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After his most recent failure of employment, Paine was contemplating forming a "Salt-Peter Association" to produce homemade gunpowder; instead, Dr. Benjamin Rush walked into his life. Rush had dropped by Aitken's one day to chat with Paine who had similar views to his regarding slavery. Rush and Paine were both social mavericks, friends of Franklin and of independence. They somehow had a meeting of minds even though Rush was an early-rising teetotaler and Paine drank at all hours and slept late. Rush told Paine he had written down some of his thoughts "and was preparing an address to the inhabitants of the Colonies about it. But I ... shuddered at the prospect ... of its not being well received."

Furthermore, Rush, while a radical, was well connected in Philadelphia, whereas Paine, a newbie, was not. "I suggested to him [Paine] that he had nothing to fear from the popular

odium to which such a publication might expose him, for he could live anywhere, but that my profession and connections, where a great majority of the citizens and some of my friends were hostile to a separation of our country from Great Britain, forbade me to come forward as a pioneer in that important controversy.”

So, with Rush hiding behind Paine and Paine hiding behind a nom de plume, the pen that became mightier than a sword began to write. “O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth!” cried the anonymous pamphleteer. Paine referred to the Bible, with its book of Kings I and II, to claim that monarchy was an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Nature abhorred kings, he wrote, “otherwise she would not so frequently turn [monarchy] into ridicule by giving mankind an ass for a lion.”

“I have heard it asserted by some, that as America has flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness ... Nothing can be more fallacious...You may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat.” Or, said the ex-corset-maker who could write from experience, “that the first 20 years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next 20...”

“The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, ‘TIS TIME To PART ... nothing can settle our affairs so expeditiously as an open and determined DECLARATION FOR INDEPENDENCE...”

There it was, finally, in black and white. Paine wanted to call the pamphlet *Plain Truth*. Rush opted for *Common Sense*. Rush won. Robert Bell, a printer “whose religion was at least doubtful” but of liberal views and actions was given the job of setting it in type. Why not? His was the only name to appear. The pamphlet came out on the same day that the King’s declaration to quash the rebellion was published in Philadelphia. *Common Sense* went for two shillings a copy, and returned £50 in the first week. Paine, being Paine, or rum being

rum, wanted to rewrite parts of the second edition. Bell refused, presumably wanting to make hay while the sun shines. So, Paine went to another printer and had 3,000 copies run off at his own expense. Thus did *Common Sense* have two printers and no known author. “I believe the number of copies printed and sold in America was not short of 150,000,” Paine the ever confident said later, “[which] is the greatest sale that any performance ever had since the use of letters.” Despite his self-aggrandizing bluster, Paine gave his half-share of the first edition to buy mittens for the freezing troops of Benedict Arnold in Canada.

And what did the critics say?

Sam Adams, who knew something about making a fuss, said in Philadelphia that *Common Sense* had “fretted some folks here more than a little.” Edmund Randolph of Virginia said, “the public sentiment which a few weeks before had shuddered at the tremendous obstacles with which independence was environed overleaped every barrier ... [*Common Sense*] put the torch to combustibles which had been deposited by the different gusts of fury ... ”

Ambrose Serle, secretary to Lord Richard Howe, the Admiral of the British fleet in America, believed John Adams had written it and called it: “A most flagitious Performance replete with Sophistry, Impudence & Falshood; but unhappily calculated to work upon the Fury of the Times ... His Attempt to justify Rebellion by the Bible is infamous beyond Expression.”

Paine’s inspiration was colored by his own animus to the King. And while he had not read John Locke, he could not have been unfamiliar with the English philosopher’s dismissal of the Divine Right of monarchs to rule, and his argument that humans were born with certain “self-evident” natural rights, including those to life, liberty and property. Men had joined voluntarily in a compact choosing one to rule over them, but Locke held this authority was only to protect those rights, and once the original compact was broken, men had the right to rebel against the monarch for they, not God, had chosen him.

What part played the demon rum? Aitken had said Paine “would never write without that.

The first glass put him in a train of thinking,” the next “illuminated his intellectual system,” the third loosened his ideas so that they “appeared to flow without any alteration or correction.” Whatever the stimulus, it was Tom Paine whose pamphlet was copied by printers all over the colonies. He threw down the idea of independence, which took root in every crossroads pub, village, farm, and the Royal Palace.

After publication, a London newspaper reported: “ ... The Prince of Wales has been discovered by the Queen Mother, reading a copy of Dr. Franklin’s dreadful pamphlet, *Common Sense* and in response to the Queen’s searching questions, refused to confess how he got the copy.” But the Prince’s father got the message.

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