

THE GUNS OF 75

One hundred and fifty years ago! (from 1925) The Battle of Lexington was fought on April 19, 1775; the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17. What emotions, what echoes, what old historic memories stir in our hearts as we remember those days and dates. When Lafayette held in his hand the musket which fired the first shot of the American Revolution, he exclaimed: "This is the alarm gun of liberty!" To England the war was an episode; to us it is an epic.

Time does not tarnish those events, nor distance dim the glory of days that tried the stuff of which men are made. All that America means, all that it has become, had its beginning at Lexington and Bunker Hill. It meant a new nation, built upon a new basis, with a new relation of Church and State, a new opportunity for mankind - the opening of a new era.

An oft-told story, taught us from our earliest years, it throbs like a drum-beat in our blood, like the echo of the foot-steps of God in time. Emerson said truly that the farmers who stood at Concord Bridge fired "A Shot Heard Round The World." Its flash divided the records of man into before and after, and its echoes will never die while men love liberty and value the rights of man. It was the first act in a drama of history, but, somehow, it reads like a record of our Family Bible.

For history, in its great meaning, is more than a series of events. It is an unfolding of ideas, the fulfillment of a Divine purpose in time. Events do not stand alone. They are linked together by a thread of cause and effect, a law of seedtime and harvest. What went before explains what followed after. If we are to know the meaning of the events we remember today, we must go back of the immediate inciting causes to the facts and forces that lay behind. History is philosophy teaching by example; it is theology acted out. Our sturdy forefathers who emigrated first to Holland, and then to America, bore with them the seeds of liberty. Those seeds nourished by the wise tolerance of the Dutch, they planted in the fresh soil of the New World. They sought the New World in search of liberty of conscience and freedom of worship. Let us never forget that our independence was first religious, then political. Our democracy had a spiritual foundation, our republic a sacred origin. Having breathed the air of religious liberty, by a sure logic our fathers finally demanded the same liberty in political affairs. They would gladly help pay debts incurred partly in their behalf; but they refused to be taxed to that end, unless they were allowed to have a voice in shaping the policy of state. It was the old, high British ideal, forgotten by the motherland and defended by its sons.

The reigning King did not understand the Colonists. They were a long distance from the homeland, and no longer under the mystic spell which waits upon royalty. But they were loyal and law-abiding. As Franklin said, they were ruled "At the Sole Expense of Pen and Ink;" but they could not be coerced. One irritating act after another provoked anger, and, at last, alienation, until men in America began to hate the land which formerly they had loved. The Boston Tea Party, planned in old St. Andrew's Lodge, and carried out by Masons masked as Mohawk Indian, was the last straw. The tension tightened, until finally the tie of allegiance was broken and resentment flamed into revolt.

Early in 1775, news arrived that Parliament, in spite of the pleadings of Pitt, Burke, and Fox; had rejected the petition of the first Continental Congress, declaring that "Rebellion Existed in America." It did, though it might have been averted, like nearly every war in history. On the night of April 18, troops were sent by General Gage to seize the powder stored by the Sons of Liberty at Concord, and to arrest as "Traitors" John Hancock and Samuel Adams, who had taken refuge with Parson James Clark at Lexington. They set out secretly, as they thought, not knowing how alert and watchful the patriots were, and how well organized.

Lanterns hung out in the tower of the old North Church flashed the signal far and wide, and Paul Revere and William Dawes rode through the night ahead of the troops led by Major Pitcairn, rousing the people and giving the alarm. When the British column reached Lexington they found a little company of "Minute-Men" drawn up on the village green, under command of Captain Parker, who had given the order: "Stand Your Ground, Don't Fire Unless Fired Upon. But If They Mean To Have War, Let it Start Here." Major Pitcairn ordered the "Rebels" to disperse, and they refused to move. A shot was fired, apparently without his order, then a volley, and a number of minute men were killed and wounded. With a shout the British marched off to Concord, took what military stores they found, rifled some houses, and encountered a company of farmers.

Again the Colonists, under Major Butrick and Captain Davis, were ordered not to fire unless fired upon. In double file they crossed the bridge and waited, the young fifers playing the "White Cockade." When within a few yards of the bridge, a shot fired by the British wounded one of their number, a volley followed and two were killed. Then the minute men were ordered to fire - the first fired gun of the American Revolution - and the British began to retreat. As Emerson said in his Concord Hymn, April 19, 1836:

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

By this time the whole countryside was aflame with anger and excitement. Men and boys came running, singly and in bands, and from behind hedges, trees, and stone walls along the road to Boston; pouring shot into the retreating British ranks, following them all the way until they were safe under the protection of their guns.

Thus, without previous design, the war began, destined to change the history of the world. Small events, born of human blunder, become great by virtue of the idea and influences back of them, and initiate vast movements. The fight on the village green and by the bridge was hardly more than a skirmish, but it used by a Power other than human to institute the greatest republic on earth.

The battle of Lexington shut the British up in Boston, then almost an island linked with the mainland by a narrow strip of sand beach. To the north lay the peninsula of Charlestown, on which were two hills, Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill. To the south Dorchester Heights overlooked the city. The American Army grew rapidly, as men flocked in from all directions - ill-prepared in all save courage. On June 17 they began busily to fortify Bunker Hill, and the British attacked. Twice the Redcoats stormed up the hill only to be turned back. When they made their third desperate charge they won, because the Americans had used all the powder they had, and were forced to flee, leaving

Warren, Grand Master of Masons, dead on the hill. Lack of preparedness lost the battle - a lesson never to be forgotten by those who are wise!

Yes. it is an old story, my brethren, as familiar to us as the alphabet; but it is a story that makes our hearts beat fast, in which our gentle Craft had an honorable part of which we have a right to be proud. It is the simple truth to say that our ancient Fraternity - faithful, wise and heroic - presided in the birth-hour of our Republic, as it guards its sanctity today. There are those who would belittle its influence, but the facts stand. It was not an accident that Washington and most of his Generals were members of the Craft. The story of the War of the Revolution might have been very different had not its leaders been bound together by the tie which Masonry knows how to weave between men, making them brothers.

What followed we know as we know our family history. The genius of Washington, the dark days of Valley forge, the crossing of the Delaware, the coming of Lafayette, the final scene at Yorktown, the Constitution, the far-flung Republic - it is a story and a tradition bequeathed to us in the mystic continuities of inheritance. America was born - the last great hope of humanity - created by the Will of God and heroism of man, dedicated to the service of peace on earth and good will to men. As in its origin, so in its history, our Republic is a Fraternal symposium, in which many races are being built together into one community - an enterprise the full meaning of which we do not yet realize.

If we celebrate our beginnings at Lexington, Bunker Hill and Yorktown, we do so with no ill will toward the motherland against which our fathers fought, wresting their liberties from an obstinate King and a truckling Parliament. Since then, in the greatest of all wars, Americans have fought side by side with Britons in an hour of common peril and high resolve, for the same principle for which our fathers fired "The Shot Heard Round The World!" The old feud long since gave place to friendship, to deepen and maintain that which is the first duty of thoughtful men on both sides of the sea.

Yet, we do affirm the uniqueness of America, and we are bound by ties of blood, history and Fraternity to keep our Republic true to its high tradition of liberty under law. Today, remembering the brave days of old, when men poured out their blood that their sons might be free, we give thanks to God for our country, reverently invoking His Blessing upon its many races united in brotherhood, upon its unconstrained religious life, upon its passion for education, its cities shining in the sunlight. its countless homes, its pacific spirit, and its promise of a future greater than its past.