

ON FRANCE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

From Thomas Jefferson to Eliza House Trist

18 August 1785

DEAR MADAM

I am much pleased with the people of this country. The roughnesses of the human mind are so thoroughly rubbed off with them that it seems as if one might glide thro' a whole life among them without a justle. Perhaps too their manners may be the best calculated for happiness to a people in their situation. But I am convinced they fall far short of effecting a happiness so temperate, so uniform and so lasting as is generally enjoyed with us. The domestic bonds here are absolutely done away. And where can their compensation be found? Perhaps they may catch some moments of transport above the level of the ordinary tranquil joy we experience, but they are separated by long intervals during which all the passions are at sea without rudder or compass. Yet fallacious as these pursuits of happiness are, they seem on the whole to furnish the most effectual abstraction from a contemplation of the hardness of their government. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how so good a people, with so good a king, so well disposed rulers in general, so genial a climate, so fertile a soil, should be rendered so ineffectual for producing human happiness by one single curse, that of a bad form of government. But it is a fact. In spite of the mildness of their governors the people are ground to powder by the vices of the form of government. Of twenty millions of people supposed to be in France I am of opinion there are nineteen millions more wretched, more accursed in every circumstance of human existence, than the most conspicuously wretched individual of the whole United states.—I beg your pardon for getting into politics. I will add only one sentiment more of that character. That is, nourish peace with their persons, but war against their manners. Every step we take towards the adoption of their manners is a step towards perfect misery.—I pray you to write to me often. Do not you turn politician too; but write me all the small news; the news about persons and not about states. Tell me who die, that I may meet these disagreeable events in detail, and not all at once when I return: who marry, who hang themselves because they cannot marry &c. &c. Present me in the most friendly terms to Mrs. House, and Browse, and be assured of the sincerity with which I am Dear Madam your affectionate friend & servant,

TH: JEFFERSON

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0318>

From Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington

16 January 1787

DEAR SIR

I am convinced that those societies (as the Indians) which live without government enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under European governments. Among the former, public opinion is in the place of law, and restrains morals as powerfully as laws ever did any where. Among the latter, under pretence of governing they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate. This is a true picture of Europe. Cherish therefore the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress, and Assemblies, judges and governors shall all become wolves. It seems to be the law of our general

nature, in spite of individual exceptions; and experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind, for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor.

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0047>

From Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette

28 February 1787

[...] I am just now, my dear Sir, in the moment of my departure. Monsr. de Montmorin having given
5 us audience at Paris yesterday, I missed the opportunity of seeing you once more. I am extremely pleased
with his modesty, the simplicity of his manners, and his dispositions towards us. I promise myself a great
deal of satisfaction in doing business with him. I hope he will not give ear to any unfriendly suggestions. I
flatter myself I shall hear from you sometimes. Send your letters to my hotel as usual and they will be
10 forwarded to me. I wish you success in your meeting. I should form better hopes of it if it were divided
into two houses instead of seven. Keeping the good model of your neighboring country before your eyes
you may get on step by step towards a good constitution. Tho' that model is not perfect, yet as it would
unite more suffrages than any new one which could be proposed, it is better to make that the object. If
every advance is to be purchased by filling the royal coffers with gold, it will be gold well employed. The
king, who means so well, should be encouraged to repeat these assemblies. You see how we republicans
15 are apt to preach when we get on politics. Adieu my dear friend.

Yours affectionately,

TH: JEFFERSON

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0198>

From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison

31 July 1788

DEAR SIR

[...] I send you also two little pamphlets of the Marquis de Condorcet, wherein is the most judicious
statement I have seen of the great questions which agitate this nation at present. The new regulations
present a preponderance of good over their evil. But they suppose that the king can model the constitution
20 at will, or in other words that this government is a pure despotism: the question then arising is whether a
pure despotism, in a single head, or one which is divided among a king, nobles, priesthood, and numerous
magistracy is the least bad. I should be puzzled to decide: but I hope they will have neither, and that they
are advancing to a limited, moderate government, in which the people will have a good share.

