

GENUINE AND CHARACTERISTIC LETTER

From a Midshipman of the Queen Charlotte.

Giving an ACCOUNT of the VICTORY gained over the ALGERINES.

"MY DEAREST,

"Queen Charlotte, August 29.

"TURBANS and trowsers are so like caps and petticoats, that you in England think the Turks and Moors are little better than old women. If you had seen them the day before yesterday, you would have had a different opinion of them. Without so much noise and jabbering, they were as active as Frenchmen, and, to do them justice, they pointed their guns with a coolness and precision that would not have disgraced any gentleman in cocked hats and pantaloons, and I think, as far as I could judge, there are few Christians who value their skins less than these Pagans. They say that they have a funny Paradise prepared for those who die in battle: some of the joys of this pretended Eden we hope to enjoy on our arrival at home; however, 7000 of the poor Mahometans have got before us.

"All the ships bore up and took their places in the best order, and the most gallant manner. It was, at least, as coolly and exactly performed as the famous review at Portsmouth, and I only wish that the Great Alexander, who, we are told, thinks we go snacks with the old Dey, had seen this review, instead of that: not that he could have seen long or much; for, after the firing once began, the little wind that there was swooned away, as if for fear, and we were all covered by thick smoke, like twenty Vauxhalls at the end of the fire-works on a cloudy night. Our old Queen Charlotte was the Madame Saqui of the piece, and danced beautifully on the tight rope, by which she was made fast to the Mole. I dare say the Dey thinks that we must be all *near-fighted*, for we seemed to think we never could get close enough. The old lord was devilish polite; and though they say the first blow is half the battle, he gave this advantage to the pirates, who began firing just about two o'clock, as I have since heard, for I forgot to look at my watch. The position of the Queen Charlotte was exactly at the entrance of the Mole, where we had a complete prospect of what they used to call the *Marine*. They must now find a new name for it, for they have no marine left. This enabled us to have a beautiful view of the commencement of the action. I cannot describe to you the immense crowd of men that covered the Mole, and all parts of the *Marine*; they were as thick as hops; thicker, I suppose, than the hops are this year, unless the weather mended. Well, just as the old lady was going to let fly her broadside, the admiral, I suppose, had some pity on the poor devils; for he stood on the poop, and motioned with his hand for them to get out of the way; but there was such a crowd that this was impossible, even if they had wished: but I don't suppose they understood what the admiral meant. At last, fire! fire! fire! and bang. I think I saw 500 or 1000 of them *bang down* in an instant. After that I did not see much, until our boats, taking pity on our darkness, set fire to a frigate close to us, just by way of light to see what we were doing. You talk of your fires in London, and of your engines and fire-men; I wish we had had some of them, when this cursed frigate was blazing not fifty yards from our dwelling, which being built of wood, with oakum for mortar, and fine verandes and balconies made of hemp and tow, was rather more in danger than one of your substantial brick messuages is, when the neighbour's house takes fire. The fact is, we were on fire, I believe, two or three times; but we were all so d—d cool that we put it out directly. The short and the long of my story is, that in six hours we knocked all their batteries and castles about their ears and eyes, like the last scene

in *Timour the Tartar*. When we come home, it would save the public some cash, and give a little employment, to hire us to clear the way for the new street; we should have St. James's market down in a twinkling; and I will venture to say, the Dey's batteries looked as like a slaughter-house as any butcher's shop in the whole row.

"All our gun-boats were numbered, and it was good fun to see how No. 8 would pull to get into the fire before No. 6; in fact they were all nobly conducted, and the only number which nobody seemed to take care of was number one. For my own part I say this with an easier conscience, because I was obliged to stay on board; the boats were supposed to be such desperate work, that it required *great interest* to get into them. I never before so wished to be an *honourable*, however I was forced to content myself with a speaking trumpet, with the assistance of which I assure you I sang out pretty well, though I can't say that it was to any great tune. You'll say, perhaps, that I am acting the *trumpeter* still.

"Now the grief of the story is, that we had no officer killed, so no promotion; the Dey's balls seemed to have the navy list by heart, and took care to avoid every body who would have made a vacancy. The admiral had a fore dowie on the chops, which did not I believe draw blood; if it did he swabbed it up directly without saying a word about it, though he must have had a good deal of jaw of his own, to have been able to stand such a thump.

"I have written my paper full, and yet I believe I have told you little or nothing about the real battle; but the truth is I saw but little of it. I was like the man in the play, who could not see the town for the houses; and Jonah in the whale's belly knew as much about a gale of wind, as a middy in a three decker does an action. But the best of the story is, and I must take a new sheet to tell it, that the *Prometheus* brought us two new midshipmen—funny little fellows; who do you think they were? The consul's wife and daughter! I wonder how they behaved in the action; I did not see them. The consul himself was in irons ashore. Now that is all over, I wonder whether he'll thank us for teaching his wife to wear the breeches. He had a child in the cradle, and the doctor promised to give it some dose that should make it lie quiet; and he engaged to bring it down in a basket like a roasting pig; but just as the poor doctor and his pig got to the last gate, the poor little devil began to squeak: so the Turks found out the whole affair, and clapped the doctor and three youngsters and the boat's crew into prison, as they do the old women about London, for child stealing. The doctor, I hear, says, that it is the most surprising thing in the world that his drugs did not keep the child quiet, and indeed I think so too; for, after taking these folks' stuffs, people are generally quiet enough. However, all's well that ends well; the Dey sent the child off next morning—we thought he must have a good force with him, when he could afford to send us the *infantry*. God bless you, my dear—. I have got a plan of the whole affair, which Jane may work into a sampler at Christmas: only, mind, the Turks must be done in *worsied*. I hear our captain is going with dispatches. I shall try to get this letter sent, to let you know that I am alive and merry; and now that you are sure of that, I'll tell you of a little scratch I had, but it's nothing at all, just like my letter. Our doctor you see has no better success with me than the *Prometheus* doctor with the little child, for he has not made me *quitt*. Again, God bless you."

Marshall, Printer, Newcastle.