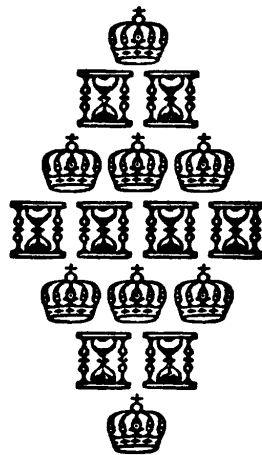


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Early Days
on
BOSTON COMMON

By
Mary Farwell Ayer

With many Illustrations after Old Prints



BOSTON
Privately Printed

1910

III

WE cannot say which act was the chief cause of the Revolution; it was more a culmination of circumstances. The student may read detailed accounts of the many reasons for the outbreak in standard histories of the times. A continual complaint heard in Massachusetts, and particularly in Boston, was of the power exerted by the royal governors. These representatives of the King's authority were often despotic in their treatment of the people, and caused continual irritation.

No general outbreak occurred until after the arrival of Bernard. This new governor possessed little tact in his treatment of the inhabitants. On one occasion, fearing that the meeting would be interrupted if held in Boston, he ordered the General Court to convene on Election Day at Cambridge. The townspeople, indignant at this change, soon found a way to thwart him. An advertisement was inserted in the newspapers, announcing that a sumptuous dinner would be provided in Faneuil Hall on Election Day, at one dollar per head; to crown all, a fine ox would be roasted whole on the Common and afterwards eaten. It was to be drawn in a decorated cart to the foot of the Common "where there used to be some hills," and there roasted. "At one o'clock the ox was said to be well done, and taken as it was on the spit, by volunteers (not hired servants) carried to the Market, placed on a butcher's block and handsomely carved." During the afternoon, all sorts of sports customary to Election Day were carried on on the Common. The writer further states that the governor, with his participants, fearing to be seen by daylight, skulked back into the town after dark.¹

A matter of importance which occurred in 1761 was the speech made by James Otis against the Writs of Assistance. The English government, however, refused to yield its right to manage the affairs of the colonies, and in 1765 passed the Stamp Act. The passing of this act enraged the colonists, not

¹ *American Anecdotes Original and Selected, by an American, 1830.*

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so much on account of the tax, but from the fact that the bill had been passed without proper representation. They at once refused to buy the stamped paper. In some towns they entered the offices of the collectors and publicly burned the stamps. In Boston the people summoned the collector and forced him to give up any attempt to sell them. It was said at the time that it was "the united Voice of all his Majesty's free and loyal Subjects in America.—Liberty and Property and no Stamps."¹

During the following year William Pitt took the place of the former prime minister, George Grenville, and began at once to institute a change in affairs,—especially in regard to the colonies. He saw that some concessions must be made them, and with the aid of Conway, Barré, and others in favor of the American cause, brought about the repeal of the Stamp Act. Great was the rejoicing and loud were the colonists in their praise of the minister who had relieved them of the hated Act. A poem written in honor of the event read as follows:

*"The great the important Day is come,
Brings forth the Hour of Albion's doom:
Break forth your Joy, you Mirmedons,
Britannia Smiles and calls you Sons:
Break forth, and loud Huzzas repeat,
Let all your Praise shout forth a Pitt,
A Pitt, a Pitt, a Pitt rehearse,
Let Pitt's great deeds fill every Verse."*²

In Boston there was a special celebration of the event on the Common,³ which is well described in the Boston Post-Boy. "In the Evening the whole Town was beautifully illuminated;—On the Common the Sons of Liberty erected a magnificent Pyramid, illuminated with 280 Lamps; The four upper Stories of which were ornamented with the Figures of their Majesties, and fourteen of the Worthy Patriots who

¹ *The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, January 6, 1766. ² *Ibid.*, May 26, 1766. ³ Two fire engines were ordered into the Common on this night of general rejoicing, in order to protect the powder-house. *Town Records*, vol. 16, April 21, 1766.

