

## VI EMPIRE OR INDEPENDENCE

and unconstitutional infringement of our rights and privileges as we are to observe and obey those laws and regula[tions] which art just and constitutional.

These are the principles upon which the nobles of England declared war against the unfortunate King John till they pressed him sword in hand to grant them that famous Charter of Priviledges commonly called by way of eminence *Magna Charta*.<sup>2</sup>

These are the principles by which the people of England boldly opposed the arbitrary measures of Charles the first.<sup>3</sup> These are the principles by which our venerable forefathers happily brought about the glorious revolution under King William the third, and by which the present royal family, the Hanoverian branch of the house of Brunswick, were placed on the Throne of Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> These, in Short, are the principles of every person in the world who rightly understands the genuine principles of Civil liberty and the rights of human nature, who are therefore justly entitled to the honourable appel[lation] of being stiled True Whigs.

Under the third Class may be ranked great numbers of ignorant thoughtless beings who are one day Tories, and the next day Whigs; and the third day nothing at all; who like the pendulum of a clock are perpetually changing sides and strictly speaking [are] as unsteady as the wind. Having no fixed principles at all, and being wholly unacquainted with the nature of Government, the principles of the English constitution, and the rights of Americans, they are easily influenced any way, and therefore, either change their sentiments daily without being able to assign any just reason for so doing, or else hastily espouse the one side or the other, merely out of humour or party spite. These I shall beg leave to distinguish by the significant name of Turn-Coats. I shall make it my business in some future paper to consider [each of] these classes of people seperately.<sup>5</sup>

1. Jacobite: supporter of the Stuart claim to the British throne which began with the reign of James I in 1603. Specifically, the term refers to the adherents of James II, who abdicated under duress in 1688-1689, or his descendants.

2. See Sec. V, Doc. 2, headnote.

3. The reference is to the English Civil War.

4. The Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689 established a Protestant succession to the throne through William and Mary. When Queen Anne died in 1714 without surviving children, the crown passed to George Augustus, the Elector of Hanover (Brunswick).

5. If the author, unknown, produced such a paper it has been lost.

## 2 The Political Creed of "Shary O'Brion"

[“Plain Dealer,” No. 5, Alexander Library, Rutgers University.]

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

In contrast to the urbane, sophisticated style that marked the other political essays in the "Plain Dealer" (and most colonial public writing for that matter), the fifth installment appears to be the work of an ordinary yeoman farmer. If the essay is not a poor attempt to satirize rustic reasoning and rhetoric — and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity — it reveals a remarkably knowledgeable Jersey citizenry. At a time when educational opportunities were few, communications media primitive, and life overwhelmingly parochial, "Shary O'Brion" possessed keen insight into and information about the political realities of the day. His "Creed" is probably representative of that held by the many Jerseymen who were more concerned with pragmatic than abstract political considerations.

January 22nd 1776

I shall entertain my readers this week by presenting them with the following Political Creed which was sent me a few days ago—

Mr Plain Dealer.

"For modes of faith, let graceless Zealots fight  
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

Pope

I am a poor ploughman, without Learning & live in a bye corner of the County. Having no opportunity of talking with knowing folks, I am entirely ignorant of what people call politics and therefore seldom go to any of our public meetings. For this reason, & because I never attempt to talk (as many people do) about that I dont understand some of your high-flying patriots or parrots I dont know which (nor is it any matter which, for as both words sound nearly alike I suppose they mean the same thing) threaten to knock me in [the] head for a Tory. Though I understand not the meaning of that new fangled nick-name, yet by the sour faces those good folks make when they pronounce the word Tory, I suppose it means a political heretic or something very bad. I therefore send you my political Creed, & desire you would publish it as soon as possible to the world in order that I may save my noggin, clear up my Character, and prove myself a true Son of Liberty.

1st I believe that many people who Bellow very loud about Liberty neither know, nor care anything about it, farther than it serves their own private interest or humour.

2d I believe many who make a great spunk about patriotism dont know the meaning of the word.

3d I believe many people who talk a great deal about politics know about as much of the matter as a hog does of Lattin, or a Horse of Divinity.

4th I believe the surest way in the world to render a man contemptable is to put him in a station that is above his abilities, or that he is incapable of Supporting, for like a monkey climbing a maypole the higher an ignorant man gets the more he will show his A—

5th I believe the quickest way to kill a man is to cut his head off.

6th I believe many who now appear foremost in Supporting the cause of their Country, would Immediately change Sides if a good opportunity offer'd & it would serve<sup>r</sup> their interest so to do.

7th I b[e]lieve the surest way to become popular now a days is to behave as bad as we can.

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8th I believe the best method of qui[e]ting the Tories is to stretch their Necks well.

9th I believe that Lord North,<sup>2</sup> Lord Bute,<sup>3</sup> Lord Mansfield,<sup>4</sup> & Lord Sandwich,<sup>5</sup> are a pack of raskels, & deserve to have their brains beat out.

10th I believe if some of our great men were weighed in a Balance they would be found greatly wanting.

11th I believe there is not one man in our County a *Tory* from principle but that all who pretend to be *Tories* are so partly out of ill nature & a spirt of opposition & one reason among many others I could mention, for my belief is because the greatest sticklar now for the King & his Laws as they call them, were before the commencement of the present dispute, the most opposed to those Laws & the civill Authority in general.

12th I believe I am as good a whig as any man in the County notwithstanding I wear my own hair.

13th I believe our Liberty Hall Gentlemen<sup>6</sup> are like piss pots & Close-stools the more they are handled the worse they Stink.

14th I believe a late blustering recanter to be a white:livered gray:eyed cabbage:brain'd poltroon,<sup>7</sup> that like Balaams ass may be frightened with a mere shadow.<sup>8</sup>

15th I believe some people will dislike my Creed because they dont understand it, and others because they understand it too well.

16th I believe the best method to frighten hogs out of mischief, is to Lug them well by the Ears.

SHARY O'BRION<sup>9</sup>

1. Appears "save" in the manuscript; probably the copyist's error.

2. Current chief minister of the British government.

3. Former chief minister and adviser to George III.

4. William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, lord chief justice of Great Britain.

5. John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich, first lord of the admiralty.

6. Reference to William Livingston and his political associates; Livingston resided on an estate named "Liberty Hall" near Elizabethtown.

7. Appears "pastroon" in the manuscript; probably the copyist's error.

8. Balaam: diviner sent by King Balak of Moab to curse Israel, but who instead blessed the Israelites at God's command. En route to perform his mission for King Balak, Balaam smote his ass three times for skittishness; actually, as Balaam later learned, the ass had taken fright at the appearance of the angel of Jehovah (Num. 22-24). Later Balaam tried to turn the Israelites from Jehovah and was killed (Num. 31). Balaam is held up several times in the New Testament as an example of hypocritical teachers who strive to lead God's people astray.

9. I have found no information about a person with this name; it is probably fictitious, since the other installments of the production were either unsigned or carried pseudonyms.