A calm address to the inhabitants of England

Wesley, John, 1703-1791

London: Printed by J. Fry and Co. in Queen-Street, Upper-Moorfields

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/536

Boston University
A CALM ADDRESS TO THE INHABITANTS OF ENGLAND.

BY JOHN WESLEY.

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M.DCC.LXXVII.
A CALM ADDRESS
TO THE
INHABITANTS OF ENGLAND, &c.

Friends and Countrymen,

ABOUT a year and an half ago, being exceedingly pained at what I saw or heard continually, I wrote a little tract intitled, "A calm Address to our American Colonies." But the ports being just then shut up by the Americans, I could not send it abroad, as I designed. However, it was not lost: within a few months, fifty, or perhaps an hundred thousand copies, in newspapers and otherwise, were dispersed throughout Great-Britain.
Great-Britain and Ireland. The effect exceeded my most fagundine hopes. The eyes of many people were opened: they saw things in a quite different light. They perceived, and that with the utmost clearness, how they had been hood-winked before. They found, they had been led unawares, into all the wilds of Political Enthusiasm, as far distant from truth and common sense, as from the real love of their country.

2. I am encouraged hereby to address myself once more, not indeed to my Countrymen afar off, but to you who remain in your native land, who are inhabitants of Old England. I have no private views in doing this. I attend no great man’s table. I have nothing to ask, either of the king, or any of his ministers. You may easily believe this: for if I had sought wealth or preferment half a century ago, I should hardly think it worth while to seek it now, when I have one foot in the grave. But I have a view to contribute all that in me lies, to the public welfare and tranquility. A flame was fluously kindled some time since, which threatened to involve the whole nation. By the blessing of God it is greatly checked: it does not spread, or blaze as formerly. But it is not quite put out. I wish to quench the remains of that evil fire.

3. My view is, as far as is possible to lessen, if not remove the misunderstandings under which many honest, well-meaning men are labouring to this day: misunderstandings, which have caused much animosity, nay, much bitterness and rancour in their minds, against those who equally strive to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man. I would fain have all these duly sensible of the blessings which they enjoy; that they may be thankful to the Giver of every blessing, and may love one another as He has loved us.

4. Surely every man of candour and humanity must wish well to such an attempt: in the prosecution of which, I will first endeavour to set down, in as plain and artless a manner as I can, according to the best light I have, the real state of those affairs which have occasioned these misunderstandings, and then add two or three short reflections, which I conceive naturally deducible therefrom.

5. And first, I will set down, in as plain and artless a manner as I can, according to the best light I have, the real state of those affairs, which have occasioned these misunderstandings. I have perhaps had some means of information, which many others have not had. Over and above those accounts which have been published, I have had abundance of letters from persons in America, on whose judgment, veracity, and impartiality I could safely depend: especially from the provinces of New-York, Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.
I have likewise had the opportunity of conversing freely and largely, with many that came from those provinces, and of comparing together the accounts of those who were attached to one or the other party. And I shall endeavour to deliver the plain facts, without speculations concerning them.

6. In the year 1737, my Brother took ship, in order to return from Georgia to England. But a violent storm drove him up to New-England; and he was for some time detained at Boston. Even then he was surprized, to hear the most serious people, and men of consequence, almost continually crying out, "We must be independent; we shall never be well, till we shake off the English yoke." This sounded exceeding strange to him; as he could not form any imagination, that they could be happier under any government, than the mild one which they then enjoyed.

A gentleman who spent some time at Boston, in the year 1739, informed me, that he had frequently heard the very same conversation there: although at that time the people only spoke what they had long and eagerly desired. But, it seems, without any formed design, or having concerted any measures upon the head.

7. Almost from their settlement in the country, but more especially from this time, the people of this, as well as the other provinces, multiplied exceedingly. This was the natural effect of the unparalleled lenity of the government they were under, and the perfect liberty they enjoyed, civil as well as religious. Through the same causes, from the smallness of their taxes, and the large bounties continually received from their mother-country, (which also protected them from all their enemies) their wealth increased as fast as their numbers. And together with their number and their wealth, the spirit of Independency increased also. At the same time, it could not be, but their shipping would likewise increase in the same proportion with their trade, which was now extended not only through America, and not only through Great-Britain and Ireland, but also (notwithstanding the Act of Navigation) through almost every part of Europe.

