

## The American Crisis XII

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TO THE EARL OF SHELBURNE.

A speech which has been printed in several of the British and New-York newspapers, as coming from your Lordship, in answer to one from the Duke of Richmond of the 10th of July last, contains expressions and opinions so new and singular, and so enveloped in mysterious reasoning, that I address this publication to you, for the purpose of giving them a free and candid examination. The speech I allude to is in these words:

"His lordship said it had been mentioned in another place, that he had been guilty of inconsistency. To clear himself of this, he asserted that he still held the same principles in respect to American independence, which he at first imbibed. He had been, and yet was of opinion, whenever the Parliament of Great-Britain acknowledges that point, the sun of England's glory is set for ever. Such were the sentiments he possessed on a former day, and such the sentiments he continued to hold at this hour. It was the opinion of Lord Chatham, as well as many other able statesmen. Other noble Lords, however, think differently; and as the majority of the cabinet support them, he acquiesced in the measure, dissenting from the idea, and the point is settled for bringing the matter into the full discussion of Parliament, where it will be candidly, fairly, and impartially debated. The independence of America would end in the ruin of England; and that a peace patched up with France would give that proud enemy the means of yet trampling on this country. The sun of England's glory he wished not to see set for ever; he looked for a spark at least to be left, which might in time light us up to a new day. But if independence was to be granted, if Parliament deemed that measure prudent, he foresaw, in his own mind, that England was undone. He wished to God that he had been deputed to Congress, that he might plead the cause of that country as well as of this, and that he might exercise whatever powers he possessed as an orator, to save both from ruin, in a conviction to Congress, that, if their independence was signed, their liberties were gone forever.

"Peace, his Lordship added, was a desirable object, but it must be an honourable peace, and not an humiliating one, dictated by France, or insisted on by America. It was very true, that this kingdom was not in a flourishing state, it was impoverished by war. But if we were not rich, it was evident that France was poor. If we were straitened in our finances, the enemy were exhausted in their resources. This was a great empire; it abounded with brave men, who were able and willing to fight in a common cause; the language of humiliation should not therefore be the language of Great-Britain. His Lordship said that he was not

afraid nor ashamed of those expressions going to America. There were numbers, great numbers there, who were of the same way of thinking, in respect to that country being dependent on this, and who, with his Lordship, perceived ruin and independence linked together."

Thus far the speech; on which I remark, — That his Lordship is a total stranger to the mind and sentiments of America; that he has wrapped himself up in fond delusion that something less than independence may, under his administration, be accepted; and he wishes himself sent to Congress, to prove, the most extraordinary of all doctrines, which is, that independence, the sublimest of all human conditions, is loss of liberty.

In answer to which we may say, that in order to know what the contrary word DEPENDENCE means, we have only to look back to those years of severe humiliation, when the mildest of all petitions could obtain no other notice than the haughtiest of all insults; and when the base terms of unconditional submission were demanded, or undistinguishable destruction threatened. It is nothing to us that the Ministry have been changed, for they may be changed again. The guilt of a government is the crime of a whole country; and the nation that can, though but for a moment, think and act as England has done, can never afterwards be believed or trusted. There are cases in which it is as impossible to restore character to life, as it is to recover the dead. It is a phoenix that can expire but once, and from whose ashes there is no resurrection. Some offences are of such a slight composition, that they reach no further than the temper, and are created or cured by a thought. But the sin of England has struck the heart of America, and nature has not left in our power to say we can forgive.

Your lordship wishes for an opportunity to plead before Congress *the cause of England and America, and to save, as you say, both from ruin.*

That the country, which, for more than seven years, has sought our destruction, should now cringe to solicit our protection, is adding the wretchedness of disgrace to the misery of disappointment; and if England has the least spark of supposed honor left, that spark must be darkened by asking, and extinguished by receiving, the smallest favor from America: For the criminal, who owes his life to the grace and mercy of the injured, is more executed by living than he who dies.

