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HAMLET TO HOTSPUR: LETTERS OF ROBERT WOODWARD BARNWELL TO ROBERT BARNWELL RHETT

JOHN BARNWELL *

Robert Woodward Barnwell has long puzzled historians of South Carolina. Clement Eaton characterized this "South Carolina aristocrat" as "a gifted individual who never fulfilled the brilliant promise of his youth."¹ Born in 1801 to the wealthy and privileged world of Beaufort's planting elite, Robert Barnwell inherited a tradition of family political prominence. His great-grandfather, Colonel John Barnwell, had won the colonial gentry's gratitude by a campaign against the Tuscorora Indians. His father, Robert Gibbes Barnwell, fought in the Revolution and afterwards successfully combined planting and Federalist politics.

Robert W. Barnwell's education fulfilled his father's expectations. James Louis Petigru was his teacher at Beaufort College, a private academy catering to the sons of low-country planters. In 1817 Barnwell went to Harvard where he formed a friendship with classmate Ralph Waldo Emerson. The South Carolinian reveled in college life and engaged in a "great struggle of ambition"² for social pre-eminence. He also excelled academically, inbibing a fondness for classics from his tutor in Greek, Edward Everett. Barnwell graduated valedictorian in 1821.

He returned to South Carolina and read law in the Charleston office of Hamilton & Petigru;³ admitted to the bar in 1823, Barnwell formed a partnership with his second cousin Robert Barnwell Smith (Rhett).⁴ Three years later both men were elected to South Carolina's lower house, and in another three, Robert Barnwell succeeded James Hamilton in Congress. Despite the excitement of the Nullification Movement, which spanned Barnwell's congressional service, he became dissatisfied

* Doctoral candidate in American History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The letters are in the Robert Barnwell Rhett Papers, Southern Historical Collection at the University. Mr. Barnwell wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance of the director and staff of the Southern Historical Collection.

¹ Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, p. 66.

² *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by William H. Gilman *et al.*, I: 38.

³ James Hamilton's state rights view had not yet clashed irreconcilably with Petigru's Unionism.

⁴ In 1837 Rhett and his five brothers changed their name from Smith.

Pringle, Jas. R.	9 Legare	X		X	X	12,000	12,000
Pringle, W. B. (Wm. B.)	King nr Lamboll	X		X	X	18,000	18,000
Pyatt, John (F.)	SE cor Meeting & Charlotte	X	X		X	.....	.....
Rhett, Barnwell (B. S.)	cor Rutledge & Vanderhorst	X		X	X	9,000	9,000
Rose, A. G. (Dr. Arthur)	Rutledge abv Calhoun	X	X		X	10,000	30,000
Rose, Hugh	74 Broad	X	X			.....	.....
Rutledge, John	156 Calhoun	X	X		X	.....	40,000
Salvo, J. M.	King bel Romney		X		X	6,500	.....
Seabrook, Wm.	Broad opp Rutledge		X		X	10,000	.....
Smith, Eliza	15 Montague	X		X	X	8,000	40,000
Smith, J. J. Pringle	18 Meeting	X	X		X	.....	20,000
Starr, W. W.	Spring bet Ashley & President	X	X		X	.....	5,000
Swinton, H. R.	.....	X				.....	15,000
Tennent, Josiah S. (J.)	cor Blake & Bay	X	X		X	12,000	40,000
Tennent, William (Wm.)	Calhoun opp Wall	X	X			.....	.....
Thompson, John	Congress & Rutledge		X		X	12,500	.....
Tirman, J. H.	.....	X			X	.....	11,000
Toomer, Henry L.	Ashley cor Cannon	X	X		X	11,700	40,000
Turnbull, Andrew (A.)	SE cor Pitt & Vanderhorst	X		X	X	3,000	6,500
Vanderhorst, E.	11 Chapel	X	X		X	100,000	100,000
Vanderlippe, F.	Bogard at Percy		X		X	1,500	.....
Vardell, W. G.	.....	X				.....	12,000
Vidal, James	23 Middle	X		X	X	5,000	6,000
Wagner, Effingham	.....	X			X	.....	.....
Waring, Morton A.	St. Philip nr Cannon	X		X	X	7,000	8,000
Weldon, John	Chapel nr NERR		X		X	5,000	.....
Weston, Francis	.....	X			X	10,000	320,000
Whaley, Christopher	10 Grange		X			.....	.....
White, J. T. H.	Charlotte cor Elizabeth	X		X	X	15,000	15,000
Wilson, Abraham (A.)	Smith & Calhoun	X		X	X	.....	2,550
Wilson, Hugh Sr. (H.)	Washington nr Chapel	X	X		X	13,000	13,000
Wilson, Hugh Jr. (H. J.)	Washington nr Charlotte	X	X		X	.....	.....
Wilson, John	Rutledge cor Smith		X		X	3,900	.....
Wilson, Radcliffe	.....	X				.....	.....
Wilson, St. Julian A.	Thomas nr Radcliffe	X	X		X	.....	2,000
Wright, D.	19 Hanover			X		.....	.....
Wundrum, Samuel L.	.....	X				.....	20,000

with politics as a career. Although he had been unopposed for re-election, he retired at the end of his second term.

Cotton planting, however, held his interest only until December 1835, when he accepted the presidency of South Carolina College. For nearly six years he conducted the College's affairs, winning praise from his colleagues and generous funding from the state legislature. Yet in the fall of 1841 Barnwell resigned: the pattern of indecision which marked his life had become fixed. The letters which follow were written just before and during a period of self-imposed retirement from public life; in them Barnwell revealed nagging doubts about himself and his careers as politician, planter and educator.

Self-doubt, a companion to Robert W. Barnwell, was a stranger to his cousin Rhett. Barnwell was self-effacing, almost shy as a legislator; Rhett was from the beginning of his career aggressive, even arrogant. Transparently ambitious, Rhett was "disliked by other political leaders as rash and presumptuous and offensively self-confident, he was for long the *enfant terrible* of South Carolina politics."⁵ During the period of the following letters, Rhett held the congressional seat which Barnwell once occupied. Rhett ended his tenure in the House of Representatives in March 1849; in December 1850 he was elected to the Senate, but resigned in May 1852 after South Carolina repudiated separate secession. From the Nullification Crisis until Reconstruction Rhett exercised great influence on the Charleston *Mercury*, and from 1862 until the paper's temporary suspension in 1865 he joined his son in editing it.

