

**REASONS, PRINCIPALLY OF
A PUBLIC NATURE, AGAINST
A NEW BRIDGE FROM
CHARLESTOWN TO BOSTON**

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Reasons, principally of a public nature, against a new bridge from Charlestown to Boston by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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A PUBLIC NATURE, AGAINST
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CHARLESTOWN TO BOSTON**

W. Garrison

REASONS,

PRINCIPALLY OF A PUBLIC NATURE,

AGAINST

A New Bridge

FROM

CHARLESTOWN TO BOSTON.



BOSTON:

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1825.

REASONS,

&c. &c.

THERE is now pending before the Honourable Legislature a Petition for another bridge from Charlestown to Boston—"toll free forever for foot passengers." An intimation has also been given that a rate of toll on carriages, lower than that at the present bridge, would be acceptable to the petitioners.—These petitioners are fully aware that the granting of their petition, will have the effect—

First, To annihilate the foot toll of Charlestown bridge.

Second, To divide equally the amount of toll received for carriages, provided the rate at the two bridges be the same.

The object of the following pages is not only to demonstrate that a new bridge, as proposed, would be utterly destructive of the present one as a property, but would involve consequences to other interests, and among the rest those of the Commonwealth, too serious to be met, for any advantages promised by this new project. The advantages such as they are, will be clearly shown to be local and personal, concerning Charlestown and its inhabitants alone.

However great the confidence which the Corporation of Charles River Bridge may feel in the wisdom,

integrity, and good faith of the legislature, a sense of security ought not to impose silence, when a project, so fatal in its consequences as respects principle, as well as property, solicits the favourable attention of the legislature, as a public benefit. The discussion of its merits in the two branches, will call up a variety of considerations of no slight interest and importance—perhaps at a late day of the session—the members of the two houses will not therefore think a portion of their leisure in the intervening time, ill bestowed, in a review of the reasons which are here respectfully offered, against the petition.

Incorporations for the mere use of capital, like banks, are to be distinguished from such as require the surrender of capital forever, and give as an equivalent in return, certain privileges or franchises to be enjoyed for a longer or shorter duration. A corporation of the first description, will commence its operations without any anxious attention to divine what is to be the amount of its profits, because its capital being always subject to its own control, may be withdrawn at pleasure, the corporation dissolved, and the money employed in any other manner, at will. But it is not so with a corporation of the other kind. The capital once invested is irredeemable. There remains nothing at the disposal of the corporation but its franchise. If its capital be employed in the construction of a public bridge, with a right of toll as its franchise, this right of toll will be its only property. It is therefore, of great moment when the charter is framed, not only that the good faith of the government, be pledged for the uninterrupted enjoyment of the right, but that with a view to the adjustment of the rate of toll and the term of the grant, upon equitable grounds, for both parties, the circumstances

which are to affect the amount of the tolls, be carefully weighed.

In the case of Charles River Bridge,—when the adjustment of the terms of its charter were under consideration, its location at and substitution for the ancient ferry,—the fact that the road over the Neck, at the South End, Winnissimmet Ferry and Charlestown Ferry, were the only frequented passes into Boston;—that Charlestown Ferry was the only one on Charles river above Chelsea,—the position of the bridge, in relation to the eastern, northern, and western sections of the country; all these circumstances were present to the minds of the General Court, and of the proprietors of the bridge, when the charter was framed. For a period of a hundred and sixty years no additional avenues to the capital had been opened; the subject of a bridge from Boston to Charlestown, had been at times discussed more than sixty years, but the project as often deemed visionary, from the depth of the water and the rapidity of the current. It seems therefore but reasonable to suppose, that it was fully the expectation of the parties that the road, by the Neck, Winnissimmet Ferry, and Charles river bridge, would continue for an unlimited period to be the only avenues to Boston, from the interior. In the then state of public information, taken in connexion with the actual condition and prospects of the country, it could hardly, at least, have been conceived by any one, that a competition was likely to arise with Charles river bridge, within a term of fifty or more years. By all the considerations here mentioned, the legislature was most undoubtedly influenced, both in fixing the rate of the tolls and the duration of the charter; and whether the toll on a carriage should be 8 pence or 12 pence, or the duration of the charter 40 or 100

years, were questions which had a direct reference to these points.

