

"Zero" Memorandum

Jan. 6 1778

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To those whom it may concern

When a State is involved in difficulties and dangers, at which its usual conductors stand aghast and confounded, it becomes the duty of every member of the community, however humble his station, to suggest to the persons in authority whatever he thinks may be expedient for the public safety. The more obscure the adviser, the less danger can arise from the advice; as it can receive no weight from his name or character, and has no chance of being followed but from its own consistency, and the good reasons he is able to produce in its support. I shall therefore make no farther apology for the presumption of this address; but shall proceed to explain the drift of it, with all the brevity which the extensiveness and importance of the subject will permit.

The political affairs of this country have exhibited, within these few years, a scene to which nothing precisely similar is to be found in history; and concerning the event of which, history cannot (of consequence, furnish us with any plausible conjecture. The Romans, indeed, in the last century of their freedom, had, like us, their Cinna, their Clodius, and many other such like patriots, who, for the support of their ambitious schemes, corrupted the common people, and rendered them seditious, and ungovernable. The Romans had, like us, a bloody war to maintain for years, called the Social war, against their own provinces and colonies, stirred up and encouraged by factious men from within the walls of Rome itself and in all which contest, Liberty, the Republic, and the Rights of mankind, were the constant pretects. We all know, however, that

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These fierce struggles for universal liberty were finished by the establishment of the most despotic government ever known. But still their circumstances were, in many respects, different from ours, and our disputes may not end in the same manner or perhaps so well. The Romans were altogether a military people, who made little account of merchandise and were perfectly unacquainted with paper money: who conquered Countries for the sake of the tributes to be raised from them, and who planted Colonies at a distance from the metropolis, only for the better securing those conquests. But the greatest and most important difference between their circumstances and ours was, that they had no powerfull neighbours ready to avail themselves of their divisions; so that they could only terminate in establishing one or other of the political antagonists, at the head of the Roman government, while Rome was sure in every event, of continuing Mistress of the world. A man must belie his own feelings, as well as be grossly ignorant in political Arithmetic, who will assert that the fate of the ancient Romans is the worst that can befall a free people, or that a despotic power established by any nation from within itself is not preferable to a like despotic power exercised over it by a foreign State. The history of the Carthaginians, even in the imperfect manner in which it has been handed down to us, furnishes an account of affairs much more resembling ours, than were those of the Romans, and of which the event was much more fatal. For not having public spirit or unanimity sufficient for the government of themselves, they became an easie prey

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to their haughty rivals the Romans, who first imposed upon them the most humiliating terms of peace, and then expunged them altogether from the list of nations.

When a physician is about to prescribe an unpalatable medicine, it becomes necessary for him to lay open to his patient the great danger of his distemper, in order to induce him to swallow it. For a like cause I have brought forth these melancholy examples from ancient history, being myself thoroughly convinced that the independency of the British nation will be in the utmost danger whenever the Americans are able to establish theirs.

Those, therefore, who, calling themselves Englishmen, labour to promote American independency can be only considered as secret enemies to this Country; or else as madmen, who inflamed with envy and disappointed ambition, utter sounds, and engage in transactions, of which they do not perceive the meaning and tendency. But all these avowed advocates for American independency carry, like the rattle snake, their warning about with them; and, by the excess of their malice, or folly, put it in our power to avoid the consequences of them. Much more is to be feared from another set of people, who hold a language that has an appearance of moderation, and is much more dangerous, as it is much more plausible. I mean those who advise us to give up all pretensions to an unconditional submission from the Americans, and to enter into covenants with them. If rage has damaged the understandings of the first set of people, fear seems to have had upon the last a like baneful influence. For a man must be totally unacquainted with the first rudiments of state affairs, who does not know that no sovereign power can enter into a binding or indissoluble

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 agreement with those who are acknowledged to be its subjects; and that history does not furnish an example of such conditions being insisted upon, without producing a war which has terminated either in absolute independency, or unlimited obedience. This assertion is not only founded upon universal experience, but is clearly deducible from the nature of Contracts; that is, from the nature of men and things, for a contract between one private man and another would have no validity; the strongest ever endeavouring to break or explain it to his own advantage so that an agreement would turn out to be only another word for an established contention of the laws or superior powers of the society, to which both the covenanting parties are subject, were not always ready at hand to prevent the infringement of the agreement, and to explain whatever happened to be ambiguous in it. By this state of the case it is perfectly clear that, to form a binding contract between Great Britain and America, the two parties must submit themselves to the correction, and controul, of some third power, such as France or Spain; which would, by this means, give law to both, and become the only Sovereign and independant power of the three. Submission is a word perfectly intelligible, and independancy is no less so; but if any man will condescend to put upon paper what he means by a conditional submission to a sovereign power, I flatter myself with being able to prove that he has considered the subject with very little attention.

