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Anonymous**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LETTER TO LORD ROBERT BERTIE



A

LETTER

TO

Lord ROBERT BERTIE.



[Price One Shilling.]

A

LETTER

TO

Lord ROBERT BERTIE,

Relating to his

CONDUCT in the Mediterranean,

AND HIS

DEFENCE of Admiral BYNG.

Hic unde vitam sumeret inscius
Pacem duello miscuit. O pudor!
O magna Carthago! probrosis
Altior Italiæ ruinis!

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Row. MDCCLVII.

A

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LETTER

TO

Lord ROBERT BERTIE.

MY LORD,

CHARACTERS like your's, are regarded with impartial Attention by human Society, and the World will impatiently expect something in your Conduct suitable to your Rank and Dignity. Those who are intrusted with the Charter of our Liberties, or the Revenge of our Wrongs, are laid under the strongest Obligations which Honour or Gratitude can impose, to maintain the Rights and execute the Resentment of their Country; but if they fail to exert themselves to the utmost for this Purpose, the People, naturally fretful at their Losses, will not forbear reflecting on the supposed Authors of their Misfortunes. And when they call to mind that indelible Disgrace which has befallen them in the *Mediterranean*, it's possible they may mingle too much Petulance and Severity in their Censures upon those who were concerned in that unfortunate Expedition.

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I AM extremely sorry, my Lord, to find your Name in the Number of those to whose Misconduct that fatal Defeat is attributed. You have been marked out by the Indignation of the Publick, and maliciously charged with Principles the most remote from your Heart, and Designs. No Person, I can assure you, was more assiduous in vindicating your Fame, than the Author of this Address; and it was not without the utmost Reluctance, that I ever suffered myself to entertain any Suspicion of the Wisdom or Activity of your Conduct: But since you have espoused the Cause of the Admiral, now under Condemnation, with so much Warmth and Solitude, I fear your Sentiments are no longer a Doubt, nor your Behaviour altogether capable of such an honourable Construction as your Friends could wish.

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I SHALL therefore take that Liberty which, as one of your Constituents, I may claim, of canvassing the Merits of that Transaction in which your Lordship had a considerable Share; and as I shall endeavour to preserve an inviolable Regard to Truth, without Partiality or Rancour, I hope you will esteem these Remonstrances as the Observations of a Friend, solicitous for your Reputation; and not of an Enemy, exulting in your Adversity. These are the unanimous Sentiments of your Constituents, who think themselves so far interested in the Fate of their Representative, as to be honoured by his Glory, and wounded by his Disgrace; who are more publick-spirited than to justify an unworthy Member, and more generous than to desert a faithful Officer, tho' the popular Cry be against him.—The principal Objections against your Lordship's Conduct, on which I shall now freely animadvert, are the Part you acted in the *Mediterranean*, and the Defence you have made at home.

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WITH relation to the first, my Lord, I believe that your Friends and Enemies both lamented that terrible Oversight in the Administration, which neglected to prepare so invaluable a Fortress, as *St. Philip's*, for every Contingency whatsoever; and, when it was besieged, heartily wished that that Detachment, which your Lordship commanded, had been stronger for its Relief. They apprehended that it was not politick, considering the precarious Events of War, to trust to a small Number, from an ostentatious Confidence of our Strength, or an ill-judged Frugality, when greater Forces might have been sent, consistent with our Safety at home.

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BUT it unfortunately happened, that those few on board were all that *Gibraltar* could spare. *Minorca* was exposed to a furious Storm, the General was brave, and the Garrison sustained the Attack with undaunted Resolution. But Valour cannot surmount all Difficulties, Courage cannot stifle the Demands of Nature, nor the greatest Spirits persevere without some

