

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY
UPON THE POLITICAL CAREER OF PATRICK HENRY

by

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A THESIS

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by

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JAMES M. WELLS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The American people today are faced with a galaxy of problems centering around the difficulties resulting from the attempt of diverse racial and economic groups to live together under a single government. The great majority of scholars agree that the roots of these problems go back through the web of American history into the colonial period.

In addition to our domestic problems, we Americans must also wrestle with the problems resulting from our assumption of the position of leadership of the Western democracies. Many of the current world problems, like some of our domestic difficulties, are the outgrowth of what many writers are now terming the "freedom explosion." A sizeable number of the new nations of the world are facing situations which have a distinct resemblance to those of eighteenth and nineteenth-century America.

A knowledge of America's past should prove, therefore, to be enlightening in studying the issues of today. Some people, perhaps, can see little correlation between the eighteenth century and our modern atomic age. Time has truly brought progress, and with that progress has come far-reaching changes in science, in technology, and in standards

of living. Yet one thing does not change--the basic human nature. A brief glance at our history books or at the Bible indicates that the basic human nature of man has changed not at all since the days of Adam or of Charlemagne. Our modern problems, like those of yesteryear, are wrapped up within the complexity of human and of group action; therefore, it should be rewarding to re-examine the American Revolutionary Period and to take a deeper look into the lives of our founding fathers.

Certainly, any study of Revolutionary America would not be complete without a penetrating analysis of the life of Patrick Henry, for this man was, in the words of John Adams, the man who would ". . . have glory with posterity of beginning and concluding this great revolution."¹ His

¹William Wirt Henry, Patrick Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, I, p. 100.

position of leadership among the Revolutionary leaders and his penetrating insight into the direction of future Constitutional development certainly places him in a preferred position to students who wish to achieve a clear understanding of this era.

Statement of the Problem

Generations of American school children are familiar with Patrick Henry. His "liberty or death" speech is one of the most quoted addresses in the annals of American history. Countless others have read and been puzzled over Henry's refusal to accept the American Constitution at the Virginia Ratification Convention, for the Constitution has evolved into the same plane of sacredness on which our founding fathers rest. Any listing of these founding fathers must, of necessity, include Patrick Henry.

Serious students of American history seem to be as puzzled over the complexity of Henry's career as is the average American schoolboy. Henry, the leader of American Revolutionaries, had led the fight against the Constitution due to his fear of its consolidating tendencies; yet, he had refused to join the Jeffersonians in their fight against the Federalists. He also had rejected the thesis of State Sovereignty outlined in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions as being unconstitutional. Henry's early biographers seem to fall into two diverse camps--accepting the viewpoint of either the Federalists or the Republicans (Jeffersonians) of his period. The modern biographers have done little or nothing to alter this picture. A part of the explanation of this lies in the meagerness of Henry's writings. He wrote no books, pamphlets, or essays outlining his views of the

nature of man or outlining his idea of the proper function and framework of government. The scholar who seeks to find some key to this seeming ambiguity or inconsistency must depend upon the personal correspondence and public speeches which have been preserved for posterity.

In reading the speeches and correspondence of Patrick Henry, the scholar, however, finds that one distinct factor does stand out--an overpowering Christian Calvinistic conscience. This conscience was preeminent over any other factor in determining Henry's daily actions. Although his Christian background is noted, it seems to have been taken somewhat lightly by his biographers; yet, it stands out distinctly and clearly in his writing and speeches. Did his biographers err in their brief consideration of this as being a key motivating factor, or does the importance of this factor in the mental makeup of Patrick Henry, perhaps, clear up seeming inconsistencies in the career of Virginia's Revolutionary leader?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover a plausible explanation for the seeming inconsistencies in the life and political career of Patrick Henry. One major factor in the life of this American statesman had apparently not been thoroughly explored. It was hoped that a re-evaluation of

Henry's career in the light of this factor might shed more knowledge upon the course of his career. This in turn would add to the store of knowledge available to scholars of the American Revolution. Thus, history and the value of historical knowledge might thereby be enriched.

Limitations of the Study

In re-examining the political career of Patrick Henry, the scholar gave primary emphasis to consideration of Henry's action in the light of strong motivation from his Christian convictions. No attempt was made to recapitulate his entire political career in detail, nor was any attempt made to dwell upon the other motivating factors in Henry's personal makeup except whenever necessary to give the proper balance in relation to the factors which were under principal consideration. The highlights of his career were, however, re-examined, in the light of this factor, in order that its importance might be assessed.

Methods of Investigation

The following methods were used in obtaining data for this study: (1) books outlining the lives and the correspondence of the outstanding leaders of the Revolutionary Period were studied, in addition to works giving the background of the period; (2) seeming inconsistencies in Henry's

career and consideration of the motivating factors were discussed with historians and theologians at the University of Houston and Rice Institute; and (3) exhaustive study was made of the personal writing, speeches, and correspondence of the subject.

An intensive search for related theses at colleges and universities in the area failed to uncover any research on the problem in question.

CHAPTER II

THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF PATRICK HENRY

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the extraordinary depth of Patrick Henry's religious convictions, the wide range of Christian doctrines which had an influence upon him, and the manner in which this affected his philosophy of life and of government.

Depth of Henry's Religious Convictions

The extraordinary depth of Patrick Henry's religious convictions is all but impossible to overestimate. Throughout his long and varied career, Henry's guiding principle, in both his personal and private life, was his idea of what course of action would best fulfill his Christian obligations. While still a young man, Henry said of the Bible, "This book is worth all of the books that ever were printed . . ."¹ This view was to remain with him throughout

¹William Wirt Henry, Patrick Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, II, p. 519.

the remainder of his life. To this man, the real test of an individual's life was in whether or not the person had conducted himself in accordance with God's plan for the individual's life. This was apparently the governing factor in any decision Henry made. Although he spent most of his

life in public office, Patrick Henry stated, ". . . I think religion of infinitely higher importance than politics," and he continued, in speaking of his Christian reputation in comparison to his political reputation, ". . . This is a character I prize far above all this world has or can boast."² A quick glance at Henry's life will show that this

²Ibid., II, p. 570.

was no spurious statement.

Henry's biographers agree that he was basically a man who was devoted to family life. Might not this love of family life have been one of the primary reasons for his early retirement? An inspection of his private life substantiates this viewpoint and reveals that, in addition to his immediate family, Henry felt a close bond with his numerous sisters.³

³Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry, Patriot in the Making, p. 45.

If Henry had not been deeply religious, his family correspondence surely would have revealed the fact. This was not the case, however, for his letters to his family demonstrate a steady and fervent Christian feeling. A typical example of this was in a letter Henry wrote to his sister in Kentucky upon receiving the news of her husband's death--a cruel death at the hands of an Indian raiding

party:

We cannot see the reason of these dispensations now, but we may be assured they are directed by wisdom and mercy. This is one of the occasions that calls your and my attention back to the many precious lessons of piety given us by our honored parents, whose lives were indeed a constant lesson and worthy of imitation. This is one of the trying scenes, in which the Christian is eminently superior to all others and finds a refuge that no misfortunes can take away . . . Perhaps I may never see you in this world--oh, may we meet in that heaven to which the merits of Jesus will carry those who love and serve him.⁴

⁴Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 286-287.

In writing to his daughter shortly before her marriage, Henry advised her to study outstanding sermons of the day because "a woman devoid of rational ideas of religion, has no security for her virtues; it is sacrificed to her passions, whose voice, not that of God, is her only governing principle."⁵ Nothing in his family correspondence

⁵Ibid., II, p. 308.

indicated that religion was anything less than of primary concern.

There are many illustrations of Henry's devotion to the Christian life in his public as well as in his private career. Morgan⁶ insists that no public record can be found

⁶George Morgan, The True Patrick Henry, p. 124.

of an instance wherein Henry cursed or swore. This biographer⁷ also asserts that Henry, who did not have a reputation

⁷Ibid., p. 366.

for liberality in financial matters, paid for the printing of and circulated at his own expense copies of Butler's Analogy of Christianity and Soame Jenyn's Internal Evidences of Christ. The first lawsuit which Henry argued before the House of Burgesses was, fittingly enough, an attempt to unseat a representative who had allegedly exerted undue influence upon the electorate by expenditure of enormous sums on campaign liquors.⁸

⁸Meade, op. cit., pp. 140-144.

Additional evidence of Patrick Henry's Christian steadfastness was indicated by the fact that almost all of his speeches demonstrated the overwhelming influence of a vigorous Christian spirit. Allusions to the Scriptures abounded throughout. In speaking, for example, of the tendency of the aristocracy to retain a sentimental attachment for the British, he declared, "The flesh pots of Egypt are still savory to degenerate palates."⁹ On many occasions

⁹Henry, op. cit., II, p. 256.

during the Revolutionary War, he reminded the hard-pressed

Virginia militia that they should pray for divine intervention and that ". . . the same God whose power divided the Red Sea for the deliverance of Israel, still reigned in all of his glory, unchanged and unchangeable . . ."¹⁰ In

¹⁰Ibid, I, p. 281.

scarcely a single one of his public speeches, did Patrick Henry fail to reaffirm his faith in an omnipotent and ever-accessible God. At the Constitutional Ratification Convention of Virginia in Richmond, he stated, "I see beings of a higher order anxious concerning our decision!"¹¹ In

¹¹Ibid., III, p. 586.

the great bulk of his speeches to the common people, Henry was ever prodding--ever goading--the deep faith that lay beneath the breast of the American frontiersman. This evidently was the way in which to strike a responsive chord in the masses of colonial America; for it was the masses, not the aristocracy, who made Patrick Henry the leader of colonial Virginia. Henry was, undoubtedly, able to move this spirit so well and to utilize its effectiveness in stirring the people to action because he shared the overpowering frontier faith in an ever-watchful God who led, guided, and protected His people.

Any lingering doubt as to the dominance of Christianity in Henry's thoughts should be removed by referring to

the well-substantiated account of the great Virginian's death. The accounts of his biographers are all in accord in this instance and are reconstructed as follows:

Henry had been informed that he had only a few moments of life left in his body. He turned to his family doctor, an old and personal friend, who was not a believer; and Henry's last words, as recorded for future generations, were: "observe how great a reality and benefit religion is to a man who is about to die!"¹²

¹²Ibid., II, p. 626.

In his final will and testament, Henry bequeathed to his children, among his worldly possessions, "The religion of Christ . . . which will make them rich indeed."¹³

¹³Ibid., II, p. 631.

As he lay dying, there was no need for pretense on Henry's part. His dying statement summed up in unmistakable terms the overpowering influence on his Christian beliefs, those beliefs which lay not far beneath the surface of his every action and deed throughout his long and varied career. Those beliefs are totaled up in the legacy which Patrick Henry left to his children: "The religion of Christ. . . ."¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., II, p. 631.

Wide Range of Doctrines Influencing
Patrick Henry

Often bitter differences of opinions occur among equally devout Christians as to just what course of action God has outlined for a nation or for a people. In determining with any precision the religious viewpoint of a person and in understanding that person's personal religious philosophy, one would find helpful an understanding of the influence which various divergent doctrines have had on the individual.

Patrick Henry was christened and remained, throughout his life, a member of the Episcopal Church.¹⁵ His father

¹⁵Henry, op. cit., I, p. 16.

and uncle, both Episcopalians, had great influence upon the thinking of Henry. His uncle was, in fact, a leading member of the Anglican clergy in Virginia. Henry admitted the great influence which this man had on his thinking, stating that his uncle taught him

to be true and just in all my dealings. To bear no malice nor hatred in my heart. To keep my hands from plucking and stealing; not to covet other men's goods, but to learn and labor truly to get my own living in that state of life into which it shall please God to call me.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., I, p. 115.

Although Henry became a firm opponent of the establishment of the Church in Virginia, the fact that he remained a member demonstrates that he must have shared many of its beliefs, at least in regard to his own personal life. A man of Patrick Henry's religious fervor would certainly not have remained in a church with which he could find no common ground.

Despite the fact that he remained an Episcopalian, Patrick Henry was even more greatly influenced by the frontier democracy and the Calvinistic doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. On many occasions, Henry demonstrated the spirit of the Calvinist in his own intimately personal life and certainly in his idea of the way a Christian should conduct himself in political service. This Presbyterian influence, undoubtedly, came to Patrick Henry through his mother. Meade¹⁷ cites evidence to the effect that she

¹⁷Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry, Patriot in the Making, p. 71.

viewed Patrick's religious training as a serious matter. Another biographer¹⁸ produced a letter of a contemporary of

¹⁸Henry, op. cit., II, p. 251.

Mrs. Henry, who stated, "Never did I know a Christian character equal to hers." While Patrick Henry was still a boy, Mrs. Henry became a devout member of the Presbyterian

Church, as did her father. Every Sunday Mrs. Henry and Patrick attended the Presbyterian Church in a double gig, and on their return from the services she would make him give the text and a summary of the sermon.¹⁹ The influence

¹⁹Henry, op. cit., I, p. 15.

of this early Presbyterian training upon Henry is clear and unmistakable, particularly in his political life. He, on many occasions, voiced his deep respect for the Presbyterian Church and his admiration of the oratorical ability of several of the Presbyterian divines who were spreading their ideal of Calvinism throughout the Virginia back country.²⁰

²⁰Ibid., I, pp. 15-16.

The Episcopalian and Presbyterian Churches were not, however, the only groups to leave their imprint upon the thinking of Patrick Henry. He was always a devoted friend of the Baptists. Meade²¹ cites a "systematic persecution"

²¹Meade, op. cit., p. 246.

of the Baptist groups near Henry's boyhood home. Despite these persecutions, the Baptists experienced great growth in the Piedmont region of Virginia during this period, and Patrick Henry, on many occasions, represented Baptist groups in court when they ran afoul of the Virginia laws

perpetuating the established Anglican church.²² The

²²Ibid., pp. 247-249.

Baptists are perhaps the only group which Henry ever represented without charge in his long career as a lawyer. In recognition of his services, they passed a resolution on August 12, 1776, greeting his election as Governor with "unspeakable pleasure,"²³ and William Wirt Henry²⁴ quotes

²³Henry, op. cit., I, p. 455.

²⁴Ibid., I, p. 118.

from a Baptist Church History of the period to the effect that ". . . the Baptist found in Henry an unwavering friend. May his name descend to posterity with unsullied honor."

Nor was this the end of Henry's contacts among the various church denominations. In his letters, he expressed great admiration for various Methodist pastors who were conducting revivals in Louisa County during his youth,²⁵

²⁵Ibid., I, p. 210.

and he was apparently always on good terms with various Quaker leaders.²⁶ Many Quakers lived in Louisa County

²⁶Ibid., I, pp. 16, 117, 197.

during Henry's boyhood. Doubtlessly he had many opportunities for contact with them,²⁷ for despite their pacifist

²⁷Meade, op. cit., p. 245.

sentiments, the Quaker leaders in Philadelphia greeted Patrick Henry's appearance at the First Continental Congress with great enthusiasm.²⁸ The wide range of doctrinal

²⁸Ibid., p. 317.

influences upon Henry in his early years partly explains the depth of his religious convictions. They left an unmistakable imprint upon him and produced a unique blend of liberality in some phases of his philosophy and, at the same time, an amazing firmness and tenacity in certain of his viewpoints concerning the duty of the Christian.

Tyler²⁹ states that "there is much contemporaneous

²⁹Moses Coit Tyler, Patrick Henry, pp. 17-18.

evidence to show that Patrick Henry was throughout life a deeply religious person . . ." He was ". . . a steady reader of the English Bible; the diction of which is stamped upon his style . . ." of oratory. Meade³⁰ relates an

³⁰Meade, op. cit., p. 323.

instance wherein a stranger mistook Henry for a country

parson. All of Henry's biographers point up the great extent of Henry's religious feeling; yet, they do not seem to place any importance upon this factor in clearing up some of the seeming inconsistencies in his political career. The biographer who is familiar with the extent of this devotion of Patrick Henry to his Christian principles can readily see wherein Henry in many cases was often placing his Christian duty above his ideas of the proper function of government. If one keeps this fact in mind, that Henry's first allegiance was to his God, many otherwise puzzling actions become more easily explainable.

