

JAMES BALCHEN'S LETTER TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND Snr.

IN the year 1748 James Balchen wrote to George Cumberland, who had the year before married his sister, and enclosed in his letter the copy of one which he had addressed to the English Resident at Bremen, and which runs as follows :

BREMEN. 8.jan. 1748.

Being a subject to his Most Gracious Majesty the King of Great Britain, I take the Liberty to acquaint Your Excellence with the following unfortunate Accident which I have met with, and hope that if it is in Your Power Your Excellence will Assist me. I am an Apprentice to a Merchant in the City of London, and have come to this place to learn the German Language, for this purpose I was with a Clergyman at a place Calld Oberneuland, about a Dutch Mile from the City of Bremen, and being in the begining of Last October in the house of the Clerk of the parish, and having a Gun loaded hanging over my Shoulder (as I had that Morning been a Shooting) it Unfortunately Whent off, and Wounded the Wife of this Person through the Side of her Thigh I have done all that was in my power to Assist this Woman Under her Misfortune, and it has Already Cost me more than go D [dollars ?] I have offer'd the Husband of the Person to whom this Accident happned 5 [or, it may be, 15] Grote pr. Day for his Wife, till she was Intirely Recover'd, in presence of the Clergyman I live with, who will be a Witness (as he is sensible of the Justness of my Proceeding) that this Person gave me his hand over the Table and agreed with me in his Presence, to accept of this my Offer-But by the Instigation of some Persons who have put in this Man's head that it is easily for him to make a Good Advantage of this Misfortune, as I am an Englishman, therefore this Person has protested against this Agreement, and altho I have asked him many Times to Acquaint me how much he Demanded, I could never gett an Answer, and Notwithstanding what I have Already paid in this affair, and that I have never Denied this Man any Reasonable Assistance, I was Arrested Last Monday, between 10 and 11 at Night, in a most shamefull Manner, by three Soldiers (at the aforesaid Clergeman's House) by the Orders of the Magistrates of this City, (altho I have been Ill, and had then a Physician to attend me) and the Next Morning Early, brought from thence, without knowing the Reason, and had it not been for a Merchant here, who is bound for 300 D. to Deliver my Person when Demanded, I must have been still Under Con- finement. What I think is very strange in this proceeding I have never been examined, since I have been Arrested which is now almost a Week, and notwithstanding my Endeavours, cannot find it possible to Vindicate my self in Person before the Magistrates of this City, which is very hard.

I am Informd that I must pay 5⁰ more to the Man, and 5⁰ D. to the Magistrates altho it was an accident which pleasd God, and not owing to any Neglect, this has been Affirm'd by the Woman her self, to me and to the Magistrates 0⁰ the City who Come to her the next Day, after the Accident happned, she then Declar'd to him, that I was noways to Blame for this Accident, as the Gun whent off in a very Unaccountable Manner, as it hung by the Strap over my shoulder and he took down the Same in Writing. I hope I am

not liable to the same punishment as if I had Done this with Intent, and shou'd think that to be pros- tituted [prosecuted] in this Manner like a Common Criminal is very hard.

The Woman is now almost Recover'd, and I have the Surgeons Attestation (to whom I have paid 56 D for this Cure) that she will have no Lameness, but will be as well as ever, and therefore after what I have Already Done I much [or must] Wonder at this Base Usage, altho it is now more than 9 Weeks since the Accident happned, and have never thought of Absconding, which I co'd Easily have done Long Since, but the Reason of their Usage is, that this Person wo'd Indeavour to Make his Fortune with this my Unhappy Accident which has befallen me, he being very much in Debt I must likewise Inform Your Excellence that my Friend the Merchant, was Oblig'd to pay the Soldiers, which Arrested me, and for the Commission which allow'd me to give Bail before I could be set at Liberty. Now I hope Your Excellence will take this my affair Under Your Favourable Consideration, and Assist an English man in Distress, and shall as in Duty Bound, be ever Oblig'd to Acknowledge the Favour from &c.

The end of James Balchen's unpleasant adventure remains unrecorded. Evidently George Cumberland and his sons after him preserved his letter, which forms the first item in the collection of family correspondence. James did not live many years longer, but died of consumption, a disease very prevalent in his family at the age of twenty four.