Relaxation from Hardship and Fatigue: They had to encounter with the intense Heat of the Climate, and were denied the necessary Refreshment of Repose. In these Circumstances, what Transports of Pleasure would the Sight of a *British* Fleet inspire? How cheerfully would they exert all their remaining Strength, in hopes of being speedily supplied with all the Necessaries their Distresses required? What noble Efforts must they make, when they saw a fresh Reinforcement of Men flying as swift as possible to their Assistance? The smallest Detachment that could have been landed, attended with Stores and Provisions, would have revived their Courage, animated their Spirits, and possibly might intirely have defeated the Designs of our Enemies. What Motives of an opposite Nature could sway with such weighty Considerations? What Danger could there be in attempting to land? What Hesitation could there be about the Expediency of it? What Council, good God! could deliberate a Moment, whether they should help their Friends, or abandon them to Destruction? The Reasons which were urged against that Enterprize, were not on account of the Smallness of the Detachment, but the Danger of entering the Harbour, which would have been equally conclusive against the most numerous Body, which must have suffered more from the Fire of their Cannon than a few, and would deter us from performing any Exploits which are attended with the least Degree of Danger or Inconvenience. But admitting the Truth of that Assertion you have frequently maintained, 'That all the Assistance you was capable of bringing would have been no effectual Relief; and, at best, could but have protracted the Siege a few Days;' admitting, I say, that the Presence and Encouragement of so many superior Officers would not have accomplished that desireable End, yet you would have stood acquitted, and glorious, in the Eyes of your Country, and of Posterity. The Guilt would have been confined intirely to those who sent you out in so miserable a Plight: We should have pitied and applauded the gallant Efforts of that Bravery which was not crowned with Success; we should have resigned the Place with less Regret, when it was so dearly bought. —But, alas! we did not put it in the Power of Fortune to save us: The least Evil was not hazarded; we had not the Pain of seeing our Friends overcome by a superior Enemy; your Valour was reserved for a nobler Theatre, and your Eloquence spared for a more glorious Occasion.

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THERE is one Circumstance, my Lord, which I shall mention, as it just occurs to my Mind. If I forget not, it was agreed in Council, that the Enemy could never neglect planting Cannon on such advantageous Places, as those two opposite Points which command the Avenue of the Harbour. Now as you did not approach so near the Place as to be Spectators of any dreadful Artillery planted to intercept Relief, this Opinion must be wholly founded on Conjecture; and you had as much Reason to apprehend it while at *Gibraltar*, as after the 20th of *May*; and if so, would it not have been more prudent to have staid at *Gibraltar*, than have put your Men on board a Squadron so imperfectly equipped, destitute of Hospital and Store-ships, where they could be of no Service, where they must consume the Provisions of the Fleet, and be liable to the Sickness which attends a close Confinement? Who could have objected to you the Disobedience of Orders then, if they acquit you now? How ridiculously must you pretend to say, that the Commands of Majesty were obeyed, when the least Attempt was never made to land the Reinforcements at that Place where it was only in their Power to be of any Service? I defy all History to produce any Instance when the Orders of a Sovereign, and the Possessions of a Kingdom, were ever so infamously disregarded, under the Sanction of a Council!

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I HAVE nothing, at present, to say concerning the Engagement betwixt the two Admirals, as your Lordship's Fame was not interested in the Event; and whatever Benefit the Squadron might be supposed to receive from the Continuance of your Regiment on board, I presume you will not ascribe to them the Merit of having defeated the Enemy. The principal Figure you had the Honour to make, was in the decisive Resolution, agreed upon in Council, of returning to *Gibraltar*. I don't suppose your Lordship was more forward in promoting that Determination, than any of those that composed that honourable Body. As to the Losses and Situation of the Fleet, I don't doubt but they might be represented to you in such a Light, that it might appear wise and necessary to repair to *Gibraltar* to refit, before you ventured upon another Engagement; but how any other Reasons could impose upon your Judgment to consent to so infamous a Retreat, I cannot conceive; and am amazed and confounded when I think of it.—Could it ever seriously be urged, that the *French* Fleet designed to escape thro' the *Streights*, in order to join a Squadron from *Brest*, and so do some terrible Mischief, the Lord knows where?—What unaccountable Panick could seize you, in behalf of *Gibraltar*? Were not all their Efforts exerted, all their Armaments drained, all their Magazines exhausted, to carry on the Siege at *Minorca*?—besides the Strength they borrowed of the *Genoese*.

