

1838

# Washington's Writings: Review of The Writings of George Washington

N. Beverley Tucker

---

## Repository Citation

Tucker, N. Beverley, "Washington's Writings: Review of The Writings of George Washington" (1838). *Faculty Publications*. 1348.  
<http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1348>

## WASHINGTON'S WRITINGS.\*

The eleventh and twelfth volumes of this work have now made their appearance. These, which complete the series of the writings of Washington, are accompanied by the long expected first volume which contains his life.

We have already taken notice of the first five volumes which appeared, and we are happy to say that the high praise then bestowed on them, is, in great measure due to the rest of the series. We acknowledge, however, that, in some instances we have been disappointed. From some specimens of Mr. Sparks's judgment in selecting and his skill in arranging the documents in his hands, we had, perhaps, been led to expect too much in other instances. We cannot better illustrate the character and value of this work, than by giving somewhat in detail, the papers relating to a particular transaction. The reader will thus be enabled to see the sort of light which it sheds on the history of the past, and the insight which it affords into the character of Washington, and of some of those with whom he had to do. We allude particularly to the papers relating to an affair popularly known as the "Conway cabal." Of this (though the volume containing it has already passed under our

\* "The Writings of George Washington; being his Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and other Papers, official and private, selected and published from the Original Manuscripts: with a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustrations. By Jared Sparks. Boston: Russell, Odiorne & Metcalfe, and Hilliard, Gray & Co."

review) we beg leave to speak with some particularity. The public has heard much of this transaction, but has never before been permitted to look so closely into its details. That the general result was honorable to General Washington and disgraceful to his enemies, has often been proclaimed. The confidence of his countrymen in his virtues prepared them to receive this annunciation as just and true, but in doing this they rather acquiesced in the judgment of others than judged for themselves. The opportunity of thus judging is now afforded them. Unfortunately the number of those who have the means of acquiring the costly publication before us and the leisure to turn over its numerous pages is necessarily limited. There are thousands capable of investigating and understanding the subject who will not enjoy this advantage, and we trust that we may find favor with our readers, when we avail ourselves of this occasion to give them a nearer view of the transaction.

There was perhaps no event which conduced more to the successful conclusion of the revolutionary war, than the victory at Saratoga, and the consequent capture of Burgoyne. There had certainly been no affair before that time comparable to it for brilliancy, or for the importance of its results. Not only was the army which had so long hung on the northern frontier annihilated, but it was clearly shown that all attempts at invasion from that quarter must be fatal to the invaders. The attention of congress was no longer distracted by the necessity of resisting the efforts of the enemy to penetrate at once from the north and the south along the valley of the Hudson, and thus to effect a junction in the heart of the continent, and to cut off all communication between its eastern and western sections. Relieved from this double danger, men began to breathe more freely. In the splendor of the achievement they saw a glorious presage of ultimate success, and hailed it as the morning star of a day of triumphant liberty. The intelligence of this important event was the more striking because it was unexpected. It came like light shining out of a dark place. The remoteness of the scene and the tardiness of communication by land, had left the public in gloomy and boding ignorance of what was passing there. The news of the result preceded any knowledge of the causes which led to it, and its annunciation procured for General Gates a sudden burst of popularity which might have turned a sounder head.

At the same time the situation of General Washington was most unenviable. His unsuccessful attack on Germantown had just been made. The unfortunate affair of Brandywine had not long preceded it, and baffled and disheartened, he was preparing to withdraw his shattered and ineffective army to their inglorious winter-quarters at Valley Forge. Twelve months might be sup-

posed to have nearly obliterated the recollection of his brilliant but brief career of victory in the winter of '76-7, and men might have been excused for believing that nothing but the success of Gates saved him from destruction.

