



The Late War Between the United States and Great Britain
Gilbert J. Hunt (1816)

Gilbert Hunt's The Late War is a curious artifact of US civil religion: a book-length history of the War of 1812, written from a patriotic American perspective and in a style emulating the King James Version of the Bible. Hunt was an aspiring author in New York City who made a living manufacturing paper goods and pigment. The Late War attracted modest attention (former president Thomas Jefferson purchased a copy), but Hunt failed in his ambition to market the work widely as a schoolbook. He hoped to write a prequel, a similarly Bible-like narrative of American history from Columbus's voyages up to the War of 1812, but that project never came to fruition.

Presented here are excerpts from The Late War's first three chapters. The original text is divided into numbered verses, like the Bible; but that formatting has been omitted here, to save space. Where these excerpts leave off, the book goes on to narrate multiple fronts of the War of 1812, including the US invasions of Canada and the Creek War, followed by a chapter-length account of the Second Barbary War.

[“The lords of Britain have trampled upon the altar of Liberty”]

Now it came to pass in the one thousand eight hundred and twelfth year of the Christian era—and in the thirty and sixth year after the people of the provinces of Columbia had declared themselves independent of all the kingdoms of the earth—that in the sixth month of the same year, on the first day of the month, the chief governor whom the people had chosen to rule over the land of Columbia, even James whose surname was Madison, delivered a written paper to the Great Sanhedrim of the people, who were assembled together. And the name of the city where the people were gathered together was called after the name of the chief captain of the land of Columbia, whose fame extendeth to the uttermost parts of the earth, albeit he had gone to the land of his fathers. Nevertheless, the people loved him, inasmuch as he wrought their deliverance from the yoke of tyranny in times past; so they called the city Washington.

Now when the written paper was received, the doors of the chambers of the Great Sanhedrim were closed, and a seal was put upon every man's mouth. And the counsellors of the nation and the wise men thereof ordered the written paper which James had delivered unto them to be read aloud; and the interpretation thereof was in this wise:

“Lo! The lords and the princes of the kingdom of Britain, in the fulness of their pride and power, have trampled upon the altar of Liberty and violated the sanctuary thereof—inasmuch as they hearkened not unto the voice of moderation, when the voice of the people of Columbia was, ‘Peace! peace!’; inasmuch as they permitted not the tall ships of Columbia to sail in peace on the waters of the mighty deep, saying in their hearts, ‘These spoils shall be given unto the king’; inasmuch as they robbed the ships of Columbia of the strong men that wrought therein and used them for their own use, even as a man useth his ox or his ass; inasmuch as they kept the men stolen from the ships of Columbia in bondage many years and caused them to fight the battles of the king—even against their own brethren!—neither gave they unto them silver or gold, but many stripes. [...]

“Moreover, the Council of Britain sent forth a decree to all the nations of the earth, [...which] was a grievous thing, inasmuch as it permitted not those who dealt in merchandise to go whithersoever they chose and trade freely with all parts of the earth. And it fell hard upon the people of Columbia, for the king said unto them, ‘Ye shall come unto me and pay tribute; then may ye depart to another country.’ Now these things pleased the pirates, and the cruisers, and all the sea-robbers of Britain mightily, inasmuch as they could rob with impunity the commerce of Columbia under the cloak of British honor.

“Furthermore, have not the servants of the king leagued with the savages of the wilderness, and given unto them silver and gold, and placed the destroying engines in their hands?—thereby stirring up the spirit of Satan within them, that they might spill the blood of the people of Columbia, even the blood of our old men, our wives, and our little ones!

“Thus hath Britain in her heart commenced war against the people of Columbia, whilst they have cried aloud for peace; and when she smote them on the one cheek, they have turned unto her the other also. Now, therefore, shall we, the independent people of Columbia, sit down silently, as slaves, and bow the neck to Britain? Or shall we nobly, and like our forefathers, assert our rights and defend that which the Lord hath given us—*liberty and independence?*”

[“*Go forth to battle, and the Lord God of hosts be with you*”]

Now when there was an end made of reading the paper which James had written, the Sanhedrim communed one with another touching the matter. And they chose certain wise men from among them to deliberate thereon, and they commanded them to go forth from their presence for that purpose and return again on the third day of the same month.

