SUGGESTIONS

of

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

Prior to Jan. I '76.

James W. Blakslee.

Thesis for Degree of A.B.

College of Literature and Arts.

Blakslee

U. of I. '96. 1896
SUGGESTIONS OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

PRIOR TO JANUARY 1st. 1776.

The subject will be divided into the five following periods: 1st. Suggestions of American Independence prior to 1763; 2nd. Suggestions made between 1763 and 1770; 3rd. Suggestions made between 1770 and the summer of 1774; 4th. Suggestions made between the summer of 1774 and the outbreak of hostilities; and the last period is from the outbreak of hostilities, April 19, 1775 to January 1st., 1776.

The first period is of a different character from those that follow. Almost all of the predictions were made, not by Americans, but by foreigners, who hoped to see America free and independent some day. There was no American of any importance, who desired or expected American independence prior to 1763. America, however, had a large militia and could have carried on very effective war against their mother country had they so desired. French and other important writers had predicted American independence but they had nothing to base their predictions on except the prosperity and condition of the colonists. The first tax levied by the mother country on the colonists was by Grenville, minister of George III,
and this may be regarded as the first step which was contrary to
the rights of self-government. As early as 1684, Sir Thomas Brown
prophesied in one of his poems, concerning America that "When A-
merica shall cease, to send out its treasure, But employ it at
home in American pleasure; When the new world shall the old invade
Nor count them their lords, but their fellows in trade." Before
1760, Chalmers, a British writer, wrote that since the revolution
of 1688, the American colonists carried with them the policy of
independence.

Dummer, a prominent Englishman, heard great men say that if
the colonists were not curbed in, they would, in time, declare their
independence. Kalm, a Swedish botanist, sent to this country, said
that he was told by Englishmen and Americans that in thirty or
forty years this country would be entirely independent. Choiseul,
minister of France, in 1760, foresaw the struggle for independence
and warned the king about it. We have seen that all these sugges-
tions have come from foreigners and not one of them from a true
American.

Independence had not entered the mind of an American prior
to 1763. The colonists were proud of their mother country and only

claimed the inherent rights and privileges of natural born sub-
jects within the kingdom of Great Britain.

Second Period. Suggestions made between

1763 and 1770.

This period differs from the former one in several respects. We begin to find some predictions made by the colonists and before the end of 1770, we find feeling still growing and taking on an air of independence. In 1763, the French were expelled from Canada and this made it possible for the colonists to dispense with Brit-
ish protection. After 1763, the colonists began to be taxed by the British minister, Grenville, and the Navigation and other acts re-
stricting American commerce were passed. In 1765, Grenville tried to impose certain Stamp Acts upon the colonists but the latter protested and finally parliament saw best to remove them and good feeling was restored between America and England. Altogether the colonists were probably more loyal after the removal of these tax-
es; they had gained their first victory and had learned what to do when they saw a chance to gain liberty in the future.

About this time several predictions of American independence were made. Ezra Stiles, an American, anticipated the independence of the colonists. In 1769, Thomas Hutchinson, royal governor of Massachusetts, wrote "that the natural increase of population was so great, it was probable in a few generations a mighty empire would be formed on this continent. James Otis, an American, lawyer

#Frothingham, History of the United States, p.199.

#Frothingham, History of the United States, p.197.
and patriot, said "that British America would never prove undutiful till driven to it as the last fatal resort against ministerial oppression which will make the wisest mad and the weakest strong." The custom house officers sent out from England were treated in a very rude manner and Britain was gradually becoming more irritated at the actions of the colonists. In June 1765, both houses condemned the disloyal spirit of Massachusetts, the non-importation agreement, and the Boston convention. On April 1765, William Livingston wrote that "Never was there such a pho­ nix state - Liberty, religion, and science were on their wing to these shores. The finger of God pointed to a mighty empire. The mother and son would again be collected in one house, and in proportion to the abatement of national glory in Europe would be the brightness of its resurrection in America. The day dawns in which the foundation of this mighty empire is to be laid by the establishment of a regular American constitution. The transfer of the European part of the great family is so swift and our growth is so fast, that before seven years roll over our heads the first stone must be laid." To Baron Kalb a French agent sent over to this country to watch the events, wrote home that unless the mother country acted differently, independence was sure to follow. Illustrious Frenchmen now uttered remarkable prophesies. Durand, a

---

# Frothingham, History of the United States, p.244.

#1 " " " " " , p.245.

#2 " " " " " , p.245.
minister of London, felt assured that the colonists would form a separate state. Chatelet, Durand's successor, predicted that the day of separation was not far off, and that it must necessarily have the greatest influence on the whole political system of Europe. Turgot witnessed with joy the prospect of an event which would separate America from all Europe. Choiseul, the prime minister for France, saw the signs of the times and planned a treaty of commerce to offer America, with the hope of hastening their independence. One of the leading patriots, who began to be prominent in this period and who has been called "The Father of American Independence" is Samuel Adams.

