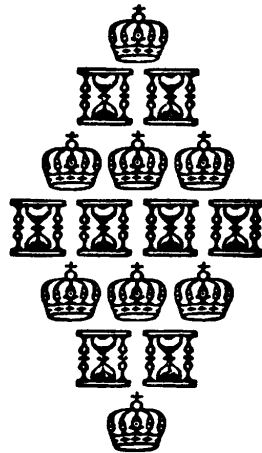


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Early Days
on
BOSTON COMMON

By
Mary Farwell Ayer

With many Illustrations after Old Prints



BOSTON
Privately Printed

1910

VIII

WITH the election of Madison's successor, James Monroe, was ushered in an era of good feeling, undisturbed by war. A few months after his inauguration the President made an extensive tour through the States, and in the course of time reached Boston. A procession met him at the southern boundary of the town, and, after an address delivered by Harrison Gray Otis, escorted him "through Boylston street, to an opening in the Common, between the Mall and Gunhouse, through lines formed by the Scholars of the different Schools in Boston, attended by their several Instructors—northwardly over the Common, towards the State-House, to a point opposite the west end of Winter street—thence across the Mall, through Winter street," &c. It was estimated that the number of spectators in the streets and in the Common was greater than on any other occasion since the visit of the "sainted Washington."¹

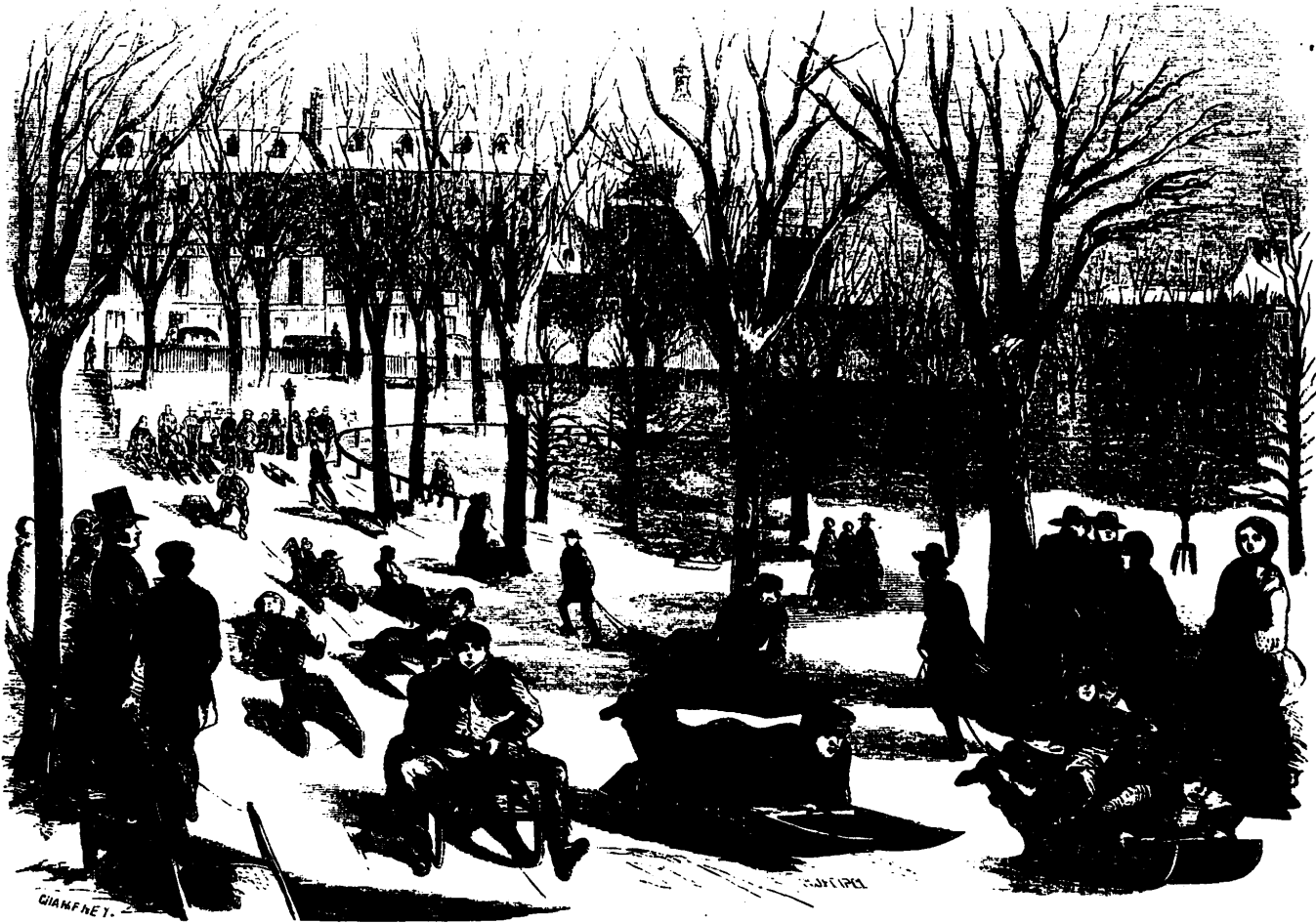
In September a notice in the paper announced that a review was to take place in the Common. All persons living in the neighborhood who objected to firing were warned to absent themselves from their homes between the hours of three and five in the afternoon.² At this review the line, consisting of infantry, artillery and cavalry, occupied three sides of the Common. The officers of the brigade gave a dinner on this occasion in a field tent "neatly dressed with national colours and garlands."³

