

Governor's Island and Fort Winthrop.

JOHN WINTHROP AND HIS CHILDREN.—THE GREAT FORTRESS.—
THE CITADEL.



HIS high green island is very conspicuous in all views of the upper harbor, and lies within two miles of Long Wharf, and less than a mile from Fort Independence. It is occupied by the strongest earthwork in Massachusetts, at present ungarrisoned, but heavily armed. In ancient times the place was much more visited than now, when the frowning defences of a military post have supplanted the homes of summer rest. The locality was first known as Conant's Island, probably in honor of Roger Conant, some time a conspicuous citizen of Hull. After the Colony granted it to John Winthrop, the head of the infant State, in 1632, it was called Governor's Island, and its annual rent was placed at a hogshead of wine *that should be made thereon*; and afterwards two bushels of the best apples *there growing*,—by which means the sagacious Winthrop secured an exemption until such time as his vineyard or orchard became productive. As to the apples, one bushel was to be given to the governor of the Colony, and another to the legislature: so that he thus secured for himself one-half of his own tribute. Here, in his famous "Governor's Garden," with his Indian servants, the worthy Puritan chieftain enjoyed many a happy day, and regarded his rising metropolis across the narrow channel with dignity and comfort. Here he doubtless smoked many a sweet and contemplative pipe, amid whose blue wreaths of incense he may have built strange prophetic air-castles along Beacon Hill, as the sun went down behind that august height. In a letter written to his wife, in 1637, he says: "I pray thee send me six or seven leaves of tobacco, dried and powdered;" and so, in common with his great contemporary John Milton, and his doughty Dutch neighbors at New Amsterdam, he found joy in the most un-Puritanic of weeds. The present lord of the island maintains the ancient traditions, both as to devoutness and smoking.

The governor planted here the first apple and pear trees in New England, and made gallant efforts to raise, also, grapes, plums, and other fruits. Many a noble orchard of the Bay towns may show lineal descent from this island-nursery; and the Yankee Pomona can justly claim this as her birth-place and shrine. His Puritanic Excellency found it worth while to erect a small fort, or blockhouse, here; and also had some kind of a house in which to live during parts of the heated season. The hospitality of the

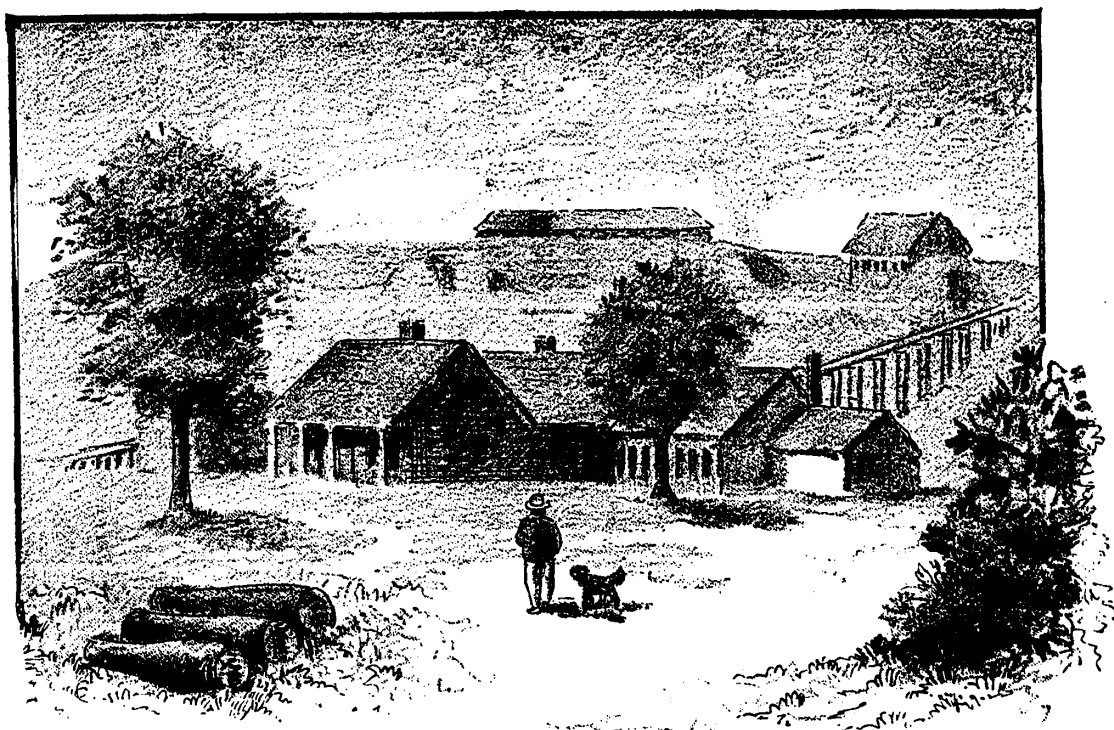
place was bestowed freely on visitors and immigrants of distinction. In 1638 Josselyn wrote that there was not an apple or pear tree in all New England, save those on Governor's Island; and described how he had enjoyed the pippins there produced. In 1643 the Huguenot noble, La Tour, who had been driven from his fort at St. John by D'Aulnay, an adventurous relative of Cardinal Richelieu, sailed into Boston Harbor in a ship with 140 Huguenots from La Rochelle, and visited Winthrop on his island, seeking aid against his Catholic enemy. The austere Puritans referred to the Bible to see if they could find any precedent for such action, but found no certain response from that oracle. "On the one hand, it was said that the speech of the Prophet to Jehoshaphat, in 2d Chronicles xix. 2, and the portion of Solomon's Proverbs contained in chap. xxvi. 17th verse, not only discharged them from any obligation, but actually forbade them to assist La Tour; while, on the other hand, it was agreed that it was as lawful for them to give him succor as it was for Joshua to aid the Gibeonites against the rest of the Canaanites, or for Jehoshaphat to aid Jehoram against Moab, in which expedition Elisha was present, and did not reprove the king of Judah." But when they had assured themselves that it would be allowable for them to aid the distressed nobleman, they sent such a fleet that D'Aulnay's forces were quickly scattered.

