SOME REFLECTIONS UPON THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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WE ARE confronted today with the spectacle of one part of the English-speaking world fighting for its very existence—faced as it is by the most terrifying ordeal that it has ever experienced. The other part is at peace, a troubled, anxious peace, reassured and comforted, in the midst of unexampled military preparations too long delayed, with the thought that so long as the British Empire survives it will continue to serve as an outer bulwark against those forces of international lawlessness which, inundating most parts of the Old World, may yet crash against the shores of the western hemisphere. Under these circumstances we inevitably tend to raise questions. Why are these English-speaking peoples—spread over the face of the earth as they are from the Orkneys to Tasmania, from the Cape of Good Hope to Alaska—organized into two rather distinct and quite independent systems of government in spite of a great and common democratic tradition cherished by all within this their own peculiar world? Why the British Commonwealth of Nations, on the one hand, and the American nation on the other? What, in other words, was it that brought about, over a century and a half ago, the separation of the British continental colonies in North America from the Empire and the creation of a new nation?

Answers to these queries are not difficult to discover. They are to be found in innumerable public orations delivered on great and on minor occasions, in a considerable body of fiction that finds a convenient setting in the epoch of the Revolutionary War, in the textbooks used in schools and colleges since the days when the study of history was thought to be of sufficient importance to find a place in the curriculum, in the biographies of the founding fathers and the more or less mature historical treatises relating

1 Presidential address delivered before the Pennsylvania Historical Association at State College on October 18, 1940.
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

to the eighteenth century that have appeared from time to time, and, finally, in the writings left by contemporaries actively identified with the movement for American independence.

These answers may either be phrased in the form of mere expletives or else demand the scope of an entire volume or even a series of volumes; they may without reservation or qualification place the onus for the separation fully upon the shoulders of the government of Great Britain, or may, in contrast, cast searching and lingering doubts as to the historical soundness, and withal the fairness, of the American position, put forth, as it was in the fever of war, in terms of the misconduct of a wicked king and his equally wicked ministers who set on foot a tyrannical project for the purpose of exploiting and even enslaving the British colonials.

It is indisputable that events characterized by a background charged with emotion can be rationalized in an attitude of even fair impartiality and coolness only with difficulty, particularly if these are related to one's present or past or the present or past of one's own people. For the individual is seldom equipped by any training designed to encourage a reaching out with detachment for an impersonalized view of things. In fact, much of his training from early childhood is in direct opposition to this, leading him to an unquestioning acceptance of all things, whether good or bad, that seem in a way hallowed by tradition. Nevertheless, it would doubtless be very illuminating to many traditionalists to discover to what extent detachment has gained ground here in the United States during the past half century in the writing and teaching of the history of such movements as that for American independence. It may be, in other words, that America shows signs of at last coming fully of age.

One explanation of this change in attitude—and there has been a very great change on the part of both writers and teachers—is the growing recognition of the fact that in spite of popular notions to the contrary momentous crises such as revolutions and rebellions within a state almost never have their roots in simple, easily explained situations—but rather in exceedingly complex ones. It is necessary only to call to mind the secession of the southern states from the Federal Union in 1860 and 1861 to illustrate this point. The characteristic and withal simple northern
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

explanation of the break was to point to the issue of slavery; the equally characteristic and simple southern explanation was to fasten upon the issue of states' rights. Those, however, who have given prolonged study to the background of this great crisis in the life of the American nation see a multitude of forces at work, none without its significance. The fact that the effects of each of these were by no means evenly distributed within the South, on the one hand, or within the North, on the other, added to the general complexity of the problem of maintaining the Federal Union. Referring to the ante-bellum days, Professor Theodore Smith of Williams College, who has studied them with care, recently wrote:

If there is anything that is thoroughly impressed upon the serious student of that period, it is the overwhelming complexity of the social, economic, and political currents and crosscurrents involved and the impossibility of depicting the actors in terms of white virtue and black villainy.

