

## THE REACTION IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA TO THE CAPTURE OF HAVANA, 1762

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August 13, 1762, after a prolonged siege "in the face of difficulties supposed to be insurmountable", Havana, the "Queen of the Indies", indeed the very key<sup>1</sup> to the great Occidental empire of Charles III., capitulated to Sir George Pocock.<sup>2</sup> The moral and economic effect of such a blow was incalculable. Havana had long been considered impregnable, the inviolate symbol of Spain's sovereignty in the west. It commanded the Florida channel through which all the fleets bound for Europe were obliged to pass.<sup>3</sup> Spain, by challenging England, hoped to regain the gateway to the Mediterranean, but instead lost the very key to the Indies, while Britain won the Gibraltar of the west.<sup>4</sup>

Captain Hervey, carrying Admiral Pocock's dispatches, arrived in London on September 27, 1762.<sup>5</sup> The news spread throughout the British Isles like wildfire. All England was moved with unbounded joy, for the victory produced a sensation.<sup>6</sup> The entire nation was wearied almost to apathy by

<sup>1</sup> Philip II. gave Havana a coat of arms, in which was a golden key to signify that it was the key to the Indies. "Havana, the principal fortress in the large island of Cuba, well known to be the key to the Spanish West Indies" (John Almon, *Review of Lord Bute's Administration*, p. 43).

<sup>2</sup> Sir George Pocock was well known by 1762 as a victorious admiral in the East Indies. See *Annual Register*, 1762, p. 36. The Pocock letters are in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. George Keppel, the Earl of Albemarle, was in command of the land forces of some ten thousand men.

<sup>3</sup> It was the center of "the whole trade and navigation of the Spanish West Indies," and "without which it cannot be carried on." It utterly intercepted the enemy's resources and exposed the whole of Spanish America (*ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36 *et seq.*

<sup>5</sup> London, *Chronicle*, September 28, 1762.

<sup>6</sup> See London *Advertiser*, October 1, 1762: "The joy expressed by all ranks on this occasion is unbounded"; and London *Chronicle*, September 28, 1762.

the long years of fighting, by the great loss of life and treasure, and by the ever increasing burden of taxation. The gloom which had enveloped the country was lifted like magic and the whole nation was borne on "flames of Triumph". The victory, so "agreeable and interesting", was announced to the London populace by the firing of the Tower guns. Bonfires and illuminations were general throughout the country,<sup>7</sup> while all ranks of people were "diffused with joy".<sup>8</sup> The London correspondent of the *Boston News Letter* wrote that the evening following the report of the capture of that "strong and important place", the London populace expressed themselves with "every unbounded mark of exultation". They were not so much carried away by the immediate effects of the conquest, but sensed the fact that their enemies would be greatly distressed

in their most vital points; viz: by that of ruining their marine and cutting them off from their treasures.<sup>9</sup>

The *London Chronicle* described as "unbounded" the exultation due not alone to the importance of the acquisition, but also to the luster shed upon his majesty's arms and the tendency the victory would have

to impress our enemies, especially our most recent one [Spain], with a due sense of the singular ardor and intrepidity of the British soldiers and sailors.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* *Boston News Letter*, December 16, 1762: "Brighton illuminated his thatched church and all Egham was on fire, and even Bishipgate had its burn-fires and illuminations. I hear London, the City especially, were nobly lighted up". See also, Duke of Cumberland to the Earl of Albemarle, October 2, 1762, Rockingham, *Memoirs* I. 126.

<sup>8</sup> *Boston News Letter*, December 16, 1762.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *London Chronicle*, September 28, 1762. The articles of capitulation are published in *ibid.*, December 30, 1762; *Boston News Letter*, November 4, 1762; *Boston Gazette*, November 1, 1762; London, *Universal Magazine*, October, 1762; *Scots Magazine*, October, 1762; *Royal Magazine*, October, 1762; *London Magazine*, October, 1762; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1762, contains many official documents, diaries, journals, and a description of Havana.

