight months, July 1827 to March 1828.\(^4\) Although previous to this he had been connected with the editorial staff of the Central Gazette, the first paper published in Albemarle County.\(^5\) The Virginia Advocate was the next journal that appeared. It began simultaneously with the cessation of the Central Gazette. Its

1. Speech to the People of Albemarle Found with the Gilmer papers.
2. Braeman : History of Virginia Conventions. not dated.
4. From a sketch by his teacher filed with the Gilmer Papers.
first editors were Thomas W. Gilmer and John A.G. Davis. This paper was edited in the interest of Andrew Jackson, as Gilmer was a Jackson man in 1828, just as he had favored Crawford in 1824. While editor of the Advocate his cousin, George R. Gilmer, said of him: "He assailed what was wrong with such hearty, vigorous blows that he brought upon himself the violent enmity of the bad, and had to fight for his life."2 Gilmer's newspaper connection brought him strongly before the public. People began to realize that he was a wide awake, public spirited man. As soon as his merits became known, the people of Albemarle chose him for their representative in the State Legislature.

It was in 1829 that he was first elected to the House of Delegates and from that time until 1839 he was almost continuously a member of that body.3 In 1831 he acted as a commissioner from the Virginia Legislature to Congress and prosecuted successfully certain claims of the State of Virginia against the United States.4 These claims arose from certain expenditures made by Virginia during the Revolution. In his speech before the two houses of Congress on December 19, 1831 he said: "The General Assembly of Virginia, believing that their State had a valid and substantial claim on the United States for various large sums of money which had been paid, and which the commonwealth may be bound to pay on account of service of the troops of her State line during the war of the Revolution, had made provision by law at their last session for the submission of such claim to the proper authorities of the

3. Southern Biography
5. Swem : Bibliography of Virginia
United States." He continued, "I do not expect United States to compensate the State of Virginia for losses and sacrifices sustained during the Revolution, these were borne by all and reward enjoyed by all, only asks United States to discharge those obligations which have been voluntarily assumed." He asked, that all sums of money which the State of Virginia had paid, since the passage of the Act of Congress, August 5, 1790, "which provided more effectually for the settlement of the account between United States and the individual States," to officers of her State line, or of continental line, on account of her engagements during the Revolution might be refunded to the Commonwealth, that all sums for which the Commonwealth was still bound on the same account might be assumed or adequately provided for by the United States so as to exempt Virginia from responsibilities which did not properly belong to her. He also asked that a deficiency in reservation of bounty lands made by the State of Virginia on the cession of Northwest territory might be made good by the United States; and that all interest which was properly due to the State of Virginia on sums of money, or such other funds advanced for public service during the late war might be paid to the Commonwealth by the United States. As mentioned above Gilmer was successful as a commissioner and satisfactorily arranged the claims of Virginia against Congress. 1

As previously stated Gilmer had been a warm partisan of General Jackson and supported him in 1828. He had written for him (Virginia Advocate was edited in Jackson's interest), spoken for

1. Memorial on the Subject of Certain Claims of the State of Virginia against the United States.
him, and voted for him. It is true that in 1832, although he supported Jackson in the Presidential elections, he refused to give his vote to Van Buren as Vice-President. In June of that year he headed a schism in the Democratic party, leading the ardent strict constructionist wing mostly confined to the counties east of the Blue Ridge, and opposed the election of Van Buren as Vice-President putting Judge F.P. Barbour forward as their choice. Thus as a sectional contest the campaign for the election of Vice-President in 1832 was more important than the presidential election.  

In 1832 Gilmer was reelected to the House of Delegates. During this session he was Chairman of the Committee on Federal Relations, and offered certain resolutions concerning the crisis between South Carolina and the Federal Government. These resolutions stated in part: "That we regard the Acts of Congress, usually denominated the Tariff Laws, so far as they were passed palpably for the exclusive protection of particular species of industry, as not only oppressive and consequently inexpedient, but as contrary to the spirit, true intent and meaning of the federal compact."

Furthermore they declared: "Resolved that we can never acquiesce in the present system of duties as the settled policy of the government. That we will by all constitutional and proper means oppose its continuation, and that we believe it to be due to a spirit of mutual conciliation and harmony—to a proper regard for the rights and interests of large portions of the United States and essential to the preservation of the Union, that its burdens should

1. Resolutions found with the Gilmer Papers.
be gradually but speedily abated, to the imposition of such duties only as the government may require for revenue". He further stated; "That we will cordially cooperate with our fellow-citizens of South Carolina and of the other States which are more immediately injured by this oppressive system, in effecting by all proper means, its speedy reduction to the extent which we believe was designed by the framers of our federal compact, and by the States when they ratified it."1

Although Gilmer was in sympathy with South Carolina and believed the tariff laws oppressive yet he did not approve the policy which that State adopted to remove the evils. He thought that South Carolina had fixed too early a date for the practical execution of the measures taken by her, before all the means of redress had been exhausted. South Carolina, he felt, had not given Congress sufficient time to act on the subject. Gilmer also strongly condemned the Proclamation of Andrew Jackson, and regarded it as violating the true construction and spirit of the Federal Constitution. He believed that a State had a right to secede when causes should occur to render such secession necessary to preserve the rights and liberties of that State, but that no State should resort to such an alternative until the last extremity had been approached and every constitutional effort had been tried to redress its wrong.

He earnestly requested South Carolina to suspend the operation of her Nullification Ordinance of November 24, 18322, until after the meeting of the next Congress, December 3, 18333, (2nd session of the 22nd Congress), in order to await the combined

1. Resolutions filed with Gilmer Papers.
2. Bassett: A Short History of U.S.
3. Congressional Debates - 22nd Congress.
efforts of the South to induce the advocates of the tariff system to abandon it and restore justice to the South and harmony to the country. In these same resolutions Gilmer remonstrated against the use of military force, and requested the Virginia Represen-
tatives and Senators to use all their influence to reduce the ex-
isting tariff system.

Gilmer had continued firmly in favor of General Jackson un-
til the Proclamation made its appearance, followed shortly after-
wards by the Force Bill, or as was the phrase in those times the
Bloody Bill". It was then that Gilmer along with John Randolph
and a vast number of others who had been staunch supporters of the
administration abandoned it and went into opposition. "Gilmer was
a powerful auxiliary to the opposition party for it was general-
ly believed, that unless he had seen something which he regarded
as very wrong, he would never have left a party in which he stood
so high, and with which he had labored so long, and so faithfully.
The truth was that Mr. Gilmer conceived that he saw in the Pro-
clamations and Force Bill, a renewal of those aggressions upon the
rights of the States which had overthrown the older Adams. It
was this and no other cause motive that caused him to break off
from the party to which he had hitherto belonged."\footnote{Newspaper clipping filed with Gilmer Papers - no date or name.}

In company with John Tyler and a number of other State-rights
men, he left his party as just mentioned and finally united with
the National Republicans in 1834 to form the Whig party. He now
opposed Jackson's policy in regard to the removal of the United
States deposits from the United States Bank. During the session
of the Virginia Legislature in 1833/34 he drew up resolutions on
the report of the Committee on the United States deposits stating
that the recent removal of deposits was in the opinion of the General Assembly "An unauthorized assumption and exercise of executive power." He was reelected to the Legislature in 1835 and in his speech of February 22, 1834 to the people of Albemarle he stated his opposition to the course of President Jackson in removal of the deposits from the United States Bank. He said: "The right of the President to remove or otherwise control the public money cannot be admitted, because Congress had directed it to be deposited in a bank, which under the constitution they had no right to charter."

He stated that Congress alone (and the Secretary of the Treasury under their superintendence) was permitted by the constitution to control the public purse. Thus he considered that the President under the constitution and laws had no right to cause the public money to be removed from the bank of the United States "on his own responsibility." Even though Jackson was attempting to destroy the United States Bank which Gilmer considered unconstitutional and for the destruction of which he was willing to cooperate in any lawful measure, yet he could not justify the President's act. It is a fact of common knowledge however, that in spite of many objections similar to those of Gilmer, Jackson consulted only himself and had the deposits removed.

In 1838 Gilmer was reelected to the Legislature. His industry and eloquence made him one of the most prominent and useful members of the House of Delegates. A letter written to his cousin, George R. Gilmer, Governor of Georgia, expresses his views on

1. Legislative Journal 1833/34.
2. Speech to the People of Albemarle - a pamphlet found with the Gilmer papers
conditions at this period, also his opinion of Calhoun.


My dear Sir:

I had the satisfaction of receiving the copy of your last message from you some time since, for which proof of your recollection I beg you to accept my acknowledgements. I have often regretted that there has been so little intercourse between us. As we rarely meet, and as our positions are such as to render more frequent and familiar interchange of sentiments agreeable and profitable (at least to me), I hope for the future there may be sometimes the scrape of the pen between us. I believe that with few, if any, exceptions we have agreed in all the changes and chance of these latter days, and our relations of blood and of feeling ought to draw us still closer together. I should like to have the aid of your superior experience and forecast in reading the signs of the horoscope, which to me are sometimes almost unintelligible. What are we to come to, and what is to come to us? I mean, of course, the honest, independent State-rights Republicans of the South. If we follow any of these fellows who have set themselves up as leaders of our little host, we run against the post of their selfish ambition at every turn, and must ramble and grope with them through the zodiac of their change. If we stand aloof from the dirty scramble for high office, and say as patriots that the "play is not worth the candle", to the people, we are denounced as exclusive and impracticable theorists, behind the spirit of the age. I confess I am at some loss whether to maintain "principles without men, or men without principles." What say you? My friend Calhoun has the happiest facility of getting others into scrapes and getting himself out, of any one I have known. He must be cured of this notion that he alone can lead a party which he never belonged to till Jackson kicked him to it as a forlorn hope, after the denunciation of the Eaton plot. You may make what terms you please as to him. I would that Virginia had some man who could once more seize the flag of the South and plant it on the turrets of the Constitution. But alas! poor Virginia! - Illius fuit!

You must raise the standard in Georgia, and we will come to it with the best hearts and stoutest hands we can rally. The present position of parties is singular, and I should not be surprised at any change. I am myself not enlisted for the war, as you are, having a large family to provide for, and only play about now and then. But while I am in the ring, I would feign sustain good, sound principles, and good, sound men too, if we could find them. My friend Rives is an American in France, a Frenchman in America, a petit maître everywhere, who regards a quizzing glass as the chief part of a statesman.

Leaving apart, I wish to communicate with you freely and unreservedly as to the present state of affairs and of parties. I
know no one with whom I could expect to confer more freely or profit-
ably at present. I am now in our Legislature, which meets in a few -
weeks. I doubt if I shall continue in public life, as my private
duties do not allow me to indulge the bent of my inclination for
public affairs. When I cannot, however, I will always endeavor
to lend a hand, good and true. Virginia and Georgia must be shoulder
to shoulder. What say you?

Write to me freely at Richmond, where I shall soon be,
and let us see what we ought to do, and what we can do.

My love to my cousin, Mrs. G. Our friends here and in
Rockingham are all well. I have seven children, so that the race is
not likely to become extinct. I trust my adventures in Texas may
turn out something for the large family who are dependent on me,
but that remains to be seen.

I remain, with affectionate regard, your friend and kinsman,
Thomas W. Gilmer.

On the 7th of January 1839 the House of Delegates was organ-
ised and Thomas W. Gilmer was elected speaker. Gilmer must have
filled the position as speaker very acceptably, for in the next
session 1838/40 he was reelected to that position showing that he
had a following in the House!

From the floor of the House Gilmer had risen to the speakers-
ship, and each step upward showed him more and more obviously fitted
for a higher position. While speaker of the House for the Second
time, he was chosen to serve his State in a much greater way - being
elected Governor in February, 1840. Although he had declared himself
an antiféderal man many, many times, yet he was elected Governor by a
Whig and Conservative majority in the Legislature over James Mc-
Dowell of the opposition. The following letter written to
Franklin Minor, concerning his election is rather interesting show-
ing that he did not seek the office.

Richmond, Feb. 12, 1840.

Dear Frank:

I received your very friendly letter some days since, and
acknowledge it with sincere gratitude. I had duly considered the
suggestions which it contained, for they had occurred to me as

1. Legislative Journals 1838/39.
2. Legislative Journal 1839/40.
possibly furnishing grounds for the uncharitable class of politi-
cal hack to assail me by misconstruction and misrepresentation.
The means of defense, however, were so abundant and accessible
that on conference with our friends, and after the maturest delib-
eration, I could not think, nor could they, that any human being
would with any plausibility misunderstand me. I have never sought
the office to which I am now elected. That is well known here by
different parties. Indeed, I have throughout the winter been endeavor-
ing to secure the election of another (Mr. MacFarlan), because I
thought with his connections among the Democrats he stood the best
chance of election. This is also known to many members of both
parties. Up to a late period on the night previous to the election,
I refused to run, and continued to endeavor to elect some one else,
urging the certainty of my vote for another, and the impossibility
of voting for myself, as a reason why another candidate would be
stronger than I. On yesterday I went to the House and kept the
chair till I was nominated. I had not consented to run up to that
moment, but left the matter in the hands of my friends, Southall
and Donnan. I was elected. One Whig was absent. My election
secures, from the hearty congratulations I receive, to have been in
the highest degree acceptable to our party, and not mortifying to
the opposite party. Indeed, many of the latter have expressed their
entire satisfaction, and say they would have voted for me over all
the candidates if they had thought their constituents would have
sanctioned such a vote. Under these circumstances you will per-
ceive that neither I nor my friends have any thing to apprehend.
The office has been forced on me under circumstances which will for-
ever acquit me of entering into or conceiving any plot to obtain
it, of of desiring it. The suspicion you alluded to was never once
hinted at in the debate by the most illiberal, unscrupulous partisans.
Southall invited every one to assail my private or political char-
acter, and defied investigation. Not one word was anywhere hinted
against either, except that I had gone into the Harrison meeting
here. But for that I could have received two-thirds or more of the
General Assembly. Never fear for my character while it is in my
keeping. What am I to do? There is a general wish for me to resign
the chair, and yet I must take some time to arrange my busi-
ness. How does my wife take it? I hope my friends, knowing her
feelings will do all they can to reconcile her feeling to my duty,
and not jest with her and aggravate objections already almost in-
vincible.

Love to all.

Faithfully yours,

Thomas W. Gilmer.

Gilmer entered upon his executive duties March 31, 1840!

His administration was noted principally for his controversy with

1. Legislative Journal 1840/41.
Governor Seward of New York. In fact when he came into office he found a correspondence going on between the executives of Virginia and New York concerning certain fugitive slave stealers for whom the executive of the former state had made demand on that of the latter. "Gilmer took up the matter with his noted energy and proved himself in every way a match for the wily arts of Seward". 1 Gov. Gilmer in a letter to Gov. Seward on April 6, 1840 reviewed the cases and stated the resolution drawn up by the General Assembly of Virginia: "The late governor of this Commonwealth communicated to the General Assembly during its recent session a correspondence between this department and yourself in reference to the refusal on your part to surrender Peter Johnson, Edward Smith and Isaac Gansey, free persons of color resident in the State of New York, who have been charged with the crime of theft, namely stealing a slave within the jurisdiction and against the laws of Virginia. The General Assembly after bestowing upon this subject the most deliberate consideration under the influence of its just and necessary regard for the rights of this Commonwealth and of its perfect respect for the State of New York adopted certain resolutions in which they expressed a desire that your excellency may be induced to review the ground which you have assumed in reference to the rights of this state. I hasten therefore to bring this subject to your consideration indulging the hope that you will obviate the necessity of invoking the cooperation of other slave-holding states by such action of the right of Virginia on your part as will restore perfect harmony to our relations and reestablish

1. Tyler: Letters and Times of the Tylers p.162.
the principles of the Constitution." 1

The resolutions drawn up by the General Assembly stated that the refusal of the Gov. of New York to give up the fugitives was a violation of the Constitution of the United States and that Virginia would not abandon her rights and therefore requested their Executive to renew the correspondence with Gov. Seward. The Gov. of Virginia was also requested to open a correspondence with the executive of each of the slave holding states asking "their co-operation in any necessary and proper means which Virginia may be forced to adopt."

