

The Library of America • Story of the Week

Reprinted from *John Adams: Revolutionary Writings 1755–1775*
(The Library of America, 2011), pages 286–289, 294.

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Destruction of the Tea in Boston

*From the Diary:
December 17, 1773*

1773. DECR. 17TH.

Last Night 3 Cargoes of Bohea Tea were emptied into the Sea. This Morning a Man of War sails.

This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity, in this last Effort of the Patriots, that I greatly admire. The People should never rise, without doing something to be remembered—something notable And striking. This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences, and so lasting, that I cant but consider it as an Epocha in History.

This however is but an Attack upon Property. Another similar Exertion of popular Power, may produce the destruction of Lives. Many Persons wish, that as many dead Carcasses were floating in the Harbour, as there are Chests of Tea:—a much

less Number of Lives however would remove the Causes of all our Calamities.

The malicious Pleasure with which Hutchinson the Governor, the Consignees of the Tea, and the officers of the Customs, have stood and looked upon the distresses of the People, and their Struggles to get the Tea back to London, and at last the destruction of it, is amazing. 'Tis hard to believe Persons so hardened and abandoned.

What Measures will the Ministry take, in Consequence of this?—Will they resent it? will they dare to resent it? will they punish Us? How? By quartering Troops upon Us?—by annulling our Charter?—by laying on more duties? By restraining our Trade? By Sacrifice of Individuals, or how.

The Question is whether the Destruction of this Tea was necessary? I apprehend it was absolutely and indispensably so.—They could not send it back, the Governor, Admiral and Collector and Comptroller would not suffer it. It was in their Power to have saved it—but in no other. It could not get by the Castle, the Men of War &c. Then there was no other Alternative but to destroy it or let it be landed. To let it be landed, would be giving up the Principle of Taxation by Parliamentary Authority, against which the Continent have struggled for 10 years, it was loosing all our labour for 10 years and subjecting ourselves and our Posterity forever to Egyptian Taskmasters—to Burthens, Indignities, to Ignominy, Reproach and Contempt, to Desolation and Oppression, to Poverty and Servitude.

But it will be said it might have been left in the Care of a Committee of the Town, or in Castle William. To this many Objections may be made.

Deacon Palmer and Mr. Is. Smith dined with me, and Mr. Trumble came in. They say, the Tories blame the Consignees, as much as the Whiggs do—and say that the Governor will loose his Place, for not taking the Tea into his Protection before, by Means of the Ships of War, I suppose, and the Troops at the Castle.

I saw him this Morning pass my Window in a Chariot with the Secretary. And by the Marching and Countermarching of Councillors, I suppose they have been framing a Proclamation, offering a Reward to discover the Persons, their Aiders,

Abettors, Counsellors and Consorters, who were concerned in the Riot last Night.

Spent the Evening with Cushing, Pemberton and Swift at Wheelwrights. Cushing gave us an Account of Bollans Letters—of the Quantity of Tea the East India Company had on Hand—40,00000 weight, that is Seven Years Consumption—two Millions Weight in America.

“THE DYE IS CAST”

To James Warren

Dr Sir

Boston Decr 17 1773

The Dye is cast: The People have passed the River and cutt away the Bridge: last Night Three Cargoes of Tea, were emptied into the Harbour. This is the grandest, Event, which has ever yet happened Since, the Controversy, with Britain, opened!

The Sublimity of it, charms me!

For my own Part, I cannot express my own Sentiments of it, better than in the Words of Coll Doane to me, last Evening—Balch Should repeat them—The worst that can happen, I think, Says he in Consequence of it, will be that the Province must pay for it. Now, I think the Province, may pay for it, if it is burn'd as easily as if it is drank—and I think it is a matter of indifference whether it is drank or drowned. The Province must pay for it, in Either Case. But there is this Difference. I believe, it will take them 10 Years to get the Province to pay for it. If so, we shall Save 10 Years Interest of the Money. Whereas if it is drank it must be paid for immediately. Thus He—However, He agreed with me that the Province, would never pay for it. And also in this that the final Ruin, of our Constitution of Government, and of all American Liberties, would be the certain Consequence of Suffering it to be landed.

Governor Hutchinson and his Family and Friends will never have done, with their good services to Great Britain and the Colonies! But for him, this Tea might have been Saved to the East India Company. Whereas this Loss if the rest of the

Colonies Should follow our Example, will in the opinion of many Persons bankrupt the Company. However, I dare Say, that the Governors, and Consignees, and Custom House Officers, in the other Colonies will have more Wisdom than ours have had, and take effectual Care that thier Tea shall be sent back to England untouched. If not it will as surely be destroyed there as it has been here.

Threats, Phantoms, Bugbears, by the million, will be invented and propagated among the People upon this occasion. Individuals will be threatened with Suits and Prosecutions. Armies and Navies will be talked of—military Execution—Charters annull'd—Treason—Tryals in England and all that—But—these Terrors, are all but Imaginations. Yet if they should become Realities they had better be Suffered, than the great Principle, of Parliamentary Taxation given up.

The Town of Boston, was never more Still and calm of a Saturday night than it was last Night. All Things were conducted with great order, Decency and *perfect Submission to Government*. No Doubt, we all thought the Administration in better Hands, than it had been.

Please to make Mrs Adams's most respectfull Compliments to Mrs Warren and mine.

I am your Friend,

John Adams

THE MARTYRDOM OF BOSTON

To Abigail Adams

My Dear

Boston May 12. 1774

I am extremely afflicted with the Relation your Father gave me, of the Return of your Disorder. I fear you have taken some Cold; We have had a most pernicious Air, a great Part of this Spring. I am sure I have Reason to remember it—my Cold is the most obstinate and threatenng one, I ever had in my Life: However, I am unwearied in my Endeavours to subdue it, and have the Pleasure to think I have had some Success. I rise at 5, walk 3 Miles, keep the Air all day and walk again in the Afternoon. These Walks have done me more good than any Thing, tho I have been constantly plied with Teas, and your Specific. My own Infirmities, the Account of the Return of yours, and the public News coming altogether have put my Utmost Philosophy to the Tryal.

We live my dear Soul, in an Age of Tryal. What will be the Consequence I know not. The Town of Boston, for ought I can see, must suffer Martyrdom: It must expire: And our principal Consolation is, that it dies in a noble Cause. The Cause of Truth, of Virtue, of Liberty and of Humanity: and that it will probably have a glorious Reformation, to greater Wealth, Splendor and Power than ever.

Let me know what is best for us to do. It is expensive keeping a Family here. And there is no Prospect of any Business in my Way in this Town this whole Summer. I dont receive a shilling a Week.

We must contrive as many Ways as we can, to save Expences, for We may have Calls to contribute, very largely in Proportion to our Circumstances, to prevent other very honest, worthy People from suffering for Want, besides our own Loss in Point of Business and Profit.

Dont imagine from all this that I am in the Dumps. Far otherwise. I can truly say, that I have felt more Spirits and Activity, since the Arrival of this News, than I had done before for years. I look upon this, as the last Effort of Lord Norths Despair. And he will as surely be defeated in it, as he was in the Project of the Tea.—I am, with great Anxiety for your Health
your

John Adams