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THE REAL DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE: A
STUDY OF COLONIAL HISTORY UNDER A
MODERN THEORY.

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In 1857, Thomas Henry Buckle published the first volume of a "History of Civilization," in which he set forth in much detail the influences of the aspects of nature upon the course of human development. Whenever we attempt to determine the date of origin of any doctrine, or find the first inventor or discoverer of any fact or method, we meet with great difficulty. It is in most cases impossible to fix on the earliest worker or determine what constitutes the real initiative. Hippocrates, born about 24 centuries ago, wrote a special treatise on the relations of the air, water and place to the conditions of human life, so we may consider Buckle anticipated as to the basic principles of his theory.

In 1867 Carl Marx published his work on "Capital," and brought forward a doctrine that has been formulated as the "materialistic conception of history," according to which economic influences are the main determinants of the course of affairs when human beings are associated in intelligent groups. Like the

doctrine of evolution and the Copernican system, this view of Marx has been bitterly antagonized from both sentimental and scientific points of view, and also like these theories it has been denounced as tending to be subversive of sound government and morals. During the late war, a teacher in a New York Public School was deemed worthy of dismissal because he expressed belief in this doctrine, just as Galileo was brought to book for declaring the heliocentric theory of the solar system, and Mr. Bryan and his associates are endeavoring to prevent the teaching of the doctrine of evolution.

I propose in this paper to set forth a study of a critical period in American history from the materialistic point of view, that is employing for the interpretation of events, the theories of Buckle and Marx. "Business is business," as Mr. Grewgious said to Rosa Bud, and the conciseness of the maxim has appealed so strongly to the world that we find the exact form in the midst of texts in other tongues. To begin, let us examine the physical geography of the Atlantic slope of North America, the region to which British, German and Irish emigrants came in great numbers. This region is distinguished by possessing many excellent harbors, some of them estuaries of large rivers, navigable for many miles by deep draft vessels. The territory into which these harbors lead was heavily forested, the woods were full of game and the streams of fish. For miles back of the ocean shore, the land is only moderately rolling, well furnished with streams of excellent water, while the subsoil is fertile and easily cultivated when the forest was removed. Fuel was plenty and cheap. The immigrants were almost entirely a hardy, determined class, and the British portion had grown up under conditions of political and religious freedom that developed a spirit of self-reliance and sturdiness in defending what they believed to be their rights. Several waves of immigration

determined by markedly different, and, in some cases, antagonistic influences had brought to these shores a considerable population. A high birth rate soon added a large proportion of persons whose attachment to their respective Mother Countries was more incidental than dominant. If we look at a map of the Atlantic shore from Maine to Florida, we will see that each one of the original thirteen Colonies had at least one good harbor, hence as the successive waves of immigration occurred, each group found a lodgment at a different point, and separate centers of population arose. The difficulties of travelling and the lack of any other method of communicating news except by land or sea journeys, kept these units from co-ordinated action for many years. A comparison of the Atlantic coast with the Pacific will show vividly what Buckle has termed the "aspects of nature," for in the West the Coast Range comes down to the shore, thus preventing the formation of harbors. From the Columbia river, entering the sea about latitude 46, to the boundary of Lower California, a coast of over a thousand miles is unbroken by a navigable stream, and only two harbors, those of San Francisco and San Diego, are of practical value. If we were to attempt to set forth the full history of this nation, we should have to go back to the time before the morning stars sang together, for the condition of the universe at any given moment is the consequence of its condition at the immediately preceding moment, and thus the evolutionary chain goes back to the initial differentiation of the primordial chaos. In practical study we start at a period within the scope of abundant written history, and we can find in the scene at Runnymede in the second decade of the thirteenth century, a point of departure interesting to us in the present inquiry.

The American Colonies grew rapidly. Wars and business enterprises tended to bring together the dif-

ferent centers of population, while Great Britain's strong impulse towards expansion and world control, steadily eliminated all but British influences along the strip of coastal plain and piedmont on which the population was mostly settled. In some favorable places the more adventurous spirits had begun to ascend the mountains or to flow southwesterly along the eastern slope thereof. A critical condition arose at the close of the seven-years war, in 1763, when Great Britain acquired by treaty the whole of Canada, and expelled France from those portions of North America with which the Colonists were concerned. France, of course, cherished hope of revenge, and less than a score of years later the hour of this revenge struck, when opportunity was given to assist the revolted Colonies to secure their independence. At the close of the seven-years' war, England was master of the seas, a position which it still holds. Relieved of anxiety about the French, and recognizing that Spain was passing into decadence, British capitalists began a series of restrictions on the Colonies with the object of preventing competitive commercial and industrial enterprises. The physiography of the settled area offered especial opportunities for building and operating ships. We are not surprised that advantage was taken of this, and that several of the Colonies built up busy ports. In the newspapers of the period just before the Revolution, maritime news constitutes a prominent item. The *American Weekly Mercury*, for example, usually devoted about one-eighth its space to shipping news, which like all news in those days was much belated and reminds us of the Inn

"Where village statesmen talked with looks profound
And news much older than their ale went round."

