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The American Flag

Ross Winn

1898

Just one hundred and twenty-two years ago a new star arose upon the political horizon, the first child-nation was born in the western hemisphere. Upon her youthful brow were thirteen stars, symbolizing the sisterhood of thirteen states, and these, united, formed Columbia's crown. Her sons were strong of arm and bold of heart, and with a dauntless spirit they broke the shackles of tyranny and erected in the wilderness an altar to fair Liberty, that all men might worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. They took the blue of heaven and the white of the milkyway and bound them with the rays of the sun, and made the American flag; and when they placed that banner in the sky, it became the flag of liberty, and carried to every shore and into every clime the message of freedom and human progress.

There were giants in those days. There was grim old John Hancock, whom tyrants honored with their hatred. He was the first president of the American congress. There was Jefferson, whose brain gave to humanity its title-deed to liberty in that matchless document, the Declaration of Independence. In human record Jefferson is a towering figure, and stands so high that somehow we feel that he is kin to the mountains—his character is like Mount

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Everest piercing the clouds until its majestic summit is lost to view and in its presence we feel that we are nothing. There were Washington and Marion and the heroes who followed them; and we must not forget that great soul, Thomas Paine, who wrote the flaming words that moved men to action, and whose every word was a cannon shot for the rights of man in that crisis that tried men's souls, and who led the way by his common sense to the establishment of a free republic and thus ushered in an age of reason, in which men began to learn of the baseness of government, of aristocracy and priestcraft, and to realize the grandeur of a free society, in which solidarity of interest made perfect liberty possible, and prepared the way for the coming era which with the twentieth century, will gladden the world.

That was a grand era. The dim eyes of liberty's devotees from many a foreign shore turned upon America, and a new hope was born. The infant republic became the model for the revolutionary movements then beginning to shake the old world. The oppressed of European despotism drew inspiration from the free nation of the west, and they began to suspect that kings and titled loafers were not a necessity. And every time the eyes of the subjects of a European monarchy rested upon the starry banner of free Columbia, there thrilled a desire for liberty. Its glittering stars flashed forth to the world the fire of individual liberty, that took hold upon the senses of half-awakened manhood, and aroused the spirit to revolt. Fired by America's example, France awoke from her national lethargy, and dismissed her tyrant king via the guillotine. A new era began—a splendid era, in which men began to learn the dignity of manhood.

A ship floating the American flag knocked at the closed portals of Japan, and for the first time in her history, the doors of that wonderful nation opened to an alien. The waters of the Mediterranean sea were closed for centuries to the world's commerce, by the Algerian pirates. A little fleet of American war-ships introduced the star-spangled banner to the notice of these haughty buccaneers,

and after listening to the strains of Yankee Doodle thundered from the brazen throats of dare-devil Decatur's American cannon, they gracefully conceded the right of uninterrupted commerce in that sea.

The American flag belongs to the brightest page of human glory. It led in the march of human emancipation and fluttered in the van of the world's enlarged commerce. Beneath its folds were wrought the deeds of martial splendor that have added a new page to human glory. And, however base be the crimes committed under its folds and in its shadow by the graceless scamps of modern degeneracy, wherever the gaze of an American patriot falls upon its beautiful folds, a thrill of pride and joy will touch his heart and a new fire will light his eye. My country's flag, wherever unfurled, I admire thy beautiful folds, but thy presence cannot make right an evil cause.