

## I A Private Man in Public Life

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*1.1 To Giovanni Fabbioni, June 8, 1778*

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1.1 To Giovanni Fabbioni

Williamsburg in Virginia, June 8, 1778

Dear Sir, – Your letter of Sep. 15. 1777 from Paris comes safe to hand. We have not however had the pleasure of seeing Mr. De Cenis, the bearer of it in this country, as he joined the army in Pennsylvania as soon as he arrived. I should have taken particular pleasure in serving him on your recommendation. From the kind anxiety expressed in your letter as well as from other sources of information we discover that our enemies have filled Europe with Thrasonic accounts of victories they had never won and conquests they were fated never to make. While these accounts alarmed our friends in Europe they afforded us diversion. We have long been out of all fear for the event of the war. I enclose you a list of the killed, wounded, and captives of the enemy from the commencement of hostilities at Lexington in April, 1775, until November, 1777, since which there has been no event of any consequence. This is the best history of the war which can be brought within the compass of a letter. I believe the account to be near the truth, tho' it is difficult to get at the numbers lost by an enemy with absolute precision. Many of the articles have been communicated to us from England as taken from the official returns made by their General. I wish it were in my power to send you as just an account of our loss. But this cannot be done without an application to the war office which being in another county is at this time out of my reach. I think that upon the whole it has been about one half the number lost by them, in some instances more, but in others less. This difference is ascribed to our superiority in taking aim when we fire; every soldier in our army having been intimate with his gun from his infancy. If there could have been a doubt before as to the event of the war it is now totally removed by the interposition of France, & the generous alliance she has entered into with us. Tho' much of my time is employed in the councils of America I have yet a little leisure to indulge my fondness for philosophical studies. I could wish to correspond with you on subjects of that kind. It might not be unacceptable to you to be informed for instance of the true power of our climate as discoverable from the thermometer, from the force & direction of the winds, the quantity of rain, the plants

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which grow without shelter in winter &c. On the other hand we should be much pleased with co-temporary observations on the same particulars in your country, which will give us a comparative view of the two climates. Farenheit's thermometer is the only one in use with us, I make my daily observations as early as possible in the morning & again about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, these generally showing the maxima of cold & heat in the course of 24 hours. I wish I could gratify your Botanical taste; but I am acquainted with nothing more than the first principles of that science; yet myself & my friends may furnish you with any Botanical subjects which this country affords, and are not to be had with you; and I shall take pleasure in procuring them when pointed out by you. The greatest difficulty will be the means of conveyance during the continuance of the war.

If there is a gratification which I envy any people in this world, it is to your country its music. This is the favorite passion of my soul, & fortune has cast my lot in a country where it is in a state of deplorable barbarism. From the line of life in which we conjecture you to be, I have for some time lost the hope of seeing you here. Should the event prove so, I shall ask your assistance in procuring a substitute, who may be a proficient in singing, & on the Harpsichord. I should be contented to receive such an one two or three years hence, when it is hoped he may come more safely and find here a greater plenty of those useful things which commerce alone can furnish. The bounds of an American fortune will not admit the indulgence of a domestic band of musicians, yet I have thought that a passion for music might be reconciled with that economy which we are obliged to observe. I retain for instance among my domestic servants a gardener (*Ortolans*), a weaver (*Tessitore di lino e lin*), a cabinet maker (*Stipeltaio*) and a stone cutter (*Scalpellino laborante in piano*) to which I would add a *vigneron*. In a country where like yours music is cultivated and practised by every class of men I suppose there might be found persons of those trades who could perform on the French horn, clarinet or hautboy & bassoon, so that one might have a band of two French horns, two clarinets, & hautboys & a bassoon, without enlarging their domestic expenses. A certainty of employment for a half dozen years, and at the end of that time to find them if they choose a conveyance to their own country might induce them to come here on reasonable wages.

*1.2 To James Monroe, May 20, 1782*

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Without meaning to give you trouble, perhaps it might be practicable for you in [your] ordinary intercourse with your people, to find out such men disposed to come to America. Sobriety and good nature would be desirable parts of their characters. If you think such a plan practicable, and will be so kind as to inform me what will be necessary to be done on my part I will take care that it shall be done. The necessary expenses, when informed of them, I can remit before they are wanting, to any port in France, with which country alone we have safe correspondence. I am Sir with much esteem your humble servant.

