

Thomas Jefferson to James Martin, September 20, 1813 , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO JAMES MARTIN J. MSS.

Monticello, September 20, 1813.

Sir, —Your letter of August 20th, enabled me to turn to mine of February 23d, 1798, and your former one of February 22d, 1801, and to recall to my memory the oration at Jamaica, which was the subject of them. I see with pleasure a continuance of the same sound principles in the address to Mr. Quincy. Your quotation from the former paper alludes, as I presume, to the term of office to our Senate; a term, like that of the judges, too long for my approbation. I am for responsibilities at short periods, seeing neither reason nor safety in making public functionaries independent of the nation for life, or even for long terms of years. On this principle I prefer the Presidential term of four years, to that of seven years, which I myself had at first suggested, annexing to it, however, ineligibility forever after; and I wish it were now annexed to the 2d quadrennial election of President.

The conduct of Massachusetts, which is the subject of your address to Mr. Quincy, is serious, as embarrassing the operations of the war, and jeopardizing its issue; and still more so, as an example of contumacy against the Constitution. One method of proving their purpose, would be to call a convention of their State, and to require them to declare themselves members of the Union, and obedient to its determinations, or not members, and let them go. Put this question solemnly to their people, and their answer cannot be doubtful. One half of them are republicans, and would cling to the Union from principle. Of the other half, the dispassionate part would consider, 1st. That they do not raise bread

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sufficient for their own subsistence, and must look to Europe for the deficiency, if excluded from our ports, which vital interests would force us to do. 2d. That they are navigating people without a stick of timber for the hull of a ship, nor a pound of anything to export in it, which would be admitted at any market. 3d. That they are also a manufacturing people, and left by the exclusive system of Europe without a market but ours. 4th. That as the rivals of England in manufactures, in commerce, in navigation,

and fisheries, they would meet her competition in every point. 5th. That England would feel no scruples in making the abandonment and ruin of such a rival the price of a treaty with the producing States; whose interest too it would be to nourish a navigation beyond the Atlantic, rather than a hostile one at our own door. And 6th. That in case of war with the Union, which occurrences between coterminous nations frequently produce, it would be a contest of one against fifteen. The remaining portion of the Federal moiety of the State would, I believe, brave all these obstacles, because they are monarchists in principle, bearing deadly hatred to their republican fellow-citizens, impatient under the ascendancy of republican principles, devoted in their attachment to England, and preferring to be placed under her despotism, if they cannot hold the helm of government here. I see, in their separation, no evil but the example, and I believe that the effect of that would be corrected by an early and humiliating return to the Union, after losing much of the population of their country, insufficient in its own resources to feed her numerous inhabitants, and inferior in all its allurements to the more inviting soils, climates, and governments of the other States. Whether a dispassionate discussion before the public, of the advantages and disadvantages of separation to both parties, would be the best medicine for this dialytic fever, or to consider it as sacrilege ever to touch the question, may be doubted. I am, myself, generally disposed to indulge, and to follow reason; and believe that in no case would it be safer than in the present. Their refractory course, however, will not be unpunished by the indignation of their coStates, their loss of influence

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with them, the censures of history, and the stain on the character of their State. With my thanks for the paper enclosed, accept the assurance of my esteem and respect.