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-13-02-0335>

From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington

4 December 1788

[...] As soon as the convocation of the States general was announced, a tranquillity took place
25 thro' the whole kingdom. Happily no open rupture had taken place in any part of it. The parliaments were
re-instated in their functions at the same time. This was all they desired, and they had called for the States

general only through fear that the crown could not otherwise be forced to re-instate them. Their end obtained, they began to foresee danger to themselves in the States general. They began to lay the foundations for cavilling at the legality of that body, if it's measures should be hostile to them. The court, to clear itself of the dispute, convened the Notables who had acted with general approbation on the former occasion, and referred to them the forms of calling and organizing the States-general. These Notables consist principally of nobility and clergy, the few of the tiers etat among them being either parliament-men, or other privileged persons. The court wished that in the future States general the members of the Tiers-etat should equal those of both the other orders, and that they should form but one house, all together, and vote by persons, not by orders. But the Notables, in the true spirit of priests and nobles, combining together against the people, have voted by 5 bureaux out of 6. that the people or tiers etat shall have no greater number of deputies than each of the other orders separately, and that they shall vote by orders: so that two orders concurring in a vote, the third will be overruled; for it is not here as in England where each of the three branches has a negative on the other two. If this project of theirs succeeds, a combination between the two houses of clergy and nobles, will render the representation of the Tiers etat merely nugatory. The bureaux are to assemble together to consolidate their separate votes; but I see no reasonable hope of their changing this. Perhaps the king, knowing that he may count on the support of the nation and attach it more closely to him, may take on himself to disregard the opinion of the Notables in this instance, and may call an equal representation of the people, in which precedents will support him. In every event, I think the present disquiet will end well. The nation has been awaked by our revolution, they feel their strength, they are enlightened, their lights are spreading, and they will not retrograde. The first states general may establish 3. important points without opposition from the court. 1. their own periodical convocation. 2. their exclusive right of taxation (which has been confessed by the king.) 3. The right of registering laws and of previously proposing amendments to them, as the parliaments have by usurpation been in the habit of doing. The court will consent to this from it's hatred to the parliaments, and from the desire of having to do with one rather than many legislatures. If the states are prudent they will not aim at more than this at first, lest they should shock the dispositions of the court, and even alarm the public mind, which must be left to open itself by degrees to successive improvements. These will follow from the nature of things. How far they can proceed, in the end, towards a thorough reformation of abuse, cannot be foreseen. In my opinion a kind of influence, which none of their plans of reform take into account, will elude them all; I mean the influence of women in the government. The manners of the nation allow them to visit, alone, all persons in office, to sollicit the affairs of the husband, family, or friends, and their sollicitations bid defiance to laws and regulations. This obstacle may seem less to those who, like our countrymen, are in the precious habit of considering Right, as a barrier against all sollicitation. Nor can such an one, without the evidence of his own eyes, believe in the desperate state to which things are reduced in this country from the omnipotence of an influence which, fortunately for the happiness of the sex itself, does not endeavor to extend itself in our country beyond the domestic line.

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-14-02-0111>

From Thomas Jefferson to Richard Price

8 January 1789

DEAR SIR

I was favoured with your letter of Oct. 26. and far from finding any of it's subjects uninteresting as you apprehend, they were to me, as every thing which comes from you, pleasing and instructive. I concur with you strictly in your opinion of the comparative merits of atheism and demonism, and really see nothing but the latter in the being worshipped by many who think themselves Christians. Your opinions and writings will have effect in bringing others to reason on this subject.—Our new constitution, of which you speak also, has succeeded beyond what I apprehended it would have done. I did not at first believe that

