

THE PAPERS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON



From John Mackey

M^R JEFFERSON—

Philadelphia, May 1st 1816.

On the 18th day of last month, I addressed a packet to you, containing desultory views of education: and my motive for addressing those views to you was manifested in the concluding paragraph. If now you are not disposed to employ your influence and authority for promoting a circulation of those views in print, be pleased to send the Manuscript to me, at N^o 42, Union Street, Philadelphia.

I am the person who superintended the erection of the Works at Harper's Ferry; and am now engaged in the business of a school-master.

With much respect,

JOHN MACKEY

RC (MoSHi: TJC-BC); addressed: "Thomas Jefferson Esquire Monticello Virginia"; endorsed by TJ as received 8 May 1816 and so recorded in SJL.

John Mackey (Mackie), public official and schoolteacher, was foreign-born. His tenure as the first paymaster and public storekeeper for the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), 1798–1800, ended amidst complaints that he showed bias in awarding contracts, kept poor records, and supplied inadequate rations to his workers. In 1804 TJ noted on a list of possible candidates for federal appointments in Louisiana that Mackey was "in customs" at Philadelphia, was "dimsighted," and had formerly resided in New Orleans. Later that year Mackey opened a school for girls in Philadelphia. He taught in that city until at least 1823. By 1825 Mackey

had converted his school, then at 258 Mulberry Street, into a store, and he was listed there as a shopkeeper until 1835 (Merritt Roe Smith, *Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology: The Challenge of Change* [1977], 37–48; James McHenry to William Simmons, 31 Mar. 1800 [DNA: RG 94, PRWP]; List of Candidates, [26 Mar. 1804] [DLC: TJ Papers, 119:20570–1]; Philadelphia *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, 6, 29 Oct., 6 Nov. 1804 [Mackey's "Reflections on the method of teaching Grammar"], 30 July 1808; James Robinson, *The Philadelphia Directory* [Philadelphia, 1805]; Robert Desilver, *The Philadelphia Index, or Directory* [Philadelphia, 1823], 56; Thomas Wilson, *The Philadelphia Directory and Stranger's Guide* [1825]: 92; [1835]: 121).

For the PACKET, see TJ to Mackey, 9 May 1816, and note.

From Joseph Bringhurst

ESTEEMED & BELOVED FR^d

Wilmington Del: 5 Mo 2^d 1816

The Wife of our mutual friend Isaac Briggs called on me yesterday to consult me respecting thy favour of the 17th ultimo to her husband. She desired me to inform thee of the absence of her husband as an apology for the delay of a reply. Isaac has been obliged to attend Congress the greater part of the session for the purpose of obtaining a law for the settlement of his publick account—After some consideration it was postponed till the next meeting of the National Legislature. Our fr^d thought it necessary to go immediately to W. City to obtain a Stay of the legal proceedings & he is yet there. When he shall return I have no doubt he [will]¹ reply to thy favour. I hope he will accept thy proposition as I do not, at present, see any prospect of a preferable employment. I have known² Isaac from his youth & have always loved & esteemed him. There are several others here who are deeply interested in his welfare. He has³ a Wife of uncommon moral excellence, & children possessing many valuable qualities for whom Jacob Alrichs & I have been exceedingly anxious. Dear Isaac, with all his extraordinary qualifications for usefulness, has not prosperd in his pecuniary concerns, & we have apprehended that the present [state]⁴ of manufactures & commerce⁵ would prevent him from obtaining suitable employment for the support of his family. We [are]⁶ therefore earnestly solicitous that he should accept thy kind aid in procuring the station proposed by thee—We hope the salary will support his family in a humble mode of life— Permit me to embrace this opportunity of telling thee how much thy character & services in Publick have been esteemed by several friends here—Cyrus Newlin. Jacob Alrichs. W^m Poole. John Reynold[s] & Isaac Starr—all men who [thou]⁷ wouldst love & esteem on personal knowledge, have often united with me in speaking, with approbation, of thy⁸ publick services, & I am add⁹ we all feel a very strong & tender interest in thy personal welfare—We are not men of the world—we mean what we say & thou mayst believe me to be with prayers for thy eternal happiness

thy sincere fr^d

JOSEPH BRINGHURST

RC (MHi); edge trimmed; endorsed by TJ as received 9 May 1816 and so recorded in SJL.

