

To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

STRICTURES ON THE CHARACTER OF  
GENERAL WASHINGTON.

UNMIXED panegyric cannot be appropriated to man, who is found to be a being of a mixed species, in whom virtues and errors are blended. He approximates nearest to virtue, who is the most free from errors. By praising a character too highly, no good is done, as some writers on morals have alleged, for it is of no avail to hold up a character as perfect, while experience shows it to be unattainable, and consequently not to be imitated. The eulogies of the French academies have been extremely faulty in this respect, and I am inclined to think the account of General Washington, published in your first number is too much in the same style.

General Washington had many amiable qualities, but being a man he had also his failings. It is greatly to be regretted that the friends of liberty are not more consistent. Much might be written to shew the inconsistencies, and the departure from their own principles of the advocates of liberty, and of the friends of free inquiry.

I have two blemishes to charge on the character of Washington; first that he continued to be a slave-holder, and secondly that when remonstrated with on this subject by the philanthropic and energetic Rushton of Liverpool, he had the *littleness* to return the letter under cover without a syllable in reply.

Some may think that Washington made amends to the cause of humanity by ordering by his will his slaves to receive their freedom on the decease of his wife, and rest satisfied with his excuse that emancipating them during her life would be attended with insuperable difficulties on account of their intermixture by marriage with the dowager negroes, it not being in his power under the tenure by which the latter were held to manumit them. I cannot admit the validity of this excuse; had he no means in his power, either by persuasion or purchase, to prevail on his wife to consent to this act of justice? It appears singular that he should leave it to posthumous execution. But the prejudices of the Virginians ran strong against the emancipation of Blacks, and I am ready to think Washington

feared to lessen his popularity by encountering these prejudices, and hence this delay of justice until after his death. I do not envy the *cold* feelings of a man, who could so easily settle the account with himself.

Now as to the second charge, I think it showed a resentment unbecoming a great mind. Edward Rushton had in early life suffered the deprivation of his sight by his kind attentions to this injured race, by undauntedly going down to attend them in the hold of a Guinea vessel in which he was an apprentice, at a time when an infectious disorder had broken out among them. An inflammation in his eyes succeeded and brought on blindness from which after thirty years' suffering, he is only lately partially recovered. It is known that Washington was acquainted with the sufferings that befel Rushton as a martyr in the cause of humanity, at the time when stung with the severe remonstrance, he so unhandsomely returned his letter. By thus wincing, he proved "his withers not unwrung."

To show the temper of the two men, as well as for the sake of the just sentiments it contains, I subjoin some extracts from this letter.

After enumerating the services of General Washington in the cause of liberty, and the happiness of America under her new constitution, he thus addresses him:

"But it is not to the commander in chief of the American forces, nor to the president of the United States, that I have aught to address, my business is with George Washington of Mount Vernon, in Virginia, a man, who notwithstanding his hatred of oppression and his ardent love of liberty, holds at this moment hundreds of his fellow beings in a state of abject bondage. Yes! you, who conquered under the banners of freedom, you, who are now the first magistrate of a free people, are, (strange to relate) a slaveholder. That a Liverpool merchant should endeavour to enrich himself by such a business is not a matter of surprise; but that you, an enlightened character, strongly enamoured of your own freedom, you who, if the British forces had succeeded in the Eastern states, would have retired with a few congenial spirits to the rude fastnesses

of the western wilderness, there to have enjoyed that blessing, without which a paradise would be disgusting, and with which the most savage region is not without its charms; that you, I say, should continue to be a slave-holder, a proprietor of human flesh and blood, creates in many of your British friends both astonishment and regret! It has been said by your apologists, that your feelings are inimical to slavery, and that you are induced to acquiesce in it at present merely from motives of policy: the only true policy is justice, and he who regards the consequences of an act, rather than the justice of it, gives no very exalted proof of the greatness of his character. But if your feelings be actually repugnant to slavery, then are you more culpable than the callous-hearted planter, who laughs at what he calls the pitiful whining of the abolitionists, because he believes slavery to be justifiable; while you persevere in a system which your conscience tells you to be wrong. If we call the man obdurate who cannot perceive the atrociousness of slavery, what epithets does he deserve, who, while he does perceive its atrociousness, continues to be a proprietor of slaves? Nor is it likely that your own unfortunate negroes are the only sufferers by your adhering to this nefarious business; consider the force of an example like yours, consider how many of the sable race may now be pining in bondage, merely, forsooth, because the President of the United States, who has the character of a wise and good man, does not see cause to discontinue the long established practice. Of all the slave-holders under heaven, those of the United States appear to me the most reprehensible; for man never is so truly odious, as when he inflicts upon others that which he himself abominates. The hypocritical bawd who preaches chastity, yet lives by the violation of it, is not more truly disgusting than one of your slave-holding gentry bellowing in favour of democracy. Man does not readily perceive defects in what he has been accustomed to venerate; hence it is that you have escaped those animadversions which your slave-proprietorship has so long merited."

I could enlarge my extracts from  
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this letter of close and just remonstrance, but I fear to trespass too far on the pages of the Magazine.

When this letter is viewed in contrast with the eulogy of D. B. Warden, it may enable us to form a juster estimate of the character of Washington. To those who conceive themselves bound to defend a favourite character through all circumstances, this set off will not be acceptable. To them, as was the case with the man to whom they were originally addressed, the effusions of an honest heart conveying the language of reproof will not be pleasing....

....."They are too rough to suit  
"Ears long accustomed to the tuneful  
lute." N. K.

For the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*.

#### AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIVERPOOL BOTANIC GARDEN.

*Extracted from an Introduction to a Catalogue of Plants belonging to it, just published.*

THE Liverpool Botanic Garden, was established by public subscription, in the year 1800, and opened in 1803. About ten statute acres of land were purchased at a convenient distance from the town, and rather more than one half of them have been appropriated to the garden. Two lodges have been built for the residence of the Curator, a committee room, and other purposes; and the whole is enclosed with a substantial stone wall. The remaining land is sold; and such has been the rapid, and perhaps unprecedented advance in the value of property in the vicinity of Liverpool, that the sale of the half has nearly repaid the purchase of the whole. The land is held by a renewable lease, under the Corporation of Liverpool, who, with the same distinguished liberality and generosity, with which they have encouraged any proposal for the improvement or ornament of the town, have made a free grant to the Proprietors of the reversionary interest of the garden and buildings, "so long as the same shall remain appropriated to the purposes of the present Institution."

The disposition of the garden was suggested by William Roscoe Esq. to whose zeal and active exertion in the dissemination of science, the encouragement of the fine arts, the general