

**Richard Bland to Unknown, 1757, Signed "Philo Patria",
Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers.
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FROM COLONEL RICHARD BLAND? ¹

Quilibet Nautarum vectorumque tranquillo Mari gubernare potest; ubi orta saeva tempestas est, ac turbato Mari rapitur Vento Navis, tum Viro et gubernatore opus est.

LIV. L. 24, N. 8.

SIR

I give you many Thanks for your Observations on the Dispute which is likely to arise between the Virginia Centinel and the Officers of the Forces employed on our Frontiers. But you must permit me to tell you, that the Reason you give to persuade me the Centinel has good Grounds for what he advances, appears to me, not to carry that Conviction with it, which most Things do, you have been used to communicate to me.

I do, indeed, approve very much, of the Centinel's Vigilancy; and am convinced he advances nothing, but what he thinks is right, and for the public Good; but yet, he certainly judges from the Appearances of things and not from the things themselves.

I confess I have a very good Opinion of most of the Officers: they have given sufficient Proofs of their Resolution in their Country's Cause; and their moral Characters, I must believe are unexceptionable. But Opinion shall never influence my Judgment; I will examine Facts, and from them discover Truths, which the Centinel may not have

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adventured to; if he had, I am certain, he would have set them forth, to the public View, in much more proper and lively Colors, than I can pretend to do.

If what I may say should give Offence to any, for I give you free Liberty to communicate it, tell them, that I have the Honour to be a British Subject; and, under that glorious Character, enjoy the Privileges of an Englishman, one of which, is to examine, with Freedom, our public Measures, without being liable to the Punishments of French Tyrany; and, if I think proper, to expose those public Errors which have had too long a Course, and which have been blindly embraced by many, as the most true Opinions. Be that as it will, you are my Friend, and in that Quality, I am going to tell you, my Thoughts of the present Conjunctions, so far as they concern my dear Country.

And I pretend to shew you, as clear as the Day, that the unhappy Situation of our public Affairs, is not to be imputed to the Persons, to whom the executive Power of the Government is committed nor to the Officers appointed to command upon our Frontiers; but that it arises from another Cause: a Cause which I really, am unwilling to name; but which the Truth forces me, not to conceal.

You must excuse me; if I remind you of several Transactions, with which you are acquainted, but which I am obliged to recapitulate that I may give you a just & honest Resolution to this Controversy.

And you, who are so well acquainted with History, know that from the Reign of Lewis the XIVth., the French have been particularly attentive, to gain the Superiority of the English, in North America; and have been constantly flinging Men into Canada & Louisiana.

Some Writers, perhaps of no great Esteem in other Respects, pointed out, with a kind of prophetic Spirit, the fatal Consequences of this Conduct to the British Plantations. But they were not regarded; nor was any Notice taken of the French Designs 'til about three years ago; when the Governor received a Letter from the Earl of Holderness one of his Majesty's

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Principal Secretaries of State, informing him of these Designs, and giving him particular Instructions how to conduct himself.

In Consequence of these Instructions, the Governor sent out Major Washington, to discover whether the French had made any Encroachments on this Colony; and if they had, to desire them to withdraw: and calling the General Assembly, he laid before them the Earl of Holderness's Letter, and demanded from the Burgesses, such Supplies as would enable him to put the Royal Instructions, effectually, into Execution; but this Information was treated as Chimerical, and without Foundation and the Burgesses peremptorily refused to grant any Supplies.

Major Washington returned, with a Letter from the French Commandant, in which he declared, he had taken Possession of the Lands on the Ohio; and was determined to hold them for his Master the French King. The Governor laid this Letter before the Burgesses and desired, with great Earnestness, such Assistance as would enable him to frustrate the Attempts of the French, now become visible, and apparent. But he could obtain only £10.000 which was put under the Direction of a Committee, the Burgesses not being willing to entrust the Administration with the Disposition of it.

With this Supply, between 3 and 4 hundred Men were raised, under the Command of Colonel Fry; but, upon his Death, the Command was given to Major Washington who was made a Colonel, and conducted the Expedition with Courage and Resolution; but, being attacked, on his March, by above 900 French and Indians, he was overborn by Numbers; and tho' he lost the Day, he acquired the Character of a good Officer, and a brave Soldier; and, with the other Officers, received the Public Notice of their Country for their gallant Behaviour.