Judge Sullivan proved or attempted to prove that Mr. Adams was the first man in America who contemplated a separation of the colonies from England. About August 1768, Adams began his active work for absolute independence and continued to work with the one end in view down to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Already Adams saw that parliament was determined to force its acts and that the struggle for independence would be necessary.

We thus come to the year 1770 and we have seen a gradual growth of the spirit of independence. In 1763, no American had thought of such a thing as independence. There have been no very severe actions in this period, on the part of England as we shall see there were in the following periods. Adams and a few more prominent men predicted independence but public feeling was not

# Frothingham, History of the United States, p. 245.

#I
yet ready to accept such a spirit. The legislature of Massachusetts, in 1768, wrote they "would not accept independence if it was offered to them."

In this period a very hostile feeling is manifested. The mother country think the colonists are becoming too stubborn and is determined to tax them. The colonists say the English are imposing on the rights and that the latter have no right to tax them. The Americans refuse to pay these illegal taxes and treat the custom-house officers very rudely. They refuse to support the British army which has been stationed in this country and they insult the royal governors. Many foreigners have become extremely anxious by 1770 to see America make a start for her liberty but so far no legislative action has been taken in that direction.

Third Period. Suggestions made between 1770 and the Summer of 1774.

In this third period things have begun to get very interesting. By 1770, there had been several acts on the part of the English which had stirred up feeling among the colonists. Since 1763, British troops had been kept in America against the will of the colonists. England said the United States needed the troops for protection but the colonists refused to support. On March 5, 1770 the British troops fired into some Boston rope-makers and killed ten of them. Adams said this act "laid the foundation of American Independence!" For the next two years, however, there were no particular disturbances among the colonists as parliament had be-
come more lenient. In 1772, the old patriot Samuel Adams said, "This country must shake off its intolerable burdens at all events. Every day strengthens our oppressors and weakens us. If each town would declare its sense of these matters, I am persuaded our enemies would not have it in their power to divide us... I wish we could rouse the continent". About this time another American patriot wrote, "May every town in the province and every colony on the continent be awakened to a sense of our danger and unite in the glorious cause of liberty". In 1773, when the English attempted to land tea on the American coast at Boston, they were unsuccessful. This action shows a determined spirit on the part of the Americans and shows they were beginning to act together in their common cause against the mother country. A Paris letter, written about this time urging a continuance of the struggle for liberty, runs: "I imagine I see illustrious statesmen, eloquent orators, wise historians, and learned philosophers rising up among you, whose generous souls have espoused the interests of humanity, and are spreading the blessings of liberty throughout the world around them!" The Boston patriots were inspired by the idea that "Harmony and concurrence in action, uniformly and purely maintained,

#  Frothingham,... pp. 265 & 266.

#1 " ... p. 271

#2 " ... p. 246.
must finally conduct them to the end of their wishes, - that is, a full enjoyment of constitutional liberty". A Philadelphia letter printed in Boston in 1773, said: "All we fear is that you will shrink at Boston. May God give you virtues enough to save the liberties of your country". About this time or a little before Cooper wrote the following to Pownall: "At a town meeting yesterday the spirit rose very high. Independence was a word much used. They expressed also resentment against Pownall for advising them to avoid severity in their pursuit against Preston". The following is taken from Hutchinson's letter to Bernard: "...the answer drawn by Adams breaths the seditious spirit which has appeared in Edes' and Gill's paper. The rudeness to the king, to the House of Commons, to the minister of state, the declaration of Independence, the menaces of an appeal to Heaven, and the people's no longer bearing with their injuries without seeking redress - plainly hinting a downright revolt ...". On the fifth of March the first anniversary of the Boston Massacre was celebrated in a manner to impress the people with the events of that memorable occasion. The following is taken from the Boston Gazette:

# Frothingham, p.304
#1 Well, Life of Samuel Adams, Vol. I. p.365
#2 " " " " " p.352
"Zwingle, the reformer of Switzerland, threw off the yoke under which his country was placed. The truth is all might be free, if they valued freedom and defended it as they ought. America should be more determined."

In 1772, the towns began to rise in union against oppression. Voices of liberty were heard all over the country. Many patriots were known to say in 1773, after the exploit of the tea party, "Now the hand is to the plow, there must be no looking back!"

In 1773, March 12, the committee of correspondence was formed and this committee did much work which helped to bring about independence. On September twenty-first 1773, the Boston committee expressed the following sentiments: "We have an animating confidence in the supreme Disposer of events, that he will never suffer a brave and virtuous people to be enslaved! By the end of 1773 we see a change in the feeling of the colonists. Both America and England seemed more determined than ever and conciliation was not probable. In 1770, the Boston Massacre had greatly aroused the American people against England and in 1773, the English were greatly irritated when the American Tea Party would not permit tea from England to land in the Boston harbor.

