

Founders Online: To George Washington from G. W. Snyder, 22 August 1798

7-9 minutes

1. John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe*, published in Philadelphia in 1798, was in GW's library at his death. This letter from Snyder initiated a flurry of correspondence between him and GW. GW replied on 25 Sept.: "Sir, Many apologies are due to you, for my not acknowledging the receipt of your obliging favour of the 22d Ulto, and for not thanking you, at an earlier period, for the Book you had the goodness to send me.

"I have heard much of the nefarious, & dangerous plan, & doctrines of the Illuminati, but never saw the Book until you were pleased to send it to me. The same causes which have prevented my acknowledging the receipt of your letter, have prevented my reading the Book, hitherto; namely—the multiplicity of matters which pressed upon me before, & the debilitated state in which I was left after, a severe fever had been removed. And which allows me to add little more now, than thanks for your kind wishes and favourable sentiments, except to correct an error you have run into, of my Presiding over the English lodges in this Country. The fact is, I preside over none, nor have I been in one more than once or twice, within the last thirty years. I believe notwithstanding, that none of the Lodges in this Country are contaminated with the principles ascribed to the Society of the Illuminati. With respect I am Sir Your Obedt Hble Servt Go: Washington" (ALS, PWacD; letterpress copy, DLC:GW; LB DLC:GW).

Not having heard from GW, Snyder wrote GW again on 1 Oct. from Frederick: "Some Weeks ago I sent you a Letter with Robison's Proof of a Conspiracy which I hope you have received. I have since been more confirmed in the Ideas I had suggested to you concerning an Order of Men, who in Germany have distinguished themselves by the Names of Illuminati—German Union—Reading Societies—and in France by that of the Jacobine-Club, that the same are now existing in the United States. It also occurred to me that you might have had Ideas to that Purport when you disapproved of the Meetings of the Democratic-Societies, which appeared to me to be a Branch of that Order, though many Members may be entirely ignorant of the Plan. Those Men who are so much attached to French Principles, have all the Marks of Jacobinism. They first cast off all religious Restraints, and then became fit for perpetrating every Act of Inhumanity. And, it is remarkable, that most of them

are actually Scoffers at all religious Principles. It is said that the 'Lodge Theodore in Bavaria became notorious for the many bold and dangerous Sentiments in Religion and Politics that were uttered in their Harangues, and its Members were remarkable for their Zeal in making Proselytes'; (and no Wonder since the Order was to rule the World.) Is not there a striking Similarity between their Proceedings and those of many Societies that oppose the Measures of our present Government? Even in this small Place the French-Faction is very numerous—their Expressions are like those of Bloody-Lutetia [Lutetia Parisiorum, or Paris]: their Sentiments in exact Unison with those of the Jacobine Club: their Hearts panting for Faggots and Guillotines. The Foundation of their Sanctuary is laid with Lies, and every Stone of the Superstructure reared with Falsehood. They are laboriously employed to excite Discord—to extinguish public Virtue—to break down the Barriers of Religion—to establish Atheism, and work the Downfall of our Civil—and Religious Liberty. Should their perfidious Schemes succeed (I tremble even at the Imagination of the Consequences) what would become of our Columbia?" (ViMtvL).

GW responded on 10 Oct.: "Sir: It is more than a fortnight since I acknowledged the receipt of your first letter, on the subject of the Illuminati and thanked you for Robinson's account of that society. It went to the post office as usual addressed to the Rev'd Mr Snyder, at Frederick Town Maryland. If it had not been received before this mishap must have attended it, of which I pray you to advise me, as it could not have been received, at the date of your last, not being mentioned. I am, &c. G. Washington" (typescript, ViMtvL).

On 17 Oct. Snyder wrote GW: "Your Excellency's Favour of the 25th of Septr last I had the Pleasure to receive on the 3d Current. My Pleasure, however, was interrupted, because I had sent another Letter [dated 1 Oct.] for your Excellency to the Post-Office about an Hour before I received Your's." After further pleasantries Snyder goes on to write: "I should be very happy in your Excellency's good Opinion, that the Contagion of Illuminatism or Jacobinism had not yet reached this Country; but when I consider the anarchical and seditious Spirit, that shewed itself in the United States from the Time M. Genet and Fauchet (who certainly is of the Order) arrived in this Country and propagated their seditious Doctrines, which the illuminated Doctor from Birmingham has been zealously employed to strengthen, I confess I cannot divest myself of my Suspicions: yet I trust that the Alwise and Omnipotent Ruler of the Universe will so dispose the Minds of the People of these United States that true Religion and righteous Government may remain the Privileges of this Nation! I cannot conclude without acquainting your Excellency that I have made Extracts from 'Robison's Proofs of a Conspiracy,' and arranged them in such a Manner as to give a compendious Information to the Public of the dangerous and pernicious Plan of the 'Illuminati or Jacobins,' and by some Remarks to caution them against it. I had them published in 'Bartgis's Federal Gazette' of this Place, from which they were copied and inserted into the 'Baltimore Federal Gazette['] of the 9th Inst. I write under the Signature of Cicero. Whether my Endeavours shall benefit the Public Time alone can evince. Harm I am conscious I do not design. Should your Excellency have Leisure to peruse the Piece, I shall

deem it a peculiar Favour to receive your Opinion upon it" (ViMtvL).

GW's response from Mount Vernon on 24 Oct. brought the exchange to a close: "Revd Sir I have your favor of the 17th instant before me; and my only motive to trouble you with the receipt of this letter, is to explain, and correct a mistake which I perceive the hurry in which I am obliged, often, to write letters, have led you into.

"It was not my intention to doubt that, the Doctrines of the Illuminati, and principles of Jacobinism had not spread in the United States. On the contrary, no one is more fully satisfied of this fact than I am.

"The idea I meant to convey, was, that I did not believe that the Lodges of Free Masons in this Country had, as Societies, endeavoured to propagate the diabolical tenets of the first, or the pernicious principles of the latter (if they are susceptible of seperation). That Individuals of them may have done it, and that the founder, or instrument employed to found, the Democratic Societies in the United States, may have had these objects—and actually had a seperation of the People from their Government in view, is too evident to be questioned.

"My occupations are such, that but little leisure is allowed me to read News Papers, or Books of any kind; the reading of letters, and preparing answers, absorb much of my time. With respect—I remain Revd Sir Your Most Obedt Hble Ser. Go: Washington" (letterpress copy, DLC:GW; LB DLC:GW).

[2.](#) The Illuminati was the name of a secret society founded in 1776 in Bavaria by Adam Weishaupt. It had an organization similar to the Freemasons and evinced republican and deistic principles.