

**Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Leiper, January 1, 1814,
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by Paul Leicester Ford.**

TO THOMAS LEIPER J. MSS.

Monticello, January 1, 1814.

Dear Sir, —I had hoped, when I retired from the business of the world, that I should have been permitted to pass the evening of life in tranquillity, disturbed by the peltings and passions of which the public papers are the vehicles. I see, however, that I have been dragged into the newspapers by the infidelity of one with whom I was formerly intimate, but who has abandoned the American principles out of which that intimacy grew, and become the bigoted partisan of England, and malcontent of his own government. In a letter which he wrote to me, he earnestly besought me to avail our country of the good understanding which existed between the executive and myself, by recommending an offer of such terms to our enemy as might produce a peace, towards which he was confident that enemy was disposed. In my answer, I stated the aggressions, the insults and injuries, which England had been heaping on us for years, our long forbearance in the hope she might be led by time and reflection to a sounder view of her own interests, and of their connection with justice to us, the repeated propositions for accommodation made by us and rejected by her, and at length her Prince Regent's solemn proclamation to the world that he would never repeal the orders in council *as to us*, until France should have revoked her illegal decrees *as to all the world*, and her minister's declaration to ours, that no admissable precaution against the impressment of our seamen, could be proposed: that the unavoidable declaration of war which followed these was accompanied

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by advances for peace, on terms which no American could dispense with, made through various channels, and unnoticed and unanswered through any; but that if he could suggest any other conditions which we ought to accept, and which had not been repeatedly offered and rejected, I was ready to be the channel of their conveyance to the government; and, to show him that neither that attachment to Bonaparte nor French influence, which they allege eternally without believing it themselves, affected my mind, I threw in the two little sentences of the printed extract enclosed in your friendly favor of the 9th ultimo, and exactly these two little sentences, from a letter of two or three pages, he has thought proper to publish, naked, alone, and with my name, although other parts of the letter would have shown that I wished such limits only to the successes of Bonaparte, as should not prevent his completely closing Europe against British manufactures and commerce; and thereby reducing her to just terms of peace with us.

Thus am I situated. I receive letters from all quarters, some from known friends, some from those who write like friends, on various subjects. What am I to do? Am I to button myself up in Jesuitical reserve, rudely declining any answer, or answering in terms so unmeaning as only to prove my distrust? Must I withdraw myself from all interchange of sentiment with the world? I cannot do this. It is at war with my habits and temper. I cannot act as if all men were unfaithful because some are so; nor believe that all will betray me, because some do. I had rather be the victim of occasional infidelities, than relinquish my general confidence in the honesty of man.

So far as to the breach of confidence which has brought me into the newspapers, with a view to embroil me with my friends, by a supposed separation in opinion and principle from them. But it is impossible that there can be any difference of opinion among us on the two propositions contained in these two little sentences, when explained, as they were explained in the context from which they were insulated. That Bonaparte is an unprincipled tyrant, who is deluging the continent of Europe with blood, there is not a human being, not even the wife of his bosom, who does not see: nor can there, I think, be a doubt as to the

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line we ought to wish drawn between his successes and those of Alexander. Surely none of us wish to see Bonaparte conquer Russia, and lay thus at his feet the whole continent of Europe. This done, England would be but a breakfast; and, although I am free from the visionary fears which the votaries of England have affected to entertain, because I believe he cannot effect the conquest of Europe; yet put all Europe into his hands, and he might spare such a force to be sent in British ships, as I would as leave not have to encounter, when I see how much trouble a handful of British soldiers in Canada has given us. No. It cannot be to our interest that all Europe should be reduced to a single monarchy. The true line of interest for us, is, that Bonaparte should be able to effect the complete exclusion of England from the whole continent of Europe, in order, as the same letter said, "by this peaceable engine of constraint, to make her renounce her views of dominion over the ocean, of permitting no other nation to navigate it but with her license, and on tribute to her, and her aggressions on the persons of our citizens who may choose to exercise their right of passing over that element." And this would be effected by Bonaparte's succeeding so far as to close the Baltic against her. This success I wished him

the last year, this I wish him this year; but were he again advanced to Moscow, I should again wish him such disasters as would prevent his reaching Petersburg. And were the consequences even to be the longer continuance of our war, I would rather meet them than see the whole force of Europe wielded by a single hand.

I have gone into this explanation, my friend, because I know you will not carry my letter to the newspapers, and because I am willing to trust to your discretion the explaining me to our honest fellow laborers, and the bringing them to pause and reflect, if any of them have not sufficiently reflected on the extent of the success we ought to wish to Bonaparte, with a view to our own interests only; and even were we not men, to whom nothing human should be indifferent. But is our particular interest to make us insensible to all sentiments of morality? Is it then become criminal, the moral wish that the torrents of blood this man is shedding in Europe, the sufferings of so many human beings, good as ourselves, on whose necks he is trampling, the burnings of ancient cities, devastations of

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great countries, the destruction of law and order, and demoralization of the world, should be arrested, even if it should place our peace a little further distant? No. You and I cannot differ in wishing that Russia, and Sweden, and Denmark, and Germany, and Spain, and Portugal, and Italy, and even England, may retain their independence. And if we differ in our opinions about Towers and his four beasts and ten kingdoms, we differ as friends, indulging mutual errors, and doing justice to mutual sincerity and honesty. In this spirit of sincere confidence and affection, I pray God to bless you here and hereafter.