# The Declaration of Independence A Masterpiece: But How it Got Mutilated!

[In reply to an article which appeared in THE TRUTH SEEKER of May 21, 1881.]

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The gentleman from Connecticut has submitted and criticised the first paragraph and part of the second *as amended* and adopted by Congress. I now submit the same portion as it existed before a word was erased or interlined. And this I shall presume to be the work of Paine, though it is quite possible that his careful composition was somewhat marred by the transcribing hand of Jefferson. Indeed, I suspect that in a few instances Jefferson changed the language by inserting words of his own. The words erased in committee or Congress will be indicated in italics, without giving the substituted language:

"When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for *a* people to *advance from that subordination in which they hav hitherto remained*, and to assume among the powers of the earth the equal and *independent* station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the *change*.

"We hold these truths to be *sacred and undeniable*, that all men are created equal *and independent;* that *from that equal creation they derive all* rights *inherent and* inalienable, among *which* are *the preservation of* life *and* liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these *ends* governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government *shall* become destructiv of these ends it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute new government, laying its

foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

It will at once be seen by the gentleman from Connecticut that several, if not all, of his most important criticisms do not apply to the above, but to the amended document. Nevertheless I will proceed to restate and answer them seriatim.

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Answer: This is a hypercriticism. Webster givs as synonyms of event, "Incident, occurrence, adventure," etc., and remarks that an occurrence has no reference to any antecedents; and therefore, in the Declaration of Independence, *occurrences* would hav been out of place.

But now let us see how Paine uses the word *event.* I turn at random to the last four pages of "Common Sense." Alluding to the alarming condition of things in America he says:

"The *Case* [the critic will understand why I capitalize and italicize this word,, if no one else does] never existed before, and who can tell what may be the *event?*"

"This line [i.e. armed defense] is a line of consistency, . . produced by a chain of *events* of which the colonies were not the author."

"The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to

receive their portion of freedom from the *events* of a few months."

Here are three instances, on three successiv pages, of the use of the word "event," and they all refer to "*human* events," not "cows' horns or harrows' teeth."

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Answer: Certainly, if they happen to be made of soluble material. Has not many an iron band been dissolved with nitric acid?

But we don't know who made that amendment, and I presume that "bonds" were intended instead of "bands"—though the two words are quite synonymous. The probability, however, is that the amendment was suggested by this clause in the last paragraph of the original Declaration, "We utterly dissolve *and break off* all political connection." That doubtless was written by Paine. What objection to that?

3. "And to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station *to* which the laws of nature and of *nature's God* entitle them." Did not the author mean, "*to the occupancy of* which;" and if so, why didn't he say so? And are the "laws of nature" made any stronger by calling them the laws of "nature's God?"

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Answer: There is no "separation," nor even "separate," in the original draft; therefore this criticism, though just, does not apply. For "separation" read "change."

In the first letter of Junius one sentence ends with "decent," and the next begins with "respect." These were favorit words with Junius and Paine. "Decent" means "suitable in words," etc.; "becoming, fit, decorous, proper, comely." Prefix the negativ to any one of these adjectivs, and see how it would qualify "respect." For example: I hav an "*im*proper respect" for such hypercriticism.

An apology for a necessity is certainly proper. But this apology had a grand purpose. Paine sought to unite and inspire the hearts of the American people to feel as he felt when he wrote that famous letter to the king, in which, with prophetic fervor, Junius said:

"Looking forward to independence, they might possibly receive you for their king: but if ever you retire to America,

be assured they will giv you such a covenant to digest as the presbytery of Scotland would have been ashamed to offer to Charles II."

(And here I beg to make a digression by quoting the next sentence, to wit, "They left their nativ land in search of freedom, and found it in a desert." In Dickinson's draft of the Declaration, or Memorial, of 1775 occurs this passage, "Our forefathers . . . left their nativ land to seek on these shores a residence for civil and religious freedom . . . in the inhospitable wilds of America." Again, in the Declaration of 1776 a like sentiment is expressed, and, what is more remarkable, not only do the passages in the two Declarations parallel in sentiment, but in language, showing that the latter is certainly borrowed from the former. But Jefferson did not write the passage in the Declaration of 1775, and he says that in drafting that of 1776 he turned neither to book nor pamphlet. True enough, for the draft was already prepared by Paine, who doubtless also had a hand in Dickinson's Declaration of 1775.)