It was while he thus lay, incapable of doing anything to claim the favorable notice of the public, that the intrigue known by the name of the "Conway cabal" was set on foot. Its object was to dislodge him from his place in the confidence and service of the people, and to place General Gates at the head of the army. That officer was a soldier by profession, who had carried arms with honor to himself for more than twenty years. Beyond this, little was known of him besides his late brilliant achievement. Of the advantages and disadvantages of his situation when opposed to Burgoyne, the public had no means of judging. Everything was naturally presumed in his favor. It was not until the disastrous and disgraceful battle of Camden had stripped him of his laurels, that men began to reflect on the arduous character of the enterprise in which Burgoyne had been baffled. It was no less than an attempt to penetrate through the heart of a continent inhabited by a hardy and hostile yeomanry with arms in their hands. It was the spontaneous movement of these that cut off his retreat and hedged him around with difficulties, and drove him on his fate. He was caught in the cleft of the oak, and had no choice but to perish by famine, or to surrender at discretion.

But of all this, at the time, the world at large knew nothing. The whole merit of the achievement was attributed to the commander. He was the lion of the day; the theme of all eulogy, the object of universal admiration. Nothing was more natural than to suppose that the fickle voice of the multitude might claim for this new favorite the first place in the service of the public. The idea was caught at with avidity by many. This was especially the case with men whose aspiring and presumptuous ambition stood rebuked by the unpretending modesty of Washington, and with others whose loose morality quailed before his stern, uncompromising virtue. In each of these descriptions General Conway stood prominent. An Irishman by birth, and an adventurer by profession, he had in early life sought his fortunes in France, and devoted the prime of his manhood to the service of his country's enemies. The same spirit of adventure and quest of advancement led him to America, and hither he brought with him the taste and turn and talent for intrigue on which promotion so much depends in those ancient monarchies,

*"Where ladies interpose, and slaves debate."*

He was not slow to discover the unmeasured and vain-glorious ambition of General Gates, and anticipating his speedy advancement, determined

to secure his favor by being among the first to hail the dawn of his greatness, and to prognosticate its meridian splendor. His letters to Gates seem calculated to answer the double purpose of gaining his favor and stimulating his ambition. In confederacy with others of the same views, a party was formed in congress who contrived to procure the appointment of a board of war suited to their purposes, and anonymous letters were addressed to influential men everywhere, lauding the exploits of Gates, and arraigning the conduct of Washington. But the popularity of that extraordinary man was not of a nature to be dissipated by a puff of caprice, or a blast of adverse fortune. It rested on the universal conviction of his disinterestedness, his magnanimity, and his law-abiding devotion to the authority of congress, and to all the duties of his important trust. It rested too on the personal acquaintance of nearly all the leading men of the country, who had known him for more than twenty years as a model, not only of virtue, but of wisdom, sobriety, judgment, fortitude and firmness; in short, of all those great qualities from which alone success in great affairs can be confidently expected. The anonymous defamations addressed to these men were not merely thrown away; they were in several instances communicated directly to Washington himself, who was thus apprised of the intrigue which was going on. In all this there was nothing to indicate the parties to the conspiracy, but there was enough to rouse the sagacious vigilance of the commander-in-chief, and to enable him to draw conclusions from circumstances which might otherwise have demanded no notice.

It happened that about this time General Wilkinson mentioned, in a way which brought the fact to Washington, that Conway had written to Gates a letter containing these words: "Heaven has been determined to save your country, or a weak general and bad counsellors would have ruined it."

This was enough for Washington. He perfectly understood the characters of the men, and was at once *au fait* to the whole intrigue. His sagacity in detecting, and his address in exposing it, the dexterity with which he turned on General Gates his own arts and devices, convicting him on his own showing, of prevarication and falsehood, the withering sarcasm which is employed in the performance of this task, along with the delicate and self-respectful courtesy of his phraseology, and finally the calm magnanimity with which he forbears to press a disgraced and humbled adversary, present a study, of which they who would learn to "quarrel by the book," would do well to avail themselves. We doubt whether any more admirable composition can anywhere be found than the letter to General Gates, in which he plainly intimates that he does not believe him, and goes on to prove by an argument at once ingenious and

conclusive, that his incredulity was justified by the words and actions of the party himself.

But we are getting ahead of our story. Immediately on receiving the information abovementioned, Washington addressed a letter to Conway, apprising him that it had been received. This letter contained only these words:

"Sir: A letter which I received last night contained the following paragraph:

"In a letter from General Conway to General Gates, he says, 'Heaven has been determined to save your country, or a weak general and bad counsellors would have ruined it.'