Joseph Bringhurst (1767–1834), apothecary and public official, was a native of Philadelphia and a member of the Society

of Friends. In 1793 he settled in Wilmington, Delaware, where he resided until his death. Bringhurst operated a drugstore on Market Street, and by 1822 he owned a cotton factory. He served as clerk of the borough, 1799–1800, and he was chairman of the Library Company of Wil-

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mington in 1828. Bringham became postmaster of Wilmington during TJ's presidency in 1802 and held this position until his removal from office in 1820. His scientific publications included "Facts concerning the Efficacy of Alkalies in Diseases of the Alimentary Canal," *Medical Repository* 5 (1802): 413–5, and "On Official Tinctures," *Journal of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy* 5 (1833): 19–20. Bringham was the author of a series of poems published under the pen name of "Birtha" in the *Philadelphia Gazette of the United States* between 23 Mar. and 6 July 1791, and he reputedly wrote a 1796 letter later published as a *Copy of a Letter from a Young Man, a Quaker, in Pennsylvania, to the late William Cowper, the Poet* (Chester, Eng., 1800) (Josiah Granville Leach, *History of the Bringham Family* [1901], 39–41; J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Delaware. 1609–1888* [1888], 2:637, 650, 652, 660, 886; Charles E. Bennett, "A Poetical Correspondence Among Elihu Hubbard Smith, Joseph Bringham, Jr., and Charles Brockden Brown in *The Gazette of the United*

States," *Early American Literature* 12 [1977/78]: 277–85; Philadelphia *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, 29 Aug. 1800; Robert J. Stets, *Postmasters & Postoffices of the United States, 1782–1811* [1994], 106; Bringham to TJ, 8 July 1803 [DLC]; *A Directory, and Register for the Year 1814 . . . of the Borough of Wilmington, and Brandywine* [Wilmington, 1813?], 12; Philadelphia *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, 19 June 1820; *Wilmington Delaware Patriot and American Watchman*, 4 Apr. 1828; gravestone inscription in cemetery of Wilmington Friends Meeting House).

¹Omitted word editorially supplied.

²Manuscript: "know."

³Reworked from "had."

⁴Omitted word editorially supplied.

⁵Manuscript: "commercee," reworked from "commence."

⁶Omitted word editorially supplied.

⁷Omitted word editorially supplied.

⁸Manuscript: "the."

⁹Thus in manuscript.

From John Adams

DEAR SIR.

Quincy May 3. 1816

Yours Ap. 8 has long Since been rec^d

J. "Would you agree to live your 80 Years over again"?

A. "Aye!¹ And Sanse Phrases."

J. "Would you agree to live your Eighty Years over again forever"?

A. I once heard our Acquaintance, Chew, of Philadelphia Say, "He Should like to go back to 25, to all Eternity": but I own my Soul would Start and Shrink back on itself, at the Prospect of an endless Succession of Boules de Savon, almost as much as at the Certainty of Annihilation. For what is human Life? I can Speak only for one. I have had more comfort than distress, more pleasure than pain, Ten to one, nay if you please an hundred to one. A pretty large Dose however of Distress and Pain. But after all, What is human Life? A Vapour, a Fog, a Dew, a Cloud,² a Blossom a flower, a Rose a blade of Grass, a glass Bubble, a Tale told by an Idiot, a Boule de Savon, Vanity of Vanities, an eternal Succession of which would terrify me, almost as much as Annihilation.