George III. held a great court at St. James's, where he received the congratulations of his loyal subjects.<sup>11</sup> The colors taken at Havana were presented to him by the earl of Halifax.<sup>12</sup> The common council of London, after holding an "extraordinary court", presented its compliments to his majesty upon the success his arms had achieved at Havana. The council said in part:

It is with the highest pleasure we reflect upon the value and importance of this conquest, attended with the acquisition of universal riches and an irreparable blow to the trade and naval power of Spain.<sup>12a</sup>

The "lords of the realm" expressed their satisfaction upon this "signal success" which they described as the very "bulwark of the Spanish colonies".<sup>13</sup> The commons were more enthusiastic, congratulating the king upon the "glorious and important conquest", as it had brought much treasure and a considerable portion of the Spanish navy into his majesty's hands.<sup>14</sup>

Possibly the mood of the nation was best expressed by the *Annual Register* when it described the conquest as the most "lucrative" that had ever been made. Then after a longer description of the "memorable siege" than was customary, the editor deeming an explanation necessary for this digression said:

It was, without question, in itself the most considerable, and in its consequences the most decisive conquest we have had since the beginning of the war; and because in no operation were the courage, steadiness, and perseverance of the British troops, and the conduct of their leaders more conspicuous. The acquisition of this place united in itself all the advantages which can be acquired in war. It was a mili-

<sup>11</sup> *London Advertiser*, October 1, 1762.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12a</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Boston News Letter*, December 16, 1762.

<sup>13</sup> Hansard, *The Parliamentary History of England*, XV. 1236.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1239.

tary advantage of the highest class; it was equal to the greatest naval victory, by its effects upon the enemy's marine; and in the plunder it equalled the produce of a national subsidy.<sup>15</sup>

After this outburst of enthusiasm, fearful of a let down in the prosecution of the war, the editor warned his readers that Great Britain should be as prudent in the enjoyment of its victory as it was brave in gaining it—not to be so elated over its good fortune as to “indulge in the luxurious lap of indolence”. It would be much safer, he advised, to prosecute the war “in the same able and vigorous manner” in which it had been begun in order “to compel her enemies to sue for that peace they had, when offered, haughtily refused”.<sup>16</sup>

In the midst of all these rejoicings, a discordant note was most conspicuous. The king and his favorite, the earl of Bute, were strangely silent, not favorably impressed with the celebrations of the people. George III., according to one contemporary account

took no part in the transports of the nation; and, when he declined availing himself of any merit from the conquest, it was plain he was grieved either to have more to restore at the peace, or less reason for making that peace but on the most advantageous terms; but he was infatuated, and, breaking through all the barriers of glory, he sent the Duke of Bedford to Paris to settle the preliminaries.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Annual Register*, 1762, p. 43. Another account (Thomas Mante, *The History of the Late War in North America, and the Islands of the West Indies*, London, 1772, p. 460) is as follows: “Thus did this conquest prove the heaviest blow, in itself, and in its consequences the most decisive, of any that had been given since the commencement of the present hostilities between so many great powers. In the acquisition of Havana were combined all the advantages that could be procured in war. It was a military victory of the first magnitude; it was equal to the greatest naval victory by its effects on the marine of the Spaniards, who lost on that occasion a whole fleet”. Mante was an assistant engineer during the siege of Havana.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of George the Third*, I. 151.

