

## Thomas Jefferson to Robert R. Livingston, March 24, 1801, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

**TO ROBERT R. LIVINGSTON J. MSS.**

Washington, Mar. 24, 1801.

Dear Sir, —Your favor of the 12th is just now at hand. With respect to the time of your departure it will depend on the return of Mr. Dawson with the ratification of the Convention. We may expect this in 4. months: so that you may have time enough to prepare for your departure soon after his arrival. We shall join with you a Secretary of Legation, to guard against any accident happening to yourself: and as we consider it advantageous to the public to make these apprenticeships to prepare subjects for principal duties hereafter, such a character has been sought out as will form a proper subject of future expectation. The elder son of General Sumpter from his rank in life & fortune, from an extraordinary degree of sound understanding & discretion, and the amiability of his temper & gentlemanly manners, has attracted our attention; it is proposed therefore to give him a commission of Secretary of Legation to accompany you, but it is not known that he will accept.<sup>1</sup> If he does, he will probably meet you there,

<sup>1</sup> Livingston seems to have objected to this appointment, for Jefferson wrote him:

“ Washington, May 8, 1801.

“ Dear Sir:—Your favor of the 3d has been duly received. It will be a subject of real regret if the regulation we have adopted does not meet your wishes, and the more so as it is too far gone to be changed, acceptance having been received. I explained to you in my former

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letter the principles on which it was done, to wit, I, to teach for public service in future such subjects as from their standing in society, talents, principles and fortune may probably come into the public councils. 2. to have a confidential person to take charge of the public papers and concerns in the case of the death of the principal. Nor is this new. When I went to France as a member of a commission, Humphreys was named as Secretary of Legation, without my having been consulted; and though I had previously engaged a private secretary who came over to me, no salary was allowed to him by the public as long as Humphreys staid. Humphreys lived in my family. So too Mr. Adams's Legation to England, Col. Smith was named Secretary by Congress and no private secretary allowed. The only difference in the regulations is that Congress allowed the Secretary of Legation the same salary (2,000 D.) as if acting as Charges des affaires: whereas we allow exactly the salary of a private secretary (1250 D) so as not to add to the public expense which we make a fundamental principle in every case. In Sumpter's character you have the utmost security, and his instructions shall moreover be pointed. Indeed the Secretary will find his interest in cultivating the patronage of his principal, as he cannot expect to remain in his family unless he can make himself agreeable, and he must moreover know, and will be told from us, that in case of disagreement or complaint he will be immediately recalled.

“With respect to the consul at Paris, Mr. Skipwith, who was consul there, was removed by Mr. Pickering for his politics, and a person appointed whom I disapprove entirely. Skipwith has accordingly been notified that his place will be restored to him. He is a man of excellent character, long versed in the consular business, having been 11 or 12 years consul, first in the West Indies, afterwards at Paris, possessing all our business there at his fingers ends, the French language, laws and institutions being to him as his native ones, independent in his fortune, and remaining at Paris for his own satisfaction being a single man. I have known him from a small boy, and can assure you you will find him a most valuable and friendly aid till you get possessed of the ground yourself & indeed afterwards.

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“While on the subject of the Secretary of Legation I should have observed in answer to your supposition that he would look on himself as heir apparent and successor to his principal, that on the contrary he will find himself excluded from the immediate succession by the rule established in General's Washington time, that no person should be continued or appointed to a foreign mission after an absence from his own country of 7. or 8. years. On this rule it is that Humphreys is recalled, having been about 11 years. I am persuaded you will find the difficulties you apprehend vanish in practice. The Secretaries of Legation, though named at first by the government, find themselves so entirely dependent on their principal for their accommodation, their character and even their continuance, that I have never known an instance where they have not been as perfectly pliant as a private secretary, except in the case of Carmichael & Jay, where I believe a bickering arose. But you know a greater one arose between Jay and his private secretary Littlepage. In hopes of seeing you here shortly according to the intimations in your letter, and of then explaining more fully, I conclude with a tender of my affectionate esteem and high respect & consideration.”

or more likely precede you. Accept assurances of my constant esteem, & high consideration & respect.