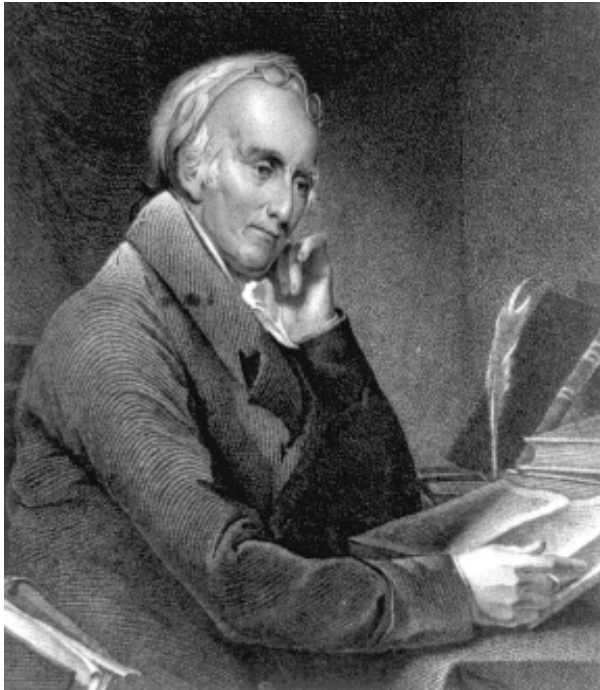


Dr. Benjamin Rush's Dream & God's Hand in Reconciling John Adams and Thomas Jefferson



“What book is that in your hands?” said I to my son Richard a few nights ago in a dream. “It is the history of the United States,” said he. “Shall I read a page of it to you?” “No, no,” said I. “I believe in the truth of no history but in that which is contained in the Old and New Testaments.” “But, sir,” said my son, “this page relates to your friend Mr. Adams.” “Let me see it then,” said I. I read it with great pleasure and herewith send you a copy of it.

Editors Note: The following is a letter by Benjamin Rush to his good friend John Adams about his dream. In that dream, his son gave him a book on the history of the United States. Written in the pages of our country's history was a discussion on their friendship, rivalry, reunited, and synchronistic death, of John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, which Benjamin felt compelled to share. Benjamin Rush's dream would turn out to be prophetic as these great men did once again become friends, and would pass into the grave within hours of each other on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

To John Adams

My Dear Friend, Philadelphia, October 17, 1809

Who were the ancestors, and posterity of Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, and Aristotle? Who were the ancestors and posterity of Cicero, Horace, and Virgil? Were any of them philosophers, orators, or poets? Who were the ancestors and posterity of Walsingham, Sully, Malborough, Wolfe? Were any of them statesman, general, or heroes? I do not ask whether they were descended from gentlemen or whether they left gentle sons behind them. I ask, were their ancestors GREAT in the same elevated walks in life as themselves? I believe history and common observation will furnish many more instances of the truth of Lord Bacon's remark than of the reverse of it.

I send you herewith a new edition of my *Lectures upon Animal Life*, extracted from the third edition of my *Medical Inquires* now in the press. It contains a number of new facts in the support of the doctrine I have advanced. Should the perusal of them render an autumnal evening less gloomy to you, I shall be highly gratified.

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relates to your friend Mr. Adams.” “Let me see it then,” said I. I read it with great pleasure and herewith send you a copy of it.

“1809.

Among the most extraordinary events of this year was the renewal of the friendship and intercourse between Mr. John Adams and Mr. Jefferson, the two ex-Presidents of the United States. They met for the first time in the Congress of 1775. Their principles of liberty, their ardent attachment to their country and their views of the importance and probable issue of the struggle with Great Britain in which they were engaged being exactly the same, they were strongly attracted to each other and became personal as well as political friends. They met in England during the war while each of them held commission of honor and trust at two of the first courts of Europe, and spent many happy hours together in reviewing the difficulties and success of their respective negotiations. A difference of opinion upon the objects and issue of the French Revolution separated them during the years in which that great event interested and divided the American people. The predominance of the party which favored the French cause threw Mr. Adams out of the Chair of the United States in the year 1800 and placed Mr. Jefferson there in his stead. The former retired with resignation and dignity to his seat at Quincy, where he spent the evening of his life in literary and philosophical pursuits, surrounded by an amiable family and a few old and affectionate friends. The latter resigned the Chair of the United States in the year 1808, sick of the cares and disgusted with the intrigues of public life, and retired to his seat at Monticello in Virginia, where he spent the remainder of his days in the cultivation of a large farm agreeably to the new system of husbandry.

