CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

THE American Revolution, if contemplated in view of its ultimate as well as immediate consequences, is doubtless the greatest event of modern times. Its importance was not fully appreciated when it took place, but still excited a great interest throughout the civilized world. It was the main subject which engrossed the attention and called out the energies of British statesmen, during the administration of Lord North. In America, of course, all other subjects were trivial in comparison with it. The contest is memorable for the struggles of heroes, for the development of unknown energies, for the establishment of a new western empire, for the triumph of the cause of liberty, and for the moral effects which resulted, even in other countries, from the examples of patriots who preferred the glory and honor of their country to their own aggrandizement.

The causes of the struggle have been already alluded to in the selfishness and folly of British statesmen, who sought to relieve the burdens of the English people by taxing the colonies. The colonies were doubtless regarded by the British parliament without proper affection or consideration; somewhat in the light of a conquered nation, from which England might derive mercantile advantage. The colonies were not ruled in a spirit of conciliation, nor were the American people fully appreciated. Some, perhaps, like Chatham and Burke, may have known the virtues and the power of the colonial population, and may have had some glimpse of the glory and greatness to which America was destined. But they composed but a small minority of the nation, and their advice and remonstrances were generally disregarded.

Serious disturbances did not take place until Lord North commenced his unfortunate administration, (1770.) Although the colonies were then resolved not to submit to unlawful taxation, and to an oppressive government, independence was not contem-

plated. Conciliatory measures, if they had been at that time adopted, probably would have deferred the Revolution. But the contest must have occurred, at a later date; for nothing, in the ordinary course of events, could have prevented the ultimate independence of the colonies. Their rapid growth, the extent of the country in which settlements were made, its distance from England, the spirit of liberty which animated the people, their general impatience under foreign restraint, and the splendid prospects of future greatness which were open to their eyes, must have led to a rupture with the mother country at no distant time.

The colonies, at the commencement of their difficulties, may have exaggerated their means of resistance, but not their future greatness. All of them, from New Hampshire to Georgia, were animated by a spirit of liberty which no misfortunes could crush. A large majority of the people were willing to incur the dangers incident to revolution, not for themselves merely, but for the sake of their posterity, and for the sacred cause of liberty. They felt that their cause was just, and that Providence would protect and aid them in their defence.

A minute detail of the events of the American Revolution, of course, cannot be expected in a history like this. Only the more prominent events can be alluded to. The student is supposed to be familiar with the details of the conflict, which are to be read in the works of numerous American authors.

Lord North, at the commencement of his administration, repealed the obnoxious duties which had been imposed in 1767, but still retained the duty on tea, with a view chiefly to assert the supremacy of Great Britain, and her right to tax the colonies. This course of the minister cannot be regarded in any other light than that of the blindest infatuation.

The imposition of the port duties, by Grenville, had fomented innumerable disturbances, and had led to universal discussion as to the nature and extent of parliamentary power. A distinction, at first, had been admitted between internal and external taxes; but it was soon asserted that Great Britain had no right to tax the colonies, either internally or externally. It was stated that the colonies had received charters, under the great seal, which had given them all the rights and privileges of Englishmen at home

and therefore that they could not be taxed, except by their own consent; that this consent had never been asked or granted; that they were unrepresented in the imperial parliament; and that the taxes which had been imposed by their own respective legislatures were, in many instances, greater than what were paid by the people of England — taxes too, incurred, to a great degree, to preserve the jurisdiction of Great Britain on the American continent. The colonies were every where exceedingly indignant with the course the mother country had pursued with reference to them. Patrick Henry, a Virginian, supported the cause of liberty with unrivalled eloquence and power, as did John Adams, Josiah Quincy, Jr., James Otis, and other patriots in Massachusetts. Riots took place in Boston, Newport, and New York, and assemblies of citizens in various parts expressed an indignant and revolutionary spirit.

The residence of the military at Boston was, moreover, the occasion of perpetual tumult. The people abused the soldiers, vilified them in newspapers, and insulted them in the street. Mutual animosity was the result. Rancor and insults produced riot, and the troops fired upon the people. So great was the disturbances, that the governor was reluctantly obliged to remove the military from the town. The General Court was then removed to Cambridge, but refused to enter upon business unless it were convened in Boston. Fresh disturbances followed. The governor quarrelled with the legislature, and a complete anarchy began to prevail. The public mind was inflamed by effigies, paintings, and incendiary articles in the newspapers. The parliament was represented as corrupt, the ministry as venal, the king as a tyrant, and England itself as a rotten, old, aristocratic structure, crumbling to pieces. The tide was so overwhelming in favor of resistance, that even moderate men were borne along in the current; and those who kept aloof from the excitement were stigmatized as timid and selfish, and the enemies of their country. The courts of justice were virtually silenced, since juries disregarded the charges of the judges. Libels were unnoticed, and the rioters were unpunished. Smuggling was carried on to a great extent, and revenue officers were insulted in the discharge of their duties. Obnoxious persons were tarred and feathered, and exposed to public derision and scorn. In Providence, they burnt the revenue

cutter, and committees were formed in the principal towns who fanned the flame of sedition. The committee in Boston, in 1773, framed a celebrated document, called the *Bill of Rights*, in which the authority of parliament to legislate for the colonies, in any respect, was denied, and in which the salaries decreed by the crown to the governor and judges were considered as a systematic attempt to enslave the land.

