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LEXINGTON AND CONCORD.

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It was said by George William Curtis, in his oration at the Concord Centennial Celebration, that for ten years before the first shock of arms in the Revolution the Colonists had seen that warfare with Great Britain was possible, and that for five years they had considered it probable, and for a year certain. The beginning of actual conflict was therefore not unexpected.

The Revolution is sometimes claimed to have begun before that memorable and splendid April morning, and in truth there had been many preliminary encounters between the Colonists and the royal authority. Five years earlier, on March 5, 1770, "under extraordinary provocation a party of soldiers fired, killing five rioters and wounding six," in the streets of Boston, but though in the spring of 1775 the town observed the anniversary of the so-called "massacre" with an oration by Dr. Joseph Warren, it was really an event of no political significance; it grew out of no invasion of Colonial rights, and these recent years ought never to have

seen the erection on Boston Common of a commemorative monument.

Then in Rhode Island, on June 9, 1772, the royal schooner *Gaspee*, charged with enforcing the Acts of Trade, ran aground on *Namquit*, some five miles from Providence, while in pursuit of a provincial vessel. The next night eight boats put out from Providence, under the command of John and Joseph Brown of that town and of Simeon Potter of Bristol, and captured and burned the stranded schooner, whose commander, Lieutenant Dudingston, was wounded by a musket shot during the attack. Thus, as Judge E. R. Hoar said at the Concord celebration, Rhode Island "undertook to commence the Revolution about three years before it began, and pretty nearly did it."

A year and a half later tea made considerable trouble. It caused disturbance in Charleston, Philadelphia and New York, as well as in Boston, but the last town especially distinguished itself by throwing into the harbor three ship-loads which had for some time been waiting to be landed. This well-considered action of the men of Massachusetts occurred on the night of December 16, 1773, and its result was a freshly-angered king and some new Acts of Parliament, among them the famous Boston Port Bill.

There were disturbances elsewhere before the outbreak of war, among them the difficulty

between the populace and the military at Golden Hill, in New York town, on January 19 and 20, 1770. During this whole preliminary period there was pretty constant friction between the Governors of various Colonies and their Assemblies; but none of these difficulties or encounters began the Revolution. They preceded the precipitation of warfare by a considerable interval.

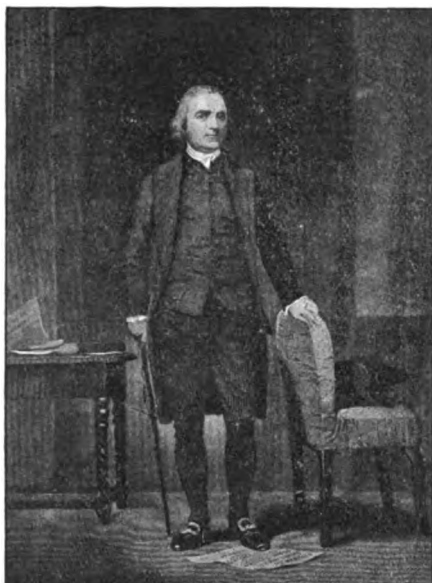
Three events now need to be noticed, as they closely preceded Lexington and Concord, and have each been claimed as the beginning of actual conflict. The first belongs to Virginia. Word had come to Dunmore, her Governor, that the Indians were about to rise all along the frontier, and so, designing, as was charged, to weaken his disloyal colony by sacrificing her forces to the savages, he despatched General Andrew Lewis with his rangers far out to where the Great Kanawha meets the waters of the greater Ohio. There Lewis, instead of sacrificing himself and his men, aroused the anger of Dunmore by overcoming the enemy under their famous chief, Cornstalk, in the battle of Point Pleasant, on October 10, 1774. This encounter on the distant frontier has been described as "the first blood shed in the Revolution." Virginia's loss was heavy, but she was the stronger for it, and the more ready to take her place by the side of Massachusetts when the homespun had at length faced the scarlet in the spring of the new year.

The second event occurred on Massachusetts soil, in the old town of Salem. There Colonel David Mason was mounting some old French cannon, and thither under orders from Gage went Lieutenant-Colonel Leslie from Castle William in Boston harbor, in command of about 300 men. This was on February 26, 1775. He did not find the cannon, for at the bridge over Salem North River his troops were opposed by the men of Essex under Colonel Timothy Pickering, and some of the patriots were pricked by British bayonets. Because of this affair it is sometimes said that within the bounds of Salem "occurred the first armed resistance to Great Britain," and that there "for the first time blood had been spilt in a strife between the colony and the mother country." Leslie crossed the bridge, but immediately re-crossed it and returned to Boston.