Whatever new pretensions may be set up in future years, no man has yet presumed, either on this, or the other side of the Atlantic, to assert that the Legislature of Great Britain never had a right

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 at any time to make laws for binding her Colonies in any case whatsoever, or that all her acts of that sort have been for these two hundred years, acts of tyranny and usurpation. The contrary has been hitherto universally admitted, and as I have already shown that there can be no line drawn by which the obedience of subjects to a supreme legislative power can be limited, but that it must either have a right to bind them in all cases whatsoever, as it is expressed in the declaratory act of Parliament, or in no case whatsoever, it follows that the war now carried on to enforce this unlimited obedience is a just and necessary War.

Having thus shown that the American pretensions to independency are unjust, that the establishment of such an independency would be fatal to Great Britain, and that the notion of a binding compromise is absurd, there remains no course for Great Britain, but that of compelling the Americans by force to return to their duty, and allegiance. To this End nothing can be more obstructive than any offer of conditions or any step towards a treaty of accomodation; and it is past a doubt that much of the arrogance of the Americans, and much of our bad success against them, have been owing to the offers of this kind already made. Happily for us the Americans are too much puffed up with their late success to listen to any terms of accomodation. Had they the temper and address to enter into any treaty, by which our troops might be withdrawn, and their own trade, fishery, agriculture and manufactures, restored, with some new liberties, they would soon be in a better condition to despise us than they are at present.

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So far I believe there are thousands of sensible people who will go along with me, but will immediately ask: How are these Americans to be subdued? The experiment, say they, has been already tried by very brave troops, commanded by officers of acknowledged bravery and military skill, and yet the success has been so bad as to give us no prospect of a favourable issue. It is impossible to deny the truth of this observation, but it will be found, upon a nearer view, to arise not from the general nature of the war between us and the Americans, but from the improper mode in which this war has been hitherto carried on.

There is a certain pedantry, or technical importance, which haunts, more or less, the professors of every art; which makes each of them overvalue his own, and often to apply it to purposes for which it is very unfit. A great Admiral is easily inclined to believe that there is no better method of reducing a forward people to submission than by a powerful fleet: but if the Enemy happen to have no fleet to encounter, and no sea ports that are easily bombarded, he is immediately at the end of his Latin, and having nothing to do, concludes that there is nothing to be done. A great Engineer, were the conduct of the whole business left to him, might perhaps spend a whole summer in making lines of circumvallation, and contravallation about some insignificant town; and finding that the taking of it very little promoted the general purpose of the Enterprize, would be apt to declare the purpose itself unattainable: While a great General would assure us, that to subdue any people you must employ the firelock and bayonet in the field, and that all other means were ineffectual. In this likewise his Excellency, like the rest may be grossly mistaken: for the same effect may be produced by many other

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kinds of distress; which, without immediately effecting men's lives might make their lives restless and uncomfortable. For instance let us suppose a man endowed with the strange faculty of hindering any number of people from sleeping as long as he pleased, he himself being all the while, unsusceptible of hurt. It is evident that such a man, having announced his intention of exerting this power upon all the inhabitants of Great Britain, might sit quietly in his Garret, and without demanding any thing of any body, have, in less than a fortnight, all the lives, liberties, and properties of the nation laid at his feet. In order to be relieved from this painful interdiction, they would probably begin by making him, what they thought, advantageous offers; which he might as readily reject, by a bare shake of his head; till, as their distresses increased, they would surrender every thing to his discretion, without stipulation, or reserve. It was by methods, founded upon this principle, that the Legislature of Great Britain attempted to bring back the people of Boston to a sense of their Duty, after some of them had injured the British subjects in their private property, in a manner that bore defiance to the Government itself; and when an assembly of the Province, instead of punishing the offenders, had formally, and deliberately, applauded the outrage. The Boston Port Act, and that for suspending the New England fishery, were humanely meant to prevent the shedding of blood; and, in the stead of it, to lay on

