Euler to Teplov
Berlin, October 15/26 1748

Synopsis: Euler’s friendship with Teplov. Razumovsky’s acceptance of Berlin’s honorary diploma. St. Petersburg membership elections protocols. Mr. Gmelin makes a bad impression.

[...] Nothing could have given me more pleasure than having felt the assurance of the strength of your friendship. I am even more touched, and I would be on the brink of despair, if some enemy were to succeed in belittling me in your regards. It is true that I have no reason to deliver myself to such suspicions, if it were not for your long silence, which threw me into such an anxious state, and as everyone fears losing something they have, we cherish it all the more. I have experienced the same feelings for your support, for which I was greatly troubled by the utmost impatience to receive your asseverations of goodwill. This same anxiety will assure You of the sincerity of my attachment, and it will always be one of my principle duties to merit, by my conduct, more significant indications of Your friendship which you have provided to me until now.

It is a great deal of honor for the Berlin Academy, and of veneration of respect with which our Academy’s President was gracious to accept their homage by accepting his diploma. The unique purpose in providing this step, awakened sentiments regarding the care and happy success that His Excellency brings, not only to the rehabilitation of the Imperial Academy, but also to the expansion, of all the sciences in general. With this in mind, I do not know if it would have been convenient to advance warn His Excellency. Mr. de Maupertuis, thought long and hard on this point, but he felt that it would lose a great deal of its importance, and besides there was no other reason to bring the Academy that far, if we had doubted that this award would not have appealed to His Excellency. But does a society of scientists
doubt that such an Illustrious Protagonist of Sciences would be able to distain the sincerest of gestures of its respect and devotion? Besides this, we have two ways of electing our members, the ordinary way is to sound out H.E. before the president proposes the persons to the assembly and after eight days we collect the votes of all the members, and if the majority of the votes is for the proposed person, the election is completed. The other way or the extraordinary way is much more honorable, where on the day of the nomination the entire assembly offered their approval by acclamation. The only ones elected in this fashion were Mr. Le Comte de Keyserling, Le Cardinal Quirini, le Comte Saluski and His Excellency Msgr. le President. From which it is perfectly clear that had we wished to sound out H.E. the election would have appeared pedestrian, instead we had judged it as our duty to imply the extraordinary deference to His Excellency.

I am extremely annoyed by M. Gmelin, it seems that no one disapproves of his behavior more than myself. You know, Sir, that when I obtained permission to leave St. Petersburg it was suggestively implied that I should return after one year, and such an offer would not only have eased my departure, but I might have been able to extract greater advantages, however far from employing such a cowardly act, I had always stated that I would not be in a position to return. It is true that when Mr. Gmelin passed by this way it had not appeared to hasten the situation, however the great advantages that his return were to provide him seemed to impress him greatly to fulfill exactly his contract, and I simply cannot understand by which reasons Mr. Muller could have possibly employed caution, if he already knew, or that he might have suspected that Mr. Gmelin could have gone back on his word. For me, had I been in his place and having been offered a position at Tubingen which would have appeared to my advantage, I would have extracted myself in a different way, and would have used all possible means to implore His Excellency, that he relinquish me from my responsibilities, and that for two years while representing the Academy for two years, it would not have been worthwhile that I double the trips of such a long
trip, and it would be of little consequence to the Academy to fill
my position, where after two years and after all these pleas that I
would not have receive this dispensation, I would have dropped
my demand. I have since received letters from M. Gmelin, in
which he tells me that his Duke has awarded him the position of
professional botanist in Tubingen, and that by its designation he
was still in the services of the Imperial Academy. they responded
that he had already accepted three years ago a position of the
Duke of Wurtemburg, and that he did not have the right to enter
into any new contractual agreements with Petersburg. I will be
very surprised if this circumstance was deceptive, but in the
event that it is true, his only crime would consist in that he
negotiated a new contract without being master of his fate. I did
not lack/119r/ to explain in all honesty that which You ordered
to this effect and his letter will leave along with mine tonight.
However, I have strong doubts that under these circumstances he
will return, for if there have been any reasons whatsoever ,
which have forced him to which have supplied him reasons to
forfeit his word during a period when he enjoyed Your
Excellency’s favor. Mr. le Comte has even better reason to
believe that he will not presently follow his resolve where he
might be subject to Your Excellency's anger. However the reason
that I feel that he allowed himself to be enticed away, is that he is
engaged to a young lady from his country who has no intentions
of following him. In that case, and as much as I am aware of
German laws, no judge could coerce him to return. I am
extremely sensitive to the fact that this situation has caused His
Excellency so much heartache, and especially to you Sir, after the
important help that you provided to him. But I feel as well that
the enormity of Mr. Gmelin's error comes about as a lack of
judgment. I am able to guarantee to you that he never intended
to insult the Academy as did De L' isle I can easily understand his
mother's circumstances, of his parents and of course of his wife
could have such a great effect on his heart, the eventual
separation from his country became an impossibility. Therefore
we must assign this as a weakness rather that attribute this step
to any maliciousness , and as guilty as he might appear in relation
to his behavior, and the state that he is in requires compassion more that indignation, because I am sure that inspite of all the obstacles that have retained him in his country, and ones which might even be responsible for lack of keeping his word. He is after all prepared to serve the Academy with all his worth and to sacrifice all of his knowledge to its glory. It comes down to a judgment of whether he is or is not in a state to render real services to the Academy. To institute measures which would be appropriate to take in relation to his inappropriate behavior. As he cannot be forced into returning, since it is only the important criminals that that forced to being returned by the princes, and it appears that this affair is already so embroiled there is unlikely that there are any verbal corrections that could possibly incite him to return under his own volition. Apparently there are only two possible recourses to end this nasty affair. On the one hand there is the necessity to have Gmelin feel the effect of the anger and indignation of the Academy, by doing so he will be very sensibly punished, if he were deprived of the many advantages that his contract, which would have been assured him is now no longer his. The other is a softer alternative and to forgive him of his waywardness, by which he was surrounded by the coercive instances of his parents to which he succumbed by weakness. You will easily judge which of the two routes will be preferable to take, as for myself I await with impatience Mr. Gmelin’s response concerning the articles which You have asked me to obtain from him and then I ardently hope that this situation can be concluded to the satisfaction of the Imperial Academy.

I am infinitely grateful, Sir, of the assurances that you have given to His Excellency. Being thoroughly pleased with his new promotion as well as the birth of the new Count, I am taking the liberty to present my very humble congratulations here included.

My entire family has been very touched by your your memory and that our your wife. We recommend ourself to Your
continued and precious protection by placing all of my interests into your hands and have the honor of being with the most perfect consideration and the strongest bonds.

/120R/ [P.S.] I have just received a letter from Delisle, in which he complains that I have not written to him for a long time. He professes that he knows nothing of the warrant brought against him, because he actually asks for me to tell him about everything that is going on here in Petersburg and what is happening at the Academy. He has told me without any equivocation whatsoever that he has been advised to not undertake any negotiations with the Academy. He will certainly lose patience while awaiting my response in view of the defense that the Academy has done on my part.