The third event took place in Vermont, then known as the New Hampshire Grants. On March 13, 1775, a party of Green Mountain Boys effectively resisted an attempt to hold a King's court at Westminster, and in the encounter William French of Brattleboro was killed outright and Daniel Houghton of Fulham (now Dummerston) was fatally wounded. This, the "Westminster Massacre," has also been called "the first blood of the momentous conflict that gave birth to a nation."

These were some of the events which expressed the temper of that pre-Revolutionary period during which the conflict was emerging from possibility into certainty. None of them, however, can be considered as the beginning of war. That beginning occurred at Lexington and Concord. The country generally was indeed in so heated a condition that flame might have been kindled at many points, but actually it did not burst forth until the 19th of April. It may be that Dunmore meant to cripple the military force of his colony by sending Lewis to the frontier, it may be that it was due only to the forbearance of Leslie and not to any lack of resolution on the part of the Essex men that there was no battle at Salem North Bridge, it may be that the resistance at Westminster was to royal authority. Still, on the border of Virginia the conflict was with savages, at Salem there was no sound of cannon or musketry, and at Westminster the enemy was only a sheriff's posse. As a matter of fact it was at Lexington, on that mild and brilliant April morning when the fields were waving with grain, that the King's soldiers first opened fire on the King's loyal subjects, and it was at Concord a few hours later that the first command was ever given the soldiers of the people to fire upon the soldiers of the King. In that day's engagement, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "the British army was first fronted, and driven back." Upon the events of that day the Revolution followed immediately, as it did not upon the others. The patriotic societies are right in dating the Revolution from the 19th of April. This was the beginning of actual war. The sword had at last been withdrawn from the scabbard. Resistance had taken up

arms, and before these should be laid down again a new nation was to be born. The result of Lexington was Ticonderoga and Bunker Hill, Bennington, Saratoga and Yorktown; it was the union of the Colonies, the Declaration of Independence and the existence of the United States.



SAMUEL ADAMS.

The outbreak could not have been long postponed. ~~The people of Massachusetts, had for years breathed an atmosphere charged with the certainty of armed conflict.~~ ^{and they were representative of the colonies in general.} The issue was inevitable between constitutional government and royal prerogative. The King was determined to be an active political force. Neither Ministry nor Parliament could resist him. Therefore his American subjects must. Massachusetts insisted that he was disregarding her guaranteed rights, and the parliamentary action of 1774 which partially annulled the charter granted her by William III. in 1692, after the union of the two colonies of Plymouth and the Bay, was intolerable. It threatened the security of all the Colonies. If the Continental Congress, from its assembling in Philadelphia in September, 1774, was not the general Colonial government, at least the Provincial Congresses and Committees of Safety were the actual government of Massachusetts. The authority of the Crown had been superseded, though Gage held the title of governor. In fact, from the very beginning of her history Massachusetts had been an independent, though loyal colony,

and her people were now determined to maintain the long-established order. They demanded no new liberties. "We were not the revolutionists," said Richard Henry Dana, Jr., at Lexington, a hundred years later, "the king and parliament were the revolutionists. They were the radical innovators. We were the conservators of existing institutions." At Concord, on the same day, George William Curtis characterized the Revolution as "a conflict which, so far as we can see, saved civil liberty in two hemispheres, saved England as well as America, and whose magnificent results shine through the world as the beacon light of free popular government."

Goldwin Smith has pronounced fair judgment upon the royal policy: "The measures of repression, in any view, deserve the censure which has been passed upon them. They were passionate, indiscriminate and insulting; bolts of blind wrath launched across the Atlantic by men imperfectly informed as to the situation and ignorant of the character of the people, as transoceanic rulers must always be. By closing the port of Boston scores of traders faithful to the government were struck. By the abrogation of the charter of Massachusetts every colony was made to feel its chartered rights imperiled. Worst of all was the revival of a law passed in the hateful reign of Henry VIII, under which subjects accused of treason anywhere could be transported to England for trial. This not only threatened all colonists with the loss of safeguards for personal liberty but outraged their self-respect. Shoot people if you must, but do not hurt their feelings. If there was to be repression at all, troops enough should have been sent, and the law should have been enforced against its violators at Boston without inflicting penalties on the innocent or menacing Colonial liberties in general. However, no repression could have been final; its temporary success would have been the beginning not the end of woes."