The Governor of New York submitted the correspondence to the Legislature of that State to get their opinion before replying to Gov. Gilmer. The Legislature of New York did not think proper to act upon it, considering this power belonging to the Executive. Nevertheless Gov. Seward delayed answering until Sept. 26, 1840 when (after many request from Gov. Gilmer) he communicated with the Virginia Executive saying his reply was ready and would be forwarded as soon as copied. The reply finally came Nov. 5, 1840. In this he stated that the Lieut. Governor of Virginia, previous to this, saw fit to demand the surrender of three persons charged with stealing a negro slave in the State of Virginia; that the affidavit was vague and informal, admitting that the slave had been retaken and restored to his master. Gov. Seward stated that the law of New York did not admit the principle that one person could be the property of another and consequently it did not admit the possibility that one man could be stolen by another. Gov. Seward,

1. Legislative Journal 1840/41.
therefore, refused to surrender the three persons, declaring: "The executive of Virginia demands what is not recognized by the Constitution and the executive of this State declines compliance with the unconstitutional demand".  

On Nov. 12, 1840, Gov. Gilmer (carrying out the instructions of the General Assembly) sent letters to the Governors of the Slave-holding States "requesting their cooperation in any necessary and proper measure of redress which Virginia may be forced to adopt". The main question he said was: whether the constitution should continue to afford to the slave-holding states that protection which was expected by these and designed by all the states. "The Governor of New York has refused to surrender these fugitives from justice on the demand of Virginia because they are charged with having stolen a slave and because slavery is not recognized by the laws of New York,... "it cannot be maintained that the constitutional rights of the slaveholding states have not been recognized by the laws of New York, they are necessarily recognized by each state of the Union so long as the federal constitution continues to be the supreme law of the land".

Next he stated the reason why Virginia asked other states to cooperate: Virginia did not regard this question as her own, but as involving principles of the utmost consequence to all the states. Thus she desired to confer with her sister states as to the mode and measure of redress instead of committing herself and them by the action. Since non-slaveholding states would only feel a general interest no appeal was made to them. He further stated that: "The

1. Legislative Journal 1840/41.
2. Ibid.
Legislature does not suggest any specific line of policy as likely to be adopted. If New York or any other state persists in this arbitrary demand on our rights, you are aware by the resolution of our Legislature that the State of Virginia does not intend to submit to so dangerous and palpable a violence of our compact. We desire to know whether those states who like ourselves have peculiar interests involved in this question concur in our conviction of right and in our resolution to maintain them."

On Dec. 2, 1840 Gov. Gilmer communicated with the Senate and House of Delegates the stand that New York had taken stating that he regretted that the sovereignty of so powerful a state as New York was invoked for the first time to extenuate theft, or to shield fugitives from justice. He also stated that the Constitution and Act of 1793 (Act passed by Congress providing specific measures for the apprehension of fugitive slaves and for the surrender of fugitives from justice) both required that the fugitive should be delivered up. The Legislature was sorely offended at the action of Seward and resolutions were passed at the session in 1840 imposing restrictions on the trade of New York. With this exception no further step was taken. The affair remained in this situation until in March 1841 when the Governor of New York demanded of the Governor of Virginia a fugitive from justice legally charged with the crime of forgery in that State who was confined in Virginia. Gilmer was a man whose word was as good as his bond and he emphatically refused to respect the rights of New York until the call of Virginia had been respected.

1. Legislative Journal 1840/41.
But the Legislature took a new tack, not exactly consistent with its vigorous course of the year before. A resolution was adopted, March 20, 1841, disapproving of the refusal of Gilmer on the ground that an breach of the Constitution "and the comity of nations on the part of New York" could not justify a similar course on the part of Virginia. The next morning Gov. Gilmer's resignation was in the hands of the Assembly who were astounded at the result of their action. Gilmer resigned because his opinions and convictions of duty to the State would not allow him to conform to the action of the Legislative Department.

During those years Gilmer was an ardent admirer of Henry Clay as the leader of the Whig party. In February of 1840 when Henry Clay came to Richmond Gov. Gilmer was invited to a public dinner given in his honor by some of the citizens of Richmond, but due to a previous engagement he had to decline the invitation. In his reply he expressed his high estimation of Clay, revealing a certain prophetic insight as to the great place the "mill boy of the Slashes" would hold in his country's annals.

Richmond, Feb. 19, 1840.

Gentlemen

I have had the satisfaction to receive your communication of this day inviting me, on behalf of the citizens of Richmond, to a public dinner on the 25th inst. in honor of Mr. Clay. I had previously made arrangements under the kind indulgence of the House of Delegates, to devote a few days to my family and business in the county of Albemarle, and leaving this city tomorrow morning, I shall not possibly return until after the period you have indicated.

I take this occasion, however, to assure you that it will always afford me pleasure to testify my high sense of the distinguished public services which entitle your guest to the token of esteem which you design to bestow on him. It is true as you intimate,

2. Ibid.
that Mr. Clay now occupies a position before the public, which enables his countrymen to regard him with that justice and impartiality by which his memory will be cherished in future history; and men of all parties will cheerfully award to him an eminently place among American patriots and Statesmen. His friends can now have no motive to exagereate his merits, while his political adversaries could never detract from them, without impairing the luster of a name which will be acknowledged by posterity as one of the beacons of his age. No difference of political sentiment nor party re-sentments should induce a generous people to withhold the tribute of their applause from one whom Virginia will be always proud to number among her most gifted sons.

I annex a sentiment, gentlemen, which may (recall) the remembrance of "auld lang syne" in the kindred bosoms of Virginia and Kentucky - united indissolubly by nature, by moral and intellectual energies agree as in 1798-9 to maintain the rights of the States and secure the liberties of the people.

With esteem etc. I have the honor to be

Your obedient servant

Thomas W. Gilmer.

In another letter written to Franklin Minor during this period Gov. Gilmer gave his opinion of the other great champion of his party - Daniel Webster. His views of the estimate of the man show that they are not colored with his political faith.

Richmond, Jan. 15, 1841.

Dear Frank:

I received your last letter yesterday and being a more punctual correspondent hasten to reply to it. I cared little about the republication of the facts of the (essays) I mentioned and do not know that my destinies will be materially affected any way by it. They contained what I esteemed sound views as to the duties of our party in 1838 and which I think peculiarily important to be remembered now and hence I desired to promulge them, merely to acquit myself of my duty and let it be known that I was so far consistent and sound. You say nothing of Tom's views as to my correspondence with Gov. Seward. He has maintained a studied silence, which induced me to apprehend he was not very favorable to my interest. I sent him a copy. His paper is rather a poor concern, I think, and seems to have disappointed public expectation altogether. He has approved Webster's appointment as Secretary of State, and is quoted by the Intelligence as a sign from Albequina, where I should suppose there's cannot be more than one hundred votes who would approve it. It is universally disapproved here by our party,
and letters have been written by everybody who could write to
Washington entreat our friends there to avert so heavy and dis-
asterous a calamity. If not averted it knocks us into a cocked hat
in Virginia and everywhere. The editors of the Whig (or rather the
senior of the concern), I believe, is the only Whig here who ap-
proves, and his article a few days since, like Tom Wood's, will
dean to undo what the whole party are trying to effect. The vice-
President and all the Southern Whigs at Washington think as we do
on this point. Tyler wrote me he would come and stay with me dur-
ing Harrison's visit here, and I shall try then to get Webster
put into some dark corner, or thrown overboard entirely. He is a
Federalist of the worst die, a blackguard and vulgar debauchee; and
but for his splendid talents would be in jail, or on some dunghill.
He won't do, and the men who cling to him can't stand.

You ask me who is to go to the Senate No. 1. I answer
Rives, I suppose. You ask as to No. 2. Non sum informatus. Many
have spoken to me about running for both places. I have invariably
answered that I did not seek either, and wished it distinctly and
emphatically understood that I would not be in anybody's way, nor
embarrass my friends. If after so broad a declaration they can
agree, as I suppose they will on some other, of course I shall not
be the man. If, however, they find difficulty, as some of our
friends apprehend, I may be chosen as a dernier resort. I thank
you for your advice. Do you observe any symptom of too much ambition?
I thought I had been very modest and self-denying, and surely the
ground I take and have taken for two years as to proffered pro-
motion to the Senate entitles me to a verdict of acquittal from a
charge of restless ambition. I try to be, as far as vain mortal
can be, devoted to the public good, while I cannot help feeling
gratified by the confidence of my countrymen and their desire to
promote me. I do not mean to run ahead of the public wish on
this head.

We are all well except myself. My health has not been
good for a month, though it is mending.

Love to all,
Thomas W. Gilmer.

Having voluntarily retired from the Chair of State Gilmer
threw himself once more with increased zeal and industry into his
profession. Such a man was not permitted long to remain in pri-
vate life. He was promptly taken up by the Whigs of Virginia and
the people of his district soon after elected him to Congress.
His attitude toward the Congressional appointment was clearly sta-
ed in the following letter to Mr. Strother.

1. Mr. Strother was a member of the House of Delegates.
Marth 3, 1841.

My Dear Sir:

Understanding that you have been kind enough to think me worthy of the seat in the United States Senate which is to be conferred by the General Assembly to-day, I take the liberty of expressing to you very candidly my wishes and feelings on the occasion. This is one of those honors of the state which is neither to be sought nor declined, yet there are peculiar reasons which induce me at this time not to embarrass any one in casting his vote, nor would I accept the distinction at the hand of a reluctant Legislature. It is a distinction moreover which should belong to the state and not to mere party.

I am informed that some doubt has been expressed as to my opinions on the subject of a United States Bank and the distribution of the proceeds of the public lands. If you hear it repeated I will be obliged to you to do me the justice to state that my opinions have undergone no change on these questions. I have always regarded a national bank as both unconstitutional and inexpedient and I am still in favor of distributing the surplus proceeds of the public lands. When this subject was under consideration in the House of Delegates some years since, I was in the chair and gave a silent vote. I then thought however, as I now do that it would be unwise and dangerous to distribute the gross proceeds of the lands, thereby creating a vacuum in the treasury which must be filled from other sources of revenue.

I have alluded to these subject now because I am unwilling under any circumstances to be misunderstood or misrepresented, and because I am in a position which deprives me to a great extent of the means of explanation or defense.

With many thanks for the generous confidence, which though almost a stranger to you, I have received at your hands.

I remain,

Your humble servant,

Thomas W. Gilmer.

Even though Gilmer stated in the above letter that he did not seek the position yet in April, 1841 he was put in nomination for Congress by the Whigs of Louisa County against James H. Garland, a Conservative. Gilmer in his letter of reply emphatically denounced the Bank and yet was elected by the Whigs as "every inch a Whig". From the Richmond Enquirer is taken the following account of the meeting in Louisa along with Gilmer's reply: "At a meet-

ing of a portion of the Whigs of Louisa, held at the Court House on Saturday, the 10th of April, 1840, on motion, William A. Abler was called to the chair and F. W. Jones appointed Secretary....

1st resolved: that Thomas J. Gilmer, Esq., is the fit and suitable person to be voted for by the Whigs of the Albemarle district as their representative in the next Congress of the United States.

2nd resolved: that John Slater, Francis W. Jones, Nathaniel Thompson and Tobias S. Callis are appointed a committee to inform Mr. Gilmer of the nomination."

Gilmer's reply was as follows:

Richmond, April 12, 1841.

To Messrs. John Slater, F. W. Jones, Nathaniel Thompson and Tobias S. Callis, committee.

Gentlemen:

I have received your communication of the 10th inst. covering resolutions of a portion of the Whigs of Louisa, recommending me as a suitable person to be voted for by the Whigs of the Albemarle district as a representative in the next Congress of the United States.

Previous to the last Albemarle court, I had received many urgent solicitations from every county of the district; and in a public interview on that day with Mr. Garland, I proposed to him, to obviate all difficulty and embarrassment to ourselves or our friends, that an equal number of Whigs and Conservatives, selected from any part every part of the district, should decide which of us should be the candidate. This proposition was twice made by me, and twice rejected by Mr. Garland.... Since that time I have received numerous evidences of the determination of my friends in various parts of the district to hold a poll for me....

Every American must be sensible that in their present posture, our public affairs require firm, united and energetic councils. The threatening aspect of our foreign relations with one of the most powerful European nations, a nation with whom we have already twice involved in war; the numerous causes of domestic excitement resulting from conflicts of interest or opinion; the sudden and lamented demise of a president, who had been called to the helm of State by an unexampled majority of his countrymen, and before he had organized an Administration from which so much was hoped, all admonish us that it is our duty to agree where we can and differ only where we must. It is a source of great consolation and encouragement under these circumstances that the executive
trust of the Federal government has devolved on one who is well known and justly appreciated in Virginia, and who comes up to the standard prescribed by our Jefferson in honesty, capacity, and fidelity to the Constitution. I venture to say that John Tyler will never disappoint the confidence that has been reposed in him; that he will regard his own and every other office under the government as a sacred trust, created for the public good, and not for a party or for private emolument....A union has been effected throughout the United States, among men of various shades of political opinion as to the fundamental principles of government, which has for its object, on one side, to sustain, and, on the other, to expel the late administration. The late presidential election, while it affords a strong guaranty that the contemplated reform in the abuses of the Federal government must be accomplished, affords also an opportunity indeed, it creates almost necessity, for parties to occupy towards one another, and towards the great measure of government positions at once more natural and more patriotic. For some years past, parties have been acting more in preference to devotion to measures, and hence we have found that, on the accession of the last two of three presidents to power, the country has seen one party pledged in advance to support and another to oppose any act of their administration which must rely on the will and justice of its measures for popular support, and which cannot be opposed unless its measures render it obnoxious to opposition. While every Whig in Virginia is content to subject the present administration to the tests of the Constitution and of fidelity to the public interest, no Democrat, it is hoped, will_content without a fault, or refuse to give it a fair and impartial trial. Under these circumstances, I am at a loss to perceive the object or propriety of any man occupying towards the present administration the position of Conservative. It either implies distrust of those responsible for the administration of the government, or a determination to maintain under any circumstances, a party organization distinct from both the other parties of the day.

The currency, and the mode of collecting and keeping the Federal revenue, have been subjects of absorbing interest for some years past...As a representative and an individual, I have been opposed to the charter of a national bank, because I have seen no sufficient reason to regard it either as a power specifically granted, or as a necessary and proper means for carrying into effect the commercial, the fiscal, or any other of the powers vested by the Constitution in the Federal government. Neither the power to coin money and regulate the value thereof, or to lay and collect taxes, duties, etc., or to regulate commerce, involves, in my opinion, that of regulating the currency, exchanges, individual or corporate obligations, or any other representative of credit which private contract or the laws of States may sanction...I was opposed to the removal of the deposits from the former Bank of the United States, and to the Sub-Treasury bill, which though it became a law on the 4th of July last, has never been enforced
by its friends or foes. While I think the State banks the safest and most convenient depositaries of the public revenue, I regard the former scheme of general deposits, or any scheme which permits those banks to trade on the revenues of the government, as the most obnoxious of all systems yet tried. I regard the principle which contemplates a separation of the revenue of the government from the funds of the Bank as a sound one, and I believe it may be accomplished, as far as it is desirable or safe, by depositing the public money specially with the Bank."

Gilmer took his seat as member of the House of Representatives May 31, 1841. Several letters written to Frank Minor during this time give his opinions on public issues.

Shepherdstown, May 25, 1841.

Dear Frank:

...... I expect to go to Washington on Friday. I spent Sunday and Monday there as I came on; dined with his majesty on Joel and greens, took my seat in the House, etc., etc., There is now a dead sea at Washington, all anxiety for the extra session; everybody speculating and nobody knowing anything that is to happen. The President told me a good deal about his views, etc., etc., but as I am not at liberty to break the seals, least said soonest mended. I think we shall have a short session. Missouri and Mississippi being absent is a good excuse for not agitating general questions, and therefore a fortunate occurrence, I think, in the present position of parties, etc. I hear nothing of the chair except general rumors not to be relied on. I have no expectation of success, and hope my friends make no calculations for me. "Blessed are they that expect little, for they shall not be disappointed."

