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Title: Letter from Charles Nisbet to Jonathan Ingham

Date: January 14, 1793

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Sir,

Carlisle, 14th January, 1793.

I was favoured with yours of Nov. 1st only this Day, Mr. Wilson, under whose Cover I received it, informs me that it was designed to have been sent by him, when he was here lately, but how it came to linger in his Custody till the 8th of this present Month, I do not know. Such Delays are not without Example in the Republic of Letters. To reply to all the particulars of yours, would require a Volume. In the present Age we have few literary Enthusiasts, especially in this Country. Our Youth in general are too much in haste to be men, to take time enough to be promising Boys, & too much afraid of Labour to acquire any tolerable Acquaintance with antient Learning, so that they readily acquiesce in the Opinion of those ignorant Quacks & Projectors in Education, who tell them that the Study of Languages & Classical Learning is useless, & that one may understand the English Language, without understanding nine tenths of the Words wherewith it is composed, viz. the Latin & Greek Languages. And as these Projectors themselves can not read one Word of the Classics, our young Men in general have great Reliance on their Judgment, on Account of its Impartiality. But this general Neglect of antient & Classical Learning has many bad Consequences, both with Regard to the Youth in particular & to the public in general. The Youth are accustomed to acquiesce in indistinct Ideas, to confound different Things with each other, & to make Distinctions where there is no Difference, & to blunder, without being sensible of it, in the Use of all the Terms they make Use of. And the public are misled and imposed on by vague & undefined Expressions, which render them an easy Prey to Demagogues, & enables them to sustain the grossest Absurdities. For as the Ideas of the People are but few & confused, the Demagogue's Vocabulary needs not be a large one. Give him but the Words "Liberty", "Philosophy", "Toleration", "Civilisation", "Liberality of Sentiment", "Rights of Man", & perhaps a few more, & he will ring the Change upon them, till he has got all the People at his Heels, who stare at him & consider him as an Oracle. And while Power & Influence can be attained by such means, it is no wonder that young Men are averse to those Studies which are favourable to clear Conception & just Reasoning, & which Study of the antient Authors, contributes to Elevation of Sentiment, justness in Reasoning, & Propriety & Vigour of Action. That they contribute to us the most favourable Side of human Nature. But these are not the things that are valued or sought for in our time. Money, Power, & Influence with the People being the only things now in Request. And as it is supposed that in a Republic, political Liberty, made manifest by speaking, most young Men are ambitious of studying Rhetoric, but they are so much in haste to learn this Art, that they will neither take time to learn the Language in which they propose to speak, nor to acquire any knowledge of the things that they wish to speak of. The love of Glory, which dazzled & misled Men in former Ages, is now succeeded by the love of Money, & the Making of Laws & Constitutions is as much a Mechanical & lucrative Trade, as the Making of Shoes, Cloths, or Books. Morality is in a great Measure out of Fashion, tho' its Name, as well as that of Virtue & Religion, has still a favourable Sound, & is pretended to by many who are strangers to the things themselves. But as fashionable Scepticism has now taught so many to esteem every Sort of Doctrine & Conduct indifferent, to suppose that every Man's Conduct is authorised by his Conscience, altho' all agree in commending Religion, Virtue & Morality, there are scarcely any two of them that mean the same thing, except those who form their Notions of Virtue & Morality from the Nature of things & the Christian Revelation. Mankind have now got so many Rights, & so much Liberty & Independency, that they will scarcely admit that they owe any Duties, either to God or Man, or that they can be under any Obligations whatsoever, except to far, to do long as they please. In such a State of the public Mind, it is a discouraging Task, to endeavour to introduce a Taste for antient Learning, or sound Morality, especially when Youth are unwilling to spend as much time in these Studies, as may enable them to judge of their Excellency & Usefulness. Perhaps all that can be done in the present Age, is to drop a few Seeds of sound Judgment, which may possibly shoot & appear above Ground in a future Age, & to endeavour at least to stem the Current of Ignorance & Error, & to deliver a few Elements & leading Principles, which if properly understood & digested, may lead those who will be at the Expence of Thinking, to just Notions of Virtue & of human Nature. Ignorant Politicians can only have false & imperfect Views of things, so that all their Capacity extends only to temporary Expedients, superficial Palliatives of public Evils, & wretched Contrivances, authorising an Multitude of greater Evils, in order to prevent a lesser, ~~or for procuring a lesser Good at the Expence & Loss of a Greater~~ of greater ones. But perhaps it may be reckoned superfluous to talk in this Manner, in an Age in which every Man is convinced that he is born a Politician, & that all Men are equally qualified to judge of their political Interests, & to fill every Station in a State. It is pity that that Elevation & Elasticity which the Minds of the People of this Country acquired by the late Revolution, was so soon damped & extinguished, by the mean & Rascally Contrivances of Degradation & Speculation, a favourite Production of their political leaders, which they have contrived to turn to their own private Advantage, tho' to the unspeakable Loss of Patriotism & public Spirit. For as soon as it was discovered that those who had contributed to emancipate their Country, were not only to be deprived of their deserved Honours, for fear of introducing Aristocratical Distinctions, but likewise of the pecuniary Rewards of their Services, & that they believed to transfer their Claims to the Leaders of the People, before they could be allowed to be of any Benefit to the Nation: When it was discovered that other Persons were to receive the Rewards of the public Creditors & Benefactors of the Community, the honest & well-disposed Part of the Citizens were astonished at such Iniquity & Ingratitude, & America lost many Friends & Admirers beyond the Atlantic. But as the leaders continued to have the Cry of the People on their side, & to make them believe that they alone were the Friends of their Liberty, who wished to affront & defraud the real Benefactors & Creditors of the public, it is no wonder that they prevailed, & ^{that} private Interest became the Object of the Majority since that time. But that the Public might not be aware of the Trick that was put upon them, & that it might be out of their Power to select the Proceedings of their leaders, it has been made a Rule in all Matters of Finance since that time, to make every thing as complicated, confused & unintelligible as possible. From this originated the various Denominations, Gradations & Divisions of public Securities, as well as the Transfer of Obligations from Congress to the individual States, & from the individual States to the Congress, and what might be supposed to be a mere Romance, the pending & ordering Payment of Interest, of

