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### THE REVOLT OF THE British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER LVII.

At first sight it would not seem that the united exertions of the individuals whose characters have been described in the last chapter could have leavened the minds of the great mass of the American Colonists with revolutionary principles; but other agencies had been at work extending over a long period, in fact from the reign of Charles II., who first attempted to fetter Colonial trade but was baffled to a very considerable extent by the energy and decision of the Colonists, and the intercourse with foreign countries which he tried to restrain continued under the disguise of a contraband trade till the outbreak of hostilities. The peace of Paris and the unsettled state of Europe in 1763 compelled Great Britain to keep afloat a large naval force in order to calm the mutterings of the coming political storm, and to please the mercantile interests, a large proportion of the vessels on the North American station were employed at the not very laudable occupation of preventing smuggling—their force being greater than that of the contrabandist of that day precluded the possibility of successful resistance, and, as a consequence, great dissatisfaction was engendered in the minds of those who suffered by the numerous forfeitures; and this discontent extended to the seamen and all the classes who live by traffic. Those facts will account for the frequent and reiterated riots at Boston, which was at that time the principal seaport in America, and whose trade lay almost wholly with Holland, the French and Spanish West Indies, and the Spanish Main. The celebrated tax of three pence per pound on tea was especially devised to break up the contraband trade of the Colonial merchants with Holland. The value of teas annually consumed in America amounted to over \$1,500,000; nearly the whole of this quantity was smuggled

from Holland. The risk of seizure was small, hardly one chest in five hundred falling into the hands of custom house officers. A considerable part of the fortune John Hancock inherited from his uncle was acquired by this means. One of Thomas Hancock's plans was to put his tea in molasses hogsheads and thus run it without payment of duties.

The East India Company had petitioned Parliament that owing to the laxity in the enforcement of the customs laws large quantities of teas had remained on their hands, and that their traffic ran a chance of being annihilated; the plan hit upon to relieve them and put down the contraband trade was to reduce the duty from one shilling per lb. in England, to three pence per lb., payable at the ports to which it should be shipped from the company's warehouses, thus allowing the article to be sold in America nine pence the pound cheaper than it could be procured under the old rate in England, thus at once securing a market, for the article was better than that smuggled, and also a revenue for the quantity actually entered at the Colonial Custom Houses.

The reason why this plan did not recommend itself to the Colonists was the repugnance of the traders engaged in the smuggling business to any measures which would interfere with their gains, and where smuggling did not exist the opposition of the English shippers was quite as bitterly hostile. What followed on the introduction of the tea is well known, and the reason its importation was universally opposed is easily understood. The shutting of the port of Boston and the deprivation of the right to fish on the *grand banks* or elsewhere was the crowning act of the policy which produced an appeal to arms.

The cry that Boston was suffering in the cause of all the Colonies arose and an universal excitement spread throughout the land.

There can be no doubt that the English commercial code was stern and cruel, but in this respect it was neither before nor behind the other nations of the civilised world at that period. A *Colonial policy* by which those dependencies of the Mother Country

in which her surplus population found space and opportunity to exercise their energies and talents, should be fairly and liberally governed was not thought of or organised. The slow process of directly responsible government had not enabled the cry of the Colonists to reach the hearts of the English people, nor could the genius of the elder Pitt, the philosophy of Burke, or the statesmanship of Fox elaborate a system which took more than half a century to bring to perfection which makes their people more intensely British than the inhabitants of the British Isles.

It is true, a Colonial merchant could import or export nothing directly—all must pass through England; nor could Colonial fishermen *legally* sell such proportions of their annual catch as were unfit for the English markets. In the disposition of the produce of the field, the mine, and the forest they were equally restricted, although they managed to compensate themselves by open disregard for the laws. Thus, in 1755, after Gen. Braddock's defeat at the Monongahela the harbor of Louisburg, in the Island of Cape Breton, was crowded with New England vessels disposing of grain and agricultural produce to the French, while the ill-starred British General had to start on his expedition with salt beef and ship's biscuit, although that expedition was intended for their direct benefit. The fact is they were traders and thought more of the profits derivable from commerce than those indirect ones from extension of territory.

The Press, dependent on the mercantile class, followed their lead in political matters. Of *thirty-seven* newspapers published in the Colonies in April, 1775, only seven or eight were in the interest of the Crown; foremost amongst the writers was Samuel Adams, who possessed a notorious talent for robbing men of their characters, many others used it as a powerful lever, while it is said that a pamphlet of the notorious Tom Paine, entitled "Common Sense," was the great and direct agent in deciding the question of independence.

That the British Crown was badly represented admits of no doubt; that a very