There were many Englishmen and other foreigners who thought the colonists were preparing for their independence. Although the mother country treated the colonists rather roughly and the spirit of independence was gradually growing, the colonists, in England, hoped to see conciliation and desired only a peaceful enjoyment.

Well, Samuel Adams p. 438.

Frothingham, p. 301.
of the liberty, common to all British subjects and secured to them by their old charters.

Fourth Period. Suggestions made between

The Summer of '74

And Outbreak of Hostilities in April 1775

--

In 1774, parliament passed severe laws against the colonists. The Boston harbor was finally blockaded. No meeting could be held in the colonies without permission of the governor. The press and pulpit all over America called on the people to unite and on the fifth of Sept. 1774, the delegates from twelve states assembled in congress at Philadelphia. The king now writes that "the die is cast. The colonists must either submit or triumph". Both sides then began to prepare for war. One writer wrote in March 1774 "It is now time for the colonies to have a grand congress to complete the system for the American independent commonwealth as it is so evident that no other plan will secure the rights of this people; for this would unite all Americans by an indissoluble bond of union, and thereby make them formidable and superior ---

# Frothingham, ... p. 314.
to any kingdom upon earth". Samuel Adams had hoped that the min-
isters would alter their policy; and if they persisted he saw no
other result than separation and independence. In July, 1774,
after the parlaiment had passed the Boston Port Bill, learned
men said "the last and recent stroke of parlaiment at our lib­
erties has astonished America into a real and efficacious union,
which it is beyowi^the power of Europe to dissolve". Adams wrote
in 1774, "Boston suffers with dignity: If Britain by her multi­
plied oppressions accelerates the independency of the colonies,
whom will she have to blame but herself? It is a consolatory
thought that an Empire is rising in America".

Although the colonists had been struggling with the mother
country for ten years in hopes of gaining its rights, the public
mind in general, still held warm affections towards their mother
country. It was said in South Carolina about this time, that,
"One soul animates three million of brave Americans, though ex­
tended over a long track of three thousand miles." The following
was taken from a paper in August, 1774: "the spirit of the peo-

# Frothingham, ... p. 316
#1 Frothingham, ... p. 341
#2 " p. 349
#3 " p. 349
#4 " p. 351
#5 " p. 356
ple was never known to be so great since the settlement, and they are determined to die or be free". In Dec., 1774, an American patriot wrote, "Let us neither think, write, speak, nor act without keeping our eyes fixed upon the period which shall dissolve our connection with Great Britain". Joseph Warren uttered the prediction, "America must and will be free - the contest may be severe; the end will be glorious".

In June, 1774, the Percy Anecdotes contained the following, "An empire is rising in America. Britain by the multiplied oppressions is hastening that independency which she dreads. We can subsist independent of all the world". In 1774, the "Solemn League and Covenant," which was an agreement signed by over a hundred patriots from different colonies: They wished to suspend all commercial intercourse with England, and neither to consume or purchase any merchandise from Great Britain, were firm patriots and worked for the independence of the colonists. By the latter part of 1774, the spirit of the colonists, to declare themselves free, could have been aroused at any time by the leaders, but prudence advised them to postpone it for a while. It was the general voice of the enemies as well as the friends of Adams, that he was the unceasing promoter of independence. The following is taken...

---

# Frothingham, ... p. 402
#1 " ... p. 414
#2 U.S.A. ... P. 184
#3 U.S.A. ... p. 128
#4 U.S.A. ... p. 251
from Force's American Archives: "It is no purpose to attempt to destroy the opposition to the omnipotence of parliament by taking off our Hancocks, Adams, and Dickinsons. Ten thousand patriots of the same stamp stand ready to fill their places. One more rash and unjust act on your side the water, may divide us beyond the possibility of a union. For God's sake, try to rouse up the ancient spirit of the nation, only grant us the liberty you enjoy and we shall always remain one people". There were many patriots in Montreal and Quebec who favored the independence of the colonists.

