

The Works of Thomas Jefferson

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by

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TO PHILLIP MAZZEI

J. MSS.

MONTICELLO, Apr. 24, 1796.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter of Oct. 26. 1795. is just received and gives me the first information that the bills forwarded for you to V. S. & H. of Amsterdam on V. Anderson for £39-17-10½ & on George Barclay for £70-8-6 both of London have

been protested. I immediately write to the drawers to secure the money if still unpaid. I wonder I have never had a letter from our friends of Amsterdam on that subject as well as acknowledging the subsequent remittances. Of these I have apprised you by triplicates, but for fear of miscarriage will just mention that on Sep. 8. I forwarded them Hodgden's bill on Robinson Saunderson & Rumney of Whitehaven for £300. and Jan. 31. that of the same on the same for £137-16-6 both received from Mr. Blair for your stock sold out. I have now the pleasure to inform you that Dohrman has settled his account with you, has allowed the New York damage of 20. per cent for the protest, & the New York interest of 7. per cent. and after deducting the partial payments for which he held receipts the balance was three thousand & eighty-seven dollars which sum he has paid into Mr. Madison's hands & as he (Mr. Madison) is now in Philadelphia, I have desired him to invest the money in good bills on Amsterdam & remit them to the V. Staphorsts & H. whom I consider as possessing your confidence as they do mine beyond any house in London. The pyracies of that nation lately extended from the sea to the debts due from them to other nations renders theirs an unsafe medium to do business through. I hope these remittances will place you at your ease & I will endeavor to execute your wishes as to the settlement of the other small matters you mention: tho' from them I expect little. E. R.¹ is bankrupt, or tantamount to it. Our friend M. P.² is embarrassed, having lately sold the

¹ Edmund Randolph.

² Mann Page.

fine lands he lives on, & being superlatively just & honorable I expect we may get whatever may be in his hands. Lomax is under greater difficulties with less means, so that I apprehend you have little more to expect from this country except the balance which will remain for Colle after deducting the little matter due to me, & what will be recovered by Anthony. This will be decided this summer.

I have written to you by triplicates with every remittance I sent to the V. S. & H. & always recapitulated in each letter the objects of the preceding ones. I enclosed in two of them some seeds of the squash as you desired. Send me in return some seeds of the winter vetch, I mean that kind which is sewn in autumn & stands thro the cold of winter, furnishing a crop of green fodder in March. Put a few seeds in every letter you may write to me. In England only the spring vetch can be had. Pray fail not in this. I have it greatly at heart.¹

¹ From this point begins the extract which is known as the "Mazzei letter." It originally appeared in a Florentine paper, from the Italian text was translated into French and printed in the *Moniteur*, and from that was retranslated into English, first appearing in America in *The Minerva* of May 14, 1797, as follows:

"Translated for the *Minerva*, from the *Paris Monitor*, of January 25.

"FLORENCE, January 1, 1797.

"From Mr. Jefferson, late Minister of the United States in France, and Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, to a Citizen of Virginia.

"This letter literally translated is addressed to M. Mazzei, author of *Researches*, historical and political, upon the United States of America, now resident in Tuscany.

'Our political situation is prodigiously changed since you left us. Instead of that noble love of liberty, and that republican government, which carried us triumphantly thro the dangers of the war, an Anglo-

The aspect of our politics has wonderfully changed since you left us. In place of that noble love of liberty, & republican government which carried us triumphantly thro' the war, an Anglican monarchical, & aristocratical party has sprung up, whose Monarchio-Aristocratic party has arisen. Their avowed object is to impose on us the *substance*, as they have already given us the *form*, of the British government. Nevertheless, the principal body of our citizens remain faithful to republican principles. All our proprietors of lands are friendly to those principles, as also the mass of men of talents. We have against us (republicans) the *Executive Power*, the *Judiciary Power*, (two of the three branches of our government) *all the officers of government, all who are seeking offices, all timid men who prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty, the British merchants and the Americans who trade on British capitals, the speculators, persons interested in the bank and the public funds.* [Establishments invented with views of corruption, and to assimilate us to the British model in its corrupt parts.

'I should give you a fever, if I should name the apostates who have embraced these heresies; men who were Solomons in council, and Samsons in combat, but whose hair has been cut off by the whore England. [In the original, *par la catin Angleterre*, probably alluding to the woman's cutting off the hair of Sampson and his loss of strength thereby.]

'They would wrest from us the liberty which we have obtained by so much labor and peril; but we shall preserve it. Our mass of weight and riches is so powerful, that we have nothing to fear from any attempt against us by force. It is sufficient that we guard ourselves, and that *we break the lilliputian ties* by which they have bound us, in the first slumbers which succeeded our labors. It suffices that we arrest the progress of that system of ingratitude and injustice towards France, from which they would alienate us, to bring us under British influence, &c.'