This Defeat obliged the Governor to demand fresh Supplies; and the Burgesses granted £20,000 under the direction of a Committee. With this Sum, about 500 Men were raised, to

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reinforce General Braddock, who was arrived, from England, with a Body of British Troops to the Assistance of the Colony.

That General, being attacked, by the French, in his Passage over the Monongehala, was defeated. The Virginians, in this Action fought like Lions, and behaved with prodigious Valour; they bravely stood the severest Fire from the Enemy; and after the Flight of the British Regulars, brought off the wounded General, who would otherwise have fallen into the most barbarous and savage Hands. Colonel Washington, acted as Aid de Camp to the General, and distinguished himself very remarkably, and with the other Officers, surviving this bloody Carnage, received, a second time peculiar Tokens of Regard from the General Assembly.

This Defeat flung the whole Colony into the ut most Consternation, which was increased by Parties of the Enemy committing the most cruel and horrid Ravages, upon the Frontiers, which were left defenceless by Colonel Dunbar, who retiring with the Remains of the British Troops, made all possible Expedition to get into Winter Quarters.

And now, that noble Ardour, which ought to have inflamed every Breast with Resentment and Indignation against the inhuman Invaders of our Country; That Zeal, which ought to have animated every Patriot Spirit to revenge the Robberies, Plunderings, Massacres, Burnings and Rapes with which the Frontiers were filled, were not to be found. Most Men were agitated with unaccountable Terrors; all Thoughts of an Offensive War were laid aside; Fort du Quesne was looked upon, as an impregnable Fortress; And no Considerations could prevail with the Majority of the Burgesses to grant more than £40.000 under the same Directions as the former Supplies, for subsisting 1200 Men, to act upon the Defensive only. And so entirely had this strange Panic taken Possession that the Government was restrained from marching any Part of the "Militia, or causing them to be marched, more than five Miles beyond where the Inhabitants of this Colony shall be settled on the Western Frontiers."

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Nor could a Proposition, sent from New-York, for a Union of the Colonies against the French, which the Governor communicated to the Burgesses, divert them from their favorite System. They refused to be concerned in this Union and employed their whole Attention, to secure the Country on the Eastern Side of the Allegany Mountains by a Chain of Forts from Cape Capon to Mayo River.

From this short Detail of our public Transactions, for the Truth of which I appeal to the Burgesses Journals, and to the Acts that have passed at the several Sessions of the General Assembly since November 1753, the Cause of the present unhappy Situation of our public Affairs, so far as they concern the French Invasion may, in my Opinion be easily discovered.

In a British Government, where the Laws controul even the Sovereign's Power, it is impossible that military Enterprizes can be carried on with Advantage without a proper Assistance from those who are intrusted with the Disposition of the People's Money. If the Supplies, necessary to give Life and Vigour to our Arms, are refused or granted with too much Frugality, we must never expect to succeed against an Enemy subject to a despotic Prince, who can dispose of the Lives and Fortunes of his Subjects as he pleases

The Government was convinced of this, and in order to facilitate the new Scene that was just opening upon us, was desirous to act with Resolution and Magnanimity; but this was not in their Power, without proper Supplies. Supplies were indeed granted, but with so frugal a Hand, and in so peculiar a Manner as not to answer any kind of Purpose.

Ten thousand pound was first given, to dispossess a politic and powerful People, who were perfecting a favorite Scheme, they had been planning for more than half a Century. This Sum was found insufficient and 20,000 pound was granted; but this would not do; the Enemy was too strong and too well secured to be beaten out, by such a trifling Supply; then only 40,000 pound could be obtained, to raise 1200 Men, tho' General Braddock had just been beaten with more than twice that Number. The Men raised upon this Supply

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could not restrain the Ravages of the Enemy; Then Forts were thought of, which have proved an ineffectual Barrier against the Enemy, but will be a certain Means impoverish the People. Thus have we gone on blundering, 'til we are become the Derision of the Enemy, and seem to be sunk in Oblivion, and forgot by our Mother Country.

The Government cannot be blamed; whoever reads the Speeches to the several General Assemblies since the beginning of these Troubles, must be of this Opinion. I am no Flatterer and want no favour; but the Truth shall always prevail with me.