Now when the third day arrived, [...the wise men] came forth and presented themselves before the Great Sanhedrim of the people. And the chief of the wise men whom they had chosen opened his mouth and spake unto them after this manner:

“Behold! Day and night have we meditated upon the words which James hath delivered, and we are weary withal, for our hearts wished peace. But the wickedness of the kingdom of Great Britain and the cruelty of the princes thereof towards the peaceable inhabitants of the land of Columbia may be likened unto the fierce lion when he putteth his paw upon the innocent lamb to devour him. Nevertheless, the lamb shall not be slain, for the Lord will be his deliverer.

“And if, peradventure, the people of Columbia go not out to battle against the king, then will the manifold wrongs committed against them be increased tenfold, and they shall be as a mock and a byword among all nations. Moreover, the righteousness of your cause shall lead you to glory, and the pillars of your liberty shall not be shaken. Therefore say we unto you: Gird on your swords and go forth to battle against the king, even against the strong powers of Britain, and the Lord God of hosts be with you.”

Now when the Great Sanhedrim of the people heard those things which the wise men had uttered, they pondered them in their minds many days and weighed them well. Even until the seventeenth day of the month, pondered they in secret concerning the matter. And it was so, that

on the next day they sent forth a decree, making war upon the kingdom of Great Britain and upon the servants and upon the slaves thereof. And the decree was signed with the handwriting of James, the chief governor of the land of Columbia. After these things, the doors of the chambers of the Sanhedrim were opened.

[“Now will we chastise the impudence of these Yankees”]

And it came to pass that when the princes, and the lords, and the counsellors of Britain saw the decree, their wrath was kindled, and their hearts were ready to burst with indignation. “For verily,” said they, “this insult hath overflowed the cup of our patience; and now will we chastise the impudence of these Yankees, and the people of Columbia shall bow before the king.” (Now the word “Yankees” was used by the people of Britain as a term of reproach.) “Then will we rule them with a rod of iron, and they shall be unto us hewers of wood and drawers of water.

“For verily, shall we suffer these cunning Yankees to beard the mighty lion with half a dozen fire-built frigates, the men whereof are but mercenary cowards, bastards, and outlaws, neither durst they array themselves in battle against the men of Britain? No! We will sweep their stars from the face of the waters, and their name shall be heard no more among nations. Shall the proud conquerors of Europe not laugh to scorn the feeble efforts of a few unorganized soldiers, undisciplined and fresh from the plough, the hoe, and the mattock? Yea, they shall surely fall, for they were not bred to fighting as were the servants of the king.

“Their large cities, their towns, and their villages will we burn with consuming fire. Their oil, and their wheat, and their rye, and their corn, and their barley, and their rice, and their buckwheat, and their oats, and their flax, and all the products of their country will we destroy and scatter the remnants thereof to the four winds of heaven.

“All these things and more will we do unto this froward people, neither shall there be found safety for age or sex from the destroying swords of the soldiers of the king, save in those provinces and towns where dwell the friends of the king—for lo!” said they, “the king’s friends are many. These will we spare, neither will we hurt a hair of their heads, nor shall the savages of the wilderness stain the scalping-knife or the tomahawk with the blood of the king’s friends.”

Now it happened about this time that there were numbers of the inhabitants of the country of Columbia whose hearts yearned after the king of Britain. These men were called Tories, which signifieth, in the vernacular tongue, the blind followers of royalty. And with their false, flattering words, they led astray some of the children of Columbian liberty, for their tongues were smoother than oil. Evil machinations entered into their hearts, and [...] they strove to dishearten the true friends of the Great Sanhedrim; but they prevailed not.

Source: Gilbert J. Hunt, *The Late War between the United States and Great Britain* [...] *Written in the Ancient Historical Style* (New York: David Longworth, 1816), 15-26, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081804100>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Versification and footnotes in the source publication omitted. Grammar and spellings in the style of the King James Version of the Bible retained; the source's Hebraized spelling *Sanhedrim* (for *Sanhedrin*, a word derived from Greek) also retained. To regularize the source's use of a KJV style, the less conventional spelling *merchandize* emended to *merchandise* (the latter being used in the KJV). Sentence fragments integrated here into full sentences; one sentence break relocated for clarity. Punctuation modernized for readability's sake, including inserting quotation marks (which are absent from the source publication, as also from the KJV). Small caps and all caps omitted, but in select cases converted to italics for emphasis.

The word *Christian*, lowercase in the source, is capitalized here per modern convention. The term *Great Sanhedrim*, inconsistently but typically capitalized in the source, is consistently capitalized here. For readability's sake, various other words capitalized in the source have been converted here to lowercase: *governor*, *kingdom*, *liberty* (except in an instance when it appears to be personified like a deity), *independence*, *decree*, *war*, and *hosts*.

These edited excerpts from Hunt's book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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