

WASHINGTON LETTERS,¹

GENERAL WASHINGTON TO MR. J. RUMNEY.

Mount Vernon, April 6, 1787.—I can say little more at this time respecting the estate of the deceased Coll. Thos. Colvill² than what is contained in my account of it to Major Swan (recited in one of the letters which you put into my hand) except that I have used every means in my power to collect materials (and very defective they are) for a final settlement of the administration of it. What the surplus of the estate will be when the debts and legacies are all paid, is more than I can inform you. The testator himself, as will appear by his will, had a doubt of there being any. And what will be done with it if there should, must be a matter for future determination. When the administration is closed, which it is my sincere wish to do as soon as the nature of the case will admit, I shall, for my own justification and security, take council with respect to the application of the surplus, if any, under the existing laws of this country. The author of the letters of instruction to you is mistaken, I conceive, when he says the claim of one Clawson was admitted, unless by admission he means that it was received. If this was not his idea, it will give him no pleasure to be informed that near twenty others, I believe, have been admitted in the same manner, under the indefinite and, I may add, indigested clause of the will which has stirred up so many pretenders, as to render it a matter of difficult investigation to determine rightly in the case.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

MR. J. RUMNEY TO MR. JAMES SCORER.

Alexandria, April 6, 1787.—Sir, I have to acknowledge receipt of your favour per Capt. Atkinson, and, agreeable to your request, have made every inquiry respecting Coll. Colville's estate that was in my power. I have seen Mr. Tom West, who is son to the old gentleman, one of the executors; he does not know much of the business, but gave

¹ All these letters, except the last, are communicated by Mr. Trueman of Durham.

² It is evident from the sequel, that this gentleman was nearly related to the Colvilles of Whitehouse, near Gateshead. Adam Colville of Boldon, gent., had a son Edward, butcher and hostman of Newcastle, who purchased Whitehouse, and died in 1750, aged 105. By his first wife Anne Ladler (mar. 1682, bur. 1686) he had a son Anthony, bap. 1683, bur. 1685. By his second, Sarah (bur. 1713), he had issue, Edward, bap. 1700, bur. 1783; Robert, bap. 1705; and John, bap. 1708, who resided at Whitehouse. John married Joan, the daughter of Wm. Fawcett, of West Boldon, gent., to whom he left his estate in fee, and died childless in 1781. She died in 1785.

up the papers to the other executors. I have wrote to Mr. Swan at Baltimore, but have not received an answer, which I wonder at. I dined last Sunday with General Washington at his house, a few miles from hence, and had a long conversation on the subject with him. He was very much averse to being an executor in this business, and had not taken any active part untill Mr. West's death. He says, so many claims have been made, that they do not know who is entitled to what was left; he therefore means to lodge what is their due in the hands of the Lord Chancellor in England, to be paid to those whose right it seems to be. He does not think there will be much, but whatever there is, it ought to be ascertained, and made an end of, and you may rely on my endeavours to forward it. The General begged I would leave your memorandum and letter with him for his perusal, which I did. I hope soon to see him again, and when anything further is done, you shall hear from me. J. RUMNEY.—Since writing the above, I have received a letter from the General, and enclosed I send you a copy of that part of it which relates to your business. I think it is not favourable by any means.

MR. JAMES SCORER to MR. JOHN CLARKSON.

W^h.Haven, June, 1787.—Dear Sirs, On the other side you have two copies of letters, the one from my friend Mr. Rumney to me, and the other from General Washington to him, by which you will see the active part my friend has taken in your business, and how little the expectation is of bringing any thing to a period. The General now thinks there will [be] very little due to the claimants, and you see denies your claim ever being admitted any more then it might have been received amongst the many claims that has been made. I always understood by you that your claim was admitted by the opinion of Councelar Wyth, &c., and as such was the style of my letters to Mr. Rumney. I wrote to Mr. Swan by the same opportunity as I wrote Mr. Rumney, telling him Mr. Rumney would correspond with him on the business, as he was so near the executor's. You see Mr. Rumney has likewise wrote him, but can get no answer, and, as Mr. Swan is empowered from you to act in this business, I don't see any thing more my friend can do in it then assist Mr. Swan in any thing he may chuse to communicate to him, but it disnot appear to me that he means to correspond with him about it. It would likewise appear by General Washington's letter to Mr. Rumney, that he and Mr. Swan has corresponded on the business, but this may refer to the copy of the letters you sent me; if so, it is very old. The General seems to wish to have the matter brought to an esue, and it appears to me if it ever be done, it must be by him. You will judge for yourselves what steps is further to be taken, but I think you should get your friends in London to write out again to Mr. Swan to push the business as he has your powers to do it, and I am sure that Mr. Rumney would do any thing in conjunction with him to bring you to your right, if there be anything for you, and that your claim is admitted of. If you have anything more to communicate to me upon this a vessel will sail for Alexaudria the

latter end of this month, and it will always give me pleasure to render you any service in my power, and am, Dr S^r, your very humble servant, JAMES SCORER.—Please to give my love to my mother, then she will know I have got home. J. S.—Mr. John Clawson, 5, Framwel Gate, Durham.