Mature scholars of our present generation, in fact, read with little less than amazement—in that spirit of detachment now possible—those hard and bitter taunts that high-minded northerners flung into the face of the South and that high-minded southerners flung into the face of the North in the midst of the passion of the crisis and do not hesitate to affirm that thoroughly angry partisans are frequently, perhaps generally, incapable of dealing justly and even candidly with the ideas and points of view of their opponents. What is more, they fully recognize that each section in 1860 had a case worthy of the most sympathetic consideration before the bar of history.

So is it equally true of the issue of the secession of the thirteen colonies from the British Empire with the promulgation of their Declaration of Independence in 1776. Today most students who have had the opportunity to study with care the history of that empire in the eighteenth century readily admit that the more serious charges made by the embattled colonials against the conduct of the mother country—in so far as these charges refer to precrisis conditions—are as difficult to substantiate as are the more serious charges that flew back and forth across Mason and Dixon's line almost a century later. Nevertheless, it is obvious that each generation of Americans since 1776 has had impressed upon it as
literal truth the terrible indictments framed and directed against King George III and his ministers by our sturdy patriot forefathers.

One may in this connection suggest in all candor that had the South succeeded in establishing its independence as the result of the Civil War, there would undoubtedly have existed within it a tendency equally strong and equally embedded in tradition to continue to denounce President Lincoln and the government that supported him, charging him, whether fairly or unfairly, as was done in his lifetime, with seeking to deny to southerners the most cherished rights previously enjoyed and solemnly guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States, thus driving the South to the dire necessity of breaking off all political and legal relations with the North. Happily, with the healing of the wounds of the tragic schism, Lincoln is no longer regarded in the South, at least among people of education, as an unprincipled politician not only swayed by revolutionary, fanatical, and unconstitutional ideas but also committed to an oppressive sectional program.

Nor do educated Americans today find it easy to echo in all honesty much that was once charged against the government of Great Britain in its relations with the American colonies. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that were any individual now to appear before a group of serious students of history here in the United States and venture to assert that before the American crisis arose at the end of the French and Indian War the British colonials were treated in a despotic and tyrannical manner by the government at home, his assertion would certainly be greeted by an amused, if somewhat critical, bored silence. Embarrassed yawns would take the place of applause. In other words, some of the utterances once in vogue with orators who were accustomed to addressing in the name of patriotism and with little regard for accuracy of statement popular audiences, especially on the occasion of our prized national holiday—utterances that may still be voiced even in the halls of our national Congress by those who hold an attitude of unquestioning traditionalism—simply cannot be employed by speakers who appear before well-informed men and women to appeal to them not only in the name of patriotism but in the sobering name likewise of truth and the open record for all students to read and ponder who will.
While American historians, political scientists, and economists may differ as to the bearing and effect of certain imperial regulations upon the thirteen colonies—as they do with reference to the degree to which the South was adversely affected by specific federal regulations during the so-called middle period of our national history, or, if one prefers, as to the effects upon certain economic groups today of the New Deal legislation—they are, nevertheless, so far as the writer is aware, in substantial agreement on certain points that place the British nation in a not unfavorable light as a colonizing power, especially in comparing it with the French, the Spanish, and the Portuguese nations, which also established themselves in the New World. The following points, at least, may be placed to its credit:

1. Among these contemporary colonizing nations the British alone possessed a constitution that repudiated the concept of the divine right of kings and that was based upon the democratic principle that all men, even the king, were under the law and only Parliament as the supreme legislature was competent to alter the constitution and to determine its nature and content.

2. Among these nations the British alone refused to recognize the existence of privileged classes and supported in contrast the democratic principles of the equality of all men before the law, the obligation of all men to contribute to the support of the state in accordance with their ability, and the right of every man when his person was in danger to a trial by a jury of his peers.