"Thus far the letter; to which are subjoined, in the French paper, the following remarks:

'This interesting letter from one of the most virtuous and enlightened citizens of the United States, explains the conduct of the Americans in regard to France. It is certain that of all the neutral and friendly powers, there is none from which France had a right to expect more interest and succours than from the United States. *She is their true mother country, since she has assured to them their liberty and inde-*

avowed object is to draw over us the substance, as they have already done the forms, of the British government. The main body of our citizens, however, remain true to their republican principles; the whole landed interest is republican, and so is a great *pendence*. Ungrateful children, instead of abandoning her, *they ought to have* armed in her defense. But if imperious circumstances had prevented them from openly declaring for the Republic of France, they ought at least to have made demonstrations and excited apprehensions in England, that at some moment or other they should declare themselves. This fear alone would have been sufficient to force the cabinet of London to make peace. It is clear that a war with the United States would strike a terrible blow at the commerce of the English, would give them uneasiness for the preservation of their possessions on the American continent, and deprive them of the means of conquering the French and Dutch colonies.

'Equally ungrateful and impolitic, the Congress hastens to encourage the English, that they might pursue in tranquility their war of extermination against France and to invade the Colonies and the commerce of England.* They sent to London, a minister, Mr. Jay known by his attachment to England, and his personal relations to Lord Grenville, and he conducted suddenly a treaty of Commerce which united them with Great Britain, more than a treaty of alliance.

'Such a treaty, under all the peculiar circumstances, and by the consequences which it must produce, is *an act of hostility against France*. The French government in short has testified the resentment of the French nation, by breaking off communication with *an ungrateful and faithless ally*, until she shall return to a more just and benevolent conduct. Justice and sound policy equally approve this measure of the French government. There is no doubt it will give rise, in the United States, to discussions which may afford a *triumph to the party of good republicans, the friends of France*.

'Some writers in disapprobation of this wise and necessary measure of the directory, maintain that in the United States, the French have for partizans only certain demagogues who aim to overthrow the existing government. But their imprudent falsehoods convince no one, and prove only what is too evident, that they use the liberty of the press, to serve the enemies of France.'

"[The foregoing letter wears all the external marks of authenticity.

* There seems to be a mistake in the original in this passage, or we mistake the construction.—Translator.

mass of talents. Against us are the Executive, the Judiciary, two out of three branches of the legislature, all the officers of the government, all who want to be officers, all timid men who prefer the calm of despotism to the boisterous sea of liberty, British merchants & Americans trading on British capitals, speculators & holders in the banks & public funds, a contrivance invented for the purposes of corruption, & for assimilating us in all things to the rotten as well as the sound parts of the British model. It would give you a fever were I to name to you the apostates who have gone over to these heresies, men who were Samsons in the field & Solomons in the council, but who have had their heads shorn by the

And yet it seems hardly possible an American could be capable of writing such a letter. As the letter is circulating in Europe, we deem it just, if a forgery, to give Mr. Jefferson an opportunity to disavow it.]”

Upon this publication in America, and Jefferson's failure to repudiate it, he was savagely attacked by the Federal press. He attempted no public explanation or palliation, but to his friends (see *post.*, letter to Madison, June 3, 1797), he sought to blame the translation for the stronger expressions, and many years later, in his letter to Van Buren (June 24, 1824), he tried to explain away the apparent allusions to Washington, even becoming insincere in his endeavors to prove that his references did not allude to his former chief. So far as this point is concerned, it is only necessary to note that the criticism on Washington in this letter is far less severe than Jefferson was writing to others in these years, and that Washington himself took the references so wholly to himself, that from the publication of this letter he ceased all correspondence and intercourse with his former secretary. Nor is it probable that Jefferson's attempt to discredit the public version at the time was so much a repudiation of what he had written, as it was a political desire to avoid the unpopularity of being known as the critic of one whom he had himself to acknowledge had such personal popularity “that the people will support him in whatever he will do or will not do, without appealing to their own reason or to anything but their feelings toward him.”

harlot England. In short, we are likely to preserve the liberty we have obtained only by unremitting labors & perils. But we shall preserve them; and our mass of weight & wealth on the good side is so great, as to leave no danger that force will ever be attempted against us. We have only to awake and snap the Lilliputian cords with which they have been entangling us during the first sleep which succeeded our labors. I will forward the testimonial of the death of Mrs. Mazzei, which I can do the more incontrovertibly as she is buried in my grave yard, and I pass her grave daily. The formalities of the proof you require, will occasion delay. John Page & his son Mann are well. The father remarried to a lady from N. York. Beverley Randolph *e la sua consorte* living & well. Their only child married to the 2d of T. M. Randolph. The eldest son you know married my eldest daughter, is an able learned & worthy character, but kept down by ill health. They have two children & still live with me. My younger daughter well. Colo. Innis is well, & a true republican still as are all those before named. Colo. Monroe is our M. P. at Paris a most worthy patriot & honest man. These are the persons you inquire after. I begin to feel the effects of age. My health has suddenly broke down, with symptoms which give me to believe I shall not have much to encounter of the *tedium vitæ*. While it remains, however, my heart will be warm in it's friendships, and among these, will always foster the affection with which I am, dear Sir, your friend and servant.