Exaltation thereof has not as yet been assigned. Knowing naturally resorts to Secrecy & Mystery for Concealment, but had it not been that public Affairs look this amazing Turn, & had not Avarice & Selfishness taken the Guise of Patriotism, even before the Revolution was completed, but especially since the Peace, it was natural for the Friends of Mankind to expect that a Country which had gained so much Renown in Arms, & in the Defence of its Liberty, would have acquired no less in the field of Legislation & Political Arrangement. It was natural in Speculation to suppose, that those who had been so zealous in defending their Liberties, would have shown no less Wisdom & Activity, in improving them for the public Good, & adding the Reputation of Civil Wisdom & Integrity to the same that they had acquired in the War. But all Expectations of this kind have been quite disappointed, & the Golden Age of America, if it ever arrives, must be put off to some distant Age, & God only knows how many Revolutions & public Convulsions it must suffer before that time. Already it may be said that we are in a declining State, & that the Burthens of the Community, compared with its Ability to bear them, are little short of those of Great Britain, fifty Years after its Revolution, tho' ours is of a more recent Date, & a Scheme of borrowing, funding & Stock-jobbing is so effectually established, & incorporated into our Government, that there is no separating the one from the other, nay the Business of Legislation appears to be entirely subordinate to that of Speculation. And if the Example of a certain Nation should prevail, which has hitherto been very successful in propagating its Fashions, Public Convulsions, Perjuries & Murders will be adapted as the shortest & most effectual, tho' not the most reputable Ways of discharging public Incumbrances, & of raising Fortunes for such as want them. And in all public Revolutions the last of these ^{objects} is much more attended to than the first. We are now become a Nation of Stock-jobbers, & must continue such, till our increased Incumbrances produce a

