

Admiralty-Office, July 25, 1814.

Copy of a Letter from Captain Hillyar, of His Majesty's Ship Phœbe, to John Wilson Croker, Esq. dated in Valparaiso-Bay, March 30, 1814.

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to acquaint you, for the information of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that a little past three o'clock on the afternoon of the 28th instant, after nearly five months anxious search, and six weeks still more anxious look-out for the Essex and her companion*, to quit the port of Valparaiso, we saw the former under weigh, and immediately, accompanied by the Cherub, made sail to close with her: on rounding the outer point of the Bay, and hauling her wind for the purpose of endeavouring to weather us, and escape, she lost her main topmast, and afterwards, not succeeding in an effort to regain the limits of the port, bore up, and anchored so near the shore (a few miles to the leeward of it), as to preclude the possibility of passing a-head of her without risk to His Majesty's ships. As we drew near, my intention of going close under her stern was frustrated by the ship breaking off, and from the wind blowing extremely fresh, our first fire, commencing a little past four, and continuing about ten minutes, produced no visible effect. Our second, a few random shot only, from having increased our distance by wearing, was not apparently more successful, and having lost the use of our mainsail, jib, and mainstay, appearances were a little inauspicious: on standing again towards her, I signified my intention of anchoring, for which we were not ready before, with springs, to Captain Tucker, directing him to keep under weigh, and take a convenient station for annoying our opponent. On closing the Essex, at thirty-five minutes past five, the firing recommenced, and before I gained my intended position, her cable was cut, and a serious conflict ensued; the guns of His Majesty's ship gradually becoming more destructive, and her crew if possible more animated, which lasted until twenty minutes past six; when it pleased the Almighty Disposer of Events to bless the efforts of my gallant companions, and my personal, very humble one, with victory. My friend Captain Tucker, an officer worthy of their Lordships' best attentions, was severely wounded at the commencement of the action, but remained on deck until it terminated, using every exertion against the baffling winds and occasional calms which followed the heavy firing, to close near the enemy; he informs me that his officers and crew, of whose loyalty, zeal, and discipline, I entertain the highest opinion, conducted themselves to his satisfaction.

I have to lament the death of four of my brave companions, and one of his; with real sorrow I add, that my First Lieutenant, Ingrain, is among the number; he fell early, is a great loss to His Majesty's service; the many manly tears which I

* The following is an extract of another letter from Captain Hillyar to Mr. Croker, dated off Valparaiso, the 28th February:

"The Essex carries forty thirty-two pound carronades and six long guns, twelve-pounders; about three hundred and twenty or thirty men; the corvette twenty guns."

observed this morning, while performing the last mournful duty at his funeral on shore, more fully evinced the respect and affection of his afflicted companions, than any eulogium my pen is equal to. Our lists of wounded are small, and there is only one for whom I am under anxiety. The conduct of my officers and crew, without an individual exception that has come to my knowledge, before, during, and after the battle, was such as become good and loyal subjects, zealous for the honour of their much loved, though distant King and country.

The defence of the Essex, taking into consideration our superiority of force, the very discouraging circumstance of her having lost her main topmast, and being twice on fire, did honour to her brave defenders, and most fully evinced the courage of Captain Porter, and those under his command. Her colours were not struck until the loss in killed and wounded was so awfully great, her shattered condition so seriously bad, as to render further resistance unavailing.

I was much hurt on hearing that her men had been encouraged, when the result of the action was evidently decided, some to take to their boats, and others to swim on shore; many were drowned in the attempt; sixteen were saved by the exertions of my people, and others, I believe between thirty and forty, effected their landing. I informed Captain Porter, that I considered the latter, in point of honour, as my prisoners; he said the encouragement was given when the ship was in danger from fire, and I have not pressed the point. The Essex is completely stored and provisioned for at least six months, and although much injured in her upper works, masts and rigging, is not in such a state as to give the slightest cause of alarm, respecting her being able to perform a voyage to Europe with perfect safety; our main and mizen-masts and main-yard, are rather seriously wounded, these, with a few shot holes between wind and water, which we can get at without lightening, and a loss of canvas and cordage, which we can partly replace from our well stored prize, are the extent of the injuries His Majesty's ship has sustained.

I feel it a pleasant duty to recommend to their Lordships notice, my now Senior Lieutenant, Pearson, and Messrs. Allen, Gardner, Porter, and Daw, Midshipmen: I should do very great injustice to Mr. George O'Brien, the mate of the Emily, merchantman, who joined a boats crew of nine in the harbour, and pushed for the ship the moment he saw her likely to come to action, were I to omit recommending him to their Lordships; his conduct, with that of Mr. N. Murphy, Master of the English brig Good Friends, were such as to entitle them both to my lasting regard, and prove that they were ever ready to hazard their lives in their country's honourable cause. They came on board when the attempt was attended with great risk, and both their boats were swamped. I have before informed their Lordships, that Mr. O'Brien was once a Lieutenant in His Majesty's service (may now add, that youthful indiscretions appear to have given place to great correctness of conduct), and as he has proved his laudable zeal for its honour, I think, if restored, he will be found one of its