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have distinguished themselves by their Love of Liberty. . . . On the Top of the Pyramid was fix'd a round Box of Fireworks horizontally. About one hundred Yards from the Pyramid the Sons of Liberty erected a Stage for the Exhibition of their Fireworks, near the Workhouse, in the lower Room of which they entertained the Gentlemen of the Town."¹

The joy of the people, however, was of short duration, for a year had not elapsed before other acts affecting the colonies had been passed by the home government.

By 1767 the ministry had greatly changed. Pitt was the acknowledged leader, although the Duke of Grafton was acting as temporary head of affairs. It is difficult to say which men had the greatest influence, for so many parties were represented that this period has been christened "The Mosaic Ministry." The Earl of Chatham was soon obliged to retire from public life on account of ill health, and was replaced by the minister of finance, Charles Townshend. This new leader, in his attempt to carry out Grenville's policy, caused the passage of the so-called Townshend Acts. One section provided a revenue by a tax on tea, glass, painters' colors, oil, paper and lead; another declared the legality of the Writs of Assistance, while a third appointed a Board of Customs to reside in the colonies, in order to exercise control over the customs service.

The first disturbance was caused by the Board of Customs which had been established in Boston. The sloop *Liberty* had been seized by the collector of the port, who insisted that some wines had been landed without payment of the necessary duty. A mob collected, which proceeded to break windows in the houses of Hallowell, Harrison and Williams, officers of the customs. After this they seized a pleasure boat belonging to Mr. Harrison and burnt it on the Common. Governor Bernard wrote: "Whilst they were upon the Common they got some Rum and attempted to get more; if they had

¹ *Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, May 26, 1766. An engraving was made of this obelisk, copies of which are still in existence.

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procured it in Quantity God knows where the Fury would have ended.”¹

This riot so alarmed the British officials living in Boston that they asked the home government to strengthen their position by sending over troops. The result of this request was that the 14th and 29th regiments were ordered to embark from Halifax for Boston, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Dalrymple. This order was immediately put into execution, and by the last of September the troops had arrived in the town.

