

**ILLUSTRATIONS OF
THE SIEGE
OF BOSTON**

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Illustrations of the Siege of Boston by Richard Frothingham

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RICHARD FROTHINGHAM

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THE SIEGE
OF BOSTON**

From Dr. S. A. Gre

ILLUSTRATIONS

OF THE

SIEGE OF BOSTON.

FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL
SOCIETY, MARCH 16, 1876.

BY

RICHARD FROTHINGHAM.

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1876.

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SIEGE OF BOSTON.

SINCE the publication (1849) of the "History of the Siege of Boston," I have kept an eye on the appearance of new matter relative to the events of this period, and have largely increased my collections from contemporary authorities. I purpose to select from this mass a few salient things to serve as my contribution to this interesting occasion. They will show the spirit of the time.

It was a saying of Cardinal De Retz, that parties never go so far as when they know not where they are going. This was the case with the popular party in this country a few years before the beginning of the siege of Boston. It was ever professing loyalty, and it was as constantly repelling as calumny the charge of aiming at independence; and yet, by attaining to united effort and the habit of obedience to the regularly collected will of the majority, it unconsciously was led far towards that national power which it was in the design of Providence should arise in America. Indeed, the spirit of American nationality may be said to have been in the air. It was the burden of many a prophecy. Thus Ezra Stiles, pondering (1774) "on that Saxon genius of liberty and law which English America inherits from the parent State," predicted that the Union would produce "a Runnemeade in America." An American, Gulian Verplanck, on a visit to England during this period, sang:—

"Hail, happy Brittan, Freedom's blest retreat!
Great is thy power, thy wealth, thy glory great,
But wealth and power have no immortal day,
For all things ripen only to decay:
And when that time arrives — the lot of all —
When Britian's glory, power and wealth shall fall
Then shall thy sons by Fate's unchanged decree
In other worlds another Briton see.
And what thou art America shall be."

This sentiment of union imbues the varied action elicited by the penal acts closing the port of Boston, and altering the government of Massachusetts. It was expressed in the remarkable correspondence, revealing the very heart of the Revolution, between the local committees of the Colonies, as they sent their generous donations for the relief of the sufferers, and the grateful replies of the Boston committee. There is no record more authentic or beautiful or suggestive connected with the formative process of the country. It was printed for the first time by this Society (Fourth Series of "Collections," 4th volume, 1858). It presents a life-like picture of the time. It shows, that, below conflicting interests and old feuds, there was ever a spirit of brotherhood, a hearty sympathy, a common faith in political ideas, and one distinct aim. While this interchange of sentiment was going on, there was sterner work in progress. "Our brethren," the "Essex Gazette" of Dec. 20, 1774, says, "of New Hampshire and Rhode Island, have signalized themselves in a manner that does them the greatest honor; and it is with pleasure we can add, that the Colony of Connecticut merit our highest regards for their present assiduity and vigilance in disciplining their militia, which consists of near thirty regiments. . . . Indeed, the whole United Colonies are extremely active and zealous in the common cause, all nobly exerting themselves for carrying into execution the measures agreed upon by the late Continental Congress, — excepting a few disappointed, factious Tories."

The preparation for a great crisis had been so efficient by political and military organization, that the events of the 19th of April, 1775, called the militia round Boston in such numbers as to place a well-appointed body of British veterans in a state of siege. "All America," a British journal said, "is now rising, and the universal cry is, 'To-arms, to-arms!'" The seat of empire seems already dedicated for the Western World. Happy Britons, if they shall owe the merit of their liberty to the success of their American brethren."

The militia, however imperfect in their organization, still gathered under the shield of American law. This law was embodied in the association of the Congress of 1774. Here is the copy that was printed in Boston on a broadside, on its reception here, with the names of the signers. In this shape the instrument was discussed in every town or county or district in the thirteen Colonies; and, very generally, was adopted. Thus it faithfully bore the "sovereign States' collected will." It authorized the government by committees

and congresses which lasted until the adoption of the Articles of the Confederation.

The public papers and private letters of the times bear witness that this government was as much respected as any laws. The newspapers now (December, 1774) begin to have advertisements of the sales at public auction of portions of cargoes, "agreeable to the American Congress Association."

The adoption of this army by the General Congress was a foregone conclusion. For this body, in October, approved of the opposition of the people of Massachusetts to the Regulation Act, and declared, that, if it was attempted to be executed by force, all America ought to rally to their support; and this pledge had been reiterated for months in the action of towns, counties, and conventions, and especially in the fiery letters which the local committees sent to Boston. The administration was endeavoring to execute this law by force. This had been met by force, and in a manner that met the entire approval of the Whigs throughout the Colonies. There was no thought, in Congress or in the people, of falling back on these pledges.

But the paramount event of the siege was the appearance in the army of Washington as the commander-in-chief. To what does the country owe this noble appointment? How were the hearts and the minds of the people of the thirteen Colonies drawn towards this great American to such a degree that they unanimously put their lives and their liberties in his hands?