I am, sir, your humble servant."

Having despatched this letter, Washington coolly awaited the result. It came in due time. No sooner does Gates hear of the affair than he writes to Conway, (of whom Washington takes no farther notice,) telling him he had learned that one of Conway's letters to himself had been copied, and begging to know which. To this inquiry Conway could give no answer, and Gates, with a trembling eagerness to know the worst, addresses a letter to Washington himself. The latter knew his man. His enemy had ventured from his covert, and he was resolved not to permit him to escape without something decisive. It happened that General Gates, wishing to make a parade of openness and sincerity, had sent a copy of his letter to congress, in consequence of which he received the reply through that body. These letters we beg leave to lay before the reader, as being more interesting and satisfactory than any abstract that we can give of them.

Horatio Gates to George Washington.

"Albany, 8th December, 1777.

"Sir: I shall not attempt to describe what, as a private gentleman, I cannot help feeling, on representing to my mind the disagreeable situation in which confidential letters, when exposed to public inspection, may place an unsuspecting correspondent; but, as a public officer, I conjure your excellency to give me all the assistance you can, in tracing out the author of the infidelity, which put extracts from General Conway's letters to me into your hands. Those letters have been stealthily copied; but which of them, when, and by whom, is to me as yet an unfathomable secret. There is not one officer in my suite, nor amongst those who have free access to me, upon whom I could, with the least justification to myself, fix the suspicion; and yet my uneasiness may deprive me of the usefulness of the worthiest men. It is, I believe, in your excellency's power to do me and the United States a very important service, by detecting a wretch who may betray me, and capitally injure the very operations under your immediate directions. For this reason, sir, I beg your excellency will favor me with the proof you can procure to that effect. But the crime being eventually so important, that the least loss of time may be attended with the worst consequences, and it being unknown to me, whether the

letter came to you from a member of congress or from an officer, I shall have the honor of transmitting a copy of this to the president, that the congress may, in concert with your excellency, obtain as soon as possible a discovery, which so deeply affects the safety of the states. Crimes of that magnitude ought not to remain unpunished. I have the honor to be, &c."

George Washington to the President of Congress.

*"Valley Forge, 4th January, 1778.*

"Sir: Unwilling as I am to add anything to the multiplicity of business, that necessarily engages the attention of congress, I am compelled by unavoidable necessity to pass my answer to General Gates through their hands. What could induce General Gates to communicate to that honorable body a copy of his letter to me is beyond the depth of my comprehension, upon any fair ground; but the fact being so, must stand as an apology for the liberty of giving you this trouble, which no other consideration would have induced me to take. With the greatest respect, sir, I am, &c."

George Washington to Horatio Gates.

*"Valley Forge, 4th January, 1778.*

"Sir: Your letter of the 8th ultimo came to my hands a few days ago, and to my great surprise informed me that a copy of it had been sent to congress, for what reason I find myself unable to account; but as some end doubtless was intended to be answered by it, I am laid under the disagreeable necessity of returning my answer through the same channel, lest any member of that honorable body should harbor an unfavorable suspicion of my having practised some indirect means to come at the contents of the confidential letters between you and General Conway.

"I am to inform you, then, that Colonel Wilkinson, on his way to congress in the month of October last, fell in with Lord Stirling at Reading, and, not in confidence that I ever understood, informed his aid-de-camp, Major McWilliams, that General Conway had written this to you: 'Heaven has been determined to save your country, or a weak general and bad counsellors would have ruined it.' Lord Stirling, from motives of friendship, transmitted the account with this remark: 'The enclosed was communicated by Colonel Wilkinson to Major McWilliams; such wicked duplicity of conduct I shall always think it my duty to detect.' In consequence of this information, and without having anything more in view than merely to show that gentleman, that I was not unapprised of his intriguing disposition, I wrote to him a letter in these words:

"Sir: A letter which I received last night, contained the following paragraph: "In a letter from General Conway to General Gates he says, '*Heaven has been determined to save your country, or a weak general and bad counsellors would have ruined it.*' I am, sir, &c."

