

held which was common to both:—which had descended from the time of Alfred; which had never been lost under Plantagenet or Tudor; which had gone forth to colonize New England when a Stuart made Old England unsafe for free men to dwell in; which, having expelled the oppressors, drew new breath under a Bill of Rights. It was the spirit which spoke in the eloquence of Chatham; which asserted itself in the sagacity and moderation of Washington. Looking at the other side in the great contest, whether the majority of the legislature and people of Great Britain, or the American Royalist, it would not be just to view them as assertors of arbitrary doctrines, intent upon reducing their fellow-men to slavery. They acted upon a mistaken principle, which they believed to be a constitutional right. The errors have not been without their use, if they have led to that better understanding of the relations between a State and its Colonies which prevails in our own day.

## CHAPTER X.

Franklin's return to America.—Meeting of Congress at Philadelphia.—Washington elected Commander-in-chief.—Events at Boston.—Battle of Bunker's Hill.—Washington blockades Boston.—Public opinion in England.—Petition from Congress to the King.—Mr. Penn, the bearer of the petition, examined in the House of Lords.—Lord North's Prohibitory Bill.—Invasion of Canada.—Silas Deane sent to Paris.—Declaration of Independence adopted by Congress.—Note: The Declaration.

AT the end of March, 1775, that remarkable man, Benjamin Franklin, who, fifty years before, had been working in London as a journeyman printer, turned his back upon that England where he had received all honour as a philosopher, to become one of her most strenuous opponents in the struggle of his native country for independence. He left England—as we learn from a letter written a short time before his departure—with a firm conviction that her system of government was conducting her to ruin and disgrace. He deprecated any further attempt to restore united interests between the mother-country and her colonies: "When I consider," he writes, "the extreme corruption prevalent among all orders of men in the old rotten state, and the glorious public virtue so predominant in our rising country, I cannot but apprehend more mischief than benefit from a close union. . . . Here, numberless and needless places, enormous salaries, pensions, perquisites, bribes, groundless quarrels, foolish expeditions, false accounts or no accounts, contracts and jobs, devour all revenue, and produce continual necessity in the midst of natural plenty."\* Making every allowance for one whose endeavours to promote peace had been met with neglect and insult, much of this severe description is undoubtedly true. But Franklin still shrunk from war. "I would try anything, and bear anything that can be borne with safety to our just liberties, rather than engage in a war with such relations, unless compelled to it by dire necessity in our own defence." On the 5th of May he arrived in Philadelphia. On the 6th he was elected by the Assembly of Pennsylvania one of the deputies to the Continental Congress appointed to meet on the 10th. In a few days came the news of the first fatal contest at Lexington; and

\* "Franklin's Works," by Sparks, vol. viii. p. 146—Letter to Galloway, February 25, 1776.

then Franklin writes to Priestley in England: "All America is exasperated. The breach between the two countries is grown wider, and in danger of becoming irreparable."\*

The Congress assembled at Philadelphia, composed of deputies from thirteen States, held at first a common agreement only upon one principle,—the determination to resist the claim of the British government to tax the American colonies without their consent. But the mode of resistance, and the probable consequences of resistance, involved great differences of opinion. The provincial Assemblies which had elected these deputies were composed of members who, in their aggregate character, represented various interests,—the agricultural and the commercial; who had varieties of national origin, Dutch, German, Swedish, as well as English; who professed various forms of religion. In the State where the Congress assembled, the majority were Quakers, who would cleave, as long as possible, to peaceful councils. The deputies from Massachusetts, on the contrary, irritated in their continual struggle with the authority of England, deprived of their charter, ruined in their commerce, would see no solution of their difficulties but in open war. There were several weeks of indecision; but, gradually the more timid councils yielded to the bolder. The moderate—who clung to union with England, from the thought of a common ancestry, from respect to the state which had given them the model of free institutions, from commercial interests—were alienated by the obstinate refusal of the British legislature to adopt reasonable measures of conciliation. The local Assemblies were using more determined language, and were organizing their provincial forces, as if there were to be a foreign enemy to be resisted. At Boston, the military authority of the Crown, and the armed resistance of the colonists, stood face to face; and no one could doubt that a more deadly trial of strength than that of the 19th of April, would speedily be the result. On the news of that day, numerous bodies of militia-men were on the march towards Boston, under bold leaders, who left their ordinary occupations to place themselves at the head of their neighbours. Such was Israel Putnam, a farmer and tavern-keeper, who became one of the generals of the revolutionary war. For a month, the British troops, who had exclusive possession of Boston, were harassed by the incessant activity of partisans who cut off supplies from the interior. General Gage was blockaded in his stronghold, having only communication by sea. Many of the inhabitants had been permitted to leave the city with their effects. Others remained, not being allowed to

\* "Franklin's Works," by Sparks, vol. iii. p. 154.