Though only forty-three, Washington had been before the public nearly a quarter of a century. The "Journey of Major Washington" to the Ohio country (1753), at the age of twenty, made his courage and his resources known throughout America and Europe. His Diary was printed widely in the journals. To this succeeded the well-known military service at the Great Meadows and on the Braddock field. Even the criticism which this service elicited in European journals had the effect to make him known. This also was the effect of a letter addressed to his brother that got into the "London Magazine" in 1754, in which he says, "I heard the bullets whistle; and believe me there is something charming in the sound." He was next appointed a lieutenant-colonel in the Virginia forces. In this capacity he engaged in a wide sphere of duty in meeting the Indians on the frontiers of Virginia, and was eminently successful in this arduous and difficult task.

A question of rank required a consultation with General Shirley in Boston. Washington, leaving his command with

Colonel Stephen, set out on horseback in company with Captain Mercer, and Captain Stewart (who was with General Braddock when he died), on a journey of five hundred miles in the dead of winter. His arrival at Philadelphia and New York was noticed in the press.* In Boston he was announced in the following way: "Last Friday came to this town, from Virginia, the Hon. Colonel Washington, a gentleman who has deservedly a high reputation for military skill, integrity, and valor; though success has not always attended his undertakings" (Boston, March 1, 1756). His sojourn in all these places was marked by every attention.

His mission was a partial success. He returned to Winchester. This year he was ordered to proclaim the declaration of war against France. He read this at several points in this place, and then addressed his command in the following terms:—

"You see, gentlemen soldiers, that it has pleased our most gracious sovereign to declare war in form against the French king, and (for divers good causes, but more particularly for their ambitious usurpations and encroachments on his American dominions) to pronounce all the said French king's subjects and vassals to be enemies to his crown and dignity; and hath willed and required all his subjects and people, and in a more especial manner commanded his captain-general of his forces, his governors, and all other his commanders and officers, to do and execute all acts of hostility in the prosecution of this just and honorable war. And though our utmost endeavors can contribute but little to the advancement of his Majesty's honor and the interest of his governments, yet let us show our willing obedience to the best of kings, and, by a strict attachment to his royal commands, demonstrate the love and loyalty we bear to his sacred person; let us, by rules of unerring bravery, strive to merit his royal favor, and a better establishment as a reward for our services."

Here is seen that loyalty to the crown which long animated Washington. This speech, though in the newspapers, cannot be found in the biographies of Marshall, Ramsay, Sparks, or Irving.

On the conclusion of the war, Washington resigned (1759) his commission, and retired to Mount Vernon. He was soon

* "NEW YORK, Feb. 23, 1756. — Last Friday, Colonel Washington left this city for Boston; there, 'tis thought, to consult with General Shirley. Measures proper to be taken with the several tribes of Indians to the southward, and particularly the Cherokees, some hundreds of whom, from the back parts of the two Carolinas, it is reported, have assured the western governments of their coming in, and firmly adhering to the interests of the English, in opposition to the French."

"NEW YORK, March 15. — Colonel Washington returned hither from Boston on Tuesday last, on his way home to Virginia."

elected a member of the House of Burgesses. Though alive to the aggressions of the British administration on the customs and rights of the Colonies, he was engaged in no action, even in the times of the Stamp Act, that brought his name before all the Colonies.

The Townshend revenue acts (1767) elicited the non-importation scheme as a peaceable means to obtain their entire repeal. The whole country became occupied with this measure. It fairly engrossed the public mind. Colonies that did not come into it—as Rhode Island—were termed plague-spots. Individuals who violated it were roughly treated. The Burgesses now (1769) passed their memorable resolves. For this the royal governor, Lord Botetourt, dissolved them.

Washington, still a member, had brought a paper providing for a non-importation agreement for Virginia, which he intended to move in the House. He, with the patriots, now repaired to the residence of Anthony Hay. Here they chose Peyton Randolph their moderator; matured a non-importation agreement for Virginia, and his signature to it is the seventh on the list. This paper was copied into the newspapers of the other Colonies, with the signers' names. It is in the "Pennsylvania Chronicle" of June 6, 1769. These proceedings were hailed with joy by the popular party throughout the Colonies. Thus the name of Washington was brought before the people, at a critical period, in connection with a vital political measure.

Five years later, the popular excitement was driven to a high pitch by the penal measures of the Boston Port Act and the Regulating Act. Every cheek glowed with resentment, and every tongue was a flame of fire. This was the case in all the towns and counties in the thirteen Colonies. All eyes were now on public men. The freholders of Fairfax County met (July 18, 1774) in Alexandria, devised means to aid the sufferers in Boston, and urged the people of Massachusetts to resist the obnoxious Regulating Act; but, if they should submit to this act, the citizens of Fairfax County would not hold the decision binding on them, but would inviolably adhere to such measures as the General Congress should devise for the preservation of their lives and liberties. The head-line over this great action has, in large capitals, the name of GEORGE WASHINGTON, *Esquire*, as the chairman. Here was the boldest of political action. It could hardly have failed to draw attention to, and to have fixed it upon, the soldier already so distinguished in the history of the Colonies.

At this period the newspapers copied an extract from a