3. Among these nations the British alone could point to a great body of principles other than the above that had likewise been embodied in their constitution as a protection against the exercise of arbitrary power within the state—principles based upon a Magna Carta, a Petition of Rights, a Habeas Corpus Act, a Bill of Rights, and an Act of Settlement, all won at great price. As a result, who was not made aware in the eighteenth century through the channels of free speech and free press of the "rights of Englishmen" whenever these seemed to be challenged either at home or in the colonies? On the other hand, who, before the period of the American Revolution, was ever made acutely aware of the "rights" of
Frenchmen, or of Spaniards, or of Portuguese—or, going farther afield, of Italians, or of Germans, or of Russians? Where were free speech and free press among all these peoples? What safeguards existed to protect them against the abuses of unlimited monarchical power?

4. Among these nations the British alone possessed a government based upon the principle of popular representation. Narrow and defective as was this representation in practice in the House of Commons, “that great Inquest of the Nation,” the chamber was nevertheless possessed of a great tradition, a proud past—a past replete with conflict with despotic tendencies in government—and it still could act.

5. Among these nations the British alone had established the principle that the ministers of state were ultimately responsible for their acts not to the king but to the national legislature and could not save themselves from impeachment by pleading the most explicit orders of the king, nor could they remain in office, as Sir Robert Walpole, the most powerful of the eighteenth-century ministers found—in spite of the favor of the king—when no longer possessing the confidence of that historic body, the Parliament, and when facing a wave of disapproval.

6. Among these nations the British alone permitted their colonials to set up popular assemblies in America and to form systems of government that placed real political responsibility upon the shoulders of both electors and representatives. As a result of this policy the British colonials were the only politically minded and politically experienced people in the New World in the eighteenth century, the only people trusted to make their own local regulations in their respective assemblies under the unifying supervision of the Privy Council, the only people that could control their governors by controlling the purse.

7. Among these nations the British alone admitted into their colonies Christians who refused to adhere to the articles of faith of the state religion; what is more, in spite of a traditional fear of Roman Catholicism as a political force Parliament was even charged by colonials with showing too much favor to that religion in its dealings with the French.
Canadians after 1763, particularly in connection with the Quebec Act of 1774. Indeed, as a result of the growth of a spirit of toleration supported by the British government Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, Lutherans, and Moravians, as well as adherents of numerous sects within the colonies, were before the outbreak of the American Revolution abiding in peace and security under the protection of the law. Where else was toleration in the New World?

8. Among these nations the British alone refused to permit within their colonies monopolies such as baffled and crushed individual enterprise within New France and within the Spanish empire.

9. Among these nations the British alone applied their navigation and trade system in such a way that with all its restrictions colonial enterprise was nevertheless given great impetus. In this connection it should be pointed out that in the course of American colonization these systems of restrictions were evolved by the colonizing powers with the express purpose of assuring to the parent country the largest measure of benefit from her colonies. The latter were, for example, expected to confine themselves to such activities as would not depress or destroy established enterprises within the mother country and were expected also while consuming her surplus manufactures to send in return their raw materials. The regulations might be harsh and unjust or otherwise, according to the temper of those who made and applied them.

In a comparative study of these eighteenth-century systems certain facts become clear. First, among the American colonials the British were the only ones to establish a great shipbuilding industry competing more than successfully with that of the mother country; second, the British were the only colonials to create and operate profitably a great merchant marine, also in successful competition with that of the mother country; and, third, the British were in spite of restrictions imposed after 1750 the only colonials to build up a great and flourishing iron industry which before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War could boast of almost as many iron
smelters, according to contemporary testimony, as were being operated in the mother country, and which likewise within the Empire successfully competed with that of the mother country. Although Parliament prohibited British colonials from exporting woolen goods and beaver hats out of any colony where these articles were made, it gave them great encouragement by means of cash premiums to produce and to carry to the mother country other staple exports such as tar, resin, pitch, turpentine, ship timber, potash, and indigo, as a result of which tens of thousands of families here in America were provided with economic security and competence.

