

**Thomas Jefferson to William Duane, October 1, 1812 ,  
from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve  
Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul  
Leicester Ford.**

**TO WILLIAM DUANE J. MSS.**

Monticello, October 1, 1812.

Dear Sir, —Your favor of September the 20th, has been duly received, and I cannot but be gratified by the assurance it expresses, that my aid in the councils of our government would increase the public confidence in them; because it admits an inference that they have approved of the course pursued, when I heretofore bore a part in those councils. I profess, too, so much of the Roman principle, as to deem it honorable for the general of yesterday to act as a corporal to-day, if his services can be useful to his country; holding that to be false pride, which postpones the public good to any private or personal considerations. But I am past service. The hand of age is upon me. The decay of bodily faculties apprizes me that those of the mind cannot be unimpaired, had I not still better proofs. Every year counts by increased debility, and departing faculties keep the score. The last year it was the sight, this it is the hearing, the next something else will be going, until all is gone. Of all this I was sensible before I left Washington, and probably my fellow laborers saw it before I did. The decay of memory was obvious; it is now become distressing. But the mind too, is weakened. When I was young, mathematics was the passion of my life. The same passion has returned upon me, but with unequal powers. Processes which I then read off with the facility of common discourse, now cost me labor, and time, and slow investigation. When I offered this, therefore, as one of the reasons deciding my retirement from office, it was offered in sincerity and a

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consciousness of its truth. And I think it a great blessing that I retain understanding enough to be sensible how much of it I have lost, and to avoid exposing myself as a spectacle for the pity of my friends; that I have surmounted the difficult point of knowing when to retire. As a compensation for faculties departed, nature gives me good health, and a perfect resignation to the laws of decay which she has prescribed to all the forms and combinations of matter.

The detestable treason of Hull has, indeed, excited a deep anxiety in all breasts. The depression was in the first moment gloomy and portentous. But it has been succeeded

by a revived animation, and a determination to meet the occurrence with increased efforts; and I have so much confidence in the vigorous minds and bodies of our countrymen, as to be fearless as to the final issue. The treachery of Hull, like that of Arnold, cannot be matter of blame on our government. His character, as an officer of skill and bravery, was established on the trials of the last war, and no previous act of his life had led to doubt his fidelity. Whether the Head of the war department is equal to his charge, I am not qualified to decide. I knew him only as a pleasant, gentlemanly man in society; and the indecision of his character rather added to the amenity of his conversation. But when translated from the colloquial circle to the great stage of national concerns, and the direction of the extensive operations of war, whether he has been able to seize at one glance the long line of defenceless border presented by our enemy, the masses of strength which we hold on different points of it, the facility this gave us of attacking him, on the same day, on all his points, from the extremity of the lakes to the neighborhood of Quebec, and the perfect indifference with which this last place, impregnable as it is, might be left in the hands of the enemy to fall of itself; whether, I say, he could see and prepare vigorously for all this, or merely wrapped himself in the cloak of cold defence, I am uninformed. I clearly think with you on the competence of Monroe to embrace great views of action. The decision of his character, his enterprise, firmness, industry, and unceasing vigilance, would, I believe, secure, as I am sure they would merit, the public confidence, and give us all the success which our means can accomplish. If our operations have suffered or languished from any

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want of energy in the present head which directs them, I have so much confidence in the wisdom and conscientious integrity of Mr. Madison, as to be satisfied, that however torturing to his feelings, he will fulfil his duty to the public and to his own reputation, by making the necessary change. Perhaps he may be preparing it while we are talking about it; for of all these things I am uninformed. I fear that Hull's surrender has been more than

the mere loss of a year to us. Besides bringing on us the whole mass of savage nations, whom fear and not affection has kept in quiet, there is danger that in giving time to an enemy who can send reinforcements of regulars faster than we can raise them, they may strengthen Canada and Halifax beyond the assailment of our lax and divided powers. Perhaps, however, the patriotic efforts from Kentucky and Ohio, by recalling the British force to its upper posts, may yet give time to Dearborne to strike a blow below. Effectual possession of the river from Montreal to the Chaudiere, which is practicable, would give us the upper country at our leisure, and close forever the scenes of the tomahawk and scalping knife.

But these things are for others to plan and achieve. The only succor from the old must lie in their prayers. These I offer up with sincere devotion; and in my concern for the great public, I do not overlook my friends, but supplicate for them, as I do for yourself, a long course of freedom, happiness and prosperity.