

Extract of a Letter of the 29th of January 1747, from Mr. Henry Thompson, Agent for Prisoners of War at Kinsale, to the Commissioners for Sick and Wounded Seamen, &c.

Great is my Concern to render you the Account of the melancholy Accident which has happened here.

The Night before last, between the Hours of Eleven and Twelve, an accidental Fire broke out in the Back-return of the large old Prison, in the lower Apartment, which so quickly communicated the Flames, the Whole was on a Blaze in a few Moments, and all Endeavours to extinguish it timely proved vain; the major Part of the Prisoners being asleep, many, alas too many, have perished.

I was my self, as usual, the Close of the Evening, in those Apartments, and repeated my Caution and Orders to have the Fire and Lights all out at Eight; at Eleven, the Turnkey was his Rounds, and every Thing very safe and orderly, and had not many Minutes returned to his Room, when the dreadful Alarm was given; when I immediately run into the Prison, and seeing the Flames so far advanced, endeavoured to save as many Souls as possible, by opening the Prison Doors, and ordering them all to follow me into the Street, to the Number of near Six Hundred; being assisted with the Guards, they were conducted to the other Castle Prison, without the Escape, as I believe, of a single Man.

This done, all Endeavours were then used to subdue the Fire, and save, if possible, the adjoining large Prison; for indeed such a Storm of Wind and Rain I scarce ever have seen; and the Sparks and Flames flew so far, I expected one Quarter of the Town would have been laid in Ashes, and my own House not a Hundred Yards off.

I as early as possible sent and acquainted Mr. Fearn of my Misfortune, to whom the Town, as well as me, owns the greatest Obligations, for by his Direction, and Assistance of his People and Water Engine, incredible Damages were in a great Measure prevented.

The Officers Prison joyning the said Back-return, was on Fire, and is partly pulled down, but extinguish'd by Six in the Morning; the large Prison Roof much damaged, &c. the Particulars of which hope you'll now pardon me, being greatly disordered from the Injuries I that unhappy Night received, but have this pleasing Consolation, let what will happen to me, that I was Instrumental in saving many Lives, at the utmost Peril of my own.

Yesterday Morning I called out all these Prisoners into an open Field, where I kept them some Hours to air them, being a fine Day; and upon a correct Muster, 54 were missing, which I believe all perished; and 25 were that Night conveyed to Hospitals, with broken Limbs, scorched and burnt; already 39 Remains of Bodies are found in the Ruins, and interred; the rest not yet come at, or quite consumed. Shall transmit you a further Account so soon as possible, I can collect my Books and Papers, which were disconcerted in order to be saved.

The inclosed Letter from my Body of Prisoners will, I hope, convince you I was not inactive upon this melancholy Occasion.

Copy of the Letter mentioned in the last Paragraph.

Monsieur,

TOUT icy nous convie à vous assurer de nos très humble Respects, et vous donner des Marques, par nos foibles Remerciments, de notre Reconnoissance pour le Service signalé que nous avons reçu de vous. Vous avez agi avec nous en Pere, permettez que nous vous rendions la Repesaille en Enfants reconnoissants, et Biens nés. Nous vous devons la Vie, et nous sommes incapables dans l'Etat present de nos Affaires de voies rendre le reciproque du'n Present si pretieux; mais, Monsieur, soiez persuadé que nous rendrons Comte en France, du Traitement humain que vous nous avez fait. Nous connoissons qu'un pareil Acte de Generosité de vôte Part, ne peut partir que d'une grande Ame; ainsy nous croirions nous devoir taxer de la plus noire des Ingratitudes, si nous oublions un pareil Bienfait. Nous ne trempons nullement dans l'affreux Desastre dont vous avez été le triste Temoin aussi bien que nous, et même nous l'abhorrons; un Portugais miserable en a seul été l'Auteur. Nous ne voulons point en faire Justice qu'il n'ait paru devant vous. Nous sommes prests a vous le livrer pour le punir selon son Crime, apres quoy nous vous supplions tous de nous le remettre, pour lui faire sentir à notre Plaisir, combien nous detestons un pareille Action.

*L. Texier,
Marseille,
Pierre Ozon,
Bouvard,
Rene Griot,
Dominique,
Le Monnier,
Belgarde,*

Au Nom de tous les Prisonniers.

Translation of the foregoing Letter.

Sir,

ALL here invite us to assure you, of our most humble Respects, and to give you Marks, by our poor Thanks, of our Acknowledgment for the signal Service we have received from you. You have behaved to us like a Father; permit us to make a Return like grateful and dutiful Children. We owe you our Lives, and are incapable, in the present State of our Affairs, to make you an equal Return for so precious a Present; But, Sir, be persuaded we shall give an Account in France of the humane Treatment we have received from you. We are sensible that such an Act of Generosity on your Part can only arise from a Greatness of Soul; We also think, we should be guilty of the blackest Ingratitude, if we should forget such a Benefit. We had not the least Hand in the dreadful Disaster, you have unhappily been Witness to as well as we; and we utterly abhor it. A wicked Portuguese was the sole Author of it. We will not do Justice upon him for it, till he has appeared before you. We are ready to deliver him to you, to be punished according to his Crime; after which, we all beg of you to return him to us, that he may be made sensible, in a Manner agreeable to our Inclination, how much we detest such an Action.

In the Name of all the Prisoners.