

## Chapter 6

# For Freedom of Opportunity

### FREEDOM FROM WANT

THE PATTERN OF LIFE was set for a tenant farmer living in a wee thatched cottage on the huge estate of an English nobleman. Year after year he and his children plowed the duke's fields, stored feed in his barns, milked his cows, tended his sheep, and toiled in his garden. The pay was small, providing the barest necessities of life, and leaving little or nothing with which to seek a better way. Few schools were provided for the poor in England and there was little hope for change. One evening a neighbor of one of these tenant farmers dropped in to bring the news from London. He carried a little pamphlet, thin as a pancake, which he had purchased for a penny at a London book stall. He was a welcome guest – this neighbor who had learned to read and write in the big city, where he went on frequent trips to sell his master's cattle. The farmer seated him on a wooden stool, lighted a candle, and the family gathered around the table to hear the news.

First, the neighbor read the front-page notice from the publisher, assuring the reader that every word was the truth, because the letter (not intended for the

press) was written by a minister living in New England.

In America land was free for the taking. A man standing on a hilltop could see thousands of acres of the finest corn land cleared by the Indians. Along the Charles River the soil was rich and black. Cattle grew fat on the long thick grass, and milk was cheap, a penny a quart. The great crop was Indian corn, which grew wherever the seed was planted. One man paid about \$1.60 for seed, traded his corn crop to the Indians for beaver pelts, and sold the furs for \$1600. Turnips, parsnips, carrots, peas, cucumbers, and pumpkins grew larger in America than in England. Greens, onions, herbs, berries, grapes, fruits, and nuts grew wild in the woods. There were many turkeys, partridges, wild ducks, and geese. Pigeons were so numerous that their flights sometimes darkened the earth like a cloud. Deer and bear roamed in the forests. The minister wrote enthusiastically about the abundance of fish – cod, herring, mullets, mackerel, haddock, crabs, and oysters. He declared that he had seen lobsters weighing as much as sixteen pounds and had heard of others weighing twenty-five pounds. Lobsters were so plentiful that even small boys could catch all they could eat. Such a

variety of food was unknown to the poor in Europe, who always seemed hungry. It was free in New England for those who hunted, fished, and farmed.

In a country where land was easy to obtain and the woods were thick with trees, any man could own his home, be he ever so poor. Stone, too, was plentiful. Not far from Salem was a place with “marblestone” which the settlers called Marble Harbor. The minister praised the climate of Massachusetts.

“A sup of New England Aire,” he said, “is better than a whole draft of Old England’s Ale.”

The winters were cold but wood was plentiful. A poor servant with fifty acres of land could afford to use more logs for heating than many a nobleman in England. “Here is good living for those who love good fires.”

It was a long letter, nearly 5000 words, praising New England. In closing, the minister wrote:

We that are settled in Salem make what hast (haste) we can to build Houses, so that within a short time we shall haue a faire Towne . . . . We haue plentie of Preaching . . . . And thus we doubt not but God will be with us, and IF GOD BE WITH US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?

The New World was a land of plenty. Without money to pay for the voyage, how could they get there? Alas! America was only a dream. Then, months later, the neighbor returned from another selling trip to London. He brought good news.

