

The noisy days of The Bell's youth were stirring, turbulent times. The colonies were increasingly aroused by the encroachment of the British government on their hard-bought New World liberties. The Bell was forever tolling alarm and excursion.

This bold young American Bell called the Convention of the Philadelphia Assembly and later bid good-bye and God speed to Benjamin Franklin, as he embarked for England in 1757, carrying with him a petition of grievance from the Colony.

It rang, muffled, in 1765 as the *Royal Charlotte*, with a protecting man-of-war, came bearing those hated tax stamps up the Delaware River. When Parliament forbade the Colonies to manufacture iron and steel, hats, and woolen goods, The Bell roared forth the national rage. It was muffled again, in sympathy, when the port of Boston was closed by the British.

Nine months later, on April 25, 1775, it brought people flocking to the public square to hear how the Redcoats had been routed at Lexington six days before. Now indeed, the great bronze throat truly "proclaimed liberty."

Contrary to popular belief, the Liberty Bell did *not* ring on July 4, 1776. The Declaration of Independence was accepted by final vote on that day, but it was not

until July 8 that it was publicly proclaimed by Colonel John Nixon in front of Independence Hall.

It was on this day that The Bell rang forth with the booming, crystal-clear voice to announce to all freedom-loving men that their new nation had been officially born. They laughed and cried as The Bell spoke out — but everyone listened. All through the day and night it recited the message through the joyous streets of Philadelphia: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Even above the noise of jubilant citizens firing muskets and shooting fireworks, the resonant voice of The Bell was heard.

The big bronze crier was not allowed to rest in its tower. In September 1777 it became apparent that the British were going to take Philadelphia, and Congress ordered The Bell removed. It was conveyed with the heavy baggage of the American Army in a supply train of 700 wagons, guarded by 200 North Carolina and Virginia cavalymen. During the wild flight over almost impassable roads, the wagon that was carrying it broke, throwing The Bell to the ground for a terrible fall. But it was undamaged. At last it was smuggled to safety in Allentown, where it was secretly buried beneath the floor of the Zion Reformed Church,

there to remain in Free Soil for the remainder of the siege.

Independence Hall was made a prison for patriots; and had The Bell remained there, it might very well have been melted into a gun to be turned against American patriots.

It was returned to its place in Independence Hall on June 27, 1778, later to clang joy over the surrender of Cornwallis in 1781. Later, it rang in bereavement for the death of George Washington. It joyously bellowed forth the election of Thomas Jefferson, and then sounded hushed tones in mourning for the deaths of Hamilton and Lafayette. On July 4, 1826, it pealed forth the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration.

Retirement with Honor

Then, on July 8, 1835, the fiftyninth anniversary of the date when The Bell first proclaimed liberty, it was rung in memoriam as the body of John Marshall was being taken from Philadelphia to Washington. There was a magnificence in the scene as the great Bell rang out the inspiring words that would for all time stir men's hearts and souls. For the last time it rang forth — and then The Bell cracked — never to peal out its wondrous messages again.

But never again to be silent, for it is the incarnation of our political

freedom. It has traveled more than 20,000 miles on exhibitions, riding in specially prepared and guarded flat cars. In little towns through which it has passed in the night, people have lit bonfires along the railroad tracks so that they might get a glimpse as it rolled slowly by.

It was most fitting that on D-Day, June 6, 1944, the people of America were again to hear faintly this majestic voice of freedom. During a radio broadcast by Mayor Bernard Samuel of Philadelphia, the great Bell was first tapped with a rubber mallet 12 times — once for each letter in the word "Independence"; at the close of the program, it was again tapped with the mallet, this time with 7 strokes — once for each letter in the word "Liberty."

Though the Liberty Bell is not a person, it is indeed a hero that was born in our greatest hour, lived through our glorious youth, retreated, advanced, sang, shouted, fought, and fell in the line of duty.

The Liberty Bell is an American symbol — great, like Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln — yet plain, like any of us, or all of us. It is the only Bell in the world in whose presence any man, regardless of race, creed, political belief, or wealth, will solemnly take off his hat and feel, as well as show, true respect.