The friendship between Barnwell and his cousin Rhett dated from their boyhood days in Beaufort. Although the two men were foils in personality, their relationship remained close for most of their lives. In 1851 their feelings for each other were strained by South Carolina's internal struggle over secession or co-operation, but by 1860 their cordiality, outwardly at least, had been restored. The Hamlet of this twosome died in 1882, having survived his Hotspur cousin by six years.

[Columbia]

23 Jany 1841

My dear Barnwell

I thank you very much for your letter received today. I ought to have written to you before but at first pressing engagements operated as a sop to my conscience & then I was becoming hardened in my neglect. I am very glad to hear that at length Mrs. Rhett & yourself have got rid of your fears about all the fevers of the last summer [which]

⁵ Laura A. White, *Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession*, p. 10.

have proved so very troublesome that I feared your fits might last until the Spring. Emily Barnwell⁶ still has fits of fever & several of the young men in College are also troubled with them. I hope that change of climate will permanently remove yours. With respect to Ford⁷ he is here as your protege. [Torn] at Commencement again applied for Sophmore, could not stand his examination for that class & took the Freshman. I have supplied him with funds to about \$150 including a tailor's bill charged to me & intended to go on to the \$200—expecting after that funds from you which will be necessary to about \$150 in April next.

I am confirmed in the opinion which I expressed to you upon his first examination that he will not make his way in any pursuit which requires much talent or learning. He seems to me to be a very amiable but a thoughtless & weak boy. I do not think him wilfully neglectful of his studies but he certainly makes very little progress in them. As he is in College I think that it would be as well to let him go on until June but if by that time he makes no improvement I really think that he had better have his attention turned to some other line of life.

The account you give of John Stuart⁸ is most dreadful, yet it grieves rather than surprises me. My brother⁹ had prepared me for it. Indeed I was extremely shocked when I saw John in Beaufort for I then first understood his real condition. All the symptoms of approaching or as I then hoped receding ruin were upon him & it was apparent that nothing but a revolution in his character & habits will save him. How pitiable! Can you not make some provision for his wife & family from the paper.¹⁰ Would he not make some assignment for their benefit.

⁶ Emily Howe Barnwell (1820-1894), the daughter of John Gibbes and Sarah Bull Barnwell, was Robert Woodward Barnwell's (hereafter RWB) second cousin and the younger sister and his wife Eliza Barnwell (1807-1891).

⁷ "W. Ford" was admitted to the sophomore class of South Carolina College, 1841-42; he left without a diploma.

⁸ In October 1832 John A. Stuart (1800-1852) became owner and editor of the Charleston *Mercury*. As his health failed, Stuart gradually relinquished management of the paper to his assistant editor John M. Clapp; in the mid-1840's Stuart completely severed his ties to the *Mercury*.

⁹ William Hazzard Wigg Barnwell (1806-1863), only brother of Robert Woodward Barnwell, inherited Laural Bay Plantation located on the Broad River next to RWB's Woodward Plantation. William Barnwell entered the Episcopal ministry, and from 1834 to 1853 he served as rector of St. Peter's Church, Charleston.

¹⁰ Robert Barnwell Rhett's (hereafter RBR) connection with Stuart was both personal and political. In 1822 Stuart married RBR's younger sister Claudia Smith (1802-1875). The *Mercury's* long popular identification as RBR's political organ

Although I expect to spend my summer in Beaufort and am very happy when circumstances throw us together, yet so much had both Mrs. Rhett & yourself suffered during the last summer that I did not wish you to try another summer in the same situation. I think that in our climate the nearer people live together in summer the greater the security against fever & I would rather trust myself in the situation which we occupied during the last summer than almost any other in the town. If N. Heyward & Eliza¹¹ do not occupy their house, I think that you would run less risk of fever there than at Edmund's.¹² This however is for yourself to say. It is not pleasant to have any doubt cast upon the healthiness of our permanent residence. I hope & think however that the last summer will prove an exception in the healthiness of Beaufort.

I am very sorry to perceive from your letter that your crop has not equalled your expectation. We cotton planters are most dreadfully deficient, for myself in the proportion of nearly 2/3 to the crop of the last year but I thought that the rice crops were fine. I am however surprised and disappointed that the success of Harrison has not rendered money matters temporarily more easy for after the evident phrensy into which the clamors of the Whigs had worked up the public mind, I did think that Bank stock & bonds &c would have risen up, but it seems that the pressure is to continue and increase. I know not how it will end; a National Bank will certainly not lessen the pressure, yet this measure the party must adopt, otherwise they have nothing to hold them together.

With respect to the Tariff we are in much danger though I do not think that anything else will be done but putting on a duty upon silks & wine & passing Mr. Adams Bill,¹³ these measures I think are as

began during Stuart's tenure as editor. Various members of the Rhett family maintained either financial or managerial connections with the *Mercury* until 1868.

¹¹ Nathaniel Barnwell Heyward (1816-1891) planted rice at White Hall Plantation on the Combahee River and maintained homes in Charleston and Beaufort. In 1838 Heyward married RBR's youngest sister Eliza Barnwell Smith (1814-1887).

¹² RBR's younger brother Edmund (1808-1863) practiced law both in Ashepoo Ferry, where he owned a plantation, and in Beaufort, which was his principal residence.

¹³ The tariff bill signed into law on July 14, 1832 was dubbed by contemporaries "the Adams Tariff" after John Quincy Adams, chairman of the House Committee on Manufacturing. In March 1833 "the Adams Tariff" was superseded by Henry Clay's compromise measure. RWB expected the recently victorious Whigs to revive "the Adams Tariff."

certain as any thing future can be. Clay's Bill for distribution¹⁴ I also fear will become a Law if the census of the New States does not prevent it. But that which in my opinion far surpasses every measure likely to be adopted in Congress, in danger, is this open & flagrant invasion of our property by New York¹⁵ & the passive acquiescence by the South under it. If no Southern convention meets upon this matter, we are gone, for it is not easy to conceive of anything more injurious and degrading than the treatment which the South will thus have patiently, no not *patiently* but *basely*, submitted to. For she has proved that she understood & felt the wrong & succumbs.