Revolution of some kind, which means will be negotiated, to pay the Debt, & to pay the interest of the same, as the means of raising it. We are now be directed towards the increasing & immortalizing the Debt of the public. Expensive & absurd Projects will be encouraged, & blown up in the Eyes of the People, & to raise their Expectations. To build a new City, which Semiramis & Ptolemy the first found to be a Task that they could hardly accomplish, by all the Exertion of arbitrary Power, is now supposed to be a Matter of mere Amusement, which an indebted Republic of Stock-jobbers may easily accomplish by Subscriptions, & the Aid of a few Loans from Holland. In short, on Account of the entire Innovation of our political System at the Peace, no Cure seems now practicable, as the People are contented with their Leaders, and of them partake in their Gains. The People, like all other Sovereigns, are ignorant, weak & easily seduced by Flattery, & their Leaders take care to give them enough of it, so that they have nothing to fear from their Report. As long as they are told that America is the best Nation in the World, that its Government is the Wonder of the World, & its prosperity envied by all other Nations, the People will let them do what they please, & submit to every Inconvenience except Taxes. I think you are right in supposing that the Introduction of the Stock-jobbing System, & the Encouragement that it still meets with, are the true Causes of the Decline of America, but the Prejudices that have been infused into the public Mind by the Arts of Demagogues, & the absurd Methods of Reasoning on all public Matters, which they have brought into Vogue have contributed in no less a Degree, to the same Effect. Our Affairs are conducted only on the Supposition that we shall forever enjoy Peace, but if a foreign War were to take Place, which is the case often in every other Nation, the whole of our present System would be at an End, & we would be as much at a loss, at least for a considerable time, as at the Beginning of the late War, with this Addition, that the Expedients which were then successful, could not be tried a second Time. No Merchant would accept of Congress Money in Payment for his Goods, nor trust a second time to that faith, which has become proverbial to the Ends of the Earth. Stock-jobbers would refuse to take the field, Officers of Men's Capacity would not be willing to expose their lives at the Head of an undisciplined & unwilling Militia, especially as they know that the Stock-jobbers & not themselves, would receive the Reward of their Services. I acknowledge that I am an unfit Person to write on Finances & Political Economy, but it would be impossible for a Person of the greatest Abilities, to give Advice, ^{that would be of any Use} to a Government destitute of Authority, & unprovided with a Constitutional force to put its own Laws in Execution, as that would amount to the Absurdity of accomplishing an End without adequate Means. The Secretary of the Treasury has given Proof of his Abilities by proposing Eight Years Taxes for bearing the Charge of a trifling & unsuccessful War with two or three hundred Indians, but Eight hundred Year Taxes would not be sufficient for resisting any of the Naval Powers of Europe, at the same Rate. Besides as almost the whole Revenue of our General Government depends on a ruinous Importation, which the very Suspicion of a War with England would reduce to nothing, the Sources of our Revenue would be dry, at a time when we had the greatest Need

of them, but what would be reckoned worse than all this, the Trade of Stocks would be ruined, & the Speculators, by the failure of the Impost, would lose their Interest. Every Government at all times contains the Seeds of its own Dissolution, & in the Order of Nature, the Elements contribute to support our Lives, without any Design on their Part, and Governors Demagogues & Stock-jobbers may contribute to our civil Security in the very same Manner. They not only their own Affairs, but they can not ^{us without ruining} themselves at the same time. God reigns over all the World, & he can preserve us by Fools as effectually as by wise Men. An Individual is nothing in a Republic, in which the Person of the greatest Abilities & Virtue is only on a Level with the meanest Idiot, & only such as make a Trade of Politics, & subsist by deceiving the People, can have any Influence. For a Republic is not in Reality a Government of the People, who can not be Governors & governed at the same time, but an arbitrary Government, in the Person who from time to time can be wifely enough to impose on the People, & establish themselves by their Interest. We may talk in private, of Learning, Virtue, & good Taste, as the Sources of political Happiness, & endeavour to disseminate them among a few, who are in our Reach, but it would be folly to expect that they could ever be relished by ignorant & selfish Politicians, who find by Experience that they can do without them. It is therefore the Duty of private speculative Politicians who form their Notions from