8. Much more wealth was accumulated in the numerous sea-port towns, by defrauding his Majesty of his customs. This was continually done, not only by stealth, but frequently with an high hand. Whole ship-loads of uncultivated goods were imported, particularly at Boston, and that at noonday. And it is notorious, that one of the greatest dealers in this kind, was the celebrated Mr. Hancock. It is true, this now and then met with some check from his Majesty's officers. But it was too little, it scarce deserves the naming. However, little as it was, they bore it not without huge indignation, and
and strong marks of resentment. And whenever a matter of this kind came before an American Jury, (which could not but frequently be the case) it was easy to foresee the event. The officer was sure to have his labour for his pains; for they were too good patriots to condemn their countryman! By this means the Customs of North-America, which ought to have brought in so considerable a sum as would have gone far toward defraying the expense of the Government, were reduced to a very small pittance.

9. In consideration of this, the English Government a few years ago, thought it equitable to lay a small duty upon the Stamps in America, in order, if not to bear themselves harmless, yet to lessen their burden. Immediately a cry arose, as if all America was just going to be swallowed up. It was echoed across the Atlantic Ocean, from America to England. The Patriots (so they called themselves) in England, eagerly joined the cry, and spared no labour and no expense, to propagate it throughout the nation. Do you suppose they did this, out of flark love and kindness to the poor, ruined Americans? No such matter. They understood the cause too well: they knew, they cried before they were hurt. But they laid hold on this, as a fair occasion to throw an asperion on those that were in power, being very willing, and supposing themselves very worthy to supply their place. However the Ministry, finding the clamour increasing, and the storm spreading on both sides the ocean, were persuaded to give way to the torrent. They did so; and the Stamp Act was repealed.

10. The American Leaders now apprehending that they had a sufficient number of fast friends in England, began to entertain higher designs: the New-England men in particular. They had no longer any thing to fear from Canada, which the English had conquered for them. And they had nothing to fear from England, when they judged the Allies were growing stronger and stronger. They therefore paved the way for the execution of their favourite scheme, first, by diligently cultivating the republican notions, which they had received from their forefathers: and then by speaking and writing in the most contemptuous and reproachful manner of the English Government.

11. Soon after, it being thought reasonable, that every part of the British Empire should furnish its share of the General Expence, the English Parliament laid a small duty on the Tea imported into America. Again a violent outcry arose, and was studiously propagated through all the Provinces. It was no less diligently spread throughout England. And as they judged the time was now come, to advance a little further, the leading men both at home
home and abroad, began more and more confidently to assert, "that the English had no right to tax "the American Colonies." The affirmers of this new position in England, strongly exhorted those in
America, to withstand what they were pleased to call, this illegal, unconstitutional oppression. Thus
encouraged, the Bostonians, under the auspices of Mr. Hancock (whose interest was particularly at
flake,) storing to do anything secretly, paraded the town at noon-day, with colours flying, and
bravely, threw the English Tea into the sea. This was the first plain overt act of Rebellion, not of a
few, but of the town of Boston. Reparation of the wrong was demanded; but it was not obtained.
Till it should be obtained, the Parliament ordered Boston Harbour to be shut up.

12. But things were not yet ripe for an open rupture. Therefore the Americans still gave the
Government good words. They protested their Loyalty, their great regard for the King, and their
desire of obeying all his legal commands. But all this time they were using all possible art and dili-
gence, to blacken first the ministry: after a time the Parliament too; and then the King himself.
Of this I had a clear and particular account, from a Friend in Pennsylvania, who then observed a storm
ripping in the North, and moving on toward the Southern Colonies. And it moved on apace. A
new Supreme Power called a Congress appeared. It openly assumed the reins of Government; exer-
cised all the rights of Sovereignty, burst all the bands, and totally disclaimed the authority both of
King and Parliament.