Drop me a line occasionally, and remember me to your wife, Aunt Sarah, and Uncle Dick, and everybody that cares for your friend, etc.,

Thomas W. Gilmer.


Dear Frank:

...... I have no news. Everything here passeth comprehension, but the cat will be out of the bag, I suppose, soon. I hope for the best, and if Tyler is firm and true all is well.

Faithfully yours,

Thomas W. Gilmer

During the session of 1841 the Fiscal Bank Bill was fought stubbornly in the Senate. Clay boasted that the country was in favor of a bank. After a long fight the bill finally passed the
Senate July 27th by a bare majority. The bill now went to the House. In that body Gilmer had the day before come to a complete understanding with his Whig friends. For seven years he had been a member of the Whig party and had thought he understood their principles, but it seemed he said, that he had been acting under some delusion. Now that they were all here together he wanted to tell them that they need not expect his cooperation if a national bank or a disturbance of the compromise act was their object.  

In spite of the strong opposition to the Fiscal Bank Bill by Gilmer, Henry Wise and others, it finally passed the House and was sent to President Tyler who promptly vetoed it. In a letter to Franklin Minor Gilmer called attention to his speech concerning the Fiscal Bank Bill:

House of Representatives, July 27, 1841.

Dear Frank:

I have made a speech to-day which I would be glad for you and our friends generally to see. It shall be written and published tomorrow; but this speech I wish to have correctly understood, as I think it will show who is who, and what is what here, and why the same harmony does not exist now that has existed. I will try and get some copies to Charlottesville by our court. Who will run for the House of Delegates in poor Cole's place? You should be the man, if it meets with the public approbation. I have much to say to you, but find no time to write. Rives is very cordial with me, consults me, etc., about everything. He is not in good spirits.

God bless you, and love to all at Eugenont.  

Thomas W. Gilmer.

When the Whigs broke with President Tyler Gilmer remained true to his position in the canvas preceding and would not vote for a national bank. Tyler's closest friends, Wise, Gilmer and Upshur were known as the "Corporate's Guard".

Gilmer while a member of the 27th Congress - 1842/43 (he was

reelected in 1843), was in favor of retrenchment and reform. In
the session of 1842 Gilmer was Chairman of the select committee on
Retrenchment. When the civil and diplomatic appropriation bill
was discussed Gilmer was opposed to extra money being appropriated
for extra help. He said there were already too many clerks with
very little to do! Because Gilmer recommended various retrench-
ments in the Civil Service he won the honorable sobriquet of
"Retrenchment Gilmer."²

A letter written in 1843 shows his desire to have the finan-
cial question explained satisfactorily to the people. He felt that
the approaching contest (presumably the Presidential election ) de-
pended greatly on a true understanding of these financial issues.

Dear Sir³:

Charlottesville, July 12, 1843.

find from much intercourse with the people that the chief
stumbling-block with many who have heretofore opposed the measures
of the national republican party, is the prevailing belief that the
agency of government by means of a national bank, protective duties,
etc., can not only prevent money from becoming scarce, but ac-
tually make it plenty. It is a part of our nature to ascribe our
misfortunes to any cause rather than our own indiscretion, and
hence while men are generally ready to claim the credit of good for-
tune to themselves, they are apt to ascribe their bad to government.
The conviction that governments of limited powers cannot legislate
for the exclusive benefit of any portion of the people is entertained
by many in the abstract who yet resist its application. The gen-
eral pecuniary embarrassments of our country and the individual
suffering which has ensued, have caused a great many intelligent
and patriotic persons to forget the lessons of their own experience
and the disastrous fluctuations of our public and private credit,
and to hope that permanent prosperity can be secured by means of
some national corporation which it is thought will certainly have
the power and may have the disposition "to make times better".
The experience you have had in public affairs and the deep re-
flexion you have bestowed on these subjects (the most difficult
perhaps connected with government) will enable you better than any
man I am acquainted with to explain the relations of causes and

3. The name is not given in the copy.
and their effects so as to make them obvious. The present is a propitious period for such explanation. The people are now investigating these subjects. Though there yet remains much prejudice — explained by our party conflicts, the popular mind is open to the convictions of politicians of reason and truth, and I think you will contribute essentially to the prosperity of our country and add another to the numerous claims your already possess to the public gratitude by explaining in a familiar manner the true sources of permanent prosperity, the dangers of monopolies and of fluctuating policy which under legislation itself a subject of speculation, enriching the few at the expense of the many. You have frequently considered these topics. I am aware in debate. But something more practical and better adapted to the mass of business and reflecting men is wanted at the present juncture. Something which will come home to the "business and bosoms" of the people. Show them the interests which they have in the great political questions now at issue. The periods in our history when these question have heretofore arisen were never so favorable to their full consideration and fair decision as the present. The success of the republican party, I think, in the approaching contest depends in a great measure on the right apprehension of these questions. You have leisure now, and I feel persuaded that you will not withhold your powerful aid whenever principles so vital, free government are involved.

If you concur with me in these suggestions, your own better judgment will enable you to select the most appropriate mode of giving to the public (what I am sure they will appreciate) your views. Pardon the liberty I have taken and if you do not approve my suggestion, think no more of it. The task will then devolve on some less competent hand.

With great esteem, etc.,
Your friend
Thomas W. Gilmer.

The question of the annexation of Texas was the dominant one under Tyler, who was a sort of foster-mother to the "starry ootl" Texas and it is but natural that Gilmer should have become interested in the question. The annexation of Texas really became a public question in Van Buren's administration. In fact as far back as 1803 at the time of the Louisiana purchase a strong claim was put up to include Texas. The Southerners wanted Texas from 1803 to 1819. In 1825 John Quincy Adams wanted the annexation of Texas, but he really had his eye on the Southern votes in favoring
as follows:  

Washington, January 10, 1843.

Dear Sir:

You ask if I have expressed the opinion that Texas would be annexed to the United States. I answer, yes; and this opinion has not been adopted without reflection, or without a careful observation of causes, which I believe, are rapidly bringing about this result. I do not know how far these causes have made the same impression on others, but I am persuaded that the time is not distant when they will be felt in all their force. The excitement which you apprehend may arise; but it will be temporary, and in the end salutary.

I am as you know, a strict constructionist of the powers of our federal government; and I do not admit the force of mere precedent to establish authority under written constitutions. The power conferred by the constitution over our foreign relations, and the repeated acquisitions of territory under it, seem to me to leave this question open, as one of expediency.

But you anticipate objections with regard to the subject of slavery. This is indeed a subject of extreme delicacy, but it is one on which the annexation of Texas will have the most salutary influence. Some have thought that the proposition would endanger our union. I am of a different opinion. I believe it will bring about a better understanding of our relative rights and obligations.

Having acquired Louisiana and Florida, we have an interest and a frontier on the Gulf of Mexico, and along our interior to the Pacific, which will not permit us to close our eyes or fold our arms with indifference to the events which a few years may disclose in that quarter. We have already had one question of boundary with Texas; other questions must soon arise, under our revenue laws, and on other points of necessary intercourse, which it will be difficult to adjust. The institutions of Texas, and her relations with other governments, are yet in that condition which inclines her people (who are our countrymen) to unite their destinies with ours. THIS MUST BE DONE SOON, OR NOT AT ALL. There are numerous tribes of Indians along both frontiers, which can easily become the cause or the instrument of border wars. Our own population is pressing onwards to the Pacific. No power can restrain it. The pioneer from our Atlantic seaboard will soon kindle his fires and erect his cabin beyond the Rocky Mountains and on the Gulf of California. If Mohammed comes not to the mountain, the mountain will go to Mohammed. Every year adds new difficulties to our progress, as natural and as inevitable as the current of the Mississippi. These difficulties will soon, 'like mountains interposed',

"Make enemies of nations,
Which now, like Kindred drops,
Right mingle into one."

Truly yours,

Thomas W. Gilmer.

This letter was sent under cover to Gen. Jackson by A.V. Brown of Tennessee, whose letter of reply warmly endorsing the arguments of Gilmer, was published in March, 1843. Gilmer thought Texas would seek terms with England or possibly France. If England gained Texas she would overthrow slavery there, and thus ultimately overthrow slavery in the South. The fact that Texas might be lost forever had inspired Gilmer's letter.

Gilmer's letter created furor and disturbance in the country and in Congress. So great was the feeling that on the closing day of the Congressional session John Quincy Adams issued a reply in the nature of an address to the people of the free states of the union. This address was issued May 3, 1843 and signed by thirteen Congressmen at that time. This was published in the National Intelligencer May 4, 1843. In this protest (believed to have been written by Adams and which he is known to have presented to the newspapers for publication) is cited the most outstanding evidence for the belief of the signors that the Southerners were determined to bring Texas into the Union for the slave interest. This address attacked speeches made by Henry A. Wise in favor of annexation and quoted the letter of Gilmer given above. In addition the fear is expressed that by the admission of a new slave territory (Texas) and slave states, "the undue ascendency of the slaveholding power in the government shall be secured and riveted beyond redemption." In the concluding paragraphs Adams and his fellow signors made this declaration of political theory:

"We hold that there is not only 'no political necessity' for it, 'no advantages to be derived from it', but that there is no
constitutional power delegated to any department of the national government to authorize it: that no act of congress or treaty for annexation can impose the least obligation upon the several states of this union to submit to such an unwarrantable act, or to receive into their family and fraternity such misbegotten and illegitimate progeny.

"We hesitate not to say that annexation, effected by any act or proceeding of the federal government, or any of its departments, WOULD BE IDENTICAL WITH DISSOLUTION. It would be a violation of our national compact, its objects, design and the great elementary principles which entered into its formation, of a character so deep and fundamental, and would be an attempt to eternity and institution and a power of nature so unjust in themselves, so injurious to the interests and abhorrent to the feelings of the people of the free states, as, in our opinion, not only to inevitably to result in a dissolution of the union, but fully to justify it; and we not only assert that the people of the free states, "ought not to submit to it," but we say, with confidence, THEY WOULD NOT SUBMIT TO IT. We know their present temper and spirit on this subject too well to believe for a moment that they would become parties criminals in any such subtle contrivance for the irretrievable perpetuation of AN INSTITUTION which the wisest and best men who formed our federal constitution, as well from the slave as the free states, regarded as an evil and a curse, soon to become extinct, under the operation of laws to be passed prohibiting the slave trade, and the progressive influence of the principles of the revolution.

"To prevent the success of this nefarious project—to preserve from such gross violation the constitution of our country, adopted expressly "to secure the blessings of liberty" and not the perpetuation of slavery— and to prevent the speedy and violent dissolution of the union, we invite you to unite without distinction of party, in an immediate expression of your views on this subject, in such manner as you may deem best calculated to answer the end proposed."1

This address was prepared just at the close of the session and was presented to very few members for their signatures for want of time—only thirteen signing it at that time. It was subsequently sent to several others for their signatures at their respective places of residence. Eight others signed it and later these names were attached to it whenever published by the request of one of the signors. The Congressional Record of that session reveals the fact that of the twenty-one names signed to this doc-

ument ten were from New England, seven from New York.

Previous to this on February 28, Adams had presented the following resolutions in the House. "Resolved, That by the Constitution of the United States no power is delegated to their Congress, or to any departments or departments of their government, to affix to the union any foreign state, or the people thereof." "Resolved, That any attempt of the government of the United States, by an act of Congress or by treaty, to annex to this union, the republic of Texas, or the people thereof, would be a violation of the Constitution of the United States, null and void, and to which the free states of this union and their people ought not to submit." 

"Objections being made the resolutions were not received, the southern members showing a disinclination to have the subject agitated in the house at present." 

On May 15, 1843, Gilmer wrote a reply to the address "To the people of the free states of the union" which was published in the National Intelligencer. In this reply he defended his position concerning the annexation of Texas and said it was not a scheme to aggrandize the South as Messrs. Adams etc., seemed to think. Then he said that: "The address which you have published is an imposing though not a very candid appeal to the people of the non-slaveholding states, not so much against the annexation of Texas as against the harmony of the union under the present constitution." He wanted to know what slavery had to do with the question. He said: "The true question is not now, any more than it was in 1787, whether there can be more territory added to the union or more

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
slaveholding states admitted, but whether the territory and the states we have can continue to be governed by a constitution which was universally believed until recently, to have settled forever the relative rights and obligations of the states as to slavery." He further stated that the signers of the address left no room to doubt that they contemplated the abolition of slavery in the United States by the agency of the federal government. "These gentlemen, he said, cannot be ignorant of the fact that the federal constitution recognizes slavery as one of the objects entitled to its protection, and as one of the elements of the government which it created." He continued: "It is your correspondents, then, and not the advocates of annexation, who meditate a dissolution of the union by virtue of their 'progressive principles of revolution'. "They have undertaken in advance to speak the voice of 'the people of the free states', and to declare that they will not submit to the perpetuation of an institution which is acknowledged to be recognized by the constitution. They have made this declaration without qualification. Its fulfillment, according to their prediction, is just as inevitable, whether Texas comes into the union or not..... Their paramount object seems to be the abolition of slavery in the United States, and not the preservation of the constitution of the union." He closed with the hope expressed that these gentlemen do not reflect the feelings of the non-slaveholding states. "The union, he said, is as necessary now as it always was for protection... "Our union has no danger to apprehend from those who believe that its genius is expansive and progressive, but from those who think
that the limits of the United States are already too large and the principles of 1776 too old-fashioned for this fastidious age." 1

A letter written by Gilmer on Dec. 17, 1843 to Calhoun stated that negotiations had been commenced for the annexation of Texas.

Washington, Dec. 17, 1843.

My Dear Sir:

At the instance of a mutual friend I venture to drop you a line, not to speak of the chances, calculations and chapter of accidents of a presidential election (For these I have very little appetite) - but to remind you of a conversation we had nearly a year since on a subject, which as I then predicted, is beginning to attract general and deserved attention. I allude to the annexation of Texas to our Union. I have not doubted for some time that this question would soon assume a practical shape and that its results would ultimately (if not immediately) ensue to the peace, permanence and prosperity of the Union. If the question were free from some prejudices (which by the way apply with equal force to a portion of the Union as it is) it would not be approached for a moment as one of only local importance. It is indeed a great American question and involves the first principle of American independence. The efforts of European powers which have been or may be made to establish an influence in Texas prejudicial to our commercial interests and republican institutions, will probably aid in giving this question a national aspect somewhat sooner than could be hoped from its intrinsic merits. You remember I asked you last winter to turn your mind to this subject in all its bearings and to be ready to meet it. As a candidate for public favor, I would not have you or any other to be omitted on this question in advance. I do not therefore approach you as one of those now in the public eye as candidate for the chief magistracy, but as an illustrious citizen whose opinions would add additional force to any station, as I believe, this would not be influenced by a desire to obtain it. I have no doubt you have bestowed much reflection on this particular subject. While I am not at liberty (nor am I informed) to speak of the precise state of this question at present, I will say to you that negotiations have been commenced, to object of which is to annex Texas to the Union. On a question of such magnitude, it is not meet, that a voice which for three than thirty years has been heard with so much interest on all public questions, should be silent. I will esteem it a favor and so will many others, if you will give us the benefit of your counsels now. They shall be regarded as confidential if you choose or otherwise. You are familiar with the negotiations, correspondence etc., between our government and Spain from 1803 to 1819 with regard to the boundaries of Louisiana under the treaty with France. The effect of annexation on the interests (domestic and foreign) of our country, however, is the point to which public attention will be chiefly directed. The test will be practically applied, whether the con-

promises of the constitution are to be regarded, or the Union en-
dangered by violating rights named under the compact of 1787.

Excuse this liberty, I beg you, and allow me to subscribe myself
With sincere esteem and very high consideration,
Your friend etc.,
Thomas W. Gilmer

Adams addressed to the free states of the Union along with Gil-
mer's reply to it caused a great agitation of the Texas question
throughout the country and in the summer of 1844 the Democrats in
making up their party program declared for the annexation of Texas.
With this impetus Texas was annexed just before Tyler went out -
a trophy to the efforts of Tyler-Gilmer-Wise and others of the
"Corporal's Guard."

