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**N**OTHING is more scandalous when the distresses of this unfortunate country are talked of, than to say our neighbours are in a worse condition than ourselves. Such a consolation is perfectly similar to the comfort which was once offered to a confided debtor, who was desired not to mind his misfortunes, because an intimate acquaintance of his, lately convicted of a highway robbery, was then ordered for speedy execution.

It is the great misfortune of the French to suffer for the guilt of their forefathers; their liberty is lost, and their situation is beyond the reach of relief. But the case is widely different with the people of Great-Britain; they are free, and have a right to expect, nay, to require, that their public concerns shall be conducted in the manner, most likely to promote their evident prosperity. If this is not done, it is their right to interpose for the dismissal, controul, or even punishment of Ministers, whose negligence, or whose tyranny, endangered the public happiness of the kingdom. Mismanagement in other countries is no excuse for mismanagement in this, nor can the miseries of any neighbouring nation ever afford satisfaction to the benevolent bosom of an Englishman.

But though we have heard so much about the distresses of other nations, it does not, from the conduct of any, if we except only the people of France, appear that our neighbours are really in a deplorable state. Ten years are elapsed since the conclusion of the late peace, and the Manilla-Ransom is yet unpaid. Nay, Portugal, the creature of our hands, the dependent upon our immediate bounty, violates her treaties with us, and promotes her own partial interests, at the notorious expence of her Protector. Whatever the real situation of our neighbours, therefore, may be, it is obvious that they entertain no very high idea of ours, or they would not thus hazard a rupture with us, in the open face of Europe. As to France, she is a known deceiver in politics, and has often meditated a blow against this kingdom, when she herself appeared to be undone. Who that knows any thing of history, can be ignorant how Lewis the Fourteenth kept the united universe at bay, when seemingly tottering on the verge of destruction; and found continual resources within himself to baffle the utmost efforts of his enemies. Let us think of these things, and let us also recollect, that notwithstanding the present imaginary ruin of the French, they have been some time industriously collecting a force at the Island of Mauritius, which is probably intended for a more important purpose than a settlement on Madagascar, though even a settlement on Madagascar is a circumstance which we should prevent by every means in our power. Portugal above all things requires our particular attention; their proceedings have of late been uniformly injurious to us in a variety of ways, and as ungratefully favourable to the trade of our enemies; so that, if we should be again plunged into another war, there can be no foundation for supposing she will not take an active part against us. In all other parts of Europe we are wholly without a friend, but such as we must purchase on terms manifestly prejudicial; at the same time, that discontent is raging in England, Ireland, and America; that our affairs are in an evident state of disorder in the East-Indies, that population is declining from the insupportable weight of taxes, and the whole system of national resource greatly impaired, so as to leave us almost hopeless in the future day of exigence.

This picture, Mr. Printer, is no flattering representation of our comparative superiority in the political ballance of Europe; and should animate us to the utmost exertions, in order, as much as possible, to become prepared for the hour of calamity.---But instead of turning their labours to these essential objects of national felicity, the sole struggle of our Patriots is to harrass the Administration; every truly great principle of public good is sacrificed to personal resentment, or interested ambition, and instead of complaining that Government does no more for our preservation, it is really surprising how, amidst the endless wantonness of opposition, they have been able to do so much.---The whole business of Parliament is now a private quarrel about places; the Sessions opens, and the Minister is attacked; the attack produces a defence; the defence opens fresh sources of accusation, and the Prerogation arrives before any thing of consequence can possibly be done for the real advantage of the people.

From the specimens which we have received of Lord North's abilities since his appointment to the Treasury, in re-establishing an intercourse with America; in abrogating Parliamentary Privilege to the Servants of Members; in electing Representatives during the periods of recess, and in regulating the mode of deciding upon contested Elections, the most flattering consequences are to be expected; if he is only allowed what the Sportsmen term *fair play*, by the Hounds of Opposition. But if he is to be *torn down* the instant he suggests any measure for the general welfare, or to be eternally pursued with a personal cry, merely because he is a Minister, it will not be in his power, it will not be in any Minister's power, treated thus unfairly, to retrieve our finances from confusion.---An Administration there *must* be, and opposition for the sake of opposition, may make the government cautious not to give any *new* cause of complaint; yet it will wholly incapacitate the servants of the Crown, from effectually establishing the security of the People.