interdict upon the property of the delinquents, as in the common practise of distraining, till such time as they should conform themselves to the will of that supreme power to which they had always before ~~acknowledged~~ acknowledged themselves to be subject. The nature of the remedy was well understood, but the dose was too weak to have its desired operation. It served only to irritate, but gave no distress beyond what was easily counterbalanced by the passions of the people, and the promises of assistance daily sent them by their parties in England; while the English ministry, trusting to such feeble means of coercion, gave the seditions time to form confederacies, and to prepare every thing for a serious and important war.

To dwell long upon the reflection of what has been improperly done, or what has been improperly neglected, serves only to give ourselves fruitless uneasiness. The manly and sensible part is to consider what may still be done, and to execute it with spirit and steadiness. To distress the Americans with effect, is still in our power, and will ever be so, whilst they inhabit a very extensive coast, and we continue to have the command of the sea that washes it. This great advantage naturally points out to us, a mode of making war the very reverse, in all its circumstances, of that which has been adopted, and from which, consequently, we have reason to expect a much more favourable event.

2733 A man who knows nothing at all of the British affairs,⁹
but what he learns by reading the dispatches from our Commander in
Chief in America, would be naturally induced to believe, that he was sent
thither, not for any important national purpose, but only to determine
a military wager between him and M^r. Washington, whom he, at the
head of a limited, ^{and} small body, of English; had undertaken to fight
with all the Americans gathered together, in any part of America, ~~that~~
M^r. Washington should chuse; and that, to give the Americans fair play, he
had obliged himself to do nothing, that should obstruct their assembling;
a mere piece of knight-errantry, in which it would be ungenerous, and
ungallant, to avail ourselves of any armour, or advantage, we might
accidentally possess over our Antagonists. For what, in examining the
detail, has been the late plan of Military Operations? It was to
proclaim protection and security for the persons and goods of all
the people of America who should not be found in the way of our
Army with weapons in their hands; in order, it should seem, that such
of them as were best qualified for fighting, might, in full ease of
mind, walk off with their muskets to join M^r. Washington; leaving
their houses, their families, their geese, and their Turkeys, to the paternal
care of the English General. — It was that the Americans who
were not immediately wanted in M^r. Washingtons Camp might, in
full security, cultivate their Rice and Tobacco, to be exchanged in
France for arms and ammunition. — It was to go in search
of M^r. Washington, by a tedious Navigation, in spite of contrary
Winds, and of a variety of obstructions, natural and artificial.
— It was to keep a brave English Army perfectly inactive upon
the sea shore, near their ships, wasting their health, and spending

immense sums of English money for the benefit of their Enemies: or it was to make them leave their ships, and their sure means of subsistence, to follow Mr. Washington, and his much more numerous army, as far up the Country as he pleased to lead them; through woods, bogs, and fortified passes, exposed to every ambuscade he had previously laid for them; by which their Numbers would be daily diminished; while his would be furnished with daily recruits. — It was to lead our army through a Country inhabited by a people universally hostile to us, and friendly to Mr. Washington; and who would supply him with fresh provisions and true intelligence; while they fed us with nothing but lies. —

It was to march them so far up into the Enemies Country, that when by want of provision, or the approach of winter, they should be obliged to retreat to their ships, they might be harassed, retarded and destroyed, in their retreat, with little power of retaliation. —

In short it was such a plan of warfare as the Sly Doctor Franklin would have suggested to our admiral and general, if ever they had been so simple as to give ear to him.

But I, who have much more tenderness for English Men than for American turkeys, will suggest a plan ^{of a} quite different nature, and shall usher it in by a passage of a letter I received from ~~my~~ ~~Brother~~, a Mate in one ~~of~~ of General Howes transports; who in his relation of what past in sailing up Chesapeake Bay, says: Upon the West side of the Bay we saw the coast of Virginia, richly adorned with houses, and plantations; and it was the opinion of every one, both sailors, and Soldiers, on board our Vessel, that 2000 men landed here would easily lay waste the whole Province: but,

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it seems, to hurt the Americans, without loss or danger to ourselves, is not the present System of Politicks.

