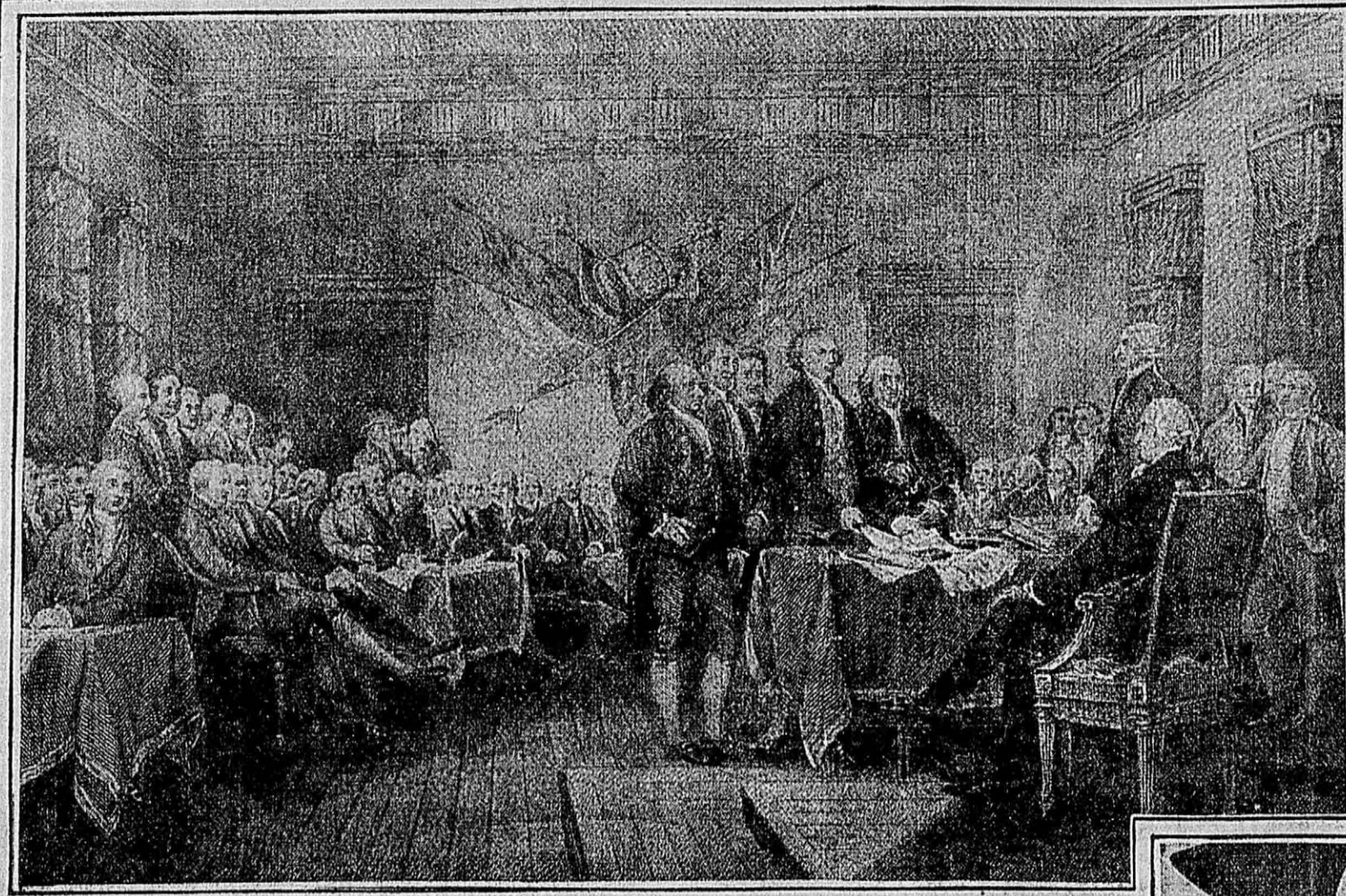


OUR DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE

Sources of Its Inspiration and Its Influence Upon the Thought of the World



Reproduction of Trumbull's Famous Painting, "THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE"

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INDEPENDENCE was born this day 133 years ago when the aged bellringer sped the tidings which still echo around the world.