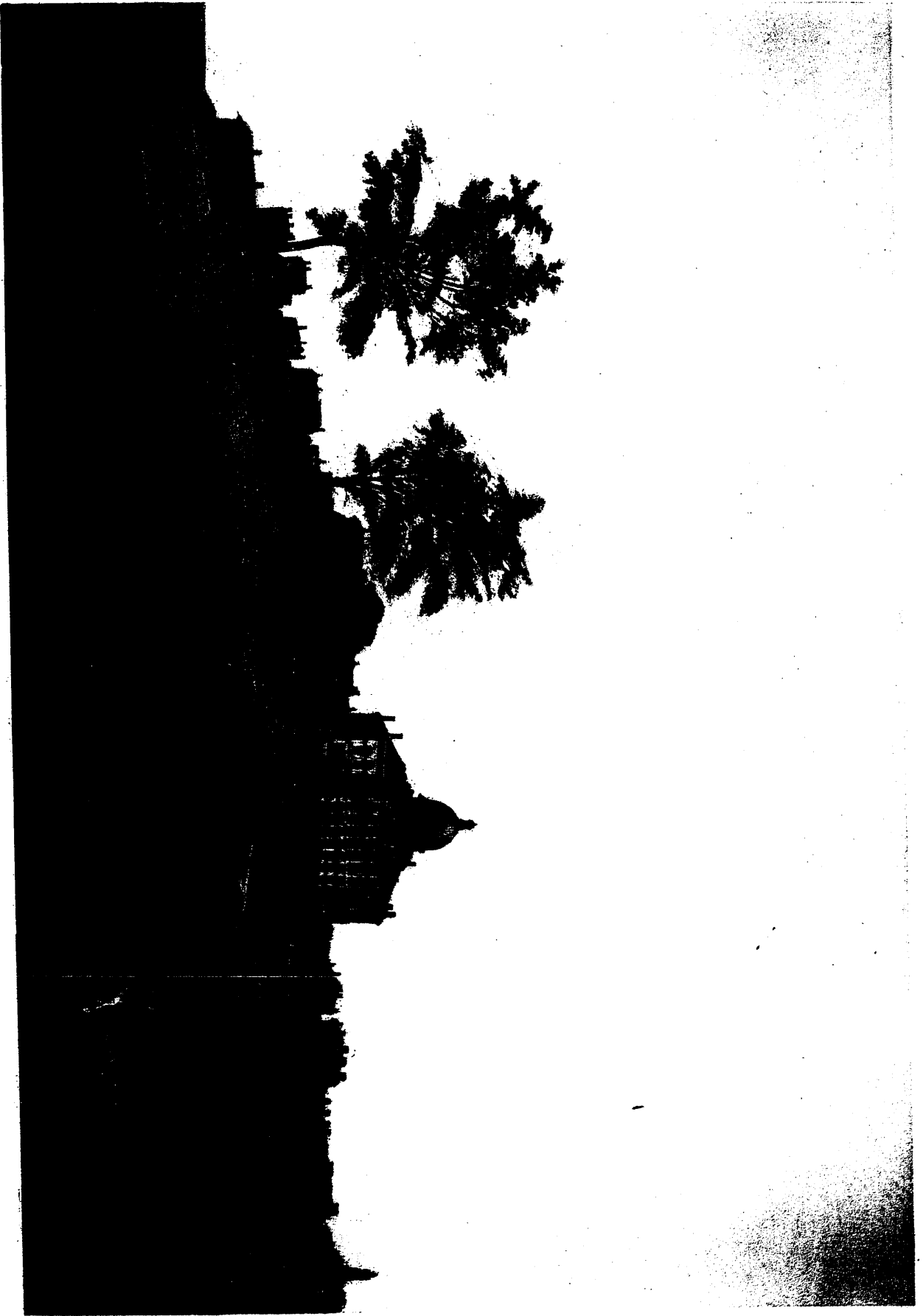
Deacon Tudor, who was in the habit of jotting down the events of the day in a diary, wrote: “The troops drew up in King Street and marched off in a Short time into the Common, with Muskets charged, Bayonets fixed. . . . In Short they made a gallant appearance, makeing with the Train of Artillery aboute 800 Men. In the afternoon Tents were set up in the Common for the 29 Regiment and about Sunsett the 14 Regem’t Marched from the Common down to Faneuil Hall.”²

Of the other regiments, the 14th was quartered in the Court House and Faneuil Hall, while the 59th and some of the artillery, which had also arrived, were placed in houses on Griffin’s Wharf. In a few weeks, however, more suitable accommodations had been found, for in the Boston Post-Boy we may read that on “Thursday last part of the 14th Regiment which has been quartered in Faneuil Hall, went into a large Store on Pitt’s Wharf. And last Saturday the 29th Regiment broke up their encampment on the Common, and went into empty Houses in different Parts of the Town, which were hired by the Barrack-Master General.”³

Before marching to their new quarters the troops were ordered into the Common to witness a sad spectacle. Richard

¹ *Letters to the Ministers from Governor Bernard, General Gage and Commodore Hood*, page 20. Bernard also notes that in September the inhabitants were alarmed at the sight of an empty turpentine barrel on the pole of the newly erected beacon—“erected anew,” says Bernard, “in a great Hurry by the Selectmen without consulting me.” A council was called to decide who should take it down. It was resolved that this duty devolved on the selectmen, but as they refused to do it the agency by which it was removed remains a mystery (page 53).

² *Deacon Tudor’s Diary*, October 1, 1768. ³ *The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, October 31, 1768.



BOSTON COMMON IN 1804
FROM A SKETCH BY DOBBINS

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Ames, of the 14th Regiment, had been convicted of desertion, and was ordered to be shot in the presence of the troops under arms.¹ His body was buried at the execution place.

General Gage had no sooner heard of the arrival of Lieutenant-Colonel Dalrymple than he started from New York for Boston. On his arrival he found the troops drawn up in the Common to receive him.² This was the first of the many reviews held by the general during his stay in Boston.