~~My Brother~~ But why it should not be the present System, is hard to say: except its being so obviously easy and safe. has made it to be overlooked by men of refining heads. Whether it be, in reality, so safe and easy, will best appear by reducing it from a general idea, to an actual plan of operations, such as the following.

To assemble all the British troops now in America at ~~the~~ New-York; which is to serve as the general rendezvous, the Magazine for our stores, and the hospital for our sick and wounded.

To draw up and print a proclamation, to be separately addressed to each of the 13 rebel Provinces, to the following purport:

Whereas certain evil disposed persons have ^{of late years} entered into an unlawfull and traiterous confederacy against the Crown and dignity of his Majesty, King George, and the supreme legislature of great Britain, under the Name of a Congress; and whereas — of the Members who compose the said traiterous Confederacy, to wit

— pretends to be elected for that purpose by the whole proprietors of the province of ~~the~~ inhabitants, thereby endeavouring to involve all and every one of the inhabitants of the said Province in the great guilt, and to subject them to the heavy penalties of High Treason and rebellion: the which report his Majesty from a tender regard of the lives and properties of so many of his subjects is unwilling, without farther proof, to believe.

12 It is therefore his Majesties pleasure that the inhabitants of the said province of — shall by a publick act of their assembly to be held at — as soon as conveniently may be, disavow the pretended representations of their Province by the said pretended deputies; and to communicate the said disavowal, in an authentick manner, to his Majesties Governor or commanding officer at New York on or before the — day of — in which case his Majesty is graciously pleased to grant pardon to all the inhabitants of the Province of — excepting the said pretended deputies, for all acts of Treason, or misprison of Treason, committed by them against his Majesty and the State of Great Britain, previous to the said disavowal. But if, by non compliance with this his Majesties gracious proclamation, ~~and that~~ the inhabitants of — are so infatuated as to acknowledge the persons aforesaid to be really their Representatives, and thereby take upon themselves all the guilt of the war that has been waged, and of the blood that has been spilt by their orders, it is his Majesties firm resolution to compel a compliance with this his just and mercifull requisition, by laying wast the houses, lands and goods of the said inhabitants of the Province of — whenever they are to be found.

An unconditional compliance with the terms ^{of the} above proclamation would put an end to the war, though not in the manner that would give us prospect of a lasting peace; as a war raised by the individuals themselves, and finished without those individuals being made to feel any of the miseries of it, would have a great chance of being revived.

2733 (3) upon the first frivolous pretence. The cheapest, and best garrison, you¹³ keeping any distant people in obedience, is the remembrance of what they have suffered by their former contumacy, and the fear of having those severities repeated; especially when they see that they may be repeated with little danger or expence, to those who inflict them. There being, however, but little likelihood of their compliance with a bare requisition of this sort, some more coercive means must be employed, such as:

To leave at New York an army so numerous as to be in no danger from an attack.

To embark 10,000 men on board transports properly escorted, and commanded by an experienced officer who has never suffered his brain to be perplexed by factious reasonings about the rights of Government, but holds the laws of his Country, and the commands of his King, as the infallible rule of his conduct.

That this army, leaving Mr. Washington to amuse himself in the woods, shall be transported, without any thing being previously known of its particular destination, to any part of any of the rebel Provinces which, from the particular state of the wind, at the time, the easiness of landing, or other circumstances shall seem the most eligible.

When come to their destined places, the troops to be landed, and after having carried away all ^{that} may be usefull for the publick service, to burn and destroy the houses, magazines, and plantations, as far as they are conveniently within their reach; sparing the lives of all the persons who do not attempt by arms to prevent them.

This service being performed, the troops once more to embark for some other Province, where the like may be repeated.

These seem to be all the instructions necessary to be given to a Commander in such an expedition. All that is required of him for this service is a moderate, steady temper, a strict observance of the common rules of Military discipline, and a due caution in landing, and re-embarking the troops, in which our Seafaring men have great experience.

Let us next see what are likely, to be the more immediate consequences of this amphibious mode of making war.