5. "We hold these truths to be *self-evident*." Then why proclaim them?

Answer: The original draft reads, "sacred and undeniable." But even as changed to "self-evident," are there not multitudes who deny them? Among whom, I am sorry to say, seems to be our astute critic.

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Answer: Certainly not. Who but an idiot or

lunatic would affirm it? But why divide the sentence? Take it complete, and then discuss its meaning.

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Answer: "Inalienable" is defined by Webster, "Incapable of being put off, alienated, or transferred to another." Complete liberty and independence are even yet a great way off, if ever attainable; but the American Revolution was a long stride in the right direction. The slave's "inalienable" right to himself has been forcibly taken from him and transferred to his master. Every philanthropist wants to help him recover it if practicable, and with it the right to "the pursuit of happiness," wherewith he has been "endowed" by nature *or* nature's God.

Technically, "life, liberty," etc., are not rights; but there is such a thing known to grammarians, and understood even by the illiterate, as an ellipsis in language. The best writers often indulge in it. But in this case the criticism does not apply, unless our critic raises a like objection to "*the preservation* of life and liberty" in the original draft. But in either case the ellipsis would bar the objection, for everybody understands exactly what it meant.

8. "That to secure these *rights* governments are instituted among *men* [not cats, says critic], deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." What rights, but the aforesaid inalienable ones? And how can government secure what is already secured and fixed fast as fate?

Answer: Cats and other domestic animals hav evoluted to their present state of liberty and happiness by the governments which men hav instituted over those primitiv wild beasts. And now in turn the evoluted cats, dogs, horses, etc., help mankind to govern themselvs, and other brutes. The "guffaw of the Guinea negro" (critic's words), who a few years ago was generally degraded to the condition of a cat, a dog, or a mule, is now beginning to be heard in the councils of the nation. And in my humble judgment that "wretched state paper" (critic's words), the Declaration of Independence, sowed the seeds of negro emancipation in America.

The word "rights" is an amendment for "ends" in the original draft. It is not an improvement. But governments *are* instituted to secure rights that are "inalienable"—that is, not transferrable to another except by force, duress, or fraud—in spite of the grammatical criticism of the gentleman from Connecticut.

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to effect their safety and happiness (while already in possession of the inalienable rights aforesaid)."

Answer: The word "ends" being found aforesaid in the original draft, the first criticism above does not apply.

How can you abolish the form of a government and leave the old government standing? Did the British government of the colonies continue after the close of the Revolution?

"Foundation" (it is singular in the original draft) means, "1. The act of founding, fixing, establishing, or beginnning to erect; 2. That upon which a thing is founded," etc. The foundation of a house may be laid on a rock or on piles, or on quicksand; so may that of a government, metaphorically speaking.

Our fathers of 1776 were deprived of the inalienable right of self-government, and they fought seven years to recover it. But the work was only partially done, and perhaps never will be completely done. Is it possible that the gentleman from Connecticut denies the self-evident truth that all men are created equal in regard to the right to life, liberty, etc? Will he or anybody else deny that I, or the meanest black man, hav not an equal right with himself to "the preservation of life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" That is exactly the meaning and the expression of the Declaration, and it is folly to deny so self-evident a truth.

The gentleman attributes that portion of the Declaration containing the statement of grievances to the hand of John Adams. This is expressly con-

tradicted by Adams himself, who says Jefferson prepared the whole, and that when they two met to con it over he (Adams) does not remember making or suggesting a single alteration. He forgot, however, that he made two or three verbal changes with his own pen. But could either the pen of John Adams or Thomas Jefferson hav described a grievance like this last one in the list?

"He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negativ for suppressing every legislativ attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them, thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another."

This most eloquent paragraph of the Declaration was stricken out unamended. Speaking of it, Prof. Denslow says, "The English language possesses no clause more elaborate in its rhetoric." And of the Declaration as a whole, Col. Ingersoll says:

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Here is expressed in sixty words every material sentiment in the first one hundred and eighty words of the Declaration. But what a skeleton! Could such language as that hav enthused anybody? Such a death's-head and cross-bones in a Declaration of Independence, instead of rallying the patriots of '76, would hav frightened the goddess of liberty out of her senses and driven her into the Dismal Swamp.

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