

THE
* *Adams-Jefferson* *
LETTERS

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*The Complete Correspondence
Between Thomas Jefferson
and Abigail and John Adams*

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EDITED BY
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IN TWO VOLUMES

Vol. II, 1812-1826



PUBLISHED FOR
*The Institute of Early American History and Culture
at Williamsburg, Virginia*
by The University of North Carolina Press • Chapel Hill

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what his proposed system of public education might further attain, and what the American example, along with the liberating influence of science, had already meant to European peoples. Adams, skeptical of man as a rational creature, found no assurance that the natural aristocracy, established by law and honor, would not also secure legal sanction as an hereditary class, succumb to political corruption, and become a venal artificial aristocracy. To Adams such an aristocracy was "a subtle Venom that diffuses itself unseen," "a Phoenix that rises again out of its own Ashes." He would "chain it . . . and place . . . on each side of it" "a Watchful Centinel," consisting of the co-ordinate branches of his balanced government.⁸ Although Jefferson's remedy of free elections prevailed as political democracy became unrestricted, Adams's argument that economic and social conditions affect political functions became more widely accepted by later generations.

The two statesmen were neither seeking controversy nor avoiding it, for they agreed that "we ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other."⁹ With the historical perspective of the revolutionary era, their philosophical discussions ran as easily to religion as to government and from the one subject to the other and back again. Both thought that corruption in government had its parallel in the hierarchies established in the name of religion; dogmatic assertions in a maze of fine-spun theological argument overpowered men's minds and obscured fundamental principles. Although they agreed that complete freedom of religion was an inviolable principle, they discussed religious issues chiefly within the framework of the prevailing faith and subscribed to the fundamentals of Jesus's teachings, "the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man."¹⁰

While Adams was the tireless reader of theological works, it was Jefferson with his scientific bent who sought to organize and systematize his thoughts on religion. Not that he expected to write a treatise on the subject—his friend Dr. Joseph Priestley had provided that—but the corruptions of Christianity ought to be refuted. "I am a Christian," he confessed to Rush, "in the only sense he [Jesus] wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others;

8. JA to TJ, Dec. 19, 1813, below, 409.

9. JA to TJ, July 15, 1813, and TJ to JA, Oct. 28, 1813, below, 358, 391.

10. JA to TJ, July 16, 1813, and TJ to JA, Oct. 12, 1813, below, 359-60, 383-86.

same motive, i.e., to derive some countenance from the Name of Jefferson. Nor has it done harm here. Priestley says to Linsay "You see he is almost one of Us, and He hopes will soon be altogether such as We are." Even in our New England I have heard a high Federal Divine say, your Letters had increased his respect for you.

"The same political parties which now agitate U. S. have existed through all time." Precisely. And this is precisely the complaint in the preface to the first volume of my defence. While all other Sciences have advanced, that of Government is at a stand; little better understood; little better practiced now than 3 or 4 thousand Years ago. What is the Reason? I say Parties and Factions will not suffer, or permit Improvements to be made. As soon as one Man hints at an improvement his Rival opposes it. No sooner has one Party discovered or invented an Amelioration of the Condition of Man or the order of Society, than the opposite Party, belies it, misconstrues it, misrepresents it, ridicules it, insults it, and persecutes it. Records are destroyed. Histories are annihilated or interpolated, or prohibited sometimes by Popes, sometimes by Emperors, sometimes by Aristocratical and sometimes by democratical Assemblies and sometimes by Mobs.

Aristotle wrote the History and description of Eighteen hundred Republicks, which existed before his time. Cicero wrote two Volumes of discour[s]es on Government, which, perhaps were worth all the rest of his Works. The Works of Livy and Tacitus etc that are lost, would be more interesting than all that remain. Fifty Gospells have been destroyed, and where are St. Lukes World of Books that had been written? If you ask my Opinion, who has committed all the havoc? I will answer you candidly; Ecclesiastical and Imperial Despotism has done it, to conceal their Frauds.

Why are the Histories of all Nations, more ancient than the Chr[is]tian Æra, lost? Who destroyed the Alexandrian Library? I believe that Christian Priests, Jewish Rabbies Grecian Sages and Roman Emperors had as great a hand in it as Turks and Mahomitans.

Democrats, Rebels and Jacobins, when they possessed a momentary Power, have shewn a disposition, both to destroy and to forge Records, as vandalical, as Priests and Despots. Such has been and such is the World We live in.

I recollect, near 30 years ago to have said car[e]lessly to You, that I wished I could find time and means to write something upon Aristocracy.³⁵ You seized upon the Idea, and encouraged me to do it, with all that friendly warmth that is natural and habitual to you. I soon began, and have been writing Upon that Subject ever since. I have been so un-

35. See TJ to JA, Feb. 6, 1787, and JA to TJ, March 1, 1787, above, 170, 177.

fortunate as never to be able to make myself understood. Your "ἄριστοι ["aristocrats"]" are the most difficult Animals to manage, of anything in the whole Theory and practice of Government. They will not suffer themselves to be governed. They not only exert all their own Subtilty Industry and courage, but they employ the Commonalty, to knock to pieces every Plan and Model that the most honest Architects in Legislation can invent to keep them within bounds. Both Patricians and Plebeians are as furious as the Workmen in England to demolish labour-saving Machinery.

