

TO LADY AILESBURY, Friday 23 July 1779

Printed from the MS now wsl; first printed *Works* v. 573-4. For the history of the MS see *ante* 23 Aug. 1760.

Address: To the Countess of Aylsbury, at Park Place near Henley.

Postmark: 24 IY.

Strawberry Hill, Friday night.

I AM not at all surprised, my dear Madam, at the intrepidity of Mrs Damer; she always was the heroic daughter of a hero.¹ Her sense and coolness never forsake her. I, who am not so firm, shuddered at your Ladyship's account.² Now that she has stood fire for four hours, I hope she will give as clear proofs of her understanding, of which I have as high opinion as of her courage, and not return in any danger.

I am to dine at Ditton³ tomorrow, and will certainly talk on the subject you recommend—yet I am far, till I have heard more, from thinking with your Ladyship, that more troops and artillery at Jersey would be desirable.⁴ Any considerable quantity of either, especially of the former cannot be spared at this moment, when so big a cloud hangs over this island, nor would any number avail if the French should be masters at sea. A large garrison would but tempt the French thither, were it but to distress this country; and what is worse would encourage Mr Conway to make an impracticable defence. If he is to remain in a situation so unworthy of him, I confess I had rather he was totally incapable of making any defence. I love him enough not to murmur at his exposing himself where his country and his honour demand him—but I would not have him measure himself in a place untenable against very superior force. My present comfort is, as to him, that France at this moment has a

1. The packet in which she was crossing from Dover to Ostend [with Lady William Campbell and the Duchess of Leinster] was taken by a French frigate after a running fight of several hours (Mary Berry); see also OSSORY ii. 113 and nn. 3, 6. She and the others were shortly released unharmed, continuing on their journey, Mrs Damer and presumably Lady William going to the Spa, and the Duchess to Aubigny (DU DEFFAND v. 160).

2. HW wrote to Lady Ossory 20 July

1779 that on 19 July 'Lady Ailesbury was come to me all terror and distress' about Mrs Damer being 'taken prisoner' (OSSORY ii. 113); the present letter, however, is probably a reply to a missing letter of Lady Ailesbury written since her visit.

3. The Hertfords' seat at Thames Ditton in Surrey.

4. Lady Ailesbury had been frightened by a false rumour that Conway and Jersey had been captured by the French (*ibid.* ii. 113 and nn. 5-6).