## **INDENTURED SERVANTS PROVIDE WORKMEN FOR THE COLONIES**

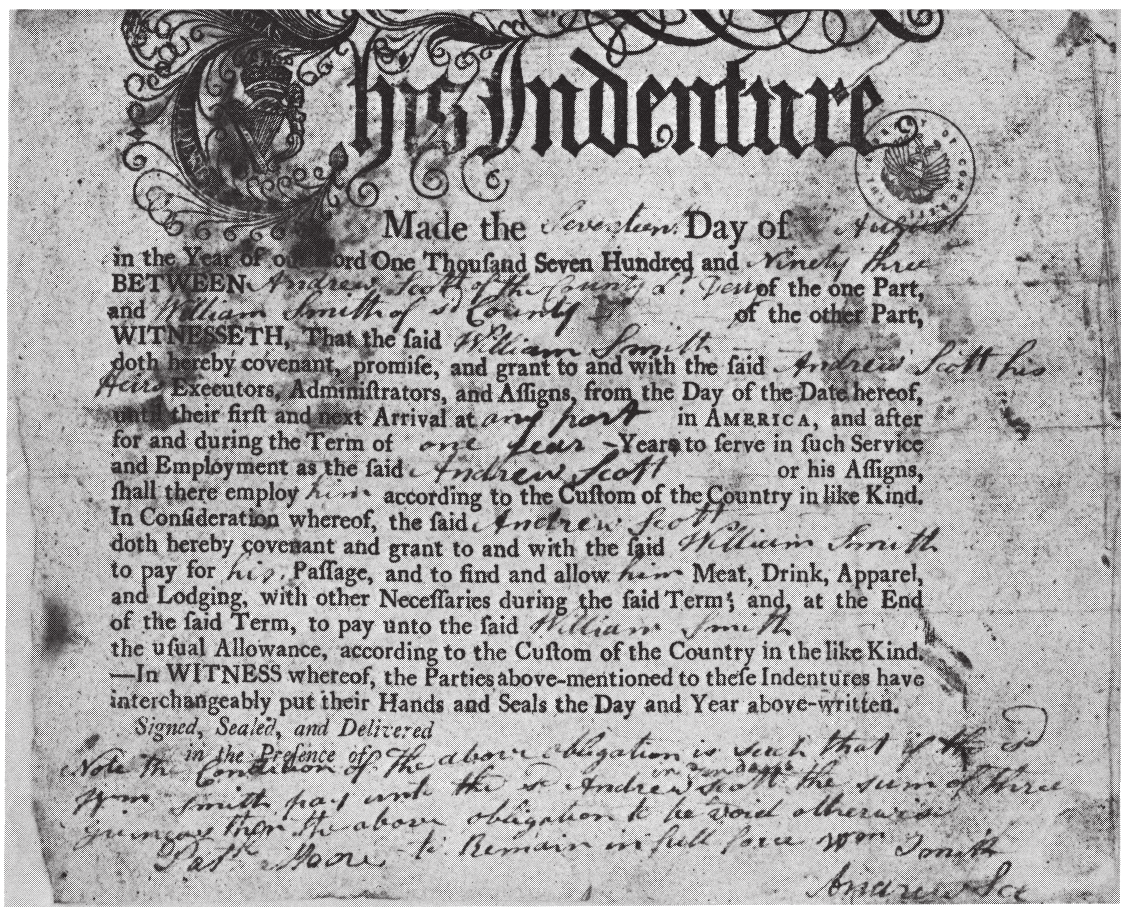
THE PLANTERS IN AMERICA needed men in their fields and shops. They

advertised for help in London and seacoast towns. They offered to pay the passage across the ocean for men, women, and families willing to bind themselves to a term of service until they had repaid their master for the cost of the voyage. To guarantee their freedom after a specified number of years, both master and servant signed duplicate papers, indented or notched in the same places to prove the agreement was mutual and legal. When a servant’s time expired, he and his master took their papers to an officer of the law. One paper was placed on top of the other to prove that the notches were identical and were made at the same time. Sometimes, both parts were written on one sheet which was torn with jagged edges. Then the master and servant fitted them together to prove that the two pieces were part of one sheet of paper. These papers protected the rights of the servants to become freemen when their time expired. The papers were known as “indentures.” Thus, men and women possessing these papers came to be called “indented” or “indentured” servants. They were not treated as slaves. They had rights in the courts to protect them from unjust and cruel masters.

Although the abuses of the system were many, tens of thousands from England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, and other countries were willing to sell themselves into bondage to escape poverty and want in their homelands. For them, America was a land of hope as well as a land of plenty. When their debt was paid, they could build their own homes, plow their own fields, raise their own cattle, and market their own products.

In fact, this trade in servants became so





Photograph of original indenture between William Smith and Andrew Scott, witnessed by Patrick Moore. Both Smith and Scott received identical copies with edges torn in the same way to prove the indenture was legal. When presented in court, a judge declared that the servant had completed the time required to pay for his passage and was free to go his own way.

THIS INDENTURE made the seventeenth day of August in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and ninety three, between Andrew Scott of the County L. Derry of the one part, and William Smith of said County . . . of the other part, WITNESSETH, that the said William Smith doth hereby covenant, promise, and grant to and with the said Andrew Scott, his heirs, administrators, and assigns, from the day of the date hereof, until their first and next arrival at any port in America, and after for and during the term of one year to serve in such service and employment as the said Andrew Scott or his assigns, shall there employ him according to the custom of the country in like kind. In consideration whereof, the said Andrew Scott doth hereby covenant and grant to and with the said William Smith to pay for his passage, and to find and allow him meat, drink, apparel, and lodging, with other necessaries during the said term; and, at the end of the said term, to pay unto the said William Smith the usual allowance, according to the custom of the country in like kind. - In WITNESS whereof, the parties above-mentioned to these indentures have interchangeably put their hands and seals the day and year above-written.

SIGNED, SEALED, AND DELIVERED IN THE PRESENCE OF  
PATRICK MOORE

William Smith  
Andrew Scott

(The added note in Moore's handwriting states that Smith can be free before his term is completed by paying Scott three guineas.)

profitable that thousands of persons, including young children, were kidnapped and sold into servitude in the colonies. The King used the system to get rid of criminals and undesirables. Many of these “undesirables,” however, had been thrown into prison for political and religious reasons, and were not guilty of crime. They made good citizens in the New World. Two of the signers of the Declaration of Independence came to this country as indentured servants. Twenty Negroes sold in Virginia by a Dutch captain in 1619 were more like indentured servants than slaves. Actual slavery came later.

