

The following letter was written by Helen Countess of Selkirk to Mr. Craik of Arbigland, a copy was given in 1894 to [Ceeel]y Countess of Selkirk by Mr. Maxwell Witham of Kircennoll

St Mary's Isle
April 25th 1778:

Sir,

Mr. Jeffrey being abroad when your letter came, I was desired to open it, and believe in perusing it have an answer by my own hand will be full as satisfactory.

The visit we had on Thursday was by no means desirable, But I have the satisfaction to be able to assure my friends, that I was neither alarmed at the time, nor have suffered in the least degree since. They took pains to make themselves understood a press gang, till they had surrounded the house, and the principal one then asked for me. I went down without scruple, they informed me what they were, said their orders was to take my Lord prisoner, or if he was absent to demand the plate. I was so sensible of the mercy it was that my Lord was absent, that I never hesitated about the other. I apprehended the consequences of a refusal or a search to be so much worse, that I would not permit the servants to conceal as they meant to do. I must confess I now regret that, as I might have saved some of the best, for it came afterwards to be firmly believed, that they were much alarmed, but at the time that was not observed, and could not otherwise be learnt as nobody was permitted to leave the house. They asked nothing but plate, I find more of that is left than I first supposed, but unluckily it is either the least was useful, or what is useful happens to be the worst of the kind. The value of it I never suffered to give me a thought, till last night that after the bustle was over my spirits did fail me, and I began to reckon what I might have saved, and consider what better might have been done. But I recovered with daylight, and am resolved if possible not to let myself sink again. I am sure I behaved at the time with the most perfect composure, I may even say indifference, and did what I then thought best, if I had done otherwise it might have turned out worse, I shall therefore allow no more reflections, and as few

regrets as possible. The only real concern which I cannot remove, is to think how my Lord might be affected if he hears this, before he learns from me, and that is most likely, for tho' I wrote and enclosed in the packet that was sent off express to London on Thursday evening, yet I have no reason to think it will find him there, for on Sunday last I had a letter, telling me I need not write again, as he meant to leave town before he could get any letter I could write after that. If you hear we have gone to England do not apprehend we have run away, for in that letter my Lord said he would tell me in his next where to meet him on the road, that letter I expect every post. The people really behaved very civilly. The men who surround the house never offered to come in, nor even ask for anything. They were well armed each with a musket, a large one, two large pistols and a hanger. Their numbers I cannot tell, they were called at first forty, alternately fifteen, I recon they were not near the first, but am persuaded more than the last. The youngest of the officers was a civil looking lad, in American uniform, but it seems he had had a blue greatcoat as a disguise, he meddled little. The other dressed in blue behaved civilly, but with so confident a look and so saucy a manner, that I daresay he could have been very rough had he seen it necessary. They told me they were on the Ranger Frigate, belonging to the States of America, commanded by Captain Paul Johnes Esquire, whom I understand you knew better than me, being John Paul whom they say was born in your ground, and is a gardener's son of yours. Afterwards he had the command of a trading vessel in this place, and is understood to have deserved the gallows oftener than once. It seems it is known this is the name he takes, and he was seen in the Isle, tho' the tenderness of his heart, they said would not allow him to come to the house. The Frigate was at a good distance before the boat reached it, and was seen to make all sail, they could tell they passed the Burrows Head. A cutter from Whitehaven dogged them all day but lost them in the dark about the Mull of Galloway, as we have not yet heard of them we fear they may have escaped. The alarm still continued so a watch was placed on the Isle all night, of a great many men and a good deal of arms, also on the two points of the Bay. I never did apprehend their return, which would have been a very foolish undertaking, as they

were so well known, so I would not leave the house, but I let Mrs Wood take my two girls to Dumfries with her, and part at the younger children being at Carlinmark I sent on other after them. But I was not left alone, for my good friend Miss Elliot, who is as tenderly attached to me as ever friend could be, has never been two yards from me since, and had they taken me on board, or even to America, she resolved to be of the party, but we are all settled now, as before, and I expect the girls home to night. This has proved a very long letter, much more so than I thought of, or than was necessary, but may I beg you will send it to Mrs. Maxwell of Kirkcondell, I darcany I shall hear from her, if I do before this reaches her, she will be so kind as to take this for an answer, for I have a great deal of writing to do and it is rather fatiguing. Mrs. Maxwell will be pleased to understand that I sent her letter to my Lord, which I hope he would get before he left London, I once thought of writing north myself, in the expectation mine might reach first, but expecting a letter on Tuesday to bid me set out to meet my Lord on Wednesday, put it out of my head one post, and the next so engaged with my American friends, she will not be surprised I forgot it. So much time has now clasped, I hope my Lord may reach us soon, if he thinks he can be of use, I beg my compliments to all your family, and am Sir with sincere regard your

Very humble Servant

H. Selkirk.