The public discontents were further inflamed by the information which Dr. Franklin, then in London, afforded the colonies, and the advice he gave them to persevere, assuring them that, if they were firm, they had nothing to apprehend. Moreover, he got into his possession a copy of the letters of Governor Hutchinson to the ministry, which he transmitted to the colonies, and which by them were made public. These letters were considered by the legislature of Massachusetts as unjust and libellous, and his recall was demanded. Resolutions, of an offensive character to the English, were every where passed, and all things indicated an approaching storm. The crisis was at hand. The outrage, in Boston harbor, of throwing overboard three hundred and forty-two chests of tea, which the East India Company had sent to America, consummated the difficulties, and induced the government to resort to more coercive measures.

It was in the power of Lord North to terminate the difficulties with the colonies when the East India Company urged him to repeal the duty of threepence per pound on tea, and offered to pay sixpence per pound in lieu of it, as export duty, if permitted to import it into the colonies duty free. The company was induced to make this proposition in view of the great accumulation of tea in England; but the government, more solicitous about the right than the revenue, would not consent. The colonists were equally determined to resist taxation, not on account of immediate burdens, but upon principle, and therefore resolved to prevent the landing of the tea. A multitude rushed to the wharf, and twenty persons, disguised as Indians, went on board the ships laden with it, staved the chests, and threw their contents into the sea. In New York and Philadelphia, as no persons could be found who would venture to receive the tea sent to those ports, the ships laden with it returned to England.

The ministers of the crown were especially indignant with the province of Massachusetts, which had always been foremost in resistance, and the scene of the greatest disorders, and therefore resolved to block up the port of Boston. Accordingly, in 1774 they introduced a bill to discontinue the lading and shipping of goods, wares, and merchandise at Boston, and to remove the custom-house to Salem. The bill received the general approbation of the House, and passed by a great majority.

No measure could possibly have been more impolitic. A large force should have been immediately sent to the colonies, to coerce them, before they had time to organize sufficient force to resist the mother country, or conciliatory measures should have been adopted. But the House was angry and infatuated, and the voice of wisdom was disregarded.

Soon after, Lord North introduced another bill for the better government of the provinces, which went to subvert the charter of the colony, and to violate all the principles of liberty and justice. By this bill, the nomination of counsellors, judges, sheriffs, and magistrates of all kinds, was vested in the crown; and these were also removable at pleasure. The ministers, in advocating the bill, urged the ground of necessity, the universal spirit of disaffection, which bordered on actual rebellion. The bill was carried, by a majority of two hundred and thirty-nine against sixty-four voices, May 2, 1774.

The next step of the minister was to bring in a bill which provided that, in case any person was indicted in Massachusetts for a capital offence, and that, if it should appear that a fair trial could not be had in the province, the prisoner might be sent to any other colony, or even to Great Britain itself, to be tried. This was insult added to injury, and met with vigorous resistance even in parliament itself. But it nevertheless passed through both Houses.

When intelligence arrived concerning it, and of the other bills, a fire was kindled in the colonies not easily to be extinguished. There was scarcely a place which did not convene its assembly. Popular orators, in the public halls and in the churches, every where inflamed the people by incendiary discourses; organizations were made to abstain from all commerce with the mother country; and measures were adopted to assemble a General Congress, to

take into consideration the state of the country. People began to talk of defending their rights by the sword. Every where was heard the sound of the drum and the fife. All were fired by the spirit of liberty. Associations were formed for the purchase of arms and ammunition. Addresses were printed and circulated calling on the people to arm themselves, and resist unlawful encroachment. All proceedings in the courts of justice were suspended. Jurors refused to take their oaths; the reign of law ceased, and that of violence commenced. Governor Gage, who had succeeded Hutchinson, fortified Boston Neck, and cut off the communication of the town with the country.

In the mean time, the Continental Congress met at Philadelphia, in which all the colonies were represented but Georgia. Congress passed resolutions approving the course of Massachusetts, and also a bill called a *Declaration of Rights*. It sent an address to the king, framed with great ability, in which it discussed the rights of the colonies, complained of the mismanagement of ministers, and besought a redress of the public evils.

