

On Bacon's Rebellion

Governor William Berkeley, 19 May 1676

The declaration and Remonstrance of Sir William Berkeley his most sacred Majesty's Governor and Captain General of Virginia

Showeth That about the year 1660 Col. Mathews the then Governor dyed and then in consideration of the service I had done the Country, in defending them from, and destroying great numbers of the Indians, without the loss of three men, in all the time that war lasted, and in contemplation of the equal and uncorrupt Justice I had distributed to all men, Not only the Assembly but the unanimous votes of all the Country, concurred to make me Governor in a time, when if the Rebels in England had prevailed, I had certainly dyed for accepting it, 'twas Gentlemen an unfortunate Love, showed to me, for to show myself grateful for this, I was willing to accept of this Government again, when by my gracious Kings favor I might have had other places much more profitable, and less toilsome then this hath been. Since that time that I returned into the Country, I call the great God Judge of all things in heaven and earth to witness, that I do not know of any thing relative to this Country wherein I have acted unjustly, corruptly, or negligently in distributing equal Justice to all men, and taking all possible care to preserve their proprieties, and defend the from their barbarous enemies.

But for all this, perhaps I have erred in things I know not of, if I have I am so conscious of human frailty, and my own defects, that I will not only acknowledge them, but repent of, and amend them, and not like the Rebel Bacon persist in an error, only because I have committed it, and tells me in diverse of his Letters that it is not for his honor to confess a fault, but I am of opinion that it is only for devils to be incorrigible, and men of principles like the worst of devils, and these he hath, if truth be reported to me, of diverse of his expressions of Atheism, tending to take away all Religion and Laws.

And now I will state the Question betwixt me as a Governor and Mr. Bacon, and say that if any enemies should invade England, any Counselor, Justice of peace or other inferior officer, might raise what forces they could to protect his Majesty's subjects, But I say again, if after the King's knowledge of this invasion, any the greatest peer of England, should raise forces against the king's prohibition this would be now, and ever was in all ages and Nations [facing] treason. Nay I will go further, that though this peer was truly zealous for the preservation of his King, and subjects, and had better and greater abilities then all the rest of his fellow subjects, do his King and Country service, yet if the King (though by false information) should suspect the contrary, it were treason in this Noble peer to proceed after the King's prohibition, and for the truth of this I appeal to all the laws of England, and the Laws and constitutions of all other Nations in the world, And yet further it is declared by this Parliament that the taking up Arms for the King and Parliament is treason, for the event showed that what ever the pretence was to seduce ignorant and well affected people, yet the end was ruinous both to King and people, as this will be if not prevented, I do therefore again declare that Bacon proceeding against all Laws of all Nations modern and ancient, is Rebel to his sacred Majesty and this Country, nor will I insist upon the swearing of men to live and dye together, which is treason by the very words of the Law.

Now my friends I have lived 34 years amongst you, as uncorrupt and diligent as ever Governor was, Bacon is a man of two years amongst you, his person and qualities unknown to most of you, and to all men else, by any virtuous action that ever I heard of, And that very action which he boasts of, was sickly and foolishly, and as I am informed treacherously carried to the dishonor of the English Nation, yet in it, he lost more men then I did in three years War, and by the grace of God will putt myself to the same dangers and troubles again when I have brought Bacon to acknowledge the Laws are above him, and I doubt not but by God's assistance to have better success then Bacon hath had, the reason of my hopes are, that I will take Council of wiser men then my self, but Mr. Bacon hath none about him, but the lowest of the people.

Yet I must further enlarge, that I cannot without your help, do any thing in this but dye in defense of my King, his laws, and subjects, which I will cheerfully do, though alone I do it, and considering my poor fortunes, I can not leave my poor Wife and friends a better legacy then by dyeing for my King and you: for his sacred Majesty will easily distinguish between Mr. Bacons actions and mine, and Kings have long Arms, either to reward or punish.

Now after all this, if Mr. Bacon can show one precedent or example where such actions in any Nation what ever, was approved of, I will mediate with the King and you for a pardon, and excuse for him, but I can show him an hundred examples where brave and great men have been putt to death for gaining Victories against the Command of their Superiors.

Lastly my most assured friends I would have preserved those Indians that I knew were [utterly] at our mercy, to have been our spies and intelligence, to find out our bloody enemies, but as soon as I had the least intelligence that they also were treacherous enemies, I gave out Commissions to destroy them all as the Commissions themselves will speak it.

To conclude, I have don what was possible both to friend and enemy, have granted Mr. Bacon three pardons, which he hath scornfully rejected, supposing himself stronger to subvert then I and you to maintain the Laws, by which only and God's assisting grace and mercy, all men might hope for peace and safety. I will add no more though much more is still remaining to Justify me and condemn Mr. Bacon, but to desire that this declaration may be read in every County Court in the Country, and that a Court be presently called to do it, before the Assembly meet, That your approbation or dissatisfaction of this declaration may be known to all the Country, and the Kings Council to whose most revered Judgments it is submitted, Given the 30th day of May, a happy day in the 35th year of his most sacred Majesty's Reign, Charles the second, who God grant long and prosperously to Reign, and let all his good subjects say Amen.