

JOSIAH QUINCY

Josiah Quincy is Johnny Tremain's lawyer in the criminal case brought by Merchant Lyte in Johnny Tremain. Esther Forbes describes Quincy as eloquent, brilliant, a true Patriot, and doomed to die soon. The real Josiah Quincy was born in Boston in 1744, graduating from Harvard with both an undergraduate and graduate degree. He married Abigail Phillips at age twenty-five, and they had two children. He wrote a number of essays that supported the Whig cause, and worked with John Adams to successfully defend the British soldiers accused of causing the Boston Massacre. He was most certainly a member of the Long Room Club, although his delicate health kept him out of much of the action. Quincy did make a speech as described in Johnny Tremain on the night of the Boston Tea Party.

In 1775, Quincy made a trip to England to represent the interests of Massachusetts, and all the colonies, to British leaders. He was hoping to persuade the British government to change its course and thus make it possible for some kind of an agreement that would end the struggle. Josiah Quincy died at sea just off the coast of Cape Ann. He almost made it home. He was thirty-one years old when he died.

As Esther Forbes wrote of him in Paul Revere and the World He Lived In, "Young Josiah Quincy was going up like a rocket for his brief spurt of fame. He was there – with his beautiful voice and wall eye, his feverish demands for liberty and justice and the prophetic, fatal cough."¹

John Quincy, *Essays*, 1767. [excerpt]

The following are extracts from two essays which Quincy signed "Hyperion," and published in the Boston Gazette in September and October 1767.

When I reflect on the exalted character of the ancient Britons, on the fortitude of our illustrious predecessors, on the noble struggles of the late memorable period, and from these reflections, when, by a natural transition, I contemplate the gloomy aspect of the present day, my heart is alternately torn with doubt and hope, despondency and terror. Can the true, generous magnanimity of British heroes be entirely lost in their degenerate progeny? Is the genius of Liberty, which so late inflamed our bosoms, fled forever?

An attentive observer of the deportment of some particular persons in this metropolis, would be apt to imagine that the grand point was gained; that the spirit of the people was entirely broken to the yoke; that all America was subjugated to bondage. Already the minions of power, in fancy fatten, and grow wanton on the spoils of the land. They insolently toss the head, and put on the air of contemptuous disdain. In the imaginary possession of lordships and dominions, these potentates and powers dare tell us, that our only hope is to crouch, to cowl under, and to kiss the iron rod of oppression.

¹ Esther Forbes, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1942), 118-119.

Precious sample of the meek and lowly temper of those, who are destined to be our lords and masters!

Be not deceived, my countrymen. Believe not those venal hirelings when they would cajole you by their subtleties into submission, or frighten you by their vapourings into compliance. When they strive to flatter you by the terms ‘moderation and prudence,’ tell them, that calmness and deliberation are to guide the judgment; courage and intrepidity command the action. When they endeavour to make us ‘perceive our inability to oppose our mother country,’ let us boldly answer: In defence of our civil and religious rights, we dare oppose the world; with the God of armies on our side, even the God who fought our fathers’ battles, we fear not the hour of trial, though the hosts of our enemies should cover the field like locusts. If this be enthusiasm, we will live and die enthusiasts.

Blandishments will not fascinate us, nor will threats of a ‘halter’ intimidate. For under God, we are determined, that wheresoever, whensoever, or howsoever, we shall be called to make our exit, we will die freemen. Well do we know that all the regalia of this world cannot dignify the death of a villain, nor diminish the ignominy, with which a slave shall quit his existence. Neither can it taint the unblemished honour of a son of freedom, though he should make his departure on the already prepared gibbet, or be dragged to the newly erected scaffold for execution. With the plaudits of his conscience he will go off the stage. A crown of joy and immortality shall be his reward. The history of his life his children shall venerate. The virtues of their sire shall excite their emulation.

Josiah Quincy, “Hyperion Essays [excerpt],” Sept.-Oct. 1767, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971 c. 1825), 12-14.

Letter from Josiah Quincy to Rev. John Eagleson, 15 September 1768

Boston, Sept. 15, 1768

Respected Sir,

Your friendly letter came to hand a few days since, and a leisure moment now presenting, I with pleasure seize the opportunity of writing to you. The rights and liberties of Americans become every day more and more the serious object of attention. As political disputation increases, a settlement of the point in question removes farther and farther from the design of both parties. Private pique, envy, and personal resentment soon preclude a fair and candid discussion, and intemperate passions will forever prevent any equitable decision.