13. But still the Americans talked of Allegiance, and said, They desired nothing but the Liberty of
Englishmen. Many in England cordially believed them: I myself for one. And many more (though
they saw deeper, perhaps were in the secret) affected to believe them, defended them with all their might,
and pleaded their cause, in public and private, as honest, upright men, who only withstood oppres-
sion, and desired nothing but what was their legal right.

14. While we were warmly debating these things in England, the Americans believing matters were
now in a proper forwardness, wholly threw off the mask, openly took up arms, seiz'd upon his Ma-
jecty's stores and ships, and avowed themselves to be Sovereign States, independent on Britain, or any
other. And herein they were still vehemently encour-
gaged by their numerous friends in England. Some
of these (and they were perform'd of no mean account)
write them letters, (which were carefully sent by
the Congress, through all the Provinces) nearly in
these words, "Make no concessions: give up no-	hing. Stand your ground. Be resolute, and you
may
may depend upon it, in less than a year and an half, there will be such commotions in England, that the Government will be glad to be reconciled to you, upon your own terms."

15. One might have imagined for some time, that this was a true prophecy. Many warm men at home, laboured to embarrass the Government in all its measures. They spoke all manner of evil of the Ministry. They made the keenest reflections on the Parliament. And when they had whetted themselves and one another, they spared not the King himself. Mean while they were so wonderfully tender of the Americans, that they would not in any wise term them Rebels, though they were in open arms against their lawful Sovereign. And all this time whatsoever was undertaken against them, went on heavily. The King's Troops were either detained in the harbours, or dropped in their passage by contrary winds. Some of the transports, and abundance of other ships fell into the hands of the Americans. Their Privateers swarmed on every side, both in the American and European seas. They were plentifully furnished with Provisions from the resources they had within themselves. And with all sorts of arms and ammunition by our good Allies, the Dutch and French. In the mean while, the few English troops, that were in America were closely shut up in Boston, by a numerous Army, holding

holding them in on every side, and gapping to swallow them up. And these within the town were in want of all things, while those without abounded with all things. This they gloried in, as a manifest proof, that God was on their side. As they now were confident of success, the talk of Liberty was over. Independence was the word: This was avowed, without any disguise, or reserve. And, indeed, Liberty was come to an end: it had no longer any being in the Confederate Colonies. If any one dared to speak a little in favour of the King, or in disfavour of the Congress, he was soon taught to know his Lords and Masters, whose little finger was heavier than the loins of Kings.

16. At length the King published a Proclamation, for a General Fast in England, that we might "humble ourselves before God, and implore his Blessing and Assistance." Some of the patrons of independency mocked at this, and endeavoured to turn it into ridicule. A company of them met at an inn in Bristol on the Fast Day, and had a plentiful entertainment. Others formed and raved at this hypocrisy, as they were pleased to term it. However, there is all reason to believe, that God was well pleased with it. We now openly acknowledged Him, and He openly acknowledged us. From this very time, the tide turned. The King's forces (which many said was impossible) made good their
18. Such is the present state of affairs in America. Let us now take a view of the whole. Twelve Provinces, upon various pretences, (all which have been confused over and over,) have declared themselves Independent States, openly renounced their Allegiance to their lawful Sovereign, taken up arms against him, and prosecuted the war in an unheard of manner. At first, Prosperity seemed to attend them in all their undertakings. But since we fought help from God, there has been a manifest blast upon them. Their armies are scattered; their forts and strongholds lost; their Provinces taken one after another. Meantime are they humbled? No; they roar like wild bulls in a net. They tear up the ground with fierceness and rage; repentance is hid from their eyes. They revenge themselves—upon women and children. They burn—all behind them! O American Virtue! Are these men, who are prostituted as a pattern to all Europe?