I have not seen the papers which have passed between the Governors of New York & Virginia, but from an extract from a recent Richmond Whig I conclude that Virginia will do nothing. Nothing but a formal call of a convention of the Slaveholding States will meet the emergency. We are no match for the [torn] game of quibbling legislation. The Constitution has been annulled by them; let us so consider it & determine rather to be efficient than legal. They have outlawed us, let us outlaw them and as we cannot recover our property in their courts, let us forbid them the use of ours. A few strong acts agreed upon by a concert of the Slaveholding States would put an end to the struggle for at least our lifetimes. I am sorry however to see in the Mercury & other papers of our party an attempt made to make political stock of this matter. That there will be division I fear but the stake is too momentous for us to provoke it. As for the Democratic party I am rather despondent about its national fortunes. Not that it may not easily

¹⁴ Henry Clay advocated distributing the proceeds of public land sales among the states. Whigs tended to support such a measure, while Democrats generally opposed it. In 1835-36 Clay renewed his campaign for a distribution. John C. Calhoun, without providing for a distribution of future land sale revenue, offered a bill to distribute pro-rata the Treasury surplus in excess of \$5 million. In June 1836 this "deposit" with the states, as Calhoun styled it, became the Surplus Revenue Act. But in the Panic of 1837 the surplus vanished, and distribution payments abruptly ceased. In 1841 the Whigs again proposed a land proceeds distribution. They obtained this goal in September with the Distribution-Pre-emption Act; Democrats, however, had attached a rider which prohibited distribution payments, if the tariff level should be increased.

¹⁵ In July 1839 a Norfolk, Virginia slave named Isaac stowed away on the schooner *Robert Center*. Isaac's owner, John G. Colley, had the fugitive arrested in New York and returned to Virginia. Colley also charged the *Robert Center's* three black sailors, Peter Johnson, Isaac Gansey and Edward Smith, with inducing his slave to escape. The state of Virginia demanded the extradition of Johnson, Gansey and Smith for stealing slave property. Governor William H. Seward of New York refused on the grounds that no such crime existed in his state. Controversy over this incident dragged on for several years and escalated into a minor sectional issue.

resume its [obligation to] the nation, but because the old leaders cannot agree & cannot be superseded. Benton, Buchanan & Calhoun cannot command the confidence of each other or the party & unless Van Buren can bring New York at his back he is out of the question. We occupy a strong position but may easily lose it by running a candidate who is only sure of our vote. I do wish Mr. Calhoun could find some other man than himself fit for the Presidency. For after all this you perceive is the decisive test as to whether he is a candidate or not. He has often disclaimed any desire of the office, but has never been able to recommend another. He is so decidedly the most worthy that it is very hard to pass him over but if Van Buren can carry New York he is our man. My paper & the time of night bid me close yet not without a few words upon that which is warmest to my heart & yours. I regret very much that you are without a confidential religious friend surrounded as you are by cares & temptations yet we know there is a friend who often secludes us from others that he may bring us into more intimate communion with himself. My remembrance of Washington is chequered indeed but not without many precious thoughts. I then found the deepest convictions of the truth of Christianity & my own need of its provisions in the perusal of the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress & Milner's Church History.¹⁶ Have you ever read Milner's? I recommend him to you if you have not. I advise you to read Bishop Hill's reflections¹⁷ if you have not read them. Let some pious author of the old time be your companion & you will not feel the want of personal converse. I do most sincerely hope that your health will be restored for we shall need all of your energy for the next four years in our political world & in our religious one. I fear that Dr. Gadsden¹⁸ may [illegible] the church to death unless some activity be given to it from within.

Things here are much as usual. We shall miss Stephen¹⁹ in the discipline of the College very much. His manners & character as well

¹⁶ *The History of the Church of Christ . . . edited from the manuscripts of . . . Joseph Milner . . . by Isaac Milner* (4 vols, York, 1794-1809). Reprinted 1835 in Philadelphia as, Rev. Joseph Milner, *Church History*.

¹⁷ E[dwin] Sidney, comp., *Mature Reflections . . . of Rowland Hill in His Old Age* (London, 1836). Reprinted as, *Mature Reflections and Devotions of the Rev. Rowland Hill* (New York, 1836).

¹⁸ Christopher Edwards Gadsden (1785-1852) served as the fourth Protestant Episcopal bishop of South Carolina, 1840-1852.

¹⁹ Stephen Elliott (1806-1866) was another of RWB's boyhood friends from Beaufort. In December 1835, when RWB accepted the Presidency of South Carolina College, Elliott became chaplain and professor of sacred literature and evidences of Christianity. In 1840 he resigned his chair to become the first Protestant Episcopal bishop of Georgia.

as his prudent counsel cannot be easily replaced. In Mr. Thornwell²⁰ however we have a pious & able man. As a teacher I think very admirable, and scarcely inferior to any one whom I have ever heard as a Preacher. I wish that you could hear him, he is full of instruction and zeal. You do not say whether Mrs. Rhett is with you. Make me very kindly remembered to her, if she is. For yourself, dear Barnwell, you have my prayers & strong wishes for every temporal & still more every spiritual blessing. Write soon & write often. I am always very glad to hear from you.

Ever yo friend

RWB

The Honble R. Barnwell Rhett
Washington City, Dist of Columbia

[Columbia]
15 May 1841

My dear Barnwell

I received your affectionate letter the day before yesterday & must not suffer any longer time to elapse without answering it as well because I need some immediate impulse to bring me to writing as because you will not else receive my answer in Carolina. I am very sorry that your family will be so long removed from the State but I feel fully the force of the reasons which you assign and have always felt the difficulty of a representative doing at the same time his duty to his family & his people; I sincerely hope that the health & education of your family will be promoted by your present plan. Allow me however to beg of you not to send your boys to the Romish seminary near Georgetown.²¹ It would give the utmost pain to many who love you dearly to think that for mere intellectual advantage you would expose your children & by your example encourage others to expose theirs to that soul destroying influence.