The present aspect of the day is gloomy indeed, yet we are far from despair. Though the clouds, full charged, rise thick and fast, the thunders roll, and lightnings play, nay, it is said, are just within striking distance, there are not wanting those among us, who believe that proper conductors will safely carry off all the political fluid, the clouds disperse, and the sky soon become calm and serene. Visionaries, you know, are credulous, enthusiasts are bold and enterprising; many such, Mr. Eagleson is sensible, inhabit these northern regions.

We Americans have a righteous cause. We know it. The power of Great Britain may oppress, nay, for a time apparently subdue us. But, before all the freeborn sons of the north will yield a general and united submission, to any tyrannic power on earth, fire and sword, famine and slaughter, desolation and ruin, will ravage the land. When thus I venture, without any pretence to the spirit of prophecy, at a hasty prediction, you will probably smile at my reverie. But you know, political dreamers are the most obstinate, and incorrigible, of all sinners. You will see, by our public prints, the late transactions of this town, and the situation that we are in at present. Daily in the expectation of troops: some say three regiments, and three ships of the line. Opinions differ respecting what ought, and what will be, the deportment of this people. On the one hand, a swarm of court dependants, and a standing army in the bowels of a state, have been in all ages, and nations, thought, and found to be, the bane of civil freedom. On the other, an open rupture with Great Britain (I had like to have said *mother* state), is a dreadful alternative.

But our all is at stake! The pulse of the people beats high, and it may well be imagined, that in our present state, all ranks among us are much agitated. This therefore may apologize for my not being in a facetious, and proper frame of mind, to answer some parts of your entertaining letter. To see the daily blunders which are committed, and the deep tragedy which is now acting, on the political theatre, and not to be moved, is to be an unfeeling wretch indeed. If the contempt and indignation of every sensible and humane man in Christendom, were sufficient to explode a political system, there would be some hopes of seeing ‘Venice Preserved and the Plot Discovered.’

Josiah Quincy to Rev. John Eagleson, 15 September 1768, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971, c.1825), 15-17.

Josiah Quincy, *Essay*, 3 October 1768

This essay was published in the Boston Gazette under the name “Hyperion.”

‘The aggregated judgment of the common people,’ says an eminent writer, ‘discerns most truly the errors of government, forasmuch as they are the first to be sure to smart under them. In this only they come to be shortsighted; that though they know the diseases, they understand not the remedies, and though good patients, they are ill physicians.’

What are the present sentiments of the inhabitants of North America? Discern they not most truly, and smart they not most severely under the errors of government? The disease is known and felt; but where is the remedy,— where is the physician? For the people to ask counsel is deemed treasonable; to assemble themselves to consult, is denominated rebellion. Thus would some potentates terrify mankind with a few sounding, technical expressions. It has been found in all ages difficult to persuade men, by the most refined court-chicane, out of their reason; and tyrants have ever found it impossible to argue, sooth, or frighten the common people out of their feelings. It is truly strange to hear the arguments, and see the parade of some at this day. One would from their conduct be induced to imagine, they thought it the most likely way of dispiriting the people, to render their case irremediable. Certainly such politicians have little studied the

volume of nature. A nation, not as yet entirely enervated by luxury, not wholly depressed by slavery, when reduced to despair, are invincible to a proverb.

After what has been said and wrote on both sides of the Atlantic, upon colony-affairs; after the most perspicuous demonstration of the illegality and ill-policy of the measures pursued against this continent; it would be an affront to the understanding to attempt setting the matter in a clearer point of view. The meanest capacity must perceive, the remotest peasant in the wilds of America must feel, the consequences.

British taxations, suspensions of legislatures, and standing armies, are but some of the clouds, which overshadow the northern world. Heaven grant that a grand constellation of virtues may shine forth with redoubled lustre, and enlighten this gloomy hemisphere!

If ever there was a time, this is the hour, for Americans to rouse themselves, and exert every ability. Their all is at a hazard, and the die of fate spins doubtful! In vain do we talk of magnanimity and heroism, in vain do we trace a descent from the worthies of the earth, if we inherit not the spirit of our ancestors. Who is he, who boasteth of his patriotism? Has he vanquished luxury, and subdued the worldly pride of his heart? Is he not yet drinking the poisonous draught, and rolling the sweet morsel under his tongue? He, who cannot conquer the little vanity of his heart, and deny the delicacy of a debauched palate, let him lay his hand upon his mouth, and his mouth in the dust.

