

MARYLAND GAZETTE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1781.

For the MARYLAND GAZETTE:

To Sir HENRY CLINTON, K. B.

SIR,

ADVICE is never attended to with more avidity, than when applied to a man—who hath smarted by his errors. To men of common good understanding misfortune is a school of wisdom. By a severe, though wholesome lecture, the unclouds the peculiar medium of individuals, through which human affairs are viewed; and it is in the school of this rugged preceptress, the great learn the beauties of wisdom, and the little and the weak taught the folly of despising her. It is there a man is the most judicious critic on his life, and forms a true estimate of things, when the passions, desitute of the means of gratification, drop the pleasing mask of delusion.

To insult the misfortunes of the amiable—and deserving, is the hellish pleasure of a fiend, and is a most daring challenge to the caprice of fortune; but you Sir Henry, if I mistake not, possess in your temper a security against the stings of censure, for I believe none are less galled by her public lash, than those who have long deserved it. It would be difficult to wound the feelings of a man—who hath long been a stranger to the meltings of sensibility, and who hath so notoriously in his office, proved paramount to the sacred rights of human nature, and citizenship.

Had you a common share of sensibility Sir Henry, you would find the tortures of mortification disturbed your peace; but allowing you the small degree of feeling which you have been heir to, sympathy with a brother officer will for an interval of astonishment, lend you a foretaste of those sensations, which ere long, a situation similar to that of the ill-starred earl—may more fully realize. Every reflection which tells you—that you are supreme in command, must make you sensible that as an officer—destined to the glories of conquest, you are unfortunate! A supine indifference, plots ingenerated in the wildness of fancy and pride, which were rendered abortive merely by the republican virtue of American peasants, and for your interests, terminating in the most tragical manner—have given so very flattering traits, to the history of your supreme command. In your southern, more extensive views—you have been not less disappointed, were the incoherency of frenzy-formed enterprises—instead of the harmony of a whole well digested design—hath stamped the impressions of despair in the result of all your undertakings. During your whole command Sir Henry, not an event on whose issue you had an influence hath taken place, but what must for ever associate with your character, the ideas of error—miscarriage, and defeat!

That lucrative spirit of supine delay, which may be called the genius of a British commander in chief, had not as yet smothered the fire of soldiership in your heart, when the small but gallant garrison of Charles-town, were deemed objects worthy of your ambition. You sailed against Charles-town, and though crowned with a dear bought victory, found your laurels too severely scorched, to promise their possessor a lasting verdure. You must confess Sir Henry—a fatality attends all your designs, when, in the very scheme you so ardently patronised, and whose execution hath proved so costly, you were but laying the groundwork of a triumph to the allied arms! Under the flattering idea of an established fame, you retired from that scene, and left to the care of an inferior officer of superior talents, the promotion of your imaginary greatness. You then tasted the sweets of supremacy, and since that period the world have heard little else from Sir Henry Clinton, than through the channel of his proclamations.

Whether the idea of a southern war, originated in the brain of your ministry or your own, we cannot determine. We must thank, though we cannot compliment the source of so stupid a design. Let it have originated with either, you Sir, have by this time had leisure to contemplate in detail—its numerous advantages, and plume yourself on participating as a conspicuous promoter of it, in the glory which its completion reflects on the British nation.

However desitute of genius a man himself may be, there is a degree of reputation to be acquired, by discovering it in others. Have then the prudence to confess the grandeur of a late design which you could not penetrate, for the evidence of your talents, is superior to your pride as an Englishman.

Confess that as you were desicent in that largeness of mind, which at one view comprehends the most intricate system of operation, so were you wanting in that fertility of invention which abounds in the happiest expedients. The sophistry of pride may hitherto have deluded you into visionary expectations of conquest, and vanity over-rated your abilities; but this last master-piece of generalship in the great Washington, is a blow that must have roused you from such ebriety of folly, and afforded a proof of his military logic—whose force of conclusion, you Sir Henry—can neither endure or dispute.

Never, you must confess Sir, was there a plan conceived with more depth of professional wisdom, than that to which Lord Cornwallis owes his captivity: and surely, never was an enterprise of such extensive, and contingent a nature, adopted with more intuitive discernment, or executed with more precision, coincidence of action, and complete success. America beheld the spectacle with an anxious concern, and also her passions which motives of patriotism had deeply interested in its decision, have been amply indulged in its success. If not decisive in her favour, she knew a favourable issue, must prove accelerative of that independence for which she hath willingly and profusely bled. The solid benefits which she derives from this event, throw on it the splendour of true glory, while the action in itself confers on the particular actors, the laurels of conquerors.

