

**OLD FAMILY LETTERS:
RELATING TO
THE YELLOW FEVER**

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Old Family Letters: Relating to the Yellow Fever by Benjamin Rush

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BENJAMIN RUSH

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THE YELLOW FEVER.

Miseris succurrere disco. ÆNEID.

SERIES B.

PRESS OF
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY,
PHILADELPHIA.
1892.



OLD FAMILY LETTERS

RELATING TO

THE YELLOW FEVER.

PHILAD^A: Aug: 21. 1793.

MY DEAR JULIA,—To prevent your being deceived by reports respecting the sickliness of our city, I sit down at a late hour, and much fatigued, to inform you that a malignant fever has broken out in Water Street between Arch and Race Streets which has already carried off twelve persons within the space which has been mentioned. It is supposed to have been produced by some damaged coffee which had putrified on one of the wharves near the middle of the above district. The disease is violent and of short duration. In one case it killed in twelve hours, and in no case has it lasted more than four days. Among its victims is Mrs. LeMaigre. I have attended three of the persons who have died with it, and seven or eight who have survived, or who are I hope recovering from it.

As yet it has not spread thro' any parts of the city which are beyond the reach of the putrid exhalation which first produced it. If it should, I shall give you notice, that you may remain where you are till you receive further advice and information from me. The

influenza continues to spread, and with more violent symptoms than when it made its first appearance. I did more business in 1780 than I do at present, but with much less anxiety, for few of the diseases of that year were attended with any danger, whereas *now*, most of the cases I attend are acute and alarming, and require an uncommon degree of vigilance and attention.

Aug: 22.

Marcus has been ill with the influenza, but is now better. Rich'd: Ben, and all the rest of the family are in good health.

I have just rec'd: a letter from Dr. * * * in which he has the following paragraph: "I have just seen Mr. Woolstonecraft. He does not like your lands, and that for the most childish reasons. He says that he saw but *one* flight of pheasants, *three* fishy ducks and *not one* woodcock on the whole creek, and that he will never settle anywhere where he cannot support himself by his *gun*."

So much the better! I have received since you left town conveyances for nearly all the lands I sold to the New Eng'd. men. They *adjoin* the lands sold by Rob't. Morris to the French Company who are about to improve them in the most extensive manner next Spring. *All* is for the best and *all will end well*.

A son of Dr. Priestley has just arrived in this city from France. He gives a most distressing account of the affairs of that country. But let us not despair Chaos existed before the order and beauty of the universe. The devil who is the present tenant of our world, will not quit his hold of it till he has done t'

premises all the mischief that lies in his power, but go he must sooner or later, with all his family of nobles and kings.

Adieu : with love as usual I am my dear Julia,

Yours affect'y,

BENJ^m RUSH.

P.S.—John should come home as soon as his vacation expires.

PHILADELPHIA, Aug: 25. 1793.

MY DEAR JULIA,—Since my letter to you of Friday, the fever has assumed a most alarming appearance. It not only mocks in most instances the power of medicine, but it has spread thro' several parts of the city remote from the spot where it originated. Water Street between Arch and Race Streets is nearly desolated by it. This morning I witnessed a scene there, which reminded me of the histories I had read of the plague. In one house I lost two patients last night, a respectable young merchant and his only child. His wife is frantic this evening with grief. Five other persons died in the neighbourhood yesterday afternoon and four more last night at Kensington. The College of Physicians met this afternoon to consult upon the means of checking the progress of this dreadful disease. They appointed a Committee to draw up directions for that purpose. The Committee imposed this business upon me, and I have just finished them. They will be handed to the Mayor when adopted by

the College and published by him in a day or two. I hope, and believe that they will be useful.

After this detail of the state of the fever, I need hardly request you to remain for a while with all the children where you are. Many people are flying from the city, and some by my advice. Continue to commit me by your prayers to the protection of that Being who has so often manifested his goodness to our family by the preservation of my life, and I hope I shall do well. I endeavour to have no will of my own. I enjoy good health and uncommon tranquility of mind. While I depend upon divine protection, and feel that at present I live, move, and have my being in a more especial manner in God alone, I do not neglect to use every precaution that experience has discovered, to prevent taking the infection. I even strive to subdue my sympathy for my patients, otherwise I should sink under the accumulated loads of misery I am obliged to contemplate. You can recollect how much the loss of a single patient once in a month used to affect me. Judge then how I must feel, in hearing every morning of the death of three or four!

I shall confine John and Richard to the house, and oblige them to use precautions against the disorder. My mother and sister are so kind and attentive as to prevent all our wants and wishes.

My love to your uncle and aunt and all the children. I am afraid you will burden our good relations, No—this cannot be. They love you, and they love to do offices of kindness and humanity.

Adieu; from your
sincere and affectionate

BENJ* RUSH.

P.S.—“Seeking thou great things? Seek them not, for behold I bring evil on all flesh.” What powerful antidotes are war and pestilence to pride, vanity and ambition!

Aug: 26: I am still preserved, and in good health. What a blessing!

PHILAD^a Aug: 26th 1793.

MY DEAR JULIA,—The boys have discovered so much apprehension of being infected by my clothes, and I think so justly, that I have concluded to send them to Trenton. If our uncles house is too crowded already to receive them, perhaps they may be accommodated at Mr. Armstrong's. Do attend to their reading something useful every day, during their absence from town. I dread very much their contracting habits of idleness. All the schools in town are either broken up by design, or mouldering away by the daily desertion of scholars into the country. It is indeed a serious time. Dejection sits upon every countenance. Tomorrow the directions of the College of Physicians will be published. I hope they will do good, but I fear no efforts will totally subdue the fever before the heavy rains or frosts of October.

Five persons died this morning in Water Street, and five more are expected to die tonight among whom is Mrs. Duncan's son, the merchant. He lies in 2nd. Street near the corner of Walnut Street.

After a busy day, I continue to enjoy good health. Help me to thank the divine Preserver of Men for it. Adieu. From my dear Julia

yours sincerely,

BENJ^a RUSH.

P.S.—August 27th. *Still* in good health, tho' called out of bed at $\frac{1}{4}$ after five o'clock. Keep the boys from exposing themselves to heat, cold, dampness and fatigue. Again adieu. The boys will give many anecdotes of Ben. He is in fine health, and every body says has grown handsome. He is as much devoted to Aunty Wallace, as he used to be to his Mame Teen. I enclose you a half Joe for contingent expenses.

Aug: 27, 93.

Tuesday night, 10 o'clock.

MY DEAR JULIA,—I feel very much for the safety of both the boys. They are both indisposed with the headache, and by no means in a condition to travel in the night, but of two dangers I believe they have chosen the least. I have advised them to go to bed as soon as they reach Trenton, and by no means to expose themselves to cold, heat or fatigue during their absence from town.

The disease spreads, and a most alarming apathy as to exertion prevails among our citizens. Our neighbourhood will be desolate in a day or two. Dr. * * *, Mr. Chew and Mr. Lewis's families are all on the wing. Young Mr. Duncan died this afternoon, much beloved and lamented by all who knew him.

Adieu. In mercy to my fellow citizens and family, my life so long and so often forfeited to divine justice, is *still* preserved. My love to each of the children. For some days past, my mind has been so occupied with the immense objects now before me, that I had almost forgotten them. Tell them all that the bes