Of course, there were indentured servants who did not live up to their bargains. The following excerpt from a colonial paper is one of many advertisements for runaway servants:

Six Pounds Reward

RAN AWAY from the subscribers, two servant lads, one named JAMES HAMBLETON, seventeen years of age, about five feet three and four inches high, wears his own red hair, a little knock-kneed; had on a new felt hat, a check shirt, striped outside jacket, a silk vest, new leather breeches, and old shoes.

The other named WILLIAM HALL, about the same age and height, full face and eyes, down look, and had light colored hair; had on a blue and white striped vest, a kersey jacket, a coarse linen shirt with a patch on the left shoulder, striped trousers, and a pair of double-soled calfskin shoes with square brass buckles in them. Whoever takes up said servants and secures them, so that their masters may have them again, shall have the above reward, or THREE POUNDS for either of them, and reasonable charges, paid by

JOHN HILLIAS  
JONAH WOOLMAN

Skilled tradesmen and professional men, as well as laborers, came to this country as indentured servants seeking freedom from

**A** PLACE in the Country is wanted for a likely, active NEGRO GIRL, who is about nine years old, and has had the small pox; she is to be bound until twenty-four years old.— For further particulars enquire of the Printer.

Sometimes owners freed the children of their slaves when they were old enough to take care of themselves. These Negroes were given legal papers assuring their freedom at a given time, and these papers were recognized by the courts.

**T O B E S O L D,**  
**T**HE TIME of an English servant Man, by trade a blacksmith, and understands forging gun barrels. Enquire of the Printer.

Only the time of an indentured servant could be sold. This advertisement offers the time an English immigrant has yet to serve to pay back the expenses of his voyage to America.

want. The desire to possess land is strong in the Anglo Saxon and Celtic peoples of northern Europe. Many humbled themselves in servitude to win a title to fifty acres of land when they became freemen in America. Without these servants to build up the colonies, it would have taken England a longer time to gain a foothold in the New World. To the poor in Europe, America was a land of promise. Even debtors, thrown into prison, found a haven in the New World.

**GEORGIA IS  
FOUNDED FOR DEBTORS**

IN ENGLAND at this time whole families were thrown into prison for debt.



In jail they could not earn money to pay their debts. They lived on in the filthy, wretched prisons until they died. Many kind-hearted Englishmen were moved to pity by the plight of these unfortunate people. The support of these prisoners, poor as it was, made the taxpayers complain of the burden.

A rich and kindly man, James Oglethorpe, asked his friends and Parliament to help him provide the funds to start a colony where these debtors could work to support themselves. The men who invested money in the colony expected some profits and believed that Oglethorpe could make the venture pay. George II favored the founding of the colony because it would place Englishmen farther south to push the Spaniards back and hold them in Florida. The new settlement would protect Carolina, founded in 1663 as a grant to proprietors who were favorites of the King. Oglethorpe's colony was named Georgia in honor of King George and was the last of the thirteen colonies. It was a proprietary colony, in a way, under Oglethorpe's direction. Oglethorpe was granted a charter in 1732, the year George Washington was born. In January of the following year, Oglethorpe arrived at Charleston, South Carolina, with his first colonists, where he was received cordially by the governor and given a pilot to guide his ships to the Savannah River.

Since the debtors had nothing at all, Oglethorpe's company furnished passage, food, and clothing for a year until they could harvest their first crop. The father of each family was given fifty acres of land and a start in cattle, hogs, and sheep. Many families who could afford to pay their way migrated to Georgia from England, Scot-

land, Ireland, and Germany. The men who invested their money in this colony had visions of gaining riches in the silk and wine industries. These adventurers asked the colonists to plant mulberry trees, which they did. In spite of the mild climate, silkworms did not thrive in Georgia. In a new country, where land was plentiful, the farmers planted rice and sugar cane and worked in the fields. Raising silkworms was a tedious, stay-at-home chore which did not appeal to men in a country rich with game. They planted the grape vines but failed to make much wine.

Although Oglethorpe did much to make his colonists happy and successful, the colony did not prosper so much as those farther north.

Some of the debtors were not thrifty. They failed to take care of themselves in the New World as they had failed in the Old World. Like all of the proprietary colonies, except Pennsylvania, Georgia eventually became the property of the Crown.