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WHAT Alarms could *Gibraltar* apprehend, unless Ships were to rise from the Deep, or an Army drop from the Skies?—Whatever they might boast of the Strength and Cleanness of their Fleet, they must have sustained some Damage in the Engagement: They must be weakened and disabled by the brisk Firing of Mr. *West's* Division; not to mention the immense Quantity of Powder and Ball discharged from the *Ramillies*, which surely could not be expended in vain.—Yet, notwithstanding these Reasons, it appeared more eligible to you to retire, than to answer the Design of your Expedition.

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I WOULD not be understood to reflect on the Valour of those Officers who embarked along with you; and you might think it a Deference due to them to acquiesce in their Sentiments.—But yet, my Lord, had you considered, with due Attention, the Distresses of the Place—the

Certainty of its falling into the Hands of the *French*, if not relieved—the grand Purpose for which you was sent—and the Censures to which you would stand peculiarly exposed, as Commander of the Regiment on board—I am persuaded you would have been the first for landing the Reinforcement, and have indignantly rejected a Proposal for abandoning a Fortress so valuable, unassisted, unrelieved.—Whatever Danger might have attended the Enterprize, would have redounded to your Glory—and your Neutrality, at least, would have endeared you to the eternal Esteem of your Friends, and recommended you to greater Honours than we can confer.—What Pleasure would it give to those who have the least Connection with you, to find your Resolution so singularly distinguished, and your Zeal for your Country so warm, as to surmount every Obstacle, every Difficulty, attending its Defence! I remember to have read of a great General, whose Example should be the Model of every Soldier, that having convened a Council to debate upon some important Enterprize, then in Agitation, and finding them discontented with his Proposal, he upbraided their Timidity, gave them Liberty to return, and declared that he would march forward with his own fifth Legion alone!—His Reproach had a just Effect upon them, and inspired them with such Shame and Indignation as rekindled their Courage, and carried them thro' the greatest Difficulties with uninterrupted Success.

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My Lord, I should not have expostulated with you so freely, had I not been assured that the intended Reinforcement was practicable, and might have been successful. History affords many Instances of Garrisons, in Strength much inferior to *St. Philip's*, holding out against a more formidable Enemy; and, whatever Representations may have been given of the romantick Nature of the Attempt, if I should maintain that your own small Supply would have been sufficient, I should be justified in the Assertion by the most unexceptionable Authority.

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THERE IS great Reason to believe, that had the fatal Attack, on the 29th of *June*, been repulsed from those Forts which were most defenceless, and most surprized, as it might have been done with a very small Number more, they never would have renewed it again with equal Fury, or equal Advantage. And if there be any Weight in this Supposition, if there was any Prospect of affording the Castle any Relief, we can't help being astonished that any Danger should induce you to decline the Prosecution of so glorious an Undertaking.—We cannot applaud the Voice you gave in the Council, according to our present Apprehensions; and we must continue in this Opinion, unless you shall vindicate your Conduct, and acquaint us with those Views that influenced your Lordship's Determination. This a Piece of Justice which the Honour of your Character requires, and which your Friends expect. As your Electors, we beseech it; as the Subjects of an insulted Kingdom, whose Losses are universally felt, we demand it at your Hands.

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REFLECT, my Lord, (for your Country can never forget) what a long Succession of dreadful Consequences this Loss must extend to Futurity? What additional Expences must the Protection of our Trade require, when thus deprived of its Guardian? What Sums can insure the Return of our Ships, exposed, as they must constantly be, to the Capture of our Enemies? What Profit can attend that Commerce, which must always be liable to irretrievable Losses? What Fleets of Convoys must be engaged for our Defence, which might otherwise be employed to the Annoyance of the Enemy? What aggravated Indignities we must receive from the most contemptible Powers in the *Mediterranean*, who will look upon this Defeat as the certain Token of the Ruin of our once invincible Navy.