The marsh-land at the bottom of the Common was once more brought up as a subject for discussion, for although a part of it had been leased to owners of ropewalks, there was still a large tract of disused land. As early as 1821 that part stretching from the Neck to the Milldam was called the

¹ *Boston Commercial Gazette*, July 3, 1817.

² *Columbian Centinel*, Sept. 18, 1819. Firing on the Common continued to disturb those living in the vicinity. The *Columbian Centinel* for June 15, 1822, states that the commanders were recommended to "avoid all unnecessary use of the malls in the performance of their military duties; and that all firings on training days, should be done as remotely from public highways as can be ... and that this part of military duty should be done southwesterly of the great tree."

³ *Columbian Centinel*, OÆ. 2, 1819.



BOYS COASTING ON BOSTON COMMON.

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Back Bay. Water had been drained off from this land, leaving thousands of shellfish imbedded in the mud-flats and exposing the inhabitants to "typhus fever."¹ Many years elapsed before the selectmen realized that this unsanitary condition of affairs was a detriment to the health of the people.

Prominent business men, however, instigated by Uriah Cotting, had already conceived of a plan to build a dam and open up roads over this marsh-land to Roxbury, Brookline and Brighton. The Boston & Roxbury Mill Dam Corporation was formed, and it was not long before a dam was built, one hundred feet wide at its broadest point.²

Shortly after the opening of the Milldam, Boston received a visit from two hundred and thirty-five cadets from West Point. They encamped on the Common in an area five hundred feet square, between the Great Elm and the old Mall.³ During their ten days' stay, they often drilled on the parade-ground, where their knowledge of tactics won for them deep admiration.

Boston showed great interest at this time in a strange invention which had made its way across the Atlantic. For many years, men in France and other parts of Europe had agitated the practicability of inventing a means of moving through the air. The extensive study of the subject carried on in France resulted in the manufacture of what were known as balloons. The "Balloon Influenza" soon raged in London, where one found advertised for sale such articles as balloon bonnets, balloon caps, even balloon ribbons and balloon pins. News of the invention eventually reached Boston. Even the countrymen became interested, and one vender of vegetables was heard crying one day "Fine Balloon string beans"! Before long the balloons themselves were on exhibition. In 1821 a certain Mr. Guillie made an ascent from Washington Gardens, Tremont Street, on the land now occupied by St. Paul's

¹ *Columbian Centinel*, April 18, 1821. ² *This dam was built at an expense of \$600,000. On the dedication day, early in the morning, the citizens formed in a procession opposite the ropewalks in Charles Street and rode over the newly finished milldam. Columbian Centinel*, July 4, 1821.

³ *Columbian Centinel*, Aug. 8, 1821.

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Church.' Later, ascensions were sometimes made from the amphitheatre erected at the foot of the Common.