In the month of November 1809, Mr. Adams addressed a short letter to his friend Mr. Jefferson in which he congratulated him upon his escape to the shades of retirement and domestic happiness, and concluded it with assurances of his regard and good wishes for his welfare. This letter did great honor to Mr. Adams. It discovered a magnanimity known only to great minds. Mr. Jefferson replied to this letter and reciprocated expressions of regard and esteem. These letters were followed by a correspondence of several years in which they mutually reviewed the scenes of business in which they had been engaged, and candidly acknowledged to each other all the errors of opinion and conduct into which they had fallen during the time they filled the same station in the service of their country. Many precious aphorisms [truths], the result of observation, experience, and profound reflection, it is said, are contained in these letters. It is to be hoped the world will be favored with a sight of them when they can neither injure nor displease any persons or families whose ancestors' follies or crimes were mentioned in them. These gentlemen sunk into the grave nearly at the same time, full of years and rich in the gratitude and praises of their country (for they outlived the heterogeneous parties that were opposed to them), and to their numerous merits and honors posterity has added that they were rival friends.”

With affectionate regard to your fireside, in which all my family join, I am, dear sir, your sincere old friend,

Benjm: Rush.¹

Editors Note: Below are excerpts from two letters of John Adams to Benjamin Rush in response to Benjamin Rush's dream. Word capitalization has been changed to reflect modern use, and the original spelling was left with most words to reflect the time period..



“Your prophecy my dear friend has not become history as yet. I have no resentment or animosity against the gentleman and abhor the idea of blackening his character or transmitting him in odious colours to posterity. But I write with difficulty and am afraid of diffusing myself in too many correspondences. If I should receive a letter from him (Jefferson) however I should not fail to acknowledge and answer it.”

John Adams. Dr. Rush.

Quincy October 25. 1809.

... A Dream again! I wish you would dream all day and all night, for one of your dreams puts me in spirits for a month. I have no other objection to your dream, but that it is not history. It may be prophecy. There has never been the smallest interruption of the personal friendship between me and Mr. Jefferson that I know of. You should remember that Jefferson was but a boy to me. I was at least ten years older than him in age and more than twenty years older than him in politicks. I am bold to say I was his preceptor in politicks and taught him every thing that has been good and solid in his whole political conduct. I served with him on many committees in Congress in which we established some of the most important regulations of the army &c., &c., &c.

Jefferson and Franklin were united with me in a commission to the King of France and fifteen other Commissions to treat with all the powers of Europe and Africa. I resided with him in France above a year in 1784 and 1785 and met him every day at my house in Auteuil at Franklin's house at Passy or at his house in Paris. In short we lived together in the most perfect friendship and harmony.

I was sent to England in 1785. He came to me in England and I travelled over the Kingdom with him. He met me afterwards in Holland. I there instructed him in the situation of all my money matters before I left Europe. I have a bushell of letters from him. If I were disposed to be captious I might complain of his open patronage of Callender, Paine, Brown and twenty others my most abandoned and unprincipled enemies. But I have seen ambition and party in so many Men of the best character of all parties that I must renounce almost all mankind if I renounce any for such causes. Fare them all well. Heaven is their judge and mine. I am not conscious that I ever injured any of them in thought word or deed to promote my own interest or reputation or to lessen theirs. Let them one and all say the same if they can.

I am &c.,

J. Adams²

John Adams. Dr. Rush.

Quincy December 21. 1809.

Why has all my life been consumed in searching for facts and principles and proofs and reasons to support them? Your dreams and fables have more genius in them than all my life. Your fable of dorcas would make a good chapter or a good appendix to *The Tale of a Tub*.

But my friend there is something very serious in this business. The Holy Ghost carries on the whole christian system in this earth. Not a baptism, not a marriage not a sacrament can be administered but by the Holy Ghost, who is transmitted from age to age by laying the hands of the bishops on the heads of candidates for the ministry. In the same manner as the Holy Ghost is transmitted from monarch to monarch by the holy oil in the vial at Rheims which was brought down from heaven by a dove and by that other phyal which I have seen in the tower of London. There is no authority civil or religious: there can be no legitimate government but what is administered by this Holy Ghost.

There can be no salvation without it. ... Your prophecy my dear friend has not become history as yet. I have no resentment or animosity against the gentleman and abhor the idea of blackening his character or transmitting him in odious colours to posterity.

But I write with difficulty and am afraid of diffusing myself in too many correspondences. If I should receive a letter from him (Jefferson) however I should not fail to acknowledge and answer it. ...

J. Adams³

Endnotes:

1. Butterfield, L.,H., Letters of Benjamin Rush - Volume II:1793-1813, Page 1021-1022; Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1951.
2. Biddle, Alexander, Old Family Letters, Page 244-240; J.P. Lippincott press, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, 1892.
3. Ibid., Page 247-249.

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