In analyzing further the operation of the navigation and trade system of the British Empire in the eighteenth century, it should be pointed out that the export of colonial tobacco and rice was strictly regulated. At the same time it is hardly to be questioned that before the Revolutionary War few people in Europe not of royalty or the nobility could surpass in splendor of living those great Virginia and South Carolina tidewater tobacco and rice planters who were disposed to apply sound business methods to their plantations and to the marketing of their crops. Indeed, what amazed contemporaries was not the poverty of the great eighteenth-century American planter, but the extravagance and the ostentatious display of wealth within and outside the home. While restrictions as to destination were placed on the export of naval stores, iron, furs, and some other commodities produced by the continental colonies as well as sugar, molasses, and other products of the British West Indies, such leading American staples as fish, flour, grain, beef, pork, dairy products, and horses and other live stock, besides a multitude of other commodities, could be carried freely from the British colonies to any market in the Americas, Europe, and Africa—with the proviso that ships, whether British or British-colonial, going to Europe and taking on board European commodities for America were expected, with some exceptions, to stop at a British port for inspection and the payment of duties.

One sure index in determining the extent to which parliamentary regulation of colonial commerce and industry acted
as a brake upon American enterprise is to observe the charac-
ter of colonial development in the course of the eighteenth
century. This was characterized on the one hand by the
rapid growth of population that doubled itself every twenty-
five years, according to the best estimates, with continuous
pressure of frontier settlement, and on the other by the
equally rapid increase in over-sea commerce. Boston, New
York, Philadelphia, Charleston, Kingston, Jamaica, and New-
port not only were by 1775 undoubtedly the most enterprising
and prosperous seaports in the New World but even chal-
lenged in volume of business transacted and display of wealth
many of the famous ports of the Old World. To make a
striking contrast one need only point out that in 1754 out of
Boston harbor alone over one thousand ships sailed loaded
with the bounty of America and destined for various seaports
on either side of the Atlantic, while from Quebec, then the
port for the whole of Canada, sailed in that same year but
fifty-two ships and from New Orleans, then the port for the
whole of the province of Louisiana including the Illinois
country, but twenty-six.

The picture of the old British Empire that gradually emerges
from a careful survey of conditions favorable and unfavorable
under which the colonials lived in the eighteenth century, while
indicating numerous restrictions imposed by the mother country,
some of them truly burdensome upon their freedom of commercial
activity, does not justify the charges that they were exploited and
oppressed as a people. It is not without significance that those
really oppressed and exploited groups from non-English lands who
came to the colonies by the thousands seeking refuge became
almost without exception so happy in their circumstances and with
the general conditions of life that surrounded them that they were
reluctant to contemplate a return to the Old World under any sort
of inducement. They now for the first time were able to regard
themselves as free people, whose religious beliefs were not struck
at by ecclesiastical authorities, whose earnings were not sys-
tematically appropriated by a voracious government—a free people
living within an empire organized upon the basis of the largest
practical measure of individual freedom. "We here enjoy full
liberty of Conscience," wrote a group of Germans from Maryland in 1746 to their friends in Germany in inviting the latter to join them. The letter continues:

The Law of the Land is so constituted that every man is secure in the enjoyment of his Property, the meanest person is out of reach of the most Powerful, nor can anything be taken from him without his securing satisfaction for it.

But, turning now to the immediate background of the American Revolution, one may assume that almost every American schoolboy can repeat the historic phrase, "Taxation without representation is tyranny!" This sentence standing apart from its frame of reference is perhaps not very enlightening. It is, for example, common knowledge that states at the present time, even the most democratically organized, may and do tax certain individuals and corporations without acknowledging that these have the right to be represented either directly or indirectly in the government. What is more, one seldom speaks in these instances of oppression or tyranny if the tax imposed upon the unrepresented is equitable and uniform in its incidence, and one can seldom expect redress through the plea of nonrepresentation. Nevertheless, generally speaking, people in democratically governed countries expect to be taxed only by properly accredited representatives. This principle has long been one of the most cherished of the English-speaking people. To British colonials in the eighteenth century, moreover, representation to be real representation was thought of as something direct and immediate, in terms of the franchise of a specific constituency bound to elect one of its own residents. The person so chosen was expected to represent his own constituents and their immediate interests and only secondarily all the people of a commonwealth and all the national interests. Whatever defects this conception of representation manifests in practice to political scientists, it was then and continues to be the American conception. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the colonials rejected as unacceptable the assumption that they and all other commoners within the Empire without direct representation in the House of Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain were at least indirectly represented, at
the time that the issue arose over the taxation of the colonies by this body, acting as the supreme legislature of the Empire. Their cry of "Taxation without representation is tyranny!" was not long delayed.