11. states out of 13. would have consented to a plan consolidating them so much into one. A change in their dispositions, which had taken place since I left them, had rendered this consolidation necessary, that is to say, had called for a federal government which could walk upon it's own legs, without leaning for support on the state legislatures. A sense of this necessity, and a submission to it, is to me a new and consulatory proof that wherever the people are well informed they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights.—You say you are not sufficiently informed about the nature and circumstances of the present struggle here. Having been on the spot from it's first origin and watched it's movements as an uninterested spectator, with no other bias than a love of mankind I will give you my ideas of it. Tho' celebrated writers of this and other countries had already sketched good principles on the subject of government, yet the American war seems first to have awakened the thinking part of this nation in general from the sleep of despotism in which they were sunk. The officers too, who had been to America, were mostly young men, less shackled by habit and prejudice, and more ready to assent to the dictates of common sense and common right. They came back impressed with these. The press, notwithstanding it's shackles, began to disseminate them: conversation too assumed new freedoms; politics became the theme of all societies, male and female, and a very extensive and zealous party was formed, which may be called the Patriotic party, who sensible of the abusive government under which they lived, longed for occasions of reforming it. This party comprehended all the honesty of the kingdom, sufficiently at it's leisure to think: the men of letters, the easy bourgeois, the young nobility, partly from reflection partly from mode; for those sentiments became a matter of mode, and as such united most of the young women to the party. Happily for the nation, it happened that at the same moment, the dissipations of the court had exhausted the money and credit of the state, and M. de Calonnes found himself obliged to appeal to the nation and to develope to it the ruin of their finances. He had no ideas of supplying the deficit by economies; he saw no means but new taxes. To tempt the nation to consent to these some douceurs were necessary. The Notables were called in 1787. The leading vices of the constitution and administration were ably sketched out, good remedies proposed, and under the splendor of these propositions a demand of more money was couched. The Notables concurred with the minister in the necessity of reformation, adroitly avoided the demand of money, got him displaced, and one of their leading men placed in his room. The Archbishop of Thoulouse by the aid of the hopes formed of him, was able to borrow some money, and he reformed considerably the expences of the court. Notwithstanding the prejudices since formed against him, he appeared to me to pursue the reformation of the laws and constitution as steadily as a man could do who had to drag the court after him, and even to conceal from them the consequences of the measures he was leading them into. In his time the Criminal laws were reformed, provincial assemblies and states established in most of the provinces, the States general promised, and a solemn acknowledgement made by the king that he could not impose a new tax without the consent of the nation. It is true he was continually goaded forward by the public clamours excited by the writings and workings of the Patriots, who were able to keep up the public fermentation at the exact point which borders on resistance without entering on it. They had taken into their alliance the parliaments also, who were led by very singular circumstances to espouse, for the first time, the rights of the nation. They had from old causes had personal hostility against M. de Calonne. They refused to register his loans or his taxes, and went so far as to acknowledge they had no power to do it. They persisted in this with his successor, who therefore exiled them. Seeing that the nation did not interest themselves much for their recall, they began to fear that the new judicatures proposed in their place would be established and that their own suppression would be perpetual. In short they found their own strength insufficient to oppose that of the king. They therefore insisted the states general should be called. Here they became united with and supported by the Patriots, and their joint influence was sufficient to produce the promise of that assembly. I always suspected that the Archbishop had no objections to this force under which they laid him. But the patriots and parliament insist it was their efforts which extorted the promise against his will. The reestablishment of the parliament was the effect of the same coalition between the patriots and parliament: but, once reestablished, the latter began to see danger in that very power, the States general, which they had called for in a moment of despair, but which they now foresaw might very possibly

abridge their powers. They began to prepare grounds for questioning their legality, as a rod over the head of the states, and as a refuge if they should really extend their reformatations to them. Mr. Neckar came in at this period, and very dexterously disembarassed the administration of these disputes by calling the Notables to advise the form of calling and constituting the states. The court was well disposed towards the people; not from principles of justice or love to them. But they want money. No more can be had from the people. They are squeezed to the last drop. The clergy and nobles, by their privileges and influence, have kept their property in a great measure untaxed hitherto. They then remain to be squeezed, and no agent is powerful enough for this but the people. The court therefore must ally itself with the people. But the Notables, consisting mostly of privileged characters, had proposed a method of composing the states, which would have rendered the voice of the people, or tiers etat, in the states general, inefficient for the purposes of the court. It concurred then with the patriots in intriguing with the parliament to get them to pass a vote in favor of the rights of the people. This vote balancing that of the Notables has placed the court at liberty to follow it's own views, and they have determined that the tiers etat shall have in the States general as many votes as the clergy and nobles put together. Still a great question remains to be decided: that is, shall the states general vote by orders or by persons? Precedents are both ways. The clergy will move heaven and earth to obtain the suffrage by orders, because that parries the effect of all hitherto done for the people. The people will probably send their deputies expressly instructed to consent to no tax, to no adoption of the public debts, unless the unprivileged part of the nation has a voice equal to that of the privileged; that is to say unless the voice of the tiers etat be equalled to that of the clergy and nobles. They will have the young noblesse in general on their side, and the king and court. Against them will be the antient nobles and the clergy. So that I hope upon the whole, that by the time they meet there will be a majority of the nobles themselves in favor of the tiers etat. So far history. We are now to come to prophecy; for you will ask, to what will all this lead? I answer, if the States general do not stumble at the threshold on the question before stated, and which must be decided before they can proceed to business, then they will in their first session easily obtain 1. the future periodical convocation of the States: 2. their exclusive right to raise and appropriate money, which includes that of establishing a civil list. 3. a participation in legislation; probably, at first, it will only be a transfer to them of the portion of it now exercised by parliament, that is to say a right to propose amendments and a negative: but it must infallibly end in a right of origination. 4. perhaps they may make a declaration of rights. It will be attempted at least. Two other objects will be attempted, viz. a habeas corpus law, and free press. But probably they may not obtain these in the first session, or with modifications only, and the nation must be left to ripen itself more for their unlimited adoption.