"Neither this letter, nor the information which occasioned it, was ever directly or indirectly communicated by me to a single officer in this army out of my own family, excepting the Marquis de Lafayette, who, having been spoken to on the subject by Gen. Conway, applied for and saw, under injunctions of secrecy, the letter which contained Wilkinson's information; so desirous was I of concealing every matter that could, in

its consequences, give the smallest interruption to the tranquillity of this army, or afford a gleam of hope to the enemy by dissensions therein.

"Thus, sir, with an openness and candor, which I hope will ever characterise and mark my conduct, have I complied with your request. The only concern I feel upon the occasion, finding how matters stand, is, that in doing this I have necessarily been obliged to name a gentleman, who, I am persuaded, although I never exchanged a word with him upon the subject, thought he was rather doing an act of justice, than committing an act of infidelity; and sure I am, that, till Lord Stirling's letter came to my hands, I never knew that General Conway, whom I viewed in the light of a stranger to you, was a correspondent of yours; much less did I suspect that I was the subject of your confidential letters. Pardon me then for adding, that, so far from conceiving that the safety of the states can be affected, or in the smallest degree injured, by a discovery of this kind, or that I should be called upon in such solemn terms to point out the author, I considered the information as coming from yourself, and given with a friendly view to forewarn, and consequently to forearm me, against a secret enemy, or in other words, a dangerous incendiary; in which character, sooner or later, this country will know General Conway. But in this, as in other matters of late, I have found myself mistaken. I am, sir, your most obedient servant."

Horatio Gates to George Washington.

*"Yorktown, 23d January, 1778.*

"Sir: The letter of the 4th instant which I had the honor to receive yesterday from your excellency, has relieved me from unspeakable uneasiness. I now anticipate the pleasure it will give you, when you discover that what has been conveyed to you for an extract of General Conway's letter to me was not an information, which friendly motives induced a man of honor to give, that injured virtue might be forearmed against secret enemies. The paragraph, which your excellency has condescended to transcribe, is spurious. It was certainly fabricated to answer the most selfish and wicked purposes. I cannot avoid sketching out to your excellency the history of General Conway's letter, from the time that it came to my hands by Lieutenant-Colonel Troup, my aid-de-camp, to whom General Conway delivered it at Reading on the 11th of October, to this time, as far as it has affected me and the officers of my family.

"That letter contained very judicious remarks upon that want of discipline, which has often alarmed your excellency and, I believe, all observing patriots. The reasons which, in his judgment, deprived us of the success we could reasonably expect, were methodically explained by him; but neither the 'weakness' of any of our generals, nor 'bad counsellors,' were mentioned; and consequently cannot be assigned or imagined as part of those reasons to which General Conway attributed some of our losses. He wrote to me as a candid observer, as other officers in every service freely write to each other, for obtaining better intelligence than that of newspapers, and that freedom renders such letters thus far confidential in some measure. The judgment of the person who receives them points out to him, according to time and circumstances, the propriety or

impropriety attending their being communicated, when no particular injunction of secrecy was requested.

"Particular actions rather than persons were blamed, but with impartiality; and I am convinced that he did not aim at lessening in my opinion the merit of any person. His letter was perfectly harmless; however, now that various reports have been circulated concerning its contents, they ought not to be submitted to the solemn inspection of even those who stand most high in the public esteem. Anxiety and jealousy would arise in the breast of very respectable officers, who, rendered sensible of faults, which inexperience, and that alone, may have led them into, would be unnecessarily disgusted, if they perceived a probability of such errors being recorded. Honor forbids it, and patriotism demands that I should return the letter into the hands of the writer. I will do it; but at the same time I declare, that the paragraph conveyed to your excellency as a genuine part of it, was in words as well as in substance a wicked forgery.