On its face the problem did not seem to present great difficulty: it was thought that simply giving to colonials direct representation in Parliament as Scotsmen had received it in 1707 would meet all objections and restore harmony. Both Benjamin Franklin and Governor Shirley agreed conditionally to this solution in 1754; Grenville, Pitt, and other British statesmen certainly considered the suggestion; there were even tentative plans which have survived; and, so far as the writer has been able to ascertain, no one in Great Britain enjoying political responsibility objected to a principle so manifestly just. The objection, in fact, came from the colonials themselves. It was frankly set forth in the Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 and in the famous Massachusetts Bay Circular Letter of 1768, both fully representing the American eighteenth-century point of view rather than the cautious view of 1754 as held by Franklin. In these historic pronouncements it was made clear that not only was British-colonial representation in Parliament impractical; it was neither asked for nor desired. So opposed were colonial leaders, in fact, to colonial parliamentary representation that the Circular Letter declares that

this House [that is, the Massachusetts Bay House of Representatives] think that a taxation of their constituents, even without their consent, grievous as it is, would be preferable to any representation that would be admitted for them there.

Thus the door was firmly closed upon what some contemporaries might have thought was a sensible solution of the problem that had arisen.

In other words, the British colonials, after the futile attempt by Parliament in 1765 to extend to America the principles embodied in the British stamp tax, made plain that the only body that they would recognize as having legal competence to tax them was the local assembly of their own particular colony and that they would therefore regard taxation by Parliament, even
should the undesired representation in it be granted, as nothing less than tyranny. Their position that taxation of them was beyond the powers of Parliament was endorsed even by such men as Pitt standing in the opposition as against the weight of legal opinion that Parliament under the constitution had sovereign powers within the Empire and had never by any act limited these powers to exempt the colonials from the binding authority of its statutes. Indeed, a century of legislation regulating the affairs of the colonies was pointed to in vindication of its position, and in this connection it was emphasized that if the colonies during the days of their infancy and poverty had been exempted from parliamentary taxation, such exemption could not be urged as any restriction of the right itself.

Without here entering into the validity of either position upon this vital issue, one finds it important to note that once having arrived at their decision—after the brushing aside of such distinctions as they had at first set up as to the legality of parliamentary “external” taxation of the colonies and the illegality of “internal” taxation of them—the British colonials found themselves impelled by the very logic of the situation to advance their position in the theory that at length was set forth in 1774: that the American assemblies enjoyed in many respects if not in most a virtual equality with Parliament, there being actually not one but many parliaments and many sovereignties within the Empire, each possessing certain exclusive powers that could not be taken away by any external authority. Thus appeared in sharp contrast the revolutionary eighteenth-century British colonial conception of “local sovereignty” as against the seventeenth-century parliamentary conception of “national sovereignty”—calling to mind as it does the sharply conflicting views of the Federal Union held by the North and the South before the outbreak of the Civil War.