But who are these "ἄριστοι"? Who shall judge? Who shall select these choice Spirits from the rest of the Congregation? Themselves? We must first find out and determine who themselves are. Shall the congregation choose? Ask Xenophon. Perhaps hereafter I may quote you Greek. Too much in a hurry at present, english must suffice. Xenophon says that the ecclesia, always chooses the worst Men they can find, because none others will do their dirty work.³⁶ This wicked Motive is worse than Birth or Wealth. Here I want to quote Greek again. But the day before I received your Letter of June 27. I gave the Book to George Washington Adams³⁷ going to the Accadamy at Hingham. The Title is ΘΘΙΚΗ ΠΟΙΗΣΙΣ a Collection of Moral Sentences from all the most Ancien[t] Greek Poets.³⁸ In one of the oldest of them I read in greek that I cannot repeat, a couplet the Sense of which was

"Nobility in Men is worth as much as it is in Horses Asses or Rams: but the meanest blooded Puppy, in the World, if he gets a little money, is as good a man as the best of them." Yet Birth and Wealth together have prevailed over Virtue and Talents in all ages. The Many, will acknowledge no other "ἄριστοι". Your Experience of this Truth, will not much differ from that of your old Friend

JOHN ADAMS

Adams to Jefferson

Quincy July 12. 1813

DEAR SIR

I forgot in my last to remark a very trifling Inaccuracy in yours of June 27th. The Letter intercepted in Hichbournes Trunk³⁹ which was reported to glance at Mr. Dickenson, was not in 1776. It was in the month

36. This statement was attributed to Xenophon in JA's time, but it was later recognized as from the unknown author of *Treatise of the Old Oligarch*.

37. JA's grandson, the son of John Quincy Adams, who died in 1829. Bemis, *John Quincy Adams*, 276.

38. "Moralia ex Poetis," compiler unknown.

39. See above, Chap. 9, 337, n. 77.

Question; was after your Arrival from Europe; and that point was the french Revolution.

You was well persuaded in your own mind that the Nation would succeed in establishing a free Republican Government: I was as well persuaded, in mine, that a project of such a Government, over five and twenty millions people, when four and twenty millions and five hundred thousands of them could neither write nor read: was as unnatural irrational and impracticable; as it would be over the Elephants Lions Tigers Panthers Wolves and Bears in the Royal Menagerie, at Versailles. Napoleon has lately invented a Word, which perfectly expresses my Opinion at that time and ever since. He calls the Project Ideology. And John Randolph, tho he was 14 years ago, as wild an Enthusiast for Equality and Fraternity, as any of them; appears to be now a regenerated Proselite to Napoleons Opinion and mine, that it was all madness.

The Greeks in their Allegorical Style said that the two Ladies *Ἀριστοκρατία* ["Aristocracy"] and *δημοκ[ρ]ατία* ["democracy"], always in a quarrel, disturbed every neighbourhood with their brawls. It is a fine Observation of yours that "Whig and Tory belong to Natural History." Inequalities of Mind and Body are so established by God Almighty in his constitution of Human Nature that no Art or policy can ever plain them down to a Level. I have never read Reasoning more absurd, Sophistry more gross, in proof of the Athanasian Creed,⁴³ or Transubstantiation, than the subtle labours of Helvetius and Rousseau to demonstrate the natural Equality of Mankind. *Jus cuique* ["Justice for everyone"]; the golden rule; do as you would be done by; is all the Equality that can be supported or defended by reason, or reconciled to common Sense.

It is very true, as you justly observe, I can say nothing new on this or any other Subject of Government. But when La Fayette harranged You and me, and John Quincy Adams, through a whole evening in your Hotel in the Cul de Sac, at Paris; and develloped the plans then in Operation to reform France: though I was as silent as you was, I then thought I could say something new to him. In plain Truth I was astonished at the Grossness of his Ignorance of Gover[n]ment and History, as I had been for Years before at that of Turgot, Rochefaucault, Condorcet and Franklin. This gross Ideology of them all, first suggested to me the thought and the inclination which I afterwards hinted to you in London, of writing Something upon Aristocracy. I was restrained for years by many fearful considerations. Who and what was I? A Man of no name or consideration in Europe. The manual Exercise of Writing was painful and distressing to

43. The belief in the Trinity, upheld by Athanasius, later Bishop of Alexandria, against Arius at the Council of Nicaea in 325, the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church.

Adams to Jefferson

Quincy July 15th 1813

Never mind it, my dear Sir, if I write four Letters to your one; your one is worth more than my four.

