Luther Martin: Reply to Maryland Landholder No. X, *Maryland Journal,* 7 March 1788

Mr. Goddard, Sir, In consequence of the justice I did Mr. Gerry, on a former occasion, I find myself complimented with an Address in your last Paper.–Whether the Landholder of the Connecticut Courant, and of the Maryland Journal, is the same person, or different, is not very material;–I however incline to the former opinion, as I hope, for the honour of human nature, it would be difficult to find more than one individual, who could be capable of so total a disregard to the principles of truth and honour.

After having made the most unjust and illiberal attack on Mr. Gerry, and stigmatized him as an enemy to his country, and the basest of mankind, for no other reason than a firm and conscientious discharge of an important trust reposed in that gentleman, had I not come in for a share of his censure, I confess I should have been both disappointed and mortified–It would have had at least the appearance, that the Landholder had discovered something in my principles, which he considered congenial with his own–However great may be my political sins, to be cursed with his approbation and applause, would be a punishment much beyond their demerit. But, Sir, at *present*, I mean to confine myself to the original subject of controversy, the injustice of the charges made against Mr. Gerry.

That my veracity will not be questioned when giving my negative to *anonymous* slander, I have the fullest confidence–I have equal confidence that it will be as little questioned by any who know me, even should the Landholder vouchsafe to give the Public his name–a *respectable* name I am sure it *cannot* be–His absolute want of truth and candour in assertions meant to injure the reputation of individuals, whose names are given to the Public, and to hold them up to the indignation of their fellow-citizens, will ever justify this assertion, even should the name belong to one decorated with wealth, or dignified by station.

But the Landholder wishes it to be supposed, that though my veracity should not be doubted, yet my evidence ought to be rejected, and observes, that to comprehend what *credit* ought to be given to it, (by which, I suppose, he means its *sufficiency* if credited) it ought to be known how long I was absent from Convention, as well as the time I attended.

I believe, Sir, whoever will read my former publication, will in a moment perceive, that I there "stated" all the "information" on this subject, that was "necessary" or material, and that I left no defect for the Landholder to supply–I *there* mentioned, that "I took my seat early in June, that I left Philadelphia on the fourth of September, and during that period, was not absent from the Convention *while sitting*, except only five days in the beginning of August, immediately after the Committee of Detail had reported."

I did not state the precise day of June when I took my seat–it was the ninth, not the tenth–a very inconsiderable mistake of the Landholder–But between that day and the fourth of September, he says, that I was absent ten days at Baltimore, and as many at

New-York; and thereby insinuates, that an *absence* of *twenty* days *from the Convention* intervened during that period, in *which time* Mr. Gerry might have *made*, and *failed in*, his motion concerning continental money.

A short state of facts is all that is necessary to shew the disingenuity of the Landholder, and that it is very possible to convey a falsehood, or something very much like it, almost in the words of truth–On the twenty-fifth [sixth] of July the Convention *adjourned*, to meet again on the sixth of August–I embraced that opportunity to come to Baltimore, and left Philadelphia on the twenty seventh; I returned on the fourth of August, and on the sixth attended the Convention, with such members as were in town, at which time the Committee of Detail made their report, and many of the members being yet absent, we adjourned to the next day–Mr. Gerry left Philadelphia to go to New-York, the day before I left there to come to Baltimore; he had not returned on Tuesday the seventh of August, when I set out for New-York, from whence I returned and took my seat in Convention on Monday the thirteenth.

It is true that from the twenty-fifth of July to the thirteenth of August, eighteen (not twenty) days had elapsed; but on *one* of those days *I attended*, and on *twelve* of them the *Convention did not meet*; I was therefore perfectly correct in my *original* statement, that from early in June till the fourth of September, I was absent but five days from the Convention while sitting, and in that statement omitted no "necessary information"–It is also true, that of *those eighteen* days Mr. Gerry was absent *twelve* or *thirteen*, and that one of those days when he was not absent was Sunday, on which day the Convention did not meet.

Thus, Sir, by relating facts as they really occurred, we find the only time between early in June and the fourth of September, when such a motion could have been made by Mr. Gerry, without my being present, is narrowed down to four, or at most five days, as I originally stated it, although the Landholder wishes it should be supposed there were twenty days during that period, when it might have taken place without my knowledge, to wit, ten while I was at Baltimore, and as many more while at New-York.

