

Andrew Jackson, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

JACKSON, ON THE DUEL BETWEEN THOMAS J. OVERTON AND JOHN DICKINSON.

July, 1805.1

1 This letter was evidently written late in July, 1805, since the duel occurred before Aug. 1 and after the "25th Instant". (Cf. Thomas J. Overton to Jackson, Aug. 1, 1805, *post.*) It was Jackson's part in this duel that led N. A. McNairy, on Feb. 15, 1806, to twit Jackson about making "boys fight at six steps distance".

On the 25 Instant I was notified by Mr Thos. Overton Junr. that he was called upon by Mr John Dickason, to meet him on the field of honour and render satisfaction, "in the mode which has hitherto been customary among Gentlemen"—and resquesting [*sic*] me to attend him, being also advised from the coopy of Mr John Dickasons note to Mr John Childress, of date the 16th. Instant, delivered on the 25th. that Mr J. C was to be the friend of Mr J. D. agreeable to Mr T. O. request, I immediately repaired to Nashville, to see Mr J. C. on the subject of the note, and reached there on the evening of the 25th. waited upon Mr J. C. and informed him, agreeable to the request of his friend J. D. I as the friend of Mr. T. O. was ready, to enter on arrangements, to give the satisfaction required. After some conversation on the subject, I stated to Mr J. C. that agreeable to custom and usage in these cases, being the friend of the Challenged, I had a right to name the distance. he observed that of this, he was not well advised, and asked me what distance I would name. I named seven feet, stand back to back, at the word prepare dress to the right—at the word fire—fire when they pleased—again stating to Mr. J. C. that I as the friend of the challenged, agreeable to every usage and custom on the subject, had the right to name the distance that this mode would place them upon an equal footing, and the best shot would have no advantage. Mr. J. C. then observed he would see his friend, and give me

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an answer the ensuing morning. on the morning of the 26th. Mr J. C. met me agreeable to appointment and stated to me, that his friend would not meet at less distance than twenty four feet. I observed to Mr. J. C. that Mr. J. D. had no right to say any thing about distance, that he had called upon us to render satisfaction, in the mode usual and customary for Gentlemen in such cases—that agreeable thereto we had named the distance and mode, which we would not abandon. Mr J. C. replied that his friend had instructed him to state, that his feelings was not wrought up to that Pitch as to throw away his life thus, that he would not meet at any less distance than Twenty four feet.

I was truly astonished to receive such a message from the challenger, and thus replied, If Mr. D. could put up, with the chastisement that he had received, if a Cane had not roused his feelings to meet upon the grounds proposed, which were usual and customary, and from which we had the right to name it was with himself to descide—that If he did not come forward on this ground, he would be disgraced and that Mr T. O. would take the liberty to Kain him for some illiberal and unjustifiable expression in his note to Mr J. C. that Mr J. D. was a young man, we wished to treat him liberally, and notwithstanding we had the right, to retire and expose him, that we would wait for his further determination on this subject and requested Mr J. C. to return to his friend, and say to him—If he did not come forward on these terms he would be exposed to the world and that Mr T. O. would Kain him for the expression used in the note aforesaid. We then Parted to meet at ten Oclock, A. M. of the same day. we met accordingly—when Mr J. C. informed me, that his friend J. D. said Positively he would not meet my friend at less distance than Twenty four feet, let the consequences be what the[y] might. I then stated, twelve feet or fifteen. Mr J. C. stated his instructions were Possitive on the subject, and at no other distance would he meet—with astonishment—I observed he the challenger, and would not receive the satisfaction requested, and that too, to prevent him from disgrace or a Kaining. Mr J. C. replied his instructions were Possitive. knowing we had a right, then to retire, proceed as we thought right, that we had offered the satisfaction required in the usual mode, but knowing that the wishes of my friend were to fight Mr J. D. even on his own terms, requested Mr J. C. to

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remain untill I could see my friend who was not far distant—to which he readily agreed. I repaired to my friend, stated to him the answer received. My friend requested me to return, and say to Mr J. C. that, his anxiety was such to fight Mr J. D. that he would meet Mr J. D. on his own Terms, reserving to himself, all benefit from the ground he stood on, to make it known to the world, and seek redress for the language in Mr J. D. note such as he might deem proper. I returned to Mr J. C. communicated the same to him, with the reservations, and that it was not hereafter to be viewed as a precedent, or abandonment of our right to name the distance, but as a mere wish to fight Mr. J. D. reserving to Mr. T. O. the ground he then stood on. We then named the place and the time taking Mr J. D. own distance and Terms, to wheel at the word, and after word fire, to advance or not, and fire when they pleased. at the time we met, all things duly prepared, the Word given, with a pause of some time, with cool deliberation, the [y] both fired without advancing and without effect—the Pistols being again charged—the word given—after a pause of some time with deliberation Mr Overton fired missing Mr Dickason. Mr. D. advanced with his Pistol in six or nine Inches of Mr. O. and fired—the Ball passing thro his arm and Breast. Mr Overton received the advance of Mr J. D. with more than usual firmness, of a youth of his age, under such circumstances. after Examining Mr T. O. wound I called upon the Gentlemen to know their wishes. Mr J. D. replied he was satisfied. I replied it was well, but that we were not—that satisfaction remained to be made Mr T. O. for the illiberal and unusual expression in the note of Mr J. D. and that he Mr J. D. must attone for them. Mr J. D. making no reply to me, but observed to Mr. J. C. he would not retract them and Mr. O. communicating to me that he was becoming fainty, I observed to Mr. J. D. that the present situation of my friend, would not permit of a prosecution of the satisfaction then intended, but hereafter satisfaction must be made. Mr J. D. and Mr J. C. then left the ground, and I attended to my wounded friend. I certify that the foregoing is substantially the facts that attended the dispute between Mr J. D. and Mr T. O.