It is true that I can say and have said nothing new on the Subject of Government. Yet I did say in my Defence and in my Discourses on Davila, though in an uncouth Style, what was new to Lock, to Harrington, to Milton, to Hume to Montesquieu to Reauseau, to Turgot, Condorcet, to Rochefaucault, to Price to Franklin and to yourself; and at that time to almost all Europe and America. I can prove all this by indisputable Authorities and documents. Writings on Government had been not only neglected, but discountenanced and discouraged, through out all Europe, from the Restoration of Charles the Second in England, till the french Revolution commenced. The English Commonwealth, the Fate of Charles 1st, and the military despotism of Cromwell had sickened Mankind with disquisitions on Government to such a degree, that there was scarcely a Man in Europe who had looked into the Subject. David Hume had made himself, so fashionable with the Aid of the Court and Clergy, A theist as they call'd him, and by his elegant Lies against the Republicans and gaudy daubings of the Courtiers, that he had nearly laughed into contempt Rapin Sydney and even Lock. It was ridiculous and even criminal in almost all Europe to speak of Constitutions, or Writers upon the Principles or the Fabricks of them. In this state of Things my poor, unprotected, unpatronised Books appeared; and met with a Fate, not quite so cruel as I had anticipated. They were At last how[ev]er overborne by Misrepresentations and will perish in Obscurity, though they have been translated into German as well as french. The three Emperors of Europe, the Prince Regents, and all the ruling Powers would no more countenanc[e] or tolerate such Writings, than the Pope, the Emperor of Haiti, Ben. Austin or Tom Paine.

The Nations of Europe, appeared to me, when I was among them, from the begining of 1778, to 1785 i.e. to the commencement of the Troubles in France, to be advancing by slow but sure Steps towards an Amelioration of the condition of Man, in Religion and Government, in Liberty, Equality, Fraternity Knowledge Civilization and Humanity. The French Revolution I dreaded; because I was sure it would, not only arrest the progress of Improvement, but give it a retrograde course, for at least a Century, if not many Centuries. The French Patriots Appeared to me like young

Schollars from a Colledge or Sailors flushed with recent pay or prize Money, mounted on wild Horses, lashing and speerring, till they would kill the Horses and break their own Necks.

Let me now ask you, very seriously my Friend, Where are now in 1813, the Perfection and perfectability of human Nature? Where is now, the progress of the human Mind? Where is the Amelioration of Society? Where the Augmentations of human Comforts? Where the diminutions of human Pains and Miseries? I know not whether the last day of Dr. Young can exhibit; to a Mind unstead by Phylosophy and Religion, for I hold there can be no Philosophy without Religion; more terrors than the present State of the World.

When? Where? and how? is the present Chaos to be arranged into Order?

There is not, there cannot be, a greater Abuse of Words than to call the Writings of Calender, Paine, Austin and Lowell⁴⁵ or the Speeches of Ned. Livingston and John Randolph, Public Discussions. The Ravings and Rantings of Bedlam, merit the Character as well; and yet Joel Barlow⁴⁶ was about to record Tom Paine as the great Author of the American Revolution! If he was; I desire that my name may be blotted out forever, from its Records.

You and I ought not to die, before We have explained ourselves to each other.

I shall come to the Subject of Religion, by and by. Your Friend

JOHN ADAMS

I have been looking for some time for a space in my good Husbands Letters to add the regards of an old Friend, which are still cherished and preserved through all the changes and v[ic]issitudes which have taken place since we first became acquainted, and will I trust remain as long as

A ADAMS

45. John Lowell's *The Antigallican; or The Lover of His Own Country* (Philadelphia, 1797), includes "extracts from letters written during the late war by a person [John Adams] in a high official station abroad."

46. Barlow, one of the original "Hartford Wits," developed from a Federalist into a liberal democrat and was made a citizen of France. His *Advice to the Privileged Orders* (London, 1792) presents the theory of the responsibility of the state. After living abroad for more than a decade, he returned to the United States in 1805. He worked on a history of the United States for TJ, but it was never completed.

most unlettered of Men, by memory, long after they had heard them from him, when much was forgotten, much misunderstood, and presented in very paradoxical Shapes. Yet such are the fragments remaining, as to show a master workman, and that his System of Morality was the most benevolent and sublime, probably that has been ever taught, and more perfect than those of any of the ancient Philosophers. His Character and Doctrines, have received still greater injury from those who pretend to be his special Disciples, and who have disfigured and sophisticated his Actions and precepts from views of personal interest, so as to induce the unthinking part of Mankind, to throw off the whole System in disgust, and to pass sentence, as an Impostor, on the most innocent, the most benevolent, the most eloquent and sublime Character, that ever has been exhibited to Man. This is the Outline."⁴⁸

"Sancte Socrate! Ora pro nobis ["Holy Socrates! Pray for us"]."⁴⁹ Erasmus. Priestley in his Letter to Lindsley inclosing a Copy of your letter to him says "He is generally considered as an Unbeliever: if so, however, he cannot be far from Us, and I hope in the Way to be not only almost, but altogether what We are. He now attends publick worship very regularly, and his moral Conduct was never impeached."