SIR WILLIAM APPLEBY³ TO MR. JOHN SWAN.

Mr. John Swan.—Sir, since my arrival from London, I have had the pleasure of reading a letter from you in answer to mine, as well as one from Mr. Scorer annexing two from Mr. Washington and Mr. Rumney to him, concerning Clarson's demand upon Washington as executor to Coll. Colvill's effects. I think it my duty as a man of honour and veracity again to assure you that every word contained in mine *was the truth*. Let Washington say what he will, or *still* use what evasive subterfuges he may, *as he has always done, and ever will* find some pretence to keep the immense property devised, in his own possession, and thereby defraud the legatees. *He dare not* show you my letters to him upon that occasion *when he played the same game as at present*, but had Mr. James Balfour (agent to Mr. Hanbury) *only survived*, he would long ere now have been compelled to make a distribution. Whatever opinion other people may have of him *I clearly see* by his letter, dated Apl, 6, 1787, now before me, to Mr. Rumney, *it wont alter mine*, which, *he well knows*, was always adverse to him, *and well founded for the reasons assigned*. He alledges there are such numerous claimants, which is false respecting the quota justly demanded—that there can no distribution be made properly. The present claimants have nothing to do with them, if there were a thousand upon three parts of the property, for they are solely and incontestably intitled to one fourth thereof as the legal inheritors to Stott's family mentioned in Colvill's will, and I know there are other legal claimants now living in this neighbourhood *who shall instantly agitate* their just right if he does not immediately satisfye the present claimants Clarsons, or he shall be publicly exposed both here and in America by me, and at my expence, for he well deserves it. Mr. Rumney can easily let you see WASHINGTON's letter to him, and, if you please, *may let* the last mentioned peruse this, who, I am confident, will *never* finish the business, unless he is shamed out of it publicly, which *indeed will be a very hard matter to do*. The present claimants are much obliged to Mr. Rumney and you, and make no doubt but by this time our worthy and honourable clerk of the peace, George Pearson, Esq., has sent you and him, through favour of Messrs. Harrison, Ainsley, and Co., of London, every necessary credential to *compel* Washington to do them justice. *I am certain* that Washington's literal expressions in a letter sent to me above ten years ago, when the affair was in the hands of Mr. Balfour, were these, "*I admit the claim*"⁴,

³ One of the Peg Nicholson knights. He is said to have refused to pay the usual fees to the officers of Heralds' College after being knighted, objecting that they could not unknigh him. The italics are his own.

⁴ Washington by such an expression probably only meant to say "I admit the existence of your clients claim as a *claim*—their *right* must be legally established for my safety."

I admit the possession of the property, but I will not pay one shilling, UNLESS I am compell'd to it, in our own Court of Chancery, for my own justification." Such was then, such is, and such ever will be the language of the modern *Fabius* in war as well as *executorships*, if not *compell'd* to do the parties justice. I have taken the liberty to send this to Mr. Rumney, and to entreat he will forward it to you, and if I am favoured with any answer from either upon the subject, may either address it to George Pearson, Esq., or Sir William Appleby, Durham, which will much oblige, Sir, your most humble servant, WILL. APPLEBY, Durham. Augt. 8, 1787.

SIR WILLIAM APPLEBY TO MR. RUMNEY.

Durham, Augt. 8, 1787. Mr. Rumney, Sir, I have taken the liberty to transmit the above to you, entreating, after your perusal thereof, and looking upon it as also addressed to you, as well as Mr. Swan, you'll please to send him it, and am, with many thanks for your attention to the interest of the present just claimants upon Washington, *as acting executor* to Col. Colvill, am, Sir, your most humble servant, WILL. APPLEBY.—P. S. My opinion of and reflections upon Mr. Washington, I do assure you, *are very just*.—I understand Col. Colvill's brother left many thousands to the present Lord Tankerville,⁵ who got it all: the late gentlemen left his property to a *greater amount* to four families here, but which I dare say they will be all cheated of, and by as before-mentioned.—Mr. J. Rumney, at Alexandria, in America.

MR. JAMES KEITH TO MR. C. RICHMOND.

