

5th January 1793 letter from Burns to Graham

Dumfries, 5th January 1793

Sir,

I am this moment honored with your letter; with what feelings I received this other instance of your goodness, I shall not pretend to describe.

Now to the charges which Malice & Misrepresentation have brought against me. It has been said, it seems, that I not only belong to, but head a disaffected party in this place. I know of no party in this place, either Republican or Reform, except an old party of Borough-Reform, with which I never had any thing to do. Individuals, both Republican & Reform, we have, though not many of either; but if they have associated, it is more than I have the least knowledge of; & if there exists such an association, it must consist of such obscure nameless beings, as precludes any possibility of my being known to them, or they to me.

I was in the playhouse one night, when *Ca ira* was called for. I was in the middle of the pit, & from the Pit the clamour arose. One or two individuals with whom I occasionally associate were of the party, but I neither knew of the Plot, nor joined in the Plot; nor ever opened my lips to hiss, or huzza, that, or any other Political tune whatever. I looked on myself as far too obscure a man to have any weight in quelling a Riot; at the same time, as a character of higher respectability, than to yell in the howlings of a rabble. This was the conduct of all the first Characters in this place, & these Characters know, & will avow that such was my conduct. I never uttered any invectives against the king. His private worth, it is altogether impossible that such a man as I, can appreciate; and in his Public capacity, I always revered, & ever will, with the soundest loyalty, revere, the Monarch of Great-Britain, as, to speak in Masonic, the sacred KEYSTONE OF OUR ROYAL ARCH CONSTITUTION.

As to REFORM PRINCIPLES, I look upon the British Constitution, as settled at the Revolution, to be the most glorious Constitution on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame; at the same time, I think, & you know what High & distinguished Characters have for some time thought, that we have a good deal deviated from the original principles of that Constitution; particularly that an alarming System of Corruption has pervaded the connection between the Executive Power & the House of Commons. This is the Truth, the Whole truth of my Reform opinions; opinions which, before I was aware of the complection of these innovating times, I too unguardedly (now I see it) sported with; but henceforth I seal up my lips. However, I never dictated to, corresponded with, or had the least connection with, any political association except, that when the Magistrates & principal inhabitants of this town, met to declare their attachment to the Constitution, & their abhorrence of Riot, which declaration you would see in the Papers, I as I thought my duty as a

Subject at large, & a Citizen in particular, called upon me, subscribed the same declatory Creed.

Of Johnston, the publisher of the Edinburgh Gazetteer, I know nothing. One evening in company with four or five friends, we met with his prospectus which we thought manly & independant; & I wrote to him, ordering his paper for us. If you think that I acted improperly in allowing his Paper to come addressed to me, I shall immediately countermand it. I never, so judge me, God! wrote a line of prose for the Gazetteer in my life. An occasional address, spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night here, which I called the Rights of Woman; I sent to the Gazetteer; as also, some extempore stanzas on the Commemoration of Thomson; both these I will subjoin for your perusal. You will see that they have nothing whatsoever to do with Politics. At the time when I sent Johnston one of these poems, but which one I do not remember, I inclosed at the request of my warm & worthy friend, Robert Riddell Esq. Of Glenriddell, a prose Essay, signed Cato, written by him, & addressed to the delegates for the County Reform, of which he was one of the County. With the merits, or demerits of that Essay I have nothing to do, farther than transmitting it in the same Frank, which Frank he had procured me.

As to France, I was her enthusiastic votary in the beginning of the business. When she came to shew her old avidity for conquest, in annexing Savoy, &c. to her dominions, & invading the rights of Holland, I altered my sentiments. A tipping Ballad which I made on the Prince of Brunswick's breaking up his camp & sung one convivial evening, I shall likewise send you, sealed up, as it is not every body's reading. This last is not worth your perusal; but lest MRS FAME should, as she has already done, use, & even abuse, her old privilege of lying, you shall be in the market of everything, le pour et le contre, of my political writings & conduct. This, my honored Patron, is all. To this statement I challenge disquisition. Mistaken Prejudice, or unguarded Passion, may mislead, & often have misled me; but when called on to answer for my mistakes, though I will say it, no man can feel keener compunction for his errors, yet. I trust, no man can be more superior to evasion or disguise.

I shall do myself the honor to thank Mrs Graham for her goodness, in a separate letter.

If, Sir, I have been so fortunate as to do away the misapprehensions of my conduct & character, I shall with the confidence which you were wont to allow me, apply to your goodness on every opening in the way of business, where I think, I, with propriety, may offer myself. An instance that occurs just now; Mr Mcfarlane, Supervisor of the Galloway District, is & has been for some time, very ill. I spoke to Mr Mitchell as to his wishes to forward my application for the job, but though he expressed & ever does express every kindness for me, he hesitates, in hopes that the disease may be of short continuance. However, as it seems to be a paralytic

affliction, I fear that it may be some time before he can take charge of so extended a District. There is a great deal of fatigue, & very little business in the District; two things suitable enough to my hardy constitution, & inexperience in that line of life. I have the honor to be, Sir, your ever grateful & highly obliged humble servant
Rob^t. Burns