Now, I see not, but you are as good a Christian as Priestley and Lindsey. Piety and Morality were the End and Object of the Christian System according to them, and according to You. They believed in the Resurrection of Jesus, in his Miracles, and in his inspiration: but what inspiration? Not all that is recorded in the New Testament, nor the old. They have not yet told Us, how much they believe, nor how much, they doubt or disbelieve. They have not told Us, how much Allegory how much Parable, they find, nor how they explain them all, in the old Testament or the new.

John Quincy Adams, has written for Years, to his two Sons, Boys of 10 and 12, a Series of Letters, in which he pursues a plan more extensive than yours, but agreeing in most of the essential points. I wish these Letters could be preserved in the Bosoms of his Boys: but Women and Priests will get them: and I expect, if he makes a peace he will be obliged to retire like a Jay⁴⁹ to study Prophecies to the End of his Life.

I have more to say, upon this Subject of Religion.

JOHN ADAMS

⁴⁸. *Ibid.*, 224-25.

⁴⁹. After his retirement from public life, following his governorship of New York, 1795-1800, John Jay became increasingly interested in religious and church activities and became president of the American Bible Society in 1821. Samuel F. Bemis, "Jay, John," *DAB*, X, 9.

State in the Union, and from the History of every Nation civilized and savage, from all We know of the time of the Creation of the World.

Whence is the derivation of the Words Generous, Generously, Generosity etc? Johnson says "Generous. a. Generosus Latin, Not of mean Birth; of good extraction. Noble of mind. Magnanimous, Open of Heart Liberal, munificent. Strong, vigorous." And he might have added, Courageous, heroic, patriotic.

Littleton happens to be at hand. Generosus— εὐγενής, γενναῖος Nobilis, ex præclaro genere ortus: qui a genere non deflectit.

Born of a noble Race, a Gentleman born. See his Examples.⁵³

What is the Origin of the Word Gentleman?

It would be a curious critical Speculation for a learned Idler to pursue this Idea, through all Languages.

We may call this Sentiment a prejudice, because We can give what names We please, to such things as We please; but in my Opinion it is a part of the Natural History of Man: and Politicians and Philosophers may as well project to make The Animal live with out Bones or Blood, as Society can pretend to establish, a free Government without Attention to it.

Quincy August 16. 1813. I can proceed no farther, with this Letter, as I intended.

Your Friend, my only Daughter,⁵⁴ expired, Yesterday Morning in the Arms of Her Husband her Son, her Daughter, her Father and Mother, her Husbonds two Sisters and two of her Nieces, in the 49th. Year of her Age, 46 of which She was the healthiest and firmest of Us all: Since which, She has been a monument to Suffering and to Patience.

JOHN ADAMS

Jefferson to Abigail Adams

Monticello Aug. 22.13.

DEAR MADAM

A kind note at the foot of Mr. Adams's letter of July 15. reminds me of the duty of saluting you with friendship and respect; a duty long suspended by the unremitting labors of public engagement, and which ought to have been sooner revived, since I am become proprietor of my own time. And yet so it is, that in no course of life have I been ever more closely pressed by business than in the present. Much of this proceeds

53. Adam Littleton, *A Latin Dictionary in Four Parts* (London, 1703).

54. Mrs. William Stephens (Abigail Adams) Smith.

Nor does a Woman disdain to be the Wife of a bad rich Man. But She prefers a Man of Property before a good Man. For Riches are honoured; and a good Man marries from a bad Family, and a bad Man from a good one. Wealth mingles all races.

Now please to tell me, whether my translation has not hit the Sense of Theognis, as exactly as that of Grotius.

Tell me also, whether Poet, Orator, Historian or Philosopher can paint the Picture of every City, County or State in our pure, uncorrupted, unadulterated, uncontaminated federal Republick; or in France England Holland, and all the rest of Chri[s]tendom or Mahometanism, in more precise Lines or Colures?

Another translation of the whole Passage of Theognis.

Arietes quidem et Asinos quaerimus, Cyrne, et Equos
 Generosos, et quisque vult ex bonis,
 Admittere: ducero autem malam (filiam) mali non renuit
 Generosus Vir, Si ei pecunias multas dederit.
 Nulla (femina) mali viri recusat esse Uxor
 Divitis; Sed divitem vult pro bono
 Opes quidem æstimant, et ex malo (natam) bonus ducet
 Et malus ex bono ortam. Divitiæ mixent genus.⁶⁴

Now, my Friend, who are the ἀριστοι ["aristocrats"]? Philosophy may Answer "The Wise and Good." But the World, Mankind, have by their practice always answered, "the rich the beautiful and well born." And Philosophers themselves in marrying their Children prefer the rich the handsome and the well descended to the wise and good.

What chance have Talents and Virtues in competition, with Wealth and Birth? and Beauty?

Haud facile emergunt, quorum Virtutibus obstant [i.e., obstat]
 Res Angusta Domi.

One truth is clear,; by all the World confess'd
 Slow rises worth, by Poverty oppress'd.

