

Thomas Jefferson to William Branch Giles, December 31, 1795, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO WILLIAM BRANCH GILES¹

¹ From a copy courteously furnished by Dr. J. S. H. Fogg, of Boston.

Monticello Dec. 31. 95.

Dear Sir, —Your favors of Dec. 15. & 20. came to hand by the last post. I am well pleased with the manner in which your house has testified their sense of the treaty. While their refusal to pass the original clause of the reported answer proved their condemnation of it, the contrivance to let it disappear silently respected appearances in favor of the President, who errs as other men do, but errs with integrity. Randolph seems to have hit upon the true theory of our constitution, that when a treaty is made, involving matters confided by the constitution to the three branches of the legislature conjointly, the representatives are as free as the President & Senate were to consider whether the national interest requires or forbids their giving the forms & force of law to the articles over which they have a power. —I thank you much for the pamphlet—his narrative is so straight & plain, that even those who did not know him will acquit him of the charge of bribery; those who knew him had done it from the first. Tho' he mistakes his own political character in the aggregate, yet he gives it to you in the detail. Thus he supposes himself a man of no party (page 97,) that his opinions not containing any systematic adherence to party, fall sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. (pa. 58.) Yet he gives you these facts, which shew that they fall generally on both sides, & are complete inconsistencies—I. He never gave an opinion in the Cabinet against the rights of the people (pa. 97.) yet he advised the denunciation of

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the popular societies. (67.) 2. He would not neglect the overtures of a commercial treaty with France (79) yet he always opposed it while atty-general, and never seems to have proposed it while Secretary of State. 3. He concurs in resorting to the militia to quell the pretended insurrection in the west (81.) and proposes an augmentation from 12.500 to 15.000 to march against men at their ploughs, (pa. 80.) yet on the 5th of Aug. he is against their marching (83. 101.) and on the 25th. of Aug. he is for it. (84.) 4. He concurs in the measure of a mission extraordinary to London (as inferred from pa. 58.) but objects to the men, to wit Hamilton & Jay (58.) 5. He was against granting commercial powers to Mr. Jay (58.) yet he besieged the doors of the Senate to procure their advice to ratify. —6. He advises the President to a ratification on the merits of the treaty (—7.) but to a suspension till the provision order is repealed. (98.) The fact is that he has generally given his principles to the one party & his practice to the other; the oyster to one, the shell to the other. Unfortunately the shell was generally the lot of his friends the French and republicans, & the oyster of their antagonists. Had he been firm to the principles he professes in the year 1793. the President would have been kept from a habitual concert with the British & Antirepublican party, but at that time I do not know which R. feared most, a British fleet, or French disorganisers. Whether his conduct is to be ascribed to a superior view of things, an adherence to right without regard to party, as he pretends, or to an anxiety to trim between both, those who know his character and capacity will decide. Were parties here divided merely by a greediness for office, as in England, to take a part with either would be unworthy of a reasonable or moral man, but where the principle of difference is as substantial and as strongly pronounced as between the republicans & the Monocrats of our country, I hold it as honorable to take a firm & decided part, and as immoral to pursue a middle line, as between the parties of Honest men, & Rogues, into which every country is divided.

A copy of the pamphlet came by this post to Charlottesville. I suppose we shall be able to judge soon what kind of impression it is likely to make. It has been a great treat to me, as it is a continuation of that Cabinet history with the former part of which I was intimate.

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I remark in the reply of the President a small travestie of the sentiment contained in the answer of the Representatives. They acknowledge that he has *contributed* a great share to the national happiness by his services. He thanks them for ascribing to his *agency* a great share of those benefits. The former keeps in view the co-operation of others towards the public good, the latter presents to view his sole agency. At a time when there would have been less anxiety to publish to the people a strong approbation from your house, this strengthening of your expression would not have been noticed. Our attentions have been so absorbed by the first manifestations of the sentiments of your house, that we have lost sight of our own legislature: insomuch that I do not know whether they are sitting or not.