The Officers are as little culpable; what can they do? Are not the greatest Part of the Forces under their Command, composed of the Militia drafted out of the Northern Counties, and are they not restrained from marching more than five miles beyond where the Inhabitants of this Colony shall be settled to the Westward? Can they be compelled to march beyond these Limits? the Law is plain that they cannot, and if the Officers attempt to lead them further, the men may, legally, refuse to obey Is it not evident, that as the Inhabitants abandon the Frontiers, and it is well known that they abandon them very fast, the Officers are more and more circumscribed in their Boundaries? Besides the Forts are to be garrisoned, and consider, I beseech you; the Figure 1,200 Men must make, dispersed upon so extensive a Frontier as ours is Nothing in my Opinion can, nothing ought to be expected from the Officers, under such a Regulation. The French and their Indians are secured in Forts at a great Distance; those, of them, who commit such Havock amongst us, are small Parties, sent out, like Wolves from their lurking Dens, and are scarce ever to be met with; when they are, I think, we have no Reason to accuse our Officers of Pusillanimity. In short, can it be possible, that Officers, who have, heretofore, behaved with remarkable Courage and Resolution; who have marched over vast Mountains; supported with invincible Patience, the rudest Fatigues; and shewed the most intrepid Valour in the greatest Dangers, and the warmest Desire to preserve their Country; I say, can these Officers so far forget their Duty and themselves, as to sacrifice that Character, they have so justly acquired; that solid Glory, that results from noble Actions, to idle Entertainments; extravagant Gaming, and glittering Pageantry. Such a

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Reflection is too improbable, and too illnated to gain Credit even with the most invidious and malevolent; and I am certain it can make no Impression on you, who think so justly and are not to be influenced by party Prejudice.

Thus have I, my Friend, given you my Thoughts upon our public Affairs. The Prospect is gloomy! the Errors great! but I hope; not irretrievable: a Field of Glory is yet open to our View; if we will but enter upon it, and play the Men; if we will behave, as becomes true Sons of Britain, we may recover our Reputation and deliver our Country.

The Earl of Loudoun, like another Fabius, is watching the Motions of the French to the Northward: and all the Northern Colonies are in Motion to assist him. and shall that Colony which calls itself² the most dutiful and loyal; which has been so frequently fired with Resentment and Indignation at the Encroachments and Depredations of the French; and offered the Lives and Fortunes of it's People to defend his Majesty's just Rights; shall the eldest, and, I am persuaded, the richest Sister of all the British Colonies, sit supine and negligent; and, like a proud Boaster be only big in Words, while her younger Sisters are gaining Laurels in the Field, and Creidt and Reputation with their common Sovereign? No, my Friend! let it not be said; but let yours and every Patriot Spirit be roused and really fired with Resentment and Indignation against the cruel Ravagers of their Country. Let us not be persuaded, that the French have any Pretense of Title to the Lands which they have so unjustly taken possession of; But let us give, freely and liberally, such Supplies, as will enable the Government, to act with Spirit and Resolution, and, at *last* least to attack, with success, Fort Du Quesne; that Source from whence all our present Evils flow. By a vigorous Effort, on this Side, early in the Spring, we shall oblige the French to divide their Forces, and thereby give real Assistance to Lord Loudoun, by preventing them from turning their whole Force against him, or, we shall be certain of Success, against that Fort, which will be, to this Colony, an ivaluable Acquisition. Let us leave the Government to act as it will; at least, let us try them for one Year; Let us shake off all Diffidence & Suspicion; and take off all Restrictions. Let their Power over the Militia be as extensive

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as the Service requires. and let them, if they think proper, offend and distress the Enemy. Believe, my Friend, the Operations of War are not to be conducted as common Affairs. Generals and Commanders of Armies, must be left to act as they find it most expedient for their Country's Interest. These few Observations will, I doubt not, have their proper Weight with you, as they come from your Friend, and, what perhaps may have a greater Influence in this Case, one of your Electors. Your good Sense will improve upon them, and, I hope at your next Meeting, we shall hear of nothing, but a laudable Emulation, to discharge your Duty to your King and Dear Bleeding Country, with Honour, Reputation and Disinterestedness.

I am, very sincerely Sir Your very affectionate Servant PHILO PATRIA.

1 This very interesting manuscript is without address and anonymous, but upon the back is inscribed in Washington's handwriting, "Written It is supposed by Colo. Richard Bland 1756."

2 "See the Addresses of the House of Burgesses in Answer to the Governor's Speeches at the opening of the several General Assemblies from the Year 1753."—A note upon the original manuscript by its author.