The five Pillars of Aristocracy, are Beauty Wealth, Birth, Genius and Virtues. Any one of the three first, can at any time over bear any one or both of the two last.

Let me ask again, what a Wave of publick Opinion, in favour of Birth has been spread over the Globe, by Abraham, by Hercules, by Mahomet, by Guelphs, Ghibellines, Bourbons, and a miserable Scottish Chief Steuart? By Zingis by, by, by, a million others? And what a Wave will be spread

64. JA earlier quoted the first four lines in his letter of Aug. [14?], 1813; see above, 365. For TJ's quotation from Theognis, see his letter of Oct. 28, 1813, below, 388, 390.

among them. . . . Opinion is power, and that opinion will come.”³ Although the science of government had never been much studied, Adams took hope from experiments in constitution-making in America and Europe since 1776 and from the advancement in civil and religious liberties, recalling, no doubt, his own contribution to this great achievement. Realist that he was, however, he could not overlook the low “Morality of Patriotism” that prevailed among nations. All contemporary sovereigns “have acted on the same Principle ‘All things were made for my Use.’” Adams scoffed at philosophers and priests in all ages who, expressing belief in the perfectability of human nature, had no respect for Truth.⁴

If Adams and Jefferson agreed that the eighteenth century was an age of progress in science and the arts, including republican government, how did they assess the status of the individual in this class-ridden society? Amid concern over the universal rights of man in the abstract, how well had men in the flesh fared in their pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness? Adams, desiring to get down to specific examples, soon provoked a reply from Jefferson concerning the reliving of his seventy years. “I think with you,” Jefferson affirmed, “that it is a good world on the whole, that it has been framed on a principle of benevolence, and more pleasure than pain dealt out to us. . . . How much pain have cost us the evils which have never happened? My temperament is sanguine. I steer my bark with Hope in the head, leaving Fear astern.”⁵ In contributing toward the good life of his fellow men this philosopher relied on science (accumulated knowledge) to serve practical ends for the benefit of all.

Adams carried the concept a step farther. He was willing to sail in Jefferson’s bark because “Hope is all that endures”—the hope of a future and better state. “The Maker of the Universe, the Cause of all Things, whether we call it, *Fate* or *Chance* or *God*, has inspired this Hope. If it is a *Fraud*, We shall never know it.” But if death were revealed as eternal extinction, “What would Men say to their Maker? . . . They would reproach him; they would curse him to his Face.”⁶ To end up with such a conclusion was impossible for Adams. “Why then should We abhor the Word God, and fall in Love with the Word

3. *Ibid.*

4. JA to TJ, July 16, 1814, Feb. 2, 1816, below, 436, 462.

5. JA to TJ, March 2, 1816, and TJ to JA, April 8, 1816, below, 464, 467.

6. JA to TJ, May 3, 1816, below, 471.

Understand our American Politicks. Nor have I. Had he been as great a Master of our Langu[a]ge as he was of his own he would have been at this day one of the most conspicuous Characters in the U. S.

So much for Vanderkemp: now for your Letter of Aug. 1. Your Poet, the Ionian I suppose, ought to have told Us, whether Jove in the distribution of good and Evil from his two Urns, observes any Rule of Equity or not. Whether he thunders out flames of eternal Fire on the Many, and Power Glory and Felicity on the Few, without any consideration of Justice?

Let Us state a few Questions, sub rosâ.

1. Would you accept a Life, if offered You, of equal pleasure and Paine? E.G. one million of moments of Pleasure and one Million of Moments of Pain? 1,000,000 Pleasure = 1,000,000 Paine. Suppose the Pleasure as exquisite as any in Life and the Paine as exquisite as any. E.G. Stone, Gravel, Gout, Head Ache, Ear Ache, Tooth Ache, Cholick. etc. I would not. I would rather be blotted out.

2. Would you accept a Life of one Year of incessant Gout, Head Ache etc for Seventy two Years of such Life as you have enjoyed? I would not.

1 Year of Cholic = 72. of Boule de Savon. pretty but unsubstantial. I had rather be extinguished. You may vary these Algebraical Equations at pleasure and without End. All this Ratiocination Calculation, call it what you will, is founded on the Supposition of no future State. Promise me eternal Life free from Pain, tho' in all other respects no better than our present terrestrial Existence, I know not how many thousand Years of Smithfield fires I would not endure to obtain it.

In fine, without the Supposition of a future State, Mankind and this Globe appear to me the most sublime and beautiful Bubble and Bauble that Imagination can conceive.

Let Us then wish for Immortality at all hazards and trust the Ruler with his Skies. I do: and earnestly wish for his Commands which to the Utmost of my Power shall be implicitly and piously obeyed.

It is worth while to live to read Grimm, whom I have read, And La Harpe and Mademoiselle D'Espinasse the fair Friend of D'Allembert both of whom Grimm Characterises very distinctly are I am told in Print. I have not seen them but hope soon to have them.