The rejection of Mr. Rutledge by the Senate is a bold thing, because they cannot pretend any objection to him but his disapprobation of the treaty. It is of course a declaration that they will receive none but tories hereafter into any department of the government. I should not wonder if Monroe were to be recalled under the idea of his being of the partisans of France, whom the President considers as the partisans of *war & confusion* in his letter of July 31, and as disposed to excite them to hostile measures, or at least to unfriendly sentiments. A most infatuated blindness to the true character of the sentiments entertained in favor of France. The bottom of my page warns me that it is time to end my commentaries on the facts you have furnished me. You would of course however wish to know the sensations here on those facts. My friendly respects to Mrs. Madison, to whom the next week's dose will be directed. Adieu affectionately.

notes on prof. ebeling's letter of july 30, 951

1 Undated, but probably written late in 1795. Christoph Daniel Ebeling was at this time preparing his *Biography and History of North America*.

Professor Ebeling mentioning the persons in America from whom he derives information for his work, it may be useful for him to know how far he may rely on their authority.

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President Stiles, an excellent man, of very great learning, but remarkable for his credulity.

All these are men of respectable characters worthy of confidence as to any facts they may state, and rendered, by their good sense, good judges of them.

Dr. Willard.

Dr. Barton

Dr. Ramsay

Mr. Barlow

Good authorities for whatever relates to the Eastern states, & perhaps as far South as the Delaware.

Mr. Morse.

Mr. Webster.

But South of that their information is worse than none at all, except as far as they quote good authorities. They both I believe took a single journey through the Southern parts, merely to acquire the right of being considered as eye-witnesses. But to pass once along a public road thro' a country, & in one direction only, to put up at it's taverns, and get into conversation with the idle, drunken individuals who pass their time lounging in these taverns, is not the way to know a country, it's inhabitants, or manners. To generalize a whole nation from these specimens is not the sort of information which Professor Ebeling would wish to compose *his work* from.

To form a just judgment of a country from it's newspapers the character of these papers should be known, in order that proper allowances & corrections may be

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used. This will require a long explanation, without which, these particular papers would give a foreigner a very false view of American affairs.

Fenno's Gazette of the U. S.

Webster's Minerva.

Columbian centinel.

The people of America, before the revolution-war, being attached to England, had taken up, without examination, the English ideas of the superiority of their constitution over every thing of the kind which ever had been or ever would be tried. The revolution forced them to consider the subject for themselves, and the result was an universal conversion to republicanism. Those who did not come over to this opinion, either left us, & were called Refugees, or staid with us under the name of tories; & some, preferring profit to principle took side with us and floated with the general tide. Our first federal constitution, or confederation as it was called, was framed in the first moments of our separation from England, in the highest point of our jealousies of independence as to her & as to each other. It formed therefore too weak a bond to produce an union of action as to foreign nations. This appeared at once on the establishment of peace, when the pressure of a common enemy which had hooped us together during the war, was taken away. Congress was found to be quite unable to point the action of the several states to a common object. A general desire therefore took place of amending the federal constitution. This was opposed by some of those who wished for monarchy to wit, the Refugees now returned, the old tories, & the timid whigs who prefer tranquility to freedom, hoping monarchy might be the remedy if a state of complete anarchy could be brought on. A Convention however being decided on, some of the monocrats got elected, with a hope of introducing an English constitution, when they found that the great body of the delegates were strongly for adhering to republicanism, & for giving due strength to their government under that form, they then directed their efforts to the assimilation of all the parts of the new

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government to the English constitution as nearly as was attainable. In this they were not altogether without success; insomuch that the monarchical features of the new constitution produced a violent opposition to it from the most zealous republicans in the several states. For this reason, & because they also thought it carried the principle of a consolidation of the states farther than was requisite for the purpose of producing an union of action as to foreign powers, it is still doubted by some whether a majority of the people of the U. S. were not against adopting it. However it was carried through all the assemblies of the states, tho' by very small majorities in the largest states. The inconveniences of an inefficient government, driving the people as is usual, into the opposite extreme, the elections to the first Congress run very much in favor of those who were known to favor a very strong government. Hence the anti-republicans appeared a considerable majority in both houses of Congress. They pressed forward the plan therefore of strengthening all the features of the government which gave it resemblance to an English constitution, of adopting the English forms & principles of administration, and of forming like them a monied interest, by means of a funding system, not calculated to pay the public debt, but to render it perpetual, and to make it an engine in the hands of the executive branch of the government which, added to the great patronage it possessed in the disposal of public offices, might enable it to assume by degrees a kingly authority. The biennial period of Congress being too short to betray to the people, spread over this great continent, this train of things during the first Congress, little change was made in the members to the second. But in the mean time two very distinct parties had formed in Congress; and before the third election, the people in general became apprised of the game which was playing for drawing over them a kind of government which they never had in contemplation. At the 3d. election therefore a decided majority of Republicans were sent to the lower house of Congress; and as information spread still farther among the people after the 4th. election the anti-republicans have become a weak minority. But the members of the Senate being changed but once in 6. years, the completion of that body will be much slower in it's assimilation to that of the people. This will account for the differences which may appear in the proceedings & spirit of the two houses. Still however it is inevitable that the Senate