## **LITTLE TRADE BEGINNINGS OF OUR GREAT INDUSTRIAL NATION**

INTO THE HARBORS along the Atlantic Coast sailed boatloads of Europeans. They were seeking freedom from want, food to eat, clothes to wear, and fires to warm them. As soon as these simple needs were filled, they grew "trade-minded." They were no longer content merely with freedom from want. Many desired to own a farm, a shop, a store, a mill, a factory, a fishing boat, a merchant vessel, and to go into business for themselves.

Land was cheap, sometimes free for the taking. Most families built their own

homes and raised their own food. To provide other needs and 'some of the luxuries, most farmers made something to sell or trade from the natural resources of the country. In the northern colonies during the winter, farmers cut down trees. From pine and spruce they made poles for masts on sailing ships. White and red oak were used for ship timber and they had a ready market in the shipbuilding industry in England and the colonies. From the refuse of pine forests they made pitch, tar, turpentine, rosin, and potash. In farm homes, barrels, shingles, and clapboards were made by hand. These products were traded for merchandise made in neighboring colonies and in England. Women and girls made linen from flax grown in the fields and woolen cloth from the fleece of barnyard sheep. In early colonial days it was hard to tell who was a farmer and who was a manufacturer, because nearly every man had some little business of his own.

One product led to another from the natural resources of the country. The forests supplied the timber that built the boats for the fishing industry. These vessels were constructed in sheltered coves on the seaboard, on the banks of larger rivers, and sometimes in the deep woods where the timber was cut, miles from water. Then, in the winter, the boats were drawn on sledges to the nearest stream.

When Captain John Smith was in Jamestown, he learned from the Indians that gold and copper deposits could be found along the Atlantic Coast north of the Virginia settlement. Several years after he had returned to England, he had been employed by some merchants to explore the North Atlantic Coast, which he named New England. Not finding either gold or

copper, John Smith wrote in his *Description of New England* in 1614:

Fish and furs were now our guard. By our late arrival and long lingering about the whale, the prime of both those seasons were past ere we perceived it, we thinking that their seasons served at all times. But we found it otherwise, for, by the middle of June, the fishing failed. Yet in July and August some was taken, but not sufficient to defray so great a charge as our stay required. Of dry fish we made about 40,000; of salted fish, about 7000. While the sailors fished, myself with eight or nine others that might best be spared, ranging the coast in a small boat, we got for trifles near 1100 beaver skins, 100 martins, and near as many otters, and most of them within the distance of twenty leagues.

John Smith and his men probably boiled ocean water to get the salt to "cure" their fish. The early colonists followed this tedious process, using 250 gallons of water to obtain a single bushel of salt. In 1629 Cape Cod fishermen walking along the rocky shore noticed that salt was sticking to their shoes. They discovered that the salt covering the rocks had evaporated from the tide water. They tried it on their fish and liked the flavor. Soon, salt was made by filling shallow vats with ocean water and leaving the water to be evaporated by the sun and the wind. Thus, because the fishing business created a demand for salt, another industry was started. Lumbering, shipbuilding, and fishing grew together. Then the demand arose for merchants who would sell these products in markets at home and abroad.

Less than fifteen years after the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts, a sawmill was built at Salmon River Falls on the Piscataqua in New Hampshire. This was years before England had a sawmill. These mills, built near streams and operated by



water power, sawed the lumber that made the ships that carried the fish, lumber, and fur of the colonies to the West Indies and ports of Europe. Salem, Boston, Plymouth, Dorchester, Salisbury, and New Bedford were shipbuilding centers in early days. In 1692 one man had twenty-one vessels trading with the West Indies, the isle of Jersey, and the ports of France. Sometimes a skipper sold both his vessel and his cargo in a foreign port, returning home as a passenger on another ship.

In New England where the winters were long and the growing seasons were short, more and more people turned from farming to trading as a means of earning a living. This created a demand for more things to sell and home manufacturing increased. On long winter evenings boys in farm families hammered out homemade nails in tiny forges in chimney corners. Yankee traders brought bales of raw cotton from islands in the West Indies and sold them to farmers in the colonies. The farmers' wives and children carded and spun the cotton. The fathers, many of whom had learned to weave in the old country, plied their looms during spare time from labor in their fields. When woven and dyed, the cloth was taken to the nearest town and offered for sale or trade. In fact, every family was expected to make some article of commerce. In Massachusetts in 1656, a law was passed demanding that each family spin three pounds of linen, cotton, or wool each week for thirty weeks of each year. This law excused them from spinning during the twenty-two weeks of the growing season in spring and summer.

In the beginning, commerce thrived on these homemade articles and farm products. Gradually, the demand grew for more goods than home manufacturing

could produce. This situation created a demand for mills and factories to produce more goods. Manufacturing outside the home made slow progress because of the lack of capital and scarcity of labor and equipment.