Now is the time for this people to summon every aid, human and divine; to exhibit every moral virtue, and call forth every christian grace. The wisdom of the serpent, the innocence of the dove, and the intrepidity of the lion, with the blessing God, will yet save us from the jaws of destruction.

Where is the boasted liberty of Englishmen, if property may be disposed of, charters suspended, assemblies dissolved, and every valued right annihilated, at the uncontrollable will of an external power? Does not every man, who feels one ethereal spark yet glowing in his bosom, find his indignation kindle, at the bare imagination of such wrongs? What would be our sentiments, were this imagination realized?

Did the blood of the ancient Britons swell our veins, did the spirit of our forefathers inhabit our breasts, should we hesitate a moment in preferring death, to a miserable existence in bondage? Did we reflect on their toils, their dangers, their fiery trials, the thought would inspire unconquerable courage.

Who has the front to ask, Wherefore do you complain? Who dares assert, every thing worth living for is not lost, when a nation is enslaved? Are not pensioners, stipendiaries, and salary men, (unknown before,) hourly multiplying on us, to riot in the spoils of miserable America? Does not every eastern gale waft us some new insect, even of that devouring kind, which eat up every green thing. Is not the bread taken out of the children's mouths and given unto the dogs? Are not our estates given to corrupt sycophants, without a design, or even a pretence of soliciting our assent, and our lives put into the hands of those whose tender mercies are cruelties? Has not an authority in a distant land, in the most public manner, proclaimed a right of disposing of *the all* of Americans? In short, what have we to lose—what have we to fear? Are not our distresses more than we can bear; and to finish all, are not our cities, in a time of profound peace, filled with standing armies, to preclude us from that last solace of the wretched—to open their mouths in complaint, and send forth their cries in bitterness of heart?

But is there no ray of hope? Is not Great Britain inhabited by the children of those renowned barons, who waded through seas of crimson gore to establish their liberty; and will they not allow us, their fellow men, to enjoy that freedom, which we claim from nature, which is confirmed by our constitution, and which they pretend so highly to value? Were a tyrant to conquer us, the chains of slavery, when opposition should become useless, might be supportable; but to be shackled by Englishmen,—by our equals,—is not to be borne!

By the sweat of our brow, we earn the little we possess; from nature we derive the common rights of man;—and by charter we claim the liberties of Britons! Shall we,—dare we,—pusillanimously surrender our birthright? Is the obligation to our fathers discharged, is the debt we owe posterity paid? Answer me, thou coward! who hidest thyself in the hour of trial! If there is no reward in this life, no prize of glory in the next, capable of animating thy dastard soul; think and tremble, thou miscreant! at the whips and stripes thy master shall lash thee with on earth,—and the flames, and scorpions, thy second master shall torment thee with hereafter!

Oh, my countrymen! what will our children say, when they read the history of these times, should they find we tamely gave away, without one noble struggle, the most invaluable of earthly blessings? As they drag the galling chain, will they not execrate us? If we have any respect for things sacred; any regard to the dearest treasure on earth;—if we have one tender sentiment for posterity; if we would not be despised by the whole world;—let us, in the most open, solemn manner, and with determined fortitude, swear,—we will die,—if we cannot live freemen!

Be not lulled, my countrymen, with vain imaginations, or idle fancies. To hope for the protection of Heaven, without doing our duty, and exerting ourselves as becomes men, is to mock the Deity. Wherefore had man his reason, if it were not to direct him? Wherefore his strength, if it be not his protection? To banish folly and luxury, correct vice and immorality, and stand immoveable in the freedom, in which we are free indeed, is eminently the duty of each individual, at this day. When this is done, we may rationally hope for an answer to our prayers; for the whole counsel of God, and the invincible armour of the Almighty.

However righteous our cause, we cannot, in this period of the world, expect a miraculous salvation. Heaven will undoubtedly assist us, if we act like men; but to expect protection from above, while we are enervated by luxury, and slothful in the exertion of those abilities with which we are endued, is an expectation vain and foolish. With the smiles of Heaven, virtue, unanimity, and firmness will insure success. While we have equity, justice, and God, on our side, Tyranny, spiritual or temporal, shall never ride triumphant in a land inhabited by Englishmen.