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J. "Would you prefer to live over again rather than Accept the Offer of a better Life in a future State"? A. Certainly not. J. "Would you live again, rather than change³ for the worse in a future State, for the Sake of trying Something new"? Certainly Yes.⁴

J. "Would you live over again once or forever, rather than run the risque of Annihilation, or of a better or a worse State at or after⁵ death"?

A. Most certainly I would not.

J. "How valiant you are"? A. Aye, at this moment, and at all other moments of my Life that I can recollect: but who can tell what will become of his Bravery when his Flesh and his heart Shall fail him?

Bolinbroke Said⁶ "his Philosophy was not Sufficient to Support him in his last hours." D'alembert Said "Happy are they who have Courage, but I have none." Voltaire the greatest Genius of them all, behaved like the greatest Coward of them all; at his death as he had like the wisest fool of them all in his Lifetime. Hume awkwardly affects⁷ to Sport away all Sober thoughts. Who can answer for his last Feelings and Reflections? especially as the Priests are in possession of the Custom of making them the great Engines of their Craft. Procul este Prophani!

J. "How shall We, how can We, estimate the real Value of human Life"?

A. I⁸ know not, I cannot weigh Sensations and Reflections, Pleasures and Pains, Hopes and Fears in Money Scales. But I can tell you how I have heard it estimated by Some Phylosophers. One of my old Friends and Clients, A Mandamus Counseller against his Will, a Man of Letters and Virtues without one Vice, that I ever knew or Suspected, except Garrulity, William Vassall, asserted to me, and Strenuously maintained that "pleasure is no Compensation for Pain." "An 100 Years of the keenest delights of human Life could not atone for one hour of Billious Cholic, that he had felt." The Sublimity of this Philosophy my dull Genius could not reach. I was willing to State a fair Account between Pleasure and Pain, and give Credit for the Balance, which I found very great in my favour.

Another Philosopher, who as We Say, believed nothing, ridiculed the Notion of a future State. One of the Company asked "Why are you an Enemy to a future State"? "Are you weary of Life"! "Do you detest Existence"?

"Weary of Life! — Detest Existence!"⁹ Said the Philosopher, No, "I love Life So well, and am So attached to Existence, that to be Sure of Immortality I would consent, to be pitched about with forks by the Devils among flames of fire and Brimstone to all Eternity."

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I find no Resources in my Courage, for this exalted Philosophy. I had rather be blotted out.

Il faut trancher Cet Mot! What is there in¹⁰ Life to attach Us, to it; but the hope of a future & a better? It is a Craker, a Rocquett a Fire-work, at best.

I admire your Navigation and Should like to Sail with you, either in your Bark or in my own, along Side of yours; Hope with her gay Ensigns displayed at the Prow; fear with her Hobgoblins behind the Stern. Hope Springs eternal; and Hope is all that endures. Take away hope and What¹¹ remains? What pleasure? I mean, Take away Fear, and what Pain remains[.] $\frac{99}{100}$ ^{ths} of the Pleasures and Pains of Life are nothing but Hopes and Fears.

All Nations, known in History or in Travels have hoped, believed, an[d] expected a future and a better State. The Maker of the Universe, the Cause of all Things, whether We call it, Fate or Chance or God has inspired this Hope. If it is a Fraud, We Shall never know it. We Shall never resen[t] the Imposition, be grateful for the Illusion, nor grieve for the disappointment. We Shall be no more. Credat Grim, Diderot, Buffon, La Lande, Condorcet, D'Holbach, Frederick Catherine; Non Ego. Arrogant as it may be, I Shall take the Liberty to pronounce them all, Idiologians. Yet I would not persecute a hair of their Heads. The World is wide enough for them and me.

