

55. *State Paper on Foreign Policy*

To Secretary Jay

Grosvenor Square, Westminster, August 10, 1785

The *arrêt* of the King of France, in his council of the 10th of July, has a preamble which deserves to be well considered in America. The increasing liberality of sentiment among philosophers and men of letters, in various nations, has for some time given reason to hope for a *reformation*, a kind of *protestantism*, in the commercial system of the world; but I believe that this *arrêt* is the first act of any sovereign which has openly avowed commercial principles so generous and noble. "Nothing could appear to the King more desirable, or suitable to his own principles, than a general liberty which, freeing from all kinds of fetters the circulation of all productions and goods of different countries, would make of all nations, as it were, but one, in point of trade; but, as long as that liberty cannot be universally admitted, and everywhere reciprocally, the interest of the kingdom requires of his Majesty's wisdom that he should exclude

from it, or suffer to be imported by the nation only, those foreign goods the free importation of which would be hurtful to his kingdom and manufactories, and might make the balance of trade to be against him."

The United States of America have done more than all the economists in France towards propagating in the world this magnanimous sentiment. But they have more cause than the court of France to complain that liberty is not universally and reciprocally admitted. They have cause to complain against France herself, in some degree, but more against Great Britain; for France, in some degree, calculates all her policy towards us, upon a principle which England pursues more steadily; a principle not so properly of enriching and strengthening herself at our expense as of impoverishing and weakening us even at her own expense. Simple selfishness, which is only the absence of benevolence, is much less unamiable than positive malevolence. As the French court has condescended to adopt our principle in theory, I am very much afraid we shall be obliged to imitate their wisdom in practice, and exclude from the United States, or suffer to be imported by our nation only, and in their own ships, those foreign goods which would be hurtful to the United States and their manufactories, make the balance of trade to be against them, or annihilate or diminish their shipping or mariners.

We have hitherto been the bubbles of our own philosophical and equitable liberality; and, instead of meeting correspondent sentiments, both France and England have shown a constant disposition to take a selfish and partial advantage of us because of them, nay, to turn them to the diminution or destruction of our own means of trade and strength. I hope we shall be the dupes no longer than we must. I would venture upon monopolies and exclusions, if they were found to be the only arms of defence against monopolies and exclusions, without fear of offending Dean Tucker or the ghost of Doctor Quesnay.

I observe further, with pleasure, in the preamble, that the King "is particularly occupied with the means of encouraging the industry of his subjects, and of propagating the extent of their trade, and reviving their manufactories." Great things may be done in this way, for the benefit of America as well as of France, if the measures are calculated upon the honest old principle of "live and let live." But, if another maxim is adopted, "I will live upon your means of living," or another still worse, "I will half starve that you may quite starve," instead of rejoicing at it, we must look out for means of preserving ourselves. These means can never be secured entirely, until Congress shall be made supreme in foreign commerce, and shall have digested a plan for all the States. But, if any of the States continue to refuse their assent, I hope that individual States will take it separately upon themselves, and confine their exports and imports wholly to ships and mariners of the United States, or even to their own ships and mariners, or, which is best of all, to the ships and mariners of those States which will adopt the same regulations.