The longer I live the more confirmed becomes my abhorrence of that Anti Christ the Romish Church, for the deeper do I feel my need of

²⁰ James Henley Thornwell (1812-1862) graduated from South Carolina College in 1831, and became a Presbyterian clergyman well-known for his conservative theological views. Appointed professor of metaphysics at his alma mater in 1837, he resigned that post in 1840; Thornwell returned to the college early in 1841 to succeed Elliott.

²¹ Rhett had considered enrolling his oldest sons, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr. (1828-1901) and Alfred Moore Rhett (1829-1889), as day students at nearby Georgetown University. RBR apparently decided against the Roman Catholic school, for in September 1842 Georgetown Classical and Mathematical Academy billed him for Alfred Rhett's tuition.

a Righteousness not my own. It is not that Rome is superstitious but because she takes away Jesus in his true character of the Savior of *sinner*s that I think there can be no peace with her. I have felt very much for the trials which I knew that [you] were undergoing this winter in the sickness of your family & in money matters & I ought to have written more frequently, but my own pecuniary affairs have been more embarrassing than at any former period of my life & this dull routine of petty employments here furnish a most dangerous[opportu- nity] to a lazy man for his idolence.

I was very much pleased with your speech²² and although I do not entirely concur in the opinions expressed, yet I think your vindication of them able & elevated. I must beg you however to moderate your tone. I do not find it easy to do so, for bred as I have been amid the hearts of Nullification, I do love the State with such passionate ardor, that my sympathy is cordial & overflowing toward all who champion her interests & honor, but in this matter we are both to blame & suffer nature to overcome grace. Not that Religion destroys Patriotism, but the spirit of love toward all mitigates its exclusive tendency. I look upon the whole batch of Whig measures with the same distrust which you express but am less sanguine than you are that the State can be brought to act against them. The National Bank has never been very unpopular in South Carolina (we owe this to Calhoun & McDuffie)²³ & in a contest between State Banks & U. S. Bank (and unfortunately this is the only issue which at present the people will make) it is very doubtful whether the public sentiment will be very decided against a U.S. Bank.

The other two prominent measures distribution & tariff ought & I hope will excite a deeper & more determined opposition. So destructive to our liberties do I believe this scheme of permanent distribution to be,²⁴ that I should be well pleased if the new states passed laws to nullify the act by granting out the lands upon their own authority until some adjustment could be effected. But I prefer the present system to Mr.

²² RBR's speech in Congress on February 19, 1841. His ostensible topic was the pending General Appropriation Bill; actually Rhett gave an exposition of South Carolina's commitment to a tariff for revenue only. RBR denounced the tariff increase proposed by the Whigs as unconstitutional and contrary to guarantees embedded in the tariff of 1833.

²³ In 1832 Congressman George McDuffie, a staunch defender of the Second Bank of the U. S., presented the Bank's memorial for recharter. Calhoun adopted a neutral stand on the issue of rechartering, but many of his contemporaries regarded him as pro-Bank because he had introduced its original (1816) charter.

²⁴ See RWB to RBR, January 23, 1841, note 10.

Calhoun's, as I do not believe that we should get anything from other states (see Pennsylvania).²⁵

I have no confidence in Tyler, he will be Clay's man. In some respects however it is better that he should be President. He is a slave holder & therefore we may expect his sympathy upon that & some cognate subjects, he will talk state rights & therefore even his party must give them some lip workship, he is also without personal popularity & therefore his acts will receive no protection from his name. But *c[etera]* contra his position will weaken a southern opposition & this is the only opposition which has vigor enough to cure the evils which threaten us.

With respect to Ford, I am afraid we have got into a difficulty from which we cannot extricate ourselves. I say a difficulty for the amount expended upon him will be large & the return small. He seems to be good tempered well-disposed youth of little talent & less energy who probably will get through college without doing any harm to others or much good to himself, but as long as he does not deserve to be sent away, his friends must determine whether he shall stay or not. Our difficulty about scholarship is always this, in a community like ours we are obliged to tolerate dunces & if you tolerate one, others get off under *[obscured]*²⁶ cover. He has spent about \$300 & probably will get on until commencement upon about \$100 more if therefore you can send the \$50 at that time I will try to make out for him until then. I am horribly hampered though. Edwards²⁷ I am told gave him some credit for clothes, this will only injure the Boy & not relieve us. He ought to have 400 & be told that he must live upon this or try something else. It is enough for the 9 months. You have heard that Mr. Thornwell has been compelled to leave us for some time.²⁸ I feel his absence very sensibly, but I trust that I am in *[illegible]* & I know that God can keep me & will do so if I trust him. And you Dear Barnwell must cast yourself upon him with a deep reliance, a reliance of love, study the character of Christ until you love him & then your peace will be deep & strong & no man will take it from you. Give me your prayers. I shall miss you more than I can say this summer in Beaufort. I had hoped to have had your counsel & your sympathy in many little yet to the feelings im-

²⁵ When Clay's Distribution Bill came before the Senate in 1836, only James Buchanan and Samuel McKean of Pennsylvania broke Democratic ranks to vote for the measure. Their votes were in compliance with instructions from the Pennsylvania legislature, dominated during 1835-36 by a coalition of Antimasons and Whigs.

²⁶ Sealing wax covers one word.

²⁷ Probably George Edwards (1777-1859) of Spring Island Plantation, St. Luke's Parish, Beaufort District.

²⁸ In the spring of 1841 James H. Thornwell left South Carolina College for a recuperative vacation in Europe; he returned in the fall.

portant things which cannot bear the constraint of writing. Do write me often. Give my remembrance to your wife & believe me

your friend ever,

R W Barnwell

The Honble R. Barnwell Rhett/Blue House P.O.
Colleton Dist., So. Ca.
[forwarded to] Washington City, D.C.

[Beaufort]

1 Oct 1842

My dear Barnwell,

As you are an indifferent correspondent yourself, you are no doubt familiar with the excuses by which such people avoid condemning themselves for a season, but which wont bear the light of a distinct statement of them to others. Give me the benefit of some of them for delaying to answer your letter.