In our own time, when a maritime disaster in the harbor of Melbourne is known on the Philadelphia Ex-

change an hour later, it is somewhat startling to read in the *Mercury* of Dec. 14, 1741, "We hear from the Capes that the ship *Vernon*, Joseph Redmond, commander was on Saturday last lost on the *Shears*. All hands were saved." (The *Shears* is a shoal near the mouth of Delaware Bay.)

The purpose of this essay is to show that the actual step towards independence was taken by the first Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia on Sept. 5, 1774, attended by representatives of all the Colonies, except Georgia. It will not be necessary to present the details of the social life of the delegates, and only scanty materials are available as to the debates. The important point, at this stage of the inquiry is to put the Congress into its environment, for which purpose some details must be given as to the business interests and methods of the Colonists. Fortunately a considerable amount of materials is available along this line. Some years ago, a large collection of letters and business records was found in a house in Newport, R. I. These related mostly to a firm that was in active business in the decade before the Revolution. A valuable selection from this find has been published by the Mass. Hist. Soc. (vol. 69) under the title "Rhode Island Commerce." The treaty of 1763 brought British statesmen and merchants to the full consciousness that world empire was possible, and the comparative indifference with which the American Colonies had been regarded gave place to interference both direct and indirect, that is, by stamp duties and tariffs. Looking at the matter in the cold light of modern economic theories, it does not seem unreasonable in the British government to expect the Americans to contribute rather liberally to the expenses of maintaining the empire. The perils of the seas were then not limited to weather conditions. Pirates and hostile warships swarmed on all the lines of commerce. Merchant ships were frequently adver-

tised as being armed with cannon and "able to make a good defense." Colonial merchants were largely dependent on overseas commerce, both for sending and receiving goods, and it seems fair that they should have contributed to the expense of the British Navy which protected their ventures. The members of the Society of Friends, who up to the time of the Revolution dominated the policy of Pennsylvania, were singularly inconsistent in this matter. They preached non-resistance in an extreme form, yet they travelled back and forth on the ocean and transmitted valuable goods in safety, which could not have been done without the protection of the "wooden walls of old England." They seemed to have ignored entirely this element of commercial operation. It might be said in criticism of these Friends, that they interpreted the text "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" in a different sense from that intended. Joseph Stansbury, who was member of "meeting," advertised "China, Glass and Liverpool Goods," and the question arises how could he have got his goods if the doctrine of non-interference had been adopted by the British government?

Early in the history of American settlement, a differentiation in the character of business developed. This was due to the different physiographic and climatic conditions. The northern Colonies became industrial and commercial; the southern, agricultural. Somewhat conflicting interests arose, among the most important was the attitude towards Negro slavery. The northern Colonies never developed this feature to a great extent, but in some parts of the south, especially South Carolina and Georgia it became a dominating system. Northern commercial interests, however, derived great profits from the importation and sale of Negroes. The contemporary documents show how brutal and cruel were the men who took part in the

business. The records obtained in the Newport house set before us vividly the ghastly and repulsive details of the traffic. It was literally born in sin and shapen in iniquity. The essential details were the importation of molasses, its conversion into rum and the carrying of this rum to the coast of Africa to be bartered for slaves with the local kidnappers. Orthodox Christian and Orthodox Jew joined in the detestable business. The professors of these two faiths, secretly disparaging each other's creed, were able to stand as a unit in defending their business against outside competition and ethical considerations. Before passing to the quotation of some records bearing on the slave-trade, I wish to present briefly the substance of an interesting document that dates from November, 1761. This is the agreement of the Spermaceti Candles, which has all the characters of the modern trust. Spermaceti candles were used in the houses of the wealthy; poor people contented themselves with fixed oils or the penny dip. The Newport cinders, a numerous and wealthy group, invited all engaged in the business to unite in the following agreements: To fix a price for head-matter (the raw material from the sperm whale) and that no indirect means should be used to increase this price; to fix a price below which candles should not be sold; to do no manufacturing for persons not signing the agreement; to use all honorable means to prevent others going into the business, as there was then enough houses to supply the public. If the whalers refused to sell head-matter at the price fixed, the signers bound themselves to build and operate their own ships.

