1776, he anonymously published Common Sense. This incendiary pamphlet had a phenomenal circulation. Over one hundred thousand copies were issued in the first three months; all told 2½ million were sold. It was a truly epochal success. According to Washington, it effected "a powerful change" in public opinion. Paine, never one to equivocate, sharply focused for the first time the issue of independence, and he also dared to make a savage attack on the strongest tie to England, the sacred person of the King. His demand for immediate and unconditional action, his insistence that continued hope of reconciliation was mere delusion, and his stirring appeal for willingness dedication to a noble cause was, perhaps, the most important single factor in resolving doubt and fear and precipitating the decision for independence.

The text is from Thomas Paine: Representative Selections, edited by H. H. Clark, New York, American Book Company, 1944, pp. 18-34, passim. III. TROUBLES ON THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense; and hope no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves, that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.

Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been interminable, and the period of debate is closed. Armed as the last resource decide the contest; the appeal was the choice of the king and the continent has accepted the challenge.

It hath been reported of the late Mr. Petham (who though an able minister was not without his faults) that "on his being attacked in the House of Commons on the score that his measures were only of a temporary kind, replied, "They will last my time." Should a thought but steal and unsomniously possess the colonies in the present contest, the name of ancestors will be remembered by future generations with derision.

The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent — of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time by the proceedings now. Now is the redemptive of continental union, faith, and honor. The least fracture now will be like a name engraven with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters.

By referring the matter from argument to arms, a new era for politics is struck — a new method of thinking and acting. All plans, proposals, &c. prior to the nineteenth of April, i.e. to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacks of the last year; which though proper then, are superseded and useless now. Whatever was advanced by the advocates on either side of the question then, terminated in one and the same point, viz. a union with Great Britain; the only difference between the parties was the method of effecting it; the one proposing force, the other friendship; but it has so far happened that the first has failed, and the second has withdrawn her influence.

As much as has been said of the advantages of reconciliation, which, like an agreeable dream, has passed away and left us as we were, it is but right that we should examine the contrary side of the argument, and inquire into some of them any material injuries which these colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected and dependent on Great Britain. To examine that connection and dependence on the principles of nature and common sense; to see what we have to

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trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect, if dependent.

I have heard it asserted by some, that as America has flourished under her for-
cour connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never so have
meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true; for I answer roundly that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no Euro-
pean power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched her-
self are the necessities of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she has protected us, say some. That she hath engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expense as well as her own is admitted; and she would have de-
fended Turkey from the same motive, viz. for the sake of trade and dominion.

Alas! we have been long led away by ancient prejudices and made large sac-
rifices to superstition. We have boasted the protection of Great Britain without con-
sidering that her motive was interest, not attachment; and that she did not protect us from our enemies on our account, but from her enemies on her own account, from those who had no quarrel with us on any other account, and who will always be our enemies on the same account. Let Brit-
ain waive her pretensions to the continent, or the continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with France and Spain were they at war with Britain. The miseries of Hanover's last war ought to warn us against connections.

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the meet shame upon her con-
duct. Even bruters do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families; whereas, the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach; but it happens not
to be true, or only partly so, and the phrase parent or master country hath been jestically adopted by the king and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds. Europe, and not England, is the parent country of Amer-
ica. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and re-
ligious liberty from every part of Europe. Either have they fled, not from the ten-
der embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home purs-
sues their descendants still.

In this extensive quarter of the globe, we forget the narrow limits of three hun-
dred and sixty miles (the extent of Eng-
land) and carry our friendship on a larger scale; we claim brotherhood with every European Christian, and triumph in the generosity of the sentiment.

It is pleasant to observe by what regular gradations we surmount the force of local prejudices as we enlarge our acquaintance with the world. A man born in any town in England divided into parishes, will nat-
urally associate most with his fellow pa-
rishioners (because their interests in many cases will be common) and distinguish him by the name of neighbour; if he meet him but a few miles from home, he drops the narrow idea of a street, and salutes him by the name of townsmen; if he travel out of the county and meet him in any other, he forgets the minor divisions of street and town, and calls him county-man, i.e. county-man; but if in their foreign excurs-
sions they should associate in France, or any other part of Europe, their local re-
membrane would be enlarged into that of Englishman. And by a just parity of rea-
soning, all Europeans meeting in America, or any other quarter of the globe, are coun-
trymen: for England, Holland, Germany, or Sweden, when compared with the whole, stand in the same places on the larger scale, which the divisions of street, town, and county do on the smaller ones; distinctions too limited for continental
minds. Not one third of the inhabitants, even of this province, are of English de-
scend. Therefore, I reproduce the phrase of
parent or mother country applied to Eng-
lund only, as being false, selfish, narrow, and ungenerous. . .

