

The *Publius* Essay – by Alexander Hamilton?

From *The New-York Packet, and the American Advertiser*, Thursday, October 12, 1780.

“My Dear Countrymen,

It is high time we should wake out of that fatal state of torpor and stupidity, in which we have too long been involved, and seriously attend to the “great things that belong to our own and our country’s salvation, ere they be hid for ever from our eyes.”

The late horrible conspiracy, from which we have so narrowly escaped, as from the *opening, expanding*, nay, almost *closing* jaws of destruction, (the bare recital of which, chills the most intrepid heart with horror,) should stimulate us to use every effort, and strain every nerve, to prevent our yet becoming a sacrifice to the infernal machinations of those unwearied imps and fiends of darkness, that are permitted to continue amongst us; who, together with *bosom-traitors*, (those *vilest* of beings) are, and for ever will be, plotting and executing schemes for our utter ruin and destruction. Happy were it for us, my dear countrymen, if the *base, unprincipled traitor*, who has so lately hung up his name to eternal infamy, or rather sunk it beneath even the reach of *infamy* itself, were the only one of our kind that we have harboured in our bosoms.

Look round, my fellow citizens, and take a view of our present situation, and reflect upon the measures that have been pursued for a long time past, and judge for yourselves, whether there appears not a gradation of error, and systematical embarrassments; now this cannot possibly be the effects of chance; *once*, or *twice*, it might happen, but a continued reiteration of the same, and similar evils, must be owing to premeditated and laboured design; and as we have found a *Judas* in the field w[h]ere we little expected it, have we not abundant reason to suspect there are traitors in the cabinet, where their secret machinations are less liable to detection? Yet no less, nay *more* injurious, to our welfare, as they are the *primum mobile* of our proceedings, which *originate* in error, are *carried on* in confusion, and *terminate* in ruin.

What greatly adds to our calamity is, that *public spirit*, (the genius of liberty) once our glory and our safety, “has fled up to the stars from whence it came;” and cursed avarice, that demon of destruction, spreads its baleful influence throughout our land.

What avails it, my dear countrymen, to be so solicitous about retrieving the unavoidable losses ever attendant on war, until we have first secured our liberties, and established peace; a few years agriculture and commerce will *then* reward us for our *present* toil and labour; when every man can sit down in safety, “under his own vine and his own fig tree,” and enjoy the fruits of his labour, and none to make him afraid.

Had the *traiterous Arnold*, and his accomplices, succeeded in their diabolical plot, we should have had a most melancholy and convincing proof of our ill-timed parsimony.

Notwithstanding our barns are filled with plenty, and our fields and pastures teem with abundance; yet it is with reluctance we afford to the brave men who fight our battles, the poor scanty pittance upon which they subsist; when alas! we were within a hair's breadth of having our habitations rising in flames about our ears; --- our all destroyed, --- our venerable matrons, chaste wives, and modest virgins, defloured and stuprated by a lawless banditti; --- our fathers, brothers, and friends, languishing in loathsome prisons, pining away with hunger and anguish; --- and our young men, the strength of our country weltring in blood and carnage.

This is no exaggerated flight of fancy, but a feint description of what really awaited us; for there remains not the least shadow of a doubt, but that at a given signal, the savages on our frontiers, and the worse than savages that are lurking up and down throughout our country, were to join issue with our ungenerous enemy, to render the massacre universal and completely horrid.

What species of punishment can be inflicted equal to the demerits of the poor sordid wretch, who for the base-born passion, love of gold, can deliberately bring upon his country, for which he has fought and bled, such a complication of horror, devastation and war; ---- were it possible to convert his breast into a living furnace, and his Heart into a nervous crucible, to be ever employed in melting and refining his beloved gold --- the days of eternity would be too few to atone for his crime.

Can any man, after the woeful experience we have had, be so lost to reason as to plead for lenitive measures to be used towards the *Tories* that are amongst us; who are continually brooding in their dark corners, on schemes of destruction, and will ever be ready to put them in execution when opportunity offers. It were as reasonable to expect to transform the devil himself into an angel of light, as to change the principles and practices of a *Tory*; and when circumstances permit him to declare himself, you will ever find him the same: And it is to be feared, those who are such strong advocates for the "poor creatures that must have a living among us," as they phrase it, will sooner or later be convinced of their error, by those same "poor creatures" cutting their throats, or stabbing them to the heart as they lie secure in their beds; --- or for quicker dispatch, set fire to their houses, and burn whole families and districts in a general conflagration.

This! my dear fellow countrymen, is all you can expect from shewing lenity to such base wretches; --- and when you hear men plead in their behalf, take it for granted that such men are actuated by base motives of one kind or other, and have either *weak* heads or *wicked* hearts, and perhaps both.

Let us, therefore, my dear countrymen, set about reformation in good earnest; let us invoke the genius of liberty to revisit us, and inspire us with sentiments suitable to the dignity of freemen; let us guard against that cursed avarice, "which is as the sin of witchcraft," and has well nigh wrought our ruin; let us contribute to the support of our army with cheerfulness and alacrity, not of necessity but of choice; let us be careful and diligent in detecting every

species of villainy that may be practised among us, especially the dangerous and fatal practice of sinking the value of our currency; let us not depend upon others to take cognizance of any enormity that may come under our notice; it is a shame for any member of a free community to consider himself of so little importance not to be able to render the public very essential services in some way or other; let us be very careful in choosing men of known integrity and abilities for our representatives, both in civil and military concerns; very much indeed depends upon this. And above all things, let us study *unanimity*, which gives firmness and strength; villains and traitors have a double advantage over us, when they perceive that we break into parties and factions among ourselves; --- I mean not by this the parties of Whig and Tory; but the different parties that subsist in the real friends to their country: In this the conduct of the Tories shame us; they unite as one man in the bonds of wickedness, whilst we, in matters of the greatest importance, act without connection, and of course, without strength.

In the late glorious deliverance, who sees not the hand of Providence intervening in our favour? But can we expect that Heaven will continue to interpose in our behalf if we refuse and neglect to exert our own abilities to the utmost of our power; As well might a drowning man expect to escape, without spreading forth his hands to swim, or lay hold of a rope thrown out for his deliverance.

Consider how much treasure we have already expended to secure the invaluable blessings of freedom; consider how many of our fellow-citizens that once lived in ease and affluence are driven from house and home, and become, as it were, fugitives on the earth; consider how many brave heroes have spilt their blood in our defence, and beware lest their "blood cry against us from the ground;" consider how many of our dear friends languish in doleful prison, destitute of every comfort of life, and that numbers have perished through want of the poor scanty pittance that humanity affords to the vilest of criminals. Consider these things, my dear countrymen, and shew yourselves to be the brave, the generous true-born sons of liberty.

Thus united, we shall in a little time, drive those greedy vultures from our shores; --- science, agriculture and commerce shall again enrich our borders; --- the invaluable blessings of "liberty, safety and peace," shall crown our labours; --- and when revolving suns shall have numbered our days, we bequeath the inestimable legacy to posterity, entailed to the latest generations.

PUBLIUS."