In Winthrop's first will, he wrote thus: "I give to my son Adam my island called the Governor's Garden, to have to him and his heirs forever; not doubting but he will be dutiful and loving to his mother, and kind to his brethren in letting them partake in such fruits as grow there. I give him also my Indians there, and my boat, and such household as is there." Soon afterwards, and eight years before his death, the governor settled the island on Adam and his heirs, reserving for himself one-third of its fruits. Twenty years later the owners petitioned the General Court to remit its tribute of apples, saying that the product had greatly fallen off. Adam Winthrop was the ancestor of the Cambridge Winthrops, so called because his son Professor John Winthrop was for more than forty years connected with Harvard College, where he achieved great works in science. It was the professor's grandson, Col. John Winthrop of Louisiana, who owned the island when the United States took possession of it, in 1833.

Margaret Winthrop and her family often dwelt on the island, among its pleasant orchards of apples, pears, and plums, and under its hard-blown grape-vines. Here her five sturdy sons made visits, when the cool harbor breezes wooed them from the little town of wood and thatch close by. Of these were Adam, the heir; John, the founder of New London, and governor of Connecticut; Stephen, who became one of Cromwell's colonels, and member of Parliament from Aberdeen; Deane, a resident of the present town of Winthrop; and Samuel, who became deputy-governor of An-

tigua, and ancestor of Lord Lyons and the Duke of Norfolk, — “and thus the Puritan blood of Margaret Winthrop is found flowing in Old England, after two and a half centuries, in the veins not merely of the highest nobility, but of the leading Roman-Catholic family of the realm.”

The colonists had trouble enough with this mountainous guard of the port. Not only did it lure on to its strand the good ship *Friendship*, bound for St. Kitts, in 1631; and hold here for a week a half-dozen good Puritan burghers, in 1635, while an angry sea beat on all its shores; but also, in 1643, terrible voices were heard issuing therefrom, which could not have been the accents of the good governor, and “sparkles” of fire cor-



Fort Winthrop, Governor's Island.

ruscated on its heights. For a brief space the Governor's Garden was regarded as an isle of demons by the superstitious and witch-ridden Bostonese. In 1696, however, the committee on defences ordered the construction of an eight-gun battery on the south-east point, and a ten-gun battery on the south-west point, the cannon to be taken from the works on the town-wharves. French visitors were then expected, and they were to be held at arm's-length down the Bay. Exactly fifty years later new and more formidable fortifications were begun here by Richard Gridley, the chief bombardier in the siege of Louisburg, colonel of the First Massachusetts Regiment, Provincial Grand Master of Masons in America, a Harvard man, editor, lawyer (“the Webster of his day”), mathematician, and military

engineer. We cannot learn much of the residents of the island in those days, but at least one hero was cradled there. When David Williams was born on this island, in 1759, it might have been an easy task to cast his horoscope, and predict that the infant whose eyes first rested on a broad rim of blue waters, across lines of redoubts, should become (as he did) a famous and valiant pilot and privateersman. But little is heard of the island thenceforth until 1776, when several British transports were driven ashore here by the furious gale which prevented Lord Percy from being annihilated on Dorchester Heights. It does not appear that the rattling skirmishes and cannonades with which nearly every other island was visited came near this spot, where peace reigned in desolation. In 1793 the Massachusetts Historical Society held a meeting here; James Winthrop, one of its owners, being then a member of the society. Fifteen years later the summit of the island was occupied by Fort Warren, an enclosed star-fort of stone and brick, with brick barracks, officers' quarters, magazine, and guard-house. During the War of 1812 these works were fully garrisoned; but Gen. Dearborn considered this point the key of the harbor, and laid out new defences, inviting the men of Boston to come down with spades, pick-axes, and wheelbarrows, to aid in their construction. The low battery on the southern point of Governor's Island was built several years before the War of 1812, of brick and stone, with a brick guard-house and magazine; and once mounted fifteen cannon. It is a picturesque bit of antique fortification, whose purpose was to sweep the wide flats adjacent, and deliver a level point-blank fire at the hulls of hostile vessels passing in the channel. Later, in the War of 1812, the Sea-Fencibles went on duty to guard the batteries, and mortars were placed in the works. Furnaces stood ready, so that all the shot required for the guns could be heated; and the presumably gallant defenders dreamed fondly of British ships-of-the-line bursting into flames, as these red-hot globes of iron plumped into them from water-line to shrouds. The commanders of the *Shannon* and *Tenedos* must have heard that the irate Sea-Fencibles were dashing their tarry toplights on this gloomy isle, for they kept their ships far out in the offing until the war was over.