The signers were mostly Newport merchants. The firms of O. Brown and Co. and Nathan Gorham are especially noticeable, these surnames being prominent in Rhode Island history. All the members of the Brown firm sign, leading off with Obadiah, after which follow the juniors, Nicholas, Joseph, John and Moses,

familiarly known as "Nicky, Josy, John and Mosy." We must not overlook the names of Aaron Lopez, Samuel Naphtali and Jacob Rod. Rivera. Of the details of the slave trade a few quotations will suffice.

James Cahoon writes to the Newport firm of Ayrault, from the African coast: "Heare is seven of us rummen that we are ready to devur (devour) one another, for our case is despart (desperate)." David Lindsay writes to the same firm in 1752, that he had on board 61 slaves and upwards of 30 ounces of gold and had "13 or 14 hhd of rum left." In 1763, a letter gives information of upwards of 200 gallons of neat rum was being paid for one slave. There were 20 vessels collected at the place with a total cargo of about 9000 hhd. Peleg Green writes from Annamaboe to Aaron Lopez in 1774, "Our captain gives 190 to 200 gallons for prime men and 170 to 180 for prime women." On another date, Abraham Pereira Mendez wrote to Aaron Lopez of the arrival of the brig Africa from which eleven slaves were sold for 15 pounds sterling, but we are told that they were "refuse." Concerning another lot, we are told that there was "not a Guinea among them." The Guinea Negro is the most stalwart form. All these merchants, Christian and Jew, knew the text in Malachi, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" but paid no attention to such principles when the opportunity was offered to secure large gains. Their ears were deaf and their eyes blind to the horrors of the traffic and to the sufferings of the wretched captives. They dealt in human beings with the same indifference that they dealt in lumber or wheat. Both types of Colonies, Northern and Southern—commercial and agricultural—were involved in the traffic, the former capturing and transporting the slaves, the latter using them. It is well known that Jefferson inserted into the written Declaration a clause condemning slavery, which was stricken out. He says that this was due principally

to the efforts of South Carolina and Georgia, but adds "our Northern brethren, also, I believe, felt a little tender under these circumstances, for tho' these people have very few slaves themselves, they have been pretty considerable carriers of them to others." Slavery was an economic sin, and we need not wonder that passed on to a later period, a long and bloody war was needed to expiate it, and the expiation is probably not yet completed.

A striking example of the character of the commerce in those days is given in the account of Dr. Drowne, who made a voyage on an American privateer. The privateer captured a British ship bound from Jamaica to New York. The cargo consisted of rum and sugar. Of the former, there were 149 puncheons, 23 hhd., $3\frac{1}{4}$ casks and 9 bbl. The manifest reads like one from the rum-runners now off our coast.

The reference to New England rum leads to the presentation of one of the most important economic disputes between the Americans and British. John Adams has told us that we should not blush to acknowledge that molasses had a good deal to do with American independence. In 1733, Parliament passed the Molasses Act, by which very high duties were imposed on molasses and sugar imported from other than British possessions. The duties were so high that smuggling was very profitable, and the character of the coast line was such that abundant opportunities were offered for such methods. We can realize the conditions when we bear in mind the activity of the rum-runners at the present day. The Act of 1733 remained without serious enforcement until the accession of the Grenville ministry and the close of the seven-years' war, when as noted above, Britain found itself master of the seas and dominant in North America. Coming events cast their shadows before, and premonitions of England's greatness were not wanting,

for in 1740 Thomson had written and Arne set to music, the well-known air beginning:

“When Britain first, at Heaven’s command,
Arose from out the azure main—
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sang the strain:
Rule Britannia; Britannia rule the waves.
Britons never shall be slaves.”

In 1763, the duty on molasses was reduced 50% and the strict enforcement begun. The rum-makers were, of course, much angered. Other interferences with commercial and industrial developments followed. It is a well-known principle of economics that indirect taxation can be carried to a much greater extent than the direct form. In 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp-Act, so often mentioned and so little known in its principle and character. It was merely an extension of the long-established system of stamp duties on papers official and private. The Northern people bore with little murmur the heavy stamp duties imposed during the war between the States, but the Colonists were otherwise minded. The resistance to the act was so effective that the revenue collected under it—about £4000—was less than the cost of collection. It was repealed, but by its influence a movement was inaugurated which was later to develop into decisive action. Nine Colonies met in convention, but contented themselves with petitioning the British government. Both classes of Colonies were represented. A declaration of rights was also adopted. Changed conditions in the British government, together with the apparent impossibility of enforcing the act, led to its repeal, but Parliament was not convinced of the correctness of the colonial view, and in the repealer definitely asserted its inherent right to tax the Colonies.