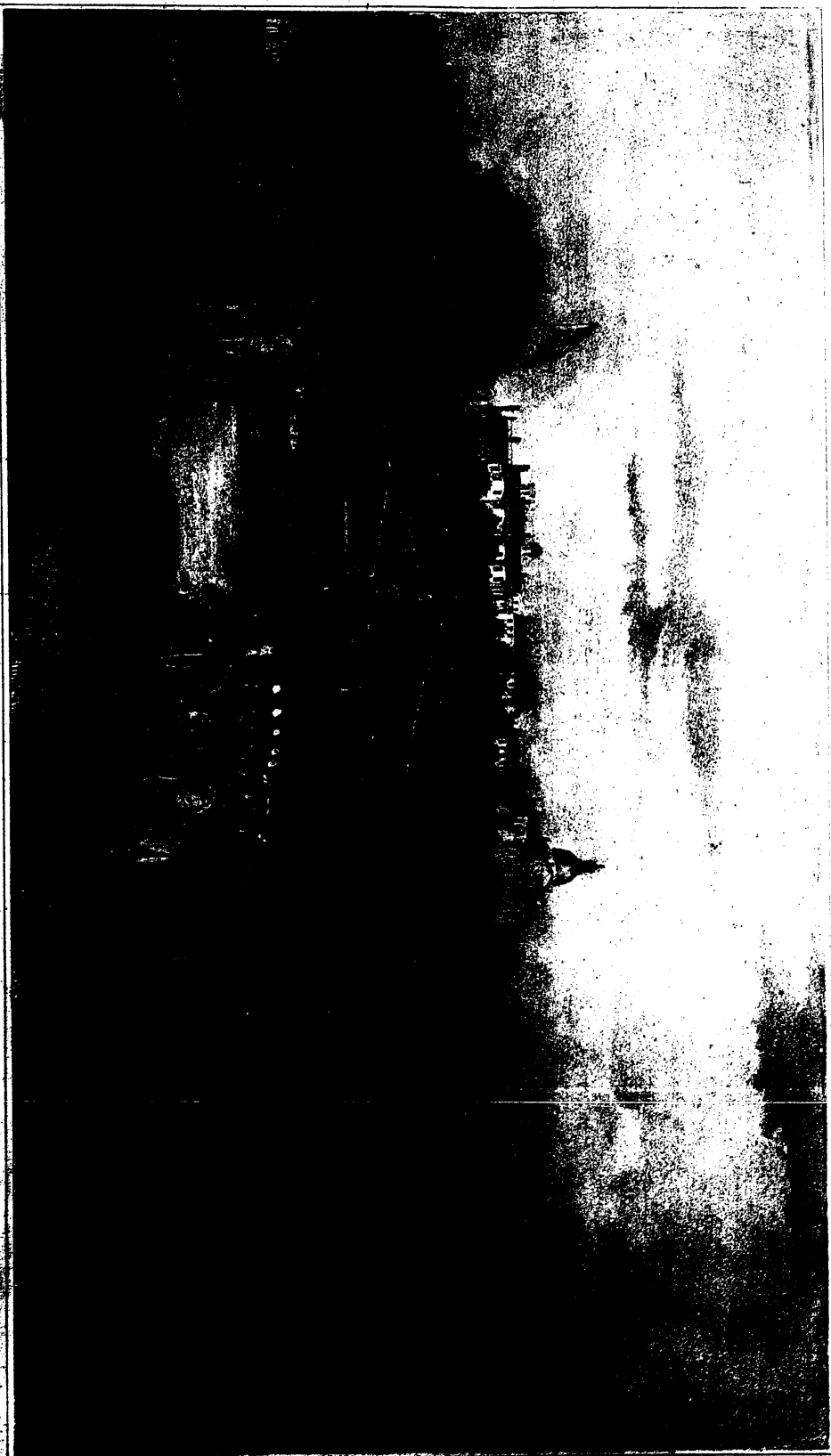
In 1822 the question of a city charter was once more agitated, and finally granted. By this charter the city council was to have the management of the property of the city, with power to lease or sell all public lands and buildings but the Common and Faneuil Hall. With the exception of parades and reviews, there was to be no driving or riding of horses in the Common without a permit from the mayor and aldermen. No trees were to be defaced, no earth carried away, no rubbish left here, and no cattle were to go at large. A special rule applied to the shaking of carpets, which were not to be shaken anywhere in the city but on the Common, and even then not within ten rods of the malls or public paths.²