consider their merchandise as effects. On the 25th of May, reinforcements arrived from England, under the command of generals Burgoyne, Howe, and Clinton; and the force under general Gage now reached ten thousand men. Such an army, it might well be imagined, would be powerful to crush the irregular troops which were surrounding Boston. Martial law was proclaimed by the British commander, and a pardon offered to all who would lay down their arms, except John Hancock and Samuel Adams. The two proscribed men were naturally the boldest advocates for war-like measures in the Congress at Philadelphia. That body had resolved to petition the king; still clinging to hopes of pacification. But the course of events rendered such a policy hopeless. The olive branch had been sent to England; the sword had been drawn in America. The Congress passed from a deliberative assembly into an executive power. The deputies had agreed upon articles of confederation and perpetual union, under the name of "The United Colonies of North America;" with authority to determine on war and peace, and on reconciliation with Great Britain; to raise troops; to appoint all officers civil and military. They resolved to provide for munitions of war by the issue of a paper currency. They appointed a commander-in-chief of the confederate forces now to be called the Continental Army. That commander was George Washington.

The early military career of Washington has been briefly traced in a former chapter.\* Twenty years before he was thus selected for the greatest trust that could be reposed in a man, he was fighting in the British ranks against the French on the Ohio. He had no subsequent military experience. Possessing ample means, he resided upon his estate in Virginia, called Mount Vernon, a plain country gentleman, managing his property with a skilful economy; engaging in those field sports which were agreeable to his vigorous constitution; reading and meditating upon the past and the present with intelligent curiosity; giving a month or two of the year to his public duties as a member of the House of Burgesses. He was neither learned nor eloquent; he was modest and retiring. But by the undeviating exercise of his sound judgment and his rigid integrity he had required a reputation in his own colony which had extended to other States. His strongest recommendations as Commander-in-Chief came from Massachusetts. The consistent force of his character procured for him a confidence that the noisy demagogue or the dashing partizan could not obtain. On the 16th of June his appointment was officially announced to him when he took

*Ante*, vol. v. p. 593.

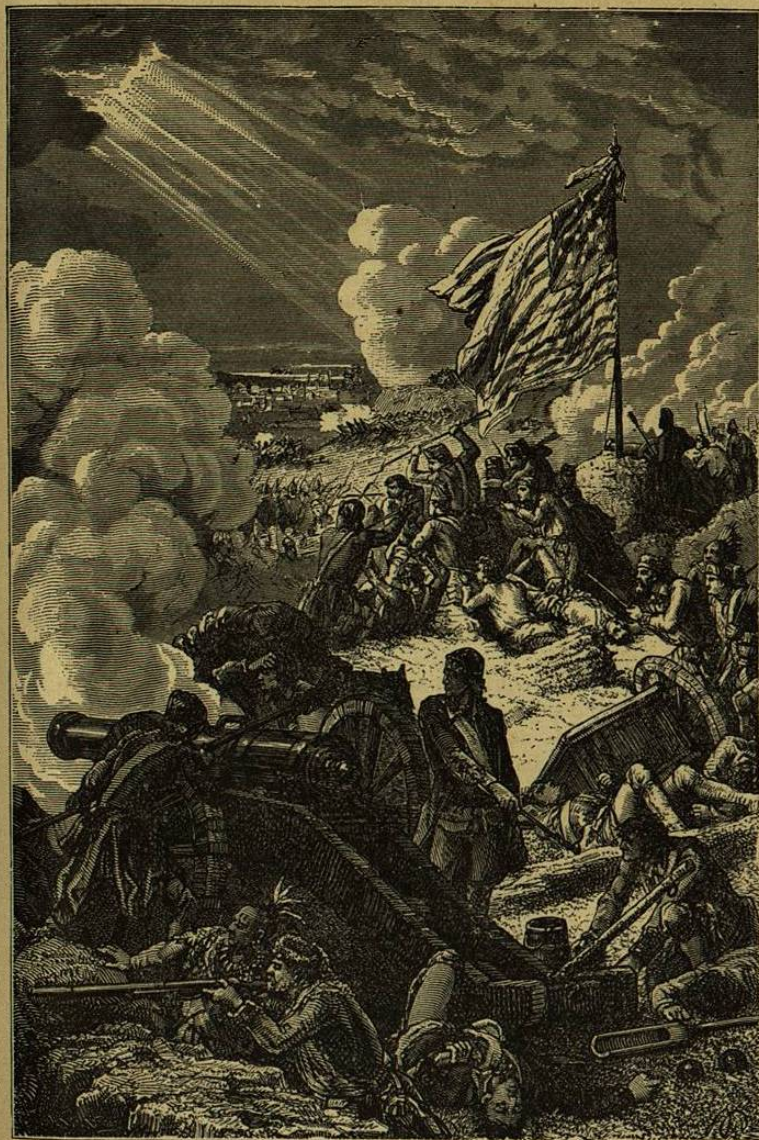
his seat in the Congress. He would enter, he said, upon the momentous duty, although he did not think himself equal to the command he was honoured with. He added, that as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted him to accept this arduous employment at the expense of his domestic ease and happiness, he had no desire to make a profit by it. He would take no pay. He would keep an exact account of his expenses, and those he doubted not would be discharged. To his wife he wrote that it was utterly out of his power to refuse the appointment, although he had used every endeavour to avoid it. "But as it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this service, I shall hope that my undertaking it is designed to answer some good purpose."

