

Autobiographical Sketch,  
January 14, 1779  
To Hon. Henry Laurens

SIR: My anxiety for your personal safety has not only fixed a profound silence upon me, but prevents my asking you a great many questions, lest I should be the unwilling, unfortunate cause of new difficulties or fatal consequences to you, and in such a case I might indeed say, “‘T is the survivor dies,”

I omitted sending the inclosed in the morning as I intended. It will serve you to parry ill nature and ingratitude with, when undeserved reflections are cast upon me.

I certainly have some awkward natural feeling, which I never shall get rid of. I was sensible of a kind of shame at the Minister's door today, lest anyone should think I was going to solicit a pardon or a pension. When I come to you I feel only an *unwillingness* to be seen, on your account. I shall never make a courtier, I see that.

I am your obedient humble servant,  
THOMAS PAINE. January 14, 1779

SIR: - For your amusement I give you a short history of my conduct since I have been in America.

I brought with me letters of introduction from Dr. Franklin. These letters were with a flying seal, that I might, if I thought proper, close them with a wafer. One was to Mr. Bathe of this city. The terms of Dr. Franklin's recommendation were “a worthy, ingenious, etc.” My particular design was to establish an academy on the plan they are conducted in and about London, which I was well acquainted with. I came some months before Dr. Franklin, and waited here for his arrival. In the meantime a person of this city desired me to give him some assistance in conducting a magazine, which I did without making any bargain. The work turned out very profitable. Dr. Witherpoon had likewise a concern [in] it. At the end of six months I thought it necessary to come to some contract. I agreed to leave the matters to arbitration. The bookseller mentioned two on his own part—Mr. Duche, your late chaplain, and Mr. Hopkinson. I agreed to them and declined mentioning any on my part. But the bookseller getting information of what Mr. Duchh's private opinion was, withdrew from the arbitration, or rather refused to go into it, as our

agreement to abide by it was only verbal. I was requested by several literary gentlemen in this city to undertake such a work on my own account, and I could have rendered it very profitable.

As I always had a taste to science, I naturally had friends of that cast in England; and among the rest George Lewis Scott, Esq., through whose formal introduction my first acquaintance with Dr. Franklin commenced. I esteem Mr. Scott as one of the most amiable characters I know of, but his particular situation had been, that in the minority of the present King he was his sub-preceptor, and from the occasional traditional accounts yet remaining in the family of Mr. Scott, I obtained the true character of the present King from his childhood upward, and, you may naturally suppose, of the present Ministry. I saw the people of this country were all wrong, by an ill-placed confidence.

After the breaking out of hostilities I was confident their design was a total conquest. I wrote to Mr. Scott in May, 1775, by Captain James Josiah, now in this city. I read the letter to him before I closed it. I used in it this free expression: "Surely the Ministry are all mad; they never will be able to conquer America." The reception which the last petition of Congress met with put it past a doubt that such was their design, on which I determined with myself to write the pamphlet [*Common*] *Sense*." As I knew the time of the Parliament meeting, and had no doubt what sort of King's speech it would produce, my contrivance was to have the pamphlet come out just at the time the speech might arrive in America, and so fortunate was I in this cast of policy that both of them made their appearance in this city on the same day. The first edition was printed by Bell on the recommendation of Dr. Rush. I gave him the pamphlet on the following conditions: That if any loss should arise I would pay it—and in order to make him industrious in circulating it, I gave him one-half the profits, if it should produce any. I gave a written order to Colonel Joseph Dean and Captain Thomas Prior, both of this city, to receive the other half, and lay it out for mittens for the troops that were going to Quebec. I did this to do honor to the cause. Bell kept the whole, and abused me into the bargain. The price he set upon them was two shillings.

I then enlarged the pamphlet with an appendix and an address to the Quakers, which made it one-third bigger than before, printed

6,000 at my own expense, 3,000 by B. Towne, 3,000 by Cist & Steyner, and delivered them ready stitched and fit for sale to Mr. Bradford at the Coffeehouse; and though the work was thus increased, and consequently should have borne a higher price, yet, in order that it might produce the general service I wished, I confined Mr. Bradford to sell them at only one shilling each, or ten-pence by the dozen, and to enable him to do this, with sufficient advantage to himself, I let him have the pamphlets at 8½ d. Pennsylvania currency each.