But the issue over the taxation of British colonials by Parliament must be considered in its historical setting. It arose at the end of a century of intermittent conflict between Great Britain and France, a conflict having its roots not so much in the dynastic problems of Europe as in disputed territorial claims in the New World. This struggle is called by Seeley in his *Expansion of England* “the Second Hundred Years’ War.”
That British colonials found their most vital interests involved in it cannot be questioned. Nor can it be doubted that they ever felt that they could unaided defend these interests so long as France, pressing as she was against their frontiers with the aid of professional soldiers and threatening at any moment to turn upon their wilderness homes innumerable savage Indian allies, was following her dynamic program of expansion in North America. Again and again they were compelled to appeal to the mother country for protection, which was never denied them. The Comte de la Galissonière, who was acting as governor-general of New France, was right when he declared in 1748:

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\text{ces colonies sont si précieuses à l'Angleterre que si une fois elle-ci [the Illinois country] étoit assez puissante en hommes pour les mettre en danger, cette crainte seule seroit capable d'empêcher les anglais d'abuser, comme si souvent de leurs forces maritimes.}
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Indeed, for more than a century the British lion stood watch over his colonial cubs in the days of their early weakness and gradual growth, now and again lashing his tail and striking out savagely when their safety was menaced. Even before the outbreak of the last of the so-called French and Indian wars in North America just preceding the American crisis we find the Massachusetts Bay assembly anxiously requesting Governor Shirley to memorialize the king to bring force to bear against French regular troops, not only concentrating at Fort St. Frederic on Lake Champlain, but also busily fortifying themselves on lands in the region of the Bay of Fundy, which regions the assembly claimed were well within the Empire. Begging for the king's "gracious interposition," the two houses of the legislature in their joint address of April 10, 1754 declared:

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\text{We therefore desire your Excellency to represent to his Majesty the exposed hazardous state of these his governments and humbly pray that he would be pleased to cause the most effectual measures to be taken in the removal of any French forts and settlements that are or may be made in any part of his territories on this Continent.}
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That same year even proud Virginia felt impelled to direct repeated appeals to a somewhat lethargic ministry to send without
delay a body of British regulars against the French, who had entrenched themselves also in the Ohio valley—appeals that at first were turned aside, since it was felt that the North American colonies were at length sufficiently powerful to defend themselves from such aggressions, outnumbering as they did the French in Canada. However, with the colonial assemblies repudiating the statesmanlike Plan of Union, adopted at Albany in August, 1754; with the enemy defeating Washington’s Virginia volunteers at Fort Necessity; with panic gripping the undefended frontier settlements of western Pennsylvania, western Maryland, and western Virginia as the people fled from the French and Indian terror; with the Pennsylvania assembly, then under the control of the Quakers, refusing to vote a shilling for western defense; with the Maryland assembly stubbornly insisting that Virginia and Pennsylvania alone were concerned with the French movement in the Ohio valley; and, finally, with Virginia declaring her utter inability without powerful assistance to retrieve the situation, faced as she was by an army of professional soldiers, all hesitation disappeared. The great fleet now went into action in what was at first an undeclared war; regiments were sent to America to be followed later by armies. The conflict over the Ohio by 1756 assumed the proportions of a world war, with each nation involved contesting for its own objectives.

With respect to the war in North America may be raised the question, what were the aims of France? These were very definite and, as based upon official instructions, may be stated as follows: first, the reconquest of the peninsula of Nova Scotia with the elimination of New England from the great summer cod fisheries in the region of the Strait of Canso, to which place thousands of Massachusetts Bay men resorted each year; second, the reoccupation of the region from the peninsula to the Kennebec River and the support of the Abinaki and other warlike Indian tribes; third, the consolidation of the French position on Lake Champlain, leading to the control of the approaches to western Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut and northern New York; fourth, the destruction of the great fur trade of the last-named colony by the expulsion of the English from the borders of Lake Ontario and the subjection of the Six Confederated Nations to French domination; and, fifth, the
locking of the doors of the passes of the Appalachians in order not only to be able to put an end to the vastly important Indian trade of Pennsylvania in the valleys of the Allegheny and the Ohio and the equally important plans of Virginia to settle the region west of the mountains but also to be in a position to threaten, if need be, the English settlements clustered in the valleys of the Shenandoah and the Susquehanna.