Suppose,¹² the Cause of the Universe, Should reveal to all Mankind, at once a Certainty that they must all die within a Century, and that death is an eternal Extinction of all living Powers, Of all Sensation and Reflection. What would be the Effect? Would there be one Man Woman or Child existing on this Globe, twenty Years hence? Would not every human Being be, a Madame Deffand, Voltaires "Aveugle clairvoiante," all her Lifetime regretting her Existance, bewailing that She had ever been born; grieving that She had ever been dragged without her Consent, into being. Who would bear the Gout the Stone the Cholick, for the Sake of a Boule de Savon when a Pistol a Cord, a Pond, or a Phyal of Laudanum was at hand? What would Men Say to their Maker,? would they thank him? No They would reproach him; they would curse him to his Face,

Voila! a Sillier Letter than my last.! For a Wonder, I have filled a Sheet. And a greater Wonder, I have read fifteen Volumes of Grim. Digo comesce Labellum. I hope to write you more upon this and other Topicks of your Letter. I have read also a History of the Jesuits in four Volumes. Can you tell me the Author or any Thing of this Work?

JOHN ADAMS

RC (DLC); edge trimmed, with missing text supplied from FC; at foot of text: “President Jefferson”; endorsed by TJ as received 13 May 1816 and so recorded in S.J.L. FC (Lb in MHi: Adams Papers).

“Sans phrases” (SANSE PHRASES): “without reservations.” BOULES DE SAVON: “soap bubbles.” A TALE TOLD BY AN IDIOT quotes William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 5, scene 5. The phrase VANITY OF VANITIES is from the Bible, Ecclesiastes 1.2.

As his death approached, Jean Le Rond D’ALEMBERT wrote “Ils sont bien heureux ceux qui ont du courage; moi je n’en ai pas” (“Happy are they who have courage; as for me, I do not”) (Friedrich Melchior, Freiherr von Grimm and Denis Diderot, *Mémoires Historiques, Littéraires et Anecdotiques, tirés de la Correspondance Philosophique et Critique, adressée au Duc De Saxe Gotha* [London, 1813], 3:126).

According to one account of the last days of VOLTAIRE, he confessed his belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ and thus died as a member of the Roman Catholic Church. At another time, however, when asked “Croyez-vous à la divinité de Jésus-Christ?” (“Do you believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ?”), Voltaire replied, “Au nom de Dieu, Monsieur, ne me parlez plus de cet homme-là, et laissez-moi mourir en repos” (“In the name of God, sir, do not speak to me anymore about that man, and let me die in peace”) (Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire* [(Kehl), 1789], 156–7).

During the last month of his life, David HUME reportedly conducted an imaginary conversation with Charon, the mythological Greek boatman who ferries the souls of the dead into Hades. According to Adam Smith’s account, Hume at one point said “Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition” (*The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself* [Dublin, 1777], 20–1).

PROCLU ESTE PROPHANI (“away! you that are uninitiated!”) is from Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.258 (Fairclough, *Virgil*, 1:550–1). A MANDAMUS COUNSELLER was one of

thirty-six men appointed to the Massachusetts Council, heretofore an elected body, under “An Act for the better regulating the Government of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England,” 20 May 1774 (14 George III, c. 45, *The Statutes at Large* [London, 1776], 12:84–9; *Massachusetts Gazette; and the Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, 1–8, 8–15 Aug. 1774). WILLIAM VASSALL was a notably litigious Bostonian who derived his wealth from plantations in his native Jamaica and fled to London as a Loyalist refugee in 1775 (*Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 9:349–59).

IL FAUT TRANCHER CET MOT: “it is necessary to make a decision on this.” HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL is taken from line 95 of the first epistle of Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man (The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.* [Edinburgh, printed for J. Balfour, 1764; Adams’s copy in MBPLi], 2:12). In stating that the designated individuals CREDAT (“may believe it”) while his own answer is NON EGO (“not I”), Adams is adapting Horace, *Satires*, 1.5.100–1 (Fairclough, *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, 72–3).