The ordinary and accustomed passing by the ferry together with the travel from the eastern, northern, and western sections of the country, from which the passage by Charlestown bridge would be shorter than by the *neck*, were, therefore to be deemed the sources of revenue from which the proprietors were to be remunerated for their hazardous enterprize, and which they were unquestionably to enjoy uninterrupted for the term of the charter. Not that the legislature may not erect other bridges, or even remove the present bridge, if the public good require, giving to Charles river bridge, a full indemnity. For in point of *interest* the franchise itself, and an equivalent for it, are one and the same thing. It may here be but an act of justice, to say a word of the public spirit of the projectors of this bridge. The current of public opinion was strongly against the scheme, as impracticable. If the natural obstacles to the completion of a bridge were overcome, which it was believed they could not be, there being no example of a pier bridge of the same extent any where in being; there was the danger to be apprehended from ice in the river, which would inevitably sweep away the bridge in a short time, and its whole cost, a large sum of money for the day, be wholly lost to the proprietors. There was no reservation in the charter, that the Commonwealth would, in that case indemnify them in whole or in any part, the hazard was wholly their own; they persevered under every discouragement and completed the work. This as it was the longest bridge then known in the civilized world, has been useful not only as a model throughout the country, but as an experiment by which the stability of wooden bridges, of

great length, was fully established ; a fact of the more importance, as the greater cheapness of wooden structures, compared with those of stone, has enabled us to avail of them when the expense of the latter, in the same places, would have been an insuperable obstacle.

What was just now said at the time of the incorporation, as to the extent of country which according to public expectation, would communicate with Boston by Charles River bridge only, and the influence this expectation must have had on the terms of the charter, has received full confirmation by a deliberate act of the Legislature itself. Seven years after the charter was granted, and while yet the circumstances under which the bridge was built, were fresh in the public mind, the project of West Boston Bridge was submitted to the Legislature. It being apparent that a portion of the western travel would be diverted from Charles River Bridge, the legislature at once gave to this bridge an additional term of thirty years as an indemnity for this loss. That this was no boon above the fair claims of the proprietors, may be shewn in other ways. When the solidity of the bridge was ascertained and its advantages began to be felt, had the Legislature in its wisdom conferred a munificent reward upon the Company, as an acknowledgment of a noble public spirit, successfully exerted in accomplishing the most useful undertaking which, viewed in all its beneficial consequences, has been devised since the revolution, the public feeling would have heartily responded to the act. It was probably supposed that the profits to arise from the wide range of travel, which would centre at the bridge, would yield such a reward, besides reimbursing the capital and a liberal compensation for its use. But the fact

is not so, and to prove it, it will not be thought unfair to assume as true that the capital employed in building this bridge, if not thus used, would have been as judiciously invested, either in real estate in Boston, in the Funds of the United States, or in active commerce, as any capital in the hands of other persons. Now the instances are numerous of the same amount of money employed in all these several ways, which has since 1786, accumulated to an amount equal to, if not exceeding, the present value of Charles River Bridge. So that as a property, it has always stood, and now stands, but on a level, with many other kinds, with this difference that this was exposed at the beginning, to imminent hazard, of total loss in an unpromising experiment, which if successful, the public was to reap as great, or far greater benefits from, than the proprietors; while, if unsuccessful, the latter alone were to be the sufferers. We say the public were to reap greater benefits from success than the proprietors, because in a pecuniary view alone, the public have profited equally, while in other respects its gain is immeasurable. For there it was first ascertained that a bridge of this construction could be depended upon; many others were in consequence built. And in the point of greater facility of intercourse between Boston and the country, two facts will suffice. Before the bridge was erected, Charlestown Ferry in the winter season was sometimes impassable for one or more days, from the violence of storms, or danger from the ice. The other fact is, that heavily laden teams always, and often other carriages coming from the country, north and east of Medford, took their course through Cambridge, Brookline, and Roxbury, to get to Boston; a circuit of thirteen miles; whereas from the same point, the way opened by the bridge was only five miles.