

Samuel Adams on the Gaspee Incident, 1772

To be, or not to be, that's the question ; whether our unalienable rights and privileges are any longer worth contending for, is now to be determined. Permit me, my countrymen, to beseech you to attend to your alarming situation.

The stamp act you opposed with a spirit and resolution becoming those who were truly solicitous to transmit to posterity those blessings which our forefathers purchased for us in the wilds of America, at an immense expense of blood and treasure.

But behold, an evil infinitely worse, in its consequences, than all the revenue laws which have been passed from the reign of Charles the First, to this time, now threatens this distressed, piratically plundered country.

A court of inquisition, more horrid than that of Spain or Portugal, is established within this colony, to inquire into the circumstances of destroying the Gaspee schooner; and the persons who are the commissioners of this new-fangled court, are vested with most exorbitant and unconstitutional power. They are directed to summon witnesses, apprehend persons not only impeached, but even suspected! and them, and every of them, to deliver them to Admiral Montagu, who is ordered to have a ship in readiness to carry them to England, where they are to be tried.

Three of the commissioners are a quorum, who are directed to apply to General Gage, for troops to protect them in their offices, and preserve the colony from riots and disturbances. The royal commission for these gentlemen, together with their instructions, transmitted to Admiral Montagu, who, upon being notified that they are convened in conformity to their appointment, is to attend them, and then deliver their commission and instructions, and to be aiding with his sage counsel and advice, whenever necessary.

So much has transpired, respecting this alarming star-chamber inquisition. And who among the natives of America, can hear it without emotion? Is there an American, in whose breast there glows the smallest spark of public virtue, but who must be fired with indignation and resentment, against a measure so replete with the ruin of our free constitution? To be tried by one's peers, is the greatest privilege a subject can wish for; and so excellent is our constitution, that no subject shall be tried, but by his peers.

Tina establishment is the grand barrier of our lives, liberties and estates; and whoever attempts to alter or invade this fundamental principle, by which the liberties of the people have been secured from time immemorial, is a declared enemy to the welfare and happiness of the King and state. The tools of despotism and arbitrary power, have long wished that this important bulwark might be destroyed, and now have the impudence to triumph in our faces, because such of their fellow subjects in America, as are suspected of being guilty of a crime, are ordered to be transported to Great Britain for trial, in open violation of Magna Charta.

Thus are we robbed of our birth-rights, and treated with every mark of indignity, insult and contempt; and can we possibly be so supine, as not to feel ourselves firmly disposed to treat, the advocates for such horrid measures with a detestation and scorn, proportionate to their perfidy and baseness?

Luxury and avarice, a more fatal and cruel scourge than war, will ere long ravage Britain and ultimately bring on the dissolution of that once happy kingdom. Ambition, and a thirst for arbitrary sway, have already banished integrity, probity and every other virtue, from those who are entrusted with the government of our mother country. Her colonies loudly complain of the violences and vexations they suffer by having their moneys taken from them, without their consent by measures more unjustifiable than highway robbery; and applied to the basest purposes,—those of supporting tyrants and debauchees. No private house is inaccessible to the avarice of custom-house officers, no place so remote whither the injustice and extortion of those miscreant tools in power, have not penetrated.

Upon the whole, it is more than probable, it is an almost absolute certainty, that, according to the present appearances, the state of an American subject, instead of enjoying the privileges of an Englishman, will soon be infinitely worse than that of a subject of France, Spain, Portugal, or any other the most despotic power on earth; so that, my countrymen, it behooves you, it is your indispensable duty to stand forth in the glorious cause of freedom, the dearest of all your earthly enjoyments; and, with a truly Roman spirit of liberty, either prevent the fastening of the infernal chains now forging for you, and your posterity, or nobly perish in the attempt.

To live a life of rational beings, is to live free; to live a life of slaves is to die by inches. Ten thousand deaths by the halter, or the axe, are infinitely preferable to a miserable life of slavery in chains, under a yoke of worse than Egyptian tyrants, whose avarice nothing less than your whole substance and income, will satisfy; and who, if they can't extort that, will glory in making a sacrifice of you and your posterity, to gratify their master the devil, who is a tyrant, and the father of tyrants and of liars.

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