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will at length be formed to the republican model of the people, & the two houses of the legislature, once brought to act on the true principles of the Constitution, backed by the people, will be able to defeat the plan of sliding us into monarchy, & to keep the Executive within Republican bounds, notwithstanding the immense patronage it possesses in the disposal of public offices, notwithstanding it has been able to draw into this vortex the judiciary branch of the government & by their expectancy of sharing the other offices in the Executive gift to make them auxiliary to the Executive in all it's views instead of forming a balance between that & the legislature as it was originally intended and notwithstanding the funding phalanx which a respect for public faith must protect, tho it was engaged by false brethren. Two parties then do exist within the U. S. they embrace respectively the following descriptions of persons.

The Anti-republicans consist of

1. The old refugees & tories.
2. British merchants residing among us, & composing the main body of our merchants.
3. American merchants trading on British capital. Another great portion.
4. Speculators & Holders in the banks & public funds.
5. Officers of the federal government with some exceptions.
6. Office-hunters, willing to give up principles for places. A numerous & noisy tribe.
7. Nervous persons, whose languid fibres have more analogy with a passive than active state of things.

The Republican part of our Union comprehends

1. The entire body of landholders throughout the United States.

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2. The body of labourers, not being landholders, whether in husbanding or the arts.

The latter is to the aggregate of the former party probably as 500 to one; but their wealth is not as disproportionate, tho' it is also greatly superior, and is in truth the foundation of that of their antagonists. Trifling as are the numbers of the Anti-republican party, there are circumstances which give them an appearance of strength & numbers. They all live in cities, together, & can act in a body readily & at all times; they give chief employment to the newspapers, & therefore have most of them under their command. The Agricultural interest is dispersed over a great extent of country, have little means of intercommunication with each other, and feeling their own strength & will, are conscious that a single exertion of these will at any time crush the machinations against their government. As in the commerce of human life, there are commodities adapted to every demand, so there are newspapers adapted to the Antirepublican palate, and others to the Republican. Of the former class are the *Columbian Centinel*, the Hartford newspaper, Webster's *Minerva*, Fenno's *Gazette of the U. S.*, Davies's Richmond paper &c. Of the latter are Adams's Boston paper, Greenleaf's of New York, Freneau's of New Jersey, Bache's of Philadelphia, Pleasant's of Virginia &c. Pleasant's paper comes out twice a week, Greenleaf's & Freneau's one a week, Bache's daily. I do not know how often Adam's. I shall according to your desire endeavor to get Pleasant's for you for 1794, & 95. and will have it forwarded through 96 from time to time to your correspondent at Baltimore.

While on the subject of authorities and information, the following works are recommended to Professor Ebeling.

Minot's *history of the insurrection in Massachusetts in 1786*. 8vo.

Mazzei. *Recherches historiques et politiques sur les E. U. de l'Amerique*. 4 vol. 8vo. This is to be had from Paris. The author is an exact man.

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The article 'Etats Unis de l'Amerique' in the *Dictionnaire d'Economie politique et diplomatique, de l'Encyclopedie methodique*. This article occupies about 90. pages, is by De Meusnier, and his materials were worthy of confidence, except so far as they were taken from the Abbe Raynal. Against these effusions of an imagination *in delirio* it is presumed Professor Ebeling needs not be put on his guard. The earlier editions of the Abbé Raynal's work were equally bad as to both South & North America. A gentleman however of perfect information as to South America, undertook to reform that part of the work, and his changes & additions were for the most part adopted by the Abbé in his latter editions. But the North-American part remains in it's original state of worthlessness.