**Letter from Josiah Quincy to his father (Josiah Quincy, Sr.), December 1768
(excerpt)**

An independency, in the strict sense of the word, I know is not the lot of man; but to restrain, to a certain degree, the instability of fortune, is much in our power. So far then, an independence is attainable. Let those, who will, laugh at the paltry certainty which is to be gained. Surely, it would be some alleviation under the pressure of misfortune, to think, that our own folly and rashness contributed in no part to the heavy burden. Alas! how few of the sons of men have this happy consolation. Hence, most of those idle and vague declamations, which we so often hear, upon the fickleness and inconstancy of fortune. When thoroughly examined, the grand source is found in the hasty presumption of a foolish vanity, or the weak irresolution of a vicious heart. To apply for assistance, where my own foresight might have prevented the necessity, would be to me worse than death. Early in life, I was fixed; experience has confirmed me, to suffer every stroke of adversity, let it be as severe as even imagination can paint, ere I would implore any earthly relief from distress, against which my own prudence might have armed me. To ask assistance, where, if it were declined, your redoubled efforts would supply your exigence, is the daily course of human affairs; but to seek relief, where a denial reduces you to despair, would be torment beyond expression.

Through your watchful care of my education and your kind munificence, I am out of a temptation to the meaner vices, and in that state, which to one of my temper, is the happiest human nature can boast, an independency, save on God and myself, for a decent support through life, and the hope of quitting the stage with that best human standard of true worth, the general approbation of my countrymen. How deeply my heart is affected, by those invaluable favours, is not for profession to convince you, but will be, I trust, best manifested by the uniform tenor of my life.”

Josiah Quincy to Josiah Quincy, Sr., December 1768, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971, c. 1825), 25-27.

Anonymous Letter of Warning to Josiah Quincy, May 1774

Sir,

I am compelled by the common principles of humanity to warn you of the imminent hazard which I consider you to be in, of the loss of life, and confiscation of your estate. It is now become very apparent that the supreme power of Great Britain, viz. King, Lords, and Commons, which you some time since, as I am informed, were pleased to term ‘*a transmarine power, to which we were not amenable,*’ hath taken a resolution to assert its sovereignty over this his Majesty’s colony of Massachusetts Bay, a sovereignty, which has never been disputed by any of the other colonies, except in the article of taxation, and not by this but a very short time since. Every measure necessary to carry this resolution into execution, hath been taken. A force is employed for this purpose, to oppose which in our weak, forlorn condition, it would be madness to attempt. This being the case, it cannot be supposed, that if there should be a continuance of these insults and

indignities, which for some years past have been put upon the government, and the servants of it, that the leading promoters of such insults and indignities will escape with impunity. Those actions and words, which by the laws of Great Britain are there determined to be treasonable and rebellious, will be considered as such here; and the authors of them suffer the pains and penalties, which are inflicted on traitors and rebels in Great Britain or any other part of the realm. Of all this you seem to me to be altogether insensible, at which I cannot but express the greatest surprise, as I consider you to be a person of quick discernment, to be well versed in the knowledge of government, law in general, and more particularly of the laws and constitution of the parent state. Your political enthusiasm and popular attachment must certainly have totally blinded the eyes of your understanding; otherwise, I cannot conceive it to be possible that a man of your good sense, instead of promoting such measures at our late town meeting, which in our most calamitous condition might have a tendency to soften the resentment of government, and to induce his Majesty and his privy council to remove those evils, which are justly brought upon us for our past crimes, should endeavour by inflammatory harangues to keep up the phrenzy of the poor, deluded people of this town; to persuade them, that they have resources sufficient within themselves, if they were united and firm, to extricate themselves out of these difficulties, and to obtain a complete conquest over Great Britain, even without the assistance of the neighbouring towns of this province, and of the sister colonies; but if they should join us, that our victory would be beyond a doubt; that some Cromwell would soon rise, and trample under his feet our enemies, viz. King, Lords, and Commons of Great Britain, for you could mean no other, they being the only enemies you were speaking of. You did indeed, in express terms, charge them with ignorance and effrontery (in another word, with impudence), for passing the late act, which will shut up our port. Not content with these bold speeches, you were the principal mover of sundry votes, passed at this meeting, which can be considered in no other light by Great Britain, than as an hostile attack upon her; as by those votes, the neighbouring towns of this province, and all the colonies from the Floridas to Newfoundland, are to be stimulated by committees of correspondence to put a force upon her trade.