Is there a serious student of American history who would venture to assert that if France had won the war and thus succeeded in her objective of imprisoning the English colonials behind these barriers, thereby shutting them off from the possibilities of future expansion either northward or westward and obliging them to face at the same time the military might of the French and their Indian allies on their borders, there would have developed among them with the establishment of peace a powerful, and finally an irresistible, movement to throw off all dependence upon Great Britain? Yet for the first two years of the war it seemed, as one defeat followed another outside of Nova Scotia, that the *fleur de lis* was destined to wave supreme in most of North America. The chief agencies for the destruction of the French dream were the royal British fleet and the British regulars. The latter were used as the spearhead in almost every important campaign from 1755 to 1760; thousands lie in unknown graves on the Monongahela, on the shores of Lakes George and Champlain, and elsewhere. The purpose of this statement is not to call into question the fine contribution of the colonial line but simply to point out that whether in defeat or in victory the burden of assault on decisive French positions was properly assigned to the regulars serving under Braddock near Fort Duquesne, under Abercrombie and Howe at Ticonderoga, under Amherst at Louisbourg, or under Wolfe at Quebec. So it was, in the course of the seven-year struggle in North America, that the British regular proved to be one of the chief instrumentalities to guarantee to the people of the thirteen colonies their marvelous opportunity for expansion westward. In this struggle, it may be noted, the Atlantic was not nearly so wide as some Americans are under the impression it is now.

Thus, happily for the British colonials, the long, discouraging struggle terminated in North America with the utter collapse
of French power. With Canada, the great valley east of the
Mississippi River, and Spanish Florida brought within the bounds
of the Empire by the terms of the peace of Paris of 1763,
Americans could at long last experience a sense of security such
as they had never before known. Defeated France found herself
at the end of the war practically bankrupt and headed for
ultimate repudiation of her huge public debt with the outbreak
of her Revolution of 1789. Victorious Great Britain viewed
her own situation with mingled feelings, for she herself was
encumbered with financial obligations vastly greater even than
those of her rival, obligations incurred not merely as the result
of her own tremendous exertions on land and sea during seven
years of fighting but also in subsidizing her allies in Europe
and even the military efforts of her colonies in North America
in what was after all their war.

With the reestablishment of peace a troubled ministry had
to find an answer to the question, how can the people of Great
Britain be prevailed upon to continue to carry an unprecedented
burden of taxes—to meet not only the ordinary charges of
government, including the upkeep of the navy, but in addition
those involved in carrying the heavy new war debt and in
administering the recent acquisitions in North America—unless
they can be assured that the colonials, the greatest beneficiaries
in the successful outcome of the war, will from now on provide
some reasonable and definite contribution to the common ends
—over and beyond that made indirectly through the application
of the navigation and trade system? The unfortunate effort
to bring to British taxpayers this assurance in some tangible
form led straight to the fateful chain of events which ushered
in the Revolutionary War crisis.

This crisis, having its beginnings in fundamental differences
in point of view, soon led to mutual recrimination with the
settling down of an almost impenetrable emotional fog over the
British Empire. It was an empire in 1775 that knew and honored
a George Washington, a Samuel Johnson, a Benjamin Franklin,
a James Watt, a Thomas Jefferson, a John Wesley, a John
Adams, a William Pitt, a William Samuel Johnson, an Edward
Gibbon, a John Dickinson, an Edmund Burke, a Joshua Reynolds,
an Oliver Goldsmith, a David Garrick, a Cartwright, an Ark-
wright, and a host of other distinguished symbols of a civilization that has never been surpassed in the modern era. Men great and mean were now brought to face one another in hostile camps with Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams pointing an accusing finger at the mother country, while Samuel Johnson, John Wesley, and Edward Gibbon pointed an equally accusing finger at the colonies.

Statesmen did not at first realize, it is important to bear in mind, the larger significance and implications of the British conquest of France's North American possessions. Among other things, it created a new nation—an American nation in which British and non-British elements had already become, though but gradually, fused. Feeling dependent no longer for their safety upon the British navy and British regulars, possessing a new sense of their own great future in North America with the elimination of the menace previously presented along their borders by the world's most formidable military power, growing at last confident in their own human resources and the unlimited wealth that a bountiful nature could afford, the colonials were not slow in indicating by words never before spoken that they considered that the thirteen colonies had at length arrived at the stature of manhood. And so they had, and they were well able to prove it not only in battle but in laying the foundations of their new national life.