On Feb. 15, 1844 Gilmer was appointed Secretary of the Navy
on the endorsement of the leading men in Congress. During the
earlier part of Tyler's administration, when there was a stubborn
fight over the Fiscal Bank Bill, his Cabinet expressed views in
opposition to his. Finally when the Fiscal Corporation Bill passed
and Tyler vetoed it the Cabinet, taking the advice of Clay, resigned,
with the exception of Webster who remained to arrange foreign af-
fairs, particularly the treaty with England. Tyler immediately
selected another Cabinet, but this was reorganized in July 1843 and
Abel P. Upshur of Virginia who had been first selected as Secretary
of the Navy was made Secretary of State. Then David Henshaw of
Massachusetts was made Secretary of the Navy. Henshaw rejected
by the Senate and Thomas W. Gilmer was soon after installed in the
vacant Secretaryship.¹ A letter to a friend announces his appointment:

Washington, Feb. 16, 1844.

My dear Friend,

Well, I am Secretary of the Navy for better, for

¹. Tyler: Letters and Times of the Tylers Vol. II. p 423, 268.
worse, God only knows how it will turn out. At least I may say that
my friends have no cause to blush at the manner in which I got it.
It was tendered and pressed again and again, and I was urged by men
of all parties to accept. Senators, the most leading Senators, and
whole delegations came to me and offered to hold meetings to urge
me to accept. I went in yesterday and was unanimously confirmed
on the spot without reference to a committee, a very unusual thing,
if not without precedent. I should be insensible if I did not feel
highly gratified at this. There is more in the manner I have been
appointed than in the office. I forward my resignation to the
Governor by to-night's mail and write to the Speaker taking leave
of the House. Tomorrow morning I enter on an untried (field I was
about to say but I must now be more nautical, and I will therefore
say) ocean of difficulties. I will do my duty to the country, and
trust in heaven to guide my poor judgement for the public good.
The longer I live the more I bow down before infinite wisdom and
mercy and feel my total want of strength, wisdom, and virtue to do
my duty without the aid of Him who has blessed me to reach beyond what
I ever did or may deserve. You may imagine that I am relieved by
being out of the turmoil of a heartless contest with my opinions.
I am too little of a partisan to be a politician. I know it, and
I wish to retire with credit if I can next month. Mrs. G. takes the
Secretaryship—tell Cousin G., as she does everything else—quite
calmly. We shall live with the salary in a plain way. The Navy
Department is incomparably the most difficult and responsible of all
and may become one of very great responsibility in a short time.
I preferred the War, but the wish was so universal for me to take
the other that I yielded. God bless you all.
Very truly in haste your friend,

Thomas J. Gilmer.

Just a few days later, Feb. 20, he accompanied the President
and Cabinet on a trip down the Potomac on the U.S. steam frigate,
Princeton. The Princeton was supplied with improved guns and a
number of other improvements in the construction of a "sea of war"
Anxious to exhibit the new work Commodore Stockton had invited all
of the dignitaries of Washington to go on the trail trip. "The Prin-
ceton proceeded down the Potomac, and the President and the visitors
regarded with delight the rapid motion of the steamer and the power
of her guns which were fired with great success. After the collision
and on the return trip, a final shot from the great gun at the bow,
named the "Peacemaker" was ordered by the Commodore. But from some
defect in the temper of the iron, the heated gun exploded with the result of killing the Secretary of State, Abel P. Upshur, the Secretary of the Navy, Thomas W. Gilmer, Hon. Virgil Haxey of Maryland, Commodore Kennedy, David Gaviliner of New York, Father of Mrs. Tyler, and wounding and shocking many others among them was Thomas H. Benton. The President was in the cabin at the time." 1 The tragedy occurred just opposite Washington's home, Mt. Vernon.

On the day of the funerals all business houses were closed for the day and Congressmen, as well as people from all parts of the city, assembled to pay their last tribute of respect to the dead. Gilmer was buried at "Mount Air", Albemarle County, Virginia.2

"A gloom overhung the whole country for days. The blow fell more heavily upon the President than on any other man in the Union.

'You have heard no doubt,' he wrote his daughter, Mrs. Jones, on the 4th of March, 1844, 'of the terrible occurrence on board the Princeton, together with all particulars. A more heart-rending scene scarcely ever occurred. What a loss I have sustained in Upshur and Gilmer. They were truly my friends, and would have aided me for the next twelve months with great effect. But it is all over now and I must look for a new cabinet." 3

Some years later, 1856, in making a speech on "The Death of the Cabinet" at Petersburg before the Petersburg Library Association, Mr. Tyler made the following statement concerning Upshur and Gilmer:

"Thus were those two noble sons of their blessed Commonwealth placed side by side to perform important parts on the great theatre of the world, to win its admiration and receive its applause.

1. Newspaper clipping filed with Gilmer Papers.
2. William and Mary Quarterly Vol XV.
3. Tyler: Letters and Times of the Tylers Vol. II.
Endowed with the gift of a high intellect, governed in their political actions by the same principles, controlled by the lofty ambition of recording their names on a fair page of history, and therefore above all things, intent upon acquitting themselves faithfully of their high duties, the two might have been regarded, almost without a metaphor, as twin stars in the firmament, borrowing and giving light from and to each other."

Although Gilmer cannot be placed with the great leaders of his country, yet he did play an important part. In fact, he was just beginning to be known nationally when death claimed him. He was stern and inflexible in his resolves and no combination of circumstances could drive him from his purpose when once it became fixed. He would maintain his convictions whether they made him popular or unpopular. "He esteemed truth the spring of heroic virtue and followed it wherever it beckoned." In conclusion his true character may be summed up in the following words of President Tyler: "He was one who, had occasion offered, would readily have acted out the saying of Metullus: 'To do an ill action is base; to do a good one, which involved you in no danger, is nothing more than common: but it is the property of a good man to do great and good things, though he risks everything by it."\(^1\)

2. Ibid.
Letter to Francis Walker Gilmer

Ridgway, May 26, 1816.

Dear uncle Francis,

I received your letter about a week ago, and I assure you it was dearer to me than I could have supposed the language or blessings of man could have been, it consoled the heart of one who is about to embark into the sea of the troubles, miseries, and misfortunes of this world, it pointed out a track by the pursuing of which, man by his own exertions may obtain glory, honor and happiness, and may stand on the firm basis, and be covered by and protected by the impenetrable aegis of justice and equity. I endeavor to act according to it, or as near as possible, but it is beyond the power of the human race for one to distribute justice to his fellow man. I do take particular notice of the most important passages of Ovid, and I admire the stile of Ovid very much, the contest between Ajax and Ulysses, is, it is true, a very fine thing, but I think the description that the Cyclop gives of Galatea is more so. You say that I should write compositions of my own, it is what I constantly do, if it will not be disagreeable I will give you one. I choose a subject, it is true, that I am unable to manage, but I will do as well as I can. The subject is that of the present state of the world.

Though I have seen but few of the devices of this world of misery, though few of my juvenile years have past, though I have felt no other air but that of my native land, I have only seen the sun to rise in the golden east and to descend behind the western hills, but why should I desire to see more, why desire to see the miseries of the world, and see it oppressed by revolutions and wars, to hear the hoarse sound of the terrifying drum disturbing the harmony of a peaceful world, the roar of the destructive cannon resounds from shore to shore, hear the rueful tale of the Comenting widow, the shrieks of the fair maiden whose snowy temple has been pierced by the deadly steel of the barbarous savage, hear the complaints of the helpless orphan, who has this world of misery to pass through, destitute of father! mother! friend! to wipe away the tear of sorrow from his cheek, to heal the painful anguish of his bosom, the scepter warm and dripping with the gore of one is plunged into the breast of another, the husbandman is torn from the midst of his ripened harvests, he takes a last, and eternal farewell of his consort, that consort who had attended him through all the cares and misfortunes of this life, his prattling babes once sailing now look up for a last time to their father, and the bold, the aspiring youth seizes the weapon, and prepares for battle, he looks at the heaving breast of the virgin, the darling of his heart? and the comfort of his bosom? he is encouraged! he rushes to battle, many are the
victims of his sword, he breaks the thick embodied phalanx of his enemy, but at last when the victory is in his hand, is lost! he falls a victim to death, those eyes once sparkling with rising hope, now sink in death! now pales that visage once the darling, the delight of his friends, the glory of his country, it sinks in death, his aged parents go down to the grave, their hoary locks moist with the tears of affliction - Such are the effects of war.

Now let us turn our attention to the incertitude of life, see a man to-day on a dazzling throne tomorrow in a dungeon, today he sees vast crowds of human beings bowing in submissive obedience to his will, and though the earth and even the pillars of heaven shake and tremble at his frown, though death and vengeance may be in his hand desolation and destruction in his eye, still he is but an insect, when fortune changes, how different is the scene, where now are those stern looks which once could have made the empire of the world to have tottered to its base and fallen, now his feats and actions are in oblivion, now his power has sunk and is changed to prayer and supplication, now his bended knees he implores mercy, see Bonaparte on the throne of France! the terror of the world! see him rolling on the downy bed of luxury, trampling the bright stars of heaven under his feet, riding in the golden chariots of the sun, tomorrow he is happy to find shelter in the meanest hut from the threatening storm, he is cheered by the dismal screams of the owl, taking all things into consideration, the world is daily growing more depopulated, and sinking into an abyss far more horrible than the black waves of the stygian lake, in the first place life is but a breeze which moves among the leaves of the forest and sinks neglected into the valleys, man enters on the stage of life bare, and destitute, he labors in vain for happiness, happiness is beyond the reach of man, where is that man that enjoys perfect happiness, it is true he may enjoy it, in a degree when sitting by his peaceful fireside, surrounded by wife! children! and friends! he wipes the sweat from his brow, and turns, and views his harvests ripened, the bowl of myrrh goes round, but it is but little way to the bottom, it is true also the first prospects of youth are flattering, when a youth sees the world before him he views it in the most favorable light, he thinks that all things are made for him, and that he is happy, but soon! too soon, are his aspiring hopes baffled! his extensive mind is confined to the narrow compass of the grave, when surrounded by friends! fortune! and, all the blessings of life, snf rd hr thought by peace! and happiness! he is clipt in the bud, by the sickle of a devouring, and inexorable death, The hero when he views the field of battle, the empty carcasses of millions, the golden standard of victory, when he receives the applause of a grateful people, the loud praises of the youth, the blessings of the aged, he feels happy for a moment, but when he comes to recollect how much slaughter he has caused, how many souls he has sunk to the shady region of Pluto he is miserable, the sage when he is in his solitary grotto conversing
with those wise men whose bodies have sunk into oblivion ten thousand years ago, but whose fame! whose memory! shall nevertheless thinks himself happy, when far from the confusion of the world, not troubled by the cares of any! he thinks himself too secure! too invulnerable, to be moved by any misfortune, but he views the sins of man and grieves. Americans! although you may rise the indisputed masters of the main; although you may hear the golden scepter and the starry ensign of victory in your right hand the branch of olive in your left hand with all, its fruits, and in this manner may run over the world in triumph, although the American may ascend in triumph the loftiest heights, the most inaccessible promonitories of nature, in quest of one who will dare to oppose him, he descends into the most gloomy caverns of the earth in quest of one who will dare to oppose his front to his invincible arm, the lion master of the forest turns for the first time his back loaded with the spoils of conquered region, and flies in vain for refuge, the furious bullock that has often turned aside from his front the destructive thunderbolt of Jupiter dares not to present it to the American, but with all this Americans, we are still in the hands of fortune, we are not yet the rulers of nature, we have not yet the helm, or the scepter in our hands with which to rule all things, there is a god who presides over us yet, who is just, and if we be but just ourselves, will reward us. Thus, my dear Uncle have I endeavored to describe my sentiments on this subject as well as possible, if you find any fault with it I would thank you to tell me, excuse bad writing.

your affectionate nephew

T.W.Gilmer

( Letter of Francis Walker Gilmer to George Gilmer, the father of Thomas Walker Gilmer )

Winchester 18th Feb. 1816.

Dear Brother George -

I have now removed so far from your neighbourhood and have ever been so little able to give you any valuable proofs of my affection when in it, that I fear you will all cease to remember that you have such a brother. The misfortunes which have scattered us over the world have borne hard upon all of us, because we were all affectinate and tender hearted to each other, but being the youngest of the brothers, they have pressed with increased severity upon me. For much more than half my life I have had no home, and it may yet be long before I acquire one.
I am glad however that you are all comfortably fixed and raising families who will remember you as their fathers, and love you I hope with the same tenderness that we did ours. It is a subject of very sincere regret to me that circumstances have compelled me to select a residence where I can be so little with them and I shall think you remiss in your brotherly love if you do not teach them to cherish my memory with some of that fondness which I would have taught them myself if I could have lived in Albemarle. You have already too much experience in the world not to know and discharge your duties to them much better than I can advise. The habits of industry and attention to business in which you will bring them up, will save them from all the mortifications and embarrassments which have harassed most of us thro' life.

I have had very bad health all the winter, I have not left my room for a week, with a lingering and debilitating fever which ensued the Influenza with which I was attacked early in December. The return of Spring I hope will restore my wanted health, and the exercise of riding may preserve it. I am very much pleased with my situation in Winchester. I have received every endearing attention from its first inhabitants during my illness, and I flatter myself with the prospect of a peaceful, agreeable, and profitable intercourse with them; much more congenial to my temper than the perpetual quarrels and prattling of Charlottesville. I owe any kind of obligation to so few of the inhabitants in that part of the world that but for my relations and a few others I should feel no regret at having left it, among those few I should put first perhaps, your good neighbour Mrs. J. Randolph, whom I shall always remember with a degree of affection that I am very sorry I have so little in my power to attest by any mark of attention that could be agreeable to her. I beg however that you will remember me to her with sentiments of unfeigned esteem.

The prospect of making a fortune here by my profession is just as it is every where else. Uncommon talents with assiduous industry cannot fail in the course of time to procure honor and wealth to their possessor. I shall endeavour to assist the mediocrity of my abilities such as they have grown up to be, under the neglect and oppression of my early life, by continued industry and attention. I can I dare say soon amass an independence but I regret very much that I cannot acquire a considerable fortune early in life, that I might pursue the bent of my inclinations without being thwarted in my purpose, as I do not expect or at present desire, to be married I am particularly desirous of having leisure and means to educate in the very first manner some one or two of my nephews who might obtain all these honors in the world that I have missed, and might reach the distinction to which if fortune had favoured my intentions I might have aspired. These opportunities have passed as to myself, and I am afraid will come too late if ever for my nephews. I now wish only to make myself as happy as circumstances will allow, to do all the good I can to my fellow creatures, and leave the world without any trace of having ever been in it, but in the remembrance of those I love, and whom it will ever be my chief pleasure to serve. Any assistance however that I can give in the mean while to you or your children or any other of my relations I hope you will always ask with the confidence of obtaining every thing in my power. I hope Walker will make himself a proficient in the languages while young, his whole progress afterwards will be easy, and if he does
Dear Walker,

Your letter of April 14th reached me at a time that I was too much pressed by business to do the justice to it which it deserves. I am glad to hear you express a determination to improve your mind. Without education man is little better if indeed he be not worse than the beasts of the field. And you may acquire more real knowledge, and form more valuable habits in one year at your present stage of life, than you can in 3 times that space 10 years hence. It will always give me pleasure to afford you any aid in the prosecution of your studies, which my longer experience may enable me. But you must believe and remember from the commencement to the end of your life, that whatever is to be done, must be achieved by your own laborious and indefatigable exertion. -"Faber quisque fortunae suas", is a beautiful saying, because with all our exertions we are often thwarted, but with the best fortune in the world unless we employ it well, we are only so much the more ridiculous by its favours. Do all you can for yourself, and leave the rest to God.

The first care of education should be to preserve health; for without it, all the learning and glory in the world are but mockeries. For this purpose if you are as studious as I am glad to hear you are, you should live chiefly upon vegetable diet, and use frequent, but moderate exercise, in riding, walking, jumping, and all the sports of the school, except wrestling which is apt to break bones and certain moreover to end in quarrels. Next to health you should be most particular in forming your manners so as to be agreeable to every person with whom you associate. Respectful to old, tender to the young, and neither familiar nor austere, but polite and good natured to all your equals. Be not too impatient to form opinions of any thing, and be always diffident and mild in your mode of expressing them. You cannot be too careful of not taking up any prejudice to the character of another, and even if you feel, endeavour to conquer it; and never unless you are compelled from respect to your own character let him perceive it. Believe nothing merely because you have heard another express the
same opinion, but consider the reasons upon which the opinion is founded. Be always willing to assist boys younger than yourself in their difficulties, for nothing is a better token of the goodness of ones heart than readiness to oblige.

