

at the time. Upon the reassembling of the General Congress in May, 1776, the great question of independence was for the first time proposed. During the adjournment of the delegates the worst government Great Britain had ever known, encouraged by its most despotic of Kings, had rejected the petition of the colonists praying for redress of their grievances and had resolved upon the most drastic measures to drive their American fellow subjects into submission. An Act was passed providing for the increase of the army and navy and the hiring of seventeen thousand Hanoverian and Hessian mercenaries to chastise the colonists. The King entertained the hope that such a display of force would overawe the rising tide of rebellion, but in this he sadly misjudged his people. He had received ample warnings from America and from his ablest statesmen in England, notably such men as Chatham, Camden, Shelburne, Fox, Burke, and Cavendish that the spirit of freedom in the proud breast of every British subject could not be quenched even by a King and Parliament and that the fundamental principles of the British Constitution would in the end prevail.

When the news of the passing of this Act reached America, the country, as a whole, was determined to resist the invasion of their rights. Fiery editors and pamphleteers preached the doctrine of independence. Thomas Paine's pamphlet "Common Sense" was read in every village and hamlet and more than any other agency diffused the sentiments and feelings which produced the act of separation. Yet in the face of the agitation for independence, only four of the colonies had taken a position, which, upon the most favourable construction, could be interpreted as giving authority to their delegates to vote for a Declaration of Independence, if such a resolution should be introduced. Resistance to the King's forces was held by the great majority to be quite compatible with a desire to preserve the old political ties. A parallel case has been aptly cited in that of the Barons of Runnymede, who had no thought of renouncing their allegiance or changing the form of government when they wrested the Magna Charta from an overbearing King.

On June 7th, 1776, a resolution in favour of independence was submitted to the Congress by Richard Henry Lee and, after some discussion, it was found that the time was not yet ripe to bring it to a vote, and further consideration was postponed for a period of three weeks. On July 1st the debate was resumed, and it was determined upon the motion of some astute politician, whose name has not been preserved, that "the decision on the question, whatever might be the state of the votes, should appear to the world as the unanimous voice of the Congress." On the first vote six colonies were in favour of independence and six were against it and, among those in favour of retaining British connection, was