

CHAPTER X.

LEXINGTON AND BUNKER HILL.

1. THE Pilgrims had passed away. Long years had elapsed since the last of the New England fathers had exchanged the earthly for the heavenly kingdom. The grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of the first immigrants possessed the soil. No aliens they, seeking a refuge in an unknown land, but the sturdy possessors of homes where they were born, and around which clustered all tender family ties. The passionate love for England, filtered through three generations, had moderated to a filial respect without impairing filial obedience.

2. Marvelous the change in outward conditions of that century and a half! Wave after wave of intelligent activity had passed over the land. Settlers' fires hunted the track of Indians westward bound. On the site of primeval forests, fields of grain shimmered in the sun. The rude hut, hastily built for shelter, had given place to the comfortable farm-house and the elegant mansion. Village and city had grown up in the centers of trade. The mechanic arts had slowly made their way. Change vast, weighty, permanent—not sudden, but orderly growth—fruit of seed sown, but none the less marvelous for that.

3. Internal change had accompanied the external. Spiritual growth had gone hand in hand with increase of life's comforts. Persecution as a means of conversion had

disappeared before common dangers and sufferings. Intolerance had toned down into a mild form of bigotry. The shovel-hat of the parson and the flowing robes of the magistrate had lost much of their superstitious significance. The hard, self-imposed restraints of the Puritans had become less rigid at home and in public. Individual life was freer, fuller, and more complete.

4. So sped the years until after the French war—until the last of England's rivals had been effectually subdued. Now England, for the first time, seems to have been brought face to face with her sturdy offspring. Now she deliberately made up her mind to make him useful—pay her debts, fight her enemies, subserve her interests first and always. So, with blustering words about rights, she imposed burdens, with significant hints in regard to chastisements; she withheld privileges; the cherishing mother in word and deed proving to be a veritable step-mother with the hardest of hearts.

5. Here trouble began. The son had an equal share with the parent in Agincourt and *Magna Charta*. He was confiding and unsuspecting, but the experience of three generations in the wilds had accustomed him to freedom, and had given him hardihood. His shoulders were broad, but it was difficult to bind burdens upon them against his will. As the policy of the parent dawned upon him, first came incredulous questioning, "What does this mean?"—then protest, showing the injury and suggesting "There must be some mistake!"—last, conviction of intended injustice, the hot wrath, and the emphatic statement, "I will not obey!" The angry note of defiance was heard rolling along the Atlantic coast from New England to Georgia. Descendants of Roundheads, Cavaliers, and Huguenots forgot their ancient prejudices and united against this common danger.

Patrick Henry responded to the sentiments of Otis and Adams, and Virginia sent friendly greetings to the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

6. The madness that afflicted the last years of the life of George III seems to have taken possession of the British ministry. Exaction followed exaction in increasing intensity and number. The history of coercive legislation can scarcely find a parallel to that of the British Parliament for the fifteen years following the fall of Quebec. Withal, no excuse was ever made for injustice done, no sympathy was ever expressed for suffering inflicted, but all communication conveyed the stern purpose to subdue. Hungry for affection, the half-grown offspring turned his face toward England for the smallest caress, and the east wind brought back across the Atlantic full in his face the sharp crack of a whip.

7. Then came a period of aggression and resistance. The Stamp Act was passed, but stamps could not be sold, and the lives of stamp-venders became miserable. Soldiers crowded citizens upon Boston Common; citizens mobbed the soldiers; soldiers fired, killing five citizens, and were saved from destruction only by the active interference of the patriot leaders. This affray marked the first shedding of blood, and has gone into history as "The Boston Massacre." Tea was taxed, but the matrons took to catnip and sage, and no tea was sold. Three cargoes of taxed tea were sent into Boston harbor, but a war-whoop was heard; the vessels were boarded by a band of painted savages, tomahawk in hand; the tea-chests were broken up and the tea was thrown into the water. This last act demanded special punishment, and the Boston Port Bill shut up the port of Boston, allowing no ship to go in or out. The sympathetic people of Salem and Marblehead placed wharf and warehouse at the disposal

of Boston merchants, softening the blow as much as possible. Relief to the suffering poor of Boston poured in from all sides, and the British ministry saw that the whole people were making common cause in resistance to oppression.

