
Albert Gallatin (1761-1849) is far from well known to the best read of modern readers, but he himself is modern enough to deserve attention in our era; and Gayle Thornbrough has done for him and for us a useful service by bringing together and annotating his exchange of letters with John Badollet (1758-1837).

They were born comrades in Geneva in Switzerland, brothers of a definite sort in aspiration and experience in America, pioneer neighbors on the Monongahela in Western Pennsylvania. How impressive their successes must have been to each of the pair is one of the results of perusing their correspondence. Gallatin, of course, was the more important winner. But Badollet also was reasonably fortunate in the country of their adoption. It is worth mentioning that he had twenty-eight grandchildren to carry forward his humane traditions.

Likewise it is significant that as late as 1833 Gallatin wrote to his friend at Vincennes, Indiana: “I tell you the truth, Badollet, when I assure you that, in the course of a life which has brought me in contact with men of all ranks and of many nations, I have not known a more virtuous and pure man than yourself.”

Gallatin obviously was an authority on human merit. When David S. Muzzey declared of him, in the Dictionary of American Biography, that “he was without a superior” in “nobility of character,” he paid a just tribute to a financier, diplomat, statesman, scientist, moral philosopher of unsurpassed distinction.

What Gayle Thornbrough now has done is to rediscover and document newly available evidence not only of Gallatin’s qualities but also those of the man who was his dearest and closest confidant for more than half a century. Students of the material garnered will find it a revelation of truth surpassing fiction. We see in these pages clear pictures of times and personalities deserving latter-day appreciation.

Both Badollet and Gallatin, let it be established, were devoted to “individual freedom” in an age, like ours, in which such preference was not easy or inexpensive.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

James Waldo Fawcett