In your conversation avoid a rapid inarticulate, or a slow and lazy utterance, speak distinctly, but not loud, and make yourself understood and heard, rather by the precision of your emphasis and the perfection of your accentuation then by bawling. Listen always to every thing which is spoken before you begin to reply. Ab never reply merely dissenting, but give the reason of the difference of your opinion. As to your duty to God I shall leave that to your parents, but never dispute with another about politics or religion. Give the grounds for your own opinions, and if you choose argue his but never quarrel because you cannot think alike.

As to reading: you should commit to memory the most beautiful passages of Ovid, such as the description of the Palace of the sun in the beginning of the 2d Book, and the 'certamen' between Ajax and Ulysses in the 53th. You should also make written translations, not only of the words but of the spirit, and tranfuse if you can all the elegance and vigour of the original into your own language. I shall expect to see some of these translations when I visit Albemarle in the summer. You should write compositions of your own also, upon subjects which require thinking and reasoning, and not merely put so many words together almost without any meaning. You should practice in arithmetic not only with a pencil and slate, but by your head without any pencil so as to multiply, divide, etc., with rapidity and accuracy. You should begin the elements of geometry, and draw the figures well from the beginning you must learn to write straight too. You may read with advantage, but must be done slowly, and deliberately and not by hurrying on to shew how quick you are, Rollins Ancient History. Avoid the silly practice which boys of the two of running over what they read without remembering it. It is waste of time, health, and eye sight, remember that whatever you read should be so perfectly impressed upon the memory that you will never have occasion to look at it again. But I will give you fuller and more particular directions when I find you have profited by these. Give my love to your Papa and Mama and all our relations, and write to me from time to time as to any particular difficulties you find. Be especially kind and attentive to your Cousin William as he is your relation and absent from his father and mother. You should be as affectionate to each other as Brothers, if you disagree it is your fault as you are the oldest.

Yours affectionately,

F.W. Gilmer.

Winchester, April 8th 1817.

Dear Walker,

I am glad to hear by your letter of the 9th of March, that you and William are well, that you are pleased with my friend Doctor Carr, and encouraged by his approbation in the prosecution
of your studies. At your age, impression from present objects are
so much more vivid than those which any representations however
strong of remote consequences can be, that whatever counsel may
be given you, will produce but a temporary and an uncertain effect.
It will be nearly impossible to make you believe, that the entire
view which you are now capable of taking of human life, and happiness,
is but an illusion; and I am not sure, that it would be either kind,
or popper, altogether to dissipate so pleasing a vision. I will how-
ever endeavour to deport what may be most fantastic, and pernicious
in your youthful delusions, and leave the rest to the sure but linger-
ing operation of time.

In our country, and in our age, it is easy to be useful,
and happy but hard, very hard to be really great. It is easy to be
useful, because I hold any man a valuable member of society— who
by honest industry contributes to make his parents and family happy,
and in his season raises a family who may enjoy the same pleasures
with himself. And as this of itself is enough to content the minas
of ordinary men, and is easily attained, it is also easy to reach
that mediocrity of happiness to which alone the generality of man-
kind aspire. It is difficult to be great for a thousand reasons: I
enumerate some of them. In the first place, I esteem him only as great
who employs extraordinary talents on the accomplishment of some great
moral good’ In this sense even Bonaparte was an extraordinary, but
not a great man. He was a prodigy of perverted genius, but no more
deserves to be called great than Milton’s Satan; on the other hand,
Epaminondas and Aristides among the Greeks and Gen, Washington
among ourselves, with far less talent, were much greater men. But
in a country where intelligence is so generally and so equally dis-
fused, whose political power is so infinitely divided and distributed,
where Government goes on rather by the inherent principles of its own
motion, than the accidental impulse of particular men, it would be
absurd to expect among us any more such men as Gen. W. as it would
be to expect a Solon or a Lyshurgoes to teach us new principles of
civilization and of Law. As to distinction in literature or science,
the obstacles are full as great. We have neither the libraries,
nor the learned associations, nor the miniscute patronage under
whose genial influence the arts and learning of Europe have spread
their branches over the world. You see, that all your education
hitherto has been, to teach you what Virgil, and Horace, and Cicero
knew and wrote near 2000 years ago.

But be not discouraged by these considerations. Tho’ some
paths of ambition be closed upon us, there are enough, and glorious
ones still open. The United States have been the first country to
place the useful professions above all the arts of peace or war. In
the ancient republics war and eloquence were the two departments which
conferred the most glorious and lasting distinction. In France war
and science have been, but science far in the rear; in England wealth
and political power, sometimes obtained by artifice, sometimes by
talent, but oftener by competition have engrossed all the interests
and all the efforts of ambition. In our country more than in any
which has ever existed, public spirit, patriotism, genius, eloquence,
and all the qualities which ennoble our nature meet with an ample even a prodigal reward. But to gain this flattering prize, considerable natural talents are required, patient and persevering industry, and elevation and rectitude of character such as we imagine in Aristides himself; an engaging and fascinating manner, like that of Alcibiades, but without his vices or dissimulation; and a constant attention to all our words and actions, so that we may never even be betrayed into an imprudent expression, or situation; in short, where the focus of public observation is thrown on each individual with its full power by a freedom of the press and of opinion bordering on licentiousness, one must not only be as pure as diamond, but like Caesar's wife must appear so, to avoid being consumed by the fire.

I have written to you as if you were a man instead of a boy, and I shall see by the effects of my letter whether I have done wrong. You and William must both read Plutarch's lives, frequently. I had rather you should read, no history for 5 or 6 years — if you can obtain Biographies of great men: great in my sense of the word. You cannot read Plutarch too often. You should get Middleton's life of Cicero if possible. William is not ready for it at this time. You must both study Geography on the maps, reading about places is a loss of time. There is a boy here not 5 years of age has answered immediately every question I have ever asked him (and they have been many) as to countries, rivers, towns, etc., etc. nor do I remember that he ever missed one. Above all things enter into your school exercises with pleasure and enthusiasm; endeavour to translate with neatness and precision — without obscure guesses as to meaning of your author. Have you read Gil Blas in French? It is an epitome of human life in Europe — in America the tints are rather more bright and cheering. It will be more useful to you than Don Quixote. Study to write a fair and clear hand, it is necessary for the character of every accomplished gentleman.

You cannot study too much to make yourself the friend of your companions, especially of those younger than yourself. To William you should be like an elder Brother. When you write again let me know what you had rather be in life, and ask William the same question. Present my warmest affections to my excellent friend Dr. Carr, and remember me to all my friends of Bentivar and the neighborhood, remember that nothing great can ever be done without labour and with it every thing.

Your affection uncle

F.W. Gilmer
You ask my advice on the school which you had best attend, to learn the Greek language. You will find it extremely difficult if not impossible, to obtain a teacher every way qualified to instruct you in that branch of your education. Mr. Robertson was far the best scholar I ever knew engaged in the business. I do not know what ravages time and disease, may have made on his originally great capacity, nor what discipline may prevail in his school. I should think you could not do better for the present year at least, than remain with my excellent friend Dr. Carr. You should have the Greek grammar, especially the themes and formation of all the verbs both regular and irregular, perfectly at your command, so as to be able to trace any verb whatever, thro' all its inflections, compositions etc., without hesitation. Unless you can do this, your Greek will be mere smattering, not worth having, and will be utterly forgotten in one year. This is a labour which will depend entirely on yourself, and you can therefore learn it as well with Dr. Carr as anywhere. I shall probably see you in the winter and will then give your father my advice as to the manner of disposing of you.

It is time you should begin to know something of the mathematics. You ought to accustom yourself to solve problems and make calculations by the head without pencil or paper. Half the use of the mathematical sciences is the power of abstraction which they give the mind, and much of the benefit is lost, by resorting to figures for everything. The days of inspiration and genius have passed, you may rely on it. Genius without industry and well disciplined knowledge is fit for nothing, but to make one ridiculous. I wish these you to be a good Latin and Greek scholar, and you should even speak French as readily as English, but if you wish to be anything more than a drone, you must learn them by patiently solving the most difficult mathematical problems, to pore over the same dry diagrams for a day or even a week if necessary. Socrates used to sit down on a stone and look at a hole in the wall all day, to teach himself patience, so one cannot bear to be confined eight hours at one theorem, may be sure that his mind is still fickle, inconstant, and superficial.

Even in your conversations with your school fellows, you should conduct the matter as a deliberate inquiry instead of a party, petulant and frivolous dispute. Never speak of any thing which you know nothing about, unless it be to learn something by a question. Listen attentively to the conversations of grown persons, for you may always learn something. Undervalue no species of useful knowledge because it is not derived from Books. Some of the most entertaining and valuable information you will receive, may be from a good honest farmer who makes no display of his learning, but has good sense and accurate observation. You should observe and
remember everything which passes before you, for our most useful knowledge is derived from what we see. Be industrious, patient of labour, tolerant of contradiction, ignorance, and perversity, for we all differ but in degree in abstinence and ignorance. The only privilege of superior knowledge is to instruct those less informed and that should be done, with gentleness, and without ostentation. Do not think it too easy to be great or good.

Your affectionate Uncle,

F.W. Gilmer.

P.S. You should write your name at full length (Thomas W. Gilmer) for no body knows but your immediate connections who T.W.G. is. I begin to do so myself, because mistakes have happened in the direction of letters. You should be the more particular in this, because T is easily mistaken for F. In so young a person writing only the initials has an appearance of affection, which you should carefully avoid even in the least things. Give my love to your Father and Mother and all your little Brothers and Sisters.

F.W. Gilmer.

Richmond, 28th Oct. 1818,

Dear Walker,

I have been surprised not to have heard from you since the death of your excellent instructor Mr. Robertson; and suppose your letter may possibly have miscarried. The present crisis is too important with you to be trifled away. If you mean to prosecute your studies at all you should not lose a day. I fear you will be advised to some temporary arrangement for the winter with resolutions of more permanent fixtures in the spring. All that will come to nothing, for if you delay a month you will find yourself as far from being fixed at the end as at the beginning of it. Do not therefore hesitate even a day if you can possibly procure the means of going to any decent college. As to those of New London, Hargow, Lexington etc, they are out of the question. Go to Cambridge or West Point. I should prefer the first. You must not imagine because you go on pretty well among your neighbours that you have done everything. You have I hope done very well, but when you reach one of these great universities where the boys are assembled from the whole U.States you will find boys of your age reading Greek, Latin, French and Italian with ease and elegance. Rely upon it you have much to learn, and consequently no time to lose. I know from experience how fatal it is to be trifling away the valuable years of ones life in solitary study. You do not learn what is most valuable even if you learn anything - and one is full as apt to forget what he already knows. Living at home, or going to any village college is mere trifling. Take a great theatre, and urge your Father and Grd. Father to cooperate - 500$ now will be worth 5000$ to you ten years hence.

Your affectionate Uncle

F.W. Gilmer
LETTERS TO HIS WIFE

Charlottesville May 5th 1823.

My dear Ann --

Your letter of the 23rd of April, reached me a few days since. Indisposition prevented an earlier answer. I now attempt to write to you -- as it is all that I can do. I shall enjoy the pleasing delusion, while I address you with my pen, that you are sitting beside me, & our conversation is directed to the subject about which I hope we both think most. Only a few weeks will elapse, ere I shall see you, & be enabled to enjoy this happiness without the aid of my imagination. Yes, my dear Ann -- in a few weeks we must pledge our faith anew at the altar, before the holy man -- to cherish & comfort one another through the vicissitudes & adversities of this world. We must be everything to each other -- we cannot rely on the cold affections of a wicked world -- we must be happy within ourselves -- we must smooth the rugged paths of life while we tread them together. As the hour approaches when we are to be united, I love you with increased attachment -- with a steadier & holier affection. I have hitherto known you as the being whom I could love, in all the circumstances under which I have ever seen you, in the gay circle -- the solitary retirement & the domestic fireside -- here I have seen you & here I loved & admired you. But I long to behold you in a still dearer character as the bosom friend, the companion, the wife, who can heal the bruised & bind up the broken heart. I am hourly contemplating the prospect which is before us, with delight. Nothing has occurred here which can interest you. I am feeble, & write with some difficulty -- but shall be well in a day or two. My indisposition is not serious, & is the effect of fatigue & exposure to the hot sun.

Tell Miss Betty, that I am sorry to say, I have not procured her a rib yet. Though I have not forgotten her, & shall make honorable mention of her to the first spruce widow whom I meet. I have a great deal of news to tell you -- but must postpone it till we meet. I will be in Shepherdstown at firstsheat by the 20th of this month -- perhaps sooner. May God bless & preserve you my dear girl, is the prayer of

Thomas W. Gilmer

Remember me most affectionately to your mother, sister, aunts, Mr. Tappworth, & all who are dear to my dear Ann --

T.W.C.

* * * * *
My dear wife,

I hope you have all arrived safely in Shepherdstown ere this, & and that our dear little girl is none the worse for the journey, that you found your friends well, & that you are happy. I was very uneasy during the rain after you set out, though I suppose you were snugly moored in good quarters at Culpeper court house. I did not think I should miss you & Elizabeth so much. I absolutely cannot bear your absence long. Everything at home looks forlorn & desolate, so much so that I can't go there without being in a'd spirits. I breakfast, sup, & sleep at home, & dine at the majors. All the cooking is done by Phil, & consists of boiling the tea kettle. Even this is often dispensed with as I get a bottle of good milk twice a day. Your cousin Sally has the cow milked, & I give her all the milk except a bottle full night and morning. Betsy stays at Mr. Ayer's & so does Lilly -- Mrs. Ryland & Saunders declined taking them. Court has just adjourned after a fatiguing week. Mr. slept with me all the while, & I had frequently three or four visitors besides. Christopher is with us now. I am dreadfully down in the mouth when alone I have no other recourse than sleep to which I can fly. I have taken a slight cold by some means which has made me a little unwell for some days. The weather is getting very warm & I hope it will leave us soon. Our garden flourishes -- it is a pity you are not at home to eat the vegetables. I give them to anyone who will send for them. The bacon bone is still exposed to view on my little table, night & morning, though very little remains to swear by. Mrs. Ryland has been kind enough to have me some bread baked once or twice & sometimes I have sat down to table without ever thinking that there was not a crumb in the house. However these things are all sources of amusement rather than regret -- all that is wanting is your presence. I did not think a wife was of so much account, really. If any spy widows should chance to come in my way, I shall be strongly tempted to make love to them, just to keep my hand in. You know I allowed you the same privilege. I think you must not stay long in Shepherdstown. You know it is very unhealthy. I shall go to Staunton about the last of this month or first of next & remain there about ten days or less. Do not be surprised if I come on for you at that time. If not, I cannot come until the first of September. However, this is as you please. I am sorry I consented to let you go, when I am by myself, listening to the rats in our deserted mansion, though I am content when I think you are happy. I shall be very busy, so that my mind cannot dwell long on my lonely condition. I made a contract yesterday for the purchase of the printing establishment here. There are five of us & we propose to publish a newspaper & a Review of literature & Science. We have been very much encouraged by the professors at the University & by the leading men of the state &
the prospect may succeed. If it does not, the experiment will
cost but a trifle & you know my anxiety to advance our fortunes
is great & that I shall not regard a little additional labor. If
the Review is not published, I shall probably be one of two pro-
prieters & editors of the newspaper. My friends say it is a great
scheme, & that we are to immortalize ourselves & make a fortune.
Tell Mrs. Baker, I saved the poor negro's life. He was acquitted.
She must credit me for this against some of my heavy transgressions,
though as most people thought him guilty. The men think I have not
done any good. There is no news here. Things go on as usual. The
town begins to be crowded by strangers as it is every summer. If
my health is not better, I shall go to the springs in August for
a short time, if I can raise the money & spare the time, both of
which are very scarce. I scarcely think I can take the northern
trip, though I may do so yet. I should like it very much & more
if you would go with me. I suppose you & the little girl are
great curiosities among your friends. Elizabeth is much superior
to John -- & I suppose T -- & your sister give it up by this
time. I wish I could hear her cry a little just now. Kiss the
dear child for her father.---- Let me hear from you at least twice
a week, & say every thing you can think of that will interest a
solitary husband at a distance from his wife. You must use a
great deal of exercise & lay in a stock of health that will last
you for years. Take good care of the little girl -- though, your
mother will do this without a caution. I got a ticket for you
yesterday from Orange Court house, to a grand barbecue & ball
on the 4th July. I suppose we shall have a great parade here --
though in all probability I will not be at home to participate in
it. I shall be very apt to get very merry, as I am a widow &
therefore privileged -- I have exhausted my wits. It would be
out of character for a husband of my sedate & sober turn to write
sentiment to his wife. We had all that, you know, before we
were married, it won't do now. I wish, however, I could kiss you
and press you to my bosom. This is not sentimental -- at least it
not such sentimentality as suits lovers before marriage. My
neighbors are all very kind to me, & are perpetually enquiring
after you -- when you will come back &c. They are all well. I
have brought the pistols down stairs for fear of ghosts, though I
have not been annoyed by them yet. I suppose they have pity for
me in my lonely situation. I shall chew tobacco again if I con-
tinue long a widower. I have oftener than you believe, looked at
your miniature in the chamber & wished for the original. It is
impossible that we can be entirely happy in this wicked world. Be
therefore contented & cheerful where you are & I will try to be so
here, untill we meet -- which I trust may be in joy & not in
sorrow. Remember me affectionately to all our friends, & believe
my dear wife your devoted husband

Thomas W. Gilmer

Write soon -- & write often, long letters & tell me every thing
about yourself & our Elizabeth.