The Congress, upon the acceptance by Washington of his appointment, resolved that it was necessary that he should immediately proceed to Boston to take upon himself the command of the army round that town. That army has been described as a mixed multitude, under very little discipline or order. They wanted many of the necessaries of war, especially ammunition. The men were brave—far braver than some of the insolent dependents upon the British ministry were willing to believe. "It was romantic to think they would fight," said Rigby, one of the parliamentary jobbers who lived upon corruption. "There was more military prowess in a militia drummer."\* Before Washington arrived at the camp near Boston, on the 3rd of July, the Provincials had shown how "they would fight."

Boston is built upon a peninsula. An isthmus on the south connected the peninsula with the mainland. A promontory, then called Dorchester Neck, now South Boston, had heights which commanded the town, and which are now fortified. On the east was the harbour; on the west the Charles River. Divided from Boston on the north by this river, was Charles Town, also a peninsula. At the northern extremity, bounded by the Mystic River, is the height of Bunker's Hill; and lower down, nearer Charles Town, is Breed's Hill. An army having possession of these two hills on the north, and of Dorchester heights on the south, would have Boston at its mercy.† The British generals had seen the importance of the acclivities of Charles Town, and had determined to land a force to take possession of them on the 18th of June. This became known to the Massachusetts Committee of Safety; and it was resolved to anticipate the movement of the British, by establishing a post on Bunker's Hill. After sunset on the 16th of June, a

\* Walpole—"Last Journals," vol. i. p. 481.

† See plan of Boston, in Maps of Useful Knowledge Society.



BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL.—Vol. vi. 177.

brigade of a thousand men, under the command of William Prescott, assembled on Cambridge Common, armed mostly with fowling-pieces, and carrying their powder and ball in horns and pouches. A proclamation had been issued from the British head-quarters, that all persons taken in arms should be hanged as rebels. The rebels marched on with a determination never to be taken alive. They crossed Charles Town Neck; and took up their position, not on Bunker's Hill, as the Committee of Safety had proposed, but on Breed's Hill. They had an engineer with them, and abundance of intrenching tools. The lines of a redoubt were drawn; and the troops who, in their occupations of husbandmen had useful familiarity with spades and pickaxes, worked through the night, whilst their commander anxiously listened for any extraordinary movement that would indicate they were discovered by the ships of war in the harbour. The defences were nearly completed as day dawned. Then the redoubt, which had arisen in the night, as if by magic, was visible to the British naval and land officers, with throngs of men still labouring at their entrenchments. The cannon of the Lively sloop commenced a fire upon the earth-works; and a battery was mounted on the Boston side, on a mound called Copp's Hill. The Americans continued to extend their lines, whilst shot and shell were dropping around them. The cannonade was the prelude to something more serious. Two thousand soldiers, with field artillery, embarked in boats, and landed under cover of the shipping on a north-eastern point of the Charles Town peninsula. They were under the command of major-general Howe. Prescott and his band waited for their approach. The British halted for some time, expecting additional force. The Americans had their rear protected by a low stone wall, surmounted with posts and rails. The ground was covered with mown grass, browning under a hot midsummer sun; and there was time to interweave the hay between the rails and form a temporary shelter. When the British troops went forth in their boats from Boston, numbers also hurried from the American camp at Cambridge to share the dangers of their comrades. Howe's reinforcements at length arrived. Before they advanced to attack the irregular force that had made such a bold show of defiance, Charles Town, a mass of wooden buildings, was set on fire by a bombardment from Copp's Hill, and from the ships of war. Between two and three o'clock the British, under the command of General Pigot, advanced up the hill steadily in line, to attack the redoubt. Prescott had commanded his men not to fire till the British were within eight or ten rods. When he gave the word, there was one simultaneous discharge from the