The marquise du DEFFAND, a correspondent of Voltaire and Horace Walpole, was the AVEUGLE CLAIRVOIANTE (“blind clairvoyant”) (Hoefer, *Nouv. biog. générale*, 13:351–5). Digito compesce (COMESCE) Labellum (“button your lip with your finger”) is from Juvenal, *Satires*, 1.160 (Susanna Morton Braund, ed. and trans., *Juvenal and Persius*, Loeb Classical Library [2004], 144–5).

¹Omitted opening quotation mark editorially supplied.

²RC: “Clould.” FC: “Cloud.”

³RC: “chang.” FC: “change.”

⁴Word added in place of “Aye,” which had been reworked from “not.”

⁵RC: “after.” FC: “after.”

⁶Preceding seven words not in FC.

⁷RC: “affect.” FC: “affects.”

⁸Unmatched opening quotation mark preceding this word editorially omitted.

⁹Omitted closing quotation mark editorially supplied.

¹⁰RC: “is.” FC: “in.”

¹¹Preceding thirteen words not in FC.

¹²RC: “Supose.” FC: “Suppose.”

To William Wingate

SIR

Monticello May 4. 16.

I recieved yesterday yours of Apr. 8. accompanied by a Manuscript volume of your interpretation of the Revelations, & their application to Napoleon Bonaparte. you request me to read it, to take minutes from it, to converse on it with Joseph Bonaparte, and to write to you the result. I am 400. miles from that gentleman, never was, and probably never shall be nearer to him. and my occupations do not allow me the time even to read it. I acknolege too that had I the time, I should prefer employing it on something more levelled to my capacity than the revelations. to understand them requires a head more sublimated than mine, and we derive no profit from reading what we do not understand. in returning the volume promptly therefore, I comply with the only part of your request in my power. I hope you will recieve it safely, and with it the assurance of my respects.

TH: JEFFERSON

PoC (MoSHi: TJC-BC); on verso of reused address cover of Archibald Robertson to TJ, 3 Apr. 1816; at foot of text: "M^r William Wingate"; endorsed by TJ. Enclosure not found.

JOSEPH BONAPARTE had fled Europe for the United States in the summer of

1815, arriving in New York City on 20 Aug. Early in 1816 he was maintaining homes in Philadelphia and at Lansdowne, a country estate outside that city (Patricia Tyson Stroud, *The Man who had been King: The American Exile of Napoleon's Brother Joseph* [2005], 1, 13, 15).

To William Short

DEAR SIR

Monticello May 5. 16.

On my return, the day before yesterday, I found here your favor of Apr. 23. and answer without delay the remaining question on your affair with mr Carter. the last payment I made him for you was by a draught of Aug. 3.¹ 1795. for 524.83 D the exact balance for the lands after the ascertainment of their contents by actual survey. consequently, in this was included the overpayment now to be refunded with interest from that date. legal interest was then 5. p.c. per ann. the law which raised it to 6. p.c. not coming into force till May 1. 97 and restraining the advance of interest strictly to contracts entered into subsequent to that day these data of course fix the date and rate of interest to be paid by mr Carter.

I am really sorry for La Motte's failure to obtain the Consulship of Havre. but no blame can be imputed to Monroe. disbanded officers,

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without means of subsistence, and favored by the public sentiment, as well as by that of the Executive, leave them without grounds of refusal, except of what is in actual possession of another. and even possession can scarcely hold it's own. I have had to make representations in favor of Cathalan of Marseilles and Appleton of Leghorn, my old friends, the one having been in office 35. years and the other 30. years. yet they were jeopardised by competitions founded on a military service of 3. years only. in a government proceeding as ours does, by general rules, little can be yielded to favor, either conscientiously, or safely. I am satisfied Monroe's wishes were with La Motte.