The city soon saw the importance of owning the marsh-land still covered by the ropewalks. This land had been a part of the Common until 1794, when it was sold to proprietors of the ropewalks. Certain citizens, however, had at last realized that in order to protect the health of the community the marsh ought to be filled in. In May, 1823, the "Ropewalk Land Loan" was opened. Fifty-four thousand dollars was to be the outside limit of this loan. The result was that the city soon had in its possession seven hundred and eighty thousand feet of land. Although the question of ownership came up in 1824, and has been agitated from time to time, it was finally decided that as the marsh-land was formerly a part of the Common, it still comes under the laws in the city charter and cannot be sold.³ As the land proved too marshy for building purposes, it was filled in, largely by levelling Fox Hill, and became later our Public Garden. In due time paths were laid out, and flowers and trees planted.

¹ *Columbian Centinel*, Sept. 5, 1821. His balloon "rose majestically over the trees of the mall, passed, at a considerable height, over the Common, and part of Mt. Vernon, crossed Charles river, and landed in perfect safety near the Ten Hills farm, on the Medford turnpike — having traversed nearly three miles in about 14 minutes."

² Shaking of carpets was finally forbidden. The late Edward Everett Hale once told me that he could remember writing an article for the newspaper at the time, entitled "The Last Shake."

³ Discussion before the city council, 1824.



THE NATIONAL LANCERS WITH THE REVIEWING OFFICERS ON BOSTON COMMON.

Taken from the Original Painting (as designed and executed by C. Hubert) on the Standard which was presented to the Company by the Executive of the Regiment, on the 20th of August, 1862. *This Print, published by request, is respectfully dedicated to the Corp.* Boston, Sept. 1862.

On page 17 of 18.

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In order to increase the popularity of this new park, a band of music was engaged to play here on summer evenings, and as an added inducement, exhibitions of flowers were held which might be viewed by those interested on payment of twelve and one-half cents. Other forms of entertainment were sometimes held here. On one occasion, the following announcement appeared in a Boston paper: "Artillery Election. A promenade concert and children's dance is to come off at the Public Garden on Monday afternoon, provided the weather is favorable. Boquets will be offered for sale. An excellent band of Music will be stationed on the grounds."¹

Although many years had elapsed since the close of the Revolution, the Americans still remembered with gratitude all that they owed to the Marquis de Lafayette. Great was their joy, therefore, on learning of his intended visit to the United States. As soon as the news reached the city, the mayor wrote Lafayette, inviting him to make Boston his first landing-place, and offering the use of a vessel for transportation across the Atlantic. The general sent a graceful reply, saying that although he appreciated the mayor's kindness, he preferred to embark in a private ship. He promised, however, that he would not leave for France without paying the city a visit.²

In midsummer Lafayette landed in New York, and after receiving a warm welcome journeyed slowly eastward. Towards the end of August he reached the outskirts of Boston, where he was met by the city officials. From there he was escorted to the Common, where he received a royal recep-

¹ *The Boston Daily Journal*, May 30, 1846.

² It is a pity that Gourand, the newly arrived French photographer, did not preserve a picture of it as it then appeared. A pupil of Du Guerre, he was sent to this country in 1840 to introduce a new method of photography. On one occasion he lectured to an audience of some five hundred on the subject of daguerreotypes. He prepared a plate and described the mode of operation as he proceeded. The photograph obtained caused the spectators great astonishment. The plate was placed "in a camera obscura, and the whole apparatus being then set on a window of the hall commanding a view of Park street from the Church to Beacon street, including a portion of the Common—a most beautiful and perfect picture was produced in ten minutes." *Daily Evening Transcript*, March 28, 1840.

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tion.¹ The governor, knowing Lafayette's fondness for military displays, had planned among other entertainments a review, and in August several brigades were ordered to assemble in the Common. It was reported that six or seven thousand troops were reviewed.² Lafayette was soon obliged to leave Boston, and continue his journey through other states. He returned, however, in the following year, in order to take part in the dedication of Bunker Hill Monument.³ Shortly after officiating at this ceremony he bade America farewell, and sailed for France.

