



Plain Truth

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by James Chalmer

in answer to Paine's "Common Sense"

INTRODUCTION.

IF indignant at the Doctrine contained in the Pamphlet, entitled COMMON SENSE: I have expressed myself, in the following Observations, with some ardor; I entreat the Reader to impute my indignation, to honest zeal against the Author's Insidious Tenets. Animated and impelled by every inducement of the Human Heart; I love, and (if I dare so express myself,) I adore my Country. Passionately devoted to true Liberty; I glow with the purest flame of Patriotism. Silver'd with age as I am, if I know myself, my humble Sword shall not be wanting to my Country; (if the most Honorable Terms are not tendered by the British Nation) to whose Sacred Cause, I am most fervently devoted. The judicious Reader, will not impute my honest, tho' bold Remarks, to unfriendly designs against my Children ---- against my Country; but to abhorrence of Independency; which if effected, would inevitably plunge our once pre-eminently envied Country into Ruin, Horror, and Desolation. PLAIN TRUTH; I HAVE now before me the Pamphlet, entitled COMMON SENSE; on which I shall remark with freedom and candour. His [Paine's] first indecent attack is against the English constitution; which with all its imperfections, is, and ever will be the pride and envy of mankind..... He indeed insidiously attributes this pre-eminent excellency, to the constitution of the people, rather than to our excellent constitution. To such contemptible subterfuge is our Author reduced. I would ask him, why did not the constitution of the people afford them superior safety, in the reign of Richard the Third, Henry the Eighth, and other tyrannic princes? Many pages might indeed be filled with encomiums bestowed on our excellent constitution, by illustrious authors of different nations. This beautiful system (according to MONTESQUIEU) our constitution is a compound of Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy..... Were I asked marks of the best government, and the purpose of political society, I would reply, the increase, preservation, and prosperity of its members, in no quarter of the Globe, are those marks so certainly to be found, as in Great Britain, and her dependencies..... He says, "The plain truth is, that the antiquity of English Monarchy will not bear looking into."After his terrible anathema against our venerable constitution, and monarchy; let us briefly examine a democratical state; and see whether of not it is a government less sanguinary. This government is extremely plausible, and indeed flattering to

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the pride of mankind. The demagogues therefore, to seduce the people into their criminal designs ever hold up democracy to them: although conscious it never did, nor ever will answer in practice. If we believe a great Author, "There never existed, nor ever will exist a real democracy in the World." If we examine the republics of Greece and Rome, we ever find them in a state of war domestic or foreign. Our Author therefore makes no mention of these ancient States. "that no government is so subject to CIVIL WARS, and INTESTINE COM-MOTIONS, as that of the democratical or popular form; because, no other tends so strongly and so constantly to alter, nor requires so much vigilance, and fortitude to preserve it from alteration. After impotently attacking our Sovereign; and the constitution: He contradicts the voice of all mankind, by declaring, that America "would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power I shall humbly endeavour to shew, that our author shamefully misrepresents facts, is ignorant of the true state of Great Britain and her Colonies, utterly unqualified for the arduous task, he has presumptuously assumed; and ardently intent on seducing us to that precipice on which himself stands trembling. Let us now briefly view the pre-eminently envied state of Great Britain. If we regard the power of Britain, unembarrassed with Continental connections, and the political balance, we may justly pronounce her what our author does, AMERICA; -- "A match for all Europe." Amazing were the efforts of England, in the war of Queen Ann, when little benefitted by colony commerce, and e'er she had availed herself of the courage, good sense, and numbers of the people of Scotland and Ireland.

That England then prescribed laws to Europe, will be long remembered. Last war, her glory was, if possible, more eminently exalted; in every quarter of the globe did victory hover round her armies and navies, and her fame re-echoed from pole to pole. At present Great Britain is the umpire of Europe. Can a reasonable being for a moment believe that Great Britain, whose political existence depends on our constitutional obedience, who but yesterday made such prodigious efforts to save us from France, will not exert herself as powerfully to preserve us from our frantic schemes of independency. Can we a moment doubt, that the Sovereign of Great Britain and his ministers, whose glory as well as personal safety depends on our obedience, will not exert every nerve of the British power, to save themselves and us from ruin. "Every quiet method of peace has been ineffectual; our prayers have been rejected with disdain." I do not indeed agree with the people of England in saying, that those, who so successfully laboured to widen the breach -- desired nothing less than peace. That they who shortly were to command the most numerous and best disciplined army under Heaven, and a navy fit to contend with the fleets of England, imagining the time had found us, disdained to be just. I highly venerate a majority of the Delegates. I have not indeed the honour of knowing all the worthy members; however, I wish the Gentlemen of the Congress, e'er they entered on their important charge, had been better acquainted with the strength of our friends in parliament. I sincerely lament, that the King did not receive the last excellent petition from the Congress; and I as sincerely wish, the Gentlemen of the Congress had not addressed themselves at that juncture, to the people of Ireland. "As to government matters," (continues our Author,) "it is not in the power of Britain to do this Continent justice: The business of it will soon be too weighty and intricate to be managed with any tolerable degree of convenience, by a power so very distant from us, and so very ignorant of us; for if they cannot conquer us, they cannot govern us. Until the present unhappy period, Great Britain has afforded