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WHOEVER considers this sad Concurrence of Misfortunes, and at the same time the Enormity of the Disgrace we have sustained, will blush to find so black a Period as this recorded in the Annals of *Great Britain*. Let it never be remembered, what great and lasting Advantage might have been reaped from the Defeat of the most rash Invasion that was ever undertaken, how fatal a Wound we might have given to their Ambition, and what future Hostilities might have been prevented. May Posterity forgive us for losing the most glorious Opportunity of gaining a complete and final Triumph over our Enemies, that Heaven ever gave. May not our Colonies reproach us for all those Cruelties and Calamities, which this disastrous Event has contributed to enhance and prolong.

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AND NOW, my Lord, I proceed to the Defence you have made in favour of the Admiral, when the united Voice of his Country called upon him to answer for his Conduct: And here you have espoused his Cause with a Solicitude eager for his Safety, and with a Confidence which the Persuasion of his Innocence could only create.—You was pleased to express the greatest Surprize, that the Action on the 20th of *May* should be so universally condemned by the Nation; and to prevent your Friends from being carried down the Tide of popular Clamour, you favoured them with a particular Account of the Situation, Strength, and Armament of the two Squadrons. You gave a particular Calculation of the Weight of Metal, the Number of Guns, and Superiority of Men; from which it appears, that if no Confidence was to be placed in the Valour and Activity of our Seamen, and the Experience of our Commanders, we must inevitably lose the Victory.—To confirm this, the State of our Fleet might be added, which has been so pathetically represented as weak, destitute, and unprovided with necessary Stores and Tenders, at a Time, alas! when it ought to have been invincible. Besides, we have been told of the immense Rate at which our Enemy's Ships failed, (if we were capable of being bubbled by so palpable an Imposition) which must necessarily disappoint our most vigorous Efforts in the Chace.

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AND yet, notwithstanding these unsurmountable Difficulties, which it was Mr. *Byng's*

peculiar Misfortune to encounter with, your Friends cannot cease to believe, with the most exquisite Concern and Regret, that it was in our Power to have destroyed their boasted Squadron, and abundantly revenged their Invasion of *Minorca*.

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WHAT Instance can be produced in our naval Records, where so small a Difference in Strength was ever urged to vindicate a timorous Action, or justify a hasty Retreat. There has been a time when our Captains, so far from being terrified with a formidable Enemy, have exulted in their Superiority—improved it to their own greater Glory, and envied no Success but what has been obtained by unequal Numbers.—Vigilance and Resolution will succeed against the strongest Force. Fortune may hold the Ballance of War; but Bravery turns the Scale.

IF any thing could embitter the Remembrance of our late Misfortunes, it must be those Circumstances that have suspended the Fate of the Author of them so long, contrary to the united Demands of the Kingdom. We are not so barbarously impatient for Justice, as to deny an equitable Trial to the worst of Criminals; but we cannot see why the Satisfaction of an injured People should be delayed; and we can never be too jealous of that Power which enables us to arraign the greatest Crimes, and condemn the most capital Offenders. And, with relation to the present Case, nothing but the most scrupulous Mercy could have deliberated on the Execution of his Sentence so long. The Fury of the People was subsided.

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All the Weapons, which Falshood and Calumny could invent, to transfer the Odium of this Transaction to a higher Cause. His Situation was considered with all the Allowance that Candour could make: His Judges entered upon his Trial free from all Prejudice and Passion, and every Witness that was desired was granted. So that all Complaints of ill Usage and Injustice are urged without the least Shadow of Foundation; and there is not the least Reason to pretend that he falls a Sacrifice to the Resentment of a private Party.—If he has the Sanction of Authority to produce, let his Commission be shewn, and the Mystery of the whole Combination be unfolded: But if no Associates should be found, if the original Springs of our Mischiefs should be inaccessible, we do know the Instruments of them, and whether Bribery or Disaffection, or Cowardice or Negligence, has principally prevailed.—We know what we ought to have done, and need not be reminded what we have lost. We are sensible