The twenty-fifth of October was the eighth anniversary of the accession of King George III to the throne, and Gage ordered the event to be celebrated in a fitting manner. "At 12 o'clock a royal salute was fired from the Castle... which was followed by three volleys from the regiment drawn up on the Common;—after which his Excellency the Governor, and General Gage with his suite, proceeded to the Council Chamber, where his Majesty's health and other loyal toasts were drank."³

The troops were much crowded together, and it was not long before sickness occurred among the soldiers. It was soon found necessary to have a hospital, and Mr. Chapman's house, near the Common, was taken for this purpose.⁴ The regimental hospital was also established near by, at the foot of the Common; this latter hospital, however, was not for infectious cases, for in 1769 a private, smitten while there with smallpox, was obliged to be moved to the province hospital at the westerly end of the town.

At this time the practice of inoculation had not become prevalent, so it was difficult to stay an epidemic of smallpox when once started. In 1774 an inoculating hospital was erected at Cat Island,⁵ but it was burned down by some persons opposed to the practice. The soldiers dying from smallpox or any other diseases were buried for the most part in the burial-ground on the Common.

¹*The Boston Chronicle*, October 24, 1768.

²*The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, October 17, 1768.

³*The Boston Chronicle*, October 31, 1768.

⁴Mr. Chapman's house is described as standing at the bottom of the Common; this probably means that it was in the vicinity of Park Square.

⁵*Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, Series 1, vol. vi, page 221.

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It was about this time that a question arose regarding the title to the Common, and a committee was appointed to look into the matter. The investigation evidently proved satisfactory, for no further mention of the subject occurred. The extent of the Common was probably definitely settled at this time, and two years later, in 1771, the selectmen appointed a committee to "inclose the Common agreeable to Order of the Town."

The Common still remained the popular recreation ground of the townspeople. Each year more trees were added and more walks and malls were laid out for its improvement. John Hancock, who had inherited his uncle's estate on Beacon Street, helped much by setting out a row of lime trees opposite his estate. He also erected a stand in the Common and furnished a band to give concerts on pleasant afternoons.

On Sundays there was very often preaching in the open air. One newspaper mentioned that on an afternoon in June, 1772, "a young man of about twenty years of age, from the country, mounted a stage in the Common, and preached from these words, 'If the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?' There were about twenty persons present when he began, but before he had finished, his audience had increased to several hundreds."¹