* * *
My dear wife,

This is Saturday -- & the mail has just arrived. I went to the Post office & enquired with anxious tone, "If there was a letter for me" -- How was I startled when I was answered -- no --. Look again, if you please, Mr. Postmaster, I expect a letter from my wife. He looked again, but no letter. I turned off partly in sorrow, partly mortified at my disappointment. She has forgotten her promise, thought I hastily, & was engaged at a tea party or something of the sort when the mail departed -- She may be sick, -- I thought a moment after, & my uneasiness, you may be sure was not allayed by the reflection. Why did you not write? I have written long, dull pages to you, biting my nails & torturing my memory all the while, least I should forget something that might serve to interest or amuse my dear wife. I have commenced this letter a day before hand, in order to give you a chronological history of events. The best plan of correspondence between husband & wife, who like to see what nobody else cares anything about, is to write every day -- not a whole letter, but just what passed in the mind, or what happens around us. For instance -- I was sitting yesterday evening (it being very hot ) in our eastern porch on the settle, with my heels above my head, reading or dozing over a pamphlett, when my brothers arrived. This is not a very important event in the history of the world; to be sure, but you will like to know that I have some little company that I was not in the sunshine yesterday evening. The boys have entered at the dancing school & are wonderfully delighted, with their morocco pumps & cotton stockings, courseing & hopping all about the town. You never saw the like of bobbing up & down -- all the little boys & girls in town, are tossing their feet, this way & that, bowing, coursting & springing about as if every mother's child of them was troubled with an evil spirit. Oh, what a miserable, poor, old fellow is your husband in the midst of all this scraffing of feet & fiddle bows. Not a smile has any one seen on my face this three days, except when a poor client passed within my web, or horn blew for dinner, or the western stage which was heard to crack at Garnett's corner. I am very sad sometimes -- but this I have said over & over again, & I am resolved to say it no more. Do you be happy -- cheerful & fatten as fast as possible -- don't let the thoughts of me make you uneasy for a moment. I will manage to do well enough, though I could perhaps do a little better, with a kind, comfortable kiss or so now & then. You wives are like a dram bottle -- he who never tasted the bittersweet, doesn't care about it, but when he has once gotten a sip, he drinks to intoxication, & he thinks. -- There is to be a cotillion party this evening at Pitts' -- I am a manager & what's more am invited. I must to & shake off my disappointment at not getting a letter today. Tomorrow I shall have something, perhaps, to write about, but now I have nothing. I have turned editor again. I enclose by this mail a copy of our "Prospectus" to Mr. postmaster, with a request that he will expose it to view. There are several proprietors of the press, & my time will not be very much occupied with this pursuit. It is our contemplation, to establish a first rate literary & scientific journal, after the
model of the Edinburgh & other Reviews. We shall write to many of the leading & distinguished men of every part of the southern & western country, requesting them to contribute to its pages. The professors of the U.V. promise large things -- if they perform one fourth, it will answer my expectations. With one or two thousand subscribers, we shall make money & perhaps, distinguish ourselves into the bargain. The scheme will cost little in experiment, if it fails -- I will now lay down my pen, to resume it tomorrow. Miss Tucker, the Vampire's daughter is to marry Emmett soon. The wedding sattin was bought yesterday. You must practice on my plan & you may write longer letters. Say something every day & keep saying until the mail closes & your letter is sent.

Sunday after church

I have just returned from church. My brothers are gone & I am altogether alone. We had quite a tolerable discourse upon a sacramental occasion, by a young Mr. Arnstead. I turn to my unfinished letter with great pleasure. It is the nearest approach I can make to my wife, & if you believe me my thoughts are very apt to be running on you, when I am alone, & sometimes in company too-- I went to the party last night. Every body I met was asking after you. When did you hear from Mrs. G? How was your wife when you heard, Mr. Gilmer? Was the child much grown? &c, &c, rung in my ears from all quarters. I intended, & had dressed my self up very primly to pass off for a young fellow on my first legs, and was engaged in a very animated, sentimental discourse with a fair one about rocks, & groves & birds & all that sort of stuff, when a shrill voice from behind saluted me with - "Oh, Mr. G. when did you hear from you wife?" Bless me how the lady stared at me! She had no doubt promised herself a conquest & was greatly surprised to learn that I was the husband of a (I would have said beautiful before we were married) one of the finest & prettiest wives & the father of the very finest child in the commonwealth. I was sitting in my office yesterday evening, when a fellow drove by with a cart, having on board a small 5-gallon keg of cherry juice, just expressed from the cherry. I gave him eighteen pence per gallon, went home, & mixed about one third French brandy with it. It promises to be excellent bounce. I filled one of our large jugs -- was very near emptying the vinegar cask on the floor, to use it, & filled half dozen bottles, when a good deal was still left. I sent it to Mrs. Dyer, with a request that she would accept one half & make the other into bounce for us. We shall have splendid drinking, when we get once snugly fixed by our own hearth again. I dug a mess of potatoes this morning & sent them to Mrs. Carr. They are as large as need be, some very large, though they are thinner than I could wish. I was told today, that my old sweetheart Miss Cocks is to be married on Tuesday to a fellow whom I know very well, named Faulcon. I hope she may do well, while I am truly happy that things have turned out as they have with both of us. I would not exchange my old woman for any, nor all the sweethearts that I or any one else ever had. I do not flatter, you know this is what nobody ever suspected me of -- Let me see, -- what else, to fill up the remaining line or two -- Oh, I was near forgetting to tell you -- a negro man was drowned this morning in the river near Mr. Saunders -- The lightning struck Maupin's old tavern the other day & tore it very much to pieces.
That's all the news. Don't you think I'll make a great editor.-- I compile so well. Give our sweet babe twenty kisses more for me, & believe me ever your devoted husband,

T. W. Gilmer

There is to be preaching again this evening at the church. We had a large party to dinner at the majors to day. Among others the Miss Carys & Fairfax. They say he's in for it again ---- Think about the time when it will be agreeable & convenient for you to come home. I assure you I can come at any time with all convenience.

T.W.G.

* * * *

Washington Thursday night. Sept.13,1827

My dear wife

I arrived here this morning about light, without suffering any other inconvenience than the fatigue usual to travellers. Nothing occurred on the way, which would afford you any interest. We had just what every one has who travels by stage or steam boat at this season, much dust & confusion from the crowds of persons who are in motion going to & returning from the north. I came on with B. Crawford of Staunton. He told me your friends there were well, & that your aunt Lisle would be in Charlottesville about the time we get back, on her way to Amherst. I shall leave here before light tomorrow morning for Baltimore, having despatched my business here. I shall not write again till I reach Philadelphia, & by that time I shall have something new & interesting to communicate. Miss Randolph came with me --she has a rough time of it, & I fear I am a poor escort, as my time & mind are very much occupied with my own business.

Tell aunt Lucy, I waited on Mr. Wirt this morning. He received me very cordially & enquired with great interest after her & the family at Ridgeway. He complains of being in bad health. If you see Col. Carr, tell him Gov. Barbour has not returned & I left his letter with Mr. Wirt. Write frequently when I get among the Yankees I will be able to give you some news. I have made very few entries in my notebook yet. It is 8 o'clock & I am weary & sleepy & must get a good night's rest. Kiss my dear child for me & be cheerful & happy yourself my dear wife for your husband's sake. My love to my aunts & cousins & the Doctor

Yrs forever

T.W.Gilmer

Washington is very dull -- nobody here. The President is yet in the neighborhood of Boston, & many of the distinguished men absent on trips of pleasure or business. I have met with a very flattering reception from my brother editors.

* * * * *
My dear wife,

Though the mail which left here this morning carried you a long letter from me, I have concluded after mature deliberation, that I could not spend a Sabbath evening more agreeably than in commencing another epistle to my better self. I sometimes wish that you were with me; but when I observe the inconveniences & privations to which females are subjected here, I had rather for your sake & mine that you were comfortably seated at home with our dear little ones, perusing the history of my adventures. This place ( & indeed all the watering places of which I have any knowledge), is anything but comfortable to the invalid. The excessive dampness of the atmosphere which is rendered more dangerous by the effects of the water on the system, the unmannerly manner in which we are crowded together, pell-mell, to sleep on hard cots, in open rooms, the great difficulty in getting a servant to wait on you &c., &c., render this quite an unpleasant place. My general health is improved, I am fatter & stronger than when I came here; though my rheumatism has gotten regularly worse since I left home. My knee is now swollen much more than it ever was & is very painful. I promised to sketch some of the most remarkable characters here for your amusement. I can only furnish a very faint outline, as we only get a superficial glance at the characters which we see here. Great delusions are often practised at the Springs, & your sex as well as mine are the dupes of many an imposition played off here. There is a wonderful propensity to exaggerate everything. If you are introduced to a young lady, it is soon whispered in your ear by somebody that she is amazingly rich, & rumor frequently designates the species of her fortune, as bank-stock, cotton plantations &c. when in fact the poor girl is not worth a cent. This deception, however, succeeds with the mere top & adventurer, who courts the girl, marries her, is disappointed, & both are miserable of course. I have heard that several persons of whom I happened to know something, were very rich. Our sex are cracked up for talents & influence &c., & the delusion is equally great. There is a widow here, about 25 or 30 years old, who bore 4 children to her quondam husband. She is not pretty, has very indifferent manners, wants intelligence, has a boy with her 7 or 8 years old as a specimen of her prowess, & is remarkable for nothing that I perceive but a prodigious longing after the holy estate of matrimony. She is said to be worth $50,000 -- a friend told me confidentially, she is not worth $1,000. She is, however, admired & caressed. I had an adventure with her myself the other night, which I will relate. There is a fine, gallant brother chit of mine, here, from S. Carolina; he is about 10 years older than I & has a wife & 6 children. We became well acquainted, & communicated to each other our respective conditions in life, each contending that he had the prettiest wife & finest children in the world. We attended at the ball room one night, & observing the widow aforesaid, determined to make our respects to her. I succeeded in obtaining an introduction, & began to extol the music & talk of such common-place topics. I asked if she was fond of music. She answered by a blunt negative. I asked if she danced. She said no -- was she fond of poetry &c., &c., no, she had no relish for
these trifles. The conversation turned on rattle snakes of which there are a great many hereabouts, & I asked finally, if she was afraid of snakes — she said no, because she had not seen any. Hereupon I abandoned her, & informed my friend Col. B. that the fair object of our admiration hated music, dancing, poetry, & to crown all, was not afraid of snakes. I need not add that we determined to give up the pursuit. This sally has so covered me with shame & disappointment, & my unmanageable leg has given me so much pain that I have since withdrawn from the gay circles, & spent my time in eating, sleeping & drinking. My two roommates are singular fellows. One is a young man of Washington City, a dependent on the government, though a violent Adams man — he is dying without any disease, of the blue devils — is a genuine blue stocking Presbyterian. The other is a wealthy Roanake tobacco planter — uncouth & ignorant, but good natured & very desirous to cut a figure, without knowing how to do it. With his servant, & equirage, he reminds one of Don Quixote & Sancho. He knows nothing of books & commits great havoc on the English grammar, paying no sort of regard to the poor nouns, verbs or adjectives, numbers, genders or persons. He is firmly persuaded that Milton lived before Moses — & that Shakespeare wrote Johnson's dictionary. His valet is a stout negro, fresh from the corn field, & has distinguished himself here by upsetting Sunday plates of soup, gravy &c. on the heads & shoulders of visitors.

Wednesday. August 19th. Nothing has happened to amuse me or interest you, since I commenced writing. My knee grows more & more painful, & I am resolved to go to the Warm Springs as soon as I can. I am in ill humour with everything around me, & have seen nothing but the phantoms of my own imagination, & heard nothing but my own groans & murmurs.

Warm Springs. August 22. I got here last night in the stage — found your letter of the 16. Wrote a hasty answer, which I sent by a passenger in the stage this morning. I have baled twice & already feel better. I hope that 8 or 10 days use of the bath will restore me perfectly. If you conclude to meet me at Staunton, I wish you to come over as soon as you can, as I wish to return to our court, & shall be compelled to leave 8. on Friday week, to get home in time by the stage. My present plan, is to leave here on Wednesday week, that is the last of Sept. & get to Staunton the next morning, & leave there at 11 on the next day (Friday) & get home that night. If I do not take the stage from Staunton on Friday, I should not get home till Monday night, after court. You must write me word, if you determine to come over. If you could leave home in time to spend a day or two at the Augusta Springs, we could meet there, on the evening after I leave here, that is Wednesday evening, if I go on that day. You would find it a pleasant trip, if the girls would accompany you, otherwise, I suppose you would not like to travel in the stage without a protector.

We have about 40 or 50 persons here. The aforesaid widow, I found here on my arrival. I shall take the first oppor-
tunity to ascertain whether she hates snakes yet. The ladies &
gentlemen bathe alternately — two hours are allotted to each sex.
A white flag over the bath house indicates that ladies are in; when
it is down, we take our turn. This is a very pleasant place. Our
accommodations are very comfortable & we know how to relax them
after the horrid fare &c. of the Sulphur Springs. I am anxious to
be able to ride out every day — when I can I will go to the Hot
Springs & try that bath. It is only 5 miles hence. Write me all the
news — about yourself & the brats, as I had rather you would talk
of what most interests me.

Yr. devoted husband

Thomas W. Gilmer.

* * * *

Richmond Dec. 18th 1839.