The merchants of London were indignant at the king's obstinacy and hissed the duke as he passed through the principal streets, while treasonable papers were dispersed in the surrounding villages.<sup>18</sup> In his address from the throne, before both houses of parliament, the king dwelt very briefly upon Havana; only announcing its capture with considerable treasure and a part of the navy of Spain.<sup>19</sup>

In the nation's ecstasy over the conquest most exaggerated assertions were made. One citizen described the capture as "the greatest made by British arms, in this or any former age".<sup>20</sup> Admiral Rodney was no less impressed. He wrote Pocock that he looked upon the victory

as the most glorious stroke that was ever struck by the British arms, and it must be fatal to the Spanish Minister, whose absurdity and Italian Politics had brought so severe a misfortune to the Spanish nation.<sup>21</sup>

Pocock had no false impressions as to the importance of his victory. He felt the blow to Spain would leave all of its settlements in the New World "exposed to any attempts that may be tho't proper to be made on them".<sup>22</sup> His royal highness, the duke of Cumberland, was most exultant of all. He congratulated the victor saying:

Upon the whole no joy can equal mine, and I strut and plume myself as if it was I that had taken the Havanah. In short you have done your King and Country the most material service that any military man has ever done since we were a nation. . . . Militarily speaking, I take your siege to have been the most difficult that has been since the invention of artillery. Sixty-eight days in that climate is

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* The French, on the other hand received the Duke as "their guardian angel".

<sup>19</sup> *Annual Register*, 1762, p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> *London Chronicle*, October 2, 1762.

<sup>21</sup> Rodney to Pocock, October 20, 1762 in Pocock MSS.

<sup>22</sup> Pocock to Cleveland, August 19, 1762; *Gentleman's Magazine*, September, 1762.

alone prodigious; without any partiality to you, 'tis a great action in itself, setting aside the immense service you have done your country.<sup>23</sup>

Others were less verbose and possibly more sincere. The "great commoner" in sending the distinguished conqueror his felicitations wrote:

I cannot refuse myself the satisfaction of expressing by a line the sincere joy I feel upon your safe and long wisht return to your Country, which owes you so much of its glory, from East to West.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the people heartily approved of the sentiment of Joseph Yorke who congratulated Sir George upon his return to his native land as "having so signally contributed to its security and glory".<sup>25</sup> They realized that Havana, "the Paris of the Caribbean", was the "most considerable place in the West Indies", and "the key to the riches of Mexico".<sup>26</sup> The victory followed by a partial reduction of the island was the "richest of England's conquests". It had deprived Spain of its most important colony, a great center of trade, and a port which commanded the route of its treasure ships.<sup>27</sup>

Official England expected the victory to have an advantageous effect upon the future treaty. Surely Spain would be rendered more tractable by such a blow, but would the English public be as willing to make peace, after having so deeply tasted of the fruits of victory? Many feared not.<sup>28</sup> Naturally, Spain would look unfavorably on the cession of one of its most lucrative colonies, but might it not be forced to give much in exchange for such an important conquest?

<sup>23</sup> Cumberland to Albemarle, October 2, 1762; Rockingham, *Memoirs*, I. 125.

<sup>24</sup> William Pitt to Pocock, January 26, 1763, in Pocock MSS.

<sup>25</sup> Yorke to Pocock, February 11, 1763, in *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Mante, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

<sup>27</sup> William Hunt, *The Political History of England*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>28</sup> Viscount Royston to Dr. Birch, September 30, 1762; Rockingham, *Memoirs*, I. 124.

Englishmen, though, did not want the “old cry of take and hold” to revive.<sup>29</sup> At any rate, the trump card was held by Britain, and this would “infallibly give a new face to the negotiations” for peace.<sup>30</sup>

The prime minister seemed all out of tune with the spirit of the day, and was not disposed to press the advantage which was his. He confided to the duke of Bedford that

the taking of Havannah has turned the heads of the wisest men and those most inclined to peace: men that your Grace is well acquainted with, and whose voice you have heard in the Cabinet loudest for almost any peace, now think the French terms ought to be screwed up higher, the most moderate state compensations for the Havannah as indispensable; and indeed I believe Lord Egremont will inform you that this is not the opinion of the English alone.<sup>31</sup>

Somewhat later, after a prolonged session of the cabinet, he again wrote Bedford:

I never was present at a more unanimous cabinet than the one held on Friday; nor must this surprise your Grace, for such is the change made here by the conquest of Havannah, that I solemnly declare, I don't meet with one man, let his attachment be never so strong to the service of the King, his wishes for peace never so great, that does not positively affirm this rich acquisition must not be ceded without satisfaction in the fishery, and some material compensation.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of strong opposition Bute and the king, determined upon peace, had their way when the treaty was signed,<sup>33</sup> though the former was not unfamiliar with the great value of the conquest.<sup>34</sup> There was a general impression that the

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Lord Russell, *The Correspondence of John, Fourth Duke of Bedford*, III. 131.