The sum of 8½d. each was reserved to defray the expense of printing, paper, advertising, etc., and such as might be given away. The state of the account at present is that I am £39 11s out of pocket, being the difference between what I have paid for printing, etc., and what I have received from Bradford. He has a sufficiency in his hands to balance with and clear me, which is all I aimed at, but by his unaccountable dilatoriness and unwillingness to settle accounts, I fear I shall be obliged to sustain a real loss exclusive of my trouble.

I think the importance of that pamphlet was such that if it had not appeared, and that at the exact time it did, the Congress would not now have been sitting where they are. The light which that performance threw upon the subject gave a turn to the politics of America which enabled her to stand her ground. Independence followed in six months after it, although before it was published it was a dangerous doctrine to speak of, and that because it was not understood.

In order to accommodate that pamphlet to every man's purchase and to do honor to the cause, I gave up the profits I was justly entitled to, which in this city only would at the usual price of books [have] produced me £1,000 at that time a day, besides what I might have made by extending it to other states. I gave permission to the printers in other parts of this State [Pennsylvania] to print it on their own account. I believe the number of copies printed and sold in America was not short of 150,000—and is the greatest sale that any performance ever had since the use of letters,—exclusive of the great run it had in England and Ireland.

The doctrine of that book was opposed in the public newspapers under the signature of CATO, who, I believe, was Dr. Smith, and I was sent for from New York to reply to him, which I did, and happily with success. My letters are under the signature of THE FOR-

ESTER. It was likewise opposed in a pamphlet signed PLAIN TRUTH, but the performance was too weak to do any hurt or deserve any answer. In July following the publication of *Common Sense* the Associators of this State marched to Amboy under the command of General Roberdeau. The command was large, yet there was no allowance for a secretary. I offered my service voluntarily, only that my expenses should be paid, all the charges I put General Roberdeau to was \$48; although he frequently pressed me to make free with his private assistance. After the Associators returned I went to Fort Lee, and continued with General [Nathanael] Greene till the evacuation.

A few days after our army had crossed the Delaware on the eighth of December, 1776, I came to Philadelphia on public service, and, seeing the deplorable and melancholy condition the people were in, afraid to speak and almost to think, the public presses stopped, and nothing in circulation but fears and falsehoods, I sat down, and in what I may call a passion of patriotism, wrote the first number of the *Crisis*. It was published on the nineteenth of December, which was the very blackest of times, being before the taking of the Hessians at Trenton. I gave that piece to the printer gratis, and confirmed him to the price of two coppers, which was sufficient to defray his charge.

I then published the second number, which being as large again as the first number, I gave it to him on the condition of his taking only four coppers each. It contained sixteen pages.

I then published the third number, containing thirty-two pages, and gave it to the printer, confining him to nine-pence.

When the account of the battle of Brandywine got to this city, the people were again in a state of fear and dread. I immediately wrote the fourth number [of the *Crisis*]. It contained only four pages, and as there was no less money than the sixth of dollars in general circulation, which would have been too great a price, I ordered 4,000 to be printed at my own private charge and given away.

The fifth number I gave Mr. Dunlap at Lancaster. He, very much against my consent, set half a crown upon it; he might have done it for a great deal less. The sixth and seventh numbers I gave in the papers. The seventh number would have made a pamphlet of twenty-four pages, and brought me in \$3,000 or \$4,000 in a very few days, at the price which it ought to have borne.

Moneys received since I have been in America:

Salary for 17 months at 70 dollars per month.	1,110	dollars
For rations and occasional assistance at Fort Lee.	141	ditto
For defraying the expense of a journey from East Town round by Morris when secretary to the Indian Commission, and some other matters, about 140 or 145 dollars	145	ditto
Total of public money	<u>1,476</u>	

In the spring, 1776, some private gentleman, thinking that it was too hard that I should, after giving away my profits for a public good, be money out of pocket on account of some expense I was put to—sent me by the hands of Mr. Christopher Marshall 108 dollars.

You have here, Sir, a faithful history of my services and my rewards.