
36. *Improvement in Human Affairs*

To Thomas Jefferson

Quincy, July 16, 1814

. . . I am sometimes afraid that my machine will not surcease motions soon enough; for I dread nothing so much as "dying at top," and expiring like Dean Swift, a "driveller and a show," or like Sam. Adams, a grief and distress to his family, a weeping, helpless object of compassion for years.

I am bold to say that neither you nor I will live to see the course which the "wonders of the times" will take. Many years and perhaps centuries must pass before the current will acquire a settled direction. If the Christian religion, as I understand it, or as you understand it, should maintain its ground, as I believe it will, yet Platonic, Pythagoric, Hindoo, and cabalistical Christianity, which is Catholic Christianity, and which has prevailed for fifteen hundred years, has received a mortal wound, of which the monster must finally die. Yet so strong is his constitution that he may endure for centuries before he expires. Government has never been much studied by mankind; but their attention has been drawn to it in the latter part of the last century and the beginning of this, more than at any former period, and the vast variety of experiments which have been made of constitutions in America, in France, in Holland, in Geneva, in Switzerland, and even in Spain and South America, can never be forgotten. They will be studied, and their immediate and remote effects and final catastrophes noted. The result in time will be improvements; and I have no doubt that the horrors we have experienced for the last forty years will ultimately terminate in the advancement of civil and religious liberty, and amelioration in the condition of mankind. For I am a believer in the probable improvability and improvement, the ameliorability and amelioration in human affairs; though I never could understand the doctrine of the perfectibility of the human mind. . . .