<sup>31</sup> Bute to Bedford, October 14, 1762, in *ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>32</sup> Bute to Bedford, October 24, 1762, in *ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>33</sup> Walpole, *Memoirs of George the Third*, I. 151.

<sup>34</sup> “With regards to the Spaniards, we have used the greatest moderation. Our demands are trivial compared with the important conquests we give up”. Bute to Bedford, October 24, 1762; *Bedford Correspondence*, III. 137.

discrepancy between the concessions made by Great Britain and the terms she could have dictated, looked as if she has been betrayed.<sup>35</sup>

When the fall of Havana was known throughout the British Isles, the king was inundated with memorials from borough councils, county councils, university faculties, and other bodies.<sup>36</sup> Such memorials constitute an excellent barometer of the public reaction to the victory. An examination reveals three general themes which seemed uppermost in the minds of the populace.

First: Peace is the dominant note, for the masses were wearied to the point of exhaustion by the long struggle. All were hopeful that "so great a conquest" would be productive of a "safe, honorable, and lasting peace". A speedy return to "normalcy" certainly was most desirable and Havana should be used to bring this about.

Second: Another note, natural in the Englishmen, is found in the memorials from the port cities. The commercial class was sensibly aroused to the trading advantages the future possession would bring. Havana, to them was the "chief city of the Great and rich Island of Cuba", yea, the very "Key to Spanish America" with all its treasures. Was this not the land the "Sea Dogs" had coveted? The plunder taken by the conqueror, equal to the produce of a national subsidy,<sup>37</sup> whetted their appetites the more. This was only a fraction of the wealth to come, so they looked forward with avidity to the future, if England retained "the pearl of the Antilles."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Cambridge Modern History*, VI. 431.

<sup>36</sup> These memorials are published in the *London Gazette*, October and November, 1762.

<sup>37</sup> *Annual Register*, 1762, p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> In 1763, when it was known that Havana was to be returned, the merchants were greatly aroused. In Liverpool alone, 145 sent a vigorous protest (*Almon, Review of Lord Bute's Administration*, p. 88). When the articles of peace were known and published there was "instantly spread such an alarm throughout the kingdom that the people rose up like one man, detestation and abhorrence of such conditions. . . . The trading port of the kingdom was most sensibly af-



Lastly, there is the religious note recurring again and again. Many were able to discern the hand of God in the defeat of Spain. The borough of Newport interpreted the acquisition with "prophetic joy" as an "Earnest of the Favor of Heaven". Divine providence had bestowed this "particular favor" because of the "Justice of the Cause", thought Northampton; while across the Irish Sea, the city of Dublin was pleased to see the "Almighty bless the English Arms" with "a conquest attended with every glorious circumstance that could give it lustre".

Thus visibly moved were all the people, each in his own way, while across the Atlantic thousands of Britons were equally agitated.

The effect in America, was indeed more profound.<sup>39</sup> Its heart was exalted! Every man was proud of belonging to a nation which had won such a great victory. There was no questioning its loyalty, for it reached a point that almost resembled fanaticism.<sup>40</sup> It was said the colonists were

as loyal to their prince and as proud of their country as the people of Kent or Yorkshire.

In Boston, the puritans held a solemn celebration.<sup>41</sup> The governor and assembly attended divine service at the Old Brick Meeting House and listened to a sermon by the Reverend Doctor Sewall, who took as his text:

Thine, O Lord, is the Greatness and the Power and Glory and the Victory, and the Majesty: For all that is in the Heaven and in the fected" (*ibid.*). Almon was most pessimistic of the future because of the surrender of Havana. "Every honest man must shudder", he wrote, "When he seriously reflects on our present condition, and the melancholy prospect there is in our future" (*ibid.*, p. 99).