First, General Washington's Army would immediately melt away like a snow ball ^{under} before a fire. Every man, more anxious for the safety of his family than for the ideal independency of America, would return to his own Province, either to assist in defending his own property, or, if that should not be found practicable in saving as much of it, as he could, either by hiding, or carrying it away.

Secondly, these strokes of severity tho' they might, in fact, fall but upon a very few, would give universal, terror, and anxiety to all the inhabitants of America: and it is from this anxiety that the most powerfull effect is to be expected, for, in comparison of it, real damage is but a small evil; as experience has often shown. The people who had lost their goods would be rid, at the same time, of their fears; and would be, perhaps, the only inhabitants upon that extended coast who would enjoy the Blessings of a sound sleep.

Thirdly, to repel these mischiefs, to be performed by 10,000 men only, all America must be in arms. Every one of the thirteen rebel Provinces, must have an army of at least double the Number of ours; that is to say, rebel America, must have in the field an Army of 260,000 men, with thirteen Commanders in chief, and a proportionate Number of inferior officers: which is more than the United powers of France and Spain would be able to bring into the field; altho' they should evacuate all their garrisons for that purpose. If the Army of 20,000 men, which I allot for the defence of each province, were to be made up of men hastily got together, from their usual labour, upon the appearance of our troops upon the coast, they could only meet them as Sheep to be slaughtered. If, on the other hand, they should be constantly disciplined, as Soldiers, and kept in a body, for many months together, in perpetual readiness to repel a possible invasion, a ruin of another sort would soon ensue. A late ingenious French writer upon Publick felicity says, that no Nation can bear the expence of an Army, if more than one man out of a hundred is employed in the Military service.

I will not take upon me to answer for the exactness of ^{this} calculation; but I am very sure that a Nation of all Soldiers would soon become a Nation of all beggars. Neither could a regular Army more powerfull than ours prevent the threatened mischief; except, by strange accident, it happened to be encamped within five or six miles of the spot which our General had chosen for his landing place.

This last assertion may be illustrated by calling to mind what happened in 1758, when a body of English troops to the number of 6000 made three different descents upon the coast of France. When tho' so small a number, could not prudently wait the assembling of the French forces from distant parts, yet the fact is that they were long enough on shore to have burnt Cherbourg, and all the villages and houses for many miles round their several landing places, if such had been their instructions. That they had no instructions for such mischief arose from this very plain reason; that it would have been cruel, unmerited, and useless; or, to speak more properly, it would have been cruel, because unmerited and useless. Every degree of pain, even the smallest, given to individuals, without any guilt in the sufferers, or without having in view any useful or humane end, is an act of cruelty, which ^{no} just or wise man will ever recommend or countenance. The Country people on the coast of France had no vote in making war upon England, nor could their fears or lamentations contribute to put an end to it. It is not so with the inhabitants of America; for they have formed themselves into a Government the most popular imaginable; in which every man is acknowledged to be a councillor of state; where every man, by himself or his representative in Congress grants money for carrying on war, and orders the mode in which this money is to be expended: where every man may be said, in his own individual person, to have declared war ~~war~~ against the King of Great Britain: so that he must thank his own folly and temerity, if, at any time, he should come off short

I have insensibly digressed a little from my main subject⁷ which was only to show, how the Americans may be subdued to obedience, with little loss or danger to us. But the digression may not be altogether useless; as a scheme for securing the public at the expence of private people altogether innocent, would be ill relished by the more humane and more respectable part of the community.

In farther considering the immediate effects to be expected from this new mode of making war in America, it may be useful to observe what actually are the effects, of that now practis'd. It will be, then, found, that none of the inconveniencies the Americans now suffer, are of such a nature as to make any violent impression upon their minds, or to raise up any new passion sufficient to counteract those with which they have inflamed one another. Every one, indeed, pays his Quota in money towards the maintenance of the war against England; but nobody feels any pain from the war except the few who, for the sake of the pay, or from a love of idleness and squabbling actually engage to carry arms. These men may be killed, they may be wounded, but they make no lamentation for themselves, nor does any body make lamentation for them. They are the admiration of their party, and the objects of the praise of men, women and children. When they fall or are disabled, others are easily found, from the same motives, to supply their places and a war of this sort may glide on, from year to year, till both England and America would be so impoverished and enfeebled as to become an easy prey to their ambitious neighbours.