I am quite out of spirits about politics, the passage of that most abominable tariff law,²⁹ the treachery of Silas Wright³⁰ and Mr. Calhoun's patience under the enactment, make me utterly despond for the country and especially for the South. Without moderate duties I firmly believe that we make a vain struggle with our dangerous and adverse condition. Assaulted as our institutions are within, trampled upon as they are without, if this wasting disease of taxation is fixed upon, we shall have neither heart nor motive to persevere and await the decision of time upon this great question.

I solemnly declare that to me the next presidential election has already lost almost all importance. If the party refuse to place themselves upon the ground of a tariff for revenue exclusively, what will it avail us if Mr. Calhoun should be elected. Mr. Tyler proves how little a President without a party can do. If we had fortitude enough to do our duty, I am decidedly of opinion that South Carolina ought not to suffer this shocking law to be enforced within her limits, but this we cannot do for even the

²⁹ Signed into law on August 30, 1842, this tariff act returned duties to the general level prevailing in 1832.

³⁰ In August 1842 New York Senator Silas Wright, a Jacksonian Democrat, declared himself against the principle of a protective tariff. Later that month Wright voted for a Whig-sponsored tariff bill which was frankly protectionist, and this measure passed the Senate 24 to 23. He had reluctantly supported the bill because, unlike an earlier Whig proposal, while increasing the tariff it also suspended distribution payments as required by the Distribution-Pre-emption Act of 1841. Despite Wright's explanation of his vote, Rhett and a number of other Southern Democrats accused the New Yorker of bad faith on the tariff issue.

old Nullifiers are unwilling to act. Mr. Appleton³¹ says truly, the South will quietly submit. Mr. Calhoun & yourself and the politicians say, let us try the next election, if we then fail we will nullify. Do you not see that you expose our action to the disadvantage & reproach of being the mere expression of the resentment of a disappointed faction. If So Ca would act with dignity and efficiency, let her at the ensuing session call a convention together to meet in March or April and nullify the law, then whether friend or foe succeed they must subdue her or do her justice. Would a proposition for the call of a Convention succeed? Perhaps not. Let Mr. Calhoun and his friends honestly urge it. Without any mental reservation let them act upon their recorded principles and if they fail they have a good cause and a good conscience to retire upon, and their future efforts will not be paralysed at home and rendered ineffective abroad by the taint of selfishness.

But whilst I speak so fiercely, as you may think, I am too indolent and timid to act in the matter and have not to any one but yourself expressed my sentiments so freely. I am losing too much of my interest in politics, "this turning and overturning" not that I feel no interest in the welfare of my country, but that my thoughts and hopes turn more to other objects.

I cannot go back to Columbia as President of the College;³² if I know myself not because I shrink from the labor or the other disagreeable accompaniments of the station though they are neither few nor light and peculiarly annoying to an indolent sensitive person like myself, these I could return to bear, helped (as you suggest) by pecuniary difficulties and cotton planting, but I am not fit for the place and was constantly ashamed of the miserable way in which I got over rather than through my duties as a professor.³³ I do not say that I would not again take the office upon me. My own necessities (for who can answer for himself under the pressure of a family in want) or the evident necessity of the institution might recal me, but with my present views and under existing circumstances I ought not to do so. The simple truth is that I have not talent, learning or industry enough to fill an important station as it ought to be filled nor have I honesty and humility enough to fill it in such manner as I can.

³¹ Nathan Appleton (1779-1861) was a textile industrialist and a spokesman for high tariffs. He served twice as a Whig congressman from Massachusetts: 1831 to 1833 and June 9 to September 28, 1842.

³² On September 23, 1841 RWB had tendered his resignation to Governor John P. Richardson.

³³ RWB had taught "metaphysics and moral and intellectual philosophy." Daniel W. Hollis, *The University of South Carolina*, 1:128.

If the main difficulty which prevents my return to Columbia were removed,³⁴ I believe God would call me into the ministry, for all my desires turn toward religious knowledge and growth in grace.

I hope, dear Barnwell, that your multiplied engagements are all pursued in the spirit of a Christian, you know that there is but one thing needful and all others may be comforts and ornaments, but there is but one *necessary* in the life of man, hold fast to this, whatever it may cost you now, how little will you count the cost in 20 perhaps many fewer years. We are all here pretty well, we have some cases of fever but they are yet mild and yield readily to quinine. My son Robert³⁵ has had & still has fever, but it intermits and seems to be rather a stomachic affection than bilious. Edmund I hope will be elected without difficulty to the legislature.³⁶ Everything as yet seems very quiet. By the by you have never taken any notice of an application which I made in behalf of young Baker³⁷ for a warrant at West Point. Let me hear on the subject. I hope to see you in Beaufort toward the end of this month. I shall spend the winter probably here. Give my respects to your wife & make me remembered to your children.

Y[ou]r aff[ectiona]t[e] friend

R W Barnwell

[Beaufort]

30 Dec 1842

Dear Barnwell

These are times when the feelings of boyhood come over one very strongly and I then instinctively turn toward the friends of that period with a nearer and stronger interest. The affections seem to desire to cluster & these are the proper external objects to which they cling. Just after a Christmas passed far more gravely but far more happily too than those of former days, Rush Perronneau³⁸ & yourself come to remem-

³⁴ RWB pleaded poor health as the reason for his resignation. In 1837 illness had kept him in Beaufort for several weeks after the opening of the fall term, and in the summer of 1841 he had gone to New York for medical treatment. But the "main difficulty" may have been a psychological one: an ennui, which he revealed in subsequent letters to RBR.

³⁵ Robert Hayne Barnwell (1834-1872).

³⁶ Edmund Rhett won this election and represented St. Helena's Parish in the South Carolina House of Representatives for the next two sessions, 1842-43.

³⁷ Probably one of the sons of John M. Baker, a small planter and a Beaufort neighbor of RWB. Apparently "young Baker" never entered the U. S. Military Academy.

³⁸ "Rush Perronneau" was probably Edward C. Peronneau of Orange Grove Plantation on the Ashley River.

brance with all the freshness of former days. I have not much to write about but I wanted merely to speak to you believing that the voice of a friend would sooth & perhaps benefit you amid the turmoils and vexations of politics. We very much want consolation and yet are reluctant to draw it from the only sure and inexhaustible fountain, the love of God in Christ. When I read the strong promises of the Bible reiterated in every form and almost upon every page of peace and joy to the children of God, I am amazed at the anxieties & sorrows of those who call themselves his people and are his people.