The immortal instrument, which was signed by John Hancock on July 4, 1776, has meant more than the growth and development of an independent nation on this side of the Atlantic. It was in itself the re-enactment of the greatest bill of human rights ever penned, which received the signet of an unwilling king at Runnymede, and the birth of constitutional liberty.

In these days of peace and plenty the Fourth of July is given to "salutes of cannon and the ringing of bells and to the few de jole," with variations, as John Adams predicted that it would be, yet the observance of the Fourth is an occasion for recalling memories past and giving thanks for the deeds of the patriot forefathers is sporadic rather than general in the United States. The Declaration of Independence is not read from the rostrum, as it once was in every community, and the orators to the links have gone.

So much has been taken here as a matter of course that it seems hard to realize that this anniversary is celebrated in the very England from which liberty was wrested, and that observances of it are officially ordered in many lands beyond the seas. The Fourth of July has become international in scope, for it has changed the governments of nations whose capitals are far from Independence Hall. So widespread have its effects become as studied in the light of the present day that in order to get the true value of all that the Declaration signifies to the world in 1909 it is necessary to go back to the very beginning of American liberty.

Had not the ideas of government held by the colonists been essentially British there would probably never have been any Declaration of Independence. It is as natural for the Briton to demand his rights as it is for him to live. The war of the Revolution was largely due to the fact that the two thousand miles of water between London and the colonies caused Parliament to lose sight of the ties of consanguinity and of race.

Although the original thirteen colonies were so essentially English in thought and feeling they had never actually been established by England as a national enterprise. The only one which had ever received any official aid whatever was Georgia, and that was not sufficient to carry any such feeling of dependence as is essential for the preservation of intimate colonial relations. The right to colonize the North American continent had been granted by charters from a British king. According to the feudal system, which was then rapidly becoming effaced, the king owned all the land and distributed it among various favored vassals.

Fables of Wealth.

The sovereign in the same way regarded the New World as if it had been won by the sword. The most extravagant ideas prevailed with regard to the wealth of the American lands. It was at one time soberly believed in England that gold and silver and precious stones could be had for the taking and that the natives were the possessors of fabulous wealth. The king gave the charters in most cases with the idea that he would profit greatly from mines which would yield enormous returns to the royal exchequer.

When the colonists came here they found it necessary to make good their titles either by peaceful bargains with the Indians or by force of arms. From the very first the spirit of independence was fostered for chiefs which had to be maintained by constant vigilance and negotiations and by show of force did not carry with them a deep sense of obligation. Indeed, even at that early day, although for the throne the colonists entertained feelings of loyalty and devotion, a shrewd idea was abroad that the king did not really own the land which he had bestowed by his charter. The conquest of nature and of the savages begot a rugged independence which as the years went by became more and more distasteful to the authorities in England.

Yet the idea of separation from the Crown was of slow growth. The forefathers maintained that they were British subjects, although not living within the realm, as indeed was specified in some of the royal

charters. The Massachusetts charter, for instance, sets forth that the colonists shall be considered "as if they and every one of them were born within the realm of England." As British subjects, then, they maintained that they should be entitled to representation, and therefore each colony had its assembly, which determined upon all matters of the common weal and established rates of taxation. It was one of the principles expressed in the Magna Charta that the Common Council of the kingdom "was to assess an aid or to assess a scutage," and again, in 1688, it was declared by the British people, then well on their way to constitutional liberty, that "no money was to be levied for the Crown without grant of Parliament."

The Declaration of Rights was a forerunner of the Declaration of Independence. There is nothing more essentially British than the dictum that there shall be no taxation without representation. Of the early American statesmen only Franklin and Otis wished to have representation in the British Parliament. The others considered that their own assemblies should be the legislative bodies entirely and that if any taxes were to be imposed they should be collected only with the consent of the colonial assemblies.

The question of taxation, however, did not enter into any controversies, for it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that Great Britain, exhausted by many wars and seeking to replenish the national treasury, sought extraordinary means for raising revenue, and her ministers proposed that the colonies, which had been growing in wealth and importance, should be made to contribute to the impoverished exchequer. The French and Indian War had shown the power of the colonies and their force and had given a very definite idea of their growing wealth and importance.