19. Brethren! Countrymen! What are the reflections, that now naturally arise in your breasts? Do not you immediately observe, That after this huge outcry for Liberty, which has echoed through all America, there is not the very shadow of Liberty left in the Confederate Provinces. There is no Liberty of the Press. A man may more safely print against the Church in Italy or Spain, than
publish a title against the Congrefs, in New-England or Pennsylvania. — There is no Religious Liberty: what minister is permitted to follow his own Conscience in the execution of his office? To put man in mind to be subject to principalities and powers? To fear God, and honour the king? Who is suffered (whatever his Conscience may dictate) to pray for the King, and all that are in authority? — There is no Civil Liberty: no man has any security either for his goods, or for his person, but is daily liable to have his goods spoiled or taken away, without either Law or form of Law, and to suffer the most cruel outrage as to his person, such as many would account worse than death. And there is no legal method wherein he can obtain redres for whatever loss or outrage he has sustained.

20. Do not you observe wherever these howlers for Liberty govern, there is the vilest Slavery? No man there can say that "his goods are his own." They are absolutely at the disposal of the mob or the Congrefs. No man can say that "his tongue is his own." If he say a word for the King, what will follow? No man can say, "that his body is his own." He may be imprisoned whenever our Lords the Congrefs please. They are as absolute as the Emperor of Morocco. Their will is the sole law. No man can say, "his life is his own." Those who have the disposal of his substance, who have the disposal of his liberty, have the disposal of his life also. And of this they have given recent proofs. It is true, they do not themselves cut throats. They do not soil their own fingers; but their friends the mob are always ready. Thus is real Liberty in all its branches given up, for that poor shadow, Independency! A phantom which does not in fact exist in any civilized nation under heaven. It never did, and never will, being wholly inconsistent with the very idea of Government. And to what a condition are these poor Colonies brought, by quitting the substance for the shadow? Do you ask, (says a Gentleman who writes from Philadelphia) what is the present state of these Provinces? You may see it upon Ezekiel's roll. Such is the condition of this country: It is written within and without, lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

21. And do not you observe, on the other hand, the perfect liberty which we enjoy? Not indeed derived from our forefathers, as some writers idly talk. No: our forefathers never enjoyed it, either before or after William the Conqueror, and least of all in the time of the long Parliament, or under Oliver Cromwell. They had then little more liberty, Civil or Religious, than is now enjoyed in the Confederate Provinces. Never talk of the Liberty of our Forefathers: English Liberty commenced at the Revolution. And how entire is it at this day? Every
man says what he will, writes what he will, prints what he will. Every man worships God, (if he worship him at all) as he is persuaded in his own mind. Every man enjoys his own property, nor can the King himself take a shilling of it, but according to law. Every man enjoys the freedom of his person, unless the law of the Land authorize his confinement. Above all, every man's life is secured, as well from the King, as from his fellow-subjects. So that it is impossible to conceive a fuller Liberty than we enjoy, both as to Religion, Life, Body, and Goods.

22. Do not you see then the abundant cause we have to be thankful to God, who having made the whole nation of men, determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, in that he hath call our lot in a fair ground, under the mildest government upon earth? Are not we of all men without fence, if instead of thankfulness, we give way to murmuring and discontent, and finding fault with we know not what? In all reason, we should be perpetually praising God, for this as well as for a thousand other benefits, and endeavouring to make him a suitable return, by devoting our lives to his service.

23. And as long as we fear God, shall we not honour the King, looking upon him with a love mixed with reverence? Should we not remember him before God in prayer, that his throne may be established in righteousness? That he and all which are in authority under him, may duly administer justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and the maintenance of true religion and virtue? And is it not our part, carefully to abstain from speaking evil of the Ruler of our people? And to study to lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty?

Hitherto I have addressed myself to my Countrymen in general. But I would add a word to you in particular, who bear a Religious Character: whether you are members of the established Church, or Dissenters of any denomination.