Whilst I do not doubt but that many deceive themselves to their condemnation yet I also firmly believe that many true Christians dishonor their God and harrass their own lives by useless & morbid inquisitions into the workings of our own hearts. Let us turn more constantly to Jesus, reflect upon his glory in the whole work of redemption even irrespective of ourselves, and our admiration and love for him becoming more disinterested, will exercise a far more powerful and benign influence upon [our] heart & lives, than self inflicted remorse or carnal strivings.

My Brother has been passing the month at Laurel Bay and leaves for Charleston on Monday. He seems discouraged by the worldliness of his people and the general state of religion in Charleston, I fear with reason for there is certainly great coldness, with regard to true experimental religion everywhere, whilst sects were never so ardent and active in proselytising.

Let each one strive for God's help to enable him to live to the glory of Jesus and that which begins in humble secrecy will I doubt not be made manifest in turning many souls to righteousness.

Whilst I cannot persuade myself or be persuaded by others, that I have a call to the ministry, I am exceedingly anxious to call others, and for you dear Barnwell, I should feel my warmest wishes gratified could I see you laboring directly for the advancement of Christ's glory, with the zeal and boldness and sincerity, with which I believe that you now labour for your country.

I need not say to you what my feelings have been with respect to the proceedings in Columbia³⁰ I feel much more for the state than yourself. For whilst I think that more jealousy & odium was excited

³⁰ By the fall of 1842 Calhoun intended to resign from the Senate in March 1843 and seek the Presidency. RBR expected to succeed Calhoun, while Albert Rhett hoped to replace his older brother in the House. James Rhett would also run for Congress, and Edmund Rhett would enter the South Carolina House to provide liaison between the state legislature and the Rhett family. When Congress passed the Tariff

by some injudicious pieces written by your friends⁴⁰ than was necessary, yet South Carolina has swerved most grievously from her principles in the choice which she has made. We ought not to suffer ourselves to be moved from our own course of duty by the oner[ous] conduct of others, but I confess I now wish you to retire. Having the full confidence of the State and placed at the head of her representation, I think that you might forego private direct influence in favor of the propagation and support of true religion, for the public service you might render the country, but now I want to see you in Charleston, Beaufort or Columbia [obscured]⁴¹ impulse to the public mind in morals and religion. I will promise to give you whatever aid I can. I think that we would work well together. I am too indolent and cowardly to accomplish anything by myself whilst you perhaps are too contentious and ardent & bold to promote the law of peace & love without a drag.

I wish very much you could settle in Beaufort. We have a very good school for boys & a good one for girls,⁴² and in a more central situation, I cannot but hope that your family would find better health, but I will willingly forego the pleasure of being with you, could I but see you acting for Christ's Kingdom. We are all well here, except Stephen Elliott wife Ann.⁴³ She I think will soon leave for a better country even a heavenly. I thank you for your Book.⁴⁴ I have read Wesley's translation but it is a book for reading often.

Yours ever, dear Barnwell

R W Barnwell

of 1842, RBR decided against any effort to reanimate the nullification movement; instead he adhered to the family's predetermined course. But South Carolina's legislative session of 1842 shattered RBR's plans. A coalition of RBR's personal and ideological antagonists elected Daniel Huger, an old-line Unionist, as Calhoun's replacement. Isaac Edward Holmes defeated James Rhett in their congressional race; Albert Rhett withdrew from his contest in favor of RBR, who was re-elected.

⁴⁰ A Rhett supporter, signing himself "Philo Calhoun," engaged in an editorial battle with "Carolina Forever," one of Huger's partisans. Another of Rhett's defenders, the Columbia "Cor.[respondent] of the Mercury," crossed pens with "Justus," a booster of Andrew Pickens Butler, and with Huger's supporters. In his final report on the legislative session, the *Mercury's* Columbia correspondent gratuitously belittled Huger's abilities.

⁴¹ Sealing wax covers one or two words.

⁴² Of Beaufort's several boys schools, RWB was probably referring either to Beaufort College or to the academy conducted by Milton Maxcy; the girls school was probably a forerunner of Beaufort Female Seminary.

⁴³ Ann Hutson Elliott died on February 19, 1843 at the age of thirty.

⁴⁴ Probably a didactic work on the Gospels or the Book of Acts.

[Beaufort]

May 5th 1844

My dear Barnwell

I have just received a letter from Edward Laurens⁴⁵ which has caused me much uneasiness. He informs me that at its maturity in '45 he will require payment in full of a Bond of \$10,800 besides interest upon which I am security.

I had forgotten the transaction hoping that it had been settled, indeed my impression is that you stated at the time that the investment of the loan would be such as to secure its payment, at its consummation. I know that I made myself very easy about the matter.

I still hope that you may have some security for the debt as in times like these the sudden payment of so large a demand must be terribly severe. For myself you know that my own debts embarrass me & that I therefore cannot aid you in this matter. I hope to hear from you soon as I acknowledge that the formality and positiveness of Laurens letter has somewhat startled me, though he is very polite & kind both in expression and in giving me notice. I have just got back to Beaufort from the country.⁴⁶ The town is very healthy & gradually filling up. I owe you a much longer letter than this but just at present must postpone writing fully for a little more leisure.

What a crisis we are now passing through & yet how ignorant and supine are our Southern people. It is not the proof brought against the expediency of preserving our institutions but the judicial infatuation which seems to possess our people, which makes me think that in these Southern States, we are come to the beginning of the end.

The impudent contempt with which we are now treated and the timid acquiescence with which we receive it are certainly very ominous prognostics of our coming fate.

I am you know without the hope & therefore without the energy which the occasion demands and South Carolina from many unfortunate concurrences will find more difficulty in bringing this question of Slavery to a determined & speedy issue than any other Southern State.

In the midst of troubles pressing now and dangers frowning from the future, we at least are not left without support & refuge. He whom in our prosperity we so often forget never forgets us in our adversity. I have been blessed with great calmness of spirit & trust that God makes me [know] how to experience its sweetness, that in any coming trouble I may turn to him with greater assurance and speed.

