

Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, April 2, 1791, from the Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES D. S. MSS.

Philadelphia Apr. 2. 1791.

Sir, —I had the honor of addressing you on the 27th. Ult. since which letters are received of Jan. 24., from Mr. Carmichael, and of Jan. 3 & 15, Madrid, and Feb. 6., and 12., Lisbon, from Colonel Humphreys. As these are interesting and may tend to settle suspense of mind to a certain degree, I shall trouble you with quotations from some parts & the substance of others.

Colo. H. says,

“I learn from other good authority, as well as from Mr. Carmichael, that all the representations of Gardoqui (when minister in America), tended to excite a belief that the most respectable & influential people throughout the U. S. did not wish to have the navigation of the Mississippi opened for years to come, from an apprehension such an event would weaken the government & impoverish the Atlantic states by emigrations. It was even pretended that none but a handful of settlers on the Western waters, & a few inhabitants of the Southern states would acquiesce in the measure.”

This is the state of mind to which they have reverted since the crisis with England is passed, for during that, the Count de Florida Blanca threw out general assertions that we should have no reason to complain of their conduct with respect to the Mississippi;

Library of Congress

which gave rise to the report it's navigation was opened. The following passages will be astonishing to you who recollect that there was not a syllable in your letters to Mr. G. M. which looked in the most distant manner to Spain. Mr. Carmichael says,

“Something however

might have been done in a moment of projects and apprehension, had not a certain negotiation, carried on on our part at London, transpired, & which I think was known here rather from British policy than from the vigilance of the Marquis del Campo. Entirely unacquainted with this manœuvre, although in correspondence with the person employed, I was suspected to be in the secret. This suspicion banished confidence, which returns by slow degrees. This circumstance induced me to drop entirely my correspondence with G. M. To continue it would have done harm, & certainly could do no good. I have seen extracts of the President's letter communicated to the Duke of Leeds, perhaps mutilated or forged to serve here the views of the British cabinet. I do not yet despair of obtaining copies of those letters through the same channel that I procured the first account of the demands of G. B. and the signature of the late convention.”

Colo. Humphreys says,

“The minister had intimations from del Campo of the conferences between Mr. Morris & the Duke of Leeds, which occasioned him to say with warmth to Mr. Carmichael, ‘Now is your time to make a treaty with England.’ Fitzherbert availed himself of these conferences to create apprehensions that the Americans would aid his nation in case of war.”

Your genuine letter could have made no such impression. The British court then must have forged one, to suit their purpose, and I think it will not be amiss to send a genuine copy to Carmichael, to place our faith on it's just ground. The principal hope of doing

anything now, is founded, either on an expected removal of the Count de F. B. from the ministry, in which case persons will be employed who are more friendly to America, or

Library of Congress

to the bursting out of that fire which both gentlemen think but superficially covered. Mr. Carmichael justifies himself by the interception of his letters. He has shown the originals to Colonel H. He concludes his present letter with these words,

“Relying on the good opinion of me, that you have been pleased to express on many occasions, I entreat you to engage the President to permit me to return to my native country.”

Colo. Humphreys, on the subjects of his justification and return says, (after speaking of the persons likely to come into power),

“Mr. Carmichael being on terms of intimacy with the characters here, is certainly capable of effecting more at this court than any other American. He is heartily desirous of accomplishing the object in view at all events, & fully determined to return to America in 12. or 18. months at farthest. He has expressed that intention repeatedly. To be invested with full powers, perhaps he would be able to do something before his departure from the continent.”

In his letter of Jan. 15. he says,

“Mr. Carmichael's ideas are just: his exertions will be powerful & unremitting to obtain the accomplishment of our desires before his departure from this country. The task will now be difficult if not impracticable.”

In that of Feb. 6. he says,

“Mr. Carmichael is much mortified that so many of his despatches have miscarried. By the original documents, which I have seen in his

hands, I am convinced he has been extremely assiduous and successful in procuring early & authentic intelligence. It is difficult for a person at a distance to form an adequate judgment of the embarrassments to which a public man, situated as he was, is subjected,

Library of Congress

in making written communications, from such an inland place, & under such a jealous government. He appears disgusted with the country & the mode of life he is compelled to lead. He desires ardently to return to his native land; but he wishes to distinguish himself first by rendering some essential service to it if possible.”

I propose to write to Mr. Carmichael that your absence prevents my asking the permission he desires, that as it is natural he should wish to do something which may make favorable impressions here before his return & an opportunity is now offered him, I will suspend asking his recall till I hear further from him.

Governor Quesada, by order of his court, is inviting foreigners to go and settle in Florida. This is meant for our people. Debtors take advantage of it, & go off with their property. Our citizens have a right to go where they please. It is the business of the states to take measures to stop them till their debts are paid. This done, I wish a hundred thousand of our inhabitants would accept the invitation, It will be the means of delivering to us peaceably, what may otherwise cost us a war. In the meantime we may complain of this seduction of our inhabitants just enough to make them believe we think it very wise policy for them, & confirm them in it. This is my idea of it.