During the days of Lieut.-Gov. Thomas L. Winthrop, the island was celebrated for its hospitality; and the Massachusetts Historical Society had meetings on its green mounds, where the venerable antiquaries could discuss the genealogies of Peter Cakebread and Robert Bootefish, and the "three brothers, one of whom landed in Virginia," etc., without alarming the town. Lieut.-Gov. Winthrop, the grandfather of the Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, was not a proprietor of the island, since he was descended from Gov. John of Connecticut; but received the freedom of the estate from his friends and kinsmen, the Cambridge Winthrops.

The fortress which now rambles, apparently without plan, over the high

bluffs, was commenced some years before the Secession War, under the direction of Gen. Sylvanus Thayer. The name of Fort Warren was then transferred to the modern work on George's Island; and the new defence here received the name of Fort Winthrop, in honor of the ancient Puritan governor. In 1861 it had received no armament, and had never been occupied as a military post; but when Gen. Schouler inspected the defences late in 1863, he found at Fort Winthrop 25 large Rodman guns, and 11 pieces of other calibres and forms. Various companies of State militia and volunteers garrisoned the post during the civil war, and found it an ineffably dull station.

The island contains seventy acres of land, comparatively low on the east, and rising to a fine commanding height on the west. Here are the great military works, on which vast sums of money have been expended by the Nation. There is little of the delusive symmetry of masonry to be seen; for vast mounds of well-turfed earth cover the entire hill, with ponderous outworks on the bluff to the eastward, mountainous magazines, and skilfully contrived traverses. Here and there long underground passages, arched with masonry, lead from one battery to another, or enter the main stronghold. At the crest of the hill is the citadel,—a massive granite structure, so well curtained by impenetrable earthworks that only its top is visible from the harbor, and entered by a light wooden bridge high above the ground. The lower story, with its roof hung with small stalactites, contains the cistern; the second story is the barracks of the garrison, with rooms opening on an interior court; the third story contains the officers' quarters; and above, on the top, covered by a temporary roof to protect them from the weather, are the immense Parrott rifled guns, which look down on the harbor. On the south of the hill a long stone stairway, so built that it cannot be raked, or carried by a rush, leads to a battery at the water's edge. Among these heavy mounds, lurk scores of powerful 10 and 15 inch guns, well mounted, and peering grimly out on the channel, as if hoping, with a dogged iron patience, that some time their hour may come. Meanwhile Sergt. Schwartz, gray veteran of Mexican and Southern wars, keeps watch over the fortress, from his quarters in the time-blackened barracks near the eastern end of the island, and hangs the keys of the frowning citadel among the pictures of the saints in his little parlor. A phalanx of fierce black dogs stand guard at the farmhouse by the wharf, and make a securer defence than good-natured Irish-American sentinels could; and on the *glacis*, and up the slopes of the ramparts above, plump cattle graze through the long day, and look wisely out over the thronged harbor.

Bird Island formerly lay close to Governor's Island, toward the northwest; and its site is marked by a spindle, rising over a gravelly shoal. The

loss of this bold bluff, around which the narrowed tide swept with scouring force, was reckoned by Professor Gould as one of the worst disasters which has befallen the harbor. The original shape of each of these islands was that of a perfect dome; but the continuous action of the north-east gales and surges for centuries has cut away half of their curves, leaving almost perpendicular cliffs on their north sides: and in this case every thing has been destroyed, and only the low-tide wreck of an island appears.

Bird Island was a spacious tract in the year 1630, as large, according to Professor Gould, as Governor's Island now is. In 1634 a party of men were frozen in, and obliged to stay here all night. A few years later the right to mow grass on the adjacent meadow was granted by the General Court to Thomas Munt. In 1726 the French miscreant, John Battis, with his son, and three Indians, were hung at Charlestown, and then cut down, and carried out,—a ghastly freight,—and buried on Bird Island. Other criminals, pirates, and sea-robbers were put to death, and buried here, or hung in chains, making a ghastly but perhaps salutary spectacle before the wharves and shipping. In 1790 there still remained a handsome grassy islet on this site; but afterwards a great deal of ballast and sand was removed therefrom, as Mayor Quincy complained in 1827. The same thoughtless dilapidations seriously injured Gallop's, Long, the Brewster, and other of the lower islands. But little such help was needed, however, for Wabun, the East Wind, and his allied waves, to batter down the hill of gibbets, and blot it out from the offended Bay.



Sergeant Schwartz, Fort Winthrop.