

would return to you soon. I am sensible how very seldom I have written to you—but you have been few moments out of my thoughts. What *they* have been, you who know me so minutely may well guess, and why they do not pass my lips. Sense, experience, circumstances, can teach one to command one's self outwardly, but do not divest a most friendly heart of its feelings. I believe the state of my mind has contributed to bring on a very weak and decaying body my present disorders. I have not been well the whole summer; but for these three weeks much otherwise. It has at last ended in the gout, which, to all appearance, will be a short fit.¹

On public affairs I cannot speak. Everything is so exaggerated on all sides, that what grains of truth remain in the sieve would appear cold and insipid; and the great manœuvres you learn as soon as I. In the naval battle between Byron and D'Estaing, our captains were worthy of any age in our story.²

You may imagine how happy I am at Mrs D.'s return, and at her not being at Naples, as she was likely to have been, at the dreadful explosion of Vesuvius.³ Surely it will have glutted Sir William's rage for volcanos!⁴ How poor Lady Hamilton's nerves stood it I do not conceive.—Oh, mankind! mankind!—Are there not calamities enough in store for us, but must destruction be our amusement and pursuit?

I send this to Ditton,⁵ where it may wait some days; but I would not suffer a sure opportunity to slip without a line. You are more obliged to me for all I do not say, than for whatever eloquence itself could pen.

PS. I unseal my letter to add, that undoubtedly you will come to the meeting of Parliament, which will be in October.⁶ Nothing can

1. HW describes his illness more fully to Mason 14 Sept. 1779, MASON i. 463.

2. D'Estaing's fleet in the West Indies (see *ante* 5 June 1779, n. 1) had on 4 July taken Grenada, and on 6 July defeated Byron's squadron, which had come to the relief of the island; however, the victory was not attained without heavy losses, and both Byron and Major-Gen. James Grant, commander-in-chief of the British forces in the Leeward Islands and a witness of the action, testified to the 'determined bravery and gallantry of the whole squadron' (Byron to Philip Stephens 8 July, and Grant to Germain 8 July,

printed in *London Gazette* No. 12012, 7-11 Sept., reprinted *Daily Adv.* 13 Sept.; see also MANN viii. 515-16 and nn. 2-4).

3. 8 Aug.; see *ibid.* viii. 514-15 and n. 4.

4. Sir William Hamilton (*ante* 29 Aug. 1757, n. 3), the British envoy at Naples and an enthusiastic student of volcanos, sent a description of the eruption in his letter of 1 Oct. to Sir Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society; the letter was read to the Society 16 Dec. (MANN viii. 514-15, nn. 3-4).

5. Where Lord Hertford had then a villa (HW).

6. On 16 Sept. Parliament was further