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who reflected Disgrace upon his Majesty's Flag, abandoned his gallant Countrymen, and infamously retreated to Gibraltar, while our Enemies were seizing an undefended Garrison, and triumphing in those Seas which never acknowledged any but a British Sovereign before. When we repose such an important Trust in the Hands of a Commander, the least Neglect in the Discharge of it is a Crime of the most aggravated Nature. What can make us a Recompence for what we have lost? not all the Spoils of Plunder, nor the Profits of illicit Trade. The Forfeiture of that immense Fortune he has accumulated would be no Amends; and the Sacrifice of that Life he did not rashly expose to Danger, would be too small an Atonement of our Wrongs. Did we not hone so memorable an Example would do Justice to our Name, and prevent the same sad Misconduct from ever being transacted any more.

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IF there be any Weight in these Observations, Mr. *Byng* has been treated with no cruel Severity to which he was not intitled; and whoever exert themselves as Patrons and Defenders of his Cause, cannot hope to be exempt from the unsparing Censures of the Publick.—Your Lordship's Evidence has not been the least remarkable: You have befriended him in open Court; and in private Conversation you have not scrupled to express your favourable Opinion of his Conduct, in Opposition to the general Belief of his Country.—

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Whatever Principles you may have declared in the latter Case, I shall not charge you with; but your Depositions, as an Evidence, are subject to every one's Examination; and these, I presume, are far from making his Character appear in a more agreeable Point of View than it was placed in before. If your Lordship could have discovered one Reason why Mr. *Byng's* Ship was prevented from bearing down upon the Enemy with all Expedition; why he was kept back so long, that one of our own Ships, which did not sail so well as the *Ramillies*, was able to get betwixt him and the Enemy, and was in great Danger therefore of receiving her Fire—you would have alledged an Argument in his Defence more material and important, than a thousand Encomiums on his Calmness and Presence of Mind. Facts are the only solid Tests of Truth, and the only Proofs which are liable to no Ambiguity: And if we appeal to these, may we not suppose that every Contingency that furnished a Pretence for Trifling and Delay, was gladly embraced.—What Appearance is there of the least Ardour to engage, or the smallest Attention to improve any favourable Event to his Advantage? Where was the Spirit of Resolution and Enterprize worthy of a *British* Commander? What Losses did he receive, but that of a Timber-head? What Danger could he apprehend, when the Enemy's Fire did not reach a Ship in his Division much nearer than himself?—Where was the Heroism of delivering his Orders without Terror or Confusion, while he was situated at so harmless a Distance? If this can proceed from Neglect, it may cost us more than *Minorca*—our Navy and Kingdom too. And what can Cowardice or Disaffection do more?—The most friendly and partial Evidences do him no Honour, and represent him, at best, but as an inactive, inglorious Spectator, indifferent to Victory, rather than as a vigorous Commander, whose Country's Reputation, as well as his own, was immediately interested in the Event. And if the unexceptionable Attestations of the rest have any Authority with them, we cannot be at a Loss to whom we shall ascribe the Defeat of that fatal Expedition; and we cannot but think a Solicitude to defend a Conduct so undeniably culpable, will deserve Part of the

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Ignominy which attends it. Your Friends, fearful of pronouncing too hasty a Sentence, rejected a great many Reports which enhanced the Guilt of this Action, and waved their Opinion till the most material Circumstances were confirmed by the Court-Martial.

