

Thomas Jefferson to Clement Caine, September 16, 1811, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO CLEMENT CAINE J. MSS.

Monticello, September 16, 1811.

Sir, —Your favor of April 2d was not received till the 23d of June last, with the volume accompanying it, for which be pleased to accept my thanks. I have read it with great satisfaction, and received from it information, the more acceptable as coming from a source which could be relied on. The retort on European censors, of their own practices on the liberties of man, the inculcation on the master of the moral duties which he owes to the slave, in return for the benefit of his service, that is to say, of food clothing, care in sickness, and maintenance under age and disability, so as to make him in fact as comfortable and more secure than the laboring man in most parts of the world; and the idea suggested of substituting free whites in all household occupations and manual arts, thus lessening the call for the other kind of labor, while it would increase the public security, give great merit to the work, and will, I have no doubt, produce wholesome impressions. The habitual violation of the equal rights of the colonist by the dominant (for I will not call them the mother) countries of Europe, the invariable sacrifice of their higher interests to the minor advantages of any individual trade or calling at home, are as immoral in principle as the continuance of them is unwise in practice, after the lessons they have received. What in short, is the whole system of Europe towards America but an atrocious and insulting tyranny? One hemisphere of the earth, separated from the other by wide seas on both sides, having a different system of interests flowing from different

Library of Congress

climates, different soils, different productions, different modes of existence, and its own local relations and duties, is made subservient to all the petty interests of the other, to *their* laws, *their* regulations, *their* passions and wars, and interdicted from social intercourse, from the interchange of mutual duties and comforts with their neighbors, enjoined on all men

by the laws of nature. Happily these abuses of human rights are drawing to a close on both our continents, and are not likely to survive the present mad contest of the lions and tigers of the other. Nor does it seem certain that the insular colonies will not soon have to take care of themselves, and to enter into the general system of independence and free intercourse with their neighboring and natural friends. The acknowledged depreciation of the paper circulation of England, with the known laws of its rapid progression to bankruptcy, will leave that nation shortly without revenue, and without the means of supporting the naval power necessary to maintain dominion over the rights and interests of different nations. The intention too, which they now formally avow, of taking possession of the ocean as their exclusive domain, and of suffering no commerce on it but through their ports, makes it the interest of all mankind to contribute their efforts to bring such usurpations to an end. We have hitherto been able to avoid professed war, and to continue to our industry a more salutary direction. But the determination to take all our vessels bound to any other than her ports, amounting to all the war she can make (for we fear no invasion), it would be folly in us to let that war be all on one side only, and to make no effort towards indemnification and retaliation by reprisal. That a contest thus forced on us by a nation a thousand leagues from us both, should place your country and mine in relations of hostility, who have not a single motive or interest but of mutual friendship and interchange of comforts, shows the monstrous character of the system under which we live. But however, in the event of war, greedy individuals on both sides, availing themselves of its laws, may commit depredations on each other, I trust that our quiet inhabitants, conscious that no cause exists but for neighborly good will, and the furtherance of common interests, will feel only those brotherly

Library of Congress

affections which nature has ordained to be those of our situation.

A letter of thanks for a good book has thus run away from its subject into fields of speculation into which discretion perhaps should have forbidden me to enter, and for which an apology is due. I trust that the reflections I hazard will be considered as no more than what they really are, those of a private individual, withdrawn from the councils of his country, uncommunicating with them, and responsible alone for any errors of fact or opinion expressed; as the reveries, in short, of an old man, who, looking beyond the present day, looks into times not his own, and as evidences of confidence in the liberal mind of the person to whom they are so freely addressed. Permit me, however, to add to them my best wishes for his personal happiness, and assurances of the highest consideration and respect.