Upon the whole it has appeared to me that the basis of the present struggle is an illumination of the public mind as to the rights of the nation, aided by fortunate incidents; that they can never retrograde, but from the natural progress of things must press forward to the establishment of a constitution which shall assure to them a good degree of liberty. They flatter themselves they shall form a better constitution than the English. I think it will be better in some points, worse in others. It will be better in the article of representation which will be more equal. It will be worse, as their situation obliges them to keep up the dangerous machine of a standing army. I doubt too whether they will obtain the trial by jury, because they are not sensible of it's value.

I am sure I have by this time heartily tired you with this long epistle, and that you will be glad to see it brought to an end with assurances of the sentiments of esteem and respect with which I have the honor to be Dear Sir Your most obedient & most humble servt,

TH: JEFFERSON

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-14-02-0196>

From Thomas Jefferson to Rabaut de St. Etienne

3 June 1789

SIR

After you quitted us yesterday evening, we continued our conversation (Monsr. de la Fayette, Mr. Short and myself) on the subject of the difficulties which environ you. The desirable object being to secure the good which the King has offered and to avoid the ill which seems to threaten, an idea was suggested, which appearing to make an impression on Monsr. de la Fayette, I was encouraged to pursue it on my return to Paris, to put it into form, and now to send it to you and him. It is this, that the king, in a seance royale, should come forward with a Charter of Rights in his hand, to be signed by himself and by every member of the three orders. This charter to contain the five great points which the Resultat of December offered on the part of the king, the abolition of pecuniary privileges offered by the privileged orders, and the adoption of the National debt and a grant of the sum of money asked from the nation. This last will be a cheap price for the preceding articles, and let the same act declare your immediate separation till the next anniversary meeting. You will carry back to your constituents more good than ever was effected before without violence, and you will stop exactly at the point where violence would otherwise begin. Time will be gained, the public mind will continue to ripen and to be informed, a basis of support may be prepared with the people themselves, and expedients occur for gaining still something further at your next meeting, and for stopping again at the point of force. I have ventured to send to yourself and Monsieur de la Fayette a sketch of my ideas of what this act might contain without endangering any dispute. But it is offered merely as a canvas for you to work on, if it be fit to work on at all. I know too little of the subject, and you know too much of it to justify me in offering any thing but a hint. I have done it too in a hurry: insomuch that since committing it to writing it occurs to me that the 5th. article may give alarm, that it is in a good degree included in the 4th. and is therefore useless. But after all what excuse can I make, Sir, for this presumption. I have none but an unmeasurable love for your nation and a painful anxiety lest Despotism, after an unaccepted offer to bind it's own hands, should seize you again with tenfold fury. Permit me to add to these very sincere assurances of the sentiments of esteem & respect with which I have the honor to be Sir Your most obedt. & most humble servt.,

TH: JEFFERSON

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-15-02-0171>

Draft of a Charter of Rights (sent by Jefferson to Lafayette)

3 June 1789

A Charter of Rights solemnly established by the King and Nation.

- 1. The States general shall assemble, uncalled, on the 1st. day of November annually, and shall remain together so long as they shall see cause. They shall regulate their own elections and proceedings, and until they shall ordain otherwise, their elections shall be in the forms observed in the present year, and shall be triennial.
- 2. The States-general alone shall levy money on the nation, and shall appropriate it.
- 3. Laws shall be made by the States-general only, with the consent of the king.
- 4. No person shall be restrained of his liberty but by regular process from a court of justice, authorized by a general law: [except that a Noble may be imprisoned by order of a court of justice on the prayer of 12. of his nearest relations.]¹ On complaint of an unlawful imprisonment, to any judge whatever, he shall have the prisoner immediately brought before him, and shall discharge him if his imprisonment be unlawful. The officer in whose custody the prisoner is shall obey the orders of the judge, and both judge and officer shall be responsible civilly and criminally for a failure of duty herein.