"About the beginning of December I was informed that letter had occasioned an explanation between your excellency and that gentleman. Not knowing whether the whole letter or a part of it had been stealthily copied, but fearing malice had altered its original texture, I own, sir, that a dread of the mischiefs, which might attend the forgery, I suspected would be made, put me for some time, in a most painful situation. When I communicated to the officers in my family the intelligence I had received, they all entreated me to rescue their characters from the suspicions they justly conceived themselves liable to, until the guilty person should be known. To facilitate the discovery, I wrote to your excellency; but, unable to learn whether General Conway's letter had been transmitted to you by a member of congress or a gentleman in the army, I was afraid much time would be lost in the course of the inquiry, and that the states might receive some capital injury from the infidelity of the person who I thought had stolen a copy of the obnoxious letter. Was it not probable that the secrets of the army might be obtained and betrayed through the same means to the enemy? For this reason, sir, not doubting the congress would most cheerfully concur with you in tracing out the criminal, I wrote to the president, and enclosed to him a copy of my letter to your excellency.

"About the time I was forwarding those letters, Brigadier-General Wilkinson returned to Albany. I informed him of the treachery which had been committed, but I concealed from him the measure I was pursuing to unmask the author. Wilkinson answered, he was assured it never would come to light, and endeavored to fix my suspicions on Lieutenant-Colonel Troup, who, said he, might have incautiously conversed on the substance of General Conway's letter with Colonel Hamilton, whom you had sent not long before to Albany. I did not listen to this insinuation against your aid-de-camp and mine.

"Would that your excellency's prediction relative to General Conway had not been inserted in your letter, which came to me unsealed through the channel of congress. I hope always to find that gentleman a firm and constant friend to America. I never wrote to him in my life, but to satisfy his doubts concerning the exposure of his private letter; nor had any sort of

intimacy, nor hardly the smallest acquaintance with him, before our meeting in this town. With great respect, I am, &c."

In reading this last letter of General Gates the reader is requested to observe that he speaks of Conway's letter as if there had been but one, and that he further favors this idea by declaring that he had no sort of intimacy with Conway, and had never written to him but to satisfy his mind concerning the exposure of his own letter. Of course, the inference is that Conway had written to him one letter which he never answered, and that the letter in question was written by Gates with no other view but to satisfy him on the subject. It is painful to think that a vice so contemptible as falsehood should be found in one who had won such proud distinction in the cause of freedom and of our country. But we find it impossible to read the following letter without imputing this paltry and disgraceful crime to General Gates:

Horatio Gates to Thomas Conway.

*"Albany, 3d December, 1777.*

"Dear General: Your excellent letter has given me pain; for, at the same time that I am indebted to you for a just idea of the cause of our misfortunes, your judicious observations make me sensible of the difficulty there is in remedying the evils, which retard our success. The perfect establishment of military discipline, consistent with the honor and principles, which ought to be cherished amongst a free people, is not only the work of genius, but time. But, dear General, you have sent your resignation; and I assure you, I fondly hope it will not be accepted; it ought not.

"The antipathy, which has long subsisted between the French and English nations, will continue until they cease to be neighbors. Such is the unhappy lot of mankind. The separation occasioned by the declaration of independence has removed the cause of that hatred which the political connexion of the British colonists has implanted in their breasts against the French, and those who were attached to their interest. Now that Machiavelism can be no longer attempted to keep up those prejudices in the minds of the unthinking amongst us, the French and the people of the United States will become friends; and I am amazed that men, in the station you mention, should have been so impolitic, or have possessed so little of the philosophic spirit, as to provoke a gentleman of your acknowledged merits, by illiberal reflections; however, I must declare to you, that I firmly believe there would be more greatness in continuing to serve the states, notwithstanding the provocation you think you have received from one of their principal members, than in resigning the commission you hold. Capricious or disgraced warriors so often leave the army, that I do not wish to see the name of Conway on the list of officers who have withdrawn from the service of our republic. I hope the result of your considerations on this subject, will retain in our service an excellent officer, who has already exposed his life in our defence; and that you will believe I am, with the purest esteem, dear General, your most humble and most obedient servant."

"P. S. This moment I received a letter from our worthy friend, General Mifflin, who informs me, that extracts from your letters to me had been conveyed to General Washington, and that it occasioned an *éclaircissement*, in which you acted with all the dignity of a virtuous soldier. I intreat you, dear General, to let me know which of the letters was copied off. It is of the greatest importance that I should detect the person, who has been guilty of that act of infidelity. I cannot trace him out unless I have your assistance."