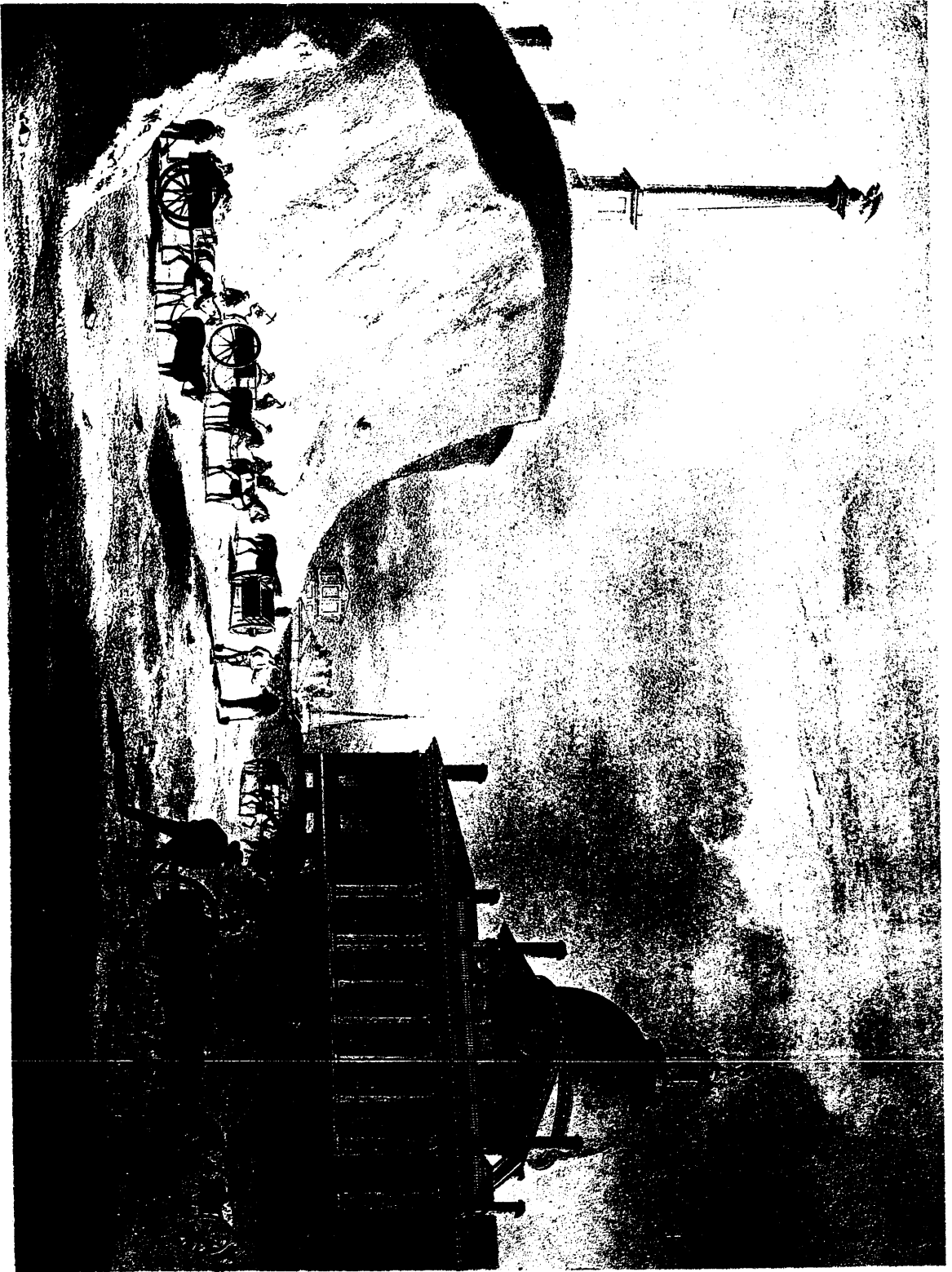
Troubles still continued between the people of Boston and the officers of the Crown, which soon resulted in bloodshed. The boys of the town were constantly provoked by the insolent authority displayed by the redcoats, which caused continual conflicts between the two parties. One night matters reached such a pass that the soldiers, thinking they heard the command to fire, at once discharged their guns into the crowd. When the smoke had cleared, five citizens were found to be killed or mortally wounded.²

The townspeople were much stirred up by this massacre, and went to the Granary Burial-Ground in a body to witness the burial of these early victims of the Revolution.

Parliament soon saw that it would be difficult to compel

¹*The Massachusetts Spy*, June 25, 1772.

²*The Boston Massacre*, March 5, 1770.



From a drawing made on the spot by J. R. Smith in 1811, 12

BEACON HILL, FROM THE PRESENT SITE OF THE RESERVOIR BETWEEN HANGOCK & TEMPLE STS.

Boston. Pub. by Smith, Knapp & Tappan. 18. Washington St. Cor. of Franklin St.

Washington St. Cor. of Franklin St.

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the colonies to obey some of the acts already in force, and decided to repeal certain clauses contained in the Townshend Acts. The Tea Tax still remained, however, in order to show the colonists that the home government still retained the right of taxation.

The English East India Company was in hard straits; not only did it have to pay an inland duty of twelvecence, but it also had to pay threepence on every pound of tea landed in the colonies. The Dutch East India Company was able to sell tea at less price, and the result was that most of the tea used by the colonists was smuggled in from the Netherlands. England, in order to help the East India Company, decided to omit the twelvecenny tax, though she still retained the Townshend duty of threepence. She felt the colonists would now be willing to buy the tea, for even after paying the threepenny tax they could obtain it cheaper than it could be obtained in England.

