

23. *Corruption in Elections*

To Benjamin Rush

New York, April 18, 1790

. . . How many follies and indiscreet speeches do your minutes in your note-book bring to my recollection, which I had forgotten forever! Alas! I fear I am not yet much more prudent. Your character of Mr. Paine is very well and very just. To the accusation against me which you have recorded in your note-book of the 17th of March last, I plead not guilty. I deny an attachment to monarchy, and I deny that I have changed my principles since 1776. No letter of mine to Mr. Hooper was ever printed that I know of. Indeed, I have but a very confused recollection of having ever written him any letter. If any letter has been printed in my name, I desire to see it. You know that a letter of mine to Mr Wythe was printed by Dunlap, in January 1776, under the title of "Thoughts on Government, in a letter from a gentlemen to his friend." In that pamphlet I recommended a legislature in three independent branches, and to such a legislature I am still attached. But I own that at that time I understood very little of the subject, and if I had changed my opinions, should have no scruple to avow it. I own that awful experience has concurred with reading and reflection to convince me that Americans are more rapidly disposed to corruption in elections than I thought they were fourteen years ago.

My friend Dr. Rush will excuse me if I caution him against a fraudulent use of the words *monarchy* and *republic*. I am a mortal and irreconcilable enemy to monarchy. I am no friend to *hereditary limited* monarchy in America. This I know can never be admitted without an hereditary Senate to control it, and a hereditary nobility or Senate in America I know to be unattainable and impracticable. I should scarcely be for it if it were. Do not, therefore, my friend, misunderstand me and misrepresent me to posterity. I am for a balance between the legislative and executive powers, and I am for enabling the executive to be at all times capable of maintaining the balance between the Senate and House, or, in other words, between the aristocratical and democratical interests. Yet I am for having all three branches elected at stated periods, and these elections, I hope, will continue until the people shall be convinced that fortune, providence, or chance, call it which you will, is better than election. If the time should come when corruption shall be added to intrigue and manœuvre in elections, and produce civil war, then, in my opinion, chance will be better than choice for all but the House of Representatives.

Accept my thanks for your polite and obliging invitation to Philadel-

phia. Nothing would give me more pleasure than such a visit; but I must deny myself that satisfaction. I know I have friends in Pennsylvania, and such as I esteem very much as friends of virtue, liberty, and good government. What you mean by "more than British degrees of corruption" at New York, and by "sophisticated government," I know not. The continent is a kind of whispering gallery, and acts and speeches are reverberated round from New York in all directions. The report is very loud at a distance, when the whisper is very gentle in the centre. But if you see such corruption in your countrymen, on what do you found your hopes? I lament the deplorable condition of my country, which seems to be under such a fatality that the people can agree upon nothing. When they seem to agree, they are so unsteady that it is but for a moment. That changes may be made for the better, is probable. I know of no change that would occasion much danger, but that of President. I wish very heartily that a change of Vice-President could be made to-morrow. I have been too ill-used in the office to be fond of it—if I had not been introduced into it in a manner that made it a disgrace. I will never serve in it again upon such terms. Though I have acted in public with immense multitudes, I have had few friends, and those certainly not interested ones. These I shall love in public or private. Adieu.