It has been said that he who would discover the subject nearest a woman's heart when she sits down to write a letter, must look for it in the postscript. A favorable judge might interpret General Gates in the same way; but unfortunately we have a letter of the next day to General Mifflin, in which he tells him that the letter to Conway had been written and sealed before Mifflin's letter, above referred to, was received. But let the matter and manner of this letter be carefully observed. What is there about it that betokens a first and only letter to a stranger in answer to an unexpected letter from that stranger? Who can believe that such a letter as Conway's appears to have been, was written to any but an intimate? The subject appears to have been, in good measure, that of the writer's private griefs, and Gates's eager inquiry as to *which* of the letters had been copied, shows that there had been several. The same anxious tone appears also in his first letter to Washington, and contrasts amusingly with the cool nonchalance with which he treats the whole affair, as soon as he received Washington's answer. He seems to have been completely set at ease by the discovery that no letter had been copied, and that only a short sentence had been detailed from memory. Nothing more was wanting than to protest that there was no such language in *some one* letter, which he might hold himself ready to produce, if called for; and there he doubtless supposed the matter would end. But he had to do with one who penetrated to the thoughts and intentions of his heart, and who, with no other light than that afforded by Gates's artful letter, saw the whole matter as it really was, and as plainly as we who are admitted behind the scenes. The following letter is an evidence of fact and sagacity without parallel:

*George Washington to Horatio Gates.*

*"Valley Forge, 9th February, 1778.*

"Sir: I was duly favored with your letter of the 23d of last month, to which I should have replied sooner, had I not been delayed by business that required my more immediate attention. It is my wish to give implicit credit to the assurances of every gentleman; but, in the subject of our present correspondence, I am sorry to confess, there happened to be some unlucky circumstances, which involuntarily compel me to consider the discovery you mention, not so satisfactory and conclusive, as you seem to think it. I am so unhappy as

to find no small difficulty in reconciling the spirit and import of your different letters, and sometimes of the different parts of the same letter with each other. It is not unreasonable to presume, that your first information of my having notice of General Conway's letter, came from himself; there were very few in the *secret*, and it is natural to suppose that he, being immediately concerned, would be most interested to convey the intelligence to you. *It is also far from improbable that he acquainted you with the substance of the passage communicated to me; one would expect this, if he believed it to be spurious, in order to ascertain the imposition and evince his innocence; especially as he seemed to be under some uncertainty as to the precise contents of what he had written, when I signified my knowledge of the matter to him. If he neglected doing it, the omission cannot easily be interpreted into anything else than a consciousness of the reality of the extract, if not literally, at least substantially. If he did not neglect it, it must appear somewhat strange that the forgery remained so long undetected, and that your first letter to me from Albany, of the 8th of December, should tacitly recognise the genuineness of the paragraph in question; while your only concern at that time seemed to be the tracing out the 'author of the infidelity, which put extracts from General Conway's letter into my hands.'*

"Throughout the whole of that letter, the reality of the extracts is by the fairest implication allowed, and your only solicitude is to find out the person that brought them to light. After making the most earnest pursuit of the author of the supposed treachery, without saying a word about the truth or falsehood of the passage, your letter of the 23d ultimo, to my great surprise, proclaims it 'in words, as well as in substance, a wicked forgery.' It is not my intention to contradict this assertion, but only to intimate some considerations, which tend to induce a supposition that, though none of General Conway's letters to you contained the offensive passage mentioned, there might have been something in them too nearly related to it, that could give such an extraordinary alarm. It may be said, if this were not the case, how easy in the first instance to have declared there was nothing exceptionable in them, and to have produced the letters themselves in support of it. This may be thought the most proper and effectual way of refuting misrepresentation and removing all suspicion. The propriety of the objections suggested against submitting them to inspection may very well be questioned. 'The various reports circulated concerning their contents,' were perhaps so many arguments for making them speak for themselves, to place the matter upon the footing of certainty. Concealment in an affair, which had made so much noise, though not by my means, will naturally lead men to conjecture the worst; and it will be a subject of speculation even to candor itself. The anxiety and jealousy you apprehended from revealing the letter, will be very apt to be increased by suppressing it.