I challenge the warmest advocate for
reconciliation to show a single advantage
that this continent can reap by being con-
ected with Great Britain. I repeat the
challenge, not a single advantage is de-
volved. Our own will fetch its price in any
market in Europe, and our imported goods
must be paid for, buy them where we will.

But the injuries and disadvantages
which we sustain, by that connection are
without number; and our duty to man-
kind at large, as well as to ourselves, in-
struct us to renounce the alliance because
any submission to, or dependence on,
Great Britain, tends directly to involve this
continent in European wars and quarrels,
and set us at variance with nations who
would otherwise seek our friendship, and
assist whom we have neither anger nor
complaint. As Europe is our market for
trade, we ought to form no partial con-
nection with any part of it. 'Tis the true
interest of America to steer clear of Euro-
pean contentions, which she never can do
while by her dependence on Britain she is
made the makeweight in the scale of Brit-
ish politics.

Europe is too thickly peopled with king-
doms to be long at peace, and whenever a
war breaks out between England and any
foreign power, the trade of America goes
to ruin, because of her connection with
Britain. The next war may not turn out
like the last, and should it not, the advo-
cates for reconciliation now will be wishing
for separation then, because neutrality
in that case would be a safer convoy than
a man of war. Everything that is right or
reasonable pleads for separation. The blood
of the slain, the weeping voice of nature
cries, 'Tis Time to Part. Even the dis-
tance at which the Almighty nath placed
England and America is a strong and nat-
ural proof that the authority of the one
over the other, was never the design of
brave. The time likewise at which the
continent was discovered, adds weight to the
argument, and the manner in which it
was peopled, increases the force of it. The
Reformation was preceded by the discovery
of America, as if the Almighty graciously
meant to open a sanctuary to the proses-
cuted in future years, where home should
afford neither friendship nor safety. . .

Though I would carefully avoid giving
unnecessary offense, yet I am inclined to
believe that all those who expose the doc-
trine of reconciliation may be included
within the following descriptions: Inte-
 rested men, who are not to be trusted, weak
men who cannot see, prejudiced men who
will not see, and a certain set of moderate
men who think better of the Europeans
would than it deserves; and this last class,
by an ill-judged deliberation, will be the
cause of more calamities to this continent
than all the other three.

It is the good fortune of many to live
distant from the scene of present sorrow;
the evil is not sufficiently brought to their
doors to make them feel the privations
with which all American property is
plagued. But let our imaginations trans-
port us a few moments to Boston; that
sheet of wretchedness will teach us wisdom,
and instruct us forever to renounce a power
in whom we can have no trust. The inhab-
habitants of that unfortunate city, who but
a few months ago were in ease and af-
thriven, have now no other alternative than
to stay and starve, or turn out to beg. En-
dangered by the fire of their friends if
they continue within the city, and puni-
dered by the soldiers if they leave it, in
their present situation they are prisoners
without the hope of redemption, and in a
general attack for their relief they would be
exposed to the fury of both armies.

Men of passive tempers look somewhat
lightly over the offenses of Great Britain,
and, still hoping for the best, are apt to
call out, Come, come, we shall be friends
again for all this. But examine the pas-
tions and feelings of mankind; bring the
doctrine of reconciliation to the touchstone
of nature, and then tell me whether you
can breathe love, honor, and faithfully serve the power that hath created you and awarded into your hand? If you cannot do all these, then are you only deceiving yourselves, and by your delay bringing ruin upon yourselves. Your future connection with Britain, whom you can otherwise love nor honor, will be forced and unnatural, and being formed only on the glad and present convenience, will in a little time fall into a separate and more wretched than the first. But if you say you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, Hath your house been burned? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or child by their hands, and yourself the tried and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderer, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or leader; and what you may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a hypocrite.

This is not flattering or exaggerating matters, but trying them by those feelings and affections which nature judges, and without which we should be incapable of discharging the social duties of life, or enjoying the felicities of it. I esteem not to exhibit barren for the purpose of provoking revenge, but to awaken us from fatal and unnatural slumber, that we may pursue determinate some fixed object. 'Tis not in the power of Britain or of Europe to conquer America, if she does not conquer herself by delay and timidity. The present union is worth an age of rigidly employed, but it is lost or neglected the whole continent will partake of the misfortune; and there is no punishment which this man doth not deserve, be he who, or what, or where he will, that may be the means of sacrificing a reason so precious and useful.

