



# A POETICAL DREAM.

## Concerning Stamped Papers, 1765

In this poem, published in Connecticut in late 1765 during the Stamp Act controversy, the anonymous narrator relates a dream in which public documents that must be taxed and stamped proclaim their usefulness and make a case against the Stamp Act. (The seven groups of documents are bonds, court papers, probate papers, diplomas, licenses, newspapers, and almanacs, ordered by official importance). While not great literature, the poem does suggest how deeply the Stamp Act intruded into the lives of the colonists and how in the eighteenth century poetry was deployed in the service of political persuasion.

A DREAM upon a subject which engages  
Men's Minds very much, when they are  
awake, as well as when they are asleep.

One night, as I lay slumbering in my Bed,  
Dark Images crouded into my Head.  
I thought, as through the Town I walk'd alone,  
I, at a Distance heard a grievous Moan.  
Attention roused; I then approach'd more near,  
And found a Croud of PAPERS gather'd there.  
To each of them, as to the Prophet's Ass,  
A Tongue was giv'n to tell his wretched Case.  
I watch'd their mournful Words with vast Concern,  
Hoping the Cause, for which they met, to learn.  
They spoke by Turns: In this they all agree,  
To plead the Cause of *English Liberty*:  
And deprecate the Woe, which each one thought  
Would, by the St—p-A-t, soon on them be brought.  
“Our Case, says one, grows more and more distres'd.  
None of our Grievances are yet redress'd.  
Our sad Complaint, and humble Supplication,  
Which, to the highest Powers of the Nation  
We long ago address'd, and soon rejected,  
And all our Pray'rs and Tears were still neglected.”

crouded: crowded

The donkey of the prophet Balaam  
is given language by God to protest  
his ill-treatment by the prophet.  
Old Testament, Numbers 22

St—p-A-t: Stamp Act

The Case of all is hard, each thinks his own  
The worst. Then all, with many a piercing Groan,  
Expostulate and say “Oh!- - - - -  
Must I (the Bond cries) suffer the Abuse  
Of being st--pt, when I'm of so much Use  
To Men of all Professions, rich and Poor,

First document to “speak”: bond

st--pt: stamped

Whose Property I daily do secure?  
Those that are honest, honest must remain;  
And he that tries to cheat, tries but in vain.  
While I exert my Skill the Rogue to catch,  
And all his false dishonest Motions watch,  
Must I be crush'd and fall a Sacrifice  
To cruel Tyr---y? Will none arise,  
Of all my Friends, to save me from this Doom  
Which will, unless they interpose, soon come?"  
Him interrupt the *Papers* of the *Court*:  
*Summons* and *Writ*, and all of ev'ry sort.  
Must we be st---pt, when we so much have done  
To serve the present and the Ages gone?  
We've call'd the Debtor to discharge his Debt;  
We many Rogues at Justice' Bar have set.  
Into the L---rs Hands, many a Jo---  
We've slyly put, that so their Tongues might go.  
And can they find no Tongues to plead our Cause,  
Which does appear so just, by Nature's Laws?  
If ne'er before, sure now, without a Fee,  
They'll plead, and seek to Gain our Liberty.

Tyr--y: Tyranny

2nd document: court papers

L----rs: Lawyers'

slyly: slyly

The *Probate Papers* next, with many a Sigh,  
"Must we be st--pt (with tender Accent cry)  
We who our Life and Breath so freely spend,  
The Fatherless and Widow to defend.  
And dare their needy and defenceless State,  
So boldly plead against the Rich and Great?  
Let not that cruel St--p destroy our Pow'r,  
To help the helpless in the needy Hour."

3rd document: probate papers

With Grief and Anger mixt, *Diploma* now,  
Starts from the seat and knits his manly Brow.  
"Must I be st--pt (says he) and barely die  
Under th' oppressive Hand of Tyr---y?  
When I have bent my utmost Skill and Knowledge  
To serve the Cause of Learning and the College?  
Will all the Men of Science me neglect,  
When I do them so carefully protect  
From those Indignities which vulgar Men  
Would, otherwise, be bold to cast on them?  
When I their Education tell around,  
And cause their Reputation to abound,  
Shall I no Privilege hereby obtain,  
But cry, to those I've serv'd, for Help in vain?"