If in an unexpected interval of political lunacy, you should ever be interrogated Sir Henry—with parliamentary whys, and wherefores, let a corrupt depravity and obsequiousness to courtiership, so far for once temporise with your honesty, as to enable you, boldly to make the notoriety of national poverty, and the experienced invincibility of the Americans, the heads of your exculpatory speech. All the world will discover that the circumstances which palliated, where they directed, the conduct of the gallant general Burgoyne, want the same influence in their judgments, when applied to the case of Lord Cornwallis. Nationally considered, there admits not a comparison in the disgrace, with which in the eyes of all Europe, these two captive armies have tarnished the arms, and wounded the pride of your haughty nation. The one had not finished his enterprise: the other was defeated, by being too successful. The local situation of their respective armies, rendered the succours which their necessities pressed for, different in their mode of conveyance. Desitute of naval co-operations, general Burgoyne's army was made an easy prey of to men, who to be victorious, desire but an equal footing with those whom they oppose. Lord Cornwallis, elate with the applauses of a ministry who already anticipated the fruits of "his activity, and conduct on which they could fully rely," pushed with the rapidity of confidence, to a position, in whose local, and natural advantages, he flattered himself a junction of his army, and marine powers, might operate with vigour. He gained his object; but here the inferiority of his expected fleets, the superiority of which hath been deemed the palladium of your island, succeeded by a superior allied army, terminated his gaudy expectations in the surrender of his army by the capitulation of York!

When his lordship sat down in York, he found within the limits of his situation, every local circumstance that could flatter, or support his first expectations: here his army, for a moment parted from the fatigues of rapine, and his lordship made some efforts of farther enterprise; when the illustrious chief of America, put in motion the wheels of a design, too refined for his detection, but whose effects have proved as visible as the day. Though the naval victory of the count de Grasse was irretrievably complete, his account of his victory, proves his just estimation of the favours of fortune, while the great regard he pays to the feelings of the vanquished—evinces the generosity of his soul. This Sir Henry should polish the manners, while it corrects the prejudices of your nation, and while the count de Grasse teaches your officers how to gain victories, let them—by imitating farther his example, learn how to acquire glory. Let their pens be exercised in the language of generosity. Let them do justice to an enemy whom they may fight, but whom they cannot hate, or despise.

Permit me once more Sir Henry to attend particularly to yourself, though digressions perhaps may in your eyes, form the most pleasing parts of this letter. Where were you—and what schemes of immortal duration were you forming, when general

Washington was preparing for the siege of New-York. Your ministry ordered you to bring if possible general Washington to a general, and as they ignorantly presumed, decisive engagement. Such an event might have inspired the conversation of your court, and by exercising the invention of fertile venality—given you temporary eclat in the dispatches of your pufflers. Such an eccentric start from your accustomed uniformity of dullness, would have been a variation of conduct, that might have drawn once more the eyes of the world upon a character, (for a second perusal) whose lines they discovered at first sight to be so insipidly legible.

But there was in the avarice, to which as commander in chief you succeeded, a security against the hostile activity of a soldier; a dilatory mode of offence, which, as we knew you possessed both the power, and inclination of an enemy, rendered your character—and exertions merely the subject of suspicion.

Safe from surprise behind your strong fortifications, you indulged yourself in the security with which nature had guarded the place of your residence—since she had not blessed you with a sagacity equal to the designs of your enemy. Under the influence of a principle more modernly fashionable, than that which moved the operations of your glorious opponent, you prudently relinquished the toys of ambition to your inferior officers; and secure in the emoluments of office, you despised the tinsel of fame while a golden harvest invited your grasp: this, from your knowledge of those springs which elevate the great, you knew would gain you the rewards—without tempting you through the rugged task of valour.

You are better acquainted Sir Henry with the temper of your nation at present than I possibly can be: you know their sanguine expectations, and can best conceive the effects which your dispatches will create in their minds. The shock must be proportioned to their elevation, and from every circumstance of intelligence, we may believe their circle of expectation included the final subjugation of the five southern states. The poignancy of their sensations will be equalled, but by the bigness of their misfortunes when your dispatches if true, and fully descriptive, shall confirm to the world the vincibility of the British fleets. The poverty, and decline of your nation, will in the eyes of all, be intimately involved with the contemplation of this event. The declension of the greatest empires—which employ the philosophic genius of history, proves that "there is a tide" in the greatness, and grandeur of nations, as well as in the affairs of men: Britain is on the rapid ebb, and by taking her place amongst the list of once famous empires who have sunk down the wheel of time, she will make this age a memorable era to posterity. Like a decayed beauty she may still retain the love of conquest, and submission, but like her, must expect the mortification of disappointment. Her exertions in this war, tho' violent for her decayed constitution, bear, in their result all the unavailing impotence of old age, without its wisdom. Your ministry may once more charm up the semblance of the British lion, but the world will instantly perceive the usurpation of the ass.

Like a man whose pride is greater than his understanding, your nation will be the last one in Europe that will discover her weakness. Too eager to admit an interval of reflection, it enters with the warmth of passion, rather than the deliberation of judgment, into all its favourite pursuits: from an impatience of temper that acts with earnestness, but with momentary impulses, it provided not the means by which an end is to be obtained, with that concatenation of events, that forms the very soul of politics—which act with a slow, but successful energy. From that warmth of complexion which marks the character of your people with a spirit so restive, arises a credulity equally destructive, to which they are made dupes, by the false intelligence of those who find it lucrative to deceive them. The body of your nation are I believe possessed of sense enough to retract from a detected, prejudicial error, but its history proves Sir Henry that they were never yet saved from a precipice by instinct.

The channel of all the official informations that amuse your misled sovereign; and act like a soothing opiate on the credulity of your countrymen, must be traced to none other than the source of action, the commander in chief. The inference is plain.

The time of your departure for England may now be near. For God's sake, and your own,