Conditions had changed. As the belted Barons at Runnymede found that united they could overcome the

divinity of kingship, so the Colonists found that by uniting they could accomplish something tangible and they proceeded to do so.

The first Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia on Sept. 5, 1774, with delegates from all the Colonies except Georgia. Conditions in Georgia were somewhat complicated. Some sections were strongly in favor of decisive action, but on the frontier the danger from Indians was serious, and many settlers dreaded the taking away of the British military forces. Georgia came into the second Congress; its delegates were among the signers of the document of 1776. The Congress was offered the State House for its meetings, but took Carpenter's Hall instead, and it is hinted that the object of this choice was to give a little more middle-class flavor to a convention of near-aristocrats. The secrecy with which the proceedings were conducted, and the absence of stenographic notes prevents us from understanding the deeper feelings and the undercurrents of conflicting opinions that must have prevailed. To present before a modern audience the course of events, it would be necessary to have in the city a corps of newspaper correspondents, an organized system of collecting and distributing news and the application of the interviewing method. Delegates would have spoken with much greater reserve if their words had been taken down and "broadcasted" by the methods now in vogue. All we get from the published official records are notes of things done, but from some private sources we get a little further data. The social life of the delegates was very active. They were lavishly entertained by the wealthier citizens. As an instance, Washington, during the 52 days of the Congress, dined at his own lodgings only nine times. John Adams gives us some most interesting and important data. Among these are notes of Patrick Henry's early remarks, concerning the basis of representation. Com-

ing from one of the larger Colonies, Henry might be expected to favor a basis of voting on population, but he was in a highly "unionized" condition then, which contrasts markedly with his attitude a little over a dozen years later, when he was one of the most bitter opponents of the Constitution as framed by the Federal Convention, having even refused to accept membership therein.

According to John Adams, Henry spoke as follows:

"Government is dissolved. . . . Where are your land-marks, your boundaries of Colonies? We are in a state of nature. I did propose that a scale should be laid down; that that part of North America which was once Massachusetts Bay, and that part which was once Virginia ought to be considered as having weight. I will submit, however, I am determined to submit, if I am over-ruled. The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American." Later, Henry said: "I go upon the supposition that government is at an end. . . . All America is thrown into one mass." A later remark by Adams makes us regret that we do not have the full report of the debates, for he says: "There is so much wit, sense, learning, acuteness, subtlety, eloquence, etc., among fifty gentlemen, each of whom has been habituated to lead his own province, that an immensity of time is spent unnecessarily."

After all it is the result of the Congress that interests us, and I may adapt a phrase from Lincoln's celebrated address and say of the gathering, that the world may care little for what was said there, but cared much for what was done there. Up to the closing of this Congress, the distresses of the American people had given rise to little else than petitions, more or less humble, with comparatively little response from the Home government. Many of Colonials cherished the idea that

the exactions which were imposed were due to the Ministry and Parliament, and that the King had a more merciful feeling. In this they were mistaken. In all its legislation, Britain was obeying inexorable economic laws and so were the Colonies although neither knew what these laws are. It is, therefore, with much interest that we take up the results of the Congress. It closed on Oct. 25th, having passed and ordered published a declaration, which, in the somewhat curious phraseology of that period is called an "Association." The word in the sense it was then used is of southern origin. The Association was a document of about 1700 words, beginning with a preamble, expressing allegiance to the King and criticizing the course of the Ministry and Parliament. Affection for their fellow subjects in Great Britain is also stated, as it was believed that a large portion of that group was in sympathy with the Colonial desires. This may have been true of limited number, but we have good reason to believe that the mass of British capitalists and business men were favorable to the restrictive legislation. It is this latter point that gives importance to the Continental Association. Unlike the great document, issued two years later, which set forth reasons for separation and was especially framed to appeal to the world at large, the Continental Association proclaimed a cessation of commercial relations with the Mother Country, and took elaborate steps to make the Colonies economically independent. It ordered that non-importation should begin on Dec. 1, 1774 and non-exportation on Sept. 10, 1775. It provided a ban on profiteering, and set bounds to expenditures, even limiting the amount of mourning which should be worn, returning, in this respect, to the principle of the sumptuary laws of earlier centuries. It also restrained games and sports. The principle now known as the boycott was involved in the agree-

ment. All these provisions show the determination and intense feeling that was abroad in the land.

A striking instance is that the Congress compelled all the delegates to sign the paper, although a considerable minority had opposed its most important provisions. It was held that the will of the majority must rule, and thus an arbitrary decision was made in a convention fighting for freedom, but such inconsistencies are common in human affairs.