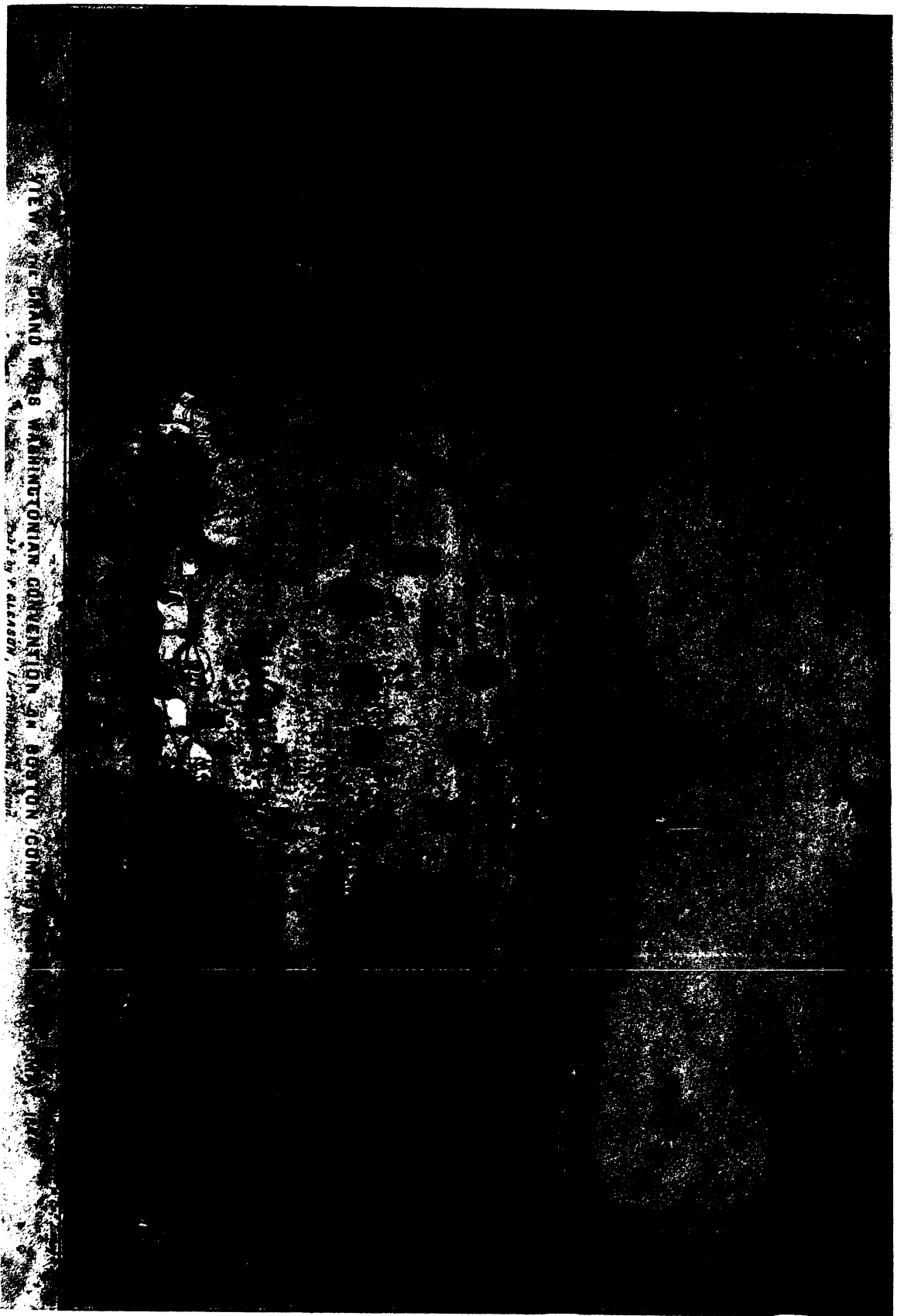
Let us turn once more to the consideration of social life in Boston at the time. During the summer months it was customary to have band concerts on the Common, which were greatly enjoyed by those obliged to stay in the hot city. To be sure, the inhabitants sometimes suggested that the repertoire be enlarged by the addition of certain favorite tunes. On

¹ *Columbian Centinel*, Aug. 25, 1824. Lafayette "passed through the Common, on which were placed, extending the whole length of it, in two lines, the Pupils of the Public Schools, the misses principally dressed in white, and the lads in Blue coats and white underclothes, each bearing a Portrait of Lafayette on their breasts, stamped on ribbons. They exceeded twenty-five hundred in number.—On passing the line a beautiful little girl, about 6 years old, stepped forth, and begged leave to address the General. She was handed to the Mayor, and by him to the General, who saluted her. She then delivered a short address, took a wreath of flowers from her head, and put it on his head. The General made her a very affectionate reply, and placed the wreath in his carriage." It was calculated that the spectators exceeded 70,000. *Columbian Centinel*, Aug. 25, 1824. During his visit to Boston, Lafayette stayed at a boarding-house on the site of the first almshouse.