Alexandria, 15th December, 1790.—The estate of the late Colonel Thomas Colvill consisted of lands, slaves, and a large debt due from the estate of his brother Col^o John Colvill. Part of his lands and slaves he gave to particular friends, the residue he directed to be sold for the payment of his debts and legacies. This has been done, and the money I believe chiefly received. His brother John Colvill had directed a tract to be sold for the payment of his debts; this had for some causes been delayed till a short time before the death of Thomas Colvill, and but a very inconsiderable part of the purchase money paid in his lifetime. Several bills of exchange had been passed to him on account of the purchase, but those were chiefly returned protested, either just before or immediately after the death of Colonel Colvill. The purchaser's

⁵ John Colville of Whitehouse had several sisters, viz., 1. Elizabeth, bap. 1689. 2. Susanna, bap. 1690, mar. Lionel Allan, Esq., an eminent merchant at Rotterdam, and died 1783, having survived her husband, ten brothers and sisters, and buried ten children. 3. Ann, bap. 1693, mar. 1710, to William Hanby of Newcastle, barber-chirurgeon. 4. Sarah, bap. with Ann. 5. Rosamond, bap. 1695, mar. to Roger Pearson of Tritlington, Esq. 6. Camilla, bap. 1698, mar. *Charles Bennet, Earl of Tankerville*, who died 1753. She died 1775. 7. Catherine, bap. 1701. 8. Jane, bap. 1703, mar. successively to Charles Clarke, of Gray's Inn, attorney, and Robert Fenwick, of Lemington, Esq., but d. s. p. There is a romantic relation of the wooing and winning of Camilla. See Hist. Darlington, iv.

circumstances about that time became desperate; the executors of Thomas Colvill in vain applied for payments, it was out of his power to make any. Things remained in this state till the beginning of the year 1772, when some of the creditors of the purchaser's conceiving the land to be worth considerably more at that time, proposed paying the balance of the purchase money, upon condition the land was conveyed to them. This, after some time, was agreed upon, and commissioners appointed to settle the accounts and ascertain the balances then due. This was done; a part of the balance was then paid, and a bond given for the balance. A suspension of all law business soon after taking place in Virginia, and hostilities commencing in 1775, nothing further was done until peace was restored, and General Washington returned home. During that period two of the executors died, one of them the person who had transacted the whole business of the estate, which, as well as his own affairs, he had left in the greatest confusion. General Washington, soon after his return home, put such of that gentlemen's papers as related to the transactions of Colvill's estate in my hands, to endeavour to state an account of his transactions. After much time spent, I formed as just an one as the lights I could procure from different parts would enable me. In the course of this business, I discovered that the commissioners who had settled the accounts between the purchaser of the land and the executors had made a gross blunder, which, if not rectified, will fall upon the estate of Thomas Colvill. A suit is instituted and now depending to get that error rectified, and to settle the question of interest upon the bond. Those suits I expect will be determined in May next, and immediately after the determination the President will close the account of that transaction. JA^s. KEITH. If the error alluded to is rectified there may probably be a surplus of 600*l*. Virginia money.

MR. C. RICHMOND TO GEORGE PEARSON, ESQ.

Philadelphia, 14th April, 1791.—Sir, You will no doubt have been surprised that the affairs of Mr. Clarkson committed to my care have seemingly been unattended to by me, but you will find by the copy of Mr. Keith's answer to my application on the subject, that I have not altogether neglected the business. When I arrived in London from the North in February, 1790, I found the gentleman (Mr. John Rumney) who was joined with me in the letter of attorney had left Virginia, and was then in London. I told him of the power I had received; he answered, he wished me success in the execution of it, but was afraid little would be obtained upon it, from what he had been able to learn. My being engaged in public business soon after I arrived in Maryland, to attend the officers of Congress at New York, as agent to settle accounts between Maryland and the United States, prevented my journey to Alexandria until December, since which my chest and papers have been detained by the ice in the bay and rivers until this few weeks past, when they came to my hands, and with them that of which I now send you the copy. General Washington, the President of the United States, is now on a tour to the Carolinas and Georgia. I think

it probable I shall be able to procure some intelligence from him relating to this matter when he has returned to this city, which will be about the begining of July next. After which time you shall hear from me again. With great respect, I am, Sir, Your obedt. humble servant, C. RICHMOND.—P.S. Will you be so good as to remember me to my brother Joseph and his family, and tell him I have not heard of or received a letter from any of my relations since I left England.—George Pearson, Esq., Clerk of the Peace, City of Durham, N^o. England, per the *Harmony*, Cap. Osman, of Philadelphia.

MRS. SARAH ADDISON TO MR. WASHINGTON SMIRK,¹

Oct. 1836.