## **CAPITAL, LABOR, AND MONOPOLY IN COLONIAL DAYS**

**MONEY FOR INVESTMENT** is commonly called "venture capital." Although the colonists had food, clothing, and shelter, and were not in want, they had little money or venture capital. Business was carried on by barter. Taxes were paid and trades made in furs, cattle, corn, leaden bullets, and beaded belts called wampum. In Virginia tobacco was used for money to pay taxes and fines. At a meeting of the House of Burgesses in 1629, a law was passed that every master of a family and every freeman must pay a tax of five pounds of tobacco to support three Indians who lived in the colony and who were public charges. Another law stated that everyone absent from church on Sunday was to be fined one pound of tobacco.

The London Company furnished the money to build the first factory in the colonies. Captain Newport, on his second voyage to Jamestown in 1608, brought over eight skilled workmen from Poland and Germany to make glass, pitch, tar and soapashes. The following year, in the woods about a mile from Jamestown, the company built a "glass house" to make beads and trinkets to trade for furs brought in by Indian trappers. During the first year this plant also produced fifty barrels of tar, pitch, and soapashes. The workmen dug a well in the fort, made nets for fishing, and



### A TOBACCO PLANTATION IN THE WEST INDIES

According to tradition, a sailor who came with Columbus in 1492 took tobacco home and smoked a pipe of it to show his friends how the Indians used the plant. At first, Europeans raised tobacco in their gardens as a curiosity, and did not use it. As the smoking habit increased, tobacco became the leading export from some colonies in the New World. Sometimes, colonists to Virginia stopped over in the West Indies to learn how to raise and market tobacco. In 1619, the first Negro servants were sold in Jamestown to work in the tobacco fields as in the West Indies.

erected a block house for the Indian trade. They built twenty houses for themselves, and cleared, plowed, and planted forty acres of land. Then, during leisure time, they made clapboards and wainscot by hand to be shipped to the London Company for sale in England. A "master of all trades" was the factory toiler in colonial days. The "glass house" near Jamestown was the first manufacturing plant to operate in what is now the United States. Ten years later the company erected an iron works in the same forest. In a few years both little factories were destroyed in an Indian attack on the Jamestown settlement. The officials of the London Company made further efforts to establish manufacturing in Virginia, but the colonists

preferred to be planters and raise tobacco.

To get manufacturing started in New England, where money was scarce, the people turned to barter. In town meetings the people voted to give land and special privileges to anyone or any group willing to invest money in a mill or a factory. In 1665 Groton, Connecticut, gave 20 acres of land within the limits of the town to a group of men to erect a mill for grinding corn. At the same time the townsmen voted that the property would be free of taxes for twenty years. They also prohibited the erection of another mill for the same length of time.

In 1646 a man in Lynn, Massachusetts, was granted a monopoly for fourteen years on his invention for using water power in mills, including a sawmill, "so his study and



cost may not be in vayne or lost.” The town of Lynn became famous for shoes instead of lumber. The first shoemaker settled there only fifteen years after the Pilgrims arrived. As cattle became more plentiful in New England, leather was tanned for shoes and clothing. The first tannery was in Lynn. The town became a great center of the shoemaking industry. The fisheries furnished oil for tanning and the woods were full of oak and sumac.

In 1641 the townsmen of Salem, Massachusetts, voted to give two acres of public land to each of three men if they would start a glass factory. Since the men lacked enough capital to complete the factory, the citizens in town meeting voted to lend them tax money which they were to repay, “if the work succeeded, when they were able.”

The colonial manufacturer had a more difficult time in getting helpers than he did in getting money. Although hundreds of skilled mechanics came to America as industrial servants, there was always more to be done than people to do it. Some men made a business out of supplying workmen for the manufacturers. This was true especially in the middle colonies of Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Advertisements like the following appeared in colonial papers:

Just Arrived

On Board The Brigantine, Friendship,

John Bean, Master, from Dublin

A NUMBER of healthy indented SERVANTS, Men and Women, among whom are several valuable Tradesmen, whose times are to be disposed of, on reasonable terms, by JOHN LYNCH, at the corner of Third and Lombard Streets, or the master on board vessel, now lying off the Drawbridge.

(Dunlap’s Pennsylvania Packet.)

Many a factory owner failed in business because the “indentured servants” left his employ when their terms of servitude were ended. These workmen had come from countries where the land was largely owned by noblemen and aristocrats. When free, both skilled mechanics and common laborers in the colonies preferred to struggle on a farm and work for themselves, rather than live easily in a town and work for wages. It was land that lured workmen from the mills and hindered the growth of manufacturing. The old-world idea that a gentleman lived on the land greatly influenced the way of life in the British colonies, where even a poor servant could become a land-owning aristocrat. Agriculture was considered more respectable than commerce. Today, the average citizen of this nation desires to own his own home, be it large or small.