Taxation a Problem.

Having reached the decision to tax the colonies, the Ministry did not spend any time in preliminaries. It was decided that Parliament had the right to levy the taxes, and the fact that the colonies had no representation in that body was not taken into account. Such a matter would ordinarily have been considered a subject for delicate negotiation, but, the decision to tax having once been made, no time was lost in levying it.

England had in effect been a constitutional monarchy since the signing of the Magna Charta in 1215, and in taxing the colonies not represented in the Common Council of the kingdom she had violated one of the oldest of the rights which every Briton claims.

Such was the situation in 1764, when the struggle began which twelve years later brought forth the Declaration of Independence, and the next year



THE TOCSIN OF LIBERTY
Rung by the State House Bell, Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 4, 1776
"Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land, Unto All the Inhabitants Thereof."—Levi, xiv, 10

brought into being the first Congress of the American Colonies which decided that the Assembly had the power to fix taxes. The Stamp Act was the first heavy impost levied by the mother country, which provided for the stamping of various legal instruments and papers and contracts of all kinds, as well as dice and playing cards.

The news of the passage of this act roused the colonists to fury. A gallows was erected in what is now City Hall Park, New York, and the British Governor was hanged in effigy, and the House of Major Jones, in command of the British regiment, was sacked. Then came the rising of the "Sons of Liberty" and the raising of the liberty poles. Boston and Philadelphia were vortices of the storm. So emphatic was the protest that much of the act was repealed and duties were established on tea, which accounted for the sudden ruin of tea in Boston Harbor. Then came the burning words of Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death!" before the Virginia Assembly in 1773. The year later brought the promulgation of the "Declaration of Rights and Privileges," in which it was declared that every man had "the right to" life, liberty and property and to that most ancient right granted at Runnymede, for trial by his "peers of the vicinage."

Throughout all this time of storm and strain the protests were made as British subjects, and that Congress which met in Carpenter's Hall in 1774 was still loyal to the Crown. It petitioned the King, remonstrated with Parliament and appealed to their brethren in England. Then came Lexington and Concord. The Congress of 1775 made provisions for an army, with Washington as commander, and still petitioned. Its petition was refused and mercenaries

were hired from petty German princes to—quoting the words of Lossing—"butcher British subjects for asserting the rights of British subjects."

Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, offered the independence resolution in June, 1776, and a committee was appointed to draft the Declaration consisting of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston. Jefferson wrote the document, and alterations were made principally at the suggestion of Franklin and Adams. The paper was submitted to Congress on June 28. It was laid on the table until July 1, when nine colonies voted in favor of it.

Signing the Declaration.

The independence resolution was actually adopted on July 2 and promulgated to the world on July 4, when John Hancock, of Massachusetts, affixed to it his bold signature.

The other members of the Congress did not sign it until August 2, and the impressive scene connected with the signing was not witnessed until nearly a month later, although it is popularly associated with the Fourth of July.

Centuries of the progress of the rights of man bear witness in the Declaration that "all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" was not new, for it was recognized at Sinai. That governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed had been stated and restated in many ways since the beginning of the colonies. Thomas Jefferson was criticized at the time for lack of originality in the Declaration. The document gained all the greater force from its statement of self-evident truths. Never was there a more masterly presentation of a bill of grievances than is contained in the Declaration, which "submits the facts to a candid world."

Arraigning the British King for acts of tyranny, it sets forth that he refused "his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good," meaning that George III. had prevented the issue of colonial currency and had refused representation to his American subjects.

It was desired on the part of the New York As-



The Manner in Which the American Colonies Declared Themselves Independent of the King of England, Throughout the Different Provinces, on July 4, 1776 From an Old Print

sembly or were permitted to meet only for the purpose of passing the required appropriations. The Declaration insists that the legislative powers are incapable of annihilation and that they be returned to the people.

The King's Advisers.