8. The next step is the vigorous use of the strong arm. Filial love must be forced in by means of bayonets, and affection secured by gunpowder and bullets. A strong force of soldiers under General Gage took possession of Boston. The troops were quartered in the City Hall and other buildings sacred in the eyes of the people to justice and peace. The city government was superseded by the military. Sentinels patrolled the streets. Arbitrary edicts took the place of law. Citizens were interfered with while in the pursuit of private business. For soldiers' insults there was no redress. The leading patriots, John Adams, Joseph Warren, James Otis, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams, were hunted, and a price was set on their heads. Boston was in the strong hands of military power. Outwardly it was subdued, but beneath was a seething fire, ready to burst into flame when the moment for conflagration should arrive.

9. But Massachusetts was aroused. Town and country were one. The war spirit invoked engendered its kind. Committees of Safety were formed in every town. The drum and fife echoed from mountain to valley. The musket of the old war, the shot-gun of the sportsman, and the rifle of the hunter were brought from their resting-places and prepared for use. Forge and hammer were busy in making guns and swords. Minute-men in every hamlet prepared to march on the moment. Nor were the women idle; wheel and loom were busy as never before. The patriot soldier, starting for the front, was clad in serviceable home-spun, prepared by loving

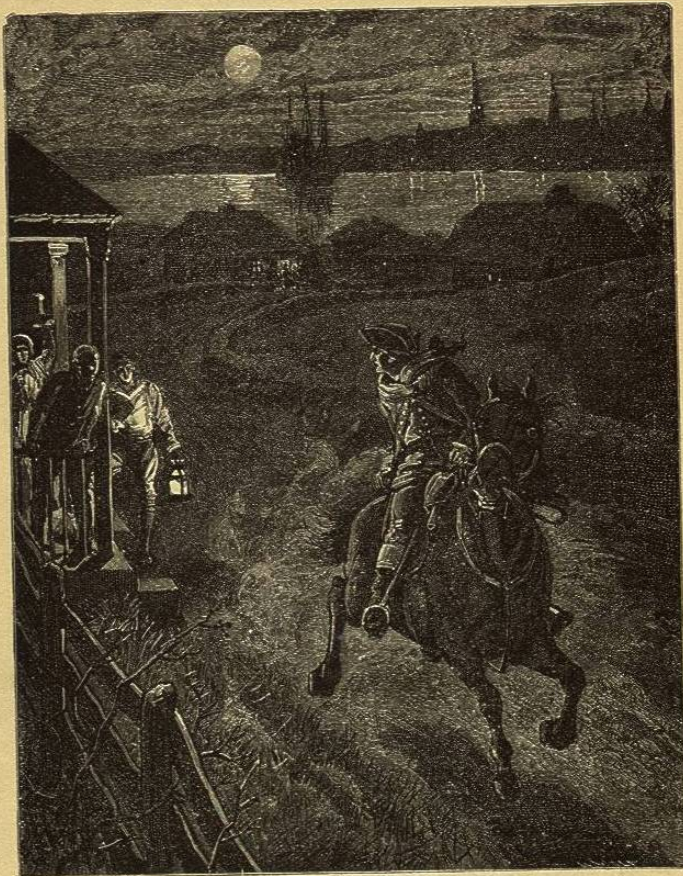
hands, and he departed amid the tears, prayers, and blessings of loving yet steadfast hearts.

10. The General Court of Massachusetts was convened. It was denounced and proscribed by General Gage, but in the eyes of the people its mandates had all the force of law. Taxes were levied and cheerfully paid. The colony was divided into military districts, and each one placed under the command of a competent officer. Powder, arms, and other military stores were collected, and all needful preparations were made for war. The other New England colonies fully shared in the excitement of Massachusetts. The note of alarm spread through the land, and a Continental Congress was called to meet at Philadelphia to consider the policy best to be pursued for the common weal.

