

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, March 14, 1800 , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO BENJAMIN HAWKINS J. MSS.

Philadelphia, Mar. 14, 1800.

Dear Sir, —I had twice before attempted to open a correspondence by writing to you, but receiving no answer, I took for granted my letters did not reach you, & consequently that no communication could be found. Yesterday, however, your nephew put into my hands your favor of Jan 23, and informs me that a letter sent by post by way of fort Wilkinson, will be certain of getting safely to you. Still, I expect your long absence from this part of the states, has rendered occurrences here but little interesting to you. Indeed, things have so much changed their aspect, that it is like a new world. Those who know us only from 1775. to 1793. can form no better idea of us now than of the inhabitants of the moon; I mean as to political matters. Of these, therefore, I shall say not one word, because nothing I could say, would be any more intelligible to you, if said in English, than if said in Hebrew. On your part, however, you have interesting details to give us. I particularly take great interest in whatever respects the Indians, and the present state of the Creeks, mentioned in your letter, is very interesting. But you must not suppose that your official communications will ever be seen or known out of the offices. Reserve as to all their proceedings is the fundamental maxim of the executive department. I must, therefore, ask from you one communication to be made to me separately, & I am encouraged to it by that part of your letter which promises me something on the Creek language. I have long believed we can never get any information of the antient history of the Indians, of

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their descent & filiation, but from a knowledge & comparative view of their languages. I have, therefore, never failed to avail myself of any opportunity which offered of getting their vocabularies. I have now made up a large collection, and afraid to risk it any longer, lest by some accident it might be lost, I am about to print it. But I still want the great southern languages, Cherokee, Creeks, Choctaw, Chickasaw. For the Cherokee, I have written to another, but for the three others, I have no chance but through yourself. I have indeed

an imperfect vocabulary of the Choctaw, but it wants all the words marked in the enclosed vocabulary¹ with either this mark (*) or this (†). I therefore throw myself on you to procure me the Creek, Choctaw, & Chickasaw; and I enclose you a vocabulary of the particular words I want. You need not take the trouble of having others taken, because all my other vocabularies are confined to these words, and my object is only a comparative view. The Creek column I expect you will be able to fill up at once, and when done I should wish it to come on without waiting for the others. As to the Choctaw & Chickasaw, I know your relations are not very direct, but as I possess no means at all of getting at them, I am induced to pray your aid. All the despatch which can be conveniently used is desirable to me, because I propose this summer to arrange all my vocabularies for the press, and I wish to place every tongue in the column adjacent to its kindred tongues. Your letters, addressed by post to me at Monticello, near Charlottesville, will come safely, & more safely than if put under cover to any of the offices, where they may be mislaid & lost.

¹ This vocabulary is missing.

Your old friend, Mrs. Trist, is now settled at Charlottesville, within 2½ miles of me. She lives with her son, who married here, & removed there. She preserves her health & spirits fully, and is much beloved with us, as she deserves to be. As I know she is a favorite correspondent of yours, I shall observe that the same channel will be a good one to her as I have mentioned for myself. Indeed, if you find our correspondence worth having, it can now be as direct as if you were in one of these states. Mr. Madison is well. I presume you have long known of his marriage. He is not yet a father. Mr. Giles is happily & wealthily

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married to a Miss Tabb. This I presume is enough for a first dose; after hearing from you, & knowing how it agrees with you, it may be repeated. With sentiments of constant & sincere esteem, I am, dear Sir, your affectionate friend & servant.