

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

F R I D A Y, AUGUST 25, 1780.

MARTINICO, June 15.

An account of the three engagements on the 17th of April, and the 15th and 19th of May, between our fleet, commanded by M. the count de Guichen, and that of the English, under the command of Admiral Rodney.

THE king's fleet sailed from Fort-Royal on the 13th of April, consisting of 22 ships of the line, 4 frigates, 2 advice boats, and a cutter; the marquis de Bouille embarked on board the Couronne, to concert with the count de Guichen, on the operations which circumstances might give rise to, and for which 4000 land forces had been put on board. The first design was to get to windward of this island, through the channel of Dominique, and to provoke the enemy to battle. The calms, currents, and winds, prevented us from getting through the channel, till the 15th in the evening, when the frigate Iphigénie made a signal, that the English fleet was to windward; our van rallied in the night; the 16th was spent in different manoeuvres, to collect into the body of the fleet, those ships, which by calms or currents had fallen to leeward, to get into the line of battle, and to work up, in order to approach the enemy's fleet, which was 4 leagues to windward. The count de Sade, commander of the white and blue squadrons, who formed the van in natural order, and the count de Grasse, who commanded the blue squadron, were charged with the manoeuvres of their division. The frigates were ordered to work up to windward as far as they could in the night, in order to observe the enemy's motions. At nine o'clock the Couronne made a signal, that the English fleet was making for our rear, the general made us tack about immediately, with the tacks to larboard, like the enemy. As soon as they perceived this manoeuvre, they again took their starboard tacks on board. Soon after, we saw their fleet in order of battle close to the wind, at the distance of three cannon shot to windward. The 17th from day light we were making manoeuvres, corresponding with those of the enemy. The vigilance of our general, rendered all their artifices useless. The two fleets were then nine leagues west of the south end of Dominique. At a quarter past one o'clock, the action began in the van, and soon became general; we were then on the starboard tack in an inverted order, the blue squadron forming the van. At three quarters after one, the van ship of admiral Rodney, having come up, and all the ships of his fleet successively, we judged that his design was to shut up our rear, and cut it off, in case our centre continued to make sail to cut off his van, which fought edging away from us. The count de Guichen could not doubt of it, when he saw the English admiral himself, with his fore sail hoisted, come up followed by 7 ships, he soon made the signal to tack luff for luff in order to cut him off; but success was this movement began, when Mr. Rodney and the ships with him, retreated again upon their former tacks, which obliged us to get into the line of battle again on the starboard tack. The smoke undoubtedly prevented our rear from seeing the last signal of counter orders, and the following one, since having obeyed the signal of tacking luff for luff, it continued for some time to run upon the other tack. The greater part of the ships of the van were fallen to leeward, by observing the signal. The count de Guichen, in order to reform the line of battle readily, made the signal for tacking again, the English who had tacked their lower sails, and kept close with the wind under the care of the Fendant, the Couronne, the Palmier, and the Indien, had advanced very much to the windward, when the Robuste and Sphynx, having presently put about, placed themselves in front of the Fendant, in the room of those which had fallen to leeward.

It appeared from the enemy's manoeuvres, that their design was to attack only the weakest parts of our line; they had formed several knots of their strongest ships, who kept as much as possible opposite to our sixty-fours. The Princess Royal, of 90 guns, declined engaging the Robuste, and turned all her force against the

Artesien, one of our weakest ships, who did her a great deal more mischief than she received. Admiral Rodney himself lay but a very short time along side of the Couronne, and all his manoeuvres made us believe that he was afraid of the approach of our centre; he and his two consorts seemed determined on engaging the Fendant and Vengeur, who received him as an admiral, and complimented him with the briskest firing.

At the instant the battle was most lively, we thought we saw a great deal of confusion on board the Sandwich, it appeared to us that admiral Rodney's flag had been taken down, and that he was going into another ship; we were not mistaken, some time after we saw his flag hoisted on board the Conqueror; we judged at the time, that the Sandwich had received considerable damage, and it has since been confirmed by the accounts of the English themselves. At the same instant, one of her topmasts fell down, fire appeared on board, and the shots she had received between wind and water, endangered her sinking. All the other vessels of their fleet, were a good deal worse treated than ours, in their masts and rigging; but the lateness of the day, and the advantage of the wind, which they had preserved, favoured their retreat, and prevented us from completing the victory.

The 18th we were employed in repairing, and the 19th having no knowledge of the enemy, we were ordered for Gaudaloupe, which was very near, where we landed our sick and wounded without anchoring. The 20th, at day break, the English appeared in the S. S. W. at about 5 leagues distance the general ordered immediately the boats on board, and we manoeuvred in order to preserve the wind. The 21st at 8 in the morning, we saw them S. S. W. Our fleet made several tacks in order to keep to windward; at half past three, our van began to feel the effects of a calm. The count de Guichen made a signal to tack, which the Solitani could not bring in a flat calm. The English fleet bearing down upon her, by means of a breeze at S. W. we tacked again in order to protect her, and joined her at 8 in the evening. The English who were not more than 2 guns shot distant, went away immediately. This day gave them the advantage of the wind. The 22d at 7 in the morning, we saw them in the horizon; at 8 o'clock they were out of sight. Our general having then no longer any hopes of gaining the wind in this position, assembled all the general officers, to take their opinions; it was determined to fail away.