11. But General Gage became impatient. He would strike a blow that would at once assert British power and terrify the whole rebel race. The mailed hand must be seen beneath the soft glove. The opportunity was not long wanting. A military depot at Concord, eighteen miles northwest of Boston, he determined to seize. A force of eight hundred men, under Lieutenant-Colonel Smith and Major Pitcairn, was to set out on the evening of April 18th. The patriot leaders were early aware that some movement was on foot, and eager eyes watched for indications of its force and direction. But it was kept a profound secret, and it was not until the troops were upon the march that their destination could be guessed. Let the poet tell how the purpose was discovered and the news carried to the country :

PAUL REVERE'S RIDE

12. Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, seventy-five.
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.
13. He said to his friend, "If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
In the North Church tower as a signal light—
One if by land, and two if by sea ;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm."
14. Then he said "Good night!" and with muffled oar
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where, swinging wide at her moorings, lay
The Somerset, British man-of-war :
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
Across the moon like a prison bar,
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
By its own reflection in the tide.
15. Meanwhile his friend, through alley and street,
Watches and wanders, with eager ears,
Till in the silence around him he hears
The muster of men at the barrack door,
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,
Marching down to their boats on the shore.



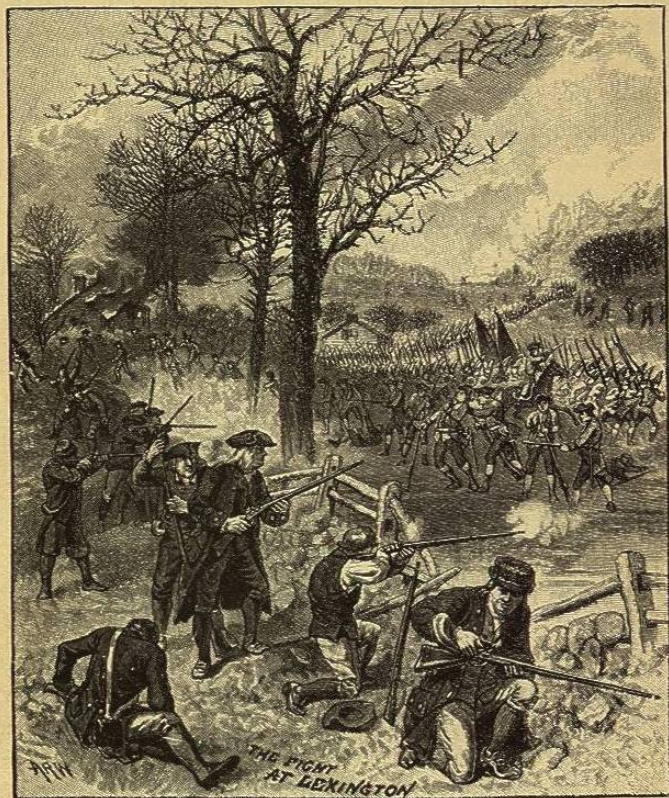
Paul Revere's Ride.

16. Then he climbed the tower of the old North Church,
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
To the belfry chamber overhead,
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the somber rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade ;
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
To the highest window in the wall,
Where he paused to listen and look down
A moment on the roofs of the town,
And the moonlight flowing over all.
17. Beneath in the churchyard lay the dead,
In their night-encampment on the hill,
Wrapped in a silence so deep and still
That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
The watchful night-wind as it went
Creeping along from tent to tent,
And seeming to whisper " All is well ! "
18. A moment only he feels the spell
Of the place and the hour, and the secret dread
Of the lonely belfry and the dead ;
For suddenly all his thoughts were bent
On a shadowy something far away,
Where the river widens to meet the bay—
A line of black that bends and floats
On the rising tide like a bridge of boats.
19. Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride,
On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
Now he patted his horse's side,
Now gazed on the landscape far and near,
Then, impetuous, stamped the earth,

And turned and tightened his saddle-girth ;
 But mostly he watched with eager search
 The belfry-tower of the old North Church,
 As it rose above the graves on the hill,
 Lonely and spectral and somber and still.
 And lo ! as he looks, on the belfry's height
 A glimmer, and then a gleam of light.
 He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
 But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
 A second lamp in the belfry burns.

