

Thomas Jefferson to Madame de Tesse, December 8, 1813, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO MADAM DE TESSÉ J. MSS.

December 8, 1813.

While at war, my dear Madam and friend, with the leviathan of the ocean, there is little hope of a letter escaping his thousand ships; yet I cannot permit myself longer to withhold the acknowledgment of your letter of June 38 of the last year, with which came the memoirs of the Margrave of Bareuth. I am much indebted to you for this singular morsel of history which has given us a certain view of kings, queens and princes, disrobed of their formalities. It is a peep into the state of the Egyptian god Apis. It would not be easy to find grosser manners, coarser vices, or more meanness in the poorest huts of our peasantry. The princess shows herself the legitimate sister of Frederic, cynical, selfish, and without a heart. Notwithstanding your wars with England, I presume you get the publications of that country. The memoirs of Mrs. Clarke and of her *darling* prince, and the book, emphatically so called, because it is the *Biblia Sacra Deorum et Dearum sub-cœlestium*, the Prince Regent, his Princess and the minor deities of his sphere, form a worthy sequel to the memoirs of Bareuth; instead of the vulgarity and penury of the court of Berlin, giving us the vulgarity and profusion of that of London, and the gross stupidity and profligacy of the latter, in lieu of the genius and misanthropism of the former. The whole might be published as a supplement to M. de Buffon, under the title of the "Natural History of Kings and Princes," or as a separate work and called "Medicine for Monarchists." The *Intercepted Letters*, a later English publication of great wit and humor, has put them to their proper

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use by holding them up as butts for the ridicule and contempt of mankind. Yet by such worthless beings is a great nation to be governed and even made to deify their old king because he is only a fool and a maniac, and to forgive and forget his having lost to them a great and flourishing empire, added nine hundred millions sterling to their debt, for which the fee simple of the whole island would not sell, if offered farm by farm at public auction, and increased their annual taxes from eight to seventy millions sterling, more than the whole rent-roll of the island. What must be the dreary prospect from the son when such a father is deplored as a national loss. But let us drop these odious beings and pass to those of an higher order, the plants of the field.

I am afraid I have given you a great deal more trouble than I intended by my inquiries for the *Maronnier* or *Castanca Saliva*, of which I wished to possess my own country, without knowing how rare its culture was even in yours. The two plants which your researches have placed in your own garden, it will be all but impossible to remove hither. The war renders their safe passage across the Atlantic extremely precarious, and, if landed anywhere but in the Chesapeake, the risk of the additional voyage along the coast to Virginia, is still greater. Under these circumstances it is better they should retain their present station, and compensate to you the trouble they have cost you.

I learn with great pleasure the success of your new gardens at Auenay. No occupation can be more delightful or useful. They will have the merit of inducing you to forget those of Charille. With the botanical riches which you mention to have been derived to England from New Holland, we are as yet unacquainted. Lewis's journey across our continent to the Pacific has added a number of new plants to our former stock. Some of them are curious, some ornamental, some useful, and some may by culture be made acceptable to our tables. I have growing, which I destine for you, a very handsome little shrub of the size of a currant bush. Its beauty consists in a great produce of berries of the size of currants, and literally as white as snow, which remain on the bush through the winter, after its leaves have fallen, and make it an object as singular as it is beautiful. We call it the snow-berry bush, no botanical name being yet given to it, but I do not know why we might

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not call it *Chionicoccus*, or *Kallicoccus*. All Lewis's plants are growing in the garden of Mr. McMahon, a gardener of Philadelphia, to whom I consigned them, and from whom I shall have great pleasure, when peace is restored, in ordering for you any of these or of our other indigenous plants. The port of Philadelphia has great intercourse with Bordeaux and Nantes, and some little perhaps with Havre. I was mortified not long since by receiving a letter from a merchant in Bordeaux, apologizing for having suffered a box of plants addressed by me to you, to get accidentally covered in his warehouse by other objects, and to remain three years undiscovered, when every thing in it was found to be rotten. I have learned occasionally that others rotted in the warehouses of the English pirates. We are now

settling that account with them. We have taken their Upper Canada and shall add the Lower to it when the season will admit; and hope to remove them fully and finally from our continent. And what they will feel more, for they value their colonies only for the bales of cloth they take from them, we have established manufactures, not only sufficient to supersede our demand from them, but to rivalize them in foreign markets. But for the course of our war I will refer you to M. de La Fayette, to whom I state it more particularly.

Our friend Mr. Short is well. He makes Philadelphia his winter quarters, and New York or the country, those of the summer. In his fortune he is perfectly independent and at ease, and does not trouble himself with the party politics of our country. Will you permit me to place here for M. de Tessé the testimony of my high esteem and respect, and accept for yourself an assurance of the warm recollections I retain of your many civilities and courtesies to me, and the homage of my constant and affectionate attachment and respect.