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THEY are sensible of the Difficulty of forming a just Judgment upon an Engagement, which requires such extensive Skill, and so minute an Attention, to be free from all Exception: Yet when they see a Ship of the first Note, for sailing, scandalously loitering in the Rear, without any just Impediment, while the rest were sustaining unequal Fire, with not one Man wounded or killed during the whole Time, though all the Evidences were unanimous in commending the Admiral, we could not help condemning it as defective; and while this is the Case, we cannot approve of your endeavouring to obstruct or mitigate the Punishment such Misbehaviour deserves. These Remonstrances are not the Dictates of Passion and Malice; but of a Desire for the impartial unbiassed Administration of Justice. The Honour of every brave Man is dear, as the Actions of every Coward are odious, to his Country.—It is incumbent on your Lordship to remove all Suspicions of Partiality from the Minds of your Friends, that your Memory may not be transmitted to Posterity in Connection with that Name, which they will have as much Reason to detest as their Ancestors had to admire.

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WHEN the necessary Rigor of the military Oeconomy is relaxed by an unbounded Indulgence to superior Officers, when supreme Orders are stripped of all their Meaning and Force, by the arbitrary Construction of those to whom they are directed, when the greatest Offenders, relying upon their affluent Fortunes and almighty Influence, shall be able to resist the united Demands of a whole People, crying for Vengeance, we can never be astonished at the Consequences which will follow. The Restraint of publick Awe will be removed, popular Displeasure despised, and our invaluable Possessions will be sacrificed to Indolence, Timidity, or private Revenge.—That this was our Case we had but too much Reason to apprehend, when such uncommon Circumstances of Delay protracted the Execution of a late Sentence so long. At last we find that neither Artifice nor Intreaty, Interest nor Power, can wrest from us that Victim to Justice which our Misfortunes require of us.—Whether we are to look upon any hidden Mover in this dark Labyrinth as antecedently guilty or no, we refer to the Deliberations of Parliament; and, waving all Assertions and Murmurs not sufficiently supported, shall acquiesce in the Result of their impartial Enquiries.

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MY Lord, you cannot do greater Justice to yourself, or Favour to your Friends, than by promoting, to the utmost of your Power, that Scrutiny we have recommended to you, that the Causes of our Disasters may no longer be concealed, nor their Authors escape with Impunity: May future Discoveries reflect an agreeable Light upon your Conduct, and restore you to that Esteem you once deservedly possessed. If these Reasonings are not founded on so exact a Knowledge of the inaccessible Situation of *St. Philip's*, or so accurate a Calculation of the Force of the two Squadrons as your Lordship obtained, we may expect you will confute them by an open Vindication; for Silence and Contempt will only confirm them.

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IT would be malignantly partial to have directed the popular Clamour against you, had not you invited this Address by the Talk you voluntarily undertook, in which you have advanced so little material, that the Admiral was indebted more to the Generosity of your Friendship than the Merit of your Evidence.

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To draw this Letter to a Conclusion; when the Actions of any Officer are not called to publick Account, it creates a strong and probable Presumption in his Defence: But there is a secret Judge in every human Breast, by which a brave Man would always wish to be approved. Honour erects a more equitable Tribunal; and its Decrees are irreversable. To stand acquitted there, it is necessary that every Prejudice and Exception, which tend to diminish the Fame of any Exploit, be cleared up and removed.

THOSE which lie against your Lordship are here faithfully related, without any groundless Aspersions or malicious Conjectures.—But it is too painful to dwell on this critical Subject any longer; may the Review of past Misfortunes animate us to a more vigorous Execution of future Measures. Our Enemies have longed triumphed in their perfidious Spoils, and reaped the Fruit of our Negligence and Misconduct.—The last dear Prizes are at Stake, our Possessions and our Being in the most critical Suspence.—Yet, when a wise and uncorrupted Administration sustains the arduous Offices of Government, when Valour and Integrity conduct our Arms, when our Commanders are recompensed with their just Deserts,—a brighter Prospect will dawn upon us; *Britain* may once more lift up her Head, her withered Laurels revive, and her Dominion over the Deep be re-assumed.—That the Infamy of our late Mismanagement may be effaced by the Steadiness of our Councils, and the Propriety of all our Measures; and that your Lordship may take an honourable and distinguished Part therein, is the sincere and ardent Wish of,

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MY LORD,
Your most obedient
Humble Servant.

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