But a thousand pleadings, even from your Lordship, can have no effect. Honor, interest, and every sensation of the heart would plead against you. We are a people who think not as you think; and what is equally true, you cannot feel as we feel. The situations of the two countries are exceedingly different. We have been the seat of war. You have seen nothing of it. The most wanton destruction has been committed in our sight. The most insolent

barbarity has been acted on our feelings. We can look round and see the remains of burnt and destroyed houses, once the fair fruit of hard industry, and now the striking monuments of British brutality. We walk over the dead whom we loved, in every part of America, and remember by whom they fell. There is scarcely a village but brings to life some melancholy thought, and reminds us of what we have suffered, and of those we have lost by the brutishness of Britain. A thousand images arise to us, which, from situation, you cannot see, and are accompanied by as many ideas which you cannot know, and therefore your supposed system of reasoning would apply to nothing, and all your expectations die of themselves.

The question whether England shall accede to the independence of America, and which your lordship says is to undergo a parliamentary discussion, is so very simple, and composed of so few cases, that it scarcely needs a debate.

It is the only way out of an expensive and ruinous war, which has now no object, and without which acknowledgment there can be no peace.

But your lordship says, "*the sun of Great-Britain will set whenever she acknowledges the independence of America.*" Whereas the metaphor would have been strictly just to have left the sun wholly out of the figure, and have ascribed her not acknowledging it to the influence of the moon.

But the expression, if true, is the greatest confession of disgrace that could be made, and furnishes America with the highest notions of sovereign independent importance. Mr. Wedderburne, about the year 1776, made use of an idea of much the same kind. — *Relinquish America! says he, What is it but to desire a Giant to shrink spontaneously into a dwarf.*

Alas! Are those people, who call themselves Englishmen, of so little internal consequence, that when America is gone, or shuts her eyes upon them, their sun is set, they can shine no more, but grope about in obscurity and contract into insignificant animals. Was America, then, the giant of the empire, and England only her dwarf in waiting? Is the case so strangely altered, that those who once thought we could not live without them, are now brought to declare that they cannot exist without us? Will they tell to the world, and that from their first Minister of State, that America is their all in all, that it is by her importance only that they can live and breathe and have a being? Will they, who long since threatened to bring us to their feet, now cast themselves at ours, and own that without us they are not a nation? Are they become so unqualified to debate on independence, that they have lost all idea of it themselves, and are calling to the rocks and mountains of America to cover their insignificance? Or, if America is lost, is it manly to sob over it like a child for its rattle,

and invite the laughter of the world, by declarations of disgrace? Surely the more consistent conduct would be to bear it without complaint, and to shew that England, without America, can preserve her independence and a suitable rank with other European powers. You were not contented while you had her, and to weep for her now is childish.

But Lord Shelburne thinks something may yet be done. What that something is, or how it is to be accomplished, is a matter in obscurity. By arms there is no hope. The experience of nearly eight years, with the expence of an hundred million pounds sterling, and the loss of two armies, must positively decide that point. Besides, the British have lost their interest in America with the disaffected. Every part of it has been tried. There is no new scene left for delusion: And the thousands who have been ruined by adhering to them, and have now to quit the settlements which they had acquired, and be conveyed like transports to cultivate the desarts of Augustine and Nova Scotia, has put an end to all further expectations of aid.

If you cast your eyes on the people of England, what have they to console themselves with for the millions expended, or what encouragement is there left to continue throwing good money after bad? America can carry on the war for ten years longer, and all the charges of government included, for less than you can defray the charges of war and government for one year. And I, who know both countries, know well that the people of America can afford to pay their share of the expence much better than the people of England can. Besides, it is their own estates and property, their own rights, liberties and government, that they are defending, and were they not to do it, they would deserve to lose all, and none would pity them. The fault would be their own, and their punishment just.