The Landholder also states, that the Convention commenced the fourteenth day of May, and that I did not take my seat till the tenth day of June, by which, if he means any thing, I presume he means to insinuate, that within that portion of time, Mr. Gerry's motion might have been made and rejected. He is here, Sir, equally unfortunate and disingenuous–Though the Convention was to have met by appointment on the fourteenth of May, yet no material business was entered upon till on or about the *thirtieth* of that month: It was on *that day* that the Convention, having had certain propositions laid before them by the Honourable Governor of Virginia, *resolved* to go into a consideration of those propositions–In this fact I am confident I am not mistaken, as I state the *day* not merely from my own recollection, from minutes, which I believe to be very correct, in my possession, of the information given by the Honourable Mr. M'Henry, to the assembly. The truth is, Sir, that very little progress had been made by the Convention before I arrived, and that they had not been more than ten days, or about that time, seriously engaged in business.–The first thing I did after I took my seat was carefully to examine the journals for information of what had already been done or proposed–I was also furnished with notes of the debates which had taken place, and can

with truth say, that I made myself "minutely informed" of what had happened before that period–In the same manner, after my return from New-York, I consulted the *journals*, (for we *were* permitted to *read* them, although we were not always permitted *to take copies*)–If the motion attributed to Mr. Gerry, had been made and rejected either before I first took my seat, or while at New-York, it would have *there* appeared; and that no such motion was made and rejected during either of those periods, I appeal to the highest possible authority–I appeal to those very journals, which ought to have been published, and which we are informed are placed in the possession of our late Honourable President–But why, Sir, should I appeal to those journals, or to any other authority? Let the Landholder turn to his *eighth* number, addressed to the Honourable Mr. Gerry–let him blush, unless incapable of that sensation, while he reads the following passage! "*Almost* the *whole time* during the sitting of the Convention, and until the *constitution* had received its *present* form, no man was more plausible and conciliating on every subject than Mr. Gerry," &c. "Thus stood Mr. Gerry till towards the *close of the business*, he introduced a motion respecting the redemption of paper–money"–The *whole time* of the sitting of the Convention was not *almost* past–The *Constitution* had not received its *present* form-nor was the *business* drawing towards a *close* until long after I took my seat in Convention. It is therefore proved by the Landholder himself, that Mr. Gerry did not make this motion at any time *before* the ninth day of June–Nay more, in the paper now before me *he* acknowledges, that in his eighth number he meant (and surely no one ought to know his meaning better than himself) "to *fix* Mr. Gerry's apostacy to a *period within the last thirteen days."*7 Why then all this misrepresentation of my absence at Baltimore and New-York? Why the attempt to induce a belief that the Convention had been engaged in business from the fourteenth of May, and the insinuation that it might have happened in those periods? And why the charge that in not stating *those facts* I had withheld from the public information *necessary* to its forming a right judgment of the credit which ought to be given to my evidence?

But, Sir, I am really at a loss which most to admire, the depravity of this writer's heart, or the weakness of his head!–Is it possible he should not perceive that the moment he *fixes* the time of Mr. Gerry's motion to the last thirteen days of the Convention, he proves incontestibly the falshood and malice of his charges against that gentleman? for he has expressly stated that this motion and the rejection it received was the cause, and the sole cause, of his apostacy; that "before, there was nothing in the system, as it *now* stands, to which he had any objection, but that *afterwards* he was inspired with the utmost rage and intemperate opposition to the whole system he had formerly praised;"8–whereas I have shewn to the clearest demonstration, that a considerable time before the last thirteen days, Mr. Gerry had given the most decided opposition to the system; I have shewn this by recital of facts, which if credited, incontestibly prove it–facts which I again repeat, will never by contradicted by any member of the Convention–I ground this assertion upon the fullest conviction, that it is impossible to find a single person in that number so wicked, as publicly and deliberately to prostitute his name in support of falsehood, and at the same time so weak as to do this when he must be sure of detection.

But the Landholder is willing to have it supposed, that Mr. Gerry might have made

the motion in a "*Committee*," and that *there* it might have happened without my knowledge; to such wretched subterfuges is he driven. This evasion, however, will be equally unavailing.

The business of the committees were not of a secret nature, nor were they conducted in a secret manner; I mean as to the members of the Convention. I am satisfied that there was no committee while I was there, of whose proceedings I was not at least "so minutely informed," that an attempt of so extraordinary a nature as that attributed to Mr. Gerry, and attended with such an immediate and remarkable revolution in his conduct, could not have taken place without my having heard something concerning it.–The non-adoption of a measure by a committee did not preclude its being proposed to the Convention, and being there adopted. Can it be presumed that a question in which Mr. Gerry is represented to have been so deeply interested, and by the fate of which his conduct was entirely influenced, would, for want of success in a *committee*, have been totally relinquished by him, without a single effort to carry it in *Convention?*–If any other proof is wanting, I appeal again to the Landholder himself:–In his *eighth* number he states that the motion was rejected "by the Convention"–Let it be remembered also, as I have before observed, in the paper now before me, he declares it was his intention in *that* number to fix Mr. Gerry's apostacy to a period within the last thirteen days; and in the *same* number he observes, that Mr. Gerry's resentment could only embarrass and delay the *completion* of the business for a *few days*; all which equally militates against every idea of the motion being made before I left Philadelphia, whether in Committee, or in Convention.