Since labor was always scarce and costly, all kinds of labor-saving machinery were welcomed and America became a land of inventions. The English colonists from the beginning took a decided stand against monopoly. They passed laws to prevent a few men from controlling the goods and services that contributed to the welfare of all the people. As early as 1641, the legislators of Massachusetts decreed “there shall be no monopolies granted or allowed among us but of such new inventions as are profitable to the country, and that for a short time.” Men were given monopolies to invest their money in mills and factories to help a community, but these all had time limits placed upon them. The colonists who had come to this country for freedom of opportunity made an effort to maintain this privilege for all. They resented attempts to deprive them of the freedom of buying and selling at their own free will.

When the London Company tried to get back Virginia after James I had taken the settlement from them, the House of Burgesses, established by the trading company, voted to belong to the Crown. The planters declared that a return to ownership by the London Company would give that group of men a monopoly of their trade. Freedom of opportunity, sometimes called free enterprise, lured men across three thousand miles of ocean to venture their lives and fortunes in the New World.

### **NORTH AMERICA WAS COLONIZED BY TRADERS.**

IN THE RACE for territory in the Americas, France, England, and the Netherlands depended largely upon trading companies to populate their colonies. Usually, these corporations operated under government charters which gave them a monopoly on trade for a specified number of years.

The Cent Associés, a French trading company headed by Champlain, received a monopoly on the fur trade forever and on all other commerce for fifteen years. In spite of this monopoly, farmers and tradesmen slyly set traps in the woods. They sold pelts to independent buyers instead of to the company that had brought them to Canada. However, the monopolies of trading companies hindered the growth of population in Canada and discouraged manufacturing. Although the shipbuilding industry made a feeble start and some grain was milled for export, the fur business absorbed the energy of New France.

The Netherlands gained a foothold in the New World by granting a charter to the Dutch West India Company. In the

instructions issued to colonists in January of 1625 is the following paragraph:

The Director of New Netherland shall give the colonists and other free persons full permission to trade in the interior and to catch the animals with the skins, but they must deliver up the said skins and goods to the Company at the price for which we obtain them at the trading place from the Indians, and he shall not permit them, by selling the skins to others, to make the Company pay a higher price.

The King of England did not grant such sweeping privileges of monopoly to the Plymouth Company and the Virginia Company, although both were purely commercial enterprises for profit. In order to get timber, furs, and minerals, it was necessary for these companies to maintain settlements for families who would produce these articles for sale. Not finding gold and silver and sudden riches, the English colonists settled down to the hard task of cutting timber and planting crops, through which prosperity came the slow way.

When tobacco became an important export in Virginia, the Crown saw a chance to gain revenue by taxing the article. By the time the adventurers of the Virginia Company were hopeful of profits on their investments, the charter was revoked in 1624. Virginia became a Crown colony. The trading companies did not last in the British colonies because the settlers wanted free enterprise for themselves. The settlers did not want to be limited to trade through the company. Therefore, more emigrants came to the English settlements. Here they could eventually have more freedom of opportunity than in the French and Dutch colonies which were largely controlled by trading companies.

The Dutch West India Company lost its



New Netherland colony to the English, who greatly outnumbered the Dutch. England claimed this region under the Plymouth and Virginia charters. Late in August of 1664, a fleet of four men-of-war cast anchor in the harbor of New Amsterdam. On the four English vessels were trained soldiers. Stuyvesant, governor of New Netherland, had less than a hundred men to defend his town. He called a meeting of the leading citizens who advised surrender after securing the best terms possible. Colonel Richard Nicolls, the English commander and new governor, promised to follow the terms suggested by Stuyvesant if the fort would surrender. Stuyvesant asked that the people be permitted: to keep their houses and lands; to have the privilege of remaining there or returning to the Netherlands;

#### PETER STUYVESANT

Peter Stuyvesant, Dutch governor of New Netherland was enraged when he received the summons to surrender New Amsterdam to the commander of the British fleet.



to have liberty of conscience; and the right to choose their local officers by vote. Nicolls agreed.

It was the eighth of September and a sad day for the governor who had ruled New Netherland for seventeen years. Peter Stuyvesant, hobbling on a wooden leg, led his Dutch troops down Beaver Street with drums beating and flags flying to board the *Gideon* for the Netherlands. Three years later, he returned to his farm, the "bouwery" on the east side of Manhattan Island to end his days in peace among his Dutch and English neighbors. His New Amsterdam had another name, New York, and he had another friend, Colonel Nicolls.

