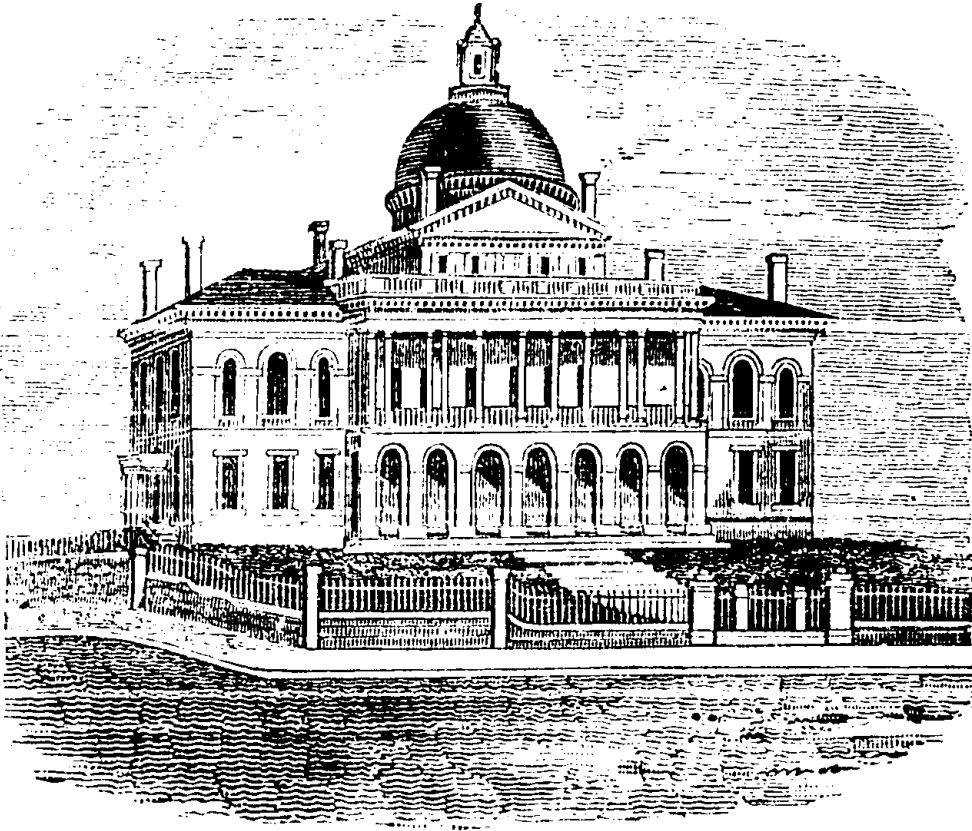


HISTORY OF BOSTON.



BY ROBIN CARVER.

BOSTON :

LILLY, WAIT, COLMAN, AND HOLDEN.

1834.

CHAPTER XII.

Col. Nesbit and the countryman. Battles of Lexington and Concord. Retreat of the regular troops. Blockade of Boston. Governor's proclamation. Battle of Bunker's Hill. Burning of Charlestown. Siege of Boston. General Washington. Proclamation. Distress.

1. IN March 1775 the public feeling was much excited, by the disgraceful conduct of a British officer. The inhabitants of the neighboring towns were suspected of purchasing guns of the soldiers. In order to inflict a striking punishment for this offence, an officer of some rank, by the name of Nesbit, ordered one of his men to offer a countryman an old rusty musket. A farmer from Billerica was tempted by this offer, and bought the gun for three dollars.

2. The poor fellow was immediately seized by Nesbit and confined all night, in the guard house. Early next morning, the soldiers stripped him entirely naked, covered him with tar and feathers, and carted him through the

streets, to Liberty Tree, where they were obliged by the citizens to release him, and retreat to their barracks. The party was composed of about thirty grenadiers with fixed bayonets, twenty drums and fifes, headed by the valiant Nesbit with a drawn sword. A British uniform has seldom been so miserably disgraced, as it was on this occasion.

3. At nightfall, on the eighteenth of April, General Gage dispatched a body of eight or nine hundred soldiers, to destroy the military stores which had been collected at Concord, a town about eighteen miles from Boston. Having reached Lexington, six miles distant from Concord, they were met by a company of militia, who had hastily assembled from the different villages on the first alarm. It was about sunrise. The British advanced at quick march to within a few rods, when Major Pitcairn called out in a loud voice, ‘disperse, you rebels, throw down your arms and disperse.’