Reflect a moment upon this conduct; consider the present strength of administration, who have carried their measures against you without the least opposition; consider the power they have at present in their hands (however weak they may be, when your formidable Cromwell steps forth,) to bring to condign punishment all offenders against the state; and I am sure you will think with me, that your situation is truly alarming. You will very probably get into the hands of a power, from which no power you can look to will be able to deliver you. You have gone such lengths that I am fearful nothing can save you. I know but of one expedient left you, which is that of acknowledging on Wednesday next to this distressed people, that you have been in an error,—that you have deceived yourself,—that you have deceived them. Employ, for God's sake, those rare talents with which he has blessed you, in convincing them that they have nothing to do, but to submit, and make their peace with that government, which they have, under the influence of you and other factious demagogues, so long offended. You may by these means probably make your own peace, and ward off the punishment that hangs over your head.

It is barely possible that government may still continue its great lenity, and overlook your offences. If this should be the case, permit me to observe, there is another danger to which you are exposed.

The inhabitants of this wretched town would, if proper measures were taken, be saved from total destruction; but if, by the mad pursuits of you and others, their ruin should be completed, if thousands of the poor, who depend upon their daily labour for their daily bread, should be in a starving condition,—if those who can now calculate upon such incomes from their real estates, as to be able to live in affluence, should find their estates to yield them not sufficient to subsist them, they will begin to look round for the real authors of their ruin, and wreak their vengeance upon them. They will no longer consider Bernard, Hutchinson, Oliver, commissioners of the customs, &c. &c. as their enemies; they will put the saddle on the right horse. We shall see an Adams, a Young, a Cooper, a Warren, a Quincy, with certain learned doctors of divinity, either destroyed by, or fleeing in their turn from their rage, and applying to that power, which they have so long insulted, for protection.

I have conversed with many of the thinking part of this community, and find very few who do not condemn your proceedings. Nothing has prevented a public protest appearing against you, but the fear of that most formidable tyranny which the ruling part of this town have so long, by having the command of an heated populace, exercised over it. Upon the appearance of any power that will be sufficient to emancipate them from this terrible hydra, you will find that spirit which now vents itself in secret curses, break out into open violence. I can hear you in almost all company I go into, styled villains, scoundrels, rascals; and many wish that the vengeance of government had been pointed at the authors of all our misery,—meaning your particular junto, where, it is said, it ought to have fallen,—and not upon the whole community, a large portion of whom are innocent.

Let me conjure you to weigh well what I have offered to your consideration, and believe me to be

Your Wellwisher.

Anonymous "Wellwisher" to Josiah Quincy, May 1774, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971, c. 1825), 150-156.

Letter from Josiah Quincy in Response to Anonymous Letter, May 1774

Boston, May, 1774.

Mr. Draper,

Having this day received from the British coffee-house an anonymous letter, in which the author "warns me of the imminent hazard which he considers me to be in, of the loss of life, and confiscation of my estate," I desire, through the medium of your paper, to acknowledge the receipt of it, and, in turn, communicate my own sentiments to the author.

The good or ill design of the writer being problematical, I suspend my censure, and he surely will not expect my thanks. Had he, instead of concealing himself beyond the power of discovery, desired a conversation with me in person, his frankness would

have been an evidence of his sincerity, and my cordiality on the occasion should have testified my gratitude.

The danger and the wrongs of my country are to me equally apparent. In all my public exertions, I feel a sense of right and duty, that not only satisfies my conscience, but inspires my zeal. While I have this sentiment, I shall persevere, till my understanding is convinced of its error; a conviction that will not be wrought by the arm of power, or the hand of an assassin.

Threats of impending danger, communicated by persons who conceal their name and character, ought never to deter from the path of duty; but exciting contempt rather than fear, they will determine a man of spirit to proceed with new vigour and energy, in his public conduct.

My place of abode is well known, and I am easily found. The author of the letter referred to, if he will favour me with a visit, shall receive the best civilities of my house; and if he will appoint a meeting, I will give him my presence, either alone, or in company; till which time he surely will not expect that I shall endeavor to point out his mistakes, or flatter himself that anonymous papers will answer the end he professes to have in view.

Josiah Quincy Jun.

Josiah Quincy to anonymous "Wellwisher," May 1774, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971, c. 1825), 156-159.