Doctrinal Influences Upon Patrick Henry's Ideas About Man and Government

The wide range of doctrinal influences which Patrick Henry encountered in his youth is very marked in studying his actions. Henry's life-long membership in the Episcopal Church is, for example, very evident in his personal dealings with others. He had none of the condemnation of the Calvinist in his social relationships. There is no record of an instance wherein he condemned the liberality of the Virginia aristocracy in their exuberant pursuit of enjoyment. He was heralded by many as a very pleasing host. His zest for life, and his almost boyish love of laughter and practical jests among his family and friends, are a matter

of record. There is much evidence of Episcopalian liberality, too, in his ability to ignore personal slights and hostilities in working with other leaders to achieve political objectives. Although a staunch personal abstainer, Henry could move around the stately ballrooms and levees of Richmond and Williamsburg with as much ease as any member of the Tidewater aristocracy of his day.

Whenever one leaves the realm of purely personal relationships with his contemporaries, however, and enters the realm of public duty, he finds a marked difference in attitude upon the part of Patrick Henry. He himself pointed out this very subtle, yet very important, difference in viewpoint:

I know, sir, how well it becomes a liberal man and a Christian to forget and forgive. As individuals professing a holy religion, it is our bounden duty to forgive injuries done us as individuals. But when to the character of a Christian you add the character of patriot, you are in a different situation. Our mild and holy system of religion inculcates an admirable maxim of forbearance. If your enemy smite one cheek, turn the other to him. But you must stop there. You cannot apply this to your country. As members of a social community, this maxim does not apply to you. When you consider injuries done to your country, your political duty tells you of vengeance. Forgive as a private man, but never forgive public injuries. Observations of this nature are exceedingly unpleasant, but it is my duty to use them.³¹

³¹Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 606-607.

Patrick Henry was, by self-admission, a Calvinist in his ideas of public life. He was strikingly reminiscent of John C. Calhoun in this respect, for Calhoun had the same intermingling of stern Presbyterian Calvinism and liberal episcopacy.³² Like Calhoun, this mixture produced in Henry

³²Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun, pp. 14-46, 467-495.

a man of amazing single-mindedness of purpose, great powers of persuasion, and unswerving disregard of those who would undermine his self-assurance. Like Calhoun, Patrick Henry could fit himself into neither the Jeffersonian or Hamiltonian view of man and government but was a peculiar mixture of both.

Patrick Henry was not unlike his Baptist friends in their officially stated determination to ". . . love all Christians as brethen."³³ He was ever vigilant--ever

³³Vincent L. Milner, Religious Denominations of the World, p. 36.

watchful--for the opportunity to advance the cause of freedom of Christian worship. Yet this liberality applied only to Christians, for he would have no truck or sympathy with the deist or agnostic. As pronounced as his liberality toward all Christians was, Henry was determined that he would do all in his power to stop the spread of French deism among

the American people. Although Patrick Henry demonstrated an almost Quaker-like determination to avoid purely personal controversy; yet, in his political career, he could be unabashedly Calvinistic in his condemnation of those who would further non-Christian doctrine. He could possess all of the flexibility of the Episcopalian in his ability to compromise, to bend with the political tide--in regard to methods and means--yet when it came to principle and to his idea of his Christian duty as a public servant and leader, there was much of his ancient ancestor, John Knox,³⁴ in his

³⁴Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 3-4.

rugged determination and steadfastness of purpose. Might there always have been, not far beneath the surface of Henry's pleasant exterior, the fear that Calvin was right in his belief that not all were elected to salvation!³⁵ In his

³⁵George A. Barton, The Religions of the World, p. 330.

dealings with many of Virginia's political leaders, who were admittedly influenced by the French "God of Reason," might not Patrick Henry have remembered and feared the stern dictates of those terse Presbyterian preachers who had warned him in his youth that the non-Christian was ". . . of nature . . . so dead, so blind, and so perverse, that neither can . . ." they ". . . feel when . . . pricked, see

the light when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is revealed. . . ."36 Beyond a doubt the first and

³⁶Milner, op. cit., p. 346.

foremost guiding principle of Patrick Henry's life was to follow the "light" of God's will in his life--to serve that ever-present God who would, if one were steadfast, cover his servants ". . . by a pillar of cloud by day, and guide their feet through the night by a pillar of fire . . ."37 toward

³⁷Henry, op. cit., I, p. 281.

eternal salvation and peace.

The long years of solitary thought in the semi-frontier Virginia of Henry's boyhood home had enabled him to blend and meld the variety of religious doctrines to which he was exposed into a peculiar, yet amazingly tenacious, Christian philosophy: a set of beliefs which was innately his own; a set of beliefs which could not be categorized--which could not be labeled Episcopalian or Calvinistic, or which would fit comfortably into any other sectarian label--yet, a set of beliefs which were ever prominent in his daily thoughts. Although these beliefs were rigid and consistent after their own individual fashion, the influence of the divergent mixture is to be seen in a certain hint of self-doubt. Toward the end of his life, Henry stated that he

reproached himself because he had not given "decided and public proofs of being a Christian."³⁸ This statement was

³⁸ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 575.

made despite consistent references--which references in the modern political arena would undoubtedly give rise to charges of religious fanaticism--in his speeches and public statements to his ever-present God.

Might not the depth of Henry's religious convictions and the peculiar admixture of constant self-questioning and self-judgment be the real source of his amazing power of oratorical ability--which ability, more than any other one single factor, had won for him a reputation in the annals of American history? The overpowering mass of tributes to Henry's speaking ability defy the imagination of the reader. The bitterest of Henry's personal enemies heralded him as the foremost of American orators of his day. He was labeled by John Randolph of Roanoke as "Shakespeare and Garrick combined."³⁹ The tributes of the founding fathers of

³⁹ Ibid., II, p. 493.

America to Henry's oratorical abilities filled pages in the works of his biographers. Henry's bitterest critic, Thomas Jefferson, wrote years later in his autobiography, "I attended the debate at the door of the lobby of the House of

Burgesses, and heard the splendid display of Mr. Henry's talents as a popular orator. They were great indeed; such as I have never heard from any other man. He appeared to me to speak as Homer wrote."⁴⁰ Contemporary after contemporary

⁴⁰Henry, op. cit., I, p. 83.

stated that they found themselves completely senseless as to place or time while listening to Henry's speeches. Almost all of them described a peculiar groping or hesitancy in the initial remarks and then a flow of oratory which produced the effect of an almost ethereal quality upon the listener. Whenever Henry was speaking ". . . a death-like silence prevailed"⁴¹ in the audience. All of Henry's biographers

⁴¹Ibid., I, pp. 211-212; II, p. 346.

referred to the well-substantiated "storm scene" at the Virginia Ratification Convention where Henry, in his warning against adoption of the Constitution, spoke of celestial concern over the proceedings. William Wirt Henry related the account of an observer, as follows:

Henry pointed . . . to those celestial beings who were hovering over the scene, and waiting with anxiety for a decision which involved the happiness or misery of more than half the human race. To those beings he had just addressed an invocation that made every nerve shudder with supernatural horror, when lo! a storm at that instant arose, which shook the whole building, and the spirits which he called seemed to have come at his bidding.

. . . Availing himself of the incident, with a master's art he seemed to mix in the fight of his ethereal auxiliaries, and rising on the wings of the tempest, to seize upon the artillery of Heaven, and direct it against his adversaries. The scene became insupportable; and the house rose without the formality of adjournment, the members rushing from their seats with precipitation and confusion.⁴²

⁴²Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 370-371.

Many contemporaries of Patrick Henry have described his manner of speech as highly reminiscent of the Calvinist preachers of the day, who exhorted their flock with threats of eternal damnation. Might not the key to Henry's effectiveness, like that of these frontier preachers, have lain in an overwhelming self-conviction--a complete faith that he was fulfilling his Christian duty in imparting God's will for the American nation to his audience? Might not this speaking ability have sprung from a personal assurance that he had the support of a power far greater than his mortal listeners? Might not the key to this amazing ability have rested in his oft repeated statement that to be silent would be "treason to God?"⁴³ That this was the case is

⁴³Ibid., II, p. 104.

evident in observing his political career.

CHAPTER III

LEADERSHIP OF REVOLUTIONARY VIRGINIA

A recapitulation of the political career of Patrick Henry, for the purposes of studying his ideas of government and of the nature of men, quite naturally falls into three divisions: first, that early portion of his career, during which he rose to acknowledged leadership of his state and to prominence as a national revolutionary spirit; second, his unsuccessful fight against the American Constitution at the Virginia Ratification Convention, which saw the fullest expression of his philosophy of government and of man; and, third, that controversial period shortly before his death when he came out of retirement to challenge the Jeffersonian leadership then dominant in Virginia.

It is the purpose of this portion of the report to resurvey that period of Patrick Henry's career during which, to quote his foremost opponent, James Madison,¹ he

¹James Madison, Letters and Other Writings of James Madison, III, pp. 283-284, 444.

reached a position of "omnipotence in Virginia." During this time, the influence of Henry's Christian philosophy is markedly evident in his attempts to secure religious freedom for all Christian groups in Virginia, to secure the freedom of the American colonies from the oppression of

the British King, and to secure for America that greatness which he felt was her "manifest destiny," through safeguarding the West. These factors may be explained best by a recapitulation of the more outstanding incidents of this portion of his career. The complete philosophy of the Virginia leader unfolds during this period, and by noting certain factors it would have been possible to predict his future course of action.

Leadership and Disestablishment

The rise of Patrick Henry into a position of political leadership in Virginia enabled him to bring about religious toleration for all Christian groups in the state. This struggle for religious freedom began with the Parson's Cause case and ended with the establishment of a new government--a government which granted religious freedom to all of its citizens.

The Parson's Cause

The first appearance of Patrick Henry which gave him statewide recognition and prominence was his role as defense lawyer in the celebrated "Parson's Cause Case." William Wirt Henry² presented the background of the case in the

²William Wirt Henry, Patrick Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, I, pp. 28-43.

following manner: The legislature of Virginia had passed legislation which would have enabled the clergy of the established Anglican or Episcopal Church of the colony to be paid in coin at the rate of twopence per pound of tobacco instead of in tobacco itself as their salary had formerly been based. The legislature had defended its action as being necessitated by a tobacco shortage due to drought and by the corresponding rise in the price of tobacco, which would, therefore, have worked a hardship on the parishioners if they had been forced to meet the salary payments in tobacco. The King, upon plea of the clergy, had disallowed the act. Thus, lower courts had been forced to declare it null and void. It remained only for the clergy to sue for damages resulting from having been paid their yearly salary on the twopence scale. The case in Louisa County had attracted great attention. Patrick Henry was at this time a relatively unknown country lawyer; yet he managed to sway the jury with his eloquence to the extent that it brought in a verdict of one penny damages for the clergy--a decided blow to their pocketbooks.

Henry cited two reasons why the court should find only one penny damages and thereby uphold the spirit of the Two-Penny Act: first, the King by disallowing the Act had broken the compact between Crown and subject; second, the clergy had failed to serve the purpose for which they were ordained and, therefore, should be punished. These ideas

Henry was to follow devotedly with amazing tenacity and consistency until his death.

Henry maintained that government was a conditional compact, composed of twin dependent covenants--the government of the King promising protection on the one hand, and the people pledging obedience and support on the other. He maintained that a violation of these covenants by either party discharged the other from its obligation. As the Two-Penny Act had been a good law and designed for the general welfare, the disallowance was an instance of misrule; therefore, the King had departed from his role as the father of his people and had degenerated into a tyrant. The people, then, were released from their obligation to follow his order regarding the Act. At this point Patrick Henry heard the first murmurs of "treason!" from a Virginia audience.

As for the clergy, by their refusal to acquiesce to a law designed to meet the general welfare of the public, they had counteracted the aims and purposes of their organization. As a result, instead of the respect due to them as useful members of the state, they should be considered as enemies of the people. In the case before the court, then, they should, instead of being awarded damages, be punished. Henry proceeded to attack the Anglican clergy with vigor. He asked, "Do they manifest their zeal in the cause of religion and humanity by practising the mild and benevolent

precepts of the Gospel of Jesus?" and replied, ". . . Oh, no, gentlemen! . . . These rapacious harpies would, were their powers equal to their will, snatch from the . . . widow and her orphan children their last milch cow!" He continued his allegory in a violent tone and concluded by saying, "they would snatch . . . the last bed, nay, the last blanket from the lying-in woman!"³ The parsons labeled

³Henry, op. cit., I, p. 41.

Henry's speech as violent demagogery designed to win popularity with the people;⁴ yet, an examination of Henry's

⁴Ibid., I, p. 44.

statements before and after this time show him to be a firm and unyielding foe of the establishment of religion. Henry concluded the case in hand by declaring that the issue was whether or not they would be free and make their own laws, or whether they would rivet the bonds of slavery by deciding for the Parsons. This insistence of self-government in local matters was to be the beacon that Henry held forth throughout the Revolution.

The case itself accentuated a revolt against establishment which Chitwood⁵ held had begun with the great

⁵Oliver Perry Chitwood, History of Colonial America, pp. 518-545.

Presbyterian and Calvinistic revival of Patrick Henry's youth and which culminated in the American Revolution.

Miller⁶ maintained that revolution and disestablishment were

⁶John C. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution, pp. 186-197.

inseparable forces in the Southern colonies. He pointed out that it was the Presbyterian Church which taught the moral righteousness of rebellion against a dictator. Patrick Henry became the acknowledged leader of both disestablishment and rebellion.

Growth of the Demand for Disestablishment

As was so often to be the case, Patrick Henry was the leader of a ground swell of popular sentiment among the people of Virginia in this demand for disestablishment. Chitwood⁷ finds that the Anglican clergy was replete with

⁷Chitwood, op. cit., pp. 519-545.

"low ethical standards." The aristocracy, or at least a large portion of them, supported the church and continued their persecution of the Baptists, Presbyterians, and other minority groups up until the very eve of the American Revolution. These common people were innately religious. They responded to the emotionalism and followed the ruggedness of the Calvinistic doctrines. Thus, as the

non-Anglican sects grew, a revolt also grew against the establishment of the Episcopal Church. An increased distaste was seen for the government of the King--whom the Anglicans held to be supreme, and whose government supported the Church. The supremacy of the King is stated among the last six articles of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith of the Episcopal Church.⁸ The Episcopalians were, at the same

⁸Milner, op. cit., p. 51.

time, becoming more convinced that the Anglican Church formed the "most genteel pathway to Heaven" and that the other groups were "low and vulgar."⁹ This spirit of dises-

⁹Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 193-196.

tablishment was growing also in the Northern colonies, under the guidance of Samuel Adams--the same Samuel Adams who was to join with Patrick Henry in pushing the American Revolution into fruition.¹⁰

¹⁰John C. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution, p. 197.

Several reasons are evident for Henry's avowal of disestablishment. Undoubtedly he opposed the admixture of church and state. He stated, "In my weak judgment, a government is strong when it applies to the most important end of all government--the rights and privileges of the

people."¹¹ To Patrick Henry the foremost right of the

¹¹Henry, op. cit., III, p. 580.

people was religious liberty. As he stated at the Constitutional Ratification Convention in Richmond, "The great and direct end of government is liberty. Secure our liberty and privileges and the end of government is answered."¹² He

¹²Ibid., III, p. 589.

demanded protection of religious freedom by a Constitutional amendment before Virginia should ratify the Constitution.¹³

¹³Ibid., III, p. 580.

After the Convention had ratified the document over his protests, he had persuaded them to stipulate among the conditions of ratification the provision that "liberty of conscience . . . cannot be cancelled, abridged, restrained or modified by any authority of the United States."¹⁴ He

¹⁴Ibid., III, p. 592.

went on to persuade the Convention to refer amendments to the national Congress for ratification. One of these would protect conscientious objectors, and another stated:

That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence, and

therefore all men have an equal, natural and unalienable right to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience, and that no particular religious sect or society ought to be favored or established by law in preference to others.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid., III, p. 596.

This statement was in part an almost exact duplication of the sixteenth article of the Virginia Bill of Rights, which some of his biographers credit to the authorship of Patrick Henry.¹⁶ These statements were the mere culmination of a

¹⁶ Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 430-431.

George Morgan, The True Patrick Henry, p. 267.

long struggle by Patrick Henry for religious freedom for all of the various Christian groups within the Old Dominion. As a boy, he must have listened to the backwoods pastors proclaim that favorite tenet of the Presbyterian Church which stated,

. . . God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men; and that the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, are universal and inalienable.¹⁷

¹⁷ Milner, op. cit., p. 119.

The boy must have taken these lessons to heart, for he learned them well. In his first case, the Parson's

Cause, he struck a blow for disestablishment. Nor was he unaware apparently of the consequences of his actions. He had begged his respected uncle, the Anglican divine, not to go into the courtroom and had added, "in this controversy, both my heart and judgment, as well as my professional duty, are on the side of the people."¹⁸ The Tidewater

¹⁸Henry, op. cit., I, p. 44.

