

Sir

Hanson 16<sup>th</sup> Sept: 1809

I fear it is to be numbered among the unfortunate incidents of my life that I accepted the invitation of Mr. Praxel to call at Monticello. My mind is tortured with the apprehension that there was something in my demeanor, something in the heedless freedom of my conversation, that was calculated to give offence, to inflict a wound upon the feelings of persons of the first rank in Society. A trespass upon decorum, in certain circles, excites as much disgust, if it does not as much abhorrence as a breach of morality - when I was guardedly apprised in this respect, my shame is the pain which I suffer - It is a general impression only which I have, from my own reflection, upon an imperfect recollection of particulars - for 'tis like a dream - not a whisper has reached me - nor do I suppose it possible that such characters will ever condescend to speak of my weakness - So far as I may have trespassed upon the rules of decorum, & have forgotten the distinctions of character, I must be viewed as a vulgar & insensible clown by those who have had no previous knowledge of me - This I must be content to suffer - but that which particularly distresses me, is the apprehension, that you, who I trust have seen me in another & a better form, you with whom acquaintance, & at one period, with whom friendships, I have been honoured, may possibly ascribe any trespass upon propriety to personal disrespect - It is this consideration that brings the determination to make this address to you - I am incapable of addressing bare adulation to any man upon earth - not even to him who has enjoyed the highest honours which an enlightened, free & grateful People could confer - to him who has bestowed a long life of unintermitting & faithful services <sup>to</sup> his Country - But when injured feelings have their just claims, & my wounded spirit seeks rather relief, I can & may with propriety speak the Truth - There, 'tis a solemn truth that you have enjoyed, and still possess the best affections of my heart, & my most profound personal respect - To reconcile this with any appearance that may unfortunately have been erroneously exhibited, permit me to speak another Truth - Nature has given me the <sup>most</sup> inflammatory constitution - my Family have gone off with apoplexies, & other inflammatory



disease - I am the solitary member of a House of Thirteen (my Father) that lives -  
slight excitement, under particular circumstances, brings to me that rapid flow of  
the blood & spirits, which destroys the guard of discretion, levels distinctions, & hurries  
me into blunders; and this predisposition has exposed me to a thousand scurrilous  
sneers, some ridiculous, some more serious - The extreme heat of the Sun beating  
upon my feeble body, was a good preparation, for the powerful operation of a  
glass or two of wine - the excessive heat & the fatigue of the evening's disputation,  
were quite sufficient for an equal effect from a single glass of spirit & water -

I do not stand scrupled - the apology would leave me more implicated, perhaps,  
than the supposed offence - No man need be more regularly temperate -  
knowing my weakness, I am, ordinarily, studiously & deliberately guarded -

Such an address as this, I am aware, would to any man be, but is especially  
so to him who occupies the first distinction in our Country, particularly delicate  
and delicate on the subject is, so well do I know the goodness of your  
heart, that I hesitate not one moment in making it - It is necessary for the  
quiet of my mind, and, what with me is equally impulsive, <sup>making</sup> as an evidence of the  
waste I have you - I know it will be received as a whisper in the ear -

To sin & repent, & sin again, if it be not our common Nature, is my unhappy  
lot - It is the attribute of superior Natures, of generous & magnanimous Spi-  
rits, to be prepared with benevolence & charity to meet the first approach  
of Contrition - However humble than I may have been, this honest, sim-  
ple & candid expression, I have no doubt will take me on such ground as I have  
any claim to have stood at any time - It is only your indulgent considera-  
tion of any error committed that I ask - It is not likely that I shall see you  
the pleasure to see you again - & most improbable that I shall fall in the way  
of those other eminent persons, before whom I may have exposed myself in my  
old age - Be that as it may, I shall remain with unaltered esteem & respect,

y. most obed. Servt.

W. Gordon



P.S.

I wished & expected to have met with Mr. Randolph, through whom  
it would have been computed with my hermitical to have approached with  
my apology verbal - but missing the sight of him, I am forced upon this more  
painful & mortifying course - I do not know whether, as he has no note in  
answer, I may not have committed some fault in the hasty note addressed  
to him, the morning I left Monticello - a note written in the very mood in  
which the preceding day pleased me - So was I accompanied with the heat of  
that & the preceding day, that I was constrained to lay by till evening -  
There being no post office in Hanover, I send this via <sup>Richmond</sup> - that being the  
single office - through which my correspondence is conducted - 1167.  
it calls for the consumption of the pleasure as soon as possible -

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Fontaine W. Hanner Sep. 16. 09.  
rec<sup>d</sup> Oct. 8.

Free

Thomas Jefferson Esq.

Monticello

CHMB. 4  
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by Rich mond Post -