DEAR BROTHER,—I write this to inform you of our decent, the papers I have seen, and what my dear mother told me respecting it. Our grandfather's name was Thomas Washington,² brother to General George Washington, of North America. Our grandfather was a planter of Virginia, Nevis, and St. Kits, and that he traded in his own vessel to England. The ports he used were Liverpool and Newcastle. The last ship he came to Newcastle in was the *Duke of Argyle*. He died suddenly, at Gateshead, without a will, leaving our grandmother with three daughters, Mary, Sarah, and Hannah, who at her death were taken by Alderman Baker, Alderman Peareth, and Alderman Vernal, each one with a promise of bringing them up according to their decent, but were made servants of, and they remained so until marriage. Our grandmother's name was Mary Smith, a native of Alnwick, Northumberland. She had an annuity from N...wick [*partially illegible*] estate for her life; but how that was left I do not know. Mr. William Peareth never let the sisters rest untill he got the papers from them to do them justice, but he never would confess with them after. He sent them to America. A gentleman belonging to Burn Hall, near Durham, told our aunt Mary he had seen a letter wrote by the General's own hand concerning three orphan sisters, a sum of 20,000*l.* for them. Mr. Peareth would never confess anything after that, which caused my father to go to London. He could make nothing out, but that the money came, received by who they would not say; and having no one to advise him, came home and would never see after it again; so it was lost. I read myself, in the Newcastle paper, put in by a Mr. Wilson, of Newcastle, son of Rector Wilson, that the niece of General Washington called upon him, and he presented her with 5*l.* as a token of respect; and that person was aunt Mary. I have to inform you Rector Wilson married our father and mother in the year of our Lord 1780, the 23d of May, at Washington

¹ Communicated by William Green, Jun., Esq., of Findon Cottage, near Durham.

² The name of Washington is so unusual in the North of England, and the connection of this person with America so minutely set out, that it is difficult to resist the impression that he was a near connexion with the General, who certainly had brothers, planters in Virginia, though not of the name of Thomas. Possibly Mrs. Addison is in error as to the baptismal name of her grandfather.

Church, near Usworth.³ Our mother was up mostly at Usworth Hall.

Our father Edward Smirk was respectfully decended from the Wylams' family.⁴ The Miss Peareths alwayes looked upon aunt Mary's son, and always gave him whenever he went on our mother's account; but we never went. They are all dead but an old lady, the last time I heard of them. My dear mother many a time has sat and wept when she looked at her sons and daughters, to think how they were wronged. She always committed her case to the God of her salvation, and she used to say He would always avenge the case of the innocent. Our hairs are numbered, and a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His permission. I know what I have said to be truth.

So dear brother, farewell.

To Washington Smirk,
Butterknowle Colliery.

SARAH ADDISON.

³ The following is the entry of the marriage in Washington Register:—"Edward Smirk and Hannah Washington, both of this parish, married, by banns duly published on the 22d day of May, 1780, by me, E. WILSON, rector. Marriage solemnized on the day and year above written between us, EDWARD SMIRK, Hannah & Washington's mark. In the presence of Jno. FATHERLEY, Jno. HALL."

⁴ Edward Smirk's mother was Ann, eldest daughter of Mr. John Wylam of North Biddick, par. Washington, farmer, by Catherine, who was living a widow at Woodhouse, North Biddick, in 1746, and on 3 July, 1750, was married at Washington to Robert Wade of Ousterly, afterwards of Patfield, yeoman. Mr. Wylam was grandfather of our highly respected neighbour, Mr. Ralph Wylam of Gateshead, who states that, in reference to his aunt's marriage to Smirk, it was said that she pleased her eyes, and grieved her heart. The ceremony took place at Washington, 27 Mar., 1749, and her husband, Thomas Smirk, was then of the parish of Chester-le-Street. In 1751, when, on 11 Dec., his daughter Catherine was baptized at Washington, he is stated to reside at Cat Dean. His son, Edward Smirk, was a horsekeeper at the New Stables in 1781, the year after his marriage with Hannah Washington, when, on 8 March, he baptized a daughter Anne at Washington. On 14 Oct., 1783, "Edward Washington, the son of Edward Smirk of Washington and Hannah, his wife," was baptized there. Both these children probably died very young. From 1783 to 1793 there is a barren gap in the register, perhaps in consequence of Edward Smirk's desertion of his wife, as it is only broken on 5 July, 1789, by a disreputable entry of the baptism of "John, illegitimate son of Hannah Smirk of Washington. John Churnside, supposed father." On 22 Dec. 1793, was baptized another Anne, described as "daughter of Edward and Hannah Smirk, North Bedick;" and on 28 Aug. 1796, we have the baptism of another Edward, the parents being described in the same way. The above letter gives the names of two other children, Washington and Sarah.