Aristocracy had at about this time begun a systematic religious persecution of dissenters which was to last up until the Revolution.¹⁹ Patrick Henry was never too busy

¹⁹Ibid., I, p. 117.

during this period to represent various groups of dissenters in court--often without charge. By the time of the Revolution he was, in the eyes of John Adams,²⁰ the

²⁰Charles Francis Adams, Works of John Adams, X, p. 376.

"acknowledged leader" of Virginian disestablishers. Nor were the dissenters unappreciative of his efforts. The Baptists heralded the election of Henry as Governor of Virginia in 1776. He replied to their congratulations in the following letter:

I am happy to find a catholic spirit prevailing in our country, and that those religious distinctions, which formerly

produced some heats, are now forgotten. Happy must every friend to virtue and America feel himself to perceive, that the only contest among us, at this critical and important period, is who shall be foremost to preserve our religious and civil liberties. My earnest wish is, that Christian charity, forbearance and love may unite all different persuasions as brethen. . . .²¹

²¹Henry, op. cit., I, p. 456.

In addition to his innate love of liberty, Patrick Henry cited other reasons for desiring freedom of religious conscience. He said that "Virginia suffered from slavery and lack of religious freedom."²² He went on to compare the

²²Ibid., I, pp. 112-116.

slow growth of Virginia's population in comparison with that of Pennsylvania and concluded that "a general toleration of Religion appears to me the best means of peopling our country." This would also, he felt, increase industry and home-manufactured products and would provide for Virginia the ". . . means of becoming the most prosperous" state on the continent; for "the free exercise of religion hath stacked the Northern part of the Continent with inhabitants . . . A Calvinist, a Lutheran, or Quaker, who hath felt these inconveniences in Europe, sails not to Virginia,

where they are felt perhaps in a (greater degree)."²³

²³Ibid., I, p. 116.

Nor was Patrick Henry sympathetic with the cries of the Episcopal clergy that they were being persecuted because they had fought against wickedness and vice. He proclaimed, "Reprehension seldom is the duty of a minister. A good life is the best lecture." If the clergy of the established church had merely censured those who were wicked in accordance with their duty, they would not be under attack. For he held that "if it happens that a life is so wicked as to become notoriously offensive, . . . such a man ceases to be popular. For I dare affirm, that vice never in any country was held in reverence for its own sake, and so far as a man is openly wicked, he is unpopular." Henry concluded that if a minister were being censured merely for doing his duty, that the minister would be upheld by all sensible men. This was not the case in regard to the clergy of the established church.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., I, p. 112.

Henry could not sanction a government which persecuted Christians in order to further an established church which the people felt had become more licentious with each passing day. The government of the King was not serving its

purpose when it had encroached upon religious liberty in order to perpetuate the Anglican Church, for Henry held that ". . . liberty ought to be the direct end of your government. . . . Liberty, the greatest of all earthly blessings--give us that precious jewel, and you may take everything else."²⁵ Undoubtedly the evils of an established church

²⁵Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 435-436.

preyed heavily upon the mind of the man who led Virginia into the path of Revolution against the divinely ordained King of the British Empire! The Revolution brought to America a new form of government--a government wherein all men might worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

The Struggle for American Freedom

The Stamp Act Resolution intensified the struggle by Patrick Henry against infringement by the British government upon the inalienable rights of all Englishmen. This struggle threw the American colonies into what Henry considered to be a state of nature, a condition in which the colonies must, if they were to fulfill their duty to God and to themselves, fight for their God-given rights, and fight, too, for that most precious of all rights--"liberty!"

Stamp Act Resolutions

The Parson's Cause Case had won for Patrick Henry attention throughout the state and a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Three years later he stood up in this chamber and gave a speech which elevated him into a permanent position in the history of the United States. This speech was in support of a series of resolutions known to history as the Stamp Act Resolutions.

These resolutions were without a doubt one of the original acts of the Revolution. Morgan²⁶ felt that the

²⁶ Morgan, op. cit., pp. 90-93.

common people of Virginia were already inclined toward the pathway of independence, yet the aristocracy hesitated, for they still maintained strong ties with the British Crown and strong sentimental feeling for the British way of life. The Tidewater leaders supported the Anglican Church, and many of them still felt great affection for the privileges and manners associated with royalty. They were unhappy with the British taxation plans but all of them still professed allegiance to the Crown. Were they willing to protest? Yes! but revolt? No! The masses on the other hand had increased daily contact with the ideas of the various dissenter groups who forcefully proclaimed natural rights, disestablishment, and the right of rebellion. The masses

were, however, as yet without a leader to co-ordinate and direct these new-born sentiments, for the Tidewater aristocracy still controlled the government of Virginia.

The young backwoods lawyer was still unknown to many of these Virginia leaders when he rose and proposed these resolutions in a vigorous protest against the laying of taxation upon the people of Virginia by any except their own duly chosen representatives. They stated that the first Englishmen who had come to Virginia had brought with them all of the rights which they had enjoyed in the mother country. These rights had been consistently reaffirmed in the various charters which the Kings had granted to the colonies. One of the foremost of these was characteristic of British freedom, in that it held that the powers of taxation and of internal police were to be handled by the elected representatives of the people. Insomuch as these rights had never been ceded by the colonies, the Americans were still in full possession of them. Indeed, they were God-given rights and could not be awarded by or taken away from Englishmen or their posterity. Any taxation, therefore, of the colonists of Virginia by any group other than their local assembly would destroy freedom basic to both the colonists and to Englishmen everywhere. Henry closed his argument with the quotation, which was to become world famous, "Tarquin and Caesar had each his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George the Third--may profit by

their example." At this point, Patrick Henry heard once more murmurs of treason from a Virginia audience.²⁷

²⁷Henry, op. cit., I, p. 86.

The speech began a new era in the political life of Virginia, for Henry soon achieved domination of the colonial legislature. Morgan²⁸ quotes observers who stated that

²⁸Morgan, op. cit., p. 145.

recognition should be given to Patrick Henry as the ". . . first who broke the influence of that aristocracy, and" who was the first to ". . . surprise them with the fact that a new path was opened to the temple of honor, besides that which led through the favor of the King."

The Parson's Cause case had won Henry a seat in the House of Burgesses from Louisa County, and this was the address which had first caused men to utter the word "treason" against him. The Parson's Cause speech and the Stamp Act Address were similar in their viewpoint; both had been protests against what he felt to be usurpation of power by the Royal government. Both had brought him close to the precipice of advocating rebellion and had been the cause of murmurs of sedition. Nor was the young Virginian unaware of the aftermath of his actions. In his will Patrick Henry left a copy of the resolutions and explained

that he had presented them as the situation appeared whereby no one else would present the resolutions through "fear" or ". . . influence of some kind or other."²⁹ William Wirt

²⁹Henry, op. cit., I, p. 81.

Henry³⁰ said, "From that day he had a right to be, as he

³⁰Ibid., I, p. 87.

was, the acknowledged leader of the colony of Virginia." The young lawyer from Louisa County might not have been aware of all of the consequences that were to follow his actions, but he had taken the first steps along the road to rebellion. Patrick Henry slowly but carefully guided the footsteps of the people of Virginia, and it was Virginia, along with Massachusetts, that assumed leadership of the American Revolution. Jefferson, Henry's most severe critic in later years, admitted, ". . . but after all, he was before all of us in inaugurating and in maintaining the spirit of the Revolution."³¹

³¹Veterans of Foreign Wars, Great Crisis in our History As Told by Its Makers, p. 284.

The Deepening Struggle

In the next few years, as protests met with suppressions, the American people quickened their pace along the perilous road to Independence, and one of their foremost guides was Patrick Henry. The Grenville Program had, through its taxation and its attempt to stifle the ever-present pioneer spirit of the people by closing the frontier, but fanned the flames of discontent. During these years, Patrick Henry led Virginia in her protests. By 1774 Meade³² found Henry to be ". . . the leader in the

³²Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry, Patriot in the Making, p. 306.

advanced measures now proposed in Virginia," against the Intolerable Acts. He was one of the leaders on the floor of the Continental Congress. As John Adams later wrote to Jefferson, "In the Congress of 1774, there was not one member, except Patrick Henry, who appeared to me sensible of the precipice, or rather, the pinnacle on which he stood, and had candor and courage enough to acknowledge it."³³ At

³³Henry, op. cit., I, p. 240.

this convention Henry admitted to Adams that he saw no solution except outright revolution--whenever popular

sentiment endorsed this procedure.³⁴

³⁴Ibid., I, p. 239.

In March of the following year, Henry led the group which overpowered the more cautious leaders of the Virginia aristocracy by forcing an army preparedness bill through the state legislature. At this time, he made yet another speech which became famous throughout the world. He began this address by remarking, ". . . It is natural for man to indulge in the illusions of hope." He pointed out, however, the folly of this course, in consideration of the manner in which the British were oppressing the citizens of Massachusetts. He stated, moreover, that there was no reason to expect anything but the worst; however, ". . . We shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations. . . ." He further exclaimed, "The war is inevitable--and let it come!! I repeat, sir, let it come!!!" Henry questioned the assembly: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?" He concluded with the immortal lines, "Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"³⁵

³⁵Ibid., I, pp. 261-266.

This was not an idle statement, for Patrick Henry

demonstrated on several occasions that death did not strike the fear within him that it commonly arouses in other men. His own death and the death of his brother-in-law provided ample illustrations of this. Another example may be found in a letter which he addressed to a relative upon hearing of the death of a friend: "I heartily lament the death . . . so far as it is rational to lament the exchange of a bad world for one where sorrow never enters."³⁶ To Patrick

³⁶Ibid., II, p. 252.

Henry death was merely a passport to eternal life; therefore, he could not understand why men should fear a revolution which was clearly blessed by God! He later wrote of his actions during this period, professing that he had not worried himself with the possible responses of the people pertaining to some of these actions, for ". . . if people would not die or be free, it was of no consequence what sort of government they lived under."³⁷

³⁷Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 109-110.

Only two months later Patrick Henry was to put the people to a test of their resolution. The royal governor, alarmed by the battles of Lexington and Concord, had removed a supply of gunpowder owned by the state and had placed it in storage. Henry rallied a militia group in his

county to capture the powder. William Wirt Henry³⁸ termed

³⁸Ibid., I, p. 296.

Patrick Henry's action during this period as "the bugle call to arms."

The following year Patrick Henry was elected to his first term as Governor of Virginia. A few weeks later, a Virginian stood up before the Continental Congress and proposed, in obedience to his state's instructions: "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states . . ."³⁹

³⁹Henry, op. cit., I, p. 401.

No one had worked more diligently to bring this day about than Patrick Henry. To him went a large measure of the glory, and the danger. As Meade⁴⁰ expressed it, "If the

⁴⁰Meade, op. cit., p. 339.

Americans won, Henry would be acclaimed as a founding father, one of the great men of history. If they failed, he would be a traitor and probably hang on an English gibbet."

A Struggle for Inalienable Rights

To Patrick Henry the question of success or failure was superfluous, for the American Revolution was a struggle for justice and the God-given rights of Americans; thus, it had Divine sanction.

Patrick Henry had no lingering doubts about the justification of rebellion against the British government. The struggle was not against the traditional English form of government; it was against the unlawful usurpation of power by the King and parliament which infringed upon the rights of Englishmen and Americans alike. He declared that "taxes in the mother country had . . . destroyed one of the most beautiful systems that ever the world saw."⁴¹ The

⁴¹Henry, op. cit., III, p. 470.

Revolution was indeed a part of a one-hundred year struggle by Englishmen against the attempt by a government to usurp by implication.⁴²

⁴²Ibid., III, p. 473.

Henry had already outlined the basis upon which government was formed in the Parson's Cause case.⁴³

⁴³Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 32-43.

Government was a conditional compact, composed of mutual and

dependent covenants, the King stipulating protection on the one and the people stipulating obedience on the other. A violation of these covenants by either party discharged the other from obligation. By disallowing acts of the colonial legislature designed for the general welfare of the colony, the King had degenerated into a tyrant and absolved the people from their obligations. As he had pointed out in the Stamp Act Resolution,⁴⁴ the attempt by Parliament to enact

⁴⁴Ibid., I, pp. 80-93.

taxation without representation was tyranny and would tend to destroy both British and American freedom. Henry had no sympathy with the idea that the actions of the people of Boston or his own action in the gunpowder incident had in any way altered the case. The gunpowder, for example, had been the property of the people of Virginia. He stated, "You will readily perceive the absurdity of the pretence, that the King can have property in anything distant from his people, and," he continued, "how dangerous is that position that his protection (for which we have already paid him) may be withdrawn at pleasure."⁴⁵ As Henry later proclaimed,

⁴⁵Ibid., I, p. 289.

"The despotism of our sovereign ought to be considered as an implied consent on his part to dissolve the compact between

us . . ." After this dissolution, America was in a state of nature--a condition under which no government exists.⁴⁶ One

⁴⁶Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 627-628.

of the most important of these natural rights, which oppressed people might now assume, was the right of rebellion.

Henry's firm belief in the right of rebellion might perhaps have dated back to his early childhood, for Presbyterian ministers had long proclaimed the right of rebellion against any infringement of a people's God-given rights.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Henry, op. cit., I, p. 196.

This right he asserted again and again during the years of controversy.⁴⁸ At the Virginia Ratification Convention he

⁴⁸Meade, op. cit., pp. 133, 173, 181, 333.

had struggled for its inclusion in the listing of rights retained by Virginia upon ratification of the United States Constitution and in the proposed amendments to the new Constitution.⁴⁹ The day before his death, he reaffirmed in

⁴⁹Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 579-580, 592-593.

his last public speech this profound theory.⁵⁰ This was,

⁵⁰ Ibid., II, p. 609.

however, not a right which should be taken lightly, he had cautioned. Nor was it an excuse for disobedience to law. Henry had, indeed, while Governor of Virginia, and as a State legislator, insisted upon obedience to the laws of the state.⁵¹ In the events leading to revolution, however, this

⁵¹ Ibid., I, p. 145; II, p. 13; III, p. 297.

was not the case. The people were oppressed by the government and were, therefore, in a "state of Nature," and had recourse to the right of rebellion in order to protect their God-given natural rights.

Liberty--The True Purpose of Government

The American Declaration of Independence had declared that all men were entitled by God to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Patrick Henry considered liberty, as being perhaps the first and foremost of their rights. He stated, ". . . The first thing I have at heart is American liberty. . . ."⁵² This right was essential to

⁵² Henry, op. cit., III, p. 449.

government, for "the great and direct end of government is

liberty. Secure our liberty and privileges, and the end of government is answered. If this be not effectually done, government is an evil."⁵³ Whether or not this liberty would

⁵³Ibid., III, p. 589.

be maintained depended upon the morality of the people--on how closely they followed God's commandments. If they failed to do so, then liberty was meaningless. He explained this to the officer he had appointed as the commandant of the Illinois Territory: "The grand objects which are disclosed to the view of your countrymen, will prove beneficial or otherwise, according to the virtue and abilities of those who are called to direct the affairs of that remote Country;" and Henry instructed the officer, "You are on all occasions to inculcate on the people the value of liberty."⁵⁴ Moreover, he endorsed the same view while discussing

⁵⁴Ibid., III, p. 214.

the value of the Stamp Act Resolutions and of the Revolution itself. He promised upon his election as Governor that "my constant endeavor shall be to guard the right of all my fellow citizens from every encroachment."⁵⁵

⁵⁵Ibid., I, p. 456.

This revolution, Henry considered a means of Divine

testing to ascertain the worthiness of the people for liberty. As he told his daughter in October of 1787, ". . . You will remember that Providence has ordered to all a position of suffering & uneasiness in this world, that we may think of preparing for a better," and again in December of that year, "experience will teach you that this world is not made for complete happiness."⁵⁶

⁵⁶Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 329-330.

Henry summed up this philosophy when he had told his militia, upon the occasion of the gunpowder incident,

Should I keep back my opinion at this time I should consider myself guilty of treason toward my country and treason toward the majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly Kings. I have no doubt but that God, who in former years had hardened Pharaoh's heart that He might show forth His power and glory in the redemption of His chosen people, has, for similar purposes permitted the flagrant outrages which have occurred. . . . Therefore, we have only to trust in the Neverchanging, all powerful God of Hosts!!!⁵⁷

⁵⁷Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 280-281.

