28. "I Do Not Curse the Day When I Engaged in Public Affairs"

To Benjamin Rush

Quincy, 1 May, 1807.

... You ask me, if I do not sometimes imprecate evils on the day on which I became a politician. I have endeavored to recollect that day. It is a remote one. ... An odd accident has within a month brought to light the inclosed letter, which has lain fifty-one years and a half in darkness and silence, in dust and oblivion. Pray tell me your reflections on the sight of this droll phenomenon. I fancy they will be, first, what would our tories and quakers and proprietors have said of this letter, had it been published in 1774, 5, or 6? But I will not guess at any more of your observations. You shall make them yourself and relate them to me. But I will make my own marks first, and submit them to you.

1. Paine, in "Common Sense," says, that nobody in America ever thought, till he revealed to them the mighty truth, that America would ever be independent. I remember not the words, but this is the sense as I remember it. This I have always, at all times and in all places, contradicted, and have affirmed that the idea of American independence, sooner or later, and of the necessity of it some time or other, was always familiar to gentlemen of reflection in all parts of America, and I spoke of my own knowledge in this province.

2. I very distinctly remember, that in the war of 1755, a union of the colonies, to defend themselves against the encroachments of the French, was the general wish of the gentlemen with whom I conversed, and it was the opinion of some that we could defend ourselves, and even conquer Canada, better without England than with her, if she would but allow us to unite and exert our strength, courage, and skill, diffident as we were of the last.

3. It was the fear of this union of the colonies, which was indeed commenced in a Congress at Albany, which induced the English to take the war into their own hands.

1 The letter to Nathan Webb, written in 1755.
4. The war was so ill conducted by Shirley, Lord Loudon, Braddock, and all other British commanders, till Wolfe and Amherst came forward, that the utmost anxiety prevailed, and a thousand panics were spread lest the French should overrun us all. All this time I was not alone in wishing that we were unshackled by Britain, and left to defend ourselves.

5. The treatment of the provincial officers and soldiers by the British officers during that war made the blood boil in my veins.

6. Notwithstanding all this, I had no desire of independence as long as Britain would do us justice. I knew it must be an obstinate struggle, and saw no advantage in it as long as Britain should leave our liberties inviolate.

7. Jefferson has acquired such glory by his declaration of independence in 1776, that I think I may boast of my declaration of independence in 1755, twenty-one years older than his.

8. Our governor elect, in his biographical sketch of Samuel Adams, ascribes to him the honor of the first idea and project of independence. In 1755, when my letter to Dr. Webb was written, I had never seen the face of Samuel Adams.

9. The English, the Scotch, the tories, and hyperfederalists will rebell their execrations against me as a rebel from my infancy, and a plotter of independence more than half a hundred years ago.

10. The present ruling party in the United States will repeat, renew, and redouble their curses and sarcasms against me for having meditated the ruin of this country from a boy, from a mere chicken in the eggshell, by building a navy under pretence of protecting our commerce and seaports, but in reality only as a hobby-horse for myself to ride and to increase my patronage. For there can be no doubt but the boy, though not yet twenty years old, and though pinched and starved in a stingy country school, fully expected to be King of North America, and to marry his daughter to the Prince of Wales, and his son, John Quincy, to the princess royal of England.

11. There can be no doubt but this letter, puerile and childish as it is, will make a distinguished figure in the memoirs of my life. . .

12. You may depend upon its authenticity, for I have copied it from the original, to every word and almost every letter of which I can attest, and so might any one else, who should compare it with this, from the similarity of hand and composition.

13. Vive la bagatelle!

Now, Sir, to be serious, I do not curse the day when I engaged in public affairs. I do not say when I became a politician, for that I never was. I cannot repent of any thing I ever did conscientiously and from a sense of duty. I never engaged in public affairs for my own interest, pleasure, envy, jealousy, avarice, or ambition, or even the desire of fame. If any of these had been my motive, my conduct would have been very different. In every considerable transaction of my public life, I have in-
variably acted according to my best judgment, and I can look up to
God for the sincerity of my intentions. How, then, is it possible I can
repent? Notwithstanding this, I have an immense load of errors, weak-
nesses, follies, and sins to mourn over and repent of, and these are the
only afflictions of my present life.

But, notwithstanding all, St. Paul and Dr. Barrow have taught me to
rejoice evermore, and be content. This phrase, "rejoice evermore," shall
never be out of my heart, memory, or mouth again, as long as I live, if I
can help it. This is my perfectibility of man.

Your "palace of ice" is a most admirable image. I agree that you and I
have been employed in building a palace of ice. However, if we did not
believe it to be marble, or silver, or gold, or ivory, or alabaster, or stone,
or brick, we both thought it good, sound white oak, which would
shelter its inhabitants from the inclemency of the weather, and last a
long time. But the heat of the climate in summer has proved it to have
been ice. It is all melted to water.

P. S. I forgot a principal point I had in view when I sat down; that is,
to congratulate you that the Queen of Etruria has fallen in love with you.
Tell Mrs. Rush that I congratulate her that the Queen of Sheba is not
likely to visit Solomon at Philadelphia.