- 5. The Military shall be subordinate to the Civil authority.²
- 6. Printers shall be liable to legal prosecution for printing and publishing false facts injurious to the party prosecuting: but they shall be under no other restraint.
- 7. All pecuniary privileges and exemptions enjoyed by any description of persons are abolished.
- 8. All debts already contracted by the king are hereby made the debts of the nation: and the faith thereof is pledged for their payment in due time.
- 9. 80. millions of livres are now granted to the king, to be raised by loan and reimbursed by the nation: and the taxes heretofore paid shall continue to be paid to the end of the present year, and no longer.
- 10. The States general shall now separate and meet again on the 1st. day of November next.

Done, on behalf of the whole nation, by the King and their representatives in the States general, at Versailles, this —— day of June 1789.

Signed by the king, and by every member individually, and in his presence.

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-15-02-0172>

From Thomas Jefferson to Diodati

3 August 1789

[...] I presume that your correspondents here have given you a history of all the events which have happened. The Leyden gazette, tho' it contains several inconsiderable errors gives on the whole a just enough idea. It is impossible to conceive a greater fermentation than has worked in Paris, nor do I believe that so great a fermentation ever produced so little injury in any other place. I have been thro' it daily, have observed the mobs with my own eyes in order to be satisfied of their objects, and declare to you that I saw so plainly the legitimacy of them, that I have slept in my house as quietly thro' the whole as I ever did in the most peaceable moments. So strongly fortified was the despotism of this government by long possession, by the respect and the fears of the people, by possessing the public force, by the imposing authority of forms and of taste, that had it held itself on the defensive only, the national assembly with all their good sense, could probably have only obtained a considerable improvement of the government, not a total revision of it. But, ill informed of the spirit of their nation, the despots around the throne had recourse to violent measures, the forerunners of force. In this they have been completely overthrown, and the nation has made a total resumption of rights, which they had certainly never before ventured even to think of. The National assembly have now as clean a canvas to work on here as we had in America. Such has been the firmness and wisdom of their proceedings in moments of adversity as well as prosperity, that I have the highest confidence that they will use their power justly. As far as I can collect from conversation with their members, the constitution they will propose will resemble that of England in it's outlines, but not in it's defects. They will certainly leave the king possessed completely of the Executive powers, and particularly of the public force. Their legislature will consist of one order only, and not of two as in England: the representation will be equal and not abominably partial as that of England: it will be guarded against corruption, instead of having a majority sold to the king, and rendering his will absolute: whether it will be in one chamber, or broke into two cannot be foreseen. They will meet at certain epochs and sit as long as they please, instead of meeting only when, and sitting only as long as, the king pleases as in England. There is a difference of opinion whether the king shall have an absolute, or

only a qualified Negative on their acts. The parliaments will probably be suppressed; and juries provided in criminal cases perhaps even in civil ones. This is what appears probable at present. The Assembly is this day discussing the question whether they will have a declaration of rights. Paris has been led by events to assume the government of itself. It has hitherto worn too much the appearance of conformity to continue thus independently of the will of the nation. Reflection will probably make them sensible that the security of all depends on the dependance of all on the national legislature. I have so much confidence in the good sense of man, and his qualifications for self-government, that I am never afraid of the issue where reason is left free to exert her force; and I will agree to be stoned as a false prophet if all does not end well in this country. Nor will it end with this country. Here is but the first chapter of the history of European liberty.