Many of the Dutch citizens welcomed the change to English rule which gave them more freedom of opportunity. Nicolls proved to be a wise and popular governor. New York began to grow into a flourishing colony. The city began to spread over the island of Manhattan under a form of government which encouraged individual enterprise. The Dutch gradually became as jealous of their rights as any Englishman. They took an active part in their government. Through town meetings and colonial assemblies the early settlers of this country gained the political liberty that insured their freedom of opportunity. New England colonies led the way. In the British possessions of North America, government by the people evolved but freedoms were hard won.

#### POLITICAL LIBERTY GROWS IN THE TOWN MEETING

The freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Topsfield Quallified according to Law for voting are to Take notice to meet at our meeting house in Topsfield on the first

Tuesday in march next at eight of ye clock  
in ye forenoon.

Dated in Topsfield:  
14th of February: 1718  
Elisha Putnam  
Constabel of Topsfield (Mass.)

It was the custom to list the reasons for calling a town meeting. This gave neighbors time to talk over the business at hand before they gathered in the meeting house. The purpose of this meeting in Topsfield, Massachusetts on March 8, 1718 was to choose officers; to consider the petition of Isaac Peabody who wanted some land near the mill pond; to agree upon some way to preserve the timber on the common land owned by the town; to choose jurymen for Ipswich Court; and to do any other thing for the benefit of the town.

The town meetings were New England's way of carrying on local government. At each meeting the townsmen chose one man to conduct the gathering. He was called the moderator. Any townsman had the right to ask for a vote on any matter affecting the public welfare.

School and church were common subjects for discussion at these meetings because each was necessary to the other. All good Puritans had to be able to read the Bible. Since both men and women needed to learn to read in order to practice their religion, schools were important in Puritan colonies. However, most of these schools were not free. Although some public funds were voted to support education, the parents paid tuition if they were able to afford it.

The school teacher and the minister were selected by vote at these town meetings and their salaries were set. Before school-houses were built, committees were appointed to find homes in which the

schoolmaster could live and teach for a few weeks in each neighborhood. In the early days of the Puritan colonies in New England, the church was supported by public funds voted by the citizens in town meetings. From old records these items were copied:

Ye towne have agreed to build ye new meeting house two and forty foot wide and four and forty foot long.

The town agreed that ye committee shall have power to Draw Money out of ye Treasury to pay Mr. Eliot for his service in ye ministry as Long as he shall Preach to & amongst us.

Disputes over boundaries, permits for mills and shops, construction of roads, building of fences, payment of bills, help for the poor, protection from Indian attack, and other neighborhood problems were discussed in open meetings. Decisions were made by vote. This was self-government at work under charters obtained from the King of England. Although the Puritans in New England had the privilege of self-government, obligations went with it. It was the duty of every freeman to attend these meetings. Absence carried a penalty. When a member was late as much as thirty minutes, he was fined. When he was tardy an hour, the sum was doubled. No man was permitted to leave until all the matters under discussion had been settled by voting. The meeting was announced by drums beating a thunderous summons thirty minutes before the time set for roll call.

The stern Puritans believed in discipline. A notice of a town meeting, posted by the village constable, was not passed by unheeded. The paper amounted to a summons and citizens obeyed the call. "Ye Olde Towne Meeting" was a training school



in political liberty. It laid the foundations for our present local governments. When James II tried to destroy this system of self-government, the independent New Englanders staged their own rebellion.

## **IN DEFENSE OF POLITICAL LIBERTY**

IN 1686 JAMES II sent Sir Edmund Andros to Massachusetts to be:

Our CAPTAIN-GENERAL and GOVERNOR IN CHIEF in and over all our territory and dominion of New England in America commonly called and known by the name of Our Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, Our Colony of New Plymouth, and Our Province of New Hampshire and Maine, the Narragansett country otherwise called the King's Province with all the islands . . .

Andros was given almost unlimited authority by King James, and he used it. He demanded the surrender of the early charters upon which depended the colonial rights of property and self-government. All obeyed the order, except Connecticut, where, according to tradition, the precious piece of parchment was hidden in the hollow of an oak tree. New York, taken from the Dutch in 1664, and the neighboring province of New Jersey also came under the control of Andros. A one-man rule was established from Delaware to the St. Croix River. Then Andros set himself up as a dictator with an advisory council.

Three years later, when a revolution in England swept James II from the throne, the long-suffering New Englanders captured Sir Edmund Andros and held him a prisoner, along with men on his council. Boston was filled with armed colonial soldiers and 1500 more awaited a call at

Charlestown. Andros tried to escape from the fort by wearing women's clothes. In this disguise he passed two guards, but the third one noticed his shoes, which he had neglected to change. He was recaptured and held a prisoner until he was deported to England. The colonists defended their action in a long paper sent to the new rulers of England, William and Mary. The colonists declared:

It was absolutely necessary for the people of New England to seize Sir Edmund Andros and his associates. They made what laws they pleased, WITHOUT ANY CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES. In New England, by constant usage under their charter governments, the inhabitants of each town did assemble to consider the welfare of their respective towns, the relief of the poor, and the like. Sir Edmund Andros, with a few of his council, made a law prohibiting any town meeting except once a year, the third Monday in May. The inhabitants of the country were startled at the law, fearful the design of it was to prevent the people from meeting to make complaints of their grievances.