the Ambition, to keep them to themselves, or to communicate them only to a few select Persons, who are capable of communicating them to the public, as the People will hear nothing but their own Praises & encomiums. I have exposed myself by freely communicating my Opinions on the Subjects mentioned in your letter, but I cannot believe that a Person who testifies such an Esteem for Learning, as you do, can either have so little Prudence, as to communicate these Opinions to the Multitude, which are not calculated for the Meridian of their Understanding, nor so much Malice as to expose an innocent Stranger to the Vengeance & Ill-will of a People, who are intoxicated by Flattery, & capable of the vilest outrages to those who will not flatter them. Your Version of the Epitaph on Hippocrates the Poet needs correction in the Language. The Particle "for" in the second line, is placed not at the beginning, as it ought to be in English, but after another Word, as in Greek & Latin. The thought in the third is too diffuse. The term "enshrouded" in the fourth, is not supported by Custom, & does not cohere with the "Arms of Death," immediately following. In the second Stanza, the term "impress'd" is not properly joined with Curiosity. The word "dear," in the fourth Stanza, is incoherent. One Reason why we ought to study the ancient Languages, is because their Beauties can not be made appear in a Translation. The Everonian critic is one of his best Performances, & contains not only the best Picture of ancient Manners, but likewise the only Traces of that we to be found among the Classics, except the Epitaphs of Seneca. The Sentiments of the ancients are not easily, when translated into English, because their Manner of thinking & speaking was so very different from ours, so that we are obliged to paraphrase them, before they are intelligible. You wanted a larger Packet, which you say you intended, so you may find many Opportunities of sending me a thing directed for me to the care of Mr. William Young, Bookseller in second Street, corner of Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, or to the care of Mr. Thomas Paine, who lives in the same Street, & who will send me without Trouble, as Postage is dear in this Country. Altho' I am sufficiently occupied with the Business of my Office, I find time & Means to answer any Queries that may be put to me, by any Person who is desirous of Information with Respect to interesting Subjects. But I carefully avoid the profanum Vulgus, who can hear nothing with Patience, except their own Opinions & such Prejudices as are infused into them by their leaders. Private Men may be informed, instructed & convinced, but the Man who attempts to instruct the Multitude, as he will never succeed, if he has their Interest in View, tho' he may endeavor to make them Fools, to serve his own. A small Number of Persons in any Country, who possess good Sense, Virtue & Taste, may be of considerable Consequence in any Country, tho' least of all in a Republic, because the Fools being not only always the most noisy, but likewise the Majority, must carry all things as they would have them. It is some Consolation to these few to hear of one another, & to communicate their Thoughts, unknown to the Multitude. For the Press being restrained among us, by public Prejudices, as effectually as it could be by any Laws or licensing Acts, almost nothing but Nonsense can be expected from it, & not every kind of Nonsense either, but only such as happens to be in Vogue for the Time. I am,

Sir,
Your very humble Servant,

Chas. Habel.

Dr. Amathen Ingham,

Physician in Salisbury Township

Bucks County,

Pennsylvania.

Carlisle, 14th January, 1793.

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Benefit to the Holders: When it was discovered that other Persons were to receive the Rewards of the public Creditors & Benefactors of the Community, the honest & well-disposed Part of the Citizens were astonished at such Iniquity & Ingratitude, & America lost many Friends & Admirers beyond the Atlantic. But as the Leaders contrived to have the Cry of the People on their Side, & to make them believe that they alone were the Friends of their Liberty, who wished to affront & defraud the real Benefactors & Creditors of the public, it is no wonder that they prevailed, & that private Interest became the Object of the Majority since that time. But that the Public might not be aware of the Trick that was put upon them, & that it might be out of their Power to detect the Proceedings of their Leaders, it has been made a Rule in all Matters of Finance since that time, to make every thing as complicated, confused & unintelligible as possible. From this originated the various Denominations, Gradations & Divisions of public securities as well as the Transfer of Obligations from Congress to the individual States, & from the individual States to the Congress, and what might be supposed to be a mere Romance, the funding & ordering Payment of Interest, of Claims, the Extent whereof has not as yet been assigned. Knavery naturally resorts to Secrecy & Mystery for Concealment, but had it not been that public Affairs took this amazing Turn, & had not Avarice & Selfishness taken the Guise of Patriotism, even before the Revolution was completed, but especially since the Peace, it was natural for the Friends of Mankind to expect that a Country which had gained so much Renown in Arms, & in the Defence of its Liberty, would have acquired no less in the field of Legislation & Political Arrangements. It was natural in Speculation to suppose that those who had been so zealous in defending their Liberties, would have shown no less Wisdom & Activity in improving them for the public Good, & adding the Reputation of Civil

