

STORIES of New Jersey

and in 1764 he wrote to Joseph Reed that "The publick is generally unthankful, and I never will become a servant of it, till I am convinced that by neglecting my own affairs I am doing more acceptable Service to God and Man."

His distaste for public life may possibly have been the result of his divided loyalties in the 10 or 12 years preceding the Revolution. Convinced as an American of the injustice of taxation without representation, he pleaded, argued and warned the British authorities. But as a loyal subject of the King, he dreaded separation from the mother country.

To study at first hand the events which were to lead to the crisis of Revolution, Stockton sailed from England in 1766 on a visit which was to last 16 months. His wife Annis, the sister of his friend Elias Boudinot, who had married Stockton's sister, remained in Princeton with their children. A loyal subject and a prominent American, Stockton enjoyed the confidence of the King and was consulted by leaders of Parliament on conditions in the colonies. His letters home were filled with interesting judgments of the men he met and the events he watched. William Pitt, he thought, had degraded himself and lost the respect of the people by accepting a title. Of others his opinion was similarly frankly expressed.

Stockton worried about the plan of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to increase the levies on the colonies and to send more troops there at the expense of the Americans. "I exceedingly fear," he said, "that we shall get together by the ears, and God only knows what is to be the issue!" He was as outspoken to prominent people in England as he was in his letters, for, as he said: "I am happy that I had nothing to ask of government, and, therefore, dare speak my sentiments without cringing." An article in the *London Chronicle* which was ascribed to Stockton held that the American colonies were not dependent on the mother country, as some Englishmen said.

While Stockton was in England, President Finley of Princeton died, and the trustees of the college elected Dr. John Witherspoon, the Scottish minister, as his successor. Though Witherspoon wished to go, his wife was unwilling to leave their native land, and it depended on Stockton to persuade her and gain for the American cause a gallant man who, like him, signed the Declaration of Independence.

The brilliance of the fashionable world and association with Britain's best minds and men of action made foreign travel very attractive to Richard Stockton, but in America he chose "to live and die." His family constantly occupied his mind, and he wrote to his wife frequently and sent her a continual stream of gifts, especially roots and bulbs for her "sweet little flower garden," as he called it. He returned home, still a loyal subject of the King, with approval from the government of Great Britain that he be a member of the executive council of New Jersey. He remained a councillor from 1768 until the end of Royal government, and in 1774 he was made Justice of the Supreme Court.

In that same year he designed a scheme, which, if London had only listened, might have left almost all of North America under the British flag. In a letter to Lord Dartmouth, Stockton proposed complete self-government for the colonies -- a system similar to the dominion form of government under which Canada and the other self-governing constituents of the British Commonwealth of Nations exist today. Stockton warned that unless some such arrangement were adopted "an obstinate, awful and tremendous war" might result.

As early as 1764, two years before his visit to England, Stockton had proposed that Americans of outstanding ability be given seats in the British Parliament, and in 1765, the year of the Stamp Act, he flatly denied the authority of Parliament over the colonies as long as they were unrepresented. His argument against the Stamp Act was a lawyer's argument, and it in no way impaired