My dear wife,

I received your letter yesterday evening, after a long &
very unhappy state of suspense. I thought you had promised to
write at least twice every week, or oft'ner. I have written two
letters, both of which I suppose you have received. In my last, I
mentioned, that I wished you to inform me when you would come to
Richmond, that we might make some timely arrangement for the trip.
You cannot conceive how much I feel the want of your presence, to
cheer & animate me in the new scenes by which I am surrounded. Their
poverty has no charms for me while my memory is recurring every in-
stant to you. Your letter breathes a spirit which has wounded my
feelings most sensibly. You seem to repine at my absence only because
you fear, or almost believe, that I could forget you, or become indif-
ferent about you. Why do you suppose that your "letters & the writer
will be soon forgotten"? Do you not know, my dear Ann, that my
affection for you is as firm & unchangeable as ever man bore to
woman? That neither time — nor place — nor any incident of life,
can change the deep & constant devotion of my heart to you? What
is there in this world beside you & my children, which can be at once
a source of consolation, & an object of my undivided affection? The
happiest reflection of my life, is that there is a heart in your bosom
which responds to every feeling & affection of my own — that poverty,
& affliction can only bind us more indissolubly to one another, &
that if every friend and every hope on earth should fail me, my wife
remains, & on her bosom I can still find consolation & peace ———

Why do you make me unhappy by intimating that I could ever forget you?
You know that you are so completely mistress of my heart, that you
can sport with my affections at pleasure. But do not, I beseech you,
torture me, only to prove the extent of my affections. Write to me
as one being should to another, whose ardent affection she reciprocates—
as a wife to a husband. I am by no means as gay or as happy here, as
you seem to think. Scenes of bustle, of fashion & of city life have
long since ceased to have charms for me. My thoughts are with you,
with my children, oftentimes when I am engaged in the business &
bustle of legislation. I keep my room almost constantly, except when my duties call me to the Capitol. My room is only about 150 yards from the Capitol -- the nearest room in town. I have never been specially invited out, & have not felt inclined to accept the numerous general invitations of "come & see me". I have paid no visit to any body, except to my neighbors in adjoining rooms. I have been twice to the theatre. The society at our boarding house is delightful -- we are like a family circle -- nothing is wanted to make me satisfied with it, but your presence, your smiles, a kiss, &c. When will you afford me this happiness? I think the legislature will adjourn early in January. You must come down before the boat stops running, that we may come around by Norfolk. The route from Fredericksburg by stage is in the night & very unpleasant. I have secured a very delightful room for us here. I think you would eclipse the wives of any of my fellow boarders, & on the score of pride, I want to exhibit you & our offspring. I have received letters since I wrote from Harmer and Christopher. H. tells me, all are well at home. No haste yet -- Christopher promises to take my advice & consider well of his love matters. I wish he may do so. The state of my father's family renders me sometimes very unhappy. What am I to do? You know that the condition of my younger sisters, has been a source of uneasiness for some time. Tell me your opinion, either by letter or when we meet. I am sometimes almost induced to go with them to some new & dear country, where they can be better provided for, than in Virginia. But we will talk of these matters when we meet.

I made my debut to day in the Legislature. I cannot know, & of course am unable to say, how I succeeded. My effort seemed to be well received by the House & I succeeded in my object — it was in behalf of the officers & soldiers of the revolution, or rather their widows & orphans. I am pretty much engaged in the duties of the Legislature — in learning the mode of going business &c. I have been half my time ** (manuscript torn) while in committee, in deciding on applications for divorce. I have felt so forcibly the value of a wife, that I have not been able to vote for putting man & wife asunder in any instance, though there have been some pretty strong cases. You must come down certainly & very soon, & see how we get on. We may have some warm work after the adjournment of the Convention, if they fail to make a constitution. Tell Tapscott, the bill for reviving the Corporation of Shepherdstown will pass without difficulty. Mrs. Morgan will come down with some female acquaintances about Xmas. Can't we arrange matters to go for me to meet you in Washington or Alexandria week after next & all come down together? Let me know when your mother will consent for you to come. Tell her, if we agree to leave Elizabeth with her, she ought to spare you. She ought to remember that a husband's affection is tenfold greater than a parent's, & that his inconvenience & anxiety in proportion. I want to escort you over the city & show you what is worth seeing. I have not been to see the sights, that I might have the pleasure of seeing them with you. There is a very good painter at our boarding house, & I should like to have your portrait taken. Our children are too much like me, or like us both, to be taken as your likenesses. You will be very much pleased with old Mrs. & Mr. Madison. They are very agreeable. Give my love to Aunt Aly -- your mother and all. Tell our aunt A. she would be delighted with a view
of the great men of the convention, as no opportunity was ever afforded of seeing them all together, it will never occur again. Let me know how & when you will come to Alexandria or Washington. Mr. Giple went home the other day. Mrs. C. is ill. I think, the best chance for you to get to Alexandria or W. will be by a hack, as the stages travel at night & you may meet with unpleasant company. Mr. ----- (manuscript dotted) & Georgianna are here. I have just heard that they are in town; but have not seen them. They are on their way to Mt. Air to spend the Xmas — Kiss our beloved & believe me ever.

Your devoted husband

Thomas W. Gilmer.

* * * * *

Richmond Dec. 27th. 1828.

My dear wife

You will not have cause to complain of my not writing often enough. Have I no right to complain of you on this score? I do not write now because I have anything particularly interesting to communicate; but because I have spent a lonely day, a lonely night too, just as I was laying aside my books, & going to bed, I very naturally thought of you, a strayway sat me down & took up my pen. I have become a close student from necessity, being driven to look within myself & my own mind for that amusement & happiness which I cannot find here. Without being very much occupied by my legislative duties, I am just sufficiently employed to furnish me some food for thought — but I should have ample leisure to spend many a happy hour of carless enjoyment with my wife, were you here. You know, at home, I am driven so incessantly by my business that it is only now & then that my dear wife is complete mistress of my whole thoughts & time — but here, I lead pretty much the life of a gentleman — which I should like above all things to share with you. I never see a man with his wife at our table, that I don’t envy him, & long for an opportunity of seeing my spouse by my side. I don’t know whether "distance lends enchantment to the view" but I have thought that I have not seen as pretty a woman, "maid, wife or widow" since I left you, as my own, dear Ann. No doubt you have seen far better looking men than your poor husband — but none I trust for whom you would exchange him. I hope by this time you have made your arrangements & are about to set out for Richmond — that you have written me my orders to meet you. I am really in a state of unpleasant suspense. Everybody asks me when Mrs. C. will be here — I can only answer, next week — next week. How long am I to say so? The roads & weather I fear will soon prevent, or render your trip uncomfortable. I fear more on John’s account than yours, as I believe you would not regard slight obstacles to join your old man where he so much desires your society. Your mother must consider the great sacrifice which we consent to in letting Elizabeth remain with her, & give you credit for that in your visit. I got a long letter from my father do day. He thinks you are here with me by this time,
& asks whether you like Richmond or not. He is, as I expected, very
unhappy about Christopher's affair, & writes to me to try & put
matters right. I have written again to C. & to Miss W-- informing
her, that I had declined employing a teacher for the present. I want
your advice about a good many things -- my own affairs -- those of
my relations & friends. Mr. Thompson is the most philosophic-hus-
band I ever sawabsent from his wife. I would give any reasonable
sum to possess his contentment -- but I cannot. I am not aware of
your value, until I feel the want of your presence, your very
scolding would cheer me, proviced I thought I did not deserve it; for
you know I take it badly when I really deserve it, as no doubt I often
have done. There is one vice however, of which I can never be guilty --
it is the vice of forgetting you for one moment. I dream of you, &
when I awake, am miserable to find that you are still far, far beyond
my reach. Wood is at home enjoying the sweet solace of "wife, children
& friends" -- while I (poor devil of a legislator) am here, at 9 past
10 - at night, in a solitary room, writing to my wife & only able to
tell her with an infamous goose quill that I love her, more I fear
than a husband ought to love a wife. I believe I do love you too
much for my own happiness, Ann. I am sometimes a little childish, I
fear, in expressing my affection for you, but I am sure you will for-
give such childishness. I have always intended to give you some
news, but my letters have come to their close before I was done telling
you how much I was in love with you. The fact is I have no news.
Every day is pretty much alike here. I am become almost an indifferent
spectator of the scenes which are acting in this Convention. The ex-
citement has lasted so long that it begins to wear itself out. I
have been to no more parties, seen no more ladies, because they only
serve to remind me of you, & make me more anxious to see you. Old
Mrs. Madison & I are become very gracious. She is a fine old lady.
You will be pleased also with old Mrs. Vanable, a good old Presby-
terian lady who boards with us. She is wife of a member of Convention.
Mrs. Morgan is not yet come. Mr. M. & I frequently condole with one
another. He bears his separation, however, better than I do. Mrs.
Wood will probably accompany W. on his return. I hope we can get
a good room at this house, if you come down, if we don't there are
plenty of excellent houses in the neighborhood, where we may be very
comfortable. I have only received two letters from you. I hear from
you. I hear from Charlottesville every day or two. All well. Shew
the balance of this to Baker & Aunt Alicey & the whole family if you
choose. But I want them with your mother & -- -- (manuscript torn)
down deliberately & arrange some plan by which you are to come down.
Tell Baker he must be the treasurer & I will honor his bill for the
amount as soon as I ascertain it. I would send you money by mail,
but it is not so safe. Well, I suppose you are all seated -- it is
admitted by all, that it is a hard case for a poor husband to be so
long separated from so pretty a wife -- well -- next, what means are
to be taken to remedy this hardship -- let me suggest --let that you
get a good hack, strong horses, careful driver, come to Fredericks-
burg, where you may arrive in 3 days, & where I will meet you. Give
me full notice that I may not get there before you, make your ar-
rangements to arrive there at Young's tavern on any day, & I will be
there & we can return next day. I fear the roads are rather deep now,
but the pair of good horses will not regard a light load. I will
carry my trunk & if you cannot get one in S. we can get one at F. If
you have made other arrangements, I will adapt mine to them, though
I should not like to be absent from the House more than one or at most 3 days. Let me know the result of your caucus, whether you will come. If you decline it much longer, you will not be able to get down this winter I fear. Patty Minor will be at Judge Carr's soon. I have not been to see my widow yet, I believe I shall decline the honor of her father acquaintance, as I have but one coat here. My father writes that he has got the pork & that Sally is doing well. The horses were much worsed he says when Billy got back. Wilson he says is a good boy. I got a letter on business from Mr. Norris, all his folks are well. The weather has been extremely warm here. I went to see Mr. & Mrs. Anderson. They say you must come & stay with them a while when you are here. He left directions for the house i.e. the porches & enclosure to be repaired. I missed an invitation to a wedding on Xmas eve -- a gentleman named Barrett who is a distant relation had a daughter married on that night. He did not discover till after the wedding that I was the grandson of his uncle, or he said I should have danced at the wedding -- he pressed me to come & see him. He lives in town. I still hear every day or two of a wish that I should establish a great paper here. If they will show me the ways & means of making $3,000 a year, & insure my health & yours & the brats, I might think of it. I will not determine whether I will offer next spring till I see you. You decide before we meet. I am tired, beastly tired of this life I am leading, I will not come again unless you are my colleague. My affectionate love to all --

Good night.

Your devoted husband

Thomas W. Gilmer

* * * * *
Charlottesville, November 1839.

Gentlemen,

Your invitation to a public dinner to be given to the Hon. W. Wise at Louisa Court House on the 16th inst: has been received, and I regret that previous and indispensable engagements will not permit me to accept it. I am gratified by the approbation you have been pleased to express of my public course, though your partiality has done much more than justice, to the very inadequate services by which I have attempted to requite the confidence of a small portion of my fellow citizens. I am not sensible of having deserved more than is due to every man, who, either a citizen or a representative, has endeavoured faithfully to discharge the important trust which our free institutions impose on all.

Every event in our history is important to a people who are alone responsible to themselves and to posterity, for the manner in which they shall conduct their own affairs. Without the unnatural design of injuring themselves, such a people can never deliberately sanction what is wrong or disapprove what is right. The will of a majority cannot be put at defiance by a representative government, unless the people encourage treachery in their servants and become traitors to themselves. The danger to popular institutions is not to be apprehended from the power of one man, or of many men, but from the indifference of the people as to their own inalienable rights, and from those passions which party strife is too apt to excite, and which sometimes tempt us to betray the permanent interests of our country for the momentary triumph of our party. In this aspect I have long contemplated with distrust, those mere presidential parties, which induce too many to regard the election of our chief magistrate as the end, instead of an important means, of good government. Hence the will of the nation ceases to control in all (if in any) of its measures, the government which it has created. The people surrender their supremacy as arbiters, they submit themselves to be led by ambitious men, where they ought to lead, they become arrayed in hostile factions pledged in advance to oppose whatever of right may be proposed on one hand, and to approve whatever of wrong may be done on the other. The power of the executive branch of our federal government, great, too great under the constitution, and infinitely enlarged in practice, have been strengthened and confirmed by the cupidity and resentments thus enlisted, until they threaten the entire fabric; diminishing every hope of reform, depriving ourselves and our rulers of the moral restraints of our system, and leaving the patriot no refuge from despair but in the hazard of some dreadful change. Parties thus organized only add their own impetus to the accumulating powers of government; they proscribe freedom of opinion and official responsibility as crimes against the State; they degrade principles and measures from the infallible test of truth and reason to the chicanery of their own selfish tactics;
they plead for Philip, not for Greece. The people soon behold with indifference and apathy, contests where they are told they can only choose between alternatives of evil. It is the duty of the statesman or the party who seek the public confidence, to by something that at least (warrant) the hope of some good. It becomes us therefore, I humbly think, to look more closely and to adhere more rigidly to those great principles of reform, which ought to (eminate) political parties; to draw the line of party discrimination on some more obvious and enduring principle than that which separates the ins from the outs; to remember that the constitution is the only standard which we all admit, as the established rule of safety and of right, to all the departments, and to all the functions of a free government; that legislative and judicial infractions of this sacred instrument are only so many breaches in the strong bulwark of our liberty, inviting more fatal encroachments from the executive.

There are still some questions, I trust, which can be met and considered by men of all parties, as they effect the interests of the whole country, and the present deranged state of our currency and finance presents one of them. The time has arrived, it must be apparent to all, when our banking system as well as the government, demands a thorough reform. Its evils have augmented, until, if they are not within the reach of legislative remedies, the question may arise, whether they are compensated by the benefits. It will require all the wisdom and all the forbearance of united councils to repair the injuries of the past, and to avert still greater calamities. If either the federal or state governments had absolute jurisdiction over the delicate subject, or if it were to be met as an original question, our duties and our inclinations might be different. But when we consider that we have twenty seven governments, each of which has claimed and exercised the power of regulating currency and credit by law, it becomes us to look at things as they are, and not as we would have them to be; to provide for the future, not to quarrel about the past. The present is a favorable period for the application of remedies to evils of which all have so much right to complain. The present condition of our country should admonish every man of the necessity for calm deliberation and decisive action on a subject which has been so long agitated and which must continue the source of incalculable mischief until it is settled. The history of the experiments of nearly fifty years is before us, and if we will consult it as a guide to our researches, and not as a source of party exasperation, we may learn wisdom ourselves instead of teaching it to posterity by our sad experience.

With the assurances of my regard I beg you to offer to the company an apology for my absence, and if it be deemed worthy the subjoined sentiment.

I have the hon or to be

Your (words blurred)

Thomas W. Gilmer

A thorough reform of the government and the banks.
Richmond- July 23rd 1840.

Gentlemen,

It affords me pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th inst., inviting me to be present at a Convention to be held in the city of Wheeling, by the Whigs of Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio, on the 3rd of September next. You have done infinitely more than justice to the services which it has been in my power to render to the cause of popular rights and constitutional freedom, a cause which has always commanded my warmest attachments, and which has only to be understood to be appreciated every where, as it deserves. The supremacy of the popular will in affairs of government is proclaimed on the little page of our institutions, and the people of the United States are not only responsible for the consequences, which will result to us and to our posterity, but for the direction which is to be given to the spirit of free and rational inquiry which our example has excited throughout the world. Though our fathers were the pioneers of the eighteenth century on the great cause of human rights, their descendants have already seen millions of the sons of men, rising up on the continents of the old world, to vindicate the true dignity of our nature, and to rebuke the injustice and insolence of tyrants. We have passed successfully through the process of revolution which awaits so large a portion of our race. An enlightened and virtuous public sentiment has been found, after repeated experiments adequate either to reform the abuses of our system, or to punish the infidelity of our public agents; and under its salutary auspices we have now nothing to apprehend from the dangerous extremes of despotism or anarchy. The vigilance of the people is the only safe guaranty for the responsibility of government, and their rights can never be permanently encroached on by others until they have ceased to be valued by themselves.

