39. On His Administration

To James Lloyd

Quincy, March 31, 1815

... I cannot repent of my "strong character." Whether I have one or not, I know not. I am not conscious of any character stronger than common. If I have such a nature, it was given me. I shall neither be rewarded nor punished for it. For all my foibles, strong or weak, I hold myself responsible to God and man. I hope to be forgiven for what I humbly acknowledge I cannot justify, and not be too severely censured for what, in my circumstances, "humana parum cavet natura." I did not humble France, nor have the combined efforts of emperors and kings humbled her, and, I hope, she never will be humbled below Austria, Russia, or England. But I humbled the French Directory as much as all Europe has humbled Bonaparte. I purchased navy yards, which would now sell for double their cost with compound interest. I built frigates, manned a navy, and selected officers with great anxiety and care, who perfectly protected our commerce, and gained virgin victories against the French, and who afterwards acquired such laurels in the Mediterranean, and who have lately emblazoned themselves and their country with a naval glory, which I tremble to think of. God forbid that American naval power should ever be such a scourge to the human race as that of Great Britain has been! I was engaged in the most earnest, sedulous, and, I must own, expensive exertions to preserve peace with the Indians, and prepare them for agriculture and civilization, through the whole of my administration. I had the inexpressible satisfaction of complete success. Not a hatchet was lifted in my time; and the single battle of Tippecanoe has since cost the United States a hundred times more money than it cost me to maintain universal and perpetual peace. I finished the demarcation of limits, and settled all controversies with Spain. I made the composition with England, for all the old Virginia debts, and all the other American debts, the most snarling, angry, thorny, scabreux negotiation that ever mortal ambassador, king, prince, emperor, or president was ever plagued with. I say I made it, and so I did, though the treaty was not ratified till Jefferson came in. My labors were indefatigable to compose all difficulties and settle all controversies with all nations, civilized and savage. And I had complete and perfect success, and left my country at peace with all the world, upon terms consistent with the honor and interest of the United States, and with all our relations with other nations, and all our obligations by the law of nations or by treaties. This is so true that no nation or individual ever
uttered a complaint of injury, insult, or offence. I had suppressed an
insurrection in Pennsylvania, and effectually humbled and punished the
insurgents; not by assembling an army of militia from three or four
States, and marching in all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of war,
at an expense of millions, but silently, without noise, and at a trifling
expense. . . .

As I am not now writing a history of my administration, I will sum
up all I have to say in a few words. I left my country in peace and har-
mony with all the world, and after all my "extravagant expenses" and
"wanton waste of public money," I left navy yards, fortifications, frigates,
timber, naval stores, manufactories of cannon and arms, and a treasury
full of five millions of dollars. This was all done step by step, against
perpetual oppositions, clamors and reproaches, such as no other Presi-
dent ever had to encounter, and with a more feeble, divided, and in-
capable support than has ever fallen to the lot of any administration
before or since. For this I was turned out of office, degraded and dis-
graced by my country; and I was glad of it. I felt no disgrace, because
I felt no remorse. It has given me fourteen of the happiest years of my
life; and I am certain I could not have lasted one year more in that
station, shackled in the chains of that arbitrary faction.