

Thomas Jefferson to Wilson Cary Nicholas, November 23, 1794, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO WILSON CARY NICHOLAS J. MSS.

Monticello, Nov. 22, 1794.

Dear Sir, —I take the liberty of enclosing for your perusal & consideration a proposal from a mr. D'Ivernois, a Genevan, of considerable distinction for science and patriotism, & that, too, of the republican kind, tho you will see that he does not carry it so far as our friends of the National Assembly of France. While I was at Paris, I knew him as an exile from his democratic principles, the aristocracy having then the upper hand in Geneva. He is now obnoxious to the democratic party. The sum of his proposition is to translate the academy of Geneva in a body to this country. You know well that the colleges of Edinburgh & Geneva, as seminaries of science, are considered as the two eyes of Europe; While Great Britain & America give the preference to the former, all other countries give it to the latter. I am fully sensible that two powerful obstacles are in the way of this proposition, 1st. The expense: 2dly. The communication of science in foreign languages; that is to say, in French or Latin; but I have been so long absent from my own country as to be an incompetent judge either of the force of the objections, or of the dispositions of those who are to decide on them. The respectability of mr. D'Ivernois' character, & that, too, of the proposition, require an answer from me, and that it should be given on due inquiry. He desires secrecy to a certain degree for the reasons which he explains. What I have to request of you, my dear Sir, is, that you will be so good as

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to consider his proposition, to consult on it's expediency and practicability with such gentlemen of the Assembly as you think best, & take such other measures as you shall find eligible to discover what would be the sense of that body, were the proposition to be hazarded to them. If yourself & friends approve of it, and think there is hope that the Assembly would do so, your zeal for the good of our country in general, & the promotion of science, as an instrument towards that, will, of course, induce you and them to bring it forward in such a way as you shall judge best. If, on the contrary, you disapprove of it yourselves, or think it would be desperate with the Assembly, be so good as to return it to me with such information as I may hand forward to mr. D'Ivernois, to put him out of suspense. Keep the matter by all means out of the public papers, and particularly, if you please, do not couple my name with the proposition if brought forward, because it is much my wish to be in nowise implicated in public affairs. It is necessary for me to appeal to all my titles for giving you this trouble, whether founded in representation, patriotism or friendship. The last, however, as the broadest, is that on which I wish to rely, being with sentiments of very cordial esteem, dear Sir, your sincere friend and humble servant.