17

In CONGRESS, December 19, 1777.

WHEREAS Sir William Howe, Commander in Chief of his Britannic Majesty's forces, has required, that provisions should be sent in for the subsistence of the American prisoners in his possession, and for the purchase of such necessaries, as they may stand in need of, and has prohibited the circulation of the money struck by the authority of these States, within such parts of the country, as are, at present, subjected to his power, whereby great difficulties have occurred in relieving the distresses of the American prisoners: And whereas large sums of Continental Bills of Credit have been counterfeited and issued by the Agents, Emissaries and Abettors of Sir William Howe

Resolved, That the accounts of all provisions and other necessaries; which already have been; or which hereafter may be supplied by the public to prisoners in the power of these States, shall be discharged, either by receiving, from the British Commissary of prisoners or any of his Agents, provisions or other necessaries equal in quality and kind to what have been supplied, or the amount thereof, in gold and silver at the rate of four shillings and six-pence sterling for every dollar of the currency of these States; and that all these accounts be liquidated and discharged, previous to the release of any prisoners, to whom provisions or other necessaries shall have been supplied.

ARCHIVES
OF THE STATE OF
MARYLAND

IN CONGRESS, January 21, 1778.

THE Board of War reported, that, having conferred with Mr. Elias Boudinot Commissary of prisoners on the 21st of December and carefully examined the evidences produced by him, they esteem it their duty to state to Congress the following facts relating to the American prisoners, in the power of the enemy.

That as far as can be collected from the testimony of prisoners and inhabitants, who have left the enemy, there are about nine hundred privates and three hundred officers in the city of New-York, and about five hundred privates and fifty officers, in the city of Philadelphia.

That the privates in New-York have been crouded all summer in sugar-houses, and the officers boarded on Long-Island, except about thirty, who have been confined in the provost-guard and in the most loathsome goals.

That, since the beginning of October, all these prisoners, both officers and privates, have been confined in prison-ships or the provost.

That the privates in the city of Philadelphia have been kept in the two public goals and the officers in the State-house.

That from the best evidence, which the nature of the subject will admit of, it appears, that the general allowance of provisions, at the most, does not exceed four ounces of meat and the same quantity of bread (oftimes so damaged as not to be eatable) per man per day, and often much less, although the professed allowance is from eight to ten ounces; and that the prisoners have been treated in general (officers not excepted) with a cruelty scarce to be paralleled, and with the most studied and illiberal insult.

That it has been a common practice with the enemy, on a prisoner being first captured, to keep him three, four and even five days without a morsel of provisions of any kind, and then to tempt him to inlist with the new levies in order to save his life.

That there are numerous instances of prisoners of war perishing in all the agonies of hunger, from their severe treatment.

That being generally stripped of what cloaths they have when taken, they have suffered greatly for want thereof during their confinement.

That, in the beginning of last summer, bills of exchange to the amount of £600 sterling, purchased of David Franks, British Commissary of prisoners, residing within the jurisdiction of these States, were sent into New-York for the relief of the prisoners; that every obstacle was thrown in the way to prevent the negociation of these bills, and after a delay of two months, they were returned to Mr. Boudinot, the American Commissary of prisoners.

That the American Commissary of prisoners had permission to send in provisions from Hudson's and Rariton rivers into New-York; and to purchase cloathing there for about two months past; but on this condition, that the sloop carrying the provisions stop at the man of war stationed in the mouth of Hudson's river, where the hands are taken on board of the ships, and the Agent for American prisoners in New-York is obliged to send hands from thence to take the sloop over to the city, and return her again to the man of war; which not only renders it very tedious and expensive, but prevents getting sloops for the purpose, as very few owners choose to trust their vessels in the enemy's hands, and to remain prisoners on board of the man of war till the sloop returns.

That provisions, which have been sent into the city of New-York for the subsistence of the American prisoners, have been prevented by a public ordinance from being sold at a higher rate than forty-five shillings per cwt. for flour, although the current price of that article was six pounds per cwt. and it actually sold current at that price between individuals, while the flour belonging to these States was sold at the ordinance price.

That the American officers in the power of the enemy, have not had any allowance made to them for their subsistance, although the British officers, in the power of these States, have been allowed, by a resolution of Congress, two dollars a week for their subsistence.

That in consequence of repeated remonstrances from General Washington to General Howe concerning the injurious treatment of prisoners in his power, General Howe in his letter to General Washington in November last promised "That a Commissary should be permitted to carry in a supply of cloathing, money and other necessaries for the prisoners in Philadelphia, and to visit the places where they were confined."

That on a conference, which passed between Mr. Ferguson the British Commissary of prisoners, and Mr. Boudinot the Commissary of prisoners for these States, who was ordered by General Washington to visit the prisoners agreeable to General Howe's promise, Mr. Ferguson said, that he was desired by General Howe to let Mr. Boudinot know "that there could be no necessity for his coming into the city as *he* would see that the prisoners were properly dealt by" and Mr. Boudinot was not suffered to go in.

That on this conference, Mr. Ferguson the British Commissary of prisoners complaining of the inattention paid to the supplying of prisoners in their hands with cloaths, said "that there was plenty of cloathing in Philadelphia, which we were at liberty to purchase for provisions, and to appoint Agents for that purpose" that on Mr. Boudinot's expressing his doubt on this point, Mr. Ferguson shewed great surprise at his unbelief, and assured him repeatedly that full liberty to purchase cloathing would be granted.

That Mr. Ferguson, in his letter of the 2d of December, says "that permission will be given to *send* in cloathing to our prisoners, but that General Howe does not think fit to allow it to be purchased in Philadelphia."

Congress