My History of the Jesuits is not elegantly written but is supported by unquesti[on]able Authorities, is very particular and very horrible. Their Restoration is indeed "a Step towards Darkness" Cruelty Perfidy Despotism Death and ——! I wish We were out of "danger of Bigotry and Jesuitism!" May We be "a Barrier against the Returns of Ignorance and Barbarism!" "What a Colossus shall We be?" But will it not be of Brass

ing to their own will. I think it will be friendly to us, as the nation itself would be were it not artfully wrought up by the hatred their government bears us. And were they once under a government which should treat us with justice and equality I should myself feel with great strength the ties which bind us together, or origin, language, laws and manners: and I am persuaded the two people would become in future, as it was with the antient Greeks, among whom it was reproachful for Greek to be found fighting against Greek in a foreign army. The individuals of the nation I have ever honored and esteemed, the basis of their character being essentially worthy: but I consider their government as the most flagitious which has existed since the days of Philip of Macedon, whom they make their model. It is not only founded in corruption itself, but insinuates the same poison into the bowels of every other, corrupts it's councils, nourishes factions, stirs up revolutions, and places it's own happiness in fomenting commotions and civil wars among others, thus rendering itself truly the *hostis humani generis*.⁴⁹ The effect is now coming home to itself. It's first operation will fall on the individuals who have been the chief instruments in it's corruptions, and will eradicate the families which have, from generation to generation been fattening on the blood of their brethren: and this scoria once thrown off, I am in hopes a purer nation will result, and a purer government be instituted, one which, instead of endeavoring to make us their natural enemies, will see in us, what we really are, their natural friends and brethren, and more interested in a fraternal connection with them than with any other nation on earth. I look therefore to their revolution with great interest. I wish it to be as moderate and bloodless, as will effect the desired object of an honest government, one which will permit the world to live in peace, and under the bonds of friendship and good neighborhood.

In this tremendous tempest, the distinctions of whig and tory will disappear like chaff on a troubled ocean. Indeed they have been disappearing from the day Hume first began to publish his history. This single book has done more to sap the free principles of the English constitution than the largest standing army of which their patriots have been so jealous. It is like the portraits of our countryman Wright, whose eye was so unhappy as to sieze all the ugly features of his subject, and to present them faithfully; while it was entirely insensible to every lineament of beauty. So Hume has consecrated, in his fascinating style, all the arbitrary proceedings of the English kings, as true evidences of the constitution, and gilded over it's whig principles as the unfounded pretensions of factious dema-

49. I.e., *Hostem generis humani*, "an enemy of the human race." Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VII, 6.

Antiquary expresses it, read to me, all the English: but as they will not read the French, I am obliged to excruciate my Eyes to read it myself. And all to what purpose? I verily believe I was as wise and good, seventy Years ago, as I am now.

At that Period Lemuel Bryant was my Parish Priest; and Joseph Cleverly my Latin School Master. Lemuel was a jolly jocular and liberal Schollar and Divine. Joseph a Scollar and Gentleman; but a biggoted episcopalian of the School of Bishop Saunders and Dr. Hicks, a down right conscientious passive Obedience Man in Church and State. The Parson and the Pedagogue lived much together, but were eternally disputing about Government and Religion. One day, when the Schoolmaster had been more than commonly fanatical, and declared "if he were a Monark, *He would have but one Religion in his Dominions*" The Parson coolly replied "Cleverly! You would be the best Man in the World, if You had no Religion."

Twenty times, in the course of my late Reading, have I been upon the point of breaking out, "This would be the best of all possible Worlds, if there were no Religion in it." !!! But in this exclamation I should have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without Religion this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite Company, I mean Hell. So far from believing in the total and universal depravity of human Nature; I believe there is no Individual totally depraved. The most abandoned Scoundrel that ever existed, never Yet Wholly extinguished his Conscience, and while Conscience remains there is some Religion. Popes, Jesuits and Sorbonists and Inquisitors have some Conscience and some Religion. So had Marius and Sylla, Caesar Cataline and Anthony, and Augustus had not much more, let Virgil and Horace say what they will.

What shall We think of Virgil and Horace, Sallust Quintillian, Pliny and even Tacitus? and even Cicero, Brutus and Seneca? Pompey I leave out of the question, as a mere politician and Soldier. Every One of these great Creatures has left indelible marks of Conscience and consequently of Religion, tho' every one of them has left abundant proofs of profligate violations of their Consciences by their little and great Passions and paltry Interests.

The vast prospect of Mankind, which these Books have passed in Review before me, from the most ancient records, histories, traditions and Fables that remain to Us, to the present day, has sickened my very Soul; and almost reconciled me to Swifts Travels among The Yahoo's. Yet I never can be a Misanthrope. Homo Sum ["I am a man"]. I must hate myself before I can hate my Fellow Men: and that I cannot and will not do. No! I will not hate any of them, base, brutal and devilish as some of them have been to me.