The British army in America care not how long the war lasts. They enjoy an easy and indolent life. They fatten on the folly of one country and the spoils of another; and, between their plunder and their pay, may go home rich. But the case is very different with the labouring farmer, the working tradesman, and the necessitous poor in England, the sweat of whose brow goes day after day to feed, in prodigality and sloth, the army that is robbing both them and us. Removed from the eye of that country that supports them, and distant from the government that employs them, they cut and carve for themselves, and there is none to call them to account.

But England will be ruined, says Lord Shelburne, if America is independent.

Then, I say, is England already ruined, for America is already independent: And if Lord Shelburne will not allow this, he immediately denies the fact which he infers. Besides, to make England the meer creature of America, is paying too great a compliment to us, and too little to himself.

But the declaration is a rhapsody of inconsistency. For to say, as Lord Shelburne has numberless times said, that the war against America is ruinous, and yet to continue the prosecution of that ruinous war for the purpose of avoiding ruin, is a language which cannot be understood. Neither is it possible to see how the independence of America is to accomplish the ruin of England after the war is over, and yet not affect it before. America cannot be more independent of her, nor a greater enemy to her, hereafter than she now is; nor can England derive less advantages from her than at present: Why then is ruin to follow in the best state of the case, and not in the worst? And if not in the worst, why is it to follow at all.

That a nation is to be ruined by peace and commerce, and fourteen or fifteen millions a year less expences than before, is a new doctrine in politics. We have heard much clamour of national savings and oeconomy, but surely the true economy would be, to save the whole charge of a silly, foolish, and headstrong war; because, compared with this, all other retrenchments are baubles and trifles.

But is it possible that Lord Shelburne can be serious in supposing that the least advantage can be obtained by arms, or that any advantage can be equal to the expence, or the danger of attempting it. Will not the capture of one army after another satisfy him, but all must become prisoners? Must England ever be the sport of hope, and the dupe of delusion? Sometimes our currency was to fail; another time our army was to disband; then whole provinces were to revolt; such a General said this and that; another wrote so and so; Lord Chatham was of this opinion; and Lord somebody else of another: To-day 20,000 Russians and 20 Russian ships of the line were to come; to-morrow the Empress was abused without mercy or decency. Then the Emperor of Germany was to be bribed with a million of money, and the King of Prussia was to do wonderful things; at one time it was Lo here! and then it was Lo there! Sometimes this power, and sometimes that power, was to engage in the war, just as if the whole world was as mad and foolish as Britain. And thus, from year to year, has every straw been caught at, and every Will-with-a-whisp led them a new dance.

This year a still newer folly is to take place. Lord Shelburne wishes to be sent to Congress, and he thinks that something may be done.

Are not the repeated answers which Congress has given, and which all America supports, that they will not even hear any proposals whatever, until the unconditional and unequivocal independence of America is recognised, are not, I say, these declarations answer enough?

But for England to receive any thing from America now, after so many insults, injuries and outrages, acted towards us, would shew such a spirit of meanness in her, that we could not

but despise her for accepting it. And so far from Lord Shelburne coming here to solicit it, it would be the greatest disgrace we could do them to offer it. England would appear a wretch indeed, at this time of day, to ask or owe any thing to the bounty of America. Has not the name of Englishman blots enough upon it, without inventing more. Even Lucifer would scorn to reign in heaven by permission, and yet an Englishman can creep for only an entrance into America. Or has a land of liberty so many charms, that to be a door-keeper in it is better than to be an English Minister of State?

But what can this expected something be? or, if obtained, what can it amount to, but new disgraces, contentions and quarrels. The people of America have for years accustomed themselves to think and speak so freely and contemptuously of English authority, and the inveteracy is so deeply rooted, that a person invested with any authority from that country, and attempting to exercise it here, would have the life of a toad under a harrow. They would look on him as an interloper, to whom their compassion permitted a residence. He would be no more than the Mungo of the farce, and if he disliked that, he must set off. It would be a station of degradation, debased by our pity, and despised by our pride, and would place England in a more contemptible situation than any she has yet been in during the war. We have too high an opinion of ourselves, ever to think of yielding again the least obedience to outlandish authority; and for a thousand reasons, England would be the last country in the world to yield it to. She has been treacherous, and we know it. Her character is gone, and we have seen the funeral.