The determination with respect to General Warrants; Mr. Printer, is universally considered as an important acquisition in the favour of Liberty, yet is by no means so essentially valuable to the subject, as the abrogation of Parliamentary Privilege in cases of debt.---An individual suffered perhaps occasionally by General Warrants, but thousands were hourly injured by the privilege, in cases of debt.---And it is really surprizing, that the present reign should be considered as oppressive by popular declaimers, since no period in our History can shew more instances of exalted attention to the public freedom.---It is fashionable to celebrate the late Prince, by way of reflecting on his successor, but good and venerable as George the Second really was, were the Judges made independent in his time?---Were General Warrants pronounced illegal in his time?---Was Parliamentary Privilege contracted in his time, or was the Press in his time tolerated with a licence unlimited? Our Patriots will feel the force of these Questions, whatever Answer they may think proper to make, and I shall have justice from their hearts, though their tongues may reproach me with being a Ministerial Hireling.

A R T H U R H A S L E R I G.

Notes on the “Letter to Printer” (i.e., letter to editor) by Arthur Haslerig, 22 August 1771

1. This is Arthur, son of Sir Robert and Sarah (Walter) Haslerig, of London. At Robert’s death, he became 9<sup>th</sup> Bt. The letter was reprinted in Benjamin Franklin’s newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 Dec 1771 (as shown here); perhaps also elsewhere, including Boston, where Arthur’s mother, Lady Sarah, had a house on Milk Street.
2. As context to the letter, remember that governmental politics in England during the 1760s and early 1770s were tumultuous for internal as well as external reasons. George III succeeded in 1760. He was somewhat at the mercy of on-going contests between Tories and Whigs for the formation of ministerial governments, with power switching back and forth rather quickly. Another matter was the Seven Years War, in which Britain finally defeated France, leading to settlement by the Treaty of Paris in 1763 (followed closely by the Proclamation of 1763). Britain became the dominant colonial power in North America and in India. During the last years of the Seven Years War, Britain also tangled with Spain, including an expedition to the Philippines as a result of which Manila and a seaport were captured and occupied (1762-64) by the British. The expedition was led by General William Draper and Admiral Samuel Cornish. Having captured a Spanish galleon and other booty, the British demanded a ransom from Spain. This was probably motivated mainly as a personal reward for Draper and Cornish, in which London acquiesced since the ransom could be used to pay expenses as well as personal reward (not uncommon practice at the time, a sort of official piracy). The ransom was never paid, as Spain refused. Moreover, there were other and much more pressing matters in ministerial government in London, so the claim got little attention. But for many people the failure to enforce “the Manilla ransom” was a serious lapse. In his *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green, 1882, vol. 3, p. 83) William Edward Hartpole Lecky, describing various proceedings of ministerial governments during the 1760s that were not “fitted to add to their popularity,” added: “Their tame acquiescence in the Spanish refusal to pay the Manilla Ransom offended bitterly the national pride.” In the same year that Arthur published his letter, Samuel Johnson published an essay, “Thoughts on the late Transactions respecting Falkland’s Islands,” in which he refers to the upset over “the Manilla ransom.”<sup>1</sup> The episode remained an issue in domestic politics for some time.
3. Arthur’s citation of “Portugal, the creature of our hands,” was probably a reference to the fact that Britain supported Portugal after it won independence from Spain in 1640. This support was enhanced by the fact that Charles II had married a member of Portugal’s royal House of Braganza, Catherine; but the support continued after Charles, mainly because of the continuing contest between Britain and Spain. No doubt the Portuguese people would (then as now) object to Arthur’s attribution, “creature of our hands.”
4. The term “prorogation” refers to the close of business of a parliamentary session before the term of the parliament had ended. Presumably all business has been finished, so the parliament

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<sup>1</sup> The essay is found in various places in different editions of Johnson’s collected works—e.g., pp. 96-141 of vol. 8 of *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, edited by Arthur Murphy (London, 1810).

is “prorogued”; it may be called back into session, however, under certain specified conditions and rules, until and unless its term ends (i.e., a new election is called for).

5. Arthur’s apparent defense of Lord North (Frederick North, prime minister since 1770) is understandable at least in the sense of “give the guy a chance.” Hindsight is unavoidable, of course; but one could nonetheless argue that it was clear enough by 1771 that Lord North was not the most adept at dealing with matters of those “rancorous colonists.”