The Landholder hath also asserted, that I have "put into Mr. Gerry's mouth, objections different from any thing his letter to the legislature of his state contains, so that if my representation is *true*, his must be *false*." In this charge he is just as well founded as in those I have already noticed.–Mr. Gerry has more than once published to the world, under the sanction of his name, that he opposed the system from a firm persuasion that it would endanger the liberties of America, and destroy the freedom of the states and their citizens.11 Every word which I have stated as coming from his mouth, so far from being inconsistent with those declarations, are perfectly correspondent thereto, and direct proofs of their truth.

When the Landholder informed us that Mr. Gerry was "face to face with his colleagues in the Convention of Massachusetts," why did he not, unless he wished to mislead the public, also inform us for what purpose he was there? That it was only to *answer* questions that might be proposed to him, not himself to *ask* questions–that he could not consistently interfere in any manner in the debates–and that he was even prohibited an opportunity of explaining such parts of his conduct as were censured in his presence.

By the anonymous publication alluded to by the Landholder, and inserted in the note, Mr. Gerry's colleagues are not called upon to *acquit* him; it only declares "that he believes them to be men of too much honour to assert that his reasons in Convention were totally different from those he published;"–and in this, I presume, he was not disappointed–the Landholder otherwise would have published it with triumph;–but if Mr. Gerry, as it is insinuated, was only prevented by pride from, in person, requesting

them to acquit him, it amounts to a proof of his consciousness that, as men of honour, they could not have refused it, had he made the request.

No person, who views the absurdities and inconsistencies of the Landholder, can, I think, have a very respectable opinion of his understanding; but I, who am not much prejudiced in his favour, could scarcely have conceived him so superlatively weak as to expect to deceive the public and obtain credit to himself, by asking "if the charges against Mr. Gerry are not true, why do not his colleagues contradict them?" and "why is it that we do not see Mr. M'Henry's verification of your assertions?"–If *these* gentlemen were to do Mr. Gerry that justice, he might as well inquire "why is it we do not also see the verification" of A, B, C and D, and so on to the last letter of the conventional alphabet.

When the Landholder, in his eighth number, addressed himself to Mr. Gerry, he introduced his charges by saying, "you doubtless will recollect the following state of facts;–if you do not, *every member* of the Convention Will *attest them*."

One member of the Convention has had firmness sufficient to contradict them with his name, although he was well apprised that he thereby exposed himself as a mark for the arrows of his political adversaries, and as to some of them, he was not unacquainted with what kind of men he had to deal: But of all the members who composed that body, not one has yet stepped forward to make good the Landholder's *prediction*; nor has one been found to "*attest*" his statement of *facts*.

Many reasons may be assigned why the members of the Convention should not think themselves under a *moral* obligation of involving themselves in controversy, by giving their names in vindication of Mr. Gerry; and I do not believe any of those who signed the proposed Constitution would consider themselves bound to do this by any *political* obligation:–But, Sir, I can hardly suppose that Mr. Gerry is so perfectly esteemed and respected by *every* person who had a seat in that body, that not a single individual could possibly be procured to give his sanction to the Landholder's charges, if it could be done with justice; and as to *myself*, I much question whether it would be easy to convince any person, who was present at our information to the assembly, that *every one* of my honourable colleagues (to each of whose merit I cordially subscribe, though compelled to differ from them in political sentiments) would be prevented by motives of personal delicacy to myself, from contradicting the facts I have stated relative to Mr. Gerry, if it could be done consistent with truth.

If the Landholder was a member of the Convention, to facilitate the adoption of a favourite system, or to gratify his resentment against its opposers, he has originally invented, and is now labouring to support, charges the most unjust and ungenerous, contrary to his own knowledge of facts.–If he was not a member, he is acting the same part, without any knowledge of the subject, and in this has the merit of either following his own invention, or of dealing out the information he receives from some person of whom he is the wretched tool and dupe, at the same time expressing himself with a decision, and making such professions of being perfectly in every secret, as naturally tends, unless contradicted, to deceive and delude the unsuspecting multitude.

In *one* of these predicaments the Landholder *must* stand–he is welcome to take his choice–in either case he only wants to be known to be despised.

Now, Sir, let the Landholder come forward and give his name to the public–It is the only thing necessary to finish his character–and to convince the world that he is as dead to shame, as he is lost to truth and destitute of honour.

If I, Sir, can be instrumental in procuring him to disclose himself; even in this I shall consider myself as rendering a service to my country.–I flatter myself, for the dignity of human kind, there are few such characters; but there is no situation in life, in which they may not prove the bane and curse of society;–they, therefore, ought to be known, that they may be guarded against.

Baltimore, March 3, 1788.

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