From the bottom of my Soul, I pity my Fellow Men. Fears and Terrors appear to have produced an univer[s]al Credulity. Fears of Calamities in Life and punishments after death, seem to have possessed the Souls of all Men. But fear of Pain and death, here, do not seem to have been so unconquerable as fear of what is to come hereafter. Priests, Hierophants, Popes, Despots Emperors, Kings, Princes Nobles, have been as credulous as Shoeblocks, Boots, and Kitchen Scullions. The former seem to have believed in their divine Rights as sincerely as the latter. Auto de fee's in Spain and Portugal have been celebrated with as good Faith as Excommunications have been practiced in Connecticut or as Baptisms have been refused in Phyladelphia.

How it is possible than [i.e., that] Mankind should submit to be governed as they have been is to me an inscrutable Mystery. How they could bear to be taxed to build the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, the Pyramyds of Egypt, Saint Peters at Rome, Notre Dame at Paris, St. Pauls in London, with a million Etceteras; when my Navy Yards, and my quasi Army made such a popular Clamour, I know not. Yet all my Peccadillos, never excited such a rage as the late Compensation Law! ! !⁵²

I congratulate you, on the late Election in Connecticut.⁵³ It is a kind of Epocha. Several causes have conspired. One which you would not suspect. Some one, no doubt instigated by the Devil, has taken it into his head to print a new Edition of "The independent Whig" even in Connecticut, and has scattered the Volumes through the State. These Volumes it is said, have produced a Burst of Indignation against Priestcraft Bigotry and Intolerance, and in conjunction with other causes have produced the late Election. When writing to you I never know when to Subscribe

JOHN ADAMS

52. In 1816 and 1817 Congress passed several invalid-pension bills for veterans of the War of 1812. Adams apparently refers to the bill enacted on March 3, 1817; *U. S. Stat. at L.*, III, 394. Also see William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (N. Y., 1918), 108-9.

53. The campaign issue in the spring election of 1817 was "whether freemen shall be tolerated in the free exercise of their religious and political rights." Oliver Wolcott, father of the Constitution of 1818 (Connecticut's first), was elected governor. George L. Clark, *A History of Connecticut, Its People and Institutions* (N.Y., [1914]), 349.

Adams to Jefferson

Quincy Dec. 8. 18.

DEAR SIR

Your Letter of Nov. 13 gave me great delight not only by the divine Consolation it Afforded me under my great Affliction: but as it gave me full Proof of your restoration to Health.

While you live, I seem to have a Bank at Montecello on which I can draw for a Letter of Friendship and entertainment when I please.

I know not how to prove physically that We shall meet and know each other in a future State; Nor does Revelation, as I can find give Us any possitive Assurance of such a felicity. My reasons for believing, it, as I do, most undoubtingly, are all moral and divine.

I believe in God and in his Wisdom and Benevolence: and I cannot conceive that such a Being could make such a Species as the human merely to live and die on this Earth. If I did not believe a future State I should believe in no God. This Un[i]verse; this all; this το πᾶν ["totality"]; would appear with all its swelling Pomp, a boyish Fire Work.

And if there be a future State Why should the Almighty dissolve forever all the tender Ties which Unite Us so delightfully in this World and forbid Us to see each other in the next?

Trumbull with a band of Associates drew me by the Cords of old Frien[d]ships to see his Picture⁶⁵ on Saturday where I got a great Cold. The Air of Ph[an]jeuil Hall is changed. I have not been Used to catch Cold there.

Sick or Well the frien[d]ship is the same of your old Acquaintance

JOHN ADAMS

65. In Feb. 1816 Congress commissioned the sixty-year-old John Trumbull to paint four scenes of the Revolution for the rotunda of the Capitol, as he had conceived them a quarter-century earlier. He painted the 12' x 18' canvases in New York and exhibited them commercially before they were installed in the Capitol in 1824. J. Q. Adams saw the "Declaration of Independence" on exhibit in Sept. 1818. It was shown in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Was this the picture JA went to Boston to see? Theodore Sizer, "Trumbull, John," *DAB*, XIX, 14.

imate meanings indeed is 'a word.' But, in that sense, it makes an unmeaning jargon: while the other meaning 'reason', equally legitimate, explains rationally the eternal preexistence of God, and his creation of the world. Knowing how incomprehensible it was that 'a word,' the mere action or articulation of the voice and organs of speech could create a world, they undertake to make of this articulation a second preexisting being, and ascribe to him, and not to God, the creation of the universe. The Atheist here plumes himself on the uselessness of such a God, and the simpler hypothesis of a self-existent universe. The truth is that the greatest enemies to the doctrines of Jesus are those calling themselves the expositors of them, who have perverted them for the structure of a system of fancy absolutely incomprehensible, and without any foundation in his genuine words. And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter. But we may hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away [with] all this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this the most venerated reformer of human errors.

So much for your quotation of Calvin's 'mon dieu! jusqu'a quand' in which, when addressed to the God of Jesus, and our God, I join you cordially, and await his time and will with more readiness than reluctance. May we meet there again, in Congress, with our antient Colleagues, and receive with them the seal of approbation 'Well done, good and faithful servants.'