The 8th of May at 10 in the morning, we were at the entrance of the channel of St. Lucia, the Ceres frigate who had been out to reconnoitre, made the signal for seeing them in the S. W. from this to the 15th the end of all our manoeuvres was to keep the wind, to draw the enemy to windward off Martinico, to avail ourselves of their mistakes and to fight them with advantage; the manoeuvres of admiral Rodney, on the contrary, seemed to get to windward and avoid fighting. Whenever we came near him, he advanced his van, and formed the line of battle, on the opposite tack to ours, but always in such a manner, that when we were within a gun shot and a half, there was not daylight enough to engage. In the night he ran large, so that the next day we were obliged to make as long a manoeuvre, without being more advanced, or if we were too much to the south, the whole day was spent in running to the north, and the English who would not seem to avoid us, went upon the same tack. While we admire the masterly manoeuvres of our general, we cannot refrain ourselves from doing justice to those of admiral Rodney, which were all well conceived and dextrously executed except one, of which we should have taken the advantage, had it not been for a calm in the critical minute.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of the 15th, we had almost joined the enemy's van, when the wind shifted to the south, with gusts, which obliged us to shut our lower ports. The English, desirous of rendering this change advantageous to them, by gaining the wind, tacked their rear by countermarch, which obliged us to tack checkerwise. But at five o'clock the wind having returned to S. E. the count made a signal for

re-tacking and forming the line, with the tacks to leeward, in natural order, without having any regard to their posts, because the change of wind had deranged the checker. This order of battle was very well formed, and presented a front to the enemy which forced them to advance by a successive motion, in order to extend us to the leeward. The action began at seven in the evening, the van ship of the enemy being only within a quarter of a gun shot; it lasted only an hour. Our general ordered the vessels before him to tack about by countermarch with the wind ahead, in order to file off a second time on the enemies, in case they should offer to charge our rear on our putting about, but having perceived this manoeuvre, they sailed off, fearing no doubt of a night engagement, and thus we preferred the advantage of the wind. The English ran all night on the opposite tack to ours.

On the 16th at day break, we could scarce observe some of their frigates, by whose manoeuvres we found that their fleet was to leeward, and was making for one of their colonies. Our general took immediately the head of the royal fleet, and about six o'clock P. M. he arrived to W. in the order of march of convoys, all his ships being formed in one line. Between eleven and twelve in the night the frigates of our van gave signal of the enemy, who immediately shifted their tacks to the larboard side. At twelve we saw them a league from us to leeward. The 17th and 18th were employed in manoeuvres equally masterly on both sides, ours tending always to bring on an engagement, and those of the English to avoid it, without dishonouring the British flag, by an evident flight. On the 19th, admiral de Guichen seeing that the enemy's fleet, which was a little to leeward of us, kept close to the wind with cruded sails, in order to get to our windward, gave orders to tack about, and came to an order of battle, with the tacks to leeward in an inverted order, in order to attack the English with opposite sides. About half an hour past two the enemy being too far engaged to decline the battle, our general made signal to the king's fleet, to use all their efforts against the van of the English, as soon as our van ship should have got above theirs. The action began at a quarter past three. Admiral Rodney advancing to pass to our leeward, the whole line fired immediately: at four o'clock our van ships having fallen much to leeward, in order to fight closer, and the others having followed them, the general made them a signal to keep the wind, to rally and form checkerwise, that the whole fleet might be to the windward of the enemy, in case they should tack about to fall on our rear. At three quarters past four several of their ships having tacked about, and falling with cruded sails on the weakest of ours, who maintained the fight, our main body came again to the order of battle, with the tacks to windward. The blue squadron followed the same manoeuvre, and posted themselves in a line with the main body; and the white and blue continued in its same direction to take the rear of the line: this movement was scarce executed, than nine English ships, which had already tacked about halted to rally and join their main body.

At half after five, our fleet presented itself again in good order, wishing ardently for the combat, but the day was too far advanced, and it was impossible to re-engage the action. The two armies passed the night within a gun shot and a half from one another, we waited with the greatest impatience for the moment when we could complete the defeat of the enemies; but they were too sensible of the superiority which the two former engagements and the inextinguishable ardour of our crews gave us over them. On the 20th at day break they ran large with small sails. The morning was employed in giving the general an account of the situation of all the ships. At 12 he made a signal to come to an order of battle, but the English having put to the opposite side, and our fleet having only three days water, it was not thought fit to pursue them, and at half past three P. M. they disappeared.

On the 21st at seven in the morning, we made for Fort Royal, where we arrived on the 22d,