Many liberty loving Germans had come to the American colonies and French Canadians were coming down to Boston and to Maryland, a kind of immigration against which the advisers of George III. especially warned him as tending to loosen his hold upon the colonies. The Declaration sets forth as a grievance that the King prevented the population of the colonies, as indeed he did by obstructing naturalization.

The Declaration protests against the judges being dependent on the will of the King for their salaries, and, indeed, in some of the colonies many of the judges had been impeached for declaring that they would receive their salaries from the royal treasury.

Graphically the authors of the document tell how the erection of a multitude of new offices had impoverished the country, referring to the collectors appointed to carry out the provisions of the Stamp act. The quartering of troops in times of peace was a substantial grievance complained of, for the King insisted on retaining British troops here after the French and Indian War at the expense of the colonists, ostensibly for defence but in reality to suppress a growing democracy.

The words "he has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power" refer to the position taken by General Gage, who with several regiments of British troops was in Boston. By order of the King he had been made superior to the civil government.

Here and there through the colonies Americans had been killed in altercations with British soldiers, who were subsequently put on trial and acquitted. The Declaration accuses the King of quartering large bodies of soldiers in the colonies, of "protecting their mock trials from punishment for any murders which they may commit."

Trade with the Spanish and French colonies had been cut off from America because England wished all the trade for herself, and even fishing on the Banks of Newfoundland had been stopped. All this is comprised in the arraignment "for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world."

Colonists were deprived of trial by jury and the monstrous practice was adopted, as stated in the Declaration, of transporting them to England for trial, in direct violation of the ancient charter of liberties, which maintains that every man "shall have a trial before his peers of the vicinage." This was violently opposed by leading British statesmen.

Such were the principles enunciated in the Declaration, and how well they were sustained by the arbitrament of war the world knows. The nation began celebrating the glorious Fourth from the very beginning. Salutes of thirteen cannon were fired by the army in 1777, and the new Republic was pledged in the following year, with more cannon and more bonfires. One of the features of parades in the South was a figure with a tremendous headpiece, intended to ridicule the follies of the Tory leaders.

West Point saw a significant celebration in 1778, when General Washington issued a pardon for all prisoners in the army under sentence of death. The last celebration of the army of the Revolution as such took place on both shores of the Hudson River, and a grand salute was fired.

To-Day.

More of the nature of a festival dominated the Fourth after 1783, for then came parades, free dinners, toasts, the reading of the Declaration in public by citizens. One of the features of parades in the younger generation, dignity and solemnity marked these early celebrations and eloquent speeches were made. In New England the day was specially observed with the old time fervor, and great orators delivered addresses of burning patriotism.

The fiftieth Fourth of July was a notable anniversary. Several of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence were still alive, although unable on account of extreme old age to take part in the exercises to which they were bidden. New York had a grand procession and a barbecue in the square now named after Washington, at which 10,000 persons were present. Josiah Quincy was the orator of the day in Boston, and addresses were also made by Webster and Peabody. Edward Everett discoursed at Cambridge. A speech was made from the steps of the National Capitol.

Freedom's jubilee was observed by the Centennial Exposition in 1876, and impressive exercises were held both in Philadelphia and New York. Since the Centennial the patriotic and serious features of the day seem to have been lessened, and the occasion is accompanied more by noise and merry-making and sports in the open air. The amount and variety of the noises have appreciably increased, and casualties on the Fourth have reached such proportions as to cause alarm and to start a movement for a celebration which shall have more Declaration of Independence and fewer fireworks and fireworks and a smaller proportion of lockjaw. The Fourth of July, 1898, which brought the news of the destruction of Cervera's fleet, caused the flame of patriotism to burn with renewed fervor and the consumption of powder by the ton.

The Fourth is a statutory holiday in every State and its fame has gone beyond the seas. Americans celebrate it by a dinner in London at the Embassy, with the kindly assistance of British officials, and in Paris and Berlin the day is toasted. Switzerland officially recognizes the day. In Japan the Japanese join with American residents in basking the birth of the American Republic. Other nations have since the Declaration achieved republican forms of government. The new American possessions and the spread of amity toward the United States, now a world power, have made the Fourth a factor throughout all the civilized world.



Tearing Down the Statue of King George III, Which Stood in Bowling Green