⁴⁵ Edward R. Laurens, the son of Henry Laurens, Jr. (1763-1821), and the owner of Spring Hill Plantation near the Cooper River.

⁴⁶ Woodward Plantation.

I was sorry to see by the papers that your health was so infirm.⁴⁷ You must come home and get quiet at any cost, five years of agitation like these five last years, will cost you your life. I hope therefore what I have not hitherto done: that you will decline a reelection, for I really believe that your health requires this withdrawal.

May God bless & keep you, with kind remembrance to your family believe me

yours affectionately

R W Barnwell

[Beaufort]

1 Nov 1844

My dear Barnwell,

If I had not been the most shameful procrastinator you would have heard from me long since. I have been intending to write to you for the last three weeks & yet I doubt whether I should at last have carried my intention into effect had not the reception of your last letter stimulated me to my duty. I have all my life [been] too timid to accomplish anything myself and to advise any other except yourself whose energy was superabundant, and now that you have become exhausted and dispirited, I am become a dangerous adviser to you.

I think that you had better not go to Columbia. The State has been placed by Mr. Calhoun and its own faint heartedness into a position to preclude its receiving advice from you.⁴⁸

Divided as the State now is, it would be sheer nonsense either to threaten or to act. She has decidedly flinched and nothing but the election of Polk can even veil her disgrace (I would not use this language to any one but one who loves & honors our State as you do). For the first time in my life I begin to despair of our institution and of course of the very existence of the Southern people as a civilised nation. Nothing but a spirit so towering and resolute as to [be] borne upward by the very violence of the assailing tempest could save us, under the fury of the world's condemnation and we have cowered.

⁴⁷ On April 22 the *Mercury* reported that RBR, "though evidently in impaired health," had spoken against a Western harbors appropriation bill.

⁴⁸ Pleased with James K. Polk's determination to annex Texas and convinced that the Democratic candidate would move to lower the tariff after the election, Calhoun had enjoined strict party loyalty during the presidential campaign. Differing with his political mentor, RBR had demanded an iron-clad pledge to decrease the tariff as the price for South Carolina's full support of the Democratic Party. To force this issue to a conclusion, RBR had launched the Bluffton Movement for separate state action on the tariff.

I assure you that the temper recently exhibited by South Carolina has in my judgement so altered the whole complexion of affairs that I no longer feel myself under the obligations to her, which I formerly regarded as so sacred. She cannot bring up my children as she brought me up and as I think they ought to be brought up.

I believe that unless slavery is upheld as a political institution essential to the preservation of our civilization and therefore to be maintained and defended in the same high strain as liberty itself we must become a degraded people. South Carolina and her offshoots have hitherto given dignity to the position of the South.

The greater part of the slaveholders in other states are mere negro-drivers believing themselves wrong and only holding on to their negroes as something to make money out of. And we have retrograded and must soon fall into the same category.

My friends here (Edmund⁴⁹ also) think my views too gloomy and I doubt not that much effort will be used to throw a deceitful varnish over this most shabby abandonment of our vital principles, but the battle of Zama⁵⁰ has been fought and we must now look to profit not to honour. The Legislature I suppose will choose Aikin⁵¹ Governor and give us a flourish of trumpets about Democracy & Texas.

I would not if I were you go to Columbia, you have done your duty manfully, let this be your consolation whatever the future may bring. Let those who have brought the State into her present position work their will and take the responsibility. I say this in no unpatriotic spirit. I really think that this Legislature with the indications which have been given of the popular will ought to submit. I should regard the calling of a convention, still more the passing laws of Nullification as preposterous in the state of the public mind indicated by public men. If the time of reaction ever comes, if South Carolina rekindles her old Beacon fires of resistance you will not fail her at the finish, until then "Bide your time."

John Stuart has seen Calhoun and been conquered, not that he abandons his principles but believes that Calhoun also adheres to them.⁵²

⁴⁹ Edmund Rhett.

⁵⁰ In the Battle of Zama (202 B.C.) Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal; the battle gave Rome victory over Carthage in the Second Punic War.

⁵¹ William Aiken (1806-1889) represented Charleston in the South Carolina House, 1838-42, and in the state Senate, 1842-44; he served as governor, 1844-46.

⁵² On August 7 Stuart had endorsed the Bluffton Movement. In October, however, Calhoun made a campaign visit to Charleston and won over Stuart, who switched his editorial support to Calhoun's position; almost simultaneously Stuart was included in Charleston's Democratic slate of candidates for the state legislature.

He says that the meeting in Charleston was wise and that Elmore⁵³ is at heart altogether with us, but uses the necessary policy. I can hardly say that I am sorry for this for John could not have maintained himself without Elmore in Charleston and he is perfectly honest in his present convictions.

Edmunds election was not in the least dependant upon you, the fact is that his having succeeded before very much surprised me (and you know it was only by a majority of 1 or 2 votes) as soon as I heard that Ben Johnson⁵⁴ intended to oppose him, I felt certain that Edmund would be defeated. You remember at [least] 25 years ago Mr Petigru warned me that I must not live in Beaufort, if I sought political distinction. The fact is that the thing is just enough, our social relations in Beaufort are in conflict with our political institutions, and I am cool enough to expect and democratic enough not merely to submit to, but to acquiesce in the triumph of politics over taste. The only objection which I feel to your retiring to Beaufort should you retire, is that a most serious obstacle would arise from our social relations here, to your re-entering into public life, should you again be needed. I suppose that you have read Everett's article on Texas in the *Dem. Rev.*⁵⁵ Is not the condition of Cuba & the conduct of Great Britain with respect to that Island,⁵⁶ a most portentous omen for us.

Our town is healthy, we have had about our usual number of fever cases, but with one or two exceptions they have been very trifling. Your Brother Thomas⁵⁷ has gone or goes to day to Ashpoo.

Make me kindly remembered to Mrs Rhett & your boys. If Clay is elected you had better hedge by bringing your boys up Yankees. I am thinking of it very seriously. May God who gives his people peace amid all their troubles, keep & bless you.