Obedience to God resulting in high morals were the answer, for "a people without morals may acquire liberty, but without morals they cannot preserve it."⁵⁸ As Henry pointed out

⁵⁸Ibid., I, p. 303.

at the Constitutional Convention, Americans must seek, for their new nation, not greatness but the "jewel" liberty. As he stated, "What do we require? Not pre-eminence, but safety. That our citizens may be able to sit down in peace and security under their own fig trees."⁵⁹ In the mind of

⁵⁹Henry, op. cit., III, p. 583.

Patrick Henry, liberty was the key to all. The British had become a powerful nation ". . . not because their government is strong and energetic; but, sir, because liberty is its direct end and foundation."⁶⁰

⁶⁰Ibid., III, p. 446.

Manifest Destiny - Key to Safety and Greatness

Patrick Henry proclaimed during the debates over ratification of the United States Constitution that the aim of the United States must be the liberty of its citizens--not world power. Yet, he speculated that America might be able to achieve both! The key to this problem, Henry proclaimed, lay in safeguarding the Western territories. He viewed Western expansion as America's manifest destiny, and it was more than this to the Virginia leader, for the West offered the only possible solution to the South's great problem--the impediments arising from Negro slavery.

Slavery--The Southern Curse

Long before the American colonies had gained their independence, Patrick Henry began wrestling with the problem which yet plagues the minds of America's statesmen--the problem of the American Negro. Could it have been through his association with the Louisa County teachers, during his boyhood, that Henry first reached the conclusion that slavery was a moral blot on the country? The Quakers had long been advocates of abolition.⁶¹ During his second term as

⁶¹John C. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution, p. 234.

Governor, Patrick Henry acknowledged the receipt of an anti-slavery tract from a Quaker friend with the following letter:

It is not a little surprising that the professors of Christianity, whose chief excellence consists in softening the human heart, and in cherishing and improving its finer feelings, should encourage a practice so totally repugnant to the first impressions of right and wrong: What adds to the wonder is that this abominable practice has been introduced in the most enlightened age.⁶²

⁶²William Wirt Henry, Patrick Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, I, p. 152.

Patrick Henry continued, with true Calvinistic introspection: ". . . it is inconsistent with the bible, and destructive to liberty. . . . and believe me I shall honor

the Quakers for their noble efforts to abolish the institution." Faced with the current reality, however, Henry could find no solution except ". . . let us transmit to our descendants, together with our slaves, a pity for their unhappy lot, and," he stressed, "an abhorrence for slavery." He concluded, "I know not when to stop. I could say many things on the subject; a serious view of which gives a gloomy perspective for future times."⁶³

⁶³Ibid., I, pp. 152-153.

Henry had long proclaimed that Virginia suffered from slavery and lack of religious freedom.⁶⁴ What was there in

⁶⁴Ibid., I, pp. 112-116.

the problem that gave him such a "gloomy perspective" for future times? The case he presented was clear. The South was a minority within the American colonies; it became increasingly so as time progressed.⁶⁵ Even before the

⁶⁵Ibid., I, pp. 112-116.

Declaration of Independence was written, he had been looking ahead to that day when there would be an American Union. This Union was inevitable, for ". . . separate Confederacies will ruin us . . ."⁶⁶ Patrick Henry emphasized the need for

⁶⁶Henry, op. cit., III, p. 486.

a Union: ". . . The first thing I have at heart is American liberty; the second thing is American Union. . . ." ⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ibid., III, p. 449.

The question remained, however; how would Henry's beloved Virginia and the remainder of the South fare in this Union? Would the liberties of Southerners be secure? Even before this time there had been signs of friction. During the revolution there had been evidence that the North might put its interests above those of the Union. ⁶⁸ As this

⁶⁸ George Morgan, The True Patrick Henry, pp. 333, 335, 348.

Henry, op. cit., I, p. 94; II, pp. 25, 48, 53, 175; III, pp. 464, 475.

strife continued, Henry could see how the South, being a slave-holding minority, would be sacrificed to the interests of the North, in laws regulating military problems. For example, Southern Congressmen had warned him during the sessions held by the Congress of the Articles of Confederation that "the Northern interest is all prevalent; their members are firmly united, and carry most measures to the disadvantage of the South." ⁶⁹ Religious freedom would help,

⁶⁹ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 402.

for it would bring increased population and might bring

manufacturing to the South and thereby lessen the sectional differences. Elimination of tariffs also might stimulate manufacturing.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 113-116.

These things would help alleviate the effect of slavery, but what of the institution itself? Generations of Southern statesmen could find no solution, nor could Patrick Henry. The only alternative for Christians lay in their moral obligation for the well-being of their human chattel and their realization of the true nature of the problem. As Henry commanded his daughter, "Your servants, . . . will have the strongest claim on your charity; let them be well fed, well clothed, nursed in sickness, and," he stressed, "let them never be unjustly treated."⁷¹

⁷¹Ibid., II, p. 309.

Although he was a slave owner himself, Patrick Henry was honest about the nature of the problem. Slavery was a sin; it was a problem that clouded the future prospects of Virginia. There was nothing she could do about it at this time, for ". . . to re-export them is now impracticable, and sorry I am for it."⁷² Not for Henry was the futility of

⁷²Ibid., I, p. 114.

plans designed toward African colonization, nor did he approve of the cruelty resulting from the emancipation of a people then incapable of caring for themselves.⁷³

⁷³Ibid., III, p. 577.

The slavery issue was one of the reasons why Henry feared the consolidated government he foresaw in the American Constitution. He predicted emancipation by Northern interests through implied emergency wartime power. He asserted, ". . . slavery is detested--we feel its fatal effects--we deplore it with all the pity of humanity. Let all these considerations . . . press with full force on the minds of Congress . . ." and emancipation would be the result. He continued, ". . . As much as I deplore slavery, I see that prudence forbids its abolition." He concluded by asking the question which was to remain before Southerners for many generations: "But is it practicable, by any human means, to liberate them without producing the most dreadful and ruinous consequences?"⁷⁴ Henry could arrive at no

⁷⁴Ibid., III, pp. 576-577.

definite conclusion. There was, however, some encouragement. He exclaimed, "Our countryside will be peopled. The question is, shall it be with Europeans or Africans?"⁷⁵

⁷⁵Henry, op. cit., I, p. 75.

Religious freedom, elimination of tariffs and encouragement of immigration could possibly provide the solution, for ". . . the disadvantage from the great number of slaves may perhaps wear off, when the present stock and their descendants are scattered through the immense deserts in the West."⁷⁶

⁷⁶Ibid., I, p. 114.

The West--America's Hope

As he had previously demonstrated in his concern over the problems of slavery, Patrick Henry was vitally interested in the West. Of frontier birth himself, he held that the open stretches of the wilderness presented the key to America's greatness, and a possible answer to the dire consequences, he prophesied, would accompany Southern slavery.

Patrick Henry sponsored a resolution in the Virginia legislature shortly after the American Revolution which stated that navigation on the Mississippi was "guaranteed" to Americans ". . . by the laws of God and nature, as well as by compact."⁷⁷ According to the Virginia statesman, the

⁷⁷Henry, op. cit., II, p. 327.

West was a gift of God to the American people; consequently,

it could not be taken away by threats of force or bartered away by treaty. Meade and Wirt⁷⁸ pointed out that Patrick

⁷⁸William Wirt, Life of Patrick Henry, pp. 1-35.

Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry, Patriot in the Making, pp. 223-226.

Henry was always a frontiersman at heart. He was born in a semi-frontier area and had spent much of his childhood in enjoyment of outdoor life. During his adulthood, Henry was always following the mobile frontier. He could not afford, due to his preoccupation with political service, to move into the wilderness itself; but he consistently transported his family into semi-isolated areas, as far away from the Virginia capital as was practical.

Both his personal and political life demonstrated the influence of the "back country." Jefferson complained of Henry that "in his heart, he preferred low society and sought it as often as possible."⁷⁹ Patrick Henry was not a

⁷⁹Veterans of Foreign Wars, Great Crisis in Our History, As Told by Its Makers, p. 285.

frontiersman in the true sense of the word; he could fit into the society of the Tidewater plantations when necessary, but on the other hand, he could adjust himself to the rusticity of frontier or semi-cultured pioneer cabins with apparently as much ease and perhaps as much or more

pleasure. Although Henry's family was socially superior to the masses during his boyhood, they taught him the value of free association with the common people.⁸⁰ Throughout his

⁸⁰Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 10-20.

adolescence Patrick Henry had contact with the dissenter religions of the West, and in later life several members of Henry's numerous family moved westward. He cautioned his daughter against the aloofness of the aristocrats, admonishing her to "take care to be affable and polite to the poorest as well as to the richest. A reserved haughtiness is a sure indication of a weak mind and an unfeeling heart."⁸¹

⁸¹Henry, op. cit., II, p. 307.

As Henry began a new phase of his professional and public career, the West was always influencing his thoughts. He wrote numerous letters to Washington and to friends elsewhere concerning his countless land speculations.⁸² He also

⁸²Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 120-121, 467-469, 618; II, pp. 175, 255, 298.

continued a voluminous correspondence stressing the essentiality of safeguarding the West throughout his

career.⁸³ During the revolution, Henry indicated an intense

⁸³ Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 146, 579, 608; II, pp. 23, 25, 218-220; III, pp. 46-47, 51-52, 215, 292-294, 327, 376.

interest in defending the Northwest Territory.⁸⁴ This

⁸⁴ Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 51-54, 209-219, 220-222, 292-296, 313, 350-355.

interest never slackened.

As the war progressed, and the Southern statesman directed his thoughts toward final victory; he became concerned over the rise of sectionalism.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 291-302, 327-328, 507; III, p. 376.

As Patrick Henry strove to gain even more western land for the colonies, he exclaimed, "Where are our men of abilities? Why do they not come forth to save our country?" He attempted to avert dissension in the western lands through encouraging the future division of Virginia's territory into new states, for "this is a matter that is in danger of being finally lost, if the Southern People do divide. It is a Matter that may ruin the Western Country, which must principally support the Glory of America in future Times." He concluded, therefore, "Let us all then unite; & when united, we shall scarcely be sufficient to

counterbalance the Weight of those who are laboring to check & keep down our western settlements."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ibid., III, p. 376.

Patrick Henry was not apprehensive about the American Indians, for they, unlike the Negroes, could be assimilated into the American culture. He had long been active in various projects to spread Christianity among them.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ibid., II, pp. 273-274.

While Henry was Governor of Virginia, he had always counseled fair treatment and patience in dealing with the various tribes. He had demanded that Virginians abide by the terms of their Indian treaties.⁸⁸ Henry displayed his

⁸⁸ Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 146-147, 374-377.

usual reaction toward mistreatment of the Indians in his letter referring to the murder of a Shawnee chief by Kentuckians: ". . . were it not for the miserable condition of many with you, I should demand the delivery of the offenders previous to any other step. For where is this wretched Business to end?"⁸⁹ He even advocated a plan in

⁸⁹ Ibid., III, pp. 144-148.

the Virginia legislature to promote eventual amalgamation

through state subsidization of Indian-white marriages.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Henry, op. cit., II, p. 219.

The primary concern of Patrick Henry was not the Indians; it was the Northern interests who would, due to differing economic conditions and slavery, attempt to prevent westward expansion. Henry feared that "the Northern people will probably embarrass Indian affairs--otherwise the Balance of power will come to the South."⁹¹ Upon

⁹¹Henry, op. cit., III, p. 410.

sending instructions to Virginia's delegate in the Continental Congress to propose independence from Britain, Henry had warned him to be certain about the securing of the West.⁹²

⁹²Henry, op. cit., I, p. 410.

After the close of the Revolution, the Virginian leader became increasingly pleased with the government of the Articles of Confederation because "the Confederation . . . has secured us a territory greater than any European monarch possesses," and he angrily denounced the Confederation's detractors, saying, ". . . and shall such a government which has been thus strong and virtuous, be accused of imbecility, and abandoned for want of energy?"⁹³ Many of Henry's

⁹³Henry, op. cit., III, p. 437.

contemporaries maintained that the West was the primary cause of his distaste for the proposed American Constitution. James Madison wrote George Washington in December of 1789, ". . . many of our most leading federal men are extremely soured by what has already passed." Madison continued, "Mr. Henry, who has hitherto been the champion of the federal cause, has become a cold advocate, and in the event of an actual sacrifice of the Mississippi by Congress, will unquestionably go over to the opposite side."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 301.

The West was, in Patrick Henry's eyes, indispensable to America. It afforded Americans the opportunity of "ascending to the rank which their natural advantages authorize them to hold among the nations of the earth."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Ibid., II, p. 299.

The West afforded too a safeguard of American liberty, "for if our present system grows into tyranny, is not a frontier possession most eligible?"⁹⁶ In the wide reaches of the

⁹⁶ Henry, op. cit., III, p. 414.

American West, the South had the opportunity to keep a balance of power which would protect her agricultural economy against the North and perhaps afford a solution to

the dilemma caused by the un-Godly system of slavery.⁹⁷

⁹⁷Ibid., I, pp. 67-69; III, p. 522.

The West would be swiftly populated through the grant of religious freedom to immigrants;⁹⁸ moreover, the West was

⁹⁸Ibid., I, p. 116.

America's "manifest destiny." It was a part of the American heritage--it was "guaranteed to Americans by the laws of nature and God . . ."⁹⁹ as a Divine blessing to

⁹⁹Ibid., II, p. 299; III, p. 327.

"principally support the glory of America in Future Times."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰Ibid., II, p. 376.

Patrick Henry, therefore, as an humble servant of God, ascertained that it was his duty to strive toward securing the West for America's posterity.

The young back-country lawyer who had shocked the courtroom with his eloquence in the Parson's Cause case had risen to acknowledged leadership of Virginia--yet Patrick Henry's basic concepts had not changed. The Parson's Cause case, the struggle for disestablishment, the Stamp Act Controversy, and the Revolution itself had been all a part of his attempts to secure religious and political freedom for

the people of his state and of his country. As a leader of Virginia and the South during this period he had been foresighted enough to see that the future of his state and region lay in an American Union. He had been foresighted enough, too, to see that the "peculiar institution" of slavery menaced the future of the South and that the only possible buffer to this menace lay in the West--which a generous God had bestowed upon his people. Throughout these years Henry had not questioned the outcome of his actions. He had been intent only in fulfilling his duty to that Master which he "revered above all earthly kings." This was to be his guiding philosophy in the years to follow.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT AGAINST CONSOLIDATION

To the American of today, who has inherited a love of the United States Constitution, no phase of Patrick Henry's career is more confusing than is his fight against the adoption of the American Constitution at the Virginia Ratification Convention.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the reasons that Henry opposed the adoption of the Constitution. Through a study of his speeches at the Ratification Convention, it becomes evident that he feared the new government would create a consolidated government which would be oppressive to the agricultural, slave-holding South. This same consolidation would, moreover, endanger the liberties of all Americans. In order to understand more fully the reasons for this fear, it is necessary to understand both Henry's ideas of human nature, and the functions of a good government, in addition to what he considered to be the defects within the Constitution itself. Only through analyzations of these factors do the reasons behind Henry's fear of the Constitution and the motivation behind the struggle for Constitutional amendments become evident. The ensuing chapter, then, will present those factors and analyze them.

Patrick Henry Announces His Opposition

In that interval between the adjournment of the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia and the election of delegates to the Virginia Ratification Convention, there was considerable speculation as to the course of action that Patrick Henry would pursue.¹ He had refused to become a

¹George Morgan, The True Patrick Henry, pp. 337-340.

delegate to the Convention, but his final position on the document itself was not known. The people of Virginia had been recognizant for some time of Henry's growing distaste for Northern politicians who proposed to relinquish the country's Mississippi River navigation rights in return for trade advantages with Spain. Henry, of course, had made known the fact that he considered the West a gift of God. He also maintained that the only hope for the agricultural, slave-holding South would be to obtain a balance of power in a union with the Northern states.²

²William Wirt Henry, Patrick Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, I, pp. 112-116; II, pp. 23-25, 174-176, 218-220, 287-301; III, pp. 374-377, 410-411, 414, 518-527.

Despite their growing realization of Henry's distrust of the more populous Northern states, the Federalists (those who favored adoption of the Constitution) had hoped that they might be able to persuade him to accept it.