One might reasonably expect, that all of you would be cheerfully subject to the higher powers. Seeing you are agreed, there is no power, whether supreme or subordinate, but of God. Nay, one would expect that you would be continually reminding all you had any intercourse with, that they must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. How is it then, that any of you espouse the cause of those that are in open rebellion against their lawful Sovereign? That if you do not plead expressly for them, you at least extenuate their crime; perhaps even scruple to call them Rebels, and speak of them with tenderness, rather than resentment.
sentiment. How is it that any of you who fear God, are not afraid to speak evil of dignities? To speak evil of the ruler of your people, as well as of those that are put in authority under him? Do you believe, that Michael the archangel durst not bring a railing accusation against Satan? And dare you bring or retail an hundred railing accusations against your lawful governors? —— Now at least, humble yourselves before God, and act more suitably to your Character. Whenever you are far from countenancing, repel the base clamours of the vulgar: remembering those awful words, If any man among you fometh to be religious, (rather, be ever so religious,) and brideth not his tongue, that man’s religion is vain.

Are not you who dissent from the established Church, in whatever kind or degree, particularly concerned to observe this, for wrath, as well as for conscience sake? Do you imagine there are no High Churchmen left? Did they all die with Dr. Sacheverell? Alas! how little do you know of mankind? Were the present restraint taken off, you would see them swarming on every side, and gnawing upon you with their teeth. There would hardly need a nod from that sacred person, whom you revile, or at least lightly affront. Were he to stand neuter, in what a condition would you be, within one twelve months? If other Bonners and Gardiners did not arise, other Lauds and Stedens would, who would either rule over you with a rod of iron, or drive you out of the land. Know the blessings you enjoy! Let Common Sense restrain you, if neither Religion, nor Gratitude can. “Beware of the wrath of a patient man.” Dare not again to open your lips against your Sovereign! lest he fall upon you? No; but let he cease to defend you. Then farewell to the Liberty you now enjoy.

Permit me to add a few more words to you, a small part of whom dissent from, but the far greater part remain in the Church, you who are vulgarly called Methodists. Do any of you blaspheme God or the King? None of you, I truf, who are in connexion with me. I would no more continue in fellowship with those, who continued in such a practice, than with whoremongers, or Sabbath-breakers, or thieves, or drunkards, or common-fearers. But there are not a few, who go under that name, though they have no connexion with us: yea, though they cordially hate us, as dreadful heretics, for believing, That God willeth all men to be saved: who hate the King and all his Ministers, only less than they do—an Arminian: and who speak all manner of evil of them in private, if not in public too.—— But suffer me to ask, Is this well done? Is it Gratitude? Is it Prudence? In the name of wonder, what could his Majesty have done for you, which he has not
not done? What would you have? Can you tell? What can you define more than you have already? Have you not full liberty of conscience in every respect, without any shadow of restraint? In what other nation under the sun, is such Religious Liberty to be found? Have you not full liberty, with regard to your life, to your person, and to your goods? In what other country upon earth, is such Civil Liberty to be found? If you are not thankful to God and the King for these blessings, you are utterly unworthy of them. ——— Is it Prudence, to speak in so bitter and contemptuous a manner, of such Governors as God has given you? What if by the bitterness of your spirit, the acrimony of your language, and the inflammatory libels which you spread abroad, you could carry your point, unhinge the present Government, and set up another in its stead? What would you gain thereby? Would another Government allow you more liberty than you now enjoy? Could they give you a more unbounded liberty of conscience? It is impossible! Would they give you a larger measure of Civil Liberty? They could not, if they would. And certainly they would not give you the liberty of railing at your governors, and flinging up your fellow-subjects against them. If you did this, you would not only lose your goods, but probably your life also. On the other hand, what if the present Government should continue, in spite of all your disloyal practices? Have you any assurance, have you any reason to believe, that our Governors will always be so patient? Nay, undoubtedly when things of greater moment are settled, they will find a time for you. Your present behaviour will then be remembered; perhaps not altogether to your advantage; it is not the ignorance, but the wisdom of your Governors, which occasions their present silence. And if you go on thus, be assured sooner or later, you will meet with your reward. There is no need that the King should do any thing: he needs only, not to restrain: that is enough: there are those on every side, who are now ready to swallow you up. You will then wish, you had been wise in time, when your wisdom comes too late: when the King of Kings laughs at your calamity, and mocks while your fear cometh.

FINIS.