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But the same men, women, and children, who would rejoice to hear of a small advantage gained over the English forces, at the expense of 3 or 4 thousand of their own soldiers, would set up a most pitious howling on seeing their own Cattle driven away, and their own chairs, tables and feather beds set in a blaze.
In whatever Province, or part of a Province, such severities might be first exercised, the distress and confusion would be soon communicated to all the rest. The immediate sufferers, or those most immediately in danger of suffering, would apply for defence, to their neighbours; who, having the like evils to apprehend, would not be able to afford them any. They would apply for relief in their wants; but they would apply to those, whose affairs are already disordered, and who had nothing to spare. Mutual blame and reproaches would naturally ensue, and great part of them would fall upon the members of the Congress as the chief instigators of the revolt. The Confederacy, which had been formed for their common safety, would be found to produce nothing but universal danger. The chimerical fears of oppression, from the unlimited Authority of the Parliament of Great Britain, would soon be defaced by the actual mischiefs they felt from their refusal to submit to it, and each Province, without consulting their Congress, would return to its former duty, leaving the extent of that Duty, as formerly, to the moderation of the British Government, and the known justice and benevolence of the British Nation.

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It will probably be objected to the foregoing plan of operations, that, tho' it should at last procure submission to the Government of Great Britain, the affections of the Americans would be entirely lost by it. To this objection a short answer might be made, by barely repeating the old proverb, that wrought is never in danger; the minds of the Americans being already so hostile to this Country, that no conduct of ours has a chance of making them more so. But this is not a compleat answer, nor all that may be said upon the subject. Whatever may be the various springs or motives of the affection which one private person bears to another, the affection of Subjects to their supreme rulers has ever been derived from one single and uniform cause, and that is, the contemplation of their uncontrollable power. From this is immediately derived fear and awe, the awe produces respect, and the respect soon creates a passion so like affection that it has not been thought necessary to find any other name for it. Those who believe that this affection is only attendant upon virtuous and kind rulers, and that it is the overflowings of gratitude for their paternal care, have paid little attention to the facts recorded in history; else they would have found that this affection, which is often denied to the most virtuous, humane and well-intentioned Princes, has been bestowed, with the most ardent enthusiasm upon the most vicious, useless, and profligate. By alluding

to these facts, I do not mean to insinuate, that it was the vices or tyranny of those Princes which recommended them to the affections of the people. On the contrary, I am confident that the very opposite qualities and behaviours would have rendered them more amiable. It is the unlimited power, that image of Divinity, which has always been the object of public adoration; and will always be so, in whatever hands it is placed. Notwithstanding the great beneficence of the British Government in America, the Americans always had a great affection for the King, and Parliament of Great Britain, till the repeal of the stamp act in 1766. Then it was that they discovered, for the first time, that the British power was very far from having that political omnipotence it had pretended to: but, on the contrary, that it was infirm and tottering, torn to pieces by faction, and that the nature of its Constitution was such as did not enable it to resent the most gross insults from the seditions within its own Capital, much less those which might be offered at 3000 miles distance. With the knowledge of the weakness of our Government all the former reverence for it ceased; and, as every new transaction gave new proofs of this weakness, their respect turned into contempt, which has been since wrought up by little and little to a most perfect hatred. That passionate attachment mentioned above, of subjects to persons whom their senses

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possessed of unlimited power seems to be one of those ²
instincts wisely given, by the Author of our Being, both
to encourage and to enable supreme Rulers to keep up the
opinion of mankind with regard to its reality, by a vigilant
and strict execution of the laws which exist in every
State against those who by any act of defiance attempt
to bring it into question. This Vigilance is of the utmost
consequence to the Peace of Society; as a contempt once
conceived for the Power of any Government can never
be removed but by extraordinary and violent exertions
of that power, which are always fatal to many
individuals and some times dangerous to the State
itself. Such however is our present disagreeable situation
of which I have endeavoured to point out both the
cause and the cure. Towards the execution of my own
plan, I have nothing to contribute but my good wishes,
which will always attend every man, who, by thought, word,
or deed, lends his assistance in restoring Great Britain
to her former splendor and Dignity.

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