Immediately upon his return from Philadelphia, George Washington sent Patrick Henry a copy of the proposed Constitution and expressed his desire that Henry would receive it favorably. In his reply, however, to Washington on October 19, Patrick Henry wrote that he would be unable to support the new form of government.³ Madison and Alexander Hamilton,

³Ibid., II, pp. 320-321.

in common with other Federalists, had expressed their eagerness through a series of letters in March, to have Henry among the ranks of supporters of the Constitution.⁴ After

⁴Ibid., II, pp. 301, 312-313, 321.

his reply to Washington, however, Patrick Henry became the object of bitter criticism from many of the Constitution's supporters. Madison, for example, wrote Jefferson letters indicating a suspicion that Henry's motives were based on designs toward dissolution of the Union and the establishment of a Southern Confederacy with Henry at the head.⁵

⁵Ibid., II, p. 332.

The ensuing election of delegates to the Virginia Ratification Convention was not conclusive to either faction. Patrick Henry wrote a confidant on June 19, 1778, that the great majority of the people of Virginia opposed the new Constitution but that "the friends and seekers of

power, have, with their usual ability wriggled themselves into the choice of the people, by assuming shapes as various as the faces of the men they address on such occasions."⁶

⁶Ibid., II, p. 343.

In the same letter Henry had begun plans with Anti-Federalists in New York to form "Republican Societies" to fight the new governmental proposals. However, the Federalists, unlike Henry, were confident. At the beginning of the Convention on June 8, Washington wrote that Henry's speeches in opposition to the Constitution were "confused." Washington confided that "friends of the Constitution think they will have a majority of twenty and will increase it considerably."⁷ This confidence was to be short-lived. By

⁷Henry P. Johnston, Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, 1794-1826, IV, p. 337.

the 13th of June, Madison was writing to Washington in "despair" because of the damage inflicted by Patrick Henry's arguments; and by June 23, the day before the final balloting, he estimated that the Federalists had "only a bare majority" and that the issue "was in doubt."⁸

⁸Henry, op. cit., II, p. 371.

Patrick Henry spoke on seventeen of the twenty-two days during which debates occurred. He made three speeches

per day on each of four days, five on another day, and eight on one day. One speech of Henry's lasted for seven hours.⁹

⁹Ibid., II, pp. 350-351.

Observers at the scene reported a "perfect stillness"¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., II, p. 347.

whenever Henry was speaking. One of the delegates present, who heard Henry's arguments that the Constitution created a consolidated government, was John Marshall. Might not Marshall have recalled many of Henry's deductions in the years to follow? Evidently Henry's oratory had its customary effect as was indicated by the declining Federalist voting strength.

The Struggle Against Ratification

In the Virginia Ratification debates Patrick Henry gave a more complete and detailed explanation of the concept of the nature of man than he had previously stated. He outlined, too, the proper function of government and illustrated why the Constitution needed additional safeguards to insure its functioning properly--as is shown in the following pages.

The Purpose of Government

Patrick Henry began his first speech by pointing out that each of the delegates should consider himself a "servant of the people" and ". . . a sentinel over their rights, liberty and happiness."¹¹ He also explained the

¹¹Ibid., III, p. 431.

purpose of government. "What, Sir," Henry asked, "is the genius of democracy?" Then he referred the assembly to the Bill of Rights of the Virginia State Constitution. "Government," he proclaimed, "is or ought to be instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people." "Therefore," he said, "the best government is that which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety." It must be ". . . effectively secured against the danger of maladministration," and, he concluded, "whenever any government shall be found inadequate, or contrary to these purposes, a majority of the community hath, an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to reform, alter or abolish it . . ."¹²

¹²Ibid., III, pp. 441-442.

He pointed out in his speech on June 7 that in government "there are certain political axioms which no free people ought ever to abandon." He elaborated, as follows:

It is impiously irritating the avenging hand of heaven, when a people who are in the full enjoyment of freedom, launch out into the wide-ocean of human affairs, and desert those axioms which alone can preserve liberty. . . . We have one, sir, that all men are by nature free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into society, they cannot by any compact deprive or divest their posterity. . . . Our bill of rights contains these admirable maxims.¹³

¹³Ibid., III, p. 459.

"In government," he proclaimed, "reason, self-preservation and every idea of propriety powerfully urges us to secure these dearest rights of human policy."¹⁴ He concluded,

¹⁴Ibid., III, p. 509.

"If you will in the language of freemen, stipulate, that there are rights which no man under heaven can take from you," then "you shall have me going along with you:--not otherwise."¹⁵ Patrick Henry had spent his entire life in

¹⁵Ibid., III, p. 579.

fighting for these basic freedoms of the American people, and he could not consent to any type of government which might endanger them. Indeed, as they were God-given freedoms, it was Patrick Henry's Christian duty as a servant of God, and as a sentinel of the people's freedoms, not to

consent to any plan of government which might interfere with them.

The Nature of Man

"Man," Patrick Henry warned, "is a fallen creature, a fallible being, and cannot be depended on without self-love."¹⁶ Certainly, a large measure of Henry's ideas of the

¹⁶Ibid., III, p. 531.

type of government which would serve the true function of government, the preservation of liberty, were based upon this idea of the nature of the human species. Had not the Presbyterian ministers which he admired during his youth proclaimed, ". . . the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his posterity of nature became enemies of God, slaves to Satan and servants unto sin. . . ."¹⁷ Henry

¹⁷Vincent L. Milner, Religious Denominations of the World, p. 346.

believed that "the depraved nature of man is well known. He has a natural bias toward his own interest, which will prevail over every consideration, unless it is checked."¹⁸ As

¹⁸Henry, op. cit., III, p. 518.

man was so weak and many among him were wicked--and therefore servants of Satan, it was apparent that any government

which did not establish safeguards against this basic human element would be unsuccessful. Indeed, the best government would be one which made the most effective provisions against this.

One of the primary modes in which this "self-love" manifested itself was in a desire for power because "human nature never will part from power."¹⁹ This human

¹⁹Ibid., III, p. 501.

temptation was present in all men, Patrick Henry deduced, for "the characteristic of the good or great Man is not that he has been exempted from the evils of life, but that he surmounted them."²⁰ The annals of history pointed this out,

²⁰Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 49-50.

for "can the annals of mankind exhibit one single example, where rulers overcharged with power willingly let go the oppressed, though solicited and requested most earnestly?"²¹

²¹Henry, op. cit., III, p. 444.

In fact, "a willing relinquishment of power is one of those things which human nature never was, nor ever will be capable of."²² What was there about the newly proposed

²²Ibid., III, p. 444.

government which did not provide for this innate weakness of man? Patrick Henry was very explicit in explaining this shortcoming.

Reasons Behind the Change in Government

In drawing up such a plan for government, the Philadelphia Convention had created a dangerous precedent for future time, for ". . . who authorized them to speak the language of, We, the People instead of We, the States?" He explained, ". . . liberty . . . tells me to ask this reason. . . . The people gave them no power to use their name. That they exceeded their power is perfectly clear."²³ Henry

²³Ibid., III, p. 433.

explained, "the federal convention ought to have amended the old system--for this purpose they were solely delegated: the object of their mission extended to no other consideration."²⁴ He pointed out that men in future generations who

²⁴Ibid., III, p. 434.

wished to usurp power would point to the fact that the government had been formed by a Convention which had no authority to do so.²⁵

²⁵Ibid., III, p. 466.

Why had the men at the Constitutional Convention usurped this authority and created a new government? Was it because the government of the Articles of Confederation was so weak that they were faced with the alternative of drastic action or anarchy? Patrick Henry did not think so. The Confederation had won the war; it had saved the West. Should it be, therefore, ". . . abandoned for want of energy?"²⁶ Henry pleaded with the delegates, "consider what

²⁶Henry, op. cit., III, p. 437.

you are about to do before you part with this government." He protested that history was replete with examples, "instances of people losing their liberties by their own carelessness and the ambition of a few."²⁷ Was this not the

²⁷Ibid., III, p. 437.

real reason for the proposed change in government? Henry did not think that the people wanted the change. After all, this convention and the Philadelphia Convention were merely the servants of the people themselves. He pointed out time and time again that the people were, in his opinion, satisfied. Their liberty and freedom were secure.²⁸ Also

²⁸Ibid., III, pp. 439, 462, 474, 578.

disturbing to Henry's mind was the fact that in many states

which had ratified the new Constitution, the masses had not been awarded the opportunity to vote on the election of delegates to the ratification conventions. He protested, ". . . only 10,000 were represented in Pennsylvania although 70,000 had a right to be represented. Is not this a serious thing?"²⁹

²⁹Ibid., III, p. 579.

If the people did not want a change in their government, why then had the Philadelphia Convention written the new Constitution? Henry could find two very distinct reasons: greed and ambition. He challenged the Federalists: "let me appeal to the candor of the committee, if the want of money be not the source of all our misfortunes."³⁰

³⁰Ibid., III, p. 486.

He maintained that the new government was clearly a consolidated one, and that its advocates sought "splendor"--not liberty.³¹ He appealed to their judgment, to examine the

³¹Ibid., III, p. 446.

pages of history. "And those nations who have gone in search of grandeur, power and splendor, have also fallen a sacrifice, and been the victims of their own folly. While they acquire those visionary blessings, they lost their

freedom."³² He asked, "cannot people be as happy under a

³²Ibid., III, pp. 438-439.

mild, as under a energetic government? . . . If I am not as rich as my neighbor, if I give my mite--my all--republican forbearance will say, that it is sufficient."³³

³³Ibid., III, pp. 485-486.

Patrick Henry warned the delegates of the greed exhibited by their Northern business associates: "There is a contest for money. . . . Not satisfied with a majority in the legislative councils, they must have all our property." He exclaimed, "I wish the Southern genius of America had been more watchful."³⁴ Furthermore, the change of

³⁴Ibid., III, p. 554.

government would not solve their financial problems: ". . . no nation ever paid its debts by a change of government, without the aid of industry. . . . At present you buy too much, and make too little to pay with. Will this new system promote manufactures, industry, and frugality? . . . The evils that attend us, lie in extravagance and want of industry, and can be removed only by assiduity and economy."³⁵

³⁵Ibid., III, p. 481.

He concluded that "the wealthy are captivated by the charm of the ten miles square"³⁶--the concentration of power in the National capital. This could bring only ruin.

³⁶Ibid., III, p. 461.

Concentration of Power

Patrick Henry feared the concentration of power into the hands of the Federal government for two reasons; these were (1) it would mean that if the consolidated government became controlled by individual interests, the liberty of the people would be completely destroyed, and (2) the South, an agricultural area beset with the sin of slavery, would be defenseless before the Northern majority. In his speeches before the Virginia Convention, he lengthily expounded those beliefs.

The newly proposed Constitution, Henry maintained, created a government of three branches--executive, judicial, and legislative. Any one of these three branches, he said, had enough authority to ultimately concentrate all of the powers of the government within its control. Once consolidation had occurred, it would be only a matter of time until the government would fall into the wrong hands and a dictatorship would result. The reason for the danger, he maintained, was due to the excess of power which the three units were given and also due to the ambiguity of the

document itself. There was, too, a very great danger in that there was no distinct listing of a Bill of Rights, enumerating the God-given rights of the people with which government was not to interfere.

Possible Governmental Usurpations

Patrick Henry made a series of predictions concerning the possible growth of the three parts of the government. He feared the power of the National Congress because he felt that it would eventually, through the means of direct taxation, assume unlimited taxation powers. He felt, also, that the groundwork had been laid for eventual national control over all elections and the possible increase or decrease of representation in the National Congress at will. The Congress would have unlimited lawmaking power, unrestrained by a bill of rights. Henry predicted that the government would redeem the paper money issued during the Revolution. As there was no power of recall, he felt that it would be impossible to impede a dictatorial Congress. The representatives of the various states would cloak their movements with secrecy and would insist to their constituents that they had been overruled by representatives of other states in their attempts to stop Congressional usurpation. Eventually the state governments would be taxed out of existence because of superior strength of the National government, and their laws would be pre-empted by Federal

legislation. Patrick Henry elaborated on these possibilities at great length.³⁷

³⁷ Henry, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 432-434, 441-446, 449-451, 453-458, 470-478, 495-503, 508, 519-530, 535-556, 567-569, 573-581.

The possibilities of Executive usurpation were no less dangerous, he stated. The President had unlimited control over the military, provided he could achieve Congressional sanction. This would not be difficult, Henry maintained, for together the two branches could increase Federal patronage to the extent that the President would come in at "the head of a Party" with a sound bedrock of a great number of Federal officeholders. The election costs of the office would be so high that the poor could not offer themselves for the office. Also, the President could, through treaty-making powers, which would be construed as being beyond the scope of the Constitution, make treaties which would be beneficial only to the commercial interests of particular segments of the population and treaties which could sacrifice the territories. Internal domestic legislation could be passed in accordance with the treaties. The legislation would, also, be beyond the scope of the Constitution. In addition, the President could, during some future war, abolish slavery as an emergency wartime measure. These possibilities, Patrick Henry reasoned, were quite

probable.³⁸

³⁸Ibid., III, pp. 432-434, 485-490, 522-526, 556-560.

The Judiciary, being appointed by the other two branches, would work hand-in-glove with them and would increase the scope of their appellate jurisdiction until they had destroyed the state judiciaries.³⁹

³⁹Ibid., III, pp. 432-434, 560-573.

The Danger of Ambiguity

Patrick Henry outlined the method by which the power of government would increase to an extent which would enable the fulfillment of these predictions. He pointed out that the Constitution and the laws passed under it would be preemptive of state jurisdiction as the "Supreme Law of the Land," and thus be paramount to any state legislation.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Ibid., III, pp. 565-569.

The power of this National government, he prophesied, would be increased immeasurably by use of the "necessary and proper" and "general welfare" clauses. These would be used to give the government additional power. Once this had been done, there would be no means to prevent the exercise of this power except through a Constitutional Amendment

which could be blocked by a small minority. Patrick Henry stated, as follows:

They say that everything that is not given is retained. The reverse of the proposition is true by implication. They do not carry their implication so far when they speak of the general welfare. No implication when the sweeping clause comes. Implication is only necessary when the existence of privileges is in dispute. The existence of powers is sufficiently established. If we trust our dearest rights to implication, we shall be in a very unhappy situation.⁴¹

⁴¹Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 472-473.

The revolution itself had been a fight over implication.⁴² The usage of implication, Henry maintained, would

⁴²Ibid., III, p. 473.

first destroy the rights of the states and then the freedom of the people.⁴³ The few clauses that restricted the

⁴³Ibid., III, pp. 489, 497-500, 517, 539, 549-550, 564, 570, 576-579.

National government were worse than no restriction at all for their inclusion was clear admission that all powers not retained were given; furthermore, this view was the usual construction in European countries. There would, therefore, be an endless amount of power and of means of exercising

this power.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Ibid., III, pp. 471-473, 533, 544, 548-549.

In addition to the sweeping clauses granting power, there was the general lack of clarity in the wording of the Constitution, as Henry pointed out in the following:

. . . for when power is given to this government . . . the language it assumes is clear, express, and unequivocal, but when this Constitution speaks of privileges, there is ambiguity, sir, a fatal ambiguity--an ambiguity which is very astonishing . . . there is the strangest language that I can conceive.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Ibid., III, p. 437.

Destruction of State Powers

Patrick Henry had pointed out that the true purpose of government was to safeguard the liberty of the people. The Constitution, he maintained, had not been written for this purpose; it had been written in a spirit of ambition and greed which sought world power. As man was by nature base and motivated by self-love and greed, an effective government must contain safeguards against this facet of human nature. The United States Constitution did not contain these safeguards; it was ambiguous and loosely worded. The new government was by construction a Federal government which would lead to a dangerous centralization of power.

Henry now explained how this would affect the state governments. This state power must be maintained because only through a separation of powers could government be controlled and "liberty" insured.

What of the powers of the states? Patrick Henry predicted that the states would ". . . glide imperceptibly and gradually out of existence."⁴⁶ This would be

⁴⁶Ibid., III, p. 472.

destructive of liberty for the state governments--those closest to the people--were the governments which the people could more easily control. This would be particularly drastic in the case of the Southern states, for the nation was divided into "carrying" and "productive," states and the "producing" South would be in a distinct minority. They would be taxed to benefit the "carrying" states; their slaves, freed. Henry warned that "no line is drawn between the powers of the government in many instances; and where there is a line there is no real check--the states must bow to the national government as being less powerful." Their best men would be attracted to the lure of the opulent Federal government; their judiciary would be sworn to maintain National law. Thus the Southern states would be prostrate.⁴⁷ Nor was there to be any hope of secession, for

⁴⁷Ibid., III, pp. 439, 497, 514-520, 554, 576-577.

the ratification was to be complete, forever, and only the right of rebellion would be left.⁴⁸ They would be helpless,

⁴⁸Ibid., III, p. 575.

for they would have given up both the sword and the purse.