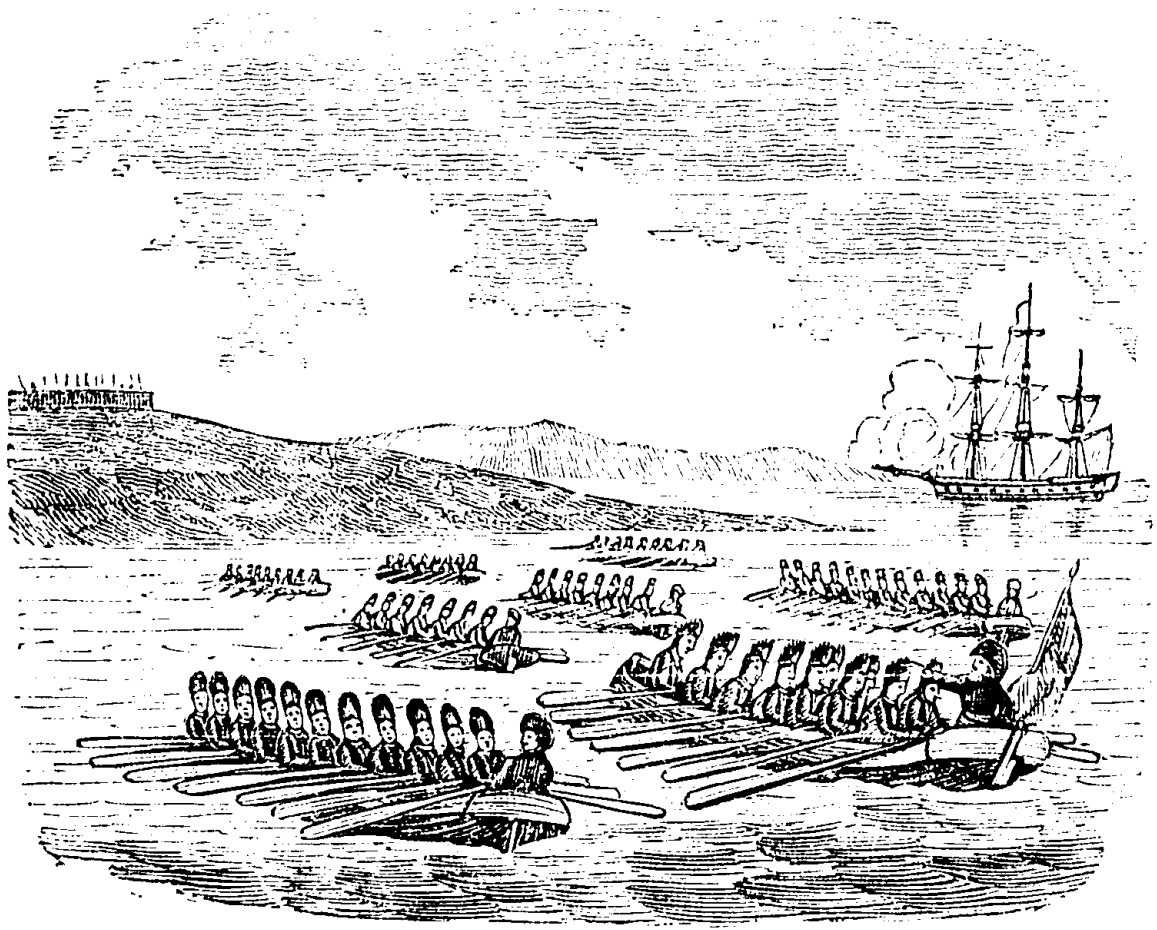
4. Their number was too small to risk a battle. While they were dispersing, the British shouted, and by a discharge from their ranks, killed several of the party. They then renewed their march to Concord, where they destroyed a few articles of stores, and sixty barrels of flour. The militia men had now collected in considerable numbers. Being enraged at the loss of their companions, they made a bold and furious attack on the enemy, and drove them back to Lexington. Hearing of the situation of his troops, General Gage sent a large reinforcement, with two field-pieces, to

their assistance. The united forces amounted to about eighteen hundred men.

5. In their hurried retreat, the regular troops were pursued with the utmost activity. From the cover of trees, and stone walls, the undisciplined farmers were able to thin the ranks of the enemy, with great success. The situation of the king's forces, during the day, was extremely hazardous, and it is wonderful that so many of them escaped. Worn down with fatigue, and almost exhausted, they reached Charlestown, about seven in the evening, with the loss of two hundred and seventy-three men, killed, wounded and taken prisoners. The next day they entered Boston.