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to all mankind, the most perfect proof of her wise, lenient, and magnanimous government of the Colonies -- The proofs to which we already have alluded, viz. Our supreme felicity, and amazing increase.Innumerable are the advantages of our connection with Britain; and a just dependence on her, is a sure way to avoid the horrors and calamities of war. Our author “challenges the warmest advocate for reconciliation to shew a single advantage this Continent can reap, by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge, not a single advantage is derived: Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe:” The greatest part of our plank, staves, shingles, hoops, corn, beef, pork herrings, and many other articles, could find no vent, but in the English Islands. The demand for our flour would also be considerably lessened. The Spaniards have no demand for these articles; and the French little or none. Britain would be a principal mart for our lumber, part of our grain, naval stores, tobacco, and many other articles, which perhaps are not generally wanted in any kingdom in Europe. Volumes were insufficient to describe the horror, misery and desolation, awaiting the people at large in the form of American independence. In short, I affirm that it would be most excellent policy in those who wish for TRUE LIBERTY to submit by an advantageous reconciliation to the authority of Great Britain; “to accomplish in the long run, what they cannot do by hypocrisy, fraud and force in the short one.”

INDEPENDENCE AND SLAVERY ARE SYNONYMOUS TERMS.

Loyalist Propaganda

This newspaper excerpt from a 1779 edition of the “New York Gazette” is signed “Candidus” and chances are good that it was penned by loyalist author James “Candidus” Chalmers. In addition to the similarity in grammar, there are references to ancient military history, something Chalmers did many times in “Plain Truth” three years before. Chalmers, of course, was in New York City at the time and had the correct military knowledge of the British army. He may have been anxious to spread the word of “Candidus” (perhaps in the hope that his commanders would realize how brilliant a thinker he was). Regardless of who wrote it, it’s a good example of loyalist editorials of the time. “July 20.-- We have just seen a rebel newspaper which contains a very curious article relative to the late attack on Stony Point. The article is written in that turgid style, and in that little spirit of triumph, which distinguish almost all the rebel publications, on the acquisition of any trifling advantage; and is at once a just sample of the eloquence and temper of the rebels... ..Our writer goes on to extol the “humanity of the rebels” and contrasts it with the “savage barbarity of burning unguarded towns, deflowering defenceless women,” &c. As far as truth will permit, I am willing to believe, for the honour of America, that the rebels on this occasion relaxed in their usual barbarity. As it is the first instance, it should be recorded, though it would have lost nothing had it been expressed in less exaggerated terms. The rebels have hitherto been infamous for their wanton cruelties. Their brutal treatment of Governor Franklin, and many other persons of distinction whom I could mention, -- their barbarity to loyalists in general, and at this present hour -- hanging men for acting according to the dictates of conscience -- whipping men almost to death because they will not take up arms - - publicly whipping even women, whose husbands would not join the militia -- their confiscations, fines, and imprisonments; these things which

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they daily and indubitably practice, very ill agree with the character of humanity so lavishly bestowed on them by this writer. Nothing but a long, very long series of conduct the reverse of this can wipe off the infamy which they hereby incurred. The charge of “deflowering defenceless women” is one of those deliberate, malicious falsehoods which are circulated by the rebels, purely to incense the inhabitants against the British troops. As to burning “unguarded towns,” this writer should know that the King’s troops burn no houses except public magazines, and those from which they are fired at, or otherwise annoyed. This was lately the case at Fairfield and Norwalk, the towns to which, I suppose, the author alludes; and when houses are thus converted into citadels, it is justifiable to burn them by the rules of war among all civilized nations. New Haven was in the possession of the King’s troops, yet they did not burn it. The reason was, they were not fired at from the houses during their approach to, or retreat from, the town. Some of the inhabitants, however, did what would have justified the British troops in consigning it to the flames. Sentries placed to guard particular houses have been fired at from those very same houses, and killed. An officer of distinction took a prisoner who was on horseback, and had a gun; the prisoner apparently submitted, but watching for an opportunity, he discharged his gun at the officer, and wounded him. The wounded officer was carried into an adjoining house to have his wound dressed; the owner of the house seemed to be kind and attentive to the officer; the latter, in gratitude for his attention, ordered the soldiery, on his departure, to be particularly careful of the house, that no injuries should be offered to it. Yet, no sooner was the officer gone, and at the distance of fifty yards, than this very man discharged a loaded musket at him. These are samples of rebel humanity, which sweetly harmonize with our writer’s sentiments. This writer, and all others of his stamp, should remember that the colonies are now in a state of revolt and rebellion against their rightful sovereign. The British legislation is unalterably determined to bring them back to their allegiance. The most generous overtures have been made to them -- a redress of grievances, an exemption from taxes, and a free trade, have been offered. These liberal terms would indubitably make America the happiest, freest, and most flourishing country in the world. But the American Congress have madly and insolently rejected these terms. The Congress, therefore, and their partisans, are justly chargeable, before God and the world, with all the calamities which America now suffers, and with all those other and greater calamities which it will probably hereafter suffer in the course of this unnatural contest.

“Candidus” in the New York Gazette, August 16, 1779.