Patrick Henry predicted that with their militia under National control and with the sources of "power" removed,

. . . we shall assemble in convention, recall our delegated powers, and punish our servants for abusing the trust reposed in them. Oh, sir, we should have fine times indeed, if to punish tyrants, it was only sufficient to assemble the people. Your arms wherewith you could defend yourselves are gone. . . . What resistance could be made? The attempt would be madness.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 442-443.

Henry foresaw a day when the majority of the people of Virginia would be united in the ". . . wish to alter their government . . ." but would be prevented from doing so by the other states.⁵⁰ What would be the position of the

⁵⁰Ibid., III, p. 447.

South when that day would come? Patrick Henry painted the following picture:

What shall the states have to do? Take care of the poor, repair and make highways, erect bridges, and so on, and so on. Abolish the state legislatures at once. What purposes should they be continued for? Our legislature will indeed be a ludicrous

spectacle--180 men marching in solemn farcial procession, exhibiting a mournful proof of the lost liberty of their country, without power of restoring it.⁵¹

⁵¹Ibid., III, pp. 497-498.

Was Patrick Henry being suspicious? He did not think so. He repeated his prior warnings:

Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect every one who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it, but downright force: Whenever you give up that force you are inevitably ruined.⁵²

⁵²Ibid., III, p. 436.

History had taught Henry that "unless a miracle" interposed no nation ever retained its liberty after this loss of both the "sword" and the "purse." Not only the South but also the other states should consider this, for "can you prove by any argumentative deduction, that it is possible to be safe without retaining one of these?"⁵³

⁵³Ibid., III, pp. 495-496.

Suffrage alone would not provide the answer either. Patrick Henry scoffed at those who "told us not to fear those in power as they are our representatives." He challenged the delegates to examine history and to determine ". . . whether liberty has been destroyed most often by the

licentiousness of the people, or by the tyranny of rulers?" He answered the question, "I imagine, sir, you will find the balance on the side of tyranny."⁵⁴

⁵⁴Ibid., III, p. 438.

He acknowledged that ". . . licentiousness is dangerous, and that it ought to be guarded against . . ." The government would do this, ". . . yet there is another thing it will as effectively do: it will oppress and ruin the people."⁵⁵

⁵⁵Ibid., III, p. 437.

What would make the government acceptable to Patrick Henry? First, there must be a Bill of Rights which would protect the freedoms which were inalienable and God-given.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Ibid., III, pp. 473, 508-509, 544-548.

Nothing could be left to implication as "the wicked will be continually watching: consequently you will be undone."⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ibid., III, p. 490.

In addition, there must be some effective way of checking the power of the National government. Henry pleaded for checks founded on "self-love." He further warned that in the Constitution "there will be no real checks, no real balances. What can avail your specious,

imaginary balances, your rope-dancing, chain-rattling, ridiculous ideal checks and contrivances?"⁵⁸ He pointed out

⁵⁸ Ibid., III, p. 446.

that there must be checks based on force. "Force" was the only real way of maintaining liberty. Otherwise, "This government will operate like an ambushade. It will destroy the State governments . . ." and then ". . . will destroy the liberties of the people, without giving them previous notice."⁵⁹ The only way to achieve a true separation of

⁵⁹ Ibid., III, p. 480.

powers between the state and National governments--the only true check on governmental powers--lay in maintaining state control of taxation and of the military power.⁶⁰ The proper

⁶⁰ Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 498-499, 588.

functions of the National government in respect to these needs must be satisfied, but the "sword" the "purse" must be left under state control. This must be accomplished before Virginia ratified the Constitution, else there would be no assurance that it could ever be effected.

Ratification of the Constitution

As the Convention wore on, it became apparent that Henry's words achieved some effect, for the fight boiled down to a struggle between subsequent or prior amendments. This was a retreat for the Federalists, as well as for Henry. Many of them had never been previously reconciled to amendments.⁶¹ Henry, of course, maintained that Virginia

⁶¹Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 410-411.

must remain out of the new government until the proposed amendments were safely adopted.⁶² However, when the final

⁶²Henry, op. cit., III, p. 480.

vote was taken on adoption of the Constitution, it passed by a vote of eighty-nine to seventy-nine.⁶³

⁶³Ibid., III, p. 591.

Patrick Henry had lost his battle against the United States Constitution, yet in a measure he had won also. Immediately after adoption, a committee was formed, including Patrick Henry and many of the opponents of the Constitution in its original form, to submit to the Convention "such amendments as shall be deemed necessary to be recommended" to the National Congress and to the other states. When the Committee reported to the Convention, it

incorporated most of Henry's proposed changes in its report. Attempts were made only to strike out one of the proposed amendments, but this failed by a vote of sixty-five to eighty-five. The remainder were passed without a record vote.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ibid., III, p. 600.

The Constitution was ratified by the State of Virginia. A struggle over amendments lay ahead.

The Struggle for Amendments

With the ratification of the United States Constitution by the Virginia Ratification Convention, Patrick Henry began the second phase of his battle for amendments to the document. He had insisted during the Convention that the basic freedoms of the people could only be insured by the refusal of Virginia to accede to the new plan of government until there should be the inclusion of a Bill of Rights and a change was made in the basic structure of the government which would leave the states some method of "force" whereby they could effectively maintain the basic separation of powers between the state and National governments. Patrick Henry felt it was still his duty as a "sentinel" of the people's rights to work for the changes he deemed essential.

Changes Advocated by the Virginia Ratification Convention

Immediately after ratifying the Constitution, the delegates at the Virginia Convention had appointed a committee to prepare such amendments as they might deem necessary for recommendation to the other states and the National Congress in accordance with the provisions of the new Constitution. The Committee had suggested some twenty amendments to the form of government itself, and the inclusion of a Bill of Rights which contained twenty articles. These recommendations incorporated basically the changes which Patrick Henry and his supporters had deemed necessary during the course of the Convention debates. Henry and several of his friends were themselves members of this Committee. The suggestions were adopted by record vote of the Convention.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 375-376; III, p. 600.

The report adopted by the Virginia Ratification Convention contained the proposals which had been advanced by Patrick Henry during the debates. The Bill of Rights incorporated the basic inalienable civil rights of the people. These were primarily covered by the first eight amendments to the United States Constitution. In addition, the third article sanctioned the right of rebellion. The nineteenth article protected conscientious objectors. The

twentieth article reaffirmed in great detail the rights of the people in regard to the free exercise of religion. This article was almost a facsimile of the Virginia Constitutional guarantee to religion.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 593-596.

Of the twenty proposed Constitutional amendments, the first and seventeenth were similar to those finally adopted as the ninth and tenth amendments to the United States Constitution. The third was an attempt to obtain some "force" by the states against usurpations of National government. It stated that in the case of direct taxes, they would be fixed by state quotas and if said quotas were raised by the states at the time required by Congress they would not be collected in such state. The remainder were an attempt to insert additional safeguards. The seventh and eighth amendments would have required a two-thirds vote of the National Congress to pass navigation laws or laws regulating commerce, a two-thirds vote of the entire Senate to ratify treaties affecting commerce, and a three-fourths vote of both Houses of Congress to ratify treaties abridging territorial rights and claims of the United States. The sixteenth amendment would have forbidden National government interference in the elective process. These amendments

were adopted by the Convention without a record vote.⁶⁷

⁶⁷Ibid., III, pp. 596-600.

The Fight for Adoption

As Patrick Henry had predicted, the adoption of the changes desired by the state convention, after the convention had ratified the Constitution, was not to be an easy matter.

At a meeting of the Anti-Federalists, members of the convention on the evening of adjournment, Patrick Henry had spoken out forcibly against proposals to resist the "operation" of the new government.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, he was

⁶⁸Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 412-413.

determined to do everything within his power to secure the adoption of the changes he deemed necessary. As several of the other states had suggested, at their ratification conventions, proposed amendments to the Constitution, Henry felt that a convention of the states for this purpose, in accordance with Constitutional provisions for this would be the most effective means of securing the amendments.⁶⁹

⁶⁹Ibid., II, p. 418.

Many of the delegates to the Ratification Convention

discovered that the Federalists, after the Convention had adjourned, were perhaps not so eager to see the new government modified as many of their supporters had thought.

James Madison wrote to Thomas Jefferson on July 24, that Patrick Henry was intent upon "mischief" to the new government.⁷⁰ On the 15th of August, Madison informed

⁷⁰ Ibid., II, p. 414.

Washington that Henry's proposals for a general convention of the states ". . . has a most pestilent tendency." He explained that "if a general convention cannot be parried, it is seriously to be feared that the system which has resisted so many direct attacks may be at last successfully undermined by its enemies."⁷¹ Washington replied on

⁷¹ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 414.

September 21, 1788, that "to be shipwrecked in sight of port would be the severest of all possible aggravations to our misery." Washington further stated, "I assure you that I am under painful apprehensions from the single circumstance of Mr. Henry having the whole game to play in the Assembly of this State," and he stressed, "the effect that it may have in others should be counteracted if possible."⁷²

⁷² Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 415-416.

George Washington's fears were realized for when the new session of the Virginia legislature met, Patrick Henry was the undoubted leader of the group. Washington wrote on November 17 that "the accounts from Richmond are indeed unpropitious to Federal measures," for "in one word it is said that the edicts of Mr. H. are enregistered with less opposition in the Virginia Assembly than those of the grand monarch by his parliaments." Washington mourned, "He has only to say, let this be law, and it is law."⁷³ Patrick

⁷³ Ibid., II, p. 432.

Henry had no time for waste on charges against the Federalists, for in his opinion "the universal cry of the people is for Amendments"⁷⁴ and Patrick Henry intended to see that

⁷⁴ Ibid., II, p. 429.

the people had them. The Federalists might wail that "it was a little importance whether a country was ruled by a despot . . . or by a demagogue" but Henry firmly pressed through measures calling upon the National Congress to call a general convention of the states and issued a circular letter to the other states asking that they join Virginia in this demand.⁷⁵ He firmly stated that he would ". . .

⁷⁵ Ibid., II, pp. 416-420.

oppose every measure tending to the organization of the government" unless the demand of the people for amendments was acceded to.⁷⁶ He stated that the people demanded

⁷⁶Ibid., II, p. 416.

amendments and that the legislators must therefore "bow, with the utmost deference, to the majesty of the people." Having secured the passage of the call for a general convention, Patrick Henry now blocked the attempts to elect Madison to the United States Senate and secured instead the election of two staunch Anti-Federalists.⁷⁷ Having accomplished these

⁷⁷Ibid., II, pp. 419, 427.

objectives, Patrick Henry went home.

The Federalists had evidently sensed the attitude of the people and when the elections for the new legislature and for United States Representatives were held, Henry could report that "the universal cry is for Amendments and the Federalists are obliged to join in it; but whether to amuse, or to conceal other views seems dubious."⁷⁸ Having

⁷⁸Ibid., II, p. 429.

resisted all attempts to place him in National office, Patrick Henry returned to the legislature, to await developments. When the National Congress met it took no action on

the pleas for a general convention. Madison introduced, as he had been instructed by the state legislature, seventeen proposed amendments in the United States House of Representatives. Twelve of these passed, and ten were ultimately adopted as the American Bill of Rights.⁷⁹ Patrick Henry

⁷⁹Ibid., II, pp. 440-460.

could do no more. He sensed that he had done all that he could at this time. He wrote a close friend on August 28, "As to my opinion of the Amendments, I think they will serve to injure rather than serve the cause of liberty, provided they go no further . . .," for as he had cautioned before, "what good end can be answered by rights, the tenure of which must be during pleasure. For right, without having power and might, is but a shadow!" He concluded with grave misgivings, "Now it seems that it is not proposed to add this force to the right by any amendment. It can therefore answer no purpose but to lull suspicion to talk on the subject."⁸⁰ Henry was no longer a young man. His health

⁸⁰Henry, op. cit., II, p. 444.

which had been poor throughout the Revolution was getting worse. Debts were piling up, and his family was pressed for his attentions. He resolved, therefore, to retire from public life. As he had stated at the Virginia Ratification

Convention, his course was to be one of acquiescence to the wishes of the people. Patrick Henry had outlined his future course of action when he had told the Virginia Ratification Convention the following:

If I shall be in the minority, I shall have those painful sensations which arise from a conviction of being overpowered in a good cause. Yet I will be a peaceable citizen. My head, my hand, and my heart shall be at liberty to retrieve the loss of liberty, and remove the defects of that system, in a Constitutional way.⁸¹

⁸¹Henry, op. cit., III, p. 590.

Patrick Henry would go home and wait, as he had phrased it:

I wish not to go to violence, but will wait with hopes that the spirit which predominated in the Revolution is not yet gone, nor the cause of those who are attached to the Revolution yet lost--I shall therefore patiently wait in expectation of seeing that government changed so as to be compatible with the safety, liberty, and happiness of the people.⁸²

⁸²Ibid., III, p. 590.

Patrick Henry went into retirement with deep misgivings. He feared for the future of America, for a Federal Government had been established. It was a government wherein the seeds of consolidation were sown. With this consolidation, there would be loss of power by those state governments--the governments closest to the people, and the increased danger of the base nature of man asserting control

over the one central government. The amendments would help, perhaps, but the Constitution itself was still vague in wording and the "wicked" were "ever watchful." He could do no more for the time being but pray to his merciful God and trust that "God grant I may never see the day when it shall be the duty of whiggish Americans to seek for shelter under any other government than that of the United States."⁸³

⁸³ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 430.

CHAPTER V

A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY

No period of Patrick Henry's life was more controversial than the period shortly before his death, when he came out of retirement and challenged the leadership of the Jeffersonian Republicans in Virginia. The Jeffersonians declared that Patrick Henry was a turncoat, and they were bitter in their criticism of him. The Federalists, on the other hand, welcomed him with open arms as a convert to their cause. The truth of the matter was that Patrick Henry was neither Jeffersonian nor Federalist. The purpose of this chapter is to point out the consistency of Patrick Henry's final days of public service. An examination of Henry's political beliefs shows that in his final candidacy for public office in Virginia he remained true to the principles which he had voiced at the Virginia Ratification Convention. These were the same principles which he had voiced as a young man. The political course pursued by Henry becomes entirely clear when considered in the light of the intense motivation of his Christian philosophy.

A Determined Retirement

When Patrick Henry had declined re-election to the Virginia legislature in 1791, he had announced his permanent

retirement from the political scene.¹ He remained true to

¹William Wirt Henry, Patrick Henry, Life, Correspondence, and Speeches, II, pp. 516-518.

this intention during the years between 1791 and 1799 despite tremendous pressure from all dominant political groups.

There were several reasons for Henry's departure from the political scene. As he had announced at the Virginia Ratification Convention, Patrick Henry felt that he should not interfere with the organization of the new government, that although he doubted the wisdom of the new system, the people were apparently reconciled to it, and, therefore, he should not stand in the way of its operation.² It was

²Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 459-462; III, p. 590.

apparent that amendments which would grant the "force" he desired for the states, in order to secure the permanent separation of powers, were not going to be adopted. Therefore, he could see no purpose in continued political activity.

In addition, Patrick Henry's health had broken, his finances were not stable, and his family duties were pressing upon him. As early as 1780, he had written a close associate of the "necessity" of retirement as "my health, I am satisfied, will never again permit a close application to

sedentary business, and I even doubt whether I can remain below long enough to serve in the assembly."³ Throughout

³Henry, op. cit., II, p. 49.

the Revolution, he had battled against ill health and on several occasions had been forced to take leave of his duties to combat illness.⁴ Nor could Patrick Henry be

⁴Henry, op. cit., I, p. 618; II, pp. 48-49; III, pp. 8, 10, 32.

baited into a return to political life. Henry had written his daughter, upon hearing of gossip wherein his comments to friends were used to party advantage, "It seems that every word was watched which I casually dropped, and wrested to answer party views. Who can have been so meanly employed, I know not,--" and he added, "nor do I care; for I no longer consider myself as an actor on the stage of public life. It is time for me to retire." Henry assured her, "I shall never more make an appearance in a public character, unless some unlooked-for circumstance shall demand from me a transient effort, not inconsistent with private life--in which I have determined to continue."⁵ Again in 1798, Henry

⁵Ibid., II, p. 569.

wrote John Marshall that "I am too old and infirm ever again to undertake public concerns. I live much retired, amidst a

multiplicity of blessings from that Gracious Ruler of all things, to whom I owe acknowledgement for his unmerited goodness to me . . ."⁶ In addition to illness and age,

⁶Ibid., II, pp. 593-594.

there was an increase in his already numerous family which made financial pressures more urgent. Henry wrote to George Washington on October 16, 1795, to decline a proffered Federal appointment and stated, "My domestic situation pleads strongly against a removal to Philadelphia," and, he explained, "having no less than eight children by my present marriage, and Mrs. Henry's situation forbidding her approach to the small pox" He went on to state that his health was poor and his finances pressing.⁷

⁷Henry, op. cit., II, p. 558.

