

**HISTORICAL ADDRESS DELIVERED ON
THE OCCASION OF THE TWO HUNDRED
AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
TOWN OF MIDDLEBOROUGH,
MASSACHUSETTS, JULY 5, 1919**

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Historical address delivered on the occasion of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the town of Middleborough, Massachusetts, July 5, 1919 by Albert H. Washburn

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July 5, 1919

BY

ALBERT H. WASHBURN

HISTORICAL ADDRESS

Delivered on the Occasion of the Two Hundred and
Fiftieth Anniversary of the Town of Middle-
borough, Massachusetts, July 5, 1919,

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"The Royal Oak it was the Tree,
That saved his Royal Majestic."

These lines of the New England Primer, for more than a hundred years the approved text book of the Pilgrim and Puritan dissenter, were doubtless droned on many a leaden school day by our forebears at an age when their meaning was but dimly guessed. This and the slightly variant companion stanza,

"The Royal Oak our King did save,
From fatal stroke of Rebel Slave,"

which is to be found in the "Child's Guide," another nightmare of only lesser fame, suggests the early Colonial idea of the beginner's lesson in patriotism. Whether poetry such as this, as stiff and wooden as the oak covers which held it together, produced quite the effect its authors intended or whether it stired in youthful breasts a reactionary spirit of rebellion and of secret sympathy for the rebel, we may not certainly know.

The allusion was, of course, to the Second Charles. For a time, Cromwell, that "stern enemy of kings," hunted him hard, but presently the Commonwealth crumbled and the House of Stuart was restored. The "Merrie Monarch" had been nine years on his throne when the town of Middle-

borough was incorporated. The date was June 1, 1669, and the place a term of the superior court holden at Plymouth. In the proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society for 1873 will be found an article on "The Origin of the Names of Towns in Massachusetts," wherein the opinion is expressed that, while there is a Middleborough in the North Riding of York, England, the name of our town, like that of Marshfield and Freetown, probably originated here and can be traced to local causes.

Some of our earlier local annalists appear to have thought that Edward Winslow, afterwards governor of Plymouth, and Stephen Hopkins, his companion of the Mayflower, were the first white men to set foot on this fertile soil, long regarded by the aborigine of this section as the fairest spot of his inheritance. Governor Bradford's embassy to the good king Massasoit, was one of his first public acts upon succeeding Carver, and in dispatching it he was careful to explain that he was not taking counsel of his fears, but rather of his desire to live "peaceably with all men, especially with our nearest neighbors." The account of the mission which has come down to us is undoubtedly the work of Winslow. The governor's present to his Indian ally was a laced "horseman's coat of red cotton." The ancient custom of propitiating royalty and near royalty with gifts is not, if we may judge from recent history, altogether extinct. Winslow and Hopkins with Squanto, the friend and interpreter of the Pilgrims, left Plymouth at nine o'clock one July morning in 1621. According to the old chronicle, they reached here "about three o'clock in the afternoon, the inhabitants entertaining us with joy in the best manner they could." There was a banquet of Indian corn, the spawn of shad and roasted acorns. This was the

last word in Indian delicacies. Before they moved on to the fishing weir near Titicut, where they camped for the night, there was, by special request, an exhibition of marksmanship in a nearby crow-infested cornfield. This feat was greatly admired by the Indians and probably was not without its psychological effect. On the return trip a few days later, a brief stop was again made at Nemasket, the messengers being as Winslow explains "wet and weary." But the main thing was that success had crowned their efforts. Massasoit had made them welcome and had given pledges that he would continue the existing alliance. The incident seems commonplace enough at this distance, but it none the less has a permanent place in colonial history. No mission ever affected more profoundly the destinies of a struggling new world settlement. Thus we see the first feeble beginnings of a league of nations upon American soil.

This is familiar history, but no less familiar is the fact that two years before, Thomas Dermer, one of John Smith's aides, with the same Squanto acting as guide, headed an expedition which explored New England, "searching every harbor and compassing every capeland." Finally he landed in the neighborhood of Plymouth and travelled "almost a day's journey westward to a place called Nummastaquyt," in other words, Nemasket. Here he rescued one of two surviving Frenchmen who had been shipwrecked several years before. The date of Dermer's letter making mention of the Nemasket visit is December 27, 1619. The substance of all this will be found in the admirable history of the Town by Thomas Weston.

