

In a debate in the House of Lords, May 18, 1775, on the memorial of the General Assembly of New York, the Earl of Effingham rose and said:

“The turn which this debate has taken makes it unnecessary for me to remark on anything which in the course of it has fallen from any noble lord; but as I wish to call your lordships’ attention rather to the subject matter, than to the form and manner of the paper offered to you, I hope I shall stand excused if I treat the latter as trifling when put in competition with the salutary or dreadful effects of admitting or rejecting the means now in your hands of restoring harmony to this distracted empire. What may be the fate of the amendment proposed, I know not; but I fear it is too easily guessed, from the complexion of the House, what will be that of the memorial. I confess I wish to avoid the discussion of our right to such a power as we are contending for; that is to say, a power of taxing a set of subjects who are not represented among us, and who have full power to tax themselves in the ordinary and constitutional manner. Were any particular province among the Americans to refuse grants of money in proportion to others, or to commit any act in abuse of their charters, I think that supreme controlling power, which the province in question allows in its full extent, would give us the charge, ‘*Ne quid detrimenti, res capiat publica.*’ And in that case, my lords, almost the whole empire would be united against the wrong-headed few, who would be soon brought to reason. But I am satisfied, that without such necessity, we have no more right to exercise the power of taxation in that country than a Roman dictator had to begin his office with a declaration that his power should be perpetual, and was necessary in the ordinary business of government.

Therefore, my lords, whatever has been done by the Americans, I must deem the mere consequence of our unjust demands. They have come to you with fair arguments, - you have refused to hear them: they make the most respectful remonstrances, - you answer them will bills of pains and penalties: they know they ought to be free, - you tell them they shall be slaves. Is it then a wonder, if they say in despair, ‘for the short remainder of our lives we will be free?’ Is there one among your lordships, who in a situation similar to that which I have described, would not resolve the same? If there should be such a one, I am sure he ought not to be here. To bring the history down to the present scene: here are two armies in presence of each other, - armies of brothers and countrymen; - each dreading the event, yet each feeling that it is in the power of the most trifling accident – a private dispute – a drunken fray in any public-house in Boston – in short, a nothing, - to cause a sword to be drawn and to plunge the whole country into all the horrors of blood, flame, and

parricide. In this dreadful moment, a set of men more wise and moderate than the rest exert themselves to bring us all to reason. They state their claims and their grievances; nay, if anything can be proved by law and history, they prove them. They propose oblivion, - they make the first concessions: we treat them with contempt: we prefer poverty, blood, and servitude, to wealth, happiness, and liberty. My lords, I should think myself guilty of offering an insult to your lordships, if I presumed to suppose there was any amongst you who would think of what was expedient, when once it appeared what was just. I might otherwise have adverted to the very formidable armament preparing by Spain; but as that armament ought to have no considerations with your lordships, I shall not suppose it would have any; and for that reason will entirely reject it. What weight these few observations may have, I do not know; but the candour your lordships have indulged me with, requires a confession on my part which may still lessen that weight. I must own I am not personally disinterested. Ever since I was of an age to have any ambition at all my highest has been to serve my country in a military capacity. If there was on earth an event I dreaded, it was to see this country so situated as to make that profession incompatible with my duty as a citizen. That period is, in my opinion, arrived; and I have thought myself bound to relinquish the hopes I had formed, by a resignation which appeared to me the only method of avoiding the guilt of enslaving my country, and imbruing my hands in the blood of her sons. When the duties of a soldier and a citizen become inconsistent, I shall always think myself obliged to sink the character of the soldier in that of the citizen, till such time as those duties shall again, by the malice of our real enemies, become united. It is no small sacrifice which a man makes who gives up his profession; but it is much greater when a predilection, strengthened by habit, has given him so strong an attachment to his profession as I feel. I have however, this one consolation that by making that sacrifice I at least give to my country an unequivocal proof of the sincerity of my principles” (i)

(i) This speech by the Earl of Effingham at the commencement of the American War has its admirable counterpart in one uttered by King George III at its termination, in reply to Mr John Adams, when in 1784 he was presented at Court as the first Plenipotentiary from the United States of America.

“And Sir, as I was the last person that consented to the independence of the United States, so shall I be the last person to disturb or in any manner to infringe upon their sovereign independent rights; and I hope and trust that from blood, religion, manners, habits of intercourse, and almost

every other consideration, the two nations will continue for ages in friendship and confidence with each other”

A local historian wrote

“Boston Castle was built at the commencement of the calamitous contest with America. A tax upon tea, which the government of this country imposed upon its transatlantic subjects, who had full power to tax themselves in a constitutional manner, excited a general spirit of hostility, and ultimately led to the independence of America. The first obstinate battle was fought in the vicinity of Boston. This event gave a name to the shooting-box near Rotherham. When it was first erected, many pleasant parties partook of the hospitality of the noble owner. They were plenteously regaled with wine and punch; but tea, the obnoxious beverage tea! was anathematised and forbidden: even ladies were not permitted to taste it, and, during the residence of the Earl of Effingham at Holmes Hall, Boston Castle was never defiled by its introduction.