If Henry had retained any political ambitions, there was no lack of inducement toward his return to public life. He was elected United States Senator from Virginia in July of 1794,⁸ offered the Spanish ambassadorship in September

⁸Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 547, 548-549.

of 1794,⁹ and was pressed to accept the positions of

⁹Ibid., II, pp. 547, 548-549.

Secretary of State, Attorney General, and French ambassador in 1795 and 1796.¹⁰ Henry was elected to his sixth term as

¹⁰Ibid., II, pp. 557, 562, 566-571.

Governor of Virginia in November of 1796,¹¹ was contacted

¹¹Ibid., II, p. 574.

concerning the Federalist candidacy for the Vice-Presidency in that year,¹² and was offered the French Ambassadorship by

¹²Charles R. King, Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, pp. 47-48.

President John Adams in 1798.¹³ To all of these offers,

¹³Henry, op. cit., II, p. 623.

Henry pleaded sickness, age, and financial pressures. Had he desired to forsake his self-pronounced retirement, he had ample opportunity to do so. Nor was there any lack of excitement on the American political scene during the years 1791-1799. The Federalist Administration of George Washington had, under the leadership of Alexander Hamilton, adopted a far-reaching financial program and had passed domestic legislation which greatly increased the power of the National government. These policies, plus the controversy over the French Revolution and the consequent overthrow of

the French monarchy, had caused a bitter split among Americans. The Federalist Party program greatly increased the scope of power held by the National government; also, the Party was accused of being anti-French and pro-British in regard to the European wars which broke out as an aftermath of the French Revolution. A rival party, the Democratic-Republican Party, led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, was decidedly pro-French and was opposed to the increased National government power as being unconstitutional. Events headed toward a fever pitch in 1798 and 1799 with increased preoccupation over foreign policy problems and with the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts by the Federalist Administration of John Adams. The Democrats attacked these measures, which were supposedly designed to prevent foreign influence in American affairs, as being unconstitutional and a violation of freedom of speech and of the Press. The Jeffersonians formed pro-French "Democratic Clubs" in order to more effectively protest against the Federalist policies. Jefferson himself later wrote that internal party strife had grown so bitter in 1798 and 1799 that ". . . a final dissolution of all bonds, civil and social, appeared imminent."¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., II, p. 605.

Although he did not lose interest in the stirring

events of these years, Patrick Henry remained firm in his resolve not to become involved in political strife.¹⁵

¹⁵ Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 535-565.

Despite this non-involvement in public life, there were certain developments during this period of retirement which had a distinct influence upon Henry's later career. One of these developments was the removal of the last remnants of the hostility that had developed between Patrick Henry and George Washington during Henry's struggle for Constitutional amendments. Their differing views on the Constitution had caused the circulation of many rumors which had an unfavorable effect upon their friendship. Mutual friends sought to bring the two men together, and that their efforts were rewarded is evidenced by the deluge of appointments which Washington offered to Henry.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., II, pp. 539-546.

The respect which Patrick Henry felt for George Washington anti-dated the American Revolution. Henry might not himself agree with Washington's political actions, but he resented the manner in which the "Father of His Country" was being subjected to partisan political attacks. Henry wrote to a mutual friend that he treasured the memory of Washington's association during the Revolution, that "the

American Revolution was the grand operation, which seemed to be consigned by the Deity to the men of this age, over and above the common duties of life." He said that "I ever prized at a high rate the superior privilege of being one in that chosen age, to which providence had entrusted its favorite work." Because of their mutual bonds and memories, Henry was glad to treasure these memories and to reassume his friendship with his "old Commander-in-Chief."¹⁷

¹⁷Ibid., II, p. 551.

Henry hastened to write Washington of this continued regard and added his hope that if ". . . evil instead of good grows out of the public measures you may adopt . . ." then Henry could only trust that the American people would ". . . give full credit to the motives."¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid., II, p. 559.

Along with this revival of the comradeship between the two Virginia Revolutionaries, there was a stiffening of Patrick Henry's resolve not to interfere with the operation of the new government in its legal sphere. He still did not approve of the Constitution in its present form, but as he wrote Monroe in January of 1791, "And altho' The Form of Gov^t into which my Countrymen determined to place themselves, had my Enmity, yet as we are one & all are

imbarked, it is natural to care for the crazy Machine."

However, he hastened to add, "at least as long as we are out of sight of a Port to refit."¹⁹ Henry always reassured

¹⁹ Ibid., II, p. 460.

Washington that although he could not accept appointment to national office, "I have never omitted a strict adherence to the principles of" the National government. He added that he noted with pride the strict obedience of national law in the area in which he lived. "My present views are to spend my days in privacy," Henry stated; "If however it shall please God during my life, so to order the course of events as to render my feeble efforts necessary for the safety of the country, in any, even the smallest degree, that little which I can do, shall be done."²⁰ Again, in October of

²⁰ Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 551-552.

1795, Henry wrote, "Believe me, Sir, I have bid adieu to the distinction of federal and antifederal ever since the commencement of the present government, and," he added, "in the circle of my friends have often expressed my fears of disunion amongst the States from collision of interests, but especially from the baneful effects of faction." He promised that he would "fight anarchy" and that he felt it his Christian duty to support the government even ". . . tho I

opposed ratification."²¹

²¹Ibid., II, p. 559.

Henry's retreat from public affairs was broken only once during the eight years of his retirement. He was enraged at Thomas Paine's Age of Reason and wrote an entire book refuting Paine's agnosticism. Before publication was started on his book, however, Patrick Henry read Bishop Watson's Apology for the Bible which he considered superior to his own effort. Henry contented himself, therefore, with circulating the Bishop's book (at Henry's own expense) among his friends and neighbors.²²

²²Ibid., II, p. 575.

As was evidenced by his reaction to Paine's publication, Patrick Henry's religious motivation had not altered during his retirement, nor had the depth of his convictions lessened. Visitors to the Henry home reported his diligent study of the Bible and his letters also indicated a continued devotion to Christianity. He wrote his daughter in 1796 that "amongst all the handsome things I hear said of you, what gives me the greatest pleasure is to be told of your piety and steady virtue."²³ During this period, too, it

²³Ibid., II, p. 571.

became Henry's custom to spend the entire day in fasting and prayer before partaking of communion.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., II, p. 575.

Both political parties--Federalists and Jeffersonians--attempted to coax Henry out of retirement. The Federalist effort is evidenced by the offers of appointment to government offices. Jefferson might complain of flattery, but he, too, was diligent in his attempts to effect reconciliation.²⁵ That Jefferson was careful not to offend the

²⁵Henry, op. cit., II, p. 550.

aged leader is exemplified in his warning to friends not to omit consulting Patrick Henry on proposed changes in the Virginia Constitution of 1792, as Jefferson feared "if a convention was called in defiance of his views, he would either fix the thing at present, or change it for the worse."²⁶ Henry, however, was adamant. He was apparently

²⁶Ibid., II, p. 463.

determined not to re-enter the political arena.

Federalism and Consolidation

Undoubtedly Henry's personal affairs had a great measure to play in his decision to retire. His retirement

was made easier, however, by the fact that he could not conscientiously support either of the major parties--the Federalists or the Jeffersonians.

On August 20, 1796, Patrick Henry wrote his daughter, "As to the reports you have heard of my changing sides in politics, I can only say that they are not true. I am too old to exchange my former opinions, which have grown up into fixed habits of thinking." He maintained this view despite Federalist inducements.²⁷ A survey of Patrick

²⁷Ibid., II, pp. 568-569.

Henry's past record shows him to have been an unalterable foe of consolidation. At the Virginia Ratification Convention, and during the Revolutionary War, he had again and again stated that a strongly centralized National government would destroy liberty because it would be beyond the control of the common man. He had feared that it would be particularly destructive of the South due to her minority position as a slaveholding and "producing" section. Patrick Henry might agree with Hamiltonians on the base nature of man, but unlike the Federalists he felt that man's evil nature could only be controlled through separation of governmental powers. Henry was also decidedly of the opinion that the rich and wellborn were not exempt from this evil nature. As his religious principles told him that all men were by nature evil, he could see no additional safety in a highly

centralized government dominated by aristocratic groups. Patrick Henry's past pronouncements had therefore placed him in unalterable opposition to the principles of those who dominated the Federalist movement.²⁸

²⁸ Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 405-443; II, pp. 372-373, 378-408; III, pp. 453-458, 470-478, 495-503, 519-520, 535-556, 573-581.

Considering his past career, it was inconceivable that Patrick Henry could conscientiously endorse the Federalist Party, nor did he do so. Patrick Henry was very outspoken during the years of his retirement against certain policies of the Federalist government. He opposed the friendly attitude of certain Federalists toward Britain. As he wrote his daughter concerning the Federalist treaty with Britain, in 1795, "The treaty is, in my opinion, a very bad one indeed." He pointed out that ". . . from the British we have everything to dread, when the opportunities of oppressing us shall offer."²⁹ Patrick Henry was equally

²⁹ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 569.

outspoken against Federal interference with the treatment of the Indian tribes within Georgia by the state government, and although Jefferson might scoff that Henry's statements were being motivated by interests in land speculation, Jefferson was more than happy to put these statements to

political use.³⁰ Patrick Henry wrote to a Georgia

³⁰Ibid., II, pp. 507-509.

associate, "It is a Deception to urge, that Encroachments from the American Government are not dangerous." He explained, ". . . In the early operations of the new system, when the world will suppose the genuine impressions & the true interpretation of it, are fresh on the minds of men," he feared that "if precedents like this Treaty shall be found, it is but too easy to see the fatal Examples they will furnish for a Repetition of the like or greater Mischiefs." He urged a "vigorous protest," as he feared that this interference could, although it might take several generations, lead to Federal ownership of private property.³¹ It was undoubtedly these outspoken opinions

³¹Ibid., II, pp. 508-511.

that caused Hamilton to refer to him as a "noisome weed."³²

³²Henry Cabot Lodge, Works of Alexander Hamilton, III, p. 336.

Patrick Henry's remarks demonstrate that he was decidedly not Hamiltonian in his viewpoint.

Tyler³³ pointed out that despite his anti-Federalist

³³Moses Coit Tyler, Patrick Henry, p. 357.

bias, Henry's friendship for Washington remained strong. Patrick Henry was loyal to Washington in that he honored his services to America and respected Washington's integrity, but he did not allow this loyalty to bind him to acceptance of the General's political views. As he wrote his family, "I see with concern our old commander-in-chief most abusively treated--nor are his long and great services remembered, as an apology for his mistakes in an office to which he was totally unaccustomed." He continued, "I ever wished he might keep himself clear of the office he bears, and its attendant difficulties--but I am sorry to see the gross abuse which is published of him."³⁴ Patrick Henry

³⁴ Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 569-570.

might bewail the slanders against Washington without changing his opinions concerning the lack of wisdom of the President's actions. Nor was Washington unaware of the fact that this might be the case.³⁵ As Henry wrote his

³⁵ Ibid., II, p. 560.

son-in-law on many occasions, he was not a Federalist--he was ". . . too old to exchange my former opinions, which have grown up into fixed habits of thinking."³⁶

³⁶ Ibid., II, pp. 568-569.

The Split With Jefferson

Patrick Henry was not a Federalist, but neither was he Jeffersonian in his political viewpoint. True, Henry and Jefferson agreed as to the necessity of separation of the powers of the government and as to the general greater safety of power resting in the state governments, but here the similarity in viewpoints ended. In their basic concepts of life, the two men were poles apart. Indeed, the wonder is that they were able to work together in harmony for so many years during the American Revolution, not that they parted political company in 1799.

Calvinism v. Deism

The principal ideals and beliefs of Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson present a striking contrast. The French Revolution was merely the method by which the basic differences of the two men were brought to public attention. This Revolution had been in one aspect a revolt not only against the established government, but also against established religion--and therefore Christianity.³⁷ Milner³⁸ states

³⁷ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 526.

³⁸ Vincent L. Milner, The Religious Denominations of the World, p. 428.

that there were several classifications of Deists. He quotes one source which describes the Deists as follows:

The Deists are a class of people whose distinguishing character it is not to profess any particular form or system of religion, but only to acknowledge the existence of a God, and to follow the law of Nature, rejecting revelation and opposing Christianity . . .

Thomas Jefferson might feel that "the liberty of the whole earth" was dependent on the success of the French Revolution and might proclaim that "never was such a prize won with so little loss of innocent blood"³⁹; however, to

³⁹ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 533.

Patrick Henry, France was doomed to failure because of her repudiation of Christianity. Henry was firm in his belief that Christian "righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid., II, p. 632.

In addition to his fervent support of the French Revolutionaries, as a triumph for Democratic government throughout the world, Thomas Jefferson undoubtedly supported a bulk of their theory, and none of their statements or actions seemed to be of repugnance to him. The Unitarian Church in America had counted Jefferson as one of its early members and they were closely akin to the Deists in their

repudiation of formal Christianity in favor of the "God of Reason." The Unitarians were firm in their pronouncement of the

. . . trustworthiness of human facilities, and their competency, when duly trained and freed from prejudice, to receive moral and religious, no less than scientific truths. In pursuance of this principle, they have carried to the farthest point yet reached by any denomination the Protestant belief in the right of private judgement and reverence for the individual conscience. They do not hesitate to bring all theological systems and the sacred writings of both Jews and Christians to this test.⁴¹

⁴¹Milner, op. cit., p. 168.

This viewpoint was inconceivable to a man trained as Patrick Henry had been to believe that man was incapable of recognizing truth or true goodness except by the redemptive Grace of God, that ". . . the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his posterity of nature became enemies of God, slaves to Satan, and servants unto sin. . . ."⁴²

⁴²Ibid., p. 346.

That this belief in the "God of Reason" had a great influence upon Jefferson was apparent. He wrote a young admirer as early as August 10, 1787, advising him to "Fix Reason firmly in her seat . . . Question with boldness even the existence of a God . . . Read the Bible then, as you would read Tacitus or Livy . . ." He urged the youth to

inquire into the veracity of the miracles recorded in the Bible as "The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it . . .," and the "Sage of Monticello" had reassured the boy, "Do not be frightened from this by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in the belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue" through observing the value of a good life in others.⁴³

⁴³ Julian P. Boyd, Papers of Thomas Jefferson, XII, pp. 15-16.

Patrick Henry firmly believed the Bible to be "worth all of the books ever written," and he considered that Christianity and the proof of one's steadfastness in the individual's daily life was the only real purpose to human existence. He believed, as he had told the Hanover volunteers, that God tested his people to determine their steadfastness and that the "God whose power divided the Red Sea . . . for the deliverance of Isreal," from Egypt "still reigned in all of his Glory, unchanged and unchangeable. . . ."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Henry, op. cit., I, p. 281.

Jefferson might agree with Thomas Paine that ". . .

man was a rational animal, . . ."⁴⁵ but Patrick Henry could

⁴⁵ John Dos Passos, The Head and Heart of Jefferson, p. 403.

never overlook Paine's infidelity despite the writer's contribution to the American Revolution. Patrick Henry maintained that ". . . the depraved nature of man is well known. He has a natural bias toward his own interest, which will prevail over every consideration, unless it is checked."⁴⁶ This natural "self-love" and greed of the

⁴⁶ Henry, op. cit., III, p. 518.

individual was the reason that Patrick Henry had insisted on the strong state governments which could be controlled by the people--not because of a Jeffersonian faith in the masses. Henry believed that only an appeal to "self-love" could exercise effective control over all men, who were by nature evil; therefore, he had feared the centralized government he had foreseen in the Constitution and had proclaimed years earlier that "taxation without Representation is Tyranny" because man, motivated by "self-love," could not be given unfettered power over other people.