A few years later, Sir Christopher Gardiner spent some time in this neighborhood. The Journal of Governor Winthrop fixes the date in the

spring of 1631. Sir Christopher seems to be entitled to the doubtful distinction of being our first bad man. Rumor had it that he was a bigamist, a charge which was never proved, but there is ample proof that he was a confidential agent of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who had his eye on the commercial possibilities of the fishing and fur industries in New England and who was at that time involved in a bitter controversy growing out of his claim, as Winthrop tells us, "to a great part of the Bay of Massachusetts." Gardiner's true character is shrouded in mystery. The late Charles Francis Adams, Jr., who put to the acid test every scrap of available evidence, refers to him as one of the puzzles of early New England history and says that "while the mystery is now unlikely to be ever wholly solved, yet he nevertheless stands out in picturesque incongruity against the monotonous background of colonial life. It is somewhat as if one were suddenly to come across the portrait of a cavalier by Van Dyke in the vestibule of a New England village church." New England novelists and poets have found in him a veritable treasure trove. He was the walking villain of the now forgotten tale of "Hope Leslie" published by Miss Sedgwick in 1827. The historian Motley featured him in his story of "Merrymount" published in 1849. He figures in Longfellow's "Tales of a Wayside Inn." Whittier mentions him in his "Margaret Smith's Journal." Whatever the truth about this somewhat melodramatic figure, it is plain enough that his own actions were largely responsible for the suspicion with which he was regarded. Bradford records the prevailing view that he was a fugitive from justice. While he professed great piety, as became a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, and it was understood that he had given up all worldly pleasure, disquieting rumors

of the routine of his daily life reached Boston. Governor Winthrop notes in his Journal, May 21, 1631, that "one Mr. Gardiner, calling himself a Knight of the Golden Melice, being accused to have two wives in England was sent for; but he had intelligence and escaped, and travelled up and down among the Indians about a month; but, by means of the governor of Plymouth, he was taken by the Indians about Nemasket and brought to Plymouth." Incidentally, the Indians with a certain stoic simplicity asked permission to kill him but this primitive suggestion was coldly received by the authorities and a capsized canoe in yonder river was directly responsible finally for the fugitive's capture. The one time current story that he was shipped back to England, after being taken to Boston is effectually disproved by Adams, and thus this early precedent for the deportation of undesirable aliens turns out to be no precedent at all. If he was under some restraint during his enforced stay in Boston, the evidence is conclusive that he freely went his way to Maine in August of the same year and that he set sail from Maine for Bristol, England, in 1632. Years afterwards, on September 9, 1644, Winthrop wrote: "Gardiner had no occasion to complain against us, for he was kindly used and dismissed in peace professing much acknowledgment for the great courtesy he found here." Nevertheless he did complain and before he drops out of sight forever, he aimed a treacherous blow which caused the greatest consternation in Boston and Plymouth. It took the form of a petition accusing the Colony of treason and rebellion, which was sent to the king December 19, 1632. There was a hearing before the Privy Council, but ultimately the Massachusetts Company was completely exonerated and it was said that the King threatened to severely pun-

ish "all who did abuse his governor and the plantation." When the news of this vindication reached Governor Winthrop in 1633, he sat down and wrote a letter to his Plymouth colleague suggesting "a day of Thanksgiving to our merciful God" because of "our deliverance from so desperate a danger," which was "against all men's expectations." We may gather from this grateful note of relief that the strain had been severe indeed.

In Old Colony affairs we justly accord primacy to Plymouth and in doing so, if we give the matter any thought at all, we are apt to overlook the claims of our own town. And yet when we get the true perspective, not by consulting local annals alone, but by including also in our vision the broader sweep of New England history, the record discloses that Middleborough was intimately concerned, first in the earlier Indian and Colonial wars and a century later in the beginnings of the Revolution itself. The war which goes by the name of Philip, which scourged over three hundred miles of scattered settlements in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and the Province of Maine, in other words, practically all of the New England of that day—those frontiers of yesterday seemed far flung to our ancestors—had its origin right here. The discovery of the body of the Indian Sausaman under the ice of Assawampsett Lake uncovered a plot which had long been hatching. There were times when a dead Indian was regarded with complacency by the colonists, but this was not one of them. Sausaman was one of Eliot's converts. In his "Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England from the First Planting Thereof in the Year 1607 to the Year 1677," William Hubbard, the Ipswich minister, speaks of him as "bred up in a profession of Christian religion," and as "a very plaus-