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STUDENT RIOTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

A Circular Letter prepared and issued by W. B. ROGERS, Chairman of the Faculty.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, April 29, 1845.

SIR, — The Faculty of the University of Virginia, complying with the recommendation of the Board of Visitors, and urged by a sense of duty to the parents and guardians of the youth committed to their care, beg leave to present a brief history of the disorders which for some time disturbed the peace, and if not arrested would have endangered the safety of the University. They hope thereby to disabuse the public mind of any false impressions produced by erroneous statements propagated through the public prints or otherwise.

The session for the first months was peaceful, and a large proportion of the students evinced a laudable diligence in their studies. The few cases of discipline which occurred, requiring the serious action of the Faculty, were violations of the law prohibiting the use of intoxicating liquors; and in these the penalty imposed was indulgently remitted in consideration of pledges given by the offenders, and a large number of other students, to abstain from intoxicating drinks throughout the session.

Early in the winter, a number of students organized themselves into a company, and, furnishing themselves with horns and various instruments with which to produce loud and discordant noises, and wholly or in part disguised, paraded the lawn and other parts of the precincts, at a late
hour of the night, disturbing the peace and good order of the University.

These parades occurred at irregular intervals of about a fortnight, but, however pernicious in their effects on the discipline and character of the University, were not attended by any outrages on the private dwellings or the public property. And the combination, now ascertained to have comprised a number of otherwise exemplary students, is said to have been informally dissolved before the first occasion of outrage committed. This occasion was the 24th of February, when the suspension of three students for disorderly conduct at one of the hotels was immediately followed by a parade at night of a like band, but more noisy and more numerous, attended by attacks on the dwelling of the Chairman and the hotel referred to, in the course of which a door and windows were broken.

An interval of some three weeks occurred, during which there was no disturbance; but from this time forth, screening themselves from detection by perfect disguise, and combining in larger numbers, with multiplied means of annoyance, one or more bands at short intervals of time disturbed late at night the peace of the University, superadding to other annoyances violence done to private dwellings and public property.

To show the spirit of insubordination and violence which, advancing step by step, at last exhibited itself in nightly riot and outrage, it may be enough to mention some of the more violent acts of the last few weeks.

On one occasion, stones and other small missiles were thrown against the parlour windows of a professor's dwelling while ladies were sitting in the room. On another occasion, persons wearing the usual disguise, and employing for the purpose of annoyance, besides pistol firing, the implements of the organized band of disturbers, galloped through the alleys and arcades of the University on horses, two of which had been obtained by breaking open, at a
late hour of the night, the stable of the Proctor. On the Sabbath, the 13th of April, in the open day, and in the immediate vicinity of the University buildings, two persons, of whom one had lately withdrawn from the Institution, and the other was a student, engaged in a horse race, at which their friends attended and betted on the result. It need scarcely be added that the names of the chief offenders having come to the knowledge of the Faculty, the one who was amenable to our laws was immediately dismissed from the Institution. On Monday, and again on Wednesday night, the band of disturbers repeated their acts of insubordination and outrage; on both occasions, the dwellings of several Professors were attacked, and in the latter case more violently, the windows of two of the houses being broken, and the doors of these and others struck. The nights of Thursday, Friday and Saturday were marked by more unrestrained outrages, in which, in addition to the attacks made on the dwellings of some of the Professors, by striking and breaking windows and door panels, as before, two doors of the Rotunda were forced, some of its windows broken, and the door of a lecture-room burst open.

During Friday and Saturday, the 18th and 19th, efforts were made to engage the body of the students to disapprove these outrages, and by expressing their disapprobation, to aid in arresting them: but these efforts were totally unsuccessful. They were met by indifference on the part of some; others who had themselves been implicated in the disturbances made by the first band, or had friends implicated, unhesitatingly refused, on this account, to join in any expression of disapprobation, however mild, of the later outrages; and those who were more or less concerned in these outrages, it was well understood, went so far as to threaten with personal injury any of their fellow-students who should venture to attend a meeting to condemn these acts of violence. Even a simple resolution not to continue
the riotous proceedings found no adequate support, and the comparatively small number who were anxious to restore good order were compelled to yield to circumstances which they could not control.

