

111
Valley Forge Decemb 23. 1777.

Sir

Till as I was in my representation of matters in the Commissary's department yesterday, fresh and more powerful reasons oblig'd me to add, that I am now convinced beyond a doubt, that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place in that line this Army must inevitably be reduced to one or other of these three things. — Starve — dissolve — or disperse, in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can. rest assured, Sir, this is not an exaggerated picture, and that I have abundant reason to support what I say.

Yesterday afternoon receiving information that the Enemy, in force, had left the City, and were advancing towards Derry, with apparent design to forage and draw subsistence from that part of the Country, I order'd the Troops to be in readiness, that I might give every Opposition in my power, when behold! to my great mortification, I was not only inform'd, but convinc'd, that the Men were unable to stir on account of provision, and that a dangerous mutiny, begun the night before and which with difficulty was suppress'd by the spirited exertions of some Officers, was still much to be apprehended for want of this article.

This brought forth the only Commissary in the purchasing line in this Camp, and with him this melancholy and alarming truth, that he had

since the battle of Brandywine. — The first indeed we have now little occasion for, few men having more than one shirt — many only the moiety of one, and some none at all. In addition to which, as a proof of the little benefit received from a Cloathing General, and at the same time, as a farther proof of the inability of an Army under the circumstances of this, to perform the common duties of Soldiers, besides a number of Men confined to Hospitals for want of Shoes, & others in Farmers Houses on the same account, we have by a Return: return this day made, no less than 2898 Men now in Camp unfit for duty, because they are barefoot and otherwise naked; and by the same return it appears, that our strength in continental Troops, including the Eastern Brigades which have joined since the surrender of Gen^l Burgoyne, exclusive of the Maryland Troops sent to Wilmington, amount to no more than 8200 — in Camp fit for duty. Notwithstanding which, and that since the ^{1st} Instant our numbers fit for duty from the hardships and exposures they have undergone, particularly on account of Blankets

(numbers having been obliged and still are, to set up all night by fires, instead of taking comfortable rest in a natural and common way) have decreased ^{near} 2000 men, we find Gen^llemen without knowing whether the Army was really going into Winter quarters or not (for I am sure no Revolution of mine would warrant the Remonstrance) reprobating the measure much, as if they thought the Soldiers were made of Hocks or Bones, and equally insensible of Frost and Snow; and moreover, as if they conceived it easily practicable for an inferior Army under the disadvantages I have described ours to be, which is by no means exaggerated, to confine a Superior one, in all respects well appointed and provided for a Winter Campaign, within the City of Philadelphia, and to cover from depredation and waste the States of Pennsylvania, Jersey &c. But what makes this matter still more extraordinary in my eye is, that these very Gen^llemen, who were well apprized of the nakedness of the Troops from ocular demonstration, ^{who} thought their own Soldiers worse clad than others and advised me near a month ago, to postpone the execution of a plan I was

about to adopt in consequence of a Resolution of
Congress for raising & cloathing, under strong
assurances, that an ample supply would be
collected within a few days agreeable to a decree of
the late act one of articles of which, by the bye,
is yet void to hand, plan to think a winter
campaign, and the covering these States from
the invasion of an Enemy as easy and practicable
with a business as has been done here, but then
that this annual supply and yet distributing
things to draw Remonstrances in a comfortable
room by a good fire side, than to occupy a cold
bleak hole, and sleep under a pack of furs without
cloaths or blankets. However, although they seem
to have little fishing for the night and as-
torted beaver, that unfortunately for them
and from one foot pit to those rivers, which it
is neither in my power to relieve or prevent.
— It is for these reasons therefore, I have
dwell upon the subject, and it adds not a title
to any other defence than and destroy, to find that
much more is expected of us than is to be
to be performed, and that upon the ground of
safety and policy, I am oblig'd to conceal the
true state of the Army from the public view, and
thus to expose myself to detraction & calumny.

The Health Committee of Congress
want from Camp just petitioned of my continuing
under the disability out of this Army — The
necessity of supplies of Ammunition — Appointment
of Officers — How long you will be. There is
no ill-blame to be put on these subjects,
but refer to them, after adding a word or two
to show that the necessity of some better pro-
vision for binding the Officers by the type of
In kind to the service for a day, as necessary
as have passed without an offer of a resigned
Commission. Otherwise, I must doubt the
practicability of holding the Army together
much longer. — In this I shall probably be
thought more sincere, when I truly declare
that I do not expect to assist the
smaller benefit from any additional kind
that Congress may adopt, other more than
as a member of the Commission at large in
the good which has proceeded with result
from the increase, by making better Officers
and better Troops, and thereby to point
out the necessity of making the appointments
as a general interest without loss of time. —
We have not more than this month to
prepare a great deal of business in — of

we let these slip or waste, we shall be labouring under the same difficulties all next Campaign, as we have done this, to rectify mistakes, and bring things to order in military arrangements and movements, in consequence like the Mechanism of a Clock, will be imperfect, and disordered, by the want of a part. — In a very sensible degree, have I experienced this in the course of the last Summer — Several Brigades having no Brigadiers appointed to them till late & some not at all. — by which means it follows, that an additional weight is thrown upon the Shoulders of the Commander in Chief to withdraw his attention from the great line of his duty. — The Gentlemen of the Committee, when they were at Camp, talked of an expedient for adjusting these matters, which I highly approved and wish to see adopted, namely that two or three Members of the Board of War — or a Committee of Congress should repair immediately to Camp, where the best aid can be had, and with the Commanding Officer, or a Committee of his appointment, prepare and digest the most perfect plan, that can be devised for correcting

correcting all abuses - making new arrangements - considering what is to be done with the weak & debilitated Regiments (of the States to which they belong will not draft men to fill them, for as to intisting soldiers it seems to me to be totally out of the question) together with many other things that would occur in the course of such a conference: and after digesting matters in the best manner they can, to submit the whole to the ultimate determination of Congress. - If this measure is approved of, I would earnestly advise the immediate execution of it. and that the Cominpany General of purchases, whom I rarely see, may be directed to form Magazines without a moments delay in the Neighbourhood of this Camp in order to secure provision for us in case of bad weather. - The Quarter Master General ought also to be busy in his department - In short, there is as much to be done in preparing for a Campaign, as in the active part of it. In fine every thing depends upon the preparation that is made in the several departments in the course of this winter and the success or misforlunes of

of our Campaign will more than probably originate with our activity in supporting the Whigs
I have the honor to be

Sir
Your most obed^t Servant

J. Napier

Henry Lawson, Esq

Dec 22 1777

Lieut Genl Washington

Ms. A. 9. 2