Ford II: 156–60

1.2 To James Monroe

Monticello, May 20, 1782

Dear Sir, – I have been gratified with the receipt of your two favours of the 6th. and 11th. inst. It gives me pleasure that your country has been wise enough to enlist your talents into their service. I am much obliged by the kind wishes you express of seeing me also in Richmond, and am always mortified when any thing is expected from me which I cannot fulfill, and more especially if it relate to the public service. Before I ventured to declare to my countrymen my determination to retire from public employment I examined well my heart to know whether it were thoroughly cured of every principle of political ambition, whether no lurking particle remained which might leave me uneasy when reduced within the limits of mere private life. I became satisfied that every fibre of that passion was thoroughly eradicated. I examined also in other views my right to withdraw. I considered that I had been thirteen years engaged in public service, that during that time I had so totally abandoned all attention to my private affairs as to permit them to run into great disorder and ruin, that I had now a family advanced to years which require my attention and instruction, that to this was added the hopeful offspring of a deceased friend whose memory must be for ever dear to me who have no other reliance for being rendered useful to themselves and their country, that by a constant sacrifice of time, labour, loss, parental and friendly duties, I had been so far

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from gaining the affection of my countrymen which was the only reward I ever asked or could have felt, that I had even lost the small estimation I before possessed: that however I might have comforted myself under the disapprobation of the well-meaning but uninformed people yet that of their representatives was a shock on which I had not calculated: that this indeed had been followed by an exculpatory declaration, but in the mean time I had been suspected and suspended in the eyes of the world without the least hint then or afterwards made public which might restrain them from supposing I stood arraigned for treasons of the heart and not mere weaknesses of the head. And I felt that these injuries, for such they have been since acknowledged, had inflicted a wound on my spirit which will only be cured by the all-healing grave. If reason and inclination unite in justifying my retirement, the laws of my country are equally in favor of it. Whether the state may command the political services of all it's members to an indefinite extent, or if these be among the rights never wholly ceded to the public power, is a question which I do not find expressly decided in England. Obiter dictums on the subject I have indeed met with, but the complection of the times in which these have dropped would generally answer them, and besides that, this species of authority is not acknowledged in our profession. In this country however since the present government has been established the point has been settled by uniform, pointed, and multiplied precedents. Offices of every kind, and given by every power, have been daily and hourly declined and resigned from the declaration of independance to this moment. The General assembly has accepted these without discrimination of office, and without ever questioning them in point of right. If a difference between the office of a delegate and any other could ever have been supposed, yet in the case of Mr. Thompson Mason who declined the office of delegate and was permitted by the house so to do that supposition has been proved to be groundless. But indeed no such distinction of offices can be admitted; reason and the opinions of the lawyers putting all on a footing as to this question and giving to the delegate the aid of all the precedents of the refusal of other offices, the law then does not warrant the assumption of such a power by the state over it's members. For if it does where is that law? Nor yet does reason, for tho' I will admit that this does subject every individual if called on to an equal tour of political duty yet it can never go so

*1.2 To James Monroe, May 20, 1782*

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far as to submit to it his whole existence. If we are made in some degree for others, yet in a greater are we made for ourselves. It were contrary to feeling and indeed ridiculous to suppose a man had less right in himself than one of his neighbors or all of them put together. This would be slavery and not that liberty which the bill of rights has made inviolable and for the preservation of which our government has been changed. Nothing could so completely divest us of that liberty as the establishment of the opinion that the state has a *perpetual* right to the services of all its members. This to men of certain ways of thinking would be to annihilate the blessing of existence; to contradict the giver of life who gave it for happiness and not for wretchedness, and certainly to such it were better that they had never been born. However with these I may think public service and private misery inseparably linked together, I have not the vanity to count myself among those whom the state would think worth oppressing with perpetual service. I have received a sufficient memento to the contrary. I am persuaded that having hitherto dedicated to them the whole of the active and useful part of my life I shall be permitted to pass the rest in mental quiet. I hope too that I did not mistake the mode any more than the matter of right when I preferred a simple act of renunciation to the taking sanctuary under those many disqualifications (provided by the law for other purposes indeed but) which afford asylum also for rest to the wearied. I dare say you did not expect by the few words you dropped on the right of renunciation to expose yourself to the fatigue of so long a letter, but I wished you to see that if I had done wrong I had been betrayed by a semblance of right at least.

I take the liberty of inclosing to you a letter for Genl. Chastellux for which you will readily find means of conveyance. But I meant to give you more trouble with the one to Pelham who lives in the neighborhood of Manchester and to ask the favor of you to send it by your servant express which I am in hopes may be done without absenting him from your person but during those hours in which you will be engaged in the house. I am anxious that it should be received immediately. Mrs. Jefferson has added another daughter to our family. She has been ever since and still continues very dangerously ill. It will give me great pleasure to see you here whenever you can favor us with your company. You will find me still busy but in lighter occupations. But in these and all others you will

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find me to retain a due sense of your friendship & to be with sincere esteem Dr. Sir Your mo. ob. & mo. hble servt.

Ford III: 56–60

1.3 To Archibald Stuart

Paris, January 25, 1786

Dear Sir, – I have received your favor of the 17th of October, which, though you have mentioned it as the third you have written me, is the first that has come to hand. I sincerely thank you for the communication it contains. Nothing is so grateful to me, at this distance, as details, both great and small, of what is passing in my own country. Of the latter, we receive little here, because they either escape my correspondents, or are thought unworthy of notice. This, however, is a very mistaken opinion, as every one may observe, by recollecting, that when he has been long absent from his neighborhood, the small news of that is the most pleasing, and occupies his first attention, either when he meets with a person from thence, or returns thither himself. I still hope, therefore, that the letter, in which you have been so good as to give me the minute occurrences in the neighborhood of Monticello, may yet come to hand, and I venture to rely on the many proofs of friendship I have received from you, for a continuance of your favors. This will be the more meritorious, as I have nothing to give you in exchange.