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-15-02-0317>

From Thomas Jefferson to William Short

3 January 1793

DEAR SIR

[...] The tone of your letters had for some time given me pain, on account of the extreme warmth with which they censured the proceedings of the Jacobins of France. I considered that sect as the same with the Republican patriots, and the Feuillants as the Monarchical patriots, well known in the early part of the revolution, and but little distant in their views, both having in object the establishment of a free constitution, and differing only on the question whether their chief Executive should be hereditary or not. The Jacobins (as since called) yeilded to the Feuillants and tried the experiment of retaining their hereditary Executive. The experiment failed completely, and would have brought on the reestablishment of despotism had it been pursued. The Jacobins saw this, and that the expunging that officer was of absolute necessity, and the Nation was with them in opinion, for however they might have been formerly for the constitution framed by the first assembly, they were come over from their hope in it, and were now generally Jacobins. In the struggle which was necessary, many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some innocent. These I deplore as much as any body, and shall deplore some of them to the day of my death. But I deplore them as I should have done had they fallen in battle. It was necessary to use the arm of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but blind to a certain degree. A few of their cordial friends met at their hands the fate of enemies. But time and truth will rescue and embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives. The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. Were there but an Adam and an Eve left in every country, and left free, it would be better than as it now is. I have expressed to you my sentiments, because they are really those of 99 in an hundred of our citizens. The universal feasts, and rejoicings which have lately been had on account of the successes of the French shewed the genuine effusions of their hearts. You have been wounded by the sufferings of your friends, and have by this circumstance been hurried into a temper of mind which would be extremely disrelished if known to your countrymen. The reserve of *the Prest. of the U.S.* had never permitted me to discover the light in which he viewed it, and as I was more anxious that you should satisfy him than me, I had still avoided explanations with you on the subject. But your 113. induced him to break silence and to notice the extreme acrimony of your expressions. He added that he had been informed the sentiments you expressed *in your conversations* were equally offensive to our allies, and that you should consider yourself as the representative of your country and that what you say⁸ might be imputed to your constituents. He desired me therefore to write to you on this subject. He added that he considered *France as the sheet anchor of this country and its friendship as a first object.*

There are in the U.S. some characters of opposite principles; some of them are high in office, others possessing great wealth, and all of them hostile to France and fondly looking to England as the staff of their hope. These I named to you on a former occasion. Their prospects have certainly not brightened. Excepting them, this country is entirely republican, friends to the constitution, anxious to preserve it and to have it administered according to it's own republican principles. The little party above mentioned have espoused it only as a stepping stone to monarchy, and have endeavored to approximate it to that in it's administration, in order to render it's final transition more easy. The successes of republicanism in France have given the coup de grace to their prospects, and I hope to their projects.—I have developed to you faithfully the sentiments of your country, that you may govern yourself accordingly. I know your republicanism to be pure, and that it is no decay of that which has embittered you against it's votaries in France, but too great a sensibility at the partial evil by which it's object has been accomplished there. I have written to you in the stile to which I have been always accustomed with you, and which perhaps it is time I should lay aside. But while old men feel sensibly enough their own advance in years, they do not sufficiently recollect it in those whom they have seen young. In writing too the last private letter which will probably be written under present circumstances, in contemplating that your correspondence will shortly be turned over to I know not whom, but certainly to some one not in the habit of considering your interests with the same fostering anxieties I do, I have presented things without reserve, satisfied you will ascribe what I have said to it's true motive, use it for your own best interest, and in that fulfill completely what I had in view.

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-25-02-0016>

From Thomas Jefferson to Henry Remsen

30 October 1794

20 DEAR SIR

I received yesterday your friendly favor of the inst. and have to thank you for your attention to the gongs. There being two of them did not merit apology: I am glad to get them, and can find use for both. Be so good as to tender to Mr. Gouverneur my particular thanks for his attention to this little commission. I inclose you an order for 25. Dollars¹ on Mr. Lownes of Philadelphia, which according to your statement will I presume pay for the gongs, the duty, and perhaps the box to pack them in. I will thank you to have them well packed, and sent by some vessel bound to Richmond (no other port) to the care of Colo. Robert Gamble merchant there. I am so much immersed in farming and nail-making (for I have set up a Nailery) that politicks are entirely banished from my mind. I feel alive to nothing in that line but the success of the French revolution. I sincerely rejoice therefore in the successes you announce on their part against their combined enemies, and I cannot help hoping that the execution of Robespierre and his bloodthirsty satellites is a proof of their return to that moderation which their best friends had feared had not been always observed.—I thank you sincerely for the tender of your services. I have had too many proofs of your friendship to doubt it and can assure you it is sincerely reciprocated by Dear Sir your affectionate friend & servt

TH: JEFFERSON

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-28-02-0132>

From Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval

12 July 1816

This portion of the letter also appears as an inscription in the Southeast Portico of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington DC.

[...] I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well
5 require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as a civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors. [...]

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-10-02-0255>