

Jefferson to Richard Rush

Dear Sir,

Monticello, May 31, 13

—No one has taken a more sincere part than myself in the affliction which has lately befallen your family, by the loss of your inestimable and ever to be lamented father. His virtues rendered him dear to all who knew him, and his benevolence led him to do all men every good in his power. Much he was able to do, and much therefore will be missed. My acquaintance with him began in 1776. It soon became intimate, and from that time a warm friendship has been maintained by a correspondence of unreserved confidence. In the course of this, each has deposited in the bosom of the other, communications which were never intended to go further. In the sacred fidelity of each to the other these were known to be safe: and above all things that they would be kept from the public eye. There may have been other letters of this character written by me to him: but two alone occur to me at present, about which I have any anxiety. These were of Apr. 21. 1803. & Jan. 16. 1811. The first of these was on the subject of religion, a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved. I have considered it as a matter between every man and his maker, in which no other, and far less the public had a right to intermeddle. To your father alone I committed some views on this subject in the first of the letters above mentioned, led to it by previous conversations, and a promise on my part to digest & communicate them in writing. The letter of Jan. 16. 1811 respected a mutual friend, between whom & myself a suspension of correspondence had taken place. This was restored by his kind intervention, the correspondence resumed, and a friendship revived, which had been much valued on both sides. Another letter of Dec. 5. 11. explains this occurrence. I very much wish that these letters should remain unseen and unknown. And, if it would be too much to ask their return, I would earnestly entreat of you so to dispose of them as that they might never be seen, if possible, but by yourself, with whom I know their contents would be safe. I have too many enemies disposed to make a lacerating use of them, not to feel anxieties inspired by a love of tranquility, now become the summum bonum of life. In your occasional visits to Philadelphia, perhaps you can lay your hand on them, which might be preferable to the drawing a marked attention to them by letter. I submit all this to your honorable & candid mind, and praying you to tender to your much esteemed mother my sincere condolences & respects, accept for yourself the assurance of my great esteem & consideration.

Thomas Jefferson

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MONTICELLO