

William Parry of Little Baddow to Robert Dixon of Felstead, June 21st 1793

Besieging the Castle

Head Quarters
Little Baddow

Dear Sir!

At this season when the attention of all Europe is turn'd to the military operations on the Continent, and when there is such a dearth of News from the combin'd Armies, that expectation is almost petrified with astonishment, I embrace the earliest opportunity to send you by this dispatch some account of the progress of the enterprize in which I am engaged. You know the object I had in view this Campaign was to gain a fair Fortress which I esteem of inestimable value, and in the acquisition of which if attainable I flatter myself with the prospect of much felicity.

I came within view of the place on the seventh of May, but owing to various Circumstances it was not till the twenty third of the Month that I began to make regular approaches and commence the Siege in form. It was with a gentle summons to surrender in the language usual on such occasions. The summons produced a Parley, in which though a surrender was positively refused, I was so charm'd with both the Officers * who gave the reply (**the understanding and the heart*) that I should esteem myself peculiarly happy to have one of them for my most intimate Counsellor, and the other for my Bosom Friend through Life. The result of the Parley was as you will naturally suppose, that I became more earnestly desirous to be possess'd of the place, and I determin'd to continue the Siege, until I could bring the Garrison if possible to reasonable terms. I took my measures accordingly.

But upon the second Attack May 29th, I met with a great and Dreadful Repulse, which was very near terminating in a Defeat and proving fatal to my design. In the affair of this Day, I had brought up a Battalion of good Expectations which were advancing secretly at the head of my Troops when the Garrison made a Sortie & they were all cut off in a few Minutes and not one left, though they were as fine and well disciplined troops of the kind as any officer collected. Next to them I had placed the Columns destined for the Attack, which were form'd by a large Body of earnest wishes & desires and on which I chiefly depended. But though they were much stronger and more determin'd troops than the former, so vigorous was the repulse from the Garrison that they were driven back, with many wounds, but happily none of their wounds were Mortal, though they occasion'd great pain when this unpleasant contest was over. I withdrew my wounded troops from the scene of action leaving all my expectations dead on the field, without the honours of Internment.

Upon a review of this distressing affair I had nothing to console me, but this consideration; that my Army had stood true to its colours and that though beaten, no part of it had fled. For some days we rested on our Arms without making any fresh advances, during which time I had the pleasure to see all my wounded troops recover and look as well as ever, though not free from pain. But as I began to despair of success in this mode of attack, I determin'd to alter my plan of operations,

accordingly I sent out reconnoitring parties, to raise if it were possible a fresh body of expectations knowing how necessary their presence always is to stimulate the exertions of the other Corps. But as none arrived, and I grew impatient of further Delay, I employed the Troops in Camp (now in perfect health) in constructing secretly a Masked Battery* on the fourteenth of June (**Writing a Letter*), which was open'd on the place very unexpectedly the next day. It was compos'd of all the heavy Artillery of Argument, and all the lighter Field Pieces of persuasion, that I could hastily collect. The former I directed against the highest and strongest part of the Fortifications, call'd the Tower of the Judgement, & the latter against another work, which from its nature I judge must be more susceptible of Impression, it being constructed in the form of a Heart. All the pieces were brought to bear at the same time and though I do not learn that any material Damage was sustain'd by the Fortress (which I should be very sorry to hear for I would not have the place injured for the world) yet the effect was that the Garrison has sent out a Flag, which though it brings no proposals of surrender has open'd the way to an amicable discussion. An immediate cessation of Hostilities took place of course, and a Negotiation is begun, which I am not quite destitute of hope may terminate in a Capitulation. If I can at last bring the Siege to this Issue, I believe there will be little difficulty then in settling the Terms, for notwithstanding the long and determin'd resistance which has been made I do not wish to propose any thing disadvantageous, or contrary to Military usage, but am willing to grant to the Garrison all the honours of War and whenever a Capitulation can be adjusted, I shall be exceeding happy to see the place enjoy as much independence and liberty as ever, upon condition only of it changing its name & forming with me a close and Perpetual Alliance. And thus having done with war I trust I shall again pitch my Tent, beneath the shade of the Temple of Concord, and repose in the Bosom of Peace.

Thus Sir as I am engaged in a better cause than that of the Allies of Flanders, so I am willing to think as yet I shall in the final Issue meet with greater Success. Be pleased to communicate this Intelligence to the Officer next in command of your Post with my Respects, and if you should both find any pleasure therein, it will add to my own.

I have the Honour to be
Sir
With great Respect
Yours very sincerely
Wm. Parry

To Citizen Dixon
Commander-in-Chief
On the upper Banks
Of the Chelmer
near Felstead
Essex

Revd. William Parry 1754-1819 was the dissenting minister at Little Baddow in Essex and a widower with 4 children under 10 years when he wrote this amusing account of his wooing and proposal of marriage to Susannah Lincolne 1757-1833. She was 36 years old, the daughter of the Revd. William Lincolne, the dissenting minister at Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, who had died the year before.

The letter was addressed to Robert Dixon, the miller at Felstead in Essex who had married Susannah's sister Rebecca Lincolne in 1787, six years earlier. They were clearly friends and Parry had presumably enlisted Robert and Rebecca to help persuade Susannah to marry him, which she finally did in October 1793. They went on to have 2 children; their daughter Rebecca died aged 13 and their son, John Lincolne Parry, died unmarried in 1867.

William Parry became the Principal of Wymondley Dissenting Academy near Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, in 1799 and died there in 1819. After his death, Susannah and John moved to Southwold, by the sea in Suffolk, to be near one of her step-daughters, Sarah Parry, who had married the dissenting minister there, Thomas Nottage. Susannah and John are buried side by side just by the main gate into St Edmund's Church graveyard in Southwold.

Transcribed from the original by Helen Wolvey, 5x great granddaughter of William Lincolne, 2015