I am glad you have fallen in with my granddaughter Ellen. from a batchelor not keeping house she could² expect nothing more than the civil attentions which I am sure you have shewn her in society. I did not know beforehand of her visit to Philadelphia or I would have sent her letters for some of my friends there. she merits any thing I could have said of a good heart, good temper, a sound head, and great range of information. the small chat of the day is a thing of habit, and of familiarity with local characters and circumstances. on these a stranger must always be deficient. it is on general topics only their measure can be taken.

I have taken it for granted that the fugitives from France would only make of this their first lighting place, from whence they might look around and see in what other residence they could ultimately find society and safety. I imagine that in no country, except England, is the state of society less adapted, than in this, to the French character and habits. the security and freedom they find under the tutelary, & yet invisible hand of our government must appear like enchantment to them. of our maniere d'etre they may with justice say it is different from theirs.

You express a wish and a hope that I may have been writing memoirs of myself. while in public life, my whole time has been absorbed by the duties that laid me under; and now, when the world imagines I have nothing to do, I am in a state of as heavy drudgery as any office of my life ever subjected me to. from sunrise till noon I am chained to the writing table. at that hour I ride of necessity for health as well as recreation. and even after dinner I must often return to the writing table. were this correspondence confined to my real friends only, it would be no more than an amusement, and would be a delicious repast. but it is one equally foreign to my interests and inclinations, & yet forced on me by the courtesies of those to whom it is responsive. it precludes me entirely from the course of studies and reading which would make my hours pass lightly and pleasantly away. however it

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must cease ere long from physical necessity, my wrist beginning to stiffen so as to render writing painful & slow. the letters I have written while in public office are in fact memorials of the transactions with which I have been associated, and may at a future day furnish something to the historian. copies of some of those written during the revolutionary war have been preserved and communicated freely to one or two persons writing the history of the day. the copying press and polygraph have preserved all written in France and subsequently.

But you propose a more Quixotic task in the reformation of what may be deemed defective in our constitution. no, my dear friend; nothing could allure me again into the furnace of politics. while engaged in the various functions of the government, duty required me to go straight forward, regardless of the enmities and execrations it excited. I felt and deplored them as a man; but scouted them as a public functionary. still I wished that in retiring from my duties, I might retire also from their afflicting associates. to volunteer again into these scenes and sufferings would be to forget what I have undergone, to be insensible of what I feel of the moral and physical decline which the laws of our structure have ordained. I submit to these with entire contentment. tranquility is the softest pillow for the head of old age; and the good will of those around us the sweetest soother of our repose. in this state of being, seasoned by occasional communications with my friends, I shall pass willingly to that eternal sleep which, whether with, or without, dreams, awaits us hereafter. I leave, with satisfaction and confidence, to those who are to come after me, the pursuit of what is right, & rectification of what is wrong; convinced they will be as able to manage their own affairs, as we have been ours. I restrict my anxieties within the circle of my family and friends, among whom I feel constant and affectionate interest in your health and happiness.

TH: JEFFERSON

RC (ViW: TJP); ink stained, with obscured text rewritten by TJ; endorsed by Short as received 13 May 1816. PoC (DLC); ink stained, with obscured text rewritten by TJ; at foot of first page: "M^r Short"; endorsed by TJ.

TJ made a PAYMENT to William Champe Carter on 3 Aug. 1795 on behalf of Short for the latter's purchase of the Indian Camp tract in Albemarle County (PTJ, 28:430). LEGAL INTEREST was capped in Virginia at 5 percent by "An Act to make void certain Contracts for

the paying excessive Usury," which took effect on 10 Nov. 1734. This rate was renewed by subsequent legislation until 23 Nov. 1796, when "An Act to amend the act, intituled, an act Against Usury" increased the maximum to 6 percent, effective 1 May 1797 (Hening, 4:395-7; *The Revised Code of the Laws of Virginia* [Richmond, 1819], 1:373n; *Acts of Assembly* [1796 sess.], 16-7). MANIERE D'ETRE: "way of life."

¹Reworked from "23."

²TJ here canceled "neither."