In 1774, General Washington wrote, "No such thing as independence is desired by any thinking man in North America. Dickinson and his followers favored yielding most anything for peaceful conciliation. In 1775, Nov. 29th, Jefferson said, "We want neither inducement nor power to declare and assert a separation. It is will alone, which is wanting, and that is growing apace under the fostering hand of our king. One bloody campaign will probably decide, everlastingly, our future course; and I am sorry to find a bloody campaign decided on." Thomas Jefferson drew up the following resolutions in 1774, "Resolved, that the inhabitants of the several states of British America are subject to the laws which

\[\text{---}\]

\# Stille, Dickinson ... p. 137.


they adopted at their first settlement, and to such others as have since been made by their respective legislatures, duly constituted apparently with their own consent. That no other legislature whatever can exercise authority over them ......... "

In this fourth period, I do not think any true American could help seeing the struggle for independence was at hand. The mother country was becoming more hostile and determined to enforce its will against the colonists while the latter were equally determined to support its freedom. Complete independence or complete submission must follow. The action of the English in 1774, when they passed severe laws against the colonists, and the Boston Massacre greatly accelerated public feeling against them and the two nations were soon to enter upon a final struggle in war. A good example of the growing intensity of feeling was shown when before the outbreak of hostilities, a false alarm was given and thirty thousand men gathered to fight. The colonists now began to prepare themselves for war and soldiers were drilled.

Fifth Period:— Suggestions made between

April '75 and Jan.1 '76

This is the last and most interesting period under discussion. Hostilities had broken out on Apr.19, '75 and at Lexington the British fired upon the Americans and killed several of them but the British received a severe punishment on their march back to Boston. This encouraged the colonists and many who had thought they were unable to defend themselves, now regarded the Americans
as standing a good show for independence. The battle of Bunker Hill also displayed what the Americans were capable of doing and stimulated them a great deal. At this time, when the king refused to notice the petitions from his subjects, many Americans changed their view and saw that complete submission or complete independence was the consequence. Men like Adams, Dickinson, Hancock and others saw that if the king and parliament continued to act as they had, a final struggle would soon come in which England would be the looser.

The members of congress, however, held different views from many of the colonists. Mr. Zubly, speaking in congress on Oct. 5, 1775, said he had come there to secure the rights of America and a reconciliation with the mother country. Johnson spoke the following in response to Zubly: "I see less and less prospect of a reconciliation every day; but I would not render it impossible; if we should render it impossible, our colony would take it into their own hands, and make concessions inconsistent with the rights of America - five or six weeks will give us the final determination of the people of Great Britain. Zubly was very much opposed to the thought of independence and said every man who favored and labored for it should be torn to pieces like De Witt. Gadsden speaking in congress concerning foreign aid said that France and Spain would be very glad to see America independent. In May 1775, Adams wished to have congress declare American independence but they would not. It was in the month of May 1775 that a number of persons in Mecklenburgh, N.C., met and drew up the following resolutions, "Resolved, that we the citizens of Mecklenburgh county,
do hereby dissolve the political bands, which have connected us to our mother country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British crown and that we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people..., under the control of no power, other than that of God, and the general congress; to the maintenance of which independence, we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual cooperation, our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor". This was the boldest action ever taken by any set of men prior to this time.

It shows that not only single individuals favored independence but that bodies of men were collecting in the states to support their complete independence. Such action on the part of sets of men tended to arouse the spirit of independence among the whole people and in congress. No action, however, was yet taken by congress towards the acquisition of independence. On Nov. 29, 1775, Jefferson said that it was the will, alone, that is wanting to declare independence and he thought that it was growing very rapidly. He sees the bloody campaign and says it will decide our future course. Independence is freely talked of during this period but no such avowals were put forth in congress until seven months yet, until the declaration of independence in 1776.

Some of the prominent men said in July 1775 that they had never heard any threats of American independence.

---

Thomas Jefferson and Judge Jay remarked that no one desired to see the independency of the colonies in July 1775. In Nov. 1775, however, when no answer could be received from the petitions sent to the king, men like Adams, Jefferson, and Lee saw that complete independence or entire subjugation would soon be at hand. This was the condition of public feeling at the close of the year 1775 and all that was lacking was the declaration of independence by congress. The people seemed ready for it and were willing to support congress in every action they took. We thus have seen the gradual growth of the spirit of independence. Prior to 1763, scarcely any one but foreigners ever thought of American independence. After 1763, things changed. The French had been suppressed and the colonists no longer needed English support. After 1770, the colonists were burdened by taxes which they claimed deprived them of the rights and severe laws passed by parliament agitated the colonists. Then in 1774, the people were irritated by the report of the Boston Massacre and the action of British officers. The battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill in 1775, showed the colonists what they were capable of doing and finally when the king and parliament completely ignored the petitions sent them by their subjects, conciliation was clearly impossible and the only thing left to do was to declare their independence.
BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Adams, C.F., Life and Works of John Adams Vol. 2,3,4
Boston 1851.

Frothingham, Rise of the Republic of the United States
Boston 1890.


Hart, Formation of the Union
New York and London 1892.

Lecky, History of England in the 18th Century.
New York 1883.

Pitkin, History of the United States Vol. I
New Haven 1828.

Randall, Life of Thomas Jefferson Vol. I.
Philadelphia 1871.

Stille, Life and Works of John Dickenson,
Philadelphia 1821.

Wells Samuel Adams Vols.I,2,
Boston 1865.