I have set forth the details of the origin, course and results of the first Continental Congress, because I believe that its work constitutes the first overt act of separation from Great Britain. Political freedom cannot exist without economic freedom. The essence of ownership is control. The late war demonstrated this fact vividly. It was said by many that Germany had no reason to fear England's navy, for German ships were free to trade and were trading to all parts of the world, but within twenty-four hours after the declaration of war, German and Austrian commerce was swept from the seven seas, and remained so until the armistice. Our Liberty Bell bears a legend that embodies the same thought. The liberty that is to be proclaimed throughout the land is economic liberty, not political or religious. This may seem strange and even untrue to many of you, but if you will turn to the 25th chapter of Leviticus you will find corroboration of the statement. In fact, the text could not refer to political or religious liberty, for the organization of the Jewish Commonwealth was theocratic, and religious liberty in the sense in which that term is now understood was impossible in the ancient world.

A second point concerning the Congress is that it was the first step towards nationality, and nationality was essential to effective resistance. Non-importation, boycott and other economic methods had been already tried, but by disjointed procedures. The Stamp-Act

Congress was made up of only nine Colonies, New Hampshire, Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia being absent, and the records seem to indicate that New York and Connecticut did not sign some of the documents. Declarations and protests were the only outcomes of the Stamp-Act Congress. It was in the meeting of 1774 that Patrick Henry enunciated the true principle, namely, that the time had come to be primarily Americans, and not citizens of any particular state. From this small beginning flowed the stream of events that have led to the nationalization of so much in the administration of our affairs, and my own wish is that before long the "States-Rights fetish" shall disappear from the land. The Congress did not content itself with declaring an economic war with England. It provided supervision of business affairs in all parts of the land. Committees were to be chosen in every county, town and city, by the voice of those qualified to vote for the legislature. It was to be the duty of those committees to observe the conduct of all persons, and to publish in the newspapers the names of all who violated the provisions of the Association and to establish publicly a boycott against such persons.

It must not be supposed that the actions of the Congress met with unanimous approval. A large proportion of the population was bitterly opposed to any commercial antagonism to England. Many were also dissatisfied with the tendency to federalism. A New Yorker said that "foreign power is brought in to govern this Province. Laws made at Philadelphia by factious men from New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas are imposed on us by the most imperious menaces." The voice of the opposing interests was practically silenced by the agents of the Congress, and it was plain that the issue was drawn, and that England would not be indifferent. Colonial governors had urged that non-im-

portation should be declared illegal as restraint of trade, but Lord North took a different view. He is reported to have said that as Americans had refused to trade with the King, they should not be allowed to trade with any other nation. The first restrictive bill applying this principle was leveled at New England, but a second bill extended the embargo to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and South Carolina. The Lower Counties on Delaware, New York, North Carolina and Georgia were exempted, but the hope that this would weaken the effort was not realized.

History is a lottery. The leaders of the secession movement in 1861 counted upon a cotton famine in England to secure interference in their favor to break the blockade, but were disappointed. So, the Colonists were unable to embarrass England seriously, for business conditions in that country had taken on a favorable state. The establishment of peace in some parts of central Europe had created a demand for British goods. Under the conditions thus established, Parliament in Dec., 1775, had passed an act forbidding all trade with the Colonies, thus practically establishing a blockade as with an enemy country. Months before this act was passed, the decisive blow had been struck. Blood had been shed and more blood would of necessity be shed before the settlement was made. The Americans had taken up arms.

"By that rude bridge that spanned the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world."

From the time the First Continental Congress decided to inaugurate a commercial war against the Mother Country and to act as a governing body over the several Colonies in the enforcement of this war, the United States was in essential existence. The document of 1776 followed as a matter of course, and the

greater document of 1787, sealed the fate of states rights. It has taken many years to exercise this fetish of state sovereignty, and, indeed the ghost still occasionally squeaks and gibbers, but its days are essentially over.

The more I read of the contemporary literature of the formative period of our nation, the more am I impressed with the bravery, earnestness and capabilities that characterized its leaders. It must be admitted that the main features of their impulses were British, for in the roll of names we see no marked evidence of either Latin or Semitic strain.

"What constitutes a State?

Not high raised battlement or labored mound,

Thick wall or moated gate.

Not cities proud, with spires and turrets crowned;

Not bays and broad-armed ports, where laughing at the storm rich
navies ride:

Not starred and spangled courts, where low-browed service wafts per-
fume to pride.

No, Men, high-minded men. Men who their duties know

But know their rights, and knowing dare maintain them."