But this congress was considered by the government of Great Britain as an illegal body, and its petition was disregarded. But the ministers no longer regarded the difficulties as trifling, and sought to remedy them, though not in the right way. The more profound of the English statesmen fully perceived the danger and importance of the crisis, and many of them took the side of liberty. Dean Tucker, who foresaw a long war, with all its expenses, urged, in a masterly treatise, the necessity of giving the Americans, at once, the liberty they sought. Others, who over rated the importance of the colonies in a mercantile view, wished to retain them, but to adopt conciliatory measures. Lord Chatham put forth all the eloquence of which he was such a master, to arouse the ministers. He besought them to withdraw the troops from Boston. He showed the folly of metaphysical refinements about the right of taxation when a continent was in arms. He spoke of the means of enforcing thraldom as inefficient and ridiculous. Lord Camden sustained Chatham in the House of Lords, and declared, not as a philosopher, but as a constitutional lawyer, that England had no right to tax America. Mr. Burke moved a conciliatory measure in the House of Commons, fraught with

wisdom and knowledge. "My hold of the colonies," said this great oracle of moral wisdom, "is the close affection which grows from the common names, from the kindred blood, from similar privileges, and from equal protection. These are the ties which, though light as air, are as strong as links of iron. Let the colonies always keep the idea of their civil rights associated with your government; they will cling and grapple with you, and no power under heaven will be able to tear them from their allegiance. But let it once be understood that your government may be one thing, and their privileges another, then the cement is gone, and every thing hastens to dissolution. It is the love of the people, it is their attachment to your government from the sense in the deep stake they have in such glorious institutions, which gives you your army and navy, and infuses into both that liberal obedience without which your army would be but a base rabble, and your navy nothing but rotten timber." But this elevated and sublime wisdom was regarded as a philosophical abstraction, as a vain and impractical view of political affairs, well enough for a writer on the "sublime and beautiful," but absurd in a British statesman. Colonel Barré and Fox supported Burke; but their eloquence had not much effect on the Commons, and the ministry was supported in their measures. The colonies were declared to be in a state of rebellion, and measures were adopted to crush them.

To declare the colonies in a state of rebellion was, in fact, to declare war. And this was perfectly understood by the popular leaders who fanned the spirit of resistance. All ideas of reconciliation now became chimerical. Necessity stimulated the timid, and vengeance excited the bold. It was felt that the people were now to choose between liberty and slavery, and slavery was, of course, regarded as worse than death. "We must look back," said the popular orators, "no more! We must conquer or die! We are placed between altars smoking with the most grateful incense of glory and gratitude on the one part, and blocks and dungeons on the other. Let each, then, rise and gird himself for the conflict. The dearest interests of the world command it; our most holy religion requires it. Let us banish fear, and remember that fortune smiles only on the brave."

Such was the general state of feeling; and there only needed a

spark to kindle a conflagration. That spark was kindled at Lexington. General Gage, the governor, having learned that military stores and arms were deposited at Concord, resolved to seize them. His design was suspected, and the people prepared to resist his orders. The alarm bells were rung, and the cannons were fired. The provincial militia assembled, and the English retreated to Lexington. That village witnessed the commencement of a long and sanguinary war. The tide of revolution could no longer be repressed. The colonies were now resolved to achieve their independence.

The Continental Congress met on the 10th of May, 1775, shortly after the first blood had been shed at Lexington, and immediately proceeded to raise an army, establish a paper currency, and to dissolve the compact between Great Britain and the Massachusetts colony. John Hancock was chosen president of the assembly, and George Washington commander-in-chief of the continental army. He accepted the appointment with a modesty only equalled by his merit, and soon after departed for the seat of war. For his associates, Congress appointed Artemas Ward, Charles Lee, Philip Schuyler, and Israel Putnam as major-generals, and Seth Pomeroy, Richard Montgomery, David Wooster, William Heath, Joseph Spencer, John Thomas, John Sullivan, and Nathanael Greene as brigadiers. Horatio Gates received the appointment of adjutant-general, with the rank of brigadier.

On the 17th of June was fought the battle of Bunker Hill, which proved the bravery of the Americans, and which was followed by great moral results. But the Americans unfortunately lost, in this battle, Dr. Warren, who had espoused the cause of revolution with the same spirit that Hampden did in England, and whom he resembled in genius, patriotism, and character. He had been chosen major-general four days before his death, but fought at Bunker Hill as a simple volunteer. On the 2d of July, Washington took command of the army, and established his headquarters at Cambridge. The American army amounted to seventeen thousand men, of whom twenty-five hundred were unfit for duty. They were assembled on the spur of the occasion, and had but few tents and stores, no clothing, no military chest and no general organization. They were collected from the various provinces and were governed by their own militia laws. Of this materia