6. Hostilities had now commenced. The strongest excitement prevailed throughout all New England. The country militia assembled from every quarter in great numbers, and in the course of two days, Boston was in a complete state of blockade. Many of the inhabitants were in a very miserable situation. All intercourse between the town and country ceased. Liberty poles were erected in almost every village, and all who fell under suspicion were obliged to make a public recantation of their odious principles.

7. Towards the end of May, the British army was reinforced by considerable numbers. About the middle of June, General Gage issued a proclamation, in which he declared the province of Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion, and offered pardon to all who would resort to his standard.



Passage to Charlestown.

He was pleased to deny pardon, particularly, to John Hancock and Samuel Adams.

8. The American commanders had obtained information, that the British intended to post themselves on Bunker's Hill. The position was a very important one, and it was determined to defeat their design. Accordingly, on the sixteenth of June, a band of one thousand provincials, under the command of Colonel Prescott, was sent to take possession of the station. It was late in the evening, before they reached the heights, and full midnight before they commenced to dig the entrenchments. They proceeded in their labors with order and the utmost silence, and it was the next morning before the British knew any thing of their operations.

9. At day-break, the hasty works of the night were discovered, and a heavy cannonade was immediately commenced, from the ships, the floating batteries, and all the fortifications which could be made of any service. Bombs and shot were incessantly pouring among the hardy provincials, who continued with unheeding perseverance to strengthen their breastworks. In the course of the forenoon they received an addition to their numbers, so that they now counted about fifteen hundred men.

10. At one o'clock, the royal forces were observed passing over to Charlestown, in boats and barges. They consisted of about three thousand men, well provided with artillery. They were formed in two lines, and advanced with

great intrepidity to the attack. The Americans withheld their fire, till they were within eight or ten rods, or as General Putnam said, 'till they saw the white of their enemies' eyes.' Their discharge of musketry was then general, and very fatal, till the regular troops were driven back in disorder, even to their boats. With great difficulty, the officers succeeded in rallying them, and they again marched forward with valor, till a second deadly fire again put them to flight.

11. A third assault was more successful. The Americans had expended nearly all their ammunition, and could obtain no farther supply. After resisting, as bravely as they could, with stones, and the butts of their muskets, they retreated under a heavy fire. They were not very warmly pursued, and met with inconsiderable loss.

12. Among the killed was General Joseph Warren, one of the earliest, and most zealous patriots. Such were his valor and zeal, that he rushed into the very front of the field, encouraging the soldiers by his noble example. Near the close of the battle, he received a fatal shot, and instantly died. His loss was much lamented, and his memory is covered with glory.

13. Just at the commencement of the battle, orders were given by the British general, to set fire to Charlestown. In a short time, this ancient town, consisting of about five hundred buildings, was wrapped in flames. It was almost entirely consumed, and a great amount of property, belong-

ing to the distressed inhabitants of Boston, was also destroyed. The battle, and the conflagration presented a scene of the most intense interest, to many thousand spectators, who, from the surrounding heights, the houses, and steeples of the neighboring towns, were waiting the issue of the contest.

14. The main body of the regular troops was immediately stationed on the hill, which they had purchased so dearly. Another division of them was strongly fortified on Boston Neck. The provincials were encamped in various parts of Cambridge and Roxbury, extending over the space of twelve miles. Every pass to Boston was guarded with the utmost vigilance. No provisions of any kind were allowed to enter. Both the inhabitants and the soldiers were reduced to great distress.

15. On the second of July, General Washington arrived at the seat of war, and took command of the provincial army. He fixed his head quarters at a house in Cambridge, not far from the colleges. The students had returned to their homes, and the college buildings were occupied by the soldiers. The army was daily increasing.

16. Early in October, General Gage sailed for England, and left the command of the regular troops with General Howe. A proclamation was issued, which threatened death to any one of the inhabitants, who should attempt to quit Boston without a license. It also declared, that if any were licensed to depart, and attempted to carry away more

than five pounds in specie, they should forfeit the whole sum, and be punished by fine and imprisonment.

17. A number of vessels, bound to Boston, loaded with arms and provisions, were taken in the course of the autumn, by American privateers. These losses were very severely felt in the besieged town, and exposed the soldiers and inhabitants almost to a state of starvation. They were even reduced to feeding upon the flesh of their horses.