The quiet of Europe, at this moment, furnishes little which can attract your notice. Nor will that quiet be soon disturbed, at least for the current year. Perhaps it hangs on the life of the King of Prussia, and that hangs by a very slender thread. American reputation in Europe is not such as to be flattering to its citizens. Two circumstances are particularly objected to us: the non-payment of our debts, and the want of energy in our government. These discourage a connection with us. I own it to be my opinion, that good will arise from the destruction of our credit. I see nothing else which can restrain our disposition to luxury, and to the change of those manners which alone can preserve republican government. As it is impossible to prevent credit, the best way would be to cure its ill effects, by giving an instantaneous recovery to the creditor. This



1.3 *To Archibald Stuart, Jan. 25, 1786*

would be reducing purchases on credit to purchases for ready money. A man would then see a prison painted on everything he wished, but had not ready money to pay for.

I fear from an expression in your letter, that the people of Kentucky think of separating, not only from Virginia (in which they are right), but also from the confederacy. I own, I should think this a most calamitous event, and such a one as every good citizen should set himself against. Our present federal limits are not too large for good government, nor will the increase of votes in Congress produce any ill effect. On the contrary, it will drown the little divisions at present existing there. Our confederacy must be viewed as the nest, from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled. We should take care, too, not to think it for the interest of that great Continent to press too soon on the Spaniards. Those countries cannot be in better hands. My fear is, that they are too feeble to hold them till our population can be sufficiently advanced to gain it from them, piece by piece. The navigation of the Mississippi we must have. This is all we are, as yet, ready to receive. I have made acquaintance with a very sensible, candid gentleman here, who was in South America during the revolt which took place there,<sup>1</sup> while our Revolution was going on. He says, that those disturbances (of which we scarcely heard anything) cost, on both sides, an hundred thousand lives.

I have made a particular acquaintance here, with Monsieur de Buffon,<sup>2</sup> and have a great desire to give him the best idea I can of our elk. Perhaps your situation may enable you to aid me in this. You could not oblige me more than by sending me the horns, skeleton, and skin of an elk, were it possible to procure them. The most desirable form of receiving them would be, to have the skin slit from the under jaw along the belly to the tail, and down the thighs to the knee, to take the animal out, leaving the legs and hoofs, the bones of the head, and the horns attached to the skin. By sewing up the belly, &c., and stuffing the skin, it would present the form

<sup>1</sup> TJ refers to the revolt in Peru led by Tupac Amaru (José Gabriel Condorcanqui, 1742?–81). In 1776 he petitioned the Spanish government, asking that Indians be exempted from forced labor in local mines; the petition was rejected; the conflict escalated into armed resistance and full-scale revolt in which many thousands of Indians were killed. Tupac was captured and executed in 1781. – *Eds.*

<sup>2</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–88), French naturalist and author of *Histoire Naturelle* (Paris, 1770–99), 44 vols. – *Eds.*

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of the animal. However, as an opportunity of doing this is scarcely to be expected, I shall be glad to receive them detached, packed in a box, and sent to Richmond, to the care of Dr. Currie. Everything of this kind is precious here. And to prevent my adding to your trouble, I must close my letter, with assurances of the esteem and attachment with which I am, dear Sir, your friend and servant.

Ford IV: 187–90

1.4 To Maria Cosway

Paris, October 12, 1786

My Dear Madam, – Having performed the last sad office of handing you into your carriage at the pavillon de St. Denis, and seen the wheels get actually into motion, I turned on my heel & walked, more dead than alive, to the opposite door, where my own was awaiting me. Mr. Danquerville was missing. He was sought for, found, & dragged down stairs. We were crammed into the carriage, like recruits for the Bastille, & not having soul enough to give orders to the coachman, he presumed Paris our destination, & drove off. After a considerable interval, silence was broke with a “*Je suis vraiment affligé du départ de ces bons gens.*” This was a signal for a mutual confession of distress. We began immediately to talk of Mr. & Mrs. Cosway, of their goodness, their talents, their amiability; & tho we spoke of nothing else, we seemed hardly to have entered into matter when the coachman announced the rue St. Denis, & that we were opposite Mr. Danquerville’s. He insisted on descending there & traversing a short passage to his lodgings. I was carried home. Seated by my fireside, solitary & sad, the following dialogue took place between my Head & my Heart:

*Head.* Well, friend, you seem to be in a pretty trim.

*Heart.* I am indeed the most wretched of all earthly beings. Overwhelmed with grief, every fibre of my frame distended beyond its natural powers to bear, I would willingly meet whatever catastrophe should leave me no more to feel or to fear.

*Head.* These are the eternal consequences of your warmth & precipitation. This is one of the scrapes into which you