

Jamaica 1st Oct. 1796

My Lord Duke

I am honored by your Grace's letter of the 12.th July, which relates to our sending the Maroons to Halifax, & also to the proposed removal of the 20.th Regiment of Light Dragoons. I am now to reply to what regards the Maroons: and in my following number I shall enter into the business of the 20.th

I should unquestionably have preferred the detaining of the Maroons in Port Royal Harbour, until Instructions should have arrived from your Grace, but the scarcity of all kinds of provisions, & an appearance of Famine, made it impossible to subsist them here. Immediately on their departure, Indian Corn rose in price from 10/ to 32/6 ^{per} Bushel.

R. Admiral Parker gave his consent to our using the Transports, for the purpose of conveying the Maroons to Halifax, but gave most powerful reasons why those Transports could not remain in the Harbour of Port Royal. The Temper of the Island was so justly irritated against those Maroons, that it would have been unsafe to have relanded them.

The Humanity of the measure, and not its severity, was another cause, which most powerfully operated. Those People, if relanded, must have remained in rigorous imprisonment.

To have allowed them to re-possess their
District

His Grace
The Duke of Portland Th. G.
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District of Country, or to have given them an opportunity of doing it, would have been madness, and in direct opposition to my orders & instructions from your Grace and Mr Dundas. The Maroons saw their situation, and were most impatient to leave the Country.

The Generosity of this Island has been unbounded. They have sent Commissioners to watch over their Comforts; to provide them in every thing necessary to their happiness: and to establish them at the sole expence of the Island Colony. - To have sent the Men without their Families, would have been cruel in the extreme. I must, however, impress on your Grace that no Maroon was sent off, excepting such as had been concerned in the rebellion; all who were innocent, were permitted to remain in the Island.

And now, My Lord, my Honor, my Character, and, I may say, my Glory, impel me to make some solemn Assertions: and, if I do not make every one of them good, to the minutest scruple, I surely can have no future claim to the Confidence of His Majesty, or my Country.

First, - If I have acted with rashness and intemperance, and plunged this Island into a War without due grounds; Or, that I could have avoided it, by any means consistent with the preservation of Jamaica.

Secondly, If I have compromised the Dignity of the CROWN, by wantonly, cruelly, & unwarrantably carrying on a War of Extirpation.

Thirdly

Thirdly, if I have, in the smallest degree, violated
Public Faith.

In either of these Cases I ought to be regarded as a dangerous Man, and unsafe to trust.
As to the First Point. Before His Majesty's Troops entered their District, those Maroons committed three most atrocious actions, which I construed into three Overt Acts of Rebellion. By chasing away the Superintendent, placed over them by Law, & threatening to kill him.

By setting fire to their Towns, and also the King's House in that District (so named by being the Residence of the Superintendent)

By attacking and killing His Majesty's Soldiers, sent to secure the Peace, & to re-establish the quiet of the Country. — These were my Reasons for entering their Lands in an hostile manner.

As to the Second Point. — The Maroons carried on a War of Extirpation against us. They murdered every white person who fell into their power; they put to death all their Prisoners; and they took an oath, to spare no white person whatsoever.

As to the Third Point. Did the Maroons comply with one Article of their Proposals, which was accepted as a Treaty? — I say, not one Item of it.

My Lord, I think I have as competent a knowledge of the British Constitution, as any Officer in ~~the~~ my Line of Service. I know that Humanity, Benignity, and Mercy, are the ornaments of the British Crown.

I also know how intimately they are interwoven into the Texture of our Government. I hope and trust these may ever be my rule of Action as a Governor. But, where I have supported those Principles, where I have offended none of them, nor even erred, - I dare to shew the spirit of a determined and an upright Man. And I call upon the Justice of your Grace to vindicate my character, and to give it to the World with the Stamp that belongs to it.

I court Investigation. I think it may be demanded elsewhere; and I stand pledged to answer those three points: to which I trust His Majesty's Ministers will confine their production of Papers. For, as to any Reports or Speculations which I may have ventured to have given, I do not think those can be produced without wounding that confidence which Governors ought to repose in the liberal Sentiments of those who act under His Majesty's commands, & from His Executive Government.

My Lord, altho' I have saved the Island, it is of the highest importance to me, to prove to His Majesty that I have done it by means strictly honorable; and that I have not extinguished this Rebellion, as Gulliver did the Flames of the Palace of Lilliput.

I have the Honor to remain
Your Grace's faithful
humble servant

Belsham

I add, as a Postscript, to shew to your Grace; that this Country has barely acted up to it's self-preservation; and also to shew the Danger this Island would have stood exposed to, had we relaxed in any Point.

The Arms which the Maroons gave up are good for nothing. It now appears, that they left in the Wood other Arms; & my conjecture is not unnatural, that they left the good, and brought in the bad. We have reason to believe this; as near one hundred Runaway Negroes have lately appeared in Arms: they had the Address to conceal themselves for a long space of time after the conclusion of the Maroon War. Forty of them were lately seen in a body; they put to death one Man; but they enquired most earnestly of other Negroes, if the Maroons were really sent away; and upon receiving assurances that it was so, they declared - that they would never molest the Whites. Is not this an Indication, that the Maroons left this as a rallying Point, in case this Island had been so weak as to have given them the opportunity of repairing the error they committed in beginning their rebellion too soon.

One Effect of our success has been, that the Negroes hold us in high estimation, having conceived that the Maroons were not only invincible, but invulnerable.

From our late Intelligence, it is evident, that the Plots of the Enemy against Jamaica were getting into maturity. And perhaps it is not a wild Idea, that their Plans are rendered abortive by the unexpected reduction of the Maroons, & their Measure thereby frustrated.

I close this business, by sending to your Grace
a Letter from Cap. Gillespie to myself, which I beg
may be added to those already sent.

The Justification of my Conduct begins only
with the commencement of Hostilities. My Responsibility
does not go back to the causes of those hostilities.
But, this Letter, with the Mess forwarded by me,
as well as the Intelligence which His Majesty's
Ministers received from other quarters, ought
to carry conviction to Men's minds, that this War
had its origin in French Principles, & the unjustifiable
mode of warfare adopted in these Islands by the
Ruling Power in France. And, of whatever Nature
the Spark might have been, that set fire to the
combustibles, the Maroon War had not its origin
in the killing of a Pig: nor the consequent
violence against the Magistrates of Montego
Bay, for having sentenced two Maroon Criminals
to receive a punishment for that offence; those
culprits having been regularly tried according
to the Laws of the Land, and duly convicted.

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2 Jamaica 1st Oct. 1796

Lord Balcarras

to

the Duke of Portland

In justification of
the Maroon War

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1 Enclosure