The French Problem

This basic difference in viewpoint made it impossible for Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry to agree on American foreign policy in the latter 1790's. Jefferson might proclaim that the French Revolution was one of the great events in world history and that "the cause of Republicanism triumphant in Europe can never fail to do so here in the long run,"⁴⁷ but Patrick Henry could see no future for

⁴⁷ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 533.

France or for any nation whose liberty was founded on the spirit of Deism. Henry had favored the election of John Marshall to the House of Representatives over a Jeffersonian candidate in 1799 for the very reason that Marshall was not fettered by the influence of French thought. He had written Marshall that as for France, her future ". . . will be calamitous. Her conduct has made it the interest of the great family of mankind to wish the downfall of her present government." France had placed herself in this position, he explained, because of the "great alarm . . . of her destroying the great pillars of all government and of social life; I mean, virtue, morality and religion." Henry warned, "this is the armor, my friend, and this alone which will make us invincible. If we lose these we are conquered, fallen indeed." Thus Patrick Henry might distrust England but fear

France, for

. . . believing as I do that these are in danger, that infidelity in its broadest sense, under the name of philosophy is fast spreading, and that under the patronage of French manners and principles, everything that ought to be dear to man is covertly but successfully assailed.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., II, pp. 591-592.

Patrick Henry could never sanction the Jeffersonian adherence to a France influenced by Deistic thought.

Anarchy and Disunion

Just as Patrick Henry could not support the Jeffersonians in their idea of the proper course of American foreign policy, neither could he sanction their domestic program. Jefferson and Henry both wanted to curb the power of the National government, but as Patrick Henry pointed out, "men may agree on principle but differ as to the means."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid., II, p. 575.

Jefferson maintained that the government of the United States was formed by co-equal states entering into a compact and establishing the National government as their agent. The states, having formed this National government, were possessed of ultimate sovereignty and were, therefore, the final judge of their powers. Believing in the ultimate

authority of the states, Jefferson could sympathize more readily with insurrections which arose, such as those over the National Whiskey Tax, and could encourage the growth of "Democratic Societies," which took a menacing attitude toward the National government. This viewpoint of the nature of the National government found its fullest expression in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of Madison and Jefferson, which were passed by these states in protest against the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts by the Federalist administration of the National government. These acts even spoke of the innate right of the states to "interpose" against their agent, the National government.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid., II, pp. 570-600.

Although he viewed the increase in the powers of the National government in much the same light as did Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry maintained that the United States Constitution had created a consolidated government over which the states had been given no means of control. Henry had, indeed, fought unsuccessfully for what he considered to be the necessary "force" needed to check the usurpation of power by the National government. Henry maintained that the people could only trust in their elected representatives and repudiate them at the polls if they overstepped their bounds. He had pointed this out at the Virginia Ratification Convention, and James Madison, among others, would not

listen to him. As he had written his daughter several years earlier, ". . . What must I think of those men, whom I myself warned of the danger . . ." of granting too much power to the government ". . . when I see those same men denying the existence of that power, which they insisted, in our convention, ought properly to be exercised . . ." by the National government. "The policy of these men, both then and now, appears to me quite devoid of wisdom and foresight."⁵¹

⁵¹Ibid., II, p. 569.

Henry granted that there was, of course, always the Right of Rebellion but that was an extreme measure which ought to be exercised only at the advent of definite and clear despotism. Meanwhile, Virginians must be dutiful in obedience to the law. Jefferson might speak of the government suppression of riots in Pennsylvania as "rising at a feather against our friends,"⁵² but to Patrick Henry there

⁵²Ibid., II, p. 534.

was no excuse for disobedience to the law. While Governor of Virginia, he had been as insistent on obedience to the state laws by others⁵³ as he was careful to abide within the

⁵³Henry, op. cit., III, pp. 144-148, 313, 377.

bounds of the state Constitution in his exercise of the Governorship.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Henry, op. cit., III, p. 116.

Patrick Henry, who had begun his career in the Parson's Cause case years ago fighting to uphold the obligation to contracts,⁵⁵ and who had been taught as a child that

⁵⁵Henry, op. cit., I, pp. 30-42.

it was his Christian duty "to be true and just in his dealings,"⁵⁶ would necessarily insist on obedience to the

⁵⁶Henry, op. cit., I, p. 115.

law now. The National government might be overstepping its bounds but unless it should become despotic, the people must protest and correct its usurpations through legal methods. Otherwise, by using unconstitutional methods of disobedience the country would drift into anarchy and disunion would result. Patrick Henry summed up this viewpoint when he said, "Although a democrat myself, I like not the late Democratic Societies. As little do I like their suppression by law."⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ibid., II, p. 551.

Patrick Henry could not sanction the aims of the

Federalist Party. Likewise, he could not agree with the Democratic-Republican sympathy for the French, nor could he uphold the means by which they sought to achieve their aims in internal affairs.

Return from Retirement

Patrick Henry had been determined to spend his last years in quiet and retirement, yet he had said time and time again to Washington and others that he would answer the country's call if his services were needed. Not to do so would have been a violation of his Christian duty.

As events moved forward after 1791, Patrick Henry became increasingly disturbed over the influence of French Deism in the country. His natural Christian philosophy made a Deistic nation the worst conceivable fate for America. He wrote his daughter in 1790 that he was not upset to be out of step with the major political parties, for "I have long learned the little value which is to be placed on popularity, acquired by any other way than virtue. I have also learned that it is often attained by other means." As he confided to her, what did upset and even alarm him was the rising influence of anti-Christian philosophies, for he said:

The view which the rising greatness of our country presents to my eye is greatly tarnished by the general prevalence of Deism; which with me, is but another name

for vice and depravity. I am, however, much consoled by reflecting that the religion of Christ has, from its first appearance in the world, been attacked by all the wits, philosophers, and the wise ones aided by every power of men, and its triumph has been complete. What is there in the wit or wisdom of the present deistical writers or professors than can compare them with Hume, Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke and others? And yet these have been confuted, and their fame decaying; insomuch that the puny efforts of Paine are thrown in to prop their tottering fabric, whose foundations cannot stand the test of time. Amongst other strange things said of me, I hear it said by the deists that I am one of their number, and indeed, that some good people think I am no Christian. This thought gives me more pain than the appellation of tory, because I think religion of infinitely higher importance than politics.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Henry, op. cit., II, p. 570.

As time passed and the influence of Deism heightened, the knowledge that his name was being used in its behalf must have been a powerful goad to Henry. As public affairs in the United States deepened in intensity and after publication of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Patrick Henry's alarm increased. On January 15, 1799, George Washington wrote Henry and pleaded with him to seek a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates. Washington pleaded that it was Henry's duty to help stem the spirit of disunion and of Deism that was plaguing Virginia.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid., II, pp. 603-604.

Patrick Henry had turned down inducements before, but he now felt it his obligation to respond to the call. Disunion would mean separate confederacies, which would result in domination by foreign countries. Would this not mean that French Deism might prevail in Virginia? Henry could not tolerate this thought. He had fought and would continue to fight against consolidation, but Deism was worse; therefore, he would oppose the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. At least the action of Washington and others in the Federalist groups were based on pure, though misguided motives. As early as 1790, right after the heat of the Ratification Convention, he had conceded this, that ". . . Truth obliges me to declare that I preceive in the Federal Characters I converse with in this Country an honest & patriotic care of the general Good."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Ibid., II, p. 510.

Patrick Henry addressed the people of Virginia at the Charlotte Court House on the first Monday in March of 1799. He was so infirm and weak that he had to be helped onto the platform. The Jeffersonian speaker for the day was none other than young John Randolph of Roanoke. Patrick Henry told the audience that the events of the day had disturbed him and had caused him to withdraw from what had been intended as a permanent retirement. He told them that the

"State had quitted the sphere in which she had been placed by the Constitution; and in daring to pronounce upon the validity of Federal laws, had gone out of her jurisdiction in a manner not warranted by any authority, and in the highest degree alarming to every considerate man." He predicted that this would mean civil war, foreign alliances, and that in the final analysis, foreign powers would be called in to support the confederacies resulting from the strife and would completely subjugate them. Patrick Henry refused to take a stand on the Alien and Sedition Acts. He could only say that if the people opposed the Acts, they should petition Congress. He reminded them that he had ". . . seen with regret the unlimited power over the purse and sword consigned to the General government," but that he had been over-ruled, and it was ". . . now necessary to submit to the Constitutional exercise of that Power." Patrick was still the same man who wrote the Stamp Act Resolutions, however, for he added that if the people ever came to ". . . feel themselves intolerably oppressed, my answer is ready: Overturn the government!" The people must be entirely certain that every possible means of redress had been exhausted, for a change of government at this time would probably mean a return of monarchy. He concluded, ". . . Let us trust God and our better judgment to set us right hereafter. United we stand, divided we fall." There

could be no future, he finished, in Civil War.⁶¹

⁶¹Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 607-610.

Patrick Henry in his final appearance on a public platform had re-echoed the same premises which he had operated under throughout his life. He had warned the people of the type of government that they were creating, but now that the government was created they must abide by it or change it. If it should oppress them, he reminded them, there was still the "Right of Rebellion," the same right that they had exercised against the King of England. Patrick Henry was not a Federalist; he could not support their consolidation of power into the hands of the National government. However, he would trust in God and the people to keep alive the spirit of independence they had always possessed. As alarming as consolidation, however, was the spirit of disobedience to law, and far worse was the spirit of Deism. Patrick Henry could not support either the domestic nor the foreign policy of either party. He was old and infirm; therefore, he had refused to enter once more into public service. The spirit of Deism had begun to grow, however, and there was no longer any other choice, except to return to the service of his country. Henry, faced with governmental policies of the Federalists and with Jeffersonian sanction of French Deism which he bitterly opposed,

made his decision with deliberate certainty. Patrick Henry was neither Federalist nor Jeffersonian, but, as always, his God came first.

Patrick Henry returned to his Red Hill plantation exhausted by his trip and was confined to bed. He was unable to attend the election which was held on the first Monday in April. The results were clear--the people of Virginia had returned Patrick Henry once more to the service of the state. Patrick Henry was unable to answer their call, however, for on June 6, 1799, he died. His last words were spoken to his family physician, an old friend who was not a Christian. "Observe," Patrick Henry instructed the doctor, "how great a reality and benefit religion is to a man who is about to die."⁶²

⁶² Ibid., II, p. 626.

Perhaps in summarizing the life of the Virginia leader, the most eloquent evidence is to be found, as was the case in recapitulating his life, in Patrick Henry's own speeches and correspondence. It seems pertinent, moreover, to quote once again Patrick Henry's final message to his beloved family and to the American people.

In Patrick Henry's will he had written, after having disposed of his not inconsiderable estate, the following words: "This is all of the inheritance I can give to my

dear family. The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed."

There was also a final bequest to the American people, for with his will Patrick Henry had left a copy of the Stamp Act Resolutions, and he had written on the back of the copy:

Whether this will prove a blessing or a curse, will depend upon the use our people make of the blessing which a gracious God hath bestowed on us. If they are wise, they will be great and happy. If they are of a contrary character, they will be miserable. Righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation. Reader!, whosoever thou art, remember this; and in thy sphere practise virtue thyself, and encourage it in others!

P. Henry⁶³

⁶³ Henry, op. cit., II, pp. 631-632.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to re-evaluate the life and political career of Patrick Henry from the standpoint of the motivation afforded by his religious convictions. In so doing, it is assumed that certain seeming inconsistencies in his political career would be cleared up. No attempt has been made to completely reconstruct Patrick Henry's life, but only the major events of his career have been re-examined in the light of his religious motivation.

Several methods were used in compiling this thesis. Various books presenting the background of Patrick Henry's period were examined, along with the writings and speeches of contemporary American leaders. All available biographies of Patrick Henry were also examined. Seeming incongruities in Patrick Henry's career were discussed with historians and theologians at the University of Houston and Rice Institute. Primary recourse, however, was in an intensive study of the personal correspondence and speeches of Patrick Henry himself.

The depth of Patrick Henry's religious convictions and the influence these convictions exerted on his thought

and career are apparent. Henry stated, for example that he considered the Bible to be the most important source of printed knowledge available to man, that he revered God far more than human monarchs, and that religion was of much greater importance to him than politics. There is nothing in Patrick Henry's public career nor, more important perhaps, in his private life to challenge the veracity of these statements. The wide range of sectarian Christian doctrines which Patrick Henry encountered in his youth evidently produced stability of Christian belief, and, at the same time, apparently caused considerable introspection on Henry's part. These factors may well have been the key to Henry's remarkable oratorical abilities. They certainly produced a man who was not a follower, but a leader of his age.

The Parson's Cause case, which was Henry's first public appearance, began a long struggle by Patrick Henry for religious and political freedom for the American people. The struggle for disestablishment, which Patrick Henry considered necessary for true religious freedom, found its culmination during the American Revolution with the grant of complete freedom of conscience in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. In his struggle for the inalienable rights of the people of Virginia, Patrick Henry's stand against usurpation of power over traditional English freedoms came into full flower with the Stamp Act Resolutions. The

persecution of Americans following their protests against the Royal Government forced Henry, the acknowledged leader of Revolutionary Virginia, to call upon the people to exercise their divinely ordained right of rebellion and culminated with complete independence by the Americans from the mother country.

Even during the American Revolution, Patrick Henry had realized that the liberties of the people could only be secured through a permanent union of the states. He realized too that the institution of slavery, which he proclaimed to be contrary to the true principles of Christianity and harmful to the ideal of human freedom, would place the Southern states in a minority position in the Union. This minority position of the slave-holding South, and the accompanying agricultural economy of the region, filled Henry with forebodings for Virginia's future. Henry felt that only through dispersing the slaves within the reaches of the great western wilderness might a solution to the problem be found; consequently, he spent much of his time during the Revolution in an attempt to safeguard the Western territories which he maintained had been guaranteed to the American people by their geography and by God.

Patrick Henry's opposition to the government outlined in the United States Constitution was largely motivated by the ideas of the nature of man which sprang from his Calvinistic approach to public problems and by the

misgivings which the sin of Southern slavery gave him.

Patrick Henry maintained that the government's sole purpose was in securing the liberties ordained by God for man, and that only through effective controls of the base nature of man--a fallen creature, who could be depended on only through operation of self-interest--could this objective be obtained. Henry feared that many of the framers of the American Constitution had been motivated by national ambition and economic desires in framing the new government, for it did not effectively control man's natural selfishness. Henry felt that the government, through its modes of creation, was centralized, which in itself was dangerous. Also, Patrick Henry feared that the ambiguity and the sweeping clauses of the Constitution would enable the ever-present wicked elements to consolidate all control into the hands of the national government and destroy the state governments and ultimately the divinely ordained freedoms of the people. After his failure to prevent ratification, however, Patrick Henry continued his fight to include a Bill of Rights in the new government and also to retain some means whereby the states could exercise control on the national government to maintain a permanent separation of powers.

Successful in obtaining a Bill of Rights, but unable to secure the needed state control, Patrick Henry determined to retire from political life. Personal factors, a

realization that the people were complacent with the new government after addition of the Bill of Rights and a conviction that the new government should not be impeded in its organization efforts, persuaded Henry, despite political enticements, that his retirement should be permanent. This period of retirement was perhaps made easier by the fact that Henry could support neither of the country's two major parties. The Federalists were creating a centralized government in the manner which he had prophesied. He could appreciate the efforts of Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans to halt this growth of national power, but he feared that the means they were using would lead to civil war, disunion and European domination. Even more alarming to Patrick Henry than what he considered to be the use of unconstitutional means by the Jeffersonians was the influence of France and French Deism upon the Jeffersonians. Therefore, Patrick Henry determined to re-enter political life and challenged the Jeffersonian leadership then dominant in the state. Although re-elected to the Virginia legislature, Patrick Henry was unable to complete this final resolve, for he died on June 6, 1799, before he could take his seat in the Virginia House of Delegates.

Throughout his long and varied career Patrick Henry remained true to his religious and political convictions. He was ever loyal to his country, but--first and foremost--Patrick Henry was faithful to his God!

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this thesis indicates that the following conclusions appear to be in order:

1. Patrick Henry possessed impressive depth and steadfastness in his Christian convictions.
2. Although many factors influenced the course of his life and career, Patrick Henry's religious convictions and his beliefs about government and man, which sprang from these convictions, were a powerful motivating factor throughout every phase of his life.
3. A re-evaluation of the life and career of Patrick Henry in the light of the motivation of his Christian philosophy aids in clarifying seeming inconsistencies and ambiguities.

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