TH: JEFFERSON

Adams to Jefferson

Quincy. Aug. 15th. '23

Watchman! what of the night!? Is darkness that may be felt to prevail over the whole world? Or can you perceive any rays of a returning dawn? Is the devil to be the "Lords anointed" over the whole globe? Or do you foresee the fulfilment of the prophecies according to Dr. Priestly's interpretation of them? I know not but I have in some of my familiar and frivolous letters to you told the story four times over, but if I have I never applied it so well as now. Not long after the denouement of the tragedy of Louis 16th. when I was vice-President, my friend the Dr. came to breakfast with me alone. He was very sociable, very learned and eloquent on the subject

of the French revolution. It was opening a new era in the world and presenting a near view of the millenium. I listened I heard with great attention and perfect sang froid. At last I asked the Dr. do you really believe the French will establish a free democratical government in France? He answered; I do firmly believe it. Will you give me leave to ask you upon what grounds you entertain this opinion? Is it from anything you ever read in history—is there any instance of a Roman Catholic monarchy of five and twenty millions at once converted into a free and rational people? No, I know of no instance like it. Is there anything in your knowledge of human nature derived from books or experience that any nation ancient or modern consisting of such multitudes of ignorant people ever were or ever can be converted suddenly into materials capable of conducting a free government especially a democratical republic? No, I know of nothing of the kind. Well then Sir what is the ground of your opinion? The answer was, my opinion is founded altogether upon revelation and the prophecies; I take it that the ten horns of the great beast in revelations, mean the ten crowned heads of Europe: and that the execution of the king of France is the falling off of the first of those horns; and the nine monarchies of Europe will fall one after another in the same way. Such was the enthusiasm of that great man, that reasoning machine. After all however he did recollect himself so far as to say, There is however a possibility of doubt, for I read yesterday a book put into my hands by a gentleman, a volume of travels, written by a french gentleman, in 1659,⁷³ in which he says he had been travelling a whole year in England, into every part of it and conversed freely with all ranks of people. He found the whole nation earnestly engaged in discussing and contriving a form of government for their future regulation. There was but one point in which they all agreed and in that they were unanimous, that monarchy nobility and prelacy never would exist in England again. The Dr. then paused, and said, Yet in the very next year the whole nation called in the King and ran mad with monarchy nobility and prelacy. I am no king killer merely because they are kings—poor creatures they know no better—they believe sincerely and conscientiously that God made them to rule the world. I would not therefore behead them or send them to St. Helena to be treated as Bonaparte was, but I would shut them up like the man in the iron mask, feed them well, give them as much finery as they pleas'd

⁷³ This volume may have been S[amuel] de Sorbière, *Relation d'un voyage en Angleterre, où sont touchées plusieurs choses qui regardent l'état des sciences et de la religion et autres matières curieuses* (Paris, 1664), translated as *A Voyage to England containing Many Things relating to the State of Learning &c.* (London, 1709); or John Evelyn, *A Character of England as It was Lately presented in a Letter to a Noble Man of France* (London, 1659), reprinted in *Harleian Miscellany*, 10 (1813), 189-98.

and obliged to enter immediately on the duties of his Office, which occasioned his detention from Congress afterwards, but I have no doubt, had he been in Congress at the time he would have subscribed to the Declaration of Independence. He would have been neither recalled by his Constituents nor have left Congress himself, like Mr. Dickinson, Mr. Willing, Governor Livingston and several others.

Nearly as I feel for the Spanish Patriots I fear the most sensible Men among them have little confidence in their Constitution which appears to me is modeled upon that in France of the Year 1789, in which the sovereignty in a single assembly was every thing and the executive nothing. The Spaniards have adopted all this, with the singular addition that the members of the Cortes can serve only two years. What rational being can have any well grounded confidence in such a Constitution?

As you write so easy, and so well, I pray you to write me as often as possible, for nothing revives my spirits so much as your letters, except the society of my Son and his Family, who are now happily with me after an absence of two Years. I am Sir, with sentiments of affection and Respect Your Ancient Friend and humble Servant

JOHN ADAMS

Jefferson to Adams

Monticello. Oct. 12. 23.

DEAR SIR

I do not write with the ease which your letter of Sep. 18. supposes. Crippled wrists and fingers make writing slow and laborious. But, while writing to you, I lose the sense of these things, in the recollection of ancient times, when youth and health made happiness out of every thing. I forget for a while the hoary winter of age, when we can think of nothing but how to keep ourselves warm, and how to get rid of our heavy hours until the friendly hand of death shall rid us of all at once. Against this tedium vitae ["weariness of life"] however I am fortunately mounted on a Hobby, which indeed I should have better managed some 30. or 40. years ago, but whose easy amble is still sufficient to give exercise and amusement to an Octogenary rider. This is the establishment of an University, on a scale more comprehensive, and in a country more healthy and central than our old William and Mary, which these obstacles have long kept in a state of languor and inefficiency. But the tardiness with