

**Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, October 4,
1803, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve
Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul
Leicester Ford.**

TO DOCTOR BENJAMIN RUSH J. MSS.

Washington, Octr 4, 03.

Dear Sir, —No one would more willingly than myself pay the just tribute due to the services of Capt. Barry, by writing a letter of condolence to his widow, as you suggest. But when one undertakes to administer justice, it must be with an even hand, & by rule; what is done for one, must be done for every one in equal degree. To what a train of attentions would this draw a President? How difficult would it be to draw the line between that degree of merit entitled to such a testimonial of it, & that not so entitled? If drawn in a particular case differently from what the friends of the deceased would judge right, what offence would it give, & of the most tender kind? How much offence would be given by accidental inattentions, or want of information? The first step into such an undertaking ought to be well weighed. On the death of Dr. Franklin, the King & Convention of France went into mourning. So did the House of Reps. of the U. S.: the Senate refused. I proposed to General Washington that the executive department should wear mourning; he declined it, because he said he should not know where to draw the line, if he once began that ceremony. Mr. Adams was then Vice President, & I thought Genl. W. had his eye on him, whom he certainly did not love. I told him the world had drawn so broad a line between himself & Dr. Franklin, on the one side, and the residue of mankind, on the other, that we might wear mourning for them, and the question still remain new & undecided as to all others. He thought it best, however, to avoid it. On these considerations alone, however

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well affected to the merit of Commodore Barry, I think it prudent not to engage myself in a practice which may become embarrassing.

Tremendous times in Europe! How mighty this battle of lions & tygers! With what sensations should the common herd of cattle look on it? With no partialities, certainly. If they can so far worry one another as to destroy their power of tyrannizing, the one over the earth, the other the waters, the world may perhaps enjoy peace, till they recruit again.

Affectionate & respectful salutations.