The duties which have been temporarily assigned me by our state necessarily confine my attention to a limited and specific sphere. I trust, however, that my fellow citizens will find in the uniform tenor of my public course, a sufficient guaranty that, wherever I am, whether in private or in public life, I shall continue steadfast in the maintenance of those opinions and principles which I am happy to find have won you approbation. It is my duty as the Executive organ of the State to aid in giving effect to the public will, when constitutionally expressed, and to abide the results of a sound popular judgment without prescribing to influence its decrees, except by a faithful performance of the task assigned me.

Though I cannot promise myself the pleasure of being with you on this occasion, I anticipate with much satisfaction a period, very remote, when I hope it will be in my power to visit so interesting a portion of our state, and to witness the cheering proofs which our great western city affords of successful enterprise and patriotism.

I have the honor, gentlemen, with sentiments of esteem etc.,

To J.S. Shiner & Mins, Committee etc.

Thomas W. Gilmer
Richmond, August 7th 1840.

Gentlemen,

I have the honor to acknowledge your communication of the 4th of July, inviting me to be present at a Convention to be held in the city of Nashville by the friends of "retrenchment and reform" on the 17th instant, and beg you to believe that I appreciate with profound sensibility this proof of your esteem. The station which I hold under the laws of Virginia has induced me to decline all active participation in the presidential election, though as an individual I cannot for a moment feel indifferent as to the result. The dread of that executive influence which has so often proved fatal to free institutions, and the dangerous tendencies of which are so strongly exemplified in our own history, has induced me to believe, that, though the governors of the States possess far less power or patronage than the Constitution has conferred on the federal executive, still the principle which restricts the functions of this class of officers, and requires that the legislative, judicial and executive powers of government should be separate and distinct, applies equally to them. Every thing which is calculated to break down these barriers or obliterate those distinctions between the several departments of government, tends directly to concentrate the power of the whole system in the executive arm. I can conceive no form of despotism so hopeless as that in which the executive is permitted under the sanction of popular excitement to assume the responsibilities of other departments of government and to dispense with the checks prescribed by the constitution for itself. The vital principle of representative democracy consists in the freedom and independence with which the citizens by his suffrage selects his agents to perform the various duties assigned by the laws and constitution to each. When an executive officer of the state or federal government seeks to influence the popular elections, either by means of his official patronage, or by degrading his high trust for mere selfish and personal ends, he ceases to be a sentinel on the ramparts of the constitution, he assumes a power and perogative which the people never designed to bestow on him, and which may be abused according to his arbitrary will for his aggrandizement or their destruction. The maintenance of the constitutional rights and jurisdiction of the States of their proper authority and dignity as the great pillars of our union, is indispensable to the happy continuance of our admirable scheme of government. When the governors of the States become the partizans of candidates for the presidential office, it is easy to foresee that the aggregate influence of the federal executive is augmented by the addition of six and twenty important auxiliaries, each of whom instead of fulfilling the trust assigned him under his own government degenerates into an obsequious satrap of the great central power, thus the state government would no longer operate as checks on the increasing power of the federal government, but would only accelerate their own downfall and the erection of a splendid monument of despotism on their ruins. This league between the executive officers of the state and federal governments will be reciprocal. It will be offensive as well as defensive, and the president is likely to exert infinitely more control over the governor than the governor over the president. The chief magistracy of the will be held at the
pleasure of the chief magistrate of the union, or exchanged at his bidding for some other boon within his gift.

I hope, gentlemen, that you will pardon me if I have seemed fastidious in these sentiments. They are sentiments which I imbibed from the precepts and examples of men who well knew the elements of our political system and who scanned with prophetic forecast all the dangers to which we have been exposed. They are sentiments which I trust will be appreciated by the "friends of retrenchment and reform" in Tennessee.

I have the honor, gentlemen, with high consideration etc., to be Your Obt. sevt.

Thomas W. Gilmer.

To Messrs.
S.D. Morgan / Committee
N. Canner
J. Shelby
(To Franklin Minor)

Richmond, March 6, 1839.

Dear Frank:

I hear that Monday passed off without much excitement and that the only danger is from Gordon's partner. I hope none of my friends have urged him out, as his running may endanger everything and he cannot be elected. It is impossible - Let him take his own course, but I beg that no one will leave it in the least doubtful that I have had nothing to do with it. I do not wish publicly to disdain and discourage this; as I do not wish to wound G's feelings - but his running as the Whig candidate, presents innumerable and insurmountable difficulties. Could you see the whole board as I see it, you would agree with me. I hope to hear more fully what is going on. Let me beseech you all to be cautious. Things are well now - let them be so - or rather they were well until Monday last. I trust you will be prudent - This is a crisis - and those who do not see the whole game should beware how they throw the fat in the fire.

Write to me fully and freely. Let me have light, if you know what; have not seen or heard. South is in f and I confess I feel uneasy - in haste. I write from the Clerk's office which is full of sound and fury.

Yours truly,
T.W.G.

Richmond, February 12, 1840.

Dear Frank:

I received your very friendly letter some days since, and acknowledge it with sincere gratitude. I had duly considered the suggestions which it contained, for they had occurred to me as possibly furnishing grounds for the uncharitable class of political hacks to assail me by misrepresentation and misrepresentation. The means of defense, however, were so abundant and accessible that on conference with our friends, and after the maturest deliberation, I could not think, nor could they, that any human being would with any plausibility misunderstand me. I have never sought the office to which I am now elected. That is well-known here by all parties. Indeed, I have throughout the winter been endeavoring to secure the election of another (Mr. McCfarland), because I thought with his connections among the Democrats he stood the best chance of election. This is also known to many members of both parties. Up to a late period on the night previous to the election, I refused to run, and continued to endeavor to elect some one else, urging the certainty of my vote for another, and the impossibility of voting for myself, as a reason why another candidate would be stronger than I. On yesterday I went to the House and kept the chair till I was nominated. I had not consented to run up to that moment, but left the matter in the hands of my friends, Southall and Dorman. I was elected. One Whig was absent. My election seems, from the hearty congratulations I receive, to have been in the highest degree acceptable to our party, and not mortifying to the opposite party. Indeed, many of the latter have expressed their entire satisfaction, and say they would have voted for me over all the candidates if they had thought their constituents would have sanctioned such a vote.
Under these circumstances you will perceive that neither I nor my friends have any thing to apprehend. The office has been forced on me under circumstances which will forever acquit me of entering into or conceiving any plot to obtain it, or of desiring it. The suspicion you allude to was never once hinted at in the debate by the most illiberal, unscrupulous partisans. Southall invited every one to assail my private or political character, and defied investigation. Not one word was anywhere hinted against either, except that I had gone into the Harrison meeting here. But for that I could have received two-thirds or more of the General Assembly. Never fear for my character while it is in my keeping.

What am I to do? There is a general wish for me not to resign the chair, and yet I must take some time to arrange my business. How does my wife take it? I hope my friends, knowing her feelings will do all they can to reconcile her feelings to my duty, and not jest with her and aggravate objections already almost invincible.

Love to all. Faithfully yours,
Thomas W. Gilmer.

Richmond, April 9, 1840.

Dear Frank:

I have received a letter from a friend in the county of Southampton informing me that a letter has been exhibited to Mr. J. Randolph, Esq. to Mr. Ridley, insinuating to me opinions and acts which Mr. Randolph must well know I never entertained or imagined, and that this letter has been (for aught I know still is) shewn by Mr. Randolph's correspondent to create a belief to my prejudice. Under these circumstances I am constrained to ask that Mr. Randolph will furnish me with a copy of this letter. I will thank you, therefore, to apply to him (in my name) to do so, or to suppress or require his correspondent to suppress its circulation and credit, and to apprise me by the first opportunity of the result of your application. I had earnestly hoped that I should have been saved this unpleasant necessity, and I still hope that the use which is made of Mr. R's letter, is against his instructions.

I will thank you to attend to this for me as soon as you can and to say nothing about it except to Mr. Randolph.

Truly yours,
Thomas W. Gilmer

P.S. I presume that Mr. Randolph either has a copy of his letter, or that he will authorize his correspondent to furnish me with one.

Richmond, Nov. 23, 1840.

Dear Frank:

When I wrote last I had not read the number I referred to for a and did not remember that they treated particularly of the one-bank scheme. My chief and indeed only object was to consult you as to the propriety of publishing now that part which refers to my views of the duties and objects of the Whig party. If you think an extract embracing these views would be well timed now, that would be far preferable to publishing my views of the one bank scheme. I think some such advice is now necessary and a short extract would answer. It is however a
Dear Frank:

I received your last letter yesterday and being a more punctual correspondent hasten to reply to it. I cared little about the republication of the facts of the essays I mentioned and do not know that my destinies will be materially effected any way by it. They contained what I esteemed sound views as to the duties of our party in 1838 and which I think peculiarly important to be remembered now and hence I desired to promulge them, merely to acquit myself of my duty and let it be known that I was so far consistent and sound. You say nothing of Tom's views as to my correspondence with Gov. Seward. He has maintained a studied silence, which induced me to apprehend he was not very favorable to my interest. I sent him a copy. His paper is rather a poor concern, I think, and seems to have disappointed public expectation altogether. He has approved Webster's appointment as Secretary of State, and is quoted by the Intelligencer as a sign from Albermarle, where I should suppose there cannot be more than one hundred votes who would approve it. It is universally disapproved here by our party, and letters have been written by everybody who could write to Washington entreat our friends there to avert so heavy and disastrous a calamity. If not averted it knocks us in to a cocked hat in Virginia and everywhere. The editors of the Whig (or rather the senior of the concern), I believe, is the only Whig here who approves, and his article a few days since, like Tom Wood's, will seem to undo what the whole party are trying to effect. The vice-president and all the Southern Whigs at Washington think as we do on this point. Tyler wrote me he would come and stay with me during Harrison's visit here, and I shall try then to get Webster put into some dark corner, or thrown overboard entirely. He is a Federalist of the worst die, a blackguard and vulgar debauche; and but for his splendid talents would be in jail, or on some dunghill. He won't do, and the men who cling to him can't stand. You ask who who is to go to the Senate No. 1. I answer Rives, I suppose. You ask as to No. 2. Non sum informatus. Many have spoken to me about running for both places. I have invariably answered that I did not seek either, and wished it distinctly and
emphatically understood that I would not be in anybody's way, nor embarrass my friends. If after so broad a declaration they can agree, as I suppose they will on some other, of course I shall not be the man. If, however, they find difficulty, as some of our friends apprehend, I may be chosen as a dernier resort. I thank you for your advice. Do you observe any symptom of too much ambition? I thought I had been very modest and self-denying, and surely the ground I take and have taken for two years as to proffered promotion to the Senate entitles me to a verdict of acquittal from a charge of restless ambition. I try to be, as far as vain mortal can be, devoted to the public good, while I cannot help feeling gratified by the confidence of my countrymen and their desire to promote me. I do not mean to run ahead of the public wish on this head.

We are all well except myself. My health has not been good for a month, though it is mending.

Love to all,

Thomas W. Gilmer.

Richmond, July 16, 1841.

Dear Frank:

I wrote yesterday answering your letter received the day before and lo! last night's mail brought another long and interesting epistle bearing your signature. What do you mean? What change has come over the spirit of your dream, my dear fellow? Have you got the (cawethes sinhindi) outright? I give you due credit and many thanks at all events for your diligence no less than your friendship as manifested in the suggestions which both your last letters contained. You are just such an adviser as I need. Your position at a distance from the scenes of action keep you free from many excitements which are felt by those in the ring, and your candour gives me sincere convictions of at least one friend, which by the way, though seldom found are much needed by public men. Let the essays of "a Virginian" rest for the present. I had a scheme which they would have contributed to promote, but now I had rather do without them. That iron is not hot now but perhaps it never was. But no matter I had rather now you would not publish any part of them. They have been seen in the quarter I designed and that is enough. The most perplexing and unpleasant part of the business is that my mind has inbibed the impression that our friend Tom is not cordially with me. How is this? If I am wrong I would like to be set right. He takes his cue too much from the R.Wig which is far from being friendly to me. It may now assume an ace of friendship, but it will not be the result of its own emotions. I fear it is so with Tom. You say you can keep a secret. I never doubted that and my whole intercourse with you must have shown you that I thought so. I quitted our old and by me beloved county under the shadow of an apprehension that my departure created little or no regret with more than a few, very few. No demonstration of a public character was made or attempted on the occasion, and some such thing has always been practiced toward other public men on such occasions. Of course it was not proper that my relations should move in anything of the kind, but there were others who would have done the thing handsomely for other men. Hence
the opinion I have more than once expressed to you - rely on the people, not the politicians. Enough of all this - I took the responsibility yesterday and appointe the bank directors. I know not yet how it takes. ............

I hear from several quarter tha I can go to the Senate No. 2. If the thing comes right side up I will take it, though I do not care for it. I have done my duty in advising proper measures. If they are not followed and harm ensues, the fault is not mine. I that my correspondence with the Governor of New York is exciting some sensation in the States.

If we do unite with our former opponents in resisting legislative encroachments, we only carry out our old principles. The test of Harrison's administration turns on his cabinet and his measures. If they are bad, we are no worse off by being in opposition. We shall soon see more and know better how to act.

Yours,

Thomas W. Gilmer.

Richmond, March 18, 1841.

Dear Frank:

I drop you a few lines by Mr. Gambill, though the weather is now so bad as to render his departure very uncertain, your letter to your representatives brought about the first and only interview I have ever had with any of them on the subject of late Senatorial election. Col. Coles came to see me and showed me your letter the evening after it was delivered. He said it had excited some surprise among the delegation and he came to consult with me. He entered into a long explanation as to the course of Southall and himself in relation to the election, which amounted to nothing more than that they would have gone for me had they known that I wished it, etc. I told him it was a subject he must be aware of too much delicacy for me to have anything to say about. He intimated I thought that it would be agreeable to them that I should take some path to allay any excitement in the county. I asked who should answer your letter. I felt rather awkwardly situated by their appeals and remarked that I had been mortified by the failure of my own representatives to mention the subject to me at all while various other members had frequently approached me, when my name was in the newspapers connected with the election and when it was canvassed freely in every circle of the city.

That I had been surprised too at their voting against me in the caucus when I was nominated by almost a stranger and that I had reason to believe this circumstance had injured me with many here, that I could not explain it, etc. So ended the interview. What they will do with your letter I know not. It is couched in rather strong terms. I have heard nothing from them for some days. I shall certainly be at our next court if I live and am able to get there. I will stay some days. I would not be able to advise you as to the course to be taken unless I knew the extent of the feeling on the subject. I wish it to be known to my friends that I am to be at court. I have heard many rumors as to incidents manifesting anything but a friendly feeling on the part of your delegates fro me. But what more evidence could be wanted of this than their refusal to vote for me in the caucus when I was nominated. Cocke had Southall's proxy and S. was not there. But as my name had been frequently canvassed I cannot believe that they were the only members who never heard of it. Besides was nominated in the Advocate and they all saw that. They have differed to
from me as to the New York controversy. If there are many mal-
contents you can easily elect two other Whigs. However I would
not determine on any definite plan of action yet. I shall be
with you soon. Let the wind blow for awhile. My friends you will
find are among the people not the politicians. Let me hear from
you again. I will write if any thing is heard.
Very truly yours,
Thomas W. Gilmer.

Washington, July 23, 1841.

Dear Frank:

... I have made a speech to-day which I would be
glad for you and our friends generally to see. It shall be written
and published. There may be a meagre sketch of it in the papers
tomorrow; but this speech I wish to have correctly understood, as
I think it will show who is who, and what is what here, and why
the same harmony does not exist now that has existed. I will try
and get some copies to Charlottesville by our court. Who will
run for the House of Delegates in poor Coles's place? You should
be the man, if it meets with the public approbation. I have much
to say to you, but find no time here to write. Rives is very
corial with me, consults me, etc., about everything. He is not in good spirits.

God bless you, and love to all at Edgemont.

Thomas W. Gilmer.
June 2, 1921.

Dr. F. W. Boatwright,
University of Richmond, Va.

My dear Dr. Boatwright:

The Department of History of Westhampton College recommends that the J. Taylor Ellyson Medal for research work in Virginia History be awarded to Miss Rebekah Lawson, who submits the attached study on Thomas Walker Gilmer, unless there are other contestants from Richmond College to be considered.

Respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

Maud H. Goodwin