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"Importation" - altered
to "Exportation"

as the Sources of political Happiness, & endeavors to disseminate them among a few, who are in our Reach, but it would be folly to expect that they could ever be relished by ignorant & selfish Politicians, who find by Experience that they can do without them. It is therefore the Duty of private speculative Politicians who form their Notions from the Antients, to keep them to themselves, or (Half line illegible) think of communicating them to the public, as the People will hear nothing but their own Praises & Encomiums (from) their Leaders. I have expressed myself by freely communicating my Opinions on the Subjects mentioned in your Letter, but I cannot believe that a Person who testifies such an Esteem for learning, as you do, can either have so little Prudence, as to communicate these Opinions to the Multitude, which are not calculated for the Meridian of their Understanding, nor so much Malice as to expose an innocent Stranger to the Vengeance & Ill-will of a People who are intoxicated by flattery, & capable of the vil(est ou)trages to those who will not flatter them. Your version of the Epitaph on Hipponax the Poet needs correction in the Language (. The) Particle "for," in the second line, is placed not at the beginning, as it ought to be in English, but after another Word, as in Greek & Latin. The thought in the third is too diffuse. The term "enshrouded" in the fourth is not supported by Custom, & does not cohere with the "Arms of Death," immediately following. In the second Stanza, the term "impress'd," is improperly joined with Curiosity. To indulge a tear, in the fourth Stanza, is incoherent. - One Reason why we ought to study the ancient Languages, is because their Beauties can not be made appear in a Translation. The *ΣΥΝΑΚΤΩΝ* critus is one of his best Performances, & contains not only the best Picture of antient Manners, but likewise the only Traces of H that are to be found among the Classics, except the Apocolocyntosis of Seneca. The

sentiments of the ancients so(und) oddly, when translated into English, because their Manner of thinking & speaking was so very different from ours, so that we are obliged to (re)visé them, before they are intelligible. You mention a large Packer, which you say you intended. As you may find many Opportunities (for?) Philadelphia, any thing directed for me, to the Care of Mr. William Young, Bookseller in second Street, Corner of Chestnut Street,

me without Trouble, as Postage is dear in this Country. Altho' I am sufficiently occupied with the Duties of my Office find time & Means to answer any Queries that may be put to me, by any Person who is desirous of Information with Regard to any interesting Subjects. But I carefully avoid the profanum vulgus, who can hear nothing with Patience, except their own Praises, & such Prejudices as are infused into them by their Leaders. Private Men may be informed, instructed & convinced, but woe be to the Man who attempts to instruct the Multitude, as he will never succeed, if he has their Interest in View, tho' he may easily make the Tools, to serve his own. A small Number of Persons, in any Country, who profess good Sense, Virtue & Taste, may be of considerable Consequence tho' least of all in a Republic, because the fools being not only always the most noisy, but likewise the Majority, must carry all things as they would have them. It is some Consolation to these few to hear of one another, & to communicate their thoughts, unknown to the Multitude. For the Press being restrained among us, by public Prejudices, as effectually as it could be by any Laws or Licensing Acts, almost nothing but Nonsense can be expected from it, & not every kind of Nonsense either, but only such as happens to be in Vogue for the Time. I am,

Sir, Your very humble servant, Chas. Nisbet.

Address: Dr. Jonathan Ingham, Physician in Solebury Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.