

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, December 20, 1801, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO DOCTOR BENJAMIN RUSH J. MSS.

Washington, Dec. 20, 1801.

Dear Sir, —I have received your favor of Nov 27, with your introductory lecture, which I have read with the pleasure and edification I do everything from you. I am happy to see that vaccination is introduced, & likely to be kept up, in Philadelphia; but I shall not think it exhibits all it's utility until experience shall have hit upon some mark or rule by which the popular eye may distinguish genuine from spurious virus. It was with this view that I wished to discover whether time could not be made the standard, and supposed, from the little experience I had, that matter, taken at 8. times 24. hours from the time of insertion, could always be in the proper state. As far as I went I found it so; but I shall be happy to learn what the immense field of experience in Philadelphia will teach us on that subject.

Our winter campaign has opened with more good humor than I expected. By sending a message, instead of making a speech at the opening of the session, I have prevented the bloody conflict to which the making an answer would have committed them. They consequently were able to set into real business at once, without losing 10. or 12. days in combating an answer. Hitherto there has been no disagreeable altercations. The suppression of useless offices, and lopping off the parasitical plant engrafted at the last session on the judiciary body, will probably produce some. Bitter men are not pleased with the suppression of taxes. Not daring to condemn the measure, they attack the motive; & too disingenuous to ascribe it to the honest one of freeing our citizens from unnecessary

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burthens and unnecessary systems of office, they ascribe it to a desire of popularity. But every honest man will suppose honest acts to flow from honest principles, & the rogues may rail without intermission.

My health has been always so uniformly firm, that I have for some years dreaded nothing so much as the living too long. I think, however, that a flaw has appeared which ensures me against that, without cutting short any of the period during which I could expect to remain capable of being useful. It will probably give me as many years as I wish, and without pain or debility. Should

this be the case, my most anxious prayers will have been fulfilled by Heaven.

I have said as much to no mortal breathing, and my florid health is calculated to keep my friends as well as foes quiet, as they should be. Accept assurances of my constant esteem & high respect.