PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 22, 1781.

Extract of a letter from Trenton, dated Jan. 20. 1781.

MILITARY systems, in general, are founded on long experience; and the operations of armies, in various ages and countries, under the conduct of great commanders, have displayed the most brilliant exertions of genius and magnanimity. To such a degree of certainty and sublimity has the art of war been advanced, that few generals dare presume so much upon their own importance as to deviate materially from the beaten tract. A Frederic indeed may contend with impossibilities, and a Washington add new lustre to the military science; but where is the Briton who is encircled with laurels uncommon to other nations? In the contest with the United States, the British operations have displayed a mixture of cruelty, blunders and indecision. In the petite guerre, however, some instances of gallantry have been exhibited, which a generous enemy will admire; but nothing of the sublime has ever descended upon their grand manoeuvres.—Their defects have uniformly resulted from superior conduct in the opposite commanders; their successes have flowed from decided superiority of numbers; and instead of being directed to the much wished for object of their master, the subduction of America, they have universally terminated in robbery, plunder, and desolation. Repeated disappointments have produced a variety of succeeding commanders; but despairing of conquest in the usual manner of conducting war, administration have finally given to the world an unparalled instance of their wisdom, in the appointment of Sir Henry Clinton. This officer, remarkable only for the flights of a bewildered imagination, which the British ministry, in a fit of political phrenzy, construed into the rare sallests of a sublime genius, has adopted a system entirely new to the military world; a system founded partly in treason, partly in intrigue, and partly in necromancy.— The “crimen lææ majestatis” may apply as well to the laws of nations and of arms as to the municipal laws of any particular country. The infamous attempts of sir Henry upon the posts of West Point and its vicinity, through that sink of polution, Arnold, are fully evincive of the two first ingredients of this system. How different was the conduct of the Roman consul, when receiving an information from the chief Physician of King Pyrrhus that for an adequate reward he would poison his master: inflamed with indignation at the monster of villainy, the magnanimous consul execrated the proposal, and informed the king, declaring that the Romans, conquered by valor, not through treason.
Sir Henry places much confidence in the certainty of dreams; for in that interval between sleeping and waking, he is persuaded that his conversation is with familiar spirits, from whom he receives infallible information. These genii, he supposes, are composed of different corps of demons, recruited nearly to their full establishment, from the straggling ghosts of Tories, deserters from this globe, during the present war. As he finds himself and his nation in the closest league with these invisible infernals, he omits no opportunity of availing himself of their assistance and pays the most obsequious deference to their suggestions.—For some time since he has indulged himself in the most profound reveries: he has frequently started from table, quitted his guests, thrown himself upon a couch, and by his foaming, frothing, and writing, discovered all the incomprehensible agitations of the pseudomanthetic fury. One day recovering in a moment from an extraordinary paroxism, he declared to his generals, that on the first day of January, anno domini 1781, the rebel army would universally mutiny, renounce their allegiance to the United States, and proffer their service to the king his master. Elated at a prospect so flattering to his views, he immediately gave orders for the necessary dispositions to receive his intended allies. Staten-Island he appointed as a place well situated, on which he could assemble a large detachment of his army, from whence he could easily cross over to the state of New-Jersey, and there form a junction with the Pennsylvania line. Armed vessels and boats were accordingly collected in the Sound. Our brave and vigilant general Wayne having undoubted intelligence of the intentions and movements of the serial Briton, was determined to fix the delusion, and, if possible, turn the comic into a tragic scene, communicated the whole to his troops; and changing uniforms between officers and serjeants, threw the line into the real appearance of a most serious insurrection.—In order to draw the romantic hero as far into the country as possible, and prevent his retreat, the new made serjeants marched the troops from Morristown to Princeton, and from Princeton to Trenton; there manœuvring in such a manner, that any but those really in the plan, would have conceived an absolute revolt. The serjeants in officers uniform, took quarters in Penny-town, apparently soliciting a return to duty. In the mean time the Jersey militia were collecting in the vicinity of Staten-Island, in order to attack the rear of sir Henry, should he direct his rout towards Trenton. Great were our expectations upon this rare occasion. The descent was almost realized, when a strange whim came into sir Henry's head, that as these insurgents had condescended to put themselves upon a par with his troops, it was absolutely necessary to receive from them the rout they intended, in order to form a junction, previous to any farther movements of his army. To this end an ambassador and a courier extraordinary were dispatched; they arrived in camp, and, as their characters rendered their persons sacred, a strong guard was posted at their quarters, to prevent any violence that might possibly be offered them. In the mean time, beholding the militia in force upon the Jersey shore, Macbeth's moving forest occurred to the mind of sir Henry, with all its horrors: He immediately changed his resolution and determined to return to New-York, as a place of greater security.— Our
general finding that no farther advantage could be taken of this military phœnomenon, hung the
ambassador and courier as spies, and re-assumed his usual order and discipline.