² The custom arose about this time of issuing a limited number of admission cards for the various reviews held on the Common. Those entitled to pass within the lines entered at the general station, between Beacon Street and the Frog Pond. *Columbian Centinel*, Oct. 2, 1822.

³ *Boston Monthly Magazine*, Aug., 1825, page 147. A visitor in Boston at the time has left us an interesting account of the events of the day. He wrote: "I repaired to the common, so famous for its command of picturesque scenery—there I saw another, and a larger collection of people. The green, from the State house to the mall, was full of troops and spectators. The mall was covered with masons, deeply arranged in close order, and every street and habitation in the vicinity was crowded with a dense population. About ten, the Grand Lodge and Royal Arch Chapter, entered the mall and joined the rest of the fraternity. . . . Scarcely were these fraternities organized into a procession, under the shady trees of the mall, before several handsome companies of light infantry, on the common, opened to the right and left,—the troop of horse rode rapidly past them and a number of carriages approached in the avenue. The bugle, horns and drums resounded, and the whole band of music performed a salute as Lafayette, drawn in a barouche, with four white horses, and a number of cars carrying distinguished individuals and old soldiers of Bunker Hill passed along. . . . The survivors of Bunker Hill battle, were about forty. . . . At last, an excellent band of music struck up a national air, which dissipated my serious meditations. The procession moved, and successive bodies in deep array, marched from the mall, to the consecrated spot."

VIEW OF THE GRAND MARRS WASHINGTONIAN CONVENTION IN BOSTON, CONN. 1852
DRAWN BY A. ALLEN



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one occasion a request was made for "a little more of the Scotch music: particularly that of the Highland quick measure." The listeners were often disturbed by boys who attempted to break up the music by sending off firecrackers close by. Another annoyance was caused by the prevalence of smoking, for complaint was made against the "vulgar cigar smokers" who were often found on the Common. The suggestion was made that a few constables be appointed to keep them in order.¹ The boys soon found a new form of amusement, for a few days later forty or fifty youths, not content with drowning the music with their din, found amusement in throwing blazing balls of pitch and tow into the crowd.² These sports were probably soon stopped, for no further complaints were apparently made.

The question of substituting music for the holiday booths generally erected on the Fourth of July had arisen. Mayor Quincy had favored the change, which had gone into effect much to the disappointment of many citizens. One writer complained that there were now no booths in the mall, "no tables groaning under the weight of ponderous hams and tender pigs,—no lobster barrows,—no dice tables,—no wheels of fortunes,—no casting at the 'black joke.'"³ The few booths erected on special occasions were seldom placed in the Mall. It was considered better to have them beneath the Great Elm.

The 17th of September, 1830, was a memorable date in the annals of the city history, for it was exactly two hundred years since the settlement of Boston. Elaborate plans were made to celebrate this event. As a part of the programme, the instructors of schools were requested to appear in the Common with their pupils "at nine o'clock at latest, and to be

¹ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 31, 1828. ² *Columbian Centinel*, Aug. 6, 1828.

³ *Columbian Centinel*, July 7, 1830. It was many years before the booths were banished from the Common. Nathaniel Hawthorne gives an amusing description of a Fourth of July celebration in 1838. The town was "much thronged; booths on the Common, selling gingerbread, sugar-plums, and confectionery, spruce beer, lemonade. . . . On the top of one of the booths a monkey, with a tail two or three feet long. . . . There are boys going about with molasses candy, almost melted down in the sun. Shows: A mammoth rat; a collection of pirates, murderers and the like, in wax. . . . One or two old salts, rather the worse for liquor; in general the people are temperate." *American Note-Books*, page 116.

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formed within half an hour of that time, selecting from their own pupils such assistants as they may need.”¹ Well might her citizens look back with pride on the advance made during those two hundred years, for through their thrift and industry Boston had become one of the leading cities in America.

¹ *Columbian Centinel*, Sept. 15, 1830.