<sup>39</sup> The news arrived in New York early in September, and in Boston on September 7. There were a considerable number of troops from the northern colonies in the expedition, notably from Connecticut and Rhode Island.

<sup>40</sup> C. C. Hazewell, *Conquest of Cuba* (in *Atlantic Monthly*), October, 1863.

<sup>41</sup> *Boston Gazette*, September 20, 1762. The celebration was held on September 16.

Earth is thine; thine is the Kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head above all.<sup>42</sup>

At noon the cannon at Castle William and the batteries of Boston and Charlestown were discharged. In the afternoon the bells were rung while

His Excellency (Governor Bernard) with the two Houses was escorted by his company of cadets to Concert Hall, where a fine piece of music was performed, to the satisfaction of a very large assembly, and in the evening there were beautiful illuminations and a great variety of fire works in many parts of the town.<sup>43</sup>

The true sense of the Bostonians was well expressed by the governor, who conforming to the assembly's request, proclaimed Thursday, October 7, as a day for public thanksgiving, to be observed with religious worship, no servile labor to be permitted. This reads in part:

Above all, with hearts full of gratitude and amazement we must contemplate the glorious and important conquest of the Havannah; which, considering the strength of the place, the resolution of the defendants, and the unhealthiness of the climate seems to have the visible hand of God in it, and to be designed by His Providence to punish the Pride and Injustice of that Prince, who had so unnecessarily made himself a Party in this war.<sup>44</sup>

Connecticut celebrated in true New England fashion. In New London all the gentlemen of the town met together and after a parade a royal salute was fired.<sup>45</sup> At noon the group was "elegantly" entertained while the afternoon was spent in the firing of guns and the drinking of loyal healths. The news report of the event says:

<sup>42</sup> I Chronicles XXIX, ii. See *Boston Evening Post*, September 20, 1762.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Boston News Letter*, September 23, 1762.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, September 16, 1762.

The evening following past in innocent mirth, the town being beautifully illuminated and bonfires erected on several eminences, which gave things a lively and pleasant aspect. The whole was conducted with decency, harmony and good order.<sup>46</sup>

At Hartford the militia companies gave a royal salute followed by the "unanimous Huzzas of the rejoicing multitude". The celebration concluded with flowing bowls, the generous glass, loyal healths, and other forms of rejoicing.<sup>47</sup>

New York received the news earlier than Boston, and Governor Moncton gave an elegant dinner at the City Arms, where General Amherst, the governor's council, the mayor, the aldermen, the members of the city council, the officers of the army and all the "principal gentlemen of the Place" were his guests. A royal salute of twenty-one guns was fired from Fort George, and at night the city was beautifully illuminated. Governor Moncton sent his congratulations to Pocock,<sup>48</sup> while General Amherst, whose headquarters were at New York, wrote the victorious leader most enthusiastically over the importance of the conquest.<sup>49</sup> In November, when the New York assembly met, the governor addressing it, said:

The military operations since your recess are also a source of public joy and exultation. Havannah the key to the settlements and treasures of Spain, fortified by all the advantages of art, and defended with vigor and obstinacy; is gloriously subjected to his Majesty's dominion, and by the capture of all the ships in that port, the marine of our enemy most essentially debilitated.<sup>50</sup>

The fall of Havana freed the people of the south from the ravages of the privateer. Governor Boone of South Carolina

<sup>46</sup> *Boston News Letter*, September 30, 1762. Many other New England towns celebrated in like manner.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, September 16, 1762. New York celebrated on September 9.

<sup>48</sup> Moncton to Pocock, September 7, 1762, in Pocock MSS.