Yet the King put his trust in force. "The time had arrived for the political severance of America, that it might play its part in the history of this globe; and the inscrutable Divine Providence gave an insane king to England. In the resistance of the Colonies he alone was immovable

on the question of force. England was so dear to us, that the Colonies could only be absolutely united by violence from England; and only one man could compel the resort to violence. So the King became insane." These were Emerson's daring words at the Concord anniversary. The King trusted in force. In February of this fatal year he said to Lord North: "I am a friend to holding out the olive branch, yet I believe that when once vigorous measures appear to be the only means the Colonies will submit."

Massachusetts was as determined as the King. She would surrender none of her rights. Her Provincial Congress was preparing for war. Yet the exactest care was to be taken that the first shot should be received, not sent. The purpose of Massachusetts was not attack but defense. The first of her sons to fall must be martyrs, and so it proved at Lexington. It was resolved in Parliament that she was in a state of rebellion, though Chatham counseled moderation and warned the Ministry that "the first shot fired in America separates the Colonies." Gage, indeed, had given assurance that four regiments ought to make Massachusetts penitent. Chatham was right. Gage was wrong. The first clash of arms brought Putnam, Arnold, Greene and Stark to Boston, and within three days the town was beleaguered by 16,000 men, gathered not only from Massachusetts but also from Connecticut, ~~Rhode Island~~ and New Hampshire.

The smoke of battle had scarcely cleared when the Colonists began to collect evidence that the first shot was fired by the King's soldiers. It was important to prove this lest it should be understood abroad that the Americans had done more than act on the defensive. So the Provincial Congress sent to England a "Narrative," the beginning of which was as follows: "On the nineteenth day of April, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, a day to be remembered by all Americans of the present generation, and which ought and doubtless will be handed down to ages yet unborn, the troops of Britain, unprovoked, shed the blood of sundry of the loyal American subjects of the British King in the field of Lexington." That was to say: "We were not the revolutionists, we were the King's loyal subjects; we acted in behalf of English institutions and English law." Englishmen themselves have amply supported this claim. John Dunning, afterward Baron Ashburton, declared in Parliament: "The Colonies are not in a state of rebellion, but resisting the attempt to establish despotism in America, as a prelude to the same system in the mother country." Burgoyne, after his return to England, made the statement in Parliament that "the principle of the American war was wrong; it was leveled against the constitution and general rights of mankind." In 1879, while Minister to the United States, Sir Edward Thornton said, "Englishmen now understand that in the American Revolution you were fighting

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our battles." Gladstone wrote to Lexington in 1876: "The circumstances of the war, the principles it illustrates, and the remarkable powers and characters of the principal men who took part, whether as soldiers or civilians, in the struggle, have always invested it with a peculiar interest in my eyes, quite independently of the intimate concern of this country in the events themselves. . . . As regards the fathers of the

American Constitution themselves, I believe we can and do now contemplate their great qualities and achievements with an admiration as pure as that of American citizens themselves; and can

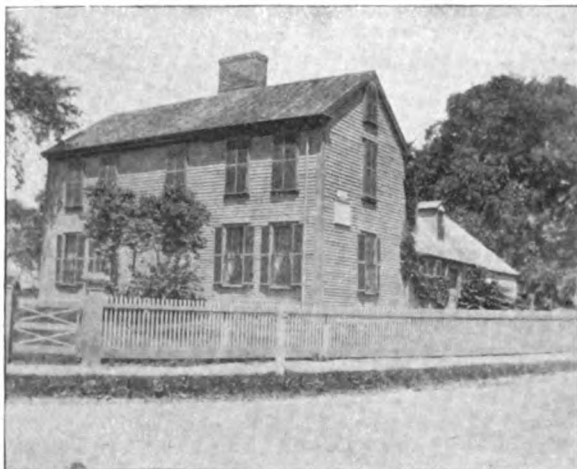


JOHN HANCOCK.

rejoice no less heartily that, in the counsels of Providence, they were made the instruments of a purpose most beneficent to the world." It is because the Revolution bears this character that it is rightly remembered as a heroic period.

The story of the initial conflict may be briefly told. The people of Concord call the resistance on their soil by the homely name of Concord Fight, though what occurred at Lexington is called a battle. The engagement was in fact rather that of the whole of Middlesex County, as well as of a part of Essex and Norfolk, than that of the two towns after which it is named. Most of the fighting was done during the retreat of the redcoats, and was participated in by twenty-three towns. The worst carnage was at Menotomy, now Arlington. The engagement began at Lexington, was fairly opened at Concord, and closed only when the protection of the ships of war was gained at Charlestown. It began at dawn and lasted till sunset.