muskets and fowling-pieces of the skilful marksmen. The front rank of the British was swept away. The rear ranks advanced to meet another discharge equally fatal. The whole line staggered, and retreated down the hill. From another point Howe led up his men to attack the fence. They were met by a volley, and fell back in confusion. Their officers rallied those who had retreated; and again the columns advanced upon the redoubt and the grass-woven rails. There was the same carnage as before. Officers had fallen in unusual numbers. It was a terrible scene. The town below Breed's Hill was furiously burning. The hill was covered with the dead, "as thick as sheep in a fold." The colonists were ready to meet a third attack, when it was discovered that their ammunition was nearly spent. This final assault of the British was conducted with a better estimate of the courage of their enemy. Cannon were brought up so as to rake the breastwork of the redoubt, against which all the available force was concentrated. The fire from the breastwork gradually ceased. The redoubt was scaled. Resistance was no longer possible; and the Americans gave way, some retiring in order, but most escaping as they best might. There was little pursuit. The British lost above a thousand killed and wounded, of whom more than eighty were officers. The American loss was represented as less than half that of the royal forces. General Gage wrote home to lord Dartmouth. "The success, which was very necessary in our present condition, cost us dear. . . . The trials we have had show the rebels are not the despicable rabble too many have supposed them to be."

Within a week after the arrival of Washington at the camp at Cambridge, he had employed all his energies to place his troops in a position of security. The British were now entrenching on Bunker's Hill, where the bulk of their army, commanded by general Howe, were encamped. Within half a mile of the British camp the Americans had thrown up entrenchments on Winter Hill and Prospect Hill; and there were other strong works at weak points. In his letter to Congress detailing these circumstances, Washington says, "considering the great extent of line, and the nature of the ground, we are as well secured as could be expected in so short a time, and with the disadvantages we labour under. These consist in a want of engineers to construct proper works and direct the men, a want of tools, and a sufficient number of men to man the works in case of attack." Nevertheless, the council of war had determined to hold and defend these works as long as possible. Under such difficulties, it is easy to conceive the arduous task that was imposed upon the commander of a body of undisciplined

men, imperfectly armed and wanting ammunition. He had to contend also against the constant solicitations of the Assembly of Massachusetts to send portions of his force upon detached services. These he steadily resisted; and, concentrating his army, was enabled to continue the blockade of Boston through the autumn and winter.

Public opinion in Great Britain, on what had now become a war with America, found its expression in the usual form of Addresses to the throne. The majority of these Addresses went to urge a vigorous prosecution of coercive measures against rebellious subjects. On the 23rd of August, the king issued a proclamation for the suppression of rebellion and sedition in America, and forbidding assistance and traitorous correspondence with the rebels. In the City, Wilkes being lord-mayor, the corporate authorities did not join the procession of heralds when the proclamation was read at the Royal exchange. On the other hand, Manchester and many trading towns sent up loyal Addresses for the prosecution of the war. "The Addresses must have been dearly bought," says Walpole.\* The king appears to have made a very sensible estimate of the value of these productions. He writes to lord North, on the 10th of September, "Address from Manchester most dutiful and affectionate. As you wish the spirit to be encouraged I have no objection; though I know from fatal experience that they will produce counter Petitions." Parliament met on the 26th of October. The encouragement which the ministry had given to "the spirit" of hostility was now to exhibit its fruits in the royal Speech. Conciliation was to be cast to the winds. The strongest words in the vocabulary were selected to terrify the men to whom the British bayonet brought no terror. "Desperate conspiracy"—"rebellious war"—were to be put an end to by "decisive exertions." The "unhappy and deluded multitude" were not only to be subdued by the naval and military armaments of their mother-country, but his majesty did not hesitate to inform his Parliament that he had condescended to implore the aid of other countries in this work: "I have the satisfaction to inform you that I have received the most friendly offers of foreign assistance." Hessians were indeed levied; and Hanoverians received British pay. But the king was disappointed in some of his overtures to great powers. He writes to lord North, only ten days after this boast of foreign aid: "The answer of the empress of Russia to my letter is a clever refusal, not in so genteel a manner as I should have thought might have been expected from her. She has not had the civility to an-

\* "Last Journals," vol. i. p. 502.

swer me in her own hand." As might be expected, the parliamentary majorities in support of the views of the Court were very large. An amendment to the Address on the first night of the session was rejected by a majority of forty in the House of Lords; by a majority of a hundred and seventy in the House of Commons. The duke of Grafton, after voting with the minority, resigned his office of Privy Seal. Two months before the meeting of Parliament he had pressed upon lord North the necessity of conciliation, but had received no reply except a draft of the king's speech. When the duke waited upon the king to resign, his majesty entered upon a discussion of this most grave subject: "He informed me that a large body of German troops were to join our forces; and appeared astonished when I answered earnestly that his majesty would find too late that twice that number would only increase the disgrace, and never effect his purpose."\* Lord Dartmouth succeeded the duke of Grafton as Privy Seal; and lord George Germaine (Sackville) became Secretary of State. In spite of the disgrace of Minden, the military experience of the clever Secretary was now to conduct the war with the Colonies. General Gage had been previously called home, and the chief command left with general Howe.

The king, before the opening of the session, said to lord North, "I am fighting the