<sup>49</sup> Amherst to Pocock, September 6, 1762, in Pocock MSS. Amherst informed the colonial governors of the victory.

<sup>50</sup> *State of New York, Messages from the Governors*, I. 669.

had claimed their trade was ruined by the war and asked repeatedly for a ship of twenty guns or for a sloop.<sup>51</sup> Upon the news of the capture he was loud in his praise.<sup>52</sup> Albemarle was appreciative of South Carolina's predicament and wrote Governor Boone after the fall of Havana that he realized the Province of South Carolina would have no little satisfaction in the conquest, for it would no longer need to fear the Spaniards,

whom this conquest has deprived of every resource by which they might be enabled to annoy or disturb your government.<sup>53</sup>

North Carolina and Georgia were likewise jubilant. The legislature of the former discerned "the hand of Providence" visibly exerted in their favor.<sup>54</sup> Governor Dobbs, in his address to the upper house, also interpreted the victory as a "Manifestation of Divine Providence in favor of the Protestant Apostolick Religion and the cause of Liberty" and with almost New England puritanism believed there should be "a due return of thanks and praise".<sup>55</sup> The Georgia legislature likewise was gratified by this instance of divine favor "shown to the British Nation".<sup>56</sup> The fall of such a fortress, hitherto deemed impregnable, was of the utmost importance to their peace, safety, and happiness and they were hopeful the success would be "productive of an honourable and lasting Peace".<sup>57</sup> Such luster, such glory and power, with a continuance of "almost unparalleled successes" they were sure, "must warm the Heart of every true Lover of his Country".<sup>58</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Boone to Pocock, July 7, 1762, in Pocock MSS.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, September 9, 1762.

<sup>53</sup> Albemarle to Boone, December 30, 1762, in *Boston News Letter*.

<sup>54</sup> *North Carolina Colonial Records*, VI. 840.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 838.

<sup>56</sup> *Colonial Records of Georgia*, XIII. 697.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Jamaica, since the war began, had constantly been in fear of a Spanish attack<sup>59</sup> and Governor Lyttelton requested Pocock not to leave the island without taking

every prudent measure that would be necessary to secure this country while your principal force is employed elsewhere,<sup>60</sup>

unless there was left a sufficient force it would most likely create "very uneasy apprehensions in the minds of the people".<sup>61</sup> He was fearful of a combined Spanish and French attack or a slave rebellion. Martial law was proclaimed which was not removed until ships were sent by Pocock to protect the island.<sup>62</sup> Upon the fall of Havana, Lyttelton assured the conqueror that he received the welcome news with the greatest pleasure, and felicitated him upon the glorious part he had "in the most important conquest".<sup>63</sup> The merchants of Jamaica were jubilant:

Permit us to embrace the first opportunity of congratulations to you upon the success of His Majesty's forces in the reduction of that most important place, the Havannah: An event which not only adds lustre to His Majesty's Arms but must reflect lasting honor on you and on the other officers who have conducted this glorious enterprise.<sup>64</sup>

Such was the general reaction everywhere.

We have here reviewed the effect of the conquest of Havana upon the English world. We have seen that the Briton was greatly moved by so "noble a victory". To some, it meant great glory for the mother country; to others, commercial advantages; while others hoped it would bring the much

<sup>59</sup> Lyttelton to Pocock, Jamaica, September 16, 1762, in Pocock MSS.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, May 16, 1762.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, May 4, 1762.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, September 16, 1762.

<sup>64</sup> Jamaica merchants to Pocock, September 17, 1762, in Pocock MSS. Other islanders were overjoyed over the conquest. We read that the people of Antigua celebrated the event in a "most joyous and Royal manner" (*Boston News Letter*, December 16, 1762).

desired peace. All were visibly moved and overjoyed—merchant, trader, laborer, colonial, governor, councilor, each in his own way. Only George III. and his favorite seemed out of tune, and their stubborn, though sincere efforts in the peace which followed, lost all the soldier and sailor had gained at Havana in the summer of 1762.

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