Lexington lies twelve miles northwest of Boston, Concord six miles west of Lexington. At the Reverend Jonas Clark's, in Lexington, were John Hancock and Samuel Adams, whom Gage was under orders to send to England to be tried for high treason. At Concord were provincial military stores. Gage's purpose was to capture both stores and men. He thought it a secret pur-



THE CLARK HOUSE.

pose, and at 10³⁰ o'clock on the night of Tuesday, the 18th, he dispatched 800 men from Boston, under Lieut.-Col. Francis Smith and Major John Pitcairn. It was far from a secret purpose. As the forces embarked for Lechmere Point, in East Cambridge, thence to take up their inland march, two signal lanterns, hung by Robert Newman, flashed from the belfry of the North or Christ Church in Boston, and immediately, by different routes, Paul Revere and William Dawes started to alarm the country. Smith, discovering on the way that the alarm had been given, delayed his own advance and sent back for reinforcements, ordering Pitcairn to go on with most of the troops and joining him later, probably at Lexington. There, upon arriving at early dawn, Pitcairn found some sixty minute-men in line upon the common, under Capt. John Parker, one of Wolfe's veterans at Quebec. Pitcairn commanded them to disperse, and then their captain gave the order, "Don't fire unless you are fired on; but, if they want a war, let it begin here!" They were fired upon. A few fell as martyrs. The others did not disperse until Parker gave the word, but stood their ground and returned the fire. So Lexington made good the message she had sent to Boston earlier in the spring: "We trust in God that, should the state of our affairs require it, we shall be

ready to sacrifice our estates and everything dear in life, yea, and life itself, in support of the common cause."

Pitcairn always declared that he gave no order to fire, and, indeed, gave an order to the contrary; but the firing took place, and the Revolution began. "Oh, what a glorious morning is this!" exclaimed the prophetic Adams.

Revere and Dawes fell into the hands of a patrol after leaving Lexington, but Dr. Samuel Prescott, who was with them, escaped capture and bore the alarm to Concord, whither the British now pushed on, followed by Parker and his men. The minute-men of Concord, Acton, Lincoln and other towns withdrew, by the old North Bridge, across the little river, and a detachment was sent to prevent their return, while the main body of invaders destroyed what stores they could find and set fire to the court house. Meanwhile the Americans had gained in numbers—they may have numbered 500 men—had formed in order and stood facing the British guard, which had also crossed the bridge. As smoke was seen rising from the town, ~~a quarter of a mile~~ away, Adj. Joseph Hosmer, of Concord, exclaimed, "Will you let them burn the town down?" Col. James Barrett, of Concord, who was in command, ordered the advance, and Capt. Isaac Davis, of Acton, who seems to have been the real leader of the patriots, gave the word to march. "I haven't a man that's afraid to go," said Davis. He led the way, with Maj. John Buttrick, of Concord, and Lieut.-Col. John Robinson, of Westford. The redcoats retreated across the bridge and began to destroy it. The patriot march quickened. The enemy fired a shot and then a volley, and Davis fell, with Abner Hosmer, his Acton neighbor. Then rang out Buttrick's order, "Fire, fellow soldiers! for God's sake, fire!" Then "the embattled farmers" fulfilled their destiny and "fired the shot heard round the world." "This," says Bancroft, "is the world-renowned BATTLE OF CONCORD; more eventful than Agincourt or Blenheim."

The British detachment retreated to the main body, and soon began their almost fatal retreat to Charlestown, stayed only for a brief time at Lexington by the arrival of Lord Percy with cannon and 1,200 men. At Merriam's Corner, a mile from Concord village, the flank-guard turned and opened fire. That fire was returned all day. Not till sunset were the King's forces released from the wrath of Middlesex.

The result of the day's fighting was an American loss of less than a hundred, a British loss, in killed, wounded and missing, of 273; the stores had been only partially destroyed, Hancock and Adams had not been captured; Boston was in a state of siege. The further result was Ticonderoga in twenty-one days, Bunker Hill (where Pitcairn met his death) within three months, and nine months after that the evacuation of Boston. Indeed, among the results must be counted Yorktown.

Robert C. Winthrop wrote from Rome to Lexington in 1875: "Even here, where I am surrounded with the monuments of so many grand and heroic acts, and where so large a part of the history of the Old World is written on the magnificent ruins which confront me on every side, I turn to Lexington and Concord for examples of deliberate valor in a just cause, which are not surpassed by any thing of Greek or Roman fame."