As early as Friday, the 18th, the Faculty sent for the Executive Committee of the Board of Visitors, that they might avail themselves of their counsel. On Saturday it was ascertained that the immediate attendance of the Executive Committee could not be had, and the lectures were suspended for the day, to afford the Faculty an opportunity to deliberate on the measures to be taken. From the steadily increasing violence of the outrages committed; from the utter rejection of all efforts of the well-disposed students to stay the disorders; and from the un concealed design on the part of the rioters to compel a premature close of the session, by continuing the riots, and by carrying their violence even to greater lengths, the Faculty were satisfied beyond a question that no reasonable hope remained of putting an end, by other means, to the existing disturbances, and therefore determined, after taking the advice of eminent counsel, to place the public property under the protection of the Civil Authority. This course was sustained and approved by the two members of the Executive Committee who reached the University on Monday.

On this day the Justices with a Jury convened at the University to inquire into the riots of which it was the scene, and under their authority the Sheriff of the County placed a guard of armed citizens at the Rotunda during that and the following night. On Monday morning, in anticipation of the meeting of the Justices, and in conformity with an express enactment, notice was given by the Proctor to a number of students who, there was reason to believe, were themselves concerned in the disturbances, or could give information of their authors, that they would be summoned to appear before the court as witnesses.
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Whereupon a large body of the students assembled on Monday morning, and adopted resolutions in which they plainly avowed their determination to evade the Civil Authority or resist it as far as possible. These resolutions they handed by a committee to the Chairman to lay before the Faculty. Being without signatures, the resolutions were returned, and shortly after the assemblage of students from which they apparently emanated, dispersed without again presenting them; and before the assemblage of the Justices, nearly all of these students left the precincts in order to evade the civil process, remaining absent during the time the Justices were in session, although many of them returned at night.

At a later hour on Monday, and when the Justices were hourly expected to convene, an attempt was made by some gentlemen of Charlottesville and the neighbourhood, without any communication with the Faculty, to effect an arrangement by which the interposition of the Civil Authority should be prevented; and with this view a meeting of students, amounting according to the highest estimate to some seventy in number, was held at 10 o’clock, A. M., and another at 4 o’clock, P. M. No resolutions adopted under such circumstances and with the number present, could have afforded any guaranty of the safety of the public property and the peace of the University: much less could they secure the removal from the Institution of those who had so flagrantly violated its laws and the laws of the land. But none were formally communicated to the Justices, and, although induced by the representations made to them to defer their meeting until the afternoon, they found no good reason to believe that their interposition was in any degree less necessary than when it was called for. On the same night, a meeting of students was held and a pledge signed by a considerable number to withdraw from the University. To this course, a part were moved most probably by the conviction to which they were brought that the Civil
Authority would render necessary their removal from the University, and they were glad to make this cover to their retreat. Others, it is believed, acted partly from the persuasion of those who were themselves committed, and partly under a feeling of irritation produced by the disappointment of the hopes they had been led to entertain of preventing the interposition of the Civil Authority. This pledge, inconsiderately made, had the effect of carrying away a number who would otherwise have gladly remained.

The Board of Visitors having assembled on Wednesday, the 23d, continued their session through the following day. After a full inquiry into the history of the riots and previous disturbances, they adopted the subjoined resolutions, intended to mark their entire concurrence in the measures adopted by the Faculty.

"Resolved, That it be recommended to the Faculty through their Chairman forthwith to address to the parents and guardians of the students of the University, a circular letter setting forth a brief statement of events connected with the recent disturbances; of the withdrawal of the Civil Authority from the precincts; of the meeting and adjournment of the Visitors, and of the resumption of the lectures and exercises of the Institution.

"Resolved, That it be recommended to the Faculty, in case of the recurrence of scenes similar to those which have recently disturbed the peace and good order of the University, to endeavour through their Chairman to concert such measures as may be deemed prudent to secure the prompt and efficient aid of the Civil Authority in preserving the peace and protecting the property of the University."

The action of the Civil Authority in ordering a guard to be stationed at the Rotunda, having been followed by an immediate cessation of the riots, and the disturbers of the peace having left the precincts, the continuance of the guard was no longer deemed necessary by the Justices, and it was
accordingly withdrawn after the second night. The lectures were regularly resumed on Friday the 25th, and it is expected that the parents and guardians of such students as have left the University without having participated in the disturbances or other acts of insubordination, and without evading the Civil process, will cause them to return, should it be their wish that they shall do so, at the earliest practicable day.

By order of the Faculty,

Wm. B. Rogers, Ch'm.