

far vaster object. I have good reason to believe the government knows that a great army is ready to embark at St Malo's;⁵ but will not stir till after a sea-fight, which we do not know but may be engaged at this moment.⁶ Our fleet is allowed to be the finest ever set forth by this country—but it is inferior in number by seventeen ships⁷ to the united squadron of the Bourbons. France, if successful, means to pour in a vast many thousands on us, and have threatened to burn the capital itself⁸—Jersey, my dear Madam, does not enter into a calculation of such magnitude. The moment is singularly awful—yet the vaunts of enemies are rarely executed successfully and ably. Have we trampled America under our foot?

You have too good sense Madam to be imposed upon by my arguments, if they are insubstantial. You do know, that I have had my terrors for Mr Conway—but at present they are out of the question from the insignificance of his island. Do not listen to rumours, nor believe a single one till it has been canvassed over and over. Fear, folly, fifty motives, will coin new reports every hour at such a conjuncture. When one is totally void of credit and power, patience is the only wisdom. I have seen dangers still more imminent. They were dispersed. Nothing happens in proportion to what is meditated. Fortune, whatever fortune is, is more constant than is the common notion—I do not give this as one of my solid arguments, but I have always encouraged myself in being superstitious on the favourable side. I never, like most superstitious people, believe auguries against my wishes. We have been fortunate in the escape of Mrs Damer and in the defeat at Jersey even before Mr Conway arrived, and thence I depend on the same future prosperity. From the authority of persons who do not reason on such airy hopes, I am seriously persuaded, that if the fleets engage, the enemy will not gain advantage without deep-felt loss, enough probably to dismay their invasion. Coolness may succeed, and then negotiation—surely, if we can weather the

5. Some 31,000 French troops were assembled at Le Havre and St-Malo; Lord North wrote to Lord Sandwich 18 July that 'immediate attention should be given to any attempt at invasion from St-Malo, Granville, and Havre' (*Sandwich Papers* iii. 48; A. T. Patterson, *The Other Armada*, Manchester, 1960, p. 151).

6. The object of the combined fleets was to cover the passage of the French troops in an attack upon England; however, no

invasion took place and there was no further sea-fighting in home waters for the rest of the war.

7. Actually, 28 (MANN viii. 502, n. 7).

8. 'Tis with the greatest confidence asserted, that the French are absolutely determined to risk sixty thousand men in a descent upon England, and that the attack and destruction of the city of London is their real object' (*Public Adv.* 8 July). See *ante* 10 July 1779, n. 11.