It is requisite to reason, to the universal order of things, to all examples from former ages, to suppose that this continent can long remain subject to any external power. The most sagacious in Britain doth not think so. The utmost stretch of human wisdom cannot, at this time, compass a plan, short of separation, which can preserve the continent even a year's security. Revolution is near a fabulous dream. Nature has deprived the connection, and art cannot supply her place. For, as Milton wisely expresses, "Never can true reconciliation grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep."

Every quiet method for peace hath been, ineffectual. Our proposals have been rejected with disdain; and have tended so to convince us that nothing but variety or continued obstinacy in brings more than repeated petitioning and nothing hath contributed more than that very assurance to make the kings of Europe absolute. Witness Denmark and Sweden. Wherefore, since nothing but blows will do, for God's sake let us come to a final separation, and set leave the next generation to be cutting thorns under the violets, unmeaning names of parent and child.

To say May will never attempt it again is idle and visionary; we thought so at the repeal of the stamp act, ye a year or two undervalued us; as well may we suppose that nations which have been once detested will never sense the quarrel.

As to government matters, it is not in the power of Britain to do this continent injustice: the business of it will soon be too weighty and intricate to be managed with any tolerable degree of convenience, by a power so distant from us, and so very ignorant of us; for if they cannot conquer we they cannot govern us. To be always running three or four thousand miles with a tale or a petition, waiting four or five months for an answer, which, when obtained, requires five or six more to explain it in, will in a few years be looked upon as silly and childishness. There was a time when it was proper, and there is a proper time for its cease.

Small islands not capable of protecting themselves are the proper objects for government to take under their care; but never
is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the continent larger than its primary plains; and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe; America to itself.

I am not induced by motives of pride, party, or resentment to expose the doctrine of separation and independence; I am clearly, positively, and conscientiously persuaded that ‘tis the true interest of this continent to be so; that everything short of that is mere patchwork, that it can afford no lasting fidelity—that it is leaving the sword to use children, and shrinking back at a time when a little more, a little further, would have removed this continent the glory of the earth...

To talk of friendship with those in whom our reason forbids us to hope for, and our affections wounded through a thousand pangs instruct us to detest, is madness and folly. Every day writes out the little remains of kindness between us and them; and can there be any reason to hope that in the relationship expires the affection will increase, or that we shall agree better when we have ten times more and greater concerns to quarrel over than ever?

Ye that tell us of harmony and conciliations, can ye restore to us the time that is past? Can ye give in provocation in far more innocence? Whether can ye reconcile Britain and America. The last cord now is broken, the people of England are presenting addresses against us. There are injuries which nature cannot forgive; she would cease to be nature if she did. As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress, as the continent forgive the mistakes of Britain. The Almighty hath implied in us those inestimable feelings for good and wise purposes. They are the guardians of his image in our breasts. He has impressed us freely the beat of common animals. The social compact would dissolve, and justice be exalted from the earth, or have only a casual existence, were we callous to the troubles of affection. The sailor and the manufacturer would often escape unpunished, did not the injuries which our tempests contain, provoke us into justice.

"O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overspread with oppression. Freedom hath been hinstared round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expired her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O receive the forgiving, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

The Declaration of Independence

As Professor Joseph C. Miller says in his Origins of the American Revolution, "The job that Thomas Paine had begun in Common Sense, Jefferson intended to finish in the Declaration of Independence." While most Americans continued to hope for reconciliation through the winter of 1775-1776, the initial clash of arms at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, and ensuing events and actions brought a growing demand for a separation. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee carried out his instructions from Virginia by introducing a resolution for independence in the Second Continental Congress. A committee of five was appointed three days later to prepare such a declaration. It was drafted by Thomas Jefferson, with some aid from John Adams and Franklin, and presented to Congress June 28. On July 2, Congress adopted Lee's original resolution, thus de facto Jefferson's draft for two days, and, after minor alterations, adopted it July 4. The engraved copies were signed August 2.

This best-known of all American documents did not, as Jefferson said, "invent new ideas." Its central thrust was the familiar contract theory as stated by John Locke, almost a century before. Nor was the bill of particulars against King George entirely accurate. But it did, as Jefferson had hoped, "place before mankind the common sense of the subject, it terms in plain and firm as to command their si