It took about 20,000 words to list the crimes of Sir Edmund Andros against liberty, in the opinion of the colonists. What did he do? One paragraph lists a number of grievances with complete frankness:

In the time of his government, without form or legal authority, he made laws destructive of the liberty of the people, imposed and levied taxes without the consent of the people either by themselves or by an assembly, threatened and imprisoned them that would not be assisting to the illegal levies, denied that they had any property in their lands without patents from him, and during the time of actual war with the Indians, he did supply them with ammunition. Several Indians declared that they were encouraged by him to make war upon the English.

At the trial of a minister in Ipswich, Massachusetts, who had organized a

movement to fight taxation without representation, a member of the council of Andros said to the defendant:

You have no more privileges left you than not to be sold for slaves.

In the report, the colonists asked this question:

What people that had the spirit of Englishmen could endure this?

Andros denied the colonists freedom of the press, the right to assemble, their own general courts, and many other liberties to which they had become accustomed. A hundred years later, the basic human freedoms defended in this lengthy document were briefly stated in Article One of the Bill of Rights, the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

THE RIGHT TO PRINT the truth is a necessary part of political liberty. Freedom of the press was won in colonial days by a poor printer, John Peter Zenger. Zenger had come to America in 1710 at the age of thirteen, a religious refugee born in Germany. His father died on shipboard, and the lad became a printer's apprentice in New York to obtain a living. He served for eight years to learn his trade. In 1726

Zenger set up his own print shop on Smith Street.

In 1726 New York was an English royal colony. It was ruled by a governor appointed by the King. Although the people had an assembly to which they sent representatives, the governor had the power to dismiss this legislative body at will. English officials collected revenues and spent the tax money as they pleased. They paid little attention to the needs of the colonists. A storm broke when William Cosby became governor in 1732. His acts fomented discontent. The people felt the need of an independent newspaper in which they could expose the acts of the governor and get him recalled. They selected the German printer, Zenger. A paper called *New York Weekly Journal* was started. The first issue appeared November 5, 1733.

In 1697 censorship of the press had been established in New York by law, "that no person keep any press for printing, nor that any book, pamphlet, or other matter whatsoever be printed without your (Governor's) especial leave and consent first obtained." When articles appeared in the *New York Weekly Journal* criticizing the governor, Cosby ordered the arrest of Peter Zenger, who had printed the sheet. When Zenger was lodged in jail, his wife put out the paper. Through a hole in the door of his cell, she would discuss the content with her husband. The anger of the people increased. They determined to free the German printer.

The trial began on the fourth of August, 1735, in the City Hall on the corner of Nassau and Wall Streets. The courtroom was jammed long before the opening. The crowd overflowed into the street. The twelve jurymen took their seats. Seven of

them were Dutch. A principle was at stake, a cornerstone of political liberty. It was the trial of a basic freedom as much as it was the trial of a man. Zenger had a famous lawyer, Andrew Hamilton from Philadelphia, who took advantage of the occasion to defend the human rights of man, such as trial by jury, freedom of speech, press, and religion. He said, among many statements:

The loss of liberty to a generous mind is worse than death . . . The man who loves his country, prefers its liberty to all other considerations, well knowing that without liberty, life is a misery.

-When both sides had presented their cases, the jury retired to reach a decision. The men were not out long. The foreman of the jury stood and spoke clearly and firmly – NOT GUILTY. Three deafening cheers filled the courtroom. In the evening forty citizens entertained Zenger's attorney at a dinner in the Black Horse Tavern. When he left New York the next day, after the printer had been released from jail, guns fired a salute in his honor, "as a public

testimony of the glorious defense he made in the cause of liberty in this province."

Thus, in colonial days, did the people of the colonies stand firmly against any form of dictatorship. Thousands of immigrants came to the settlements along the Atlantic seaboard, with only a vague idea of the freedoms they were seeking, because they had not known many of them. They were pursuing a vision. Freedoms sprouted in a wilderness like flowers on a vacant lot, because each person who came had broken the pattern of life in his old country and he was starting all over again. "Something new" began to grow in the New World – a mere idea. People began to question the right of government to interfere with their freedom to come and go, to buy and sell, to own or lease, to talk or listen, to vote and elect. In other words, people began to think they had the right to govern themselves. Yet, a new nation had to rise in the Western Hemisphere before this idea gained the force of law.