Y[ou]r affectionate friend

R W Barnwell

⁵³ Franklin Harper Elmore (1799-1850), president of the Bank of the State of South Carolina, 1839-50, was usually allied with RBR in state politics.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Jenkins Johnson (1817-1861) represented St. Helena in the South Carolina House, 1844-53, and in the state Senate, 1854-57.

⁵⁵ Alexander Hill Everett's article, favoring the annexation of Texas, published in the *U. S. Magazine and Democratic Review* (September 1844). The brother of Edward Everett, Alexander Everett was an editor and a diplomat.

⁵⁶ By an 1820 treaty with Great Britain, Spain prohibited the African slave trade to its possessions in return for £ 400,000; an 1835 treaty empowered the British navy to search Spanish flag vessels suspected of carrying slaves. In the early 1840's the American press circulated various reports of British agents encouraging emancipation in Cuba. RWB's remark may have been prompted by one such report in the *U. S. Magazine and Democratic Review*.

⁵⁷ Thomas Moore Rhett (1794-1860) was RBR's eldest brother.

[Beaufort]

Nov 18th 1844

My dear Barnwell

I write a very hurried letter about our mail. The Department has employed a Steamer to carry the mail from Charleston to Savannah and we are informed that in consequence the mail will come to Beaufort but twice a week, this will be a very serious and I think unreasonable deprivation, for intelligence from Charleston will reach New Orleans from Charleston as soon as Beaufort, in the interval between Wednesday and Monday; and besides the Port Master informs me that our office pays nearly 100 per cent on the expence of transmitting it at present. If we cannot be connected with the Line of Steamers so as to have a daily mail I would suggest that an arrangement be made with the Steamer *Beaufort District* or if she declines with the *Seabrook* to bring the mail on Friday. I do not beleive that the cost would at all exceed the reduction caused by running the mail once a week less than heretofore.

I have but time for a few words. This Election of Polk will of course make our session of the legislature altogether insignificant. I hope that Mr Calhoun will accomplish something to save appearances for the State. I do not beleive that any substantial modification of the Tariff can be got. I remove into the Country tomorrow for the holidays. The town is healthy. May God bless & keep you dear Barnwell. May he give you what we all need so much: faith to beleive that the things which he has said are true, so that we may live as seeing those things which are invisible and not loving or fearing this "present world" love that which is to come. If you or I could only realise our condition twenty or thirty years hence how calmly would we look upon all the changes & chances which now perplex and harrass us.

Write to me whenever you can

Y[ou]rs truly and affectionately

R W Barnwell

[Beaufort]

Febv 19th 1845

My dear Barnwell,

I ought to have answered your first letter received ten days since immediately, but I was just on the eve of my departure for Charleston to attend the Convention⁵⁸ and I therefore postponed my reply until my return.

⁵⁸ RWB was a delegate from St. Helena to the South Carolina Diocesan Convention, Protestant Episcopal Church.

I was very sorry when I received a note from Treville⁵⁹ apprising me that the Bond was put into his hands for collection, with instructions to allow no indulgence as to time, but not at all surprised, for after the formal annunciation of the last year, made by one of Laurens reputed character, I anticipated a most inflexible exercise of his rights as a creditor.

I regretted at the time when I conversed with you about it, to perceive that you had some expectations of making terms with Laurens, I regret still more now to see that you have not entirely given up a hope, which I must look upon as dangerous and delusive. Laurens with Treville as his agent will exact the last dollar, in the speediest and most stringent method, by selling your property or mine in the most ruinous manner. I earnestly beg you not to allow yourself to suppose that you can obtain any delay or indulgence. If you can raise the money before the Sheriff has a right to seize your property it will be well, otherwise you had much better sell the negroes under mortgage to me. I cannot pretend to know your affairs as well as yourself, but I am decidedly of opinion that you had better obtain a purchaser for these negroes or through Elmore sell them to Laurens himself and thus extinguish the debt. It is certainly most unsafe for either of us to be placed by an execution at the mercy of a man like Treville. For your sake I trust that you will have the business removed from his control, before he is able to gratify his malice through the power of the Court.

With regard to your interest to my Sister,⁶⁰ I am sure that she will be very much annoyed, by your failing to pay as much of it as you promised her. You know that Ladies generally think themselves hardly treated and she is no exception with respect to her debtors, believing that they pay others in preference to herself. She is at present in Columbia & I have not spoken to her on the subject. You know, dear Barnwell, that I sympathise very deeply in these cruel embarrassments, which so much distress you, the more that my own circumstances prevent me from offering you more than barren sympathy.

If by giving up the mortgage and going upon your note for \$2 or 3,000 without any security you can make arrangements for paying off this debt, I will very cheerfully cooperate with you in doing so. All that I beg is that you bestir yourself at once to get out of the clutches of those who are now eagerly pressing upon you.

As for public affairs, I am almost in despair, the infamous conduct of our Southern Senators combined with the folly and apathy of those whom they represent, seem to me to indicate that our institutions are doomed &

⁵⁹ Richard DeTreville, a Beaufort planter and lawyer.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Barnwell Fuller (1797-1872) or Ann Barnwell (1799-1846).

that the Southern civilization must go out in blood. Nor do I feel as I once did, that I am bound to abide with all of mine, the fate of my country. It seems to me that when a country degrades itself, its citizens may abjure the country with the disgrace it has drawn upon them.

I have no expectation of the annexation of Texas except upon conditions which will render it a source of weakness & degradation to the South.

The spirit of South Carolina is broken, and if McDuffie or any one else believes that any manly energy can be stirred up in her they will find themselves mistaken. Elmore says that the conduct of the Northern Democrats will throw Polk into the arms of Calhoun!!!⁶¹ What do you or can you expect?

Our friends & relations here are generally well, William⁶² is in Beaufort looking & feeling badly, but I hope with no serious or fixed disease. I am writing at night & must now close.

May God keep & bless you dear Barnwell. Do write to me whenever you can.

Y[ou]r friend

R W Barnwell

⁶¹ The Barnburner faction of the Democratic Party, embittered by Van Buren's loss of the nomination to Polk, was largely denied the President-elect's patronage. Van Buren and his followers complained that the party had become subservient to slaveholders and began to disassociate themselves from the Polk administration.

⁶² William H. W. Barnwell.