"It may be asked, Why not submit to inspection a performance perfectly harmless, and of course conceived in terms of proper caution and delicacy? Why suppose, that 'anxiety and jealousy would have arisen in the breasts of very respectable officers, or that they would have been unnecessarily disgusted at being made sen-

sible of their faults, when related with judgment and impartiality by a candid observer'? Surely they could not have been unreasonable enough to take offence at a performance so perfectly inoffensive, 'blaming actions rather than persons,' which have evidently no connexion with one another, and indulgently 'recording the errors of inexperience.'

"You are pleased to consider General Conway's letters as of a confidential nature; observing 'that time and circumstances must point out the propriety or impropriety of communicating such letters.' Permit me to inquire whether, when there is an impropriety in communicating, it is only applicable with respect to the parties, who are the subjects of them? One might be led to imagine this to be the case, from your having admitted others into the secret of your confidential correspondence, at the same time that you thought it ineligible it should be trusted to those 'officers, whose actions underwent its scrutiny.' Your not knowing whether the letter under consideration 'came to me from a member of congress, or from an officer,' plainly indicates that you originally communicated it to at least one of that honorable body; and I learn from General Conway, that before his late arrival at Yorktown, it had been committed to the perusal of several of its members, and was afterwards shown by himself to three more. It is somewhat difficult to conceive a reason, founded in generosity, for imparting the free and confidential strictures of that ingenious censor on the operations of the army under my command, to a member of congress; but perhaps 'time and circumstances pointed it out.' It must indeed be acknowledged, that the faults of very respectable officers, not less injurious for being the result of inexperience, were not improper topics to engage the attention of members of congress.

"It is, however, greatly to be lamented, that this adept in military science did not employ his abilities in the progress of the campaign, in pointing out those wise measures, which were calculated to give us 'that degree of success we could reasonably expect.' The United States have lost much from that unseasonable diffidence, which prevented his embracing the numerous opportunities he had in council of displaying those rich treasures of knowledge and experience he has since so freely laid open to you. I will not do him the injustice to impute the penurious reserve, which ever appeared in him upon such occasions, to any other cause than an excess of modesty; neither will I suppose, that he possesses no other merit than that after kind of sagacity, which qualifies a man better for profound discoveries of errors that have been committed, and advantages that have been lost, than for the exercise of that foresight and provident discernment, which enable him to avoid the one and anticipate the other. But, willing as I am to subscribe to all his pretensions, and to believe that his remarks on the operations of the campaign were very judicious, and that he has sagaciously descanted on many things that might have been done, I cannot help being a little skeptical as to his ability to have found out the means of accomplishing them, or to prove the sufficiency of those in our possession. These minutiae, I suspect, he did not think worth his attention, particularly as they might not be within the compass of his views.

"Notwithstanding the hopeful presages you are

pleased to figure to yourself of General Conway's firm and constant friendship to America, I cannot persuade myself to retract the prediction concerning him, which you so emphatically wish had not been inserted in my last. A better acquaintance with him, than I have reason to think you have had, from what you say, and a concurrence of circumstances, oblige me to give him but little credit for the qualifications of his heart; of which, at least, I beg leave to assume the privilege of being a tolerable judge. Were it necessary, more instances than one might be adduced, from his behavior and conversation, to manifest that he is capable of all the malignity of detraction, and all the meannesses of intrigue, to gratify the absurd resentment of disappointed vanity, or to answer the purposes of personal aggrandisement, and promote the interest of faction. I am with respect, sir, your most obedient servant."

Now here is the "lie by circumstance" insinuated with a degree of distinctness to which nothing but conscious guilt, christian forbearance, or abject cowardice, could have been expected to submit. It was the more provoking, too, because the whole of the argument drawn from the supposed communication of Washington's discovery by Conway himself, could have been shown to be destitute of any such foundation. Gates had got his information from Mifflin, who gave no intimation of the terms of the supposed letter or extract. Under these circumstances, it is almost incredible that Gates should have deigned to write the following reply:

Horatio Gates to George Washington.