Surely she loves to fish in troubled waters, and drink the cup of contention, or she would not now think of mingling her affairs with those of America. It would be like a foolish dotard taking to his arms the bride that despises him, or who has placed on his head the ensigns of her disgust. It is kissing the hand that boxes his ears, and proposing to renew the exchange. The thought is as servile as the war is wicked, and shews the last scene of the drama to be as inconsistent as the first.

As America is gone, the only act of manhood is to *let her go*. Your Lordship had no hand in the separation, and you will gain no honor by temporising politics. Besides, there is something so exceedingly whimsical, unsteady, and even insincere in the present conduct of England, that she exhibits herself in the most dishonorable colours.

On the second of August last General Carleton and Admiral Digby wrote to General Washington in these words:

"The resolution of the House of Commons of the 27th of February last has been placed in your Excellency's hands, and intimations given at the same time, that further pacific measures were likely to follow. Since which, until the present time, we have had no direct

communications with England; but a mail is now arrived, which brings us very important information. We are acquainted, Sir, *by authority*, that negotiations for a general peace have already commenced at Paris, and that Mr. Grenville is invested with full powers to treat with all the parties at war, and is now at Paris in execution of his commission. And we are further, Sir, made acquainted, \*that His Majesty, in order to remove any obstacles to this peace which he so ardently wishes to restore, has commanded his ministers to direct Mr. Grenville, that the Independence of the Thirteen Provinces should be proposed by him in the first instance, instead of making it a condition of a general treaty."

Now, taking your present measures into view, and comparing them with the declaration in this letter, pray what is the word of your King, or his Ministers, or the Parliament, good for? Must we not look upon you as a confederated body of faithless, treacherous men, whose assurances are fraud, and their language deceit? What opinion can we possibly form of you, but that you are a lost, abandoned, profligate nation, who sport even with your own character, and are to be held by nothing but the bayonet or the halter.

To say, after this, *that the sun of Great-Britain will be set, whenever she acknowledges the independence of America*, when the not doing it is the unqualified lie of government, can be no other than the language of ridicule, the jargon of inconsistency. There were thousands in America who predicted the delusion, and looked upon it as a trick of treachery, to take us from our guard, and draw off our attention from the only system of finance, by which we can be called, or deserve to be called, a sovereign, independent people. The fraud, on your part, might be worth attempting, but the sacrifice to obtain it is too high.

There are others who credited the assurances, because they thought it impossible that men who had their characters to establish, would begin it with a lie. The prosecution of the war by the former Ministry was savage and horrid, since which it has been mean, trickish, and delusive. The one went greedily into the passion of revenge, the other into the subtleties of low contrivance, till, between the crimes of both, there is scarcely left a man in America, be he whig or tory, who does not despise or detest the conduct of Britain.

The management of Lord Shelburne, whatever may be his views, is a caution to us, and must be to the world, never to regard British assurances. A perfidy so notorious cannot be hid. It stands even in the public papers of New-York, with the names of Carleton and Digby affixed to it. It is a proclamation that the King of England is not to be believed: that the spirit of lying is the governing principle of the Ministry. It is holding up the character of the House of Commons to public infamy, and warning all men not to credit them. Such are the consequences which Lord Shelburne's management has brought upon his country.

After the authorized declarations contained in Carleton and Digby's letter, you ought, from every motive of honor, policy and prudence, to have fulfilled them, whatever might have been the event. It was the least atonement that you could possibly make to America, and the greatest kindness you could do to yourselves; for you will save millions by a general peace, and you will lose as many by continuing the war.

COMMON SENSE.

*Philadelphia, October 29, 1782.*

*P. S.* The manuscript copy of this letter is sent your Lordship, by the way of our Head Quarters, to New-York, inclosing a late pamphlet of mine, addressed to the Abbe Reynal, which will serve to give your Lordship some idea of the principles and sentiments of America.

*C. S.*