As the people saw, however, that the principle of taxation was still maintained, many refused to use the tea. In Boston a number of men dressed as Indians boarded the tea-ships and threw the boxes of tea into the harbor. Bonfires were lighted on the Common, and the townspeople were urged to throw into them any tea in their possession. There appears in a diary of the times this item: "Last evening, a number of persons went over to Dorchester and brought from thence part of a chest of tea that a man there had taken up at the time the Indians destroyed the tea, on the 16th of December, 1773, and burnt it in our Common the same evening."¹

Parliament was very angry at this expression of defiance, and passed the Port Bill, which shut up the harbor of Boston.² In order to enforce this act, more troops were sent over from England. On June 14 the 4th or King's Own Regiment landed at Long Wharf, and at once encamped on the Common. On July 2 artillery from Castle William, with eight brass cannon, also encamped here, and a few days later

¹*Thomas Newell's Diary. See Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings, Series 1, vol. iv.*

²*The Port Bill went into effect June 1, 1774.*

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the 38th Regiment joined them. Four of the large field-pieces were soon taken from the Common and placed on the Neck, in order to guard the only entrance to the town. So many more troops arrived during the next year that there were present at a field-day held on the Common on December 7, 1775, the 4th, 5th, 23rd, 38th, 47th and 52nd regiments. In order to accommodate these troops, an attempt was made to build barracks on the Common. In September, 1774, a contract for supplying bricks was made with Thompson of Mistick, which met with opposition from the townspeople. The Sons of Liberty also forbade the carpenters working for the troops upon pain of their displeasure. One man who paid no attention to this command was seized by a mob and only narrowly escaped with his life. The governor implored the selectmen not to hinder the workmen from completing the barracks, but his efforts proved unavailing. As the carpenters from the ships of war proved too inexperienced to carry on the project, the work was necessarily abandoned, and the King's forces were obliged to seek accommodations at the castle or in makeshift barracks on the town dock.¹

The arrival of so many well-drilled troops must have dismayed our little army. To judge, however, from a letter written in 1773 by a certain John Andrews, the forces, even at that time, were not to be scoffed at. He wrote: "Am almost every minute taken off with agreeable sight of our militia companies marching into the Common . . . and I assure were you to see 'em, you'd scarcely believe your eyes they are so strongly metamorphos'd. From making the most despicable appearance they now vie with the best troops in his majesties service, being dressed all in blue uniforms, with drums and fifes to each company dress'd in white uniforms trim'd in ye most elegant manner; with a company of Grenadiers in red with every other apparatus that equal any regular company I ever saw both in regard to appearance and discipline having a grand band of musick consisting of

¹*Harold Murdock's Earl Percy's Dinner-Table, page 64. Also Letters of John Andrews: Mass. Hist. Soc. Proc., Series 1, vol. viii, pages 366, 368, 374.*

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eight that play nearly equal to that of the 64th. What crowns all is the Cadet Company being perfectly compleat and under the best order you can conceive of, with a band of musick likewise that perform admirably well. What with these and Paddock's company of artillery make ye compleat-est militia in America. Not a drummer fifer and scarcely a soldier but what are in compleat uniforms and thoroughly instructed in the military exercises. In addition to all this the Town House is fitted up in the most elegant manner with the whole of the outside painted of a stone color which gives it a fine appearance."¹

A gradual change was occurring in the aspect of affairs. The people were opening their eyes wider and wider to the fact that a definite step must be taken in order to check the growth of British power in the colonies. A letter written in January, 1775, echoes this thought. "There is a spirit prevailing here, such as I never saw before. I remember the conquest of Louisburg in 1745; I remember the spirit here when the Duke d'Anville's squadron was upon the coast, when forty thousand men marched down to Boston, and were mustered and numbered up upon the Common, compleat in arms, from this province only in three weeks; but I remember nothing like what I have seen these six months past."²

It was this change of spirit continuing to expand which led three months later to the outbreak of the Revolution.

¹ Letter of John Andrews. See *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings, Series 1, vol. viii, page 323.* ² *Almon's Remembrancer, vol. i, page 11.*