"Yorktown, 19th February, 1778.

"Sir: Yesterday I had the honor to receive your excellency's letter of the 9th instant, and earnestly hope no more of that time, so precious to the public, may be lost upon the subject of General Conway's letter. Whether that gentleman does or does not deserve the suspicions you express, would be entirely indifferent to me, did he not possess an office of high rank in the army of the United States; for that reason solely I wish he may answer all the expectations of congress. As to the gentleman, I have no personal connexion with him, nor had I any correspondence, previous to his writing the letter which has given offence; nor have I since written to him, save to certify what I know to be the contents of the letter. He therefore must be responsible; as I heartily dislike controversy, even upon my own account, and much more in a matter wherein I was only accidentally concerned. In regard to the parts of your excellency's letter addressed particularly to me, I solemnly declare that I am of no faction; and if any of my letters taken aggregately or by paragraphs convey any meaning which in any construction is offensive to your excellency, that was by no means the intention of the writer. After this, I cannot believe your excellency will either suffer your suspicions or the prejudices of others to induce you to spend another moment upon this subject. With great respect, I am, sir, &c."

The reply of the commander-in-chief to this



sneaking letter, which is found at page 513, closes this remarkable correspondence :

George Washington to Horatio Gates.

*"Valley Forge, 24th February, 1778.*

"Sir: I yesterday received your favor of the 19th instant. I am as averse to controversy as any man; and, had I not been forced into it, you never would have had occasion to impute to me even the shadow of a disposition towards it. Your repeatedly and solemnly disclaiming any offensive views, in those matters which have been the subject of our past correspondence, makes me willing to close with the desire you express, of burying them hereafter in silence and, as far as future events will permit, oblivion. My temper leads me to peace and harmony with all men; and it is peculiarly my wish to avoid any personal feuds or dissensions with those who are embarked in the same great national interest with myself, as every difference of this kind must in its consequences be very injurious. I am, sir, your most obedient servant."

After all this it is due to General Gates to own that he was no ordinary man, and yet we may safely challenge a search into all the records of this sort of diplomacy, in which the superiority of one party over the other is more triumphantly established. That it was the triumph of truth and virtue, is made manifest, to all who might doubt it, (if such there could be) by the following letter from Conway, written, as he then believed, on his death bed.

Thomas Conway to George Washington.

*"Philadelphia, 23d July, 1778.*

"Sir: I find myself just able to hold the pen during a few minutes, and take this opportunity of expressing my sincere grief for having done, written, or said anything disagreeable to your excellency. My career will soon be over; therefore justice and truth prompt me to declare my last sentiments. You are in my eyes the great and good man. May you long enjoy the love, veneration and esteem of these states, whose liberties you have asserted by your virtues. I am, with the greatest respect, &c.

"THOMAS CONWAY."

We have given these letters at large, not only because they are more interesting than anything of our own, but because we can no otherwise so well convey to the reader a just idea of the work under review. It is only thus that the character of such a work can be displayed. When we say that this is but a fair sample of the sort of information it contains, and of the manner in which it is communicated and substantiated, we have said enough to satisfy the public that it has well fulfilled the high expectations awakened by its annunciation.

We are not sure that in every instance the compiler's task has been executed with the same skill and fidelity. In the papers relating to the interesting affair of Major André, there is a meagerness which leaves the reader unsatisfied, and dis-

appointed. We can hardly bring ourselves to believe that the whole of them are given, and we look in vain in the appendix for the same amplitude of elucidation which we find in other cases. Instead of it, we have, indeed, a reference to "Sparks's Life and Treason of Arnold;" but, under favor, we think the purchasers of the present work had a right to expect that Mr. Sparks would have given them all the necessary information *here*. He certainly was at liberty to extract from his own work as freely as from that of any other person, although we are sensible the sale of it might be impaired by transferring from it a fuller account of the transaction which conferred on that traitor his only celebrity.

But we have no mind to say anything ill-natured to Mr. Sparks. He has given us a compilation of great interest to the general reader, and of infinite value to the historian. He has executed his task with exemplary diligence and fidelity, and deserves our thanks and our praise.