The impressive political and economic maturity of the American people by 1775, it is quite clear, came as a result of the passing of an infancy and an adolescence in an environment fundamentally different from that provided for the colonials belonging to France, Spain, and Portugal in the New World, an environment that far from submerging and oppressing their native talents fostered them and gave them scope, an environment vibrating with the force of a fine tradition of individual initiative and personal liberty so that a Patrick Henry could echo in all sincerity, in the heat and passion of the growing revolutionary crisis, what Englishmen through the ages have exclaimed: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

In bringing to a close this commentary on the relations of Great Britain to her colonies before the beginning of the American crisis, it may not be inappropriate, as an answer to many dis-
tortions of the true situation, to give three brief quotations that probably set forth fairly accurately the spirit in which the Empire was administered during this period. Appearing before the North Carolina assembly on December 11, 1754, Governor Dobbs declared in commenting upon the benevolent attitude of the mother country toward the colonies that while the people of Great Britain were

> loaded with debts and enormous, tho' necessary taxes, [the British government] hath not only protected these colonies but indulged them in . . . the easiest taxes (spent for their own support), of any civilized nation on the Globe. . . .

On October 2 of that same year the Connecticut assembly, in adopting "Reasons Considered and Offered" against the Albany Plan of Union, set forth the happy conditions of the American colonies under the then present constitution of the Empire, the people of which, it was pointed out,

> delight in obedience to, and admire the protection and privileges of, the laws of England.

Finally, John Bartram, the distinguished Pennsylvanian, wrote in 1750:

> England already possesses an uninterrupted line of well-peopled provinces on the coast successively begun within less than one hundred and fifty years. She sees them every year augmented by an accession of subjects excited by the desire of living under governments and laws formed on the most excellent model upon earth. In vain do we look for an equal prosperity among the plantations of other European nations, because every power has transplanted its constitution with its people. This surprising increase of people is a foundation that will bear a mighty super-structure. . . .

The people who came to what is now the United States and with determination and spirit of enterprise and sacrifice founded and expanded by settlement the thirteen colonies were, it would appear—irrespective of the issue of good government or bad
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

government on the part of Great Britain—destined by the very nature of the peculiar constitutional, political, social, and economic evolution that took place here in North America, especially in the course of the eighteenth century, to establish at one time or another their political independence. Even George Grenville, prime minister at the time of the passing of the Stamp Act by Parliament, saw the eventual separation of the colonies from the mother country looming inevitably upon the horizon of the future, largely as a result of the existent wide geographical separation of the two groups of English-speaking people, with consequent difficulties of intercommunication. But there existed something more than the lack of physical propinquity. There was the ever-increasing divergence in the institutions and outlook of the two. One group was living in the midst of an environment that while far from static, in view of the operation of the agricultural and industrial revolutions in England, was nevertheless insular, highly aristocratic, and highly conservative, an environment that therefore fostered and preserved accumulated traditional forms and symbols. The other group was, in contrast, living in the midst of an environment that while far from repudiating the past, in view especially of the strength of the attachment of Americans for much of their rich heritage of religious and political principles, was nevertheless dynamic, an environment shaped less and less as time went on by traditional modes of thought and action and more and more by the exigencies of frontier living, of the meeting of everyday problems in the building of America out of a raw wilderness country. One may accordingly in accepting this larger view put aside as perhaps somewhat incidental, if not irrelevant, the exact nature of the events that were to set free the American colonials from the implications of an old-world economy and also an old-world philosophy of state and to give to them freedom to work out their future no longer trammeled by the inevitable vexations and irritations incident to having that future, with all its promise, subordinated to the problems of even a benevolent parent country.