

December 1792 letter from Burns to Graham of Fintry.

"Sir,—I have been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr. Mitchell, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board, to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to Government.

"Sir, you are a husband and a father. You know what you would feel to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence.

"Alas! sir, must I think that such soon will be my lot! and from the dark insinuations of hellish, groundless envy, too! I believe, sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head; and I say, that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached. You, sir, have been much and generously my friend.—Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you. Fortune, sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent—has given you patronage, and me dependence. I would not, for my single self, call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye. I would brave misfortune—I could face ruin, for at the worst Death's thousand doors stand open; but the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve courage and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due. To these, sir, permit me to appeal; by these may I adjure you, to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which—with my latest breath I will say it—I have not deserved. R. B."