

The journals of Major Samuel Shaw : the first American consul at Canton : with a life of the author Josiah Quincy [editor], Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1847
pages 102-105

“The delegation from the army to Congress set out on their mission the 21st of December. On the address and petition being read in Congress, a grand committee, consisting of a member from each State, was chosen to confer with our commissioners. The result of this conference was certain resolves of Congress, passed on the 25th of January, the purport whereof was, that the army should receive one month’s pay, and that their accounts should be settled as soon as possible, for discharging the balances of which Congress would endeavour to provide adequate funds. The matter respecting a commutation of the half-pay was recommitted. These resolutions at large were transmitted by our commissioners, in a letter of the 8th of February, to General Knox, which was immediately communicated to the respective lines of the army.

This report, though far from being satisfactory, joined to the certainty that we were on the eve of a general peace, kept the army quiet. In this state of patient expectation, the anonymous address to the officers made its appearance. Immediately on this, the Commander-in-chief, by an order of the 11th of March, directed the officers to assemble on the 15th, which produced the second anonymous address.

The meeting of the officers was in itself exceedingly respectable, the matters they were called to deliberate upon were of the most serious nature, and the unexpected attendance of the Commander-in-chief heightened the solemnity of the scene. Every eye was fixed upon the illustrious man, and attention to their beloved General held the assembly mute. He opened the meeting by apologizing for his appearance there, which was by no means his intention when he published the order which directed them to assemble. But the diligence used in circulating the anonymous pieces rendered it necessary that he should give his sentiments to the army on the nature and tendency of them, and determined him to avail himself of the present opportunity; and, in order to do it with greater perspicuity, he had committed his thoughts to writing, which, with the indulgence of his brother officers, he would take the liberty of reading to them. It is needless for me to say any thing of this production; *it speaks for itself*. After he had concluded his address, he said, that, as a corroborating testimony of the good disposition in Congress towards the army, he would communicate to them a letter received from a worthy member of that body, and one who on all occasions had ever approved himself their fast friend. This was an exceedingly sensible letter; and, while it pointed out the difficulties and embarrassments of Congress, it held up very forcibly the idea that the army should, at all events, be generously dealt with. One circumstance in reading this letter must not be omitted. His Excellency, after reading the first paragraph, made a short pause, took out his spectacles, and begged the indulgence of his audience while he put them on, observing at the same time, that he had grown gray in their service, and now found himself growing blind. There was something so natural, so unaffected, in this appeal, as rendered it superior to the most studied oratory; it forced its way to the heart, and you might see sensibility moisten every eye. The General, having finished, took leave of the assembly, and the business of the day was conducted in the manner which is related in the account of the proceedings.

I cannot dismiss this subject without observing, that it is happy for America that she has a *patriot army*, and equally so that a *Washington* is its leader. I rejoice in the opportunities I have had of seeing this great man in a variety of stations;—calm and intrepid where the battle raged, patient and persevering under the pressure of misfortune, moderate and possessing himself in the full career of

victory. Great as these qualifications deservedly render him, he never appeared to me more truly so, than at the assembly we have been speaking of. On other occasions he has been supported by the exertions of an army and the countenance of his friends; but in this he stood single and alone. There was no saying where the passions of an army, which were not a little inflamed, might lead; but it was generally allowed that longer forbearance was dangerous, and moderation had ceased to be a virtue. Under these circumstances he appeared, not at the head of his troops, but as it were in opposition to them; and for a dreadful moment the interests of the army and its General seemed to be in competition! He spoke,—every doubt was dispelled, and the tide of patriotism rolled again in its wonted course. Illustrious man! what he says of the army may with equal justice be applied to his own character. ‘Had this day been wanting, the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.’”

West Point, May 3d, 1783.