20. A hurry of hoofs in the village street,
 A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
 And beneath, from the pebbles in passing, a spark
 Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet.
 That was all ! and yet, through the gloom and the
 light,
 The fate of a nation was riding that night ;
 And the spark struck out by that steed in its flight
 Kindled the land into flame with its heat.

21. The British column moved on through the darkness with no sound save the steady tread of marching feet. At first, farm-house and hamlet were wrapped in a deep repose, but as the night wore on signs of life began to appear. At every cross-road, horsemen galloped off at their approach, and hurried lights at chamber windows showed that slumber had been suddenly interrupted. At day-break the invading force reached Lexington, a little village twelve miles from Boston. Here minute-men to the number of about one hundred and twenty, aroused by the cry of Paul Revere, had hastily assembled. They offered no opposition to the British troops, but stood silent spectators to the unusual sight.



22. The British column halted, and Major Pitcairn rode forward, and, in the most peremptory tone of command, cried out: "Disperse, you rebels! Throw down your arms and disperse!" No one obeyed, and he gave the order to fire. Out blazed the muskets, and what remained of the little group sought safety in flight. The British marched on, leaving on that peaceful common, under the very shadow of the church, eight figures stark and motionless in death. From this baptism of blood they moved on, regretful, perhaps, at the stern necessity of their action, but rejoicing that all opposition had been so easily and completely overcome.

23. On they sped. The sun arose in its glory to cheer them on their march. Their thoughts were jubilant as in fancy they posed as heroes before their fellows left behind. No vision of the dead men staring upward from the blood-drenched grass of Lexington haunted them. The silent march of the night had ended, and now they could press onward with clatter and song. The six miles to Concord were soon passed over. A strong guard was left at the bridge, for, with all his confidence, Colonel Smith was a skillful commander, and would neglect no precaution to secure the safety of his troops. So careful was he that he sent back a secret messenger from Lexington for more men. On press the exulting soldiers, on through the streets of Concord in search of the military stores. But lo! they had taken wings and flown to a place of safety. A few barrels of flour, half destroyed, a few hundred cannon-balls thrown into wells, was the sole outcome of the intended destruction. The Committee of Safety had performed their duty discreetly and in time.

24. But hark! What means that musketry? Not the scattering fire of a skirmish, but volley answering volley! Has the impossible come to pass? Have the rebels

dared to fire upon the king's troops? But the firing grows warmer, louder. Hasten to the bridge lest retreat be cut off! The guards, sore beset, welcome the aid. Armed foes spring up on every side! They are behind, before—everywhere! No safety now but in instant, rapid retreat.

25. "You know the rest. In the books you have read,
How the British regulars fired and fled—
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farm-yard wall;
Chasing the red-coats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields, to emerge again
Under the trees, at the bend of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load."

26. Discipline and valor are of no avail here. Vollied musketry has little chance against backwoods sharpshooters occupying every vantage-ground that their knowledge of the country enabled them to do. The day was wearing on. Noon found them a disorganized mass, flying through Lexington streets, the scene of their morning victory.

27. In the mean time Lord Percy, with eight hundred fresh troops and two field-pieces, is marching out on the Lexington road; not that any danger was apprehended, but simply as a precautionary measure. Between two and three o'clock, while yet two miles short of Lexington, ominous sounds of conflict smote his ears: not the rolling volleys and stately tread of victory, but the confused noise of fight and flight, betokening irretrievable disaster. The fresh troops were formed into a hollow square, and pell-mell the hunted fugitives came rushing into their place of refuge. Exhausted by their long march and hot fight, many of them fell prone upon the ground, "their tongues," says a high authority, "hanging out of their mouths."