4th document: diploma

The *Licence Paper* next, with ruddy Face,  
No longer can, in Silence, keep his Place;

5th document: license

But cries (with Spirits high, and Blood inflam'd)  
"Think I'll be st--pt! I'll sooner much be d---d!  
For Ages past I've fill'd the generous Bowl,  
And pour'd seraphick Pleasures on the Soul  
Of old and young, the Statesman and the Priest,  
And lull'd their troubled Minds to quiet rest.  
I've rais'd their drooping Spirits when sunk low,  
And dissipated all their Grief and Woe.  
But, with unquenched Thirst, they all shall pine,  
If they won't pitv such as Case as mine."

pitv: pity

6th document: newspaper

The *Paper* which retails the weekly News,  
Seems also bent the St--p-A-t to refuse;  
And cries, "Oh! Hard indeed my Fate must be,  
If from the D---l's Foot I mayn't be free,  
To bear the *D---l's Tails*<sup>†</sup> enough for me.  
Who, of ye all, has shewn a readier Mind,  
At once to please and profit all Mankind?  
I travel far and near; the World I range  
And carry with me all that's *new* and strange.  
Advices of Importance I convey;  
As well as merry Tales, to please the Gay.  
Must I be burden'd with this cruel St--p,  
Which will my Speed and Progress greatly cramp?  
He sigh'd and said no more. Next him arose  
The *Almanack*, the St--p-A-t to oppose;  
And says with heavy Heart, and downcast Look,  
(As though, by all his Friends, he'd been forsook)  
"I thought I'd Friends enough to keep me free  
From being hurt by this Calamity.  
Both Men and Women I have fought to win,  
And all my Days, a humble *Courtier* been.  
I always dress'd me new from Year to Year,  
That I the more engaging might appear.  
I try'd, by Turns (as *Trimmers* do) to please  
Both Rich and Poor, and Men of all Degrees.  
I talk'd about the Stars and future Scenes;  
I us'd a mystick Style, and told my Dreams.  
By Signs infallible, I pointed out  
Those Days which great Events would bring about.  
But yet, sometimes I dar'd not be exact;  
For Fear some jealous People should suspect  
I us'd dishonest Arts; and was so evil  
As, in dark Cases, to consult the D---l.  
I'm sure my Faults, which have been very few,

shewn: shown

7th document: annual almanac

D---l: Devil

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<sup>†</sup>A vulgar Name for the large Handle of a Printing Press. [footnote in original]

Can't be the Cause of what I undergo.  
I beg for Help, which, if deny'd, I fear  
I cannot live to see another Year."

The other *Papers* told their piteous Case,  
But with such heart-felt Anguish and Distress  
As render'd inarticulate their Voice;  
All I heard more, was a hoarse murmuring Noise.

A few besides myself, I thought drew near,  
The wretched *Papers* dying Groans to hear.  
And all seem'd touch'd with sympathetick Grief,  
And to each other said, *Can no Relief*  
*At all be found? Come let us all unite*  
*To show the Papers Case in a true Light*  
*To all their Friends (for many Friends they have)*  
*Perhaps 'tis not too late their Lives to save.*

Their wretched Case was soon abroad declar'd;  
Which none could help but pity when he heard.  
And deep Resentment, first by Few express'd  
Against the St--p-A-t, catch'd from Breast to Breast,  
Till all did burn with one increasing Flame,  
The same were all their Hearts; their Voice the same.

The KING and *Parliament* vouchsaf'd to hear  
The Force of Reason, and the ardent Pray'r  
Of those who join'd to plead the *Papers* Cause;  
And eas'd their *Burden*; and repeal'd those *Laws*  
Which were so grievous.—Oh what sudden Joy  
Fill'd all their Hearts! at once they all employ  
Their Tongues and Pens to celebrate the Fame  
Of KING and *Parliament*; and all proclaim  
Their Wisdom, Justice, Tenderness and Love  
Shewn to these *Colonies*.—*May GOD above*  
*Save GEORGE our gracious King, and always smile*  
*On all the Rulers of the British Isle!*  
I echo'd to this Pray'r and clap'd my Hands,  
Which quick dissolv'd the soporifick Bands  
That held my sleeping Pow'rs. I op'd mine Eyes  
And found, with no small Wonder and Surprise,  
The *melancholly* and the *joyful* Themes  
Which fill'd my Mind, by Turns, were only *Dreams*.

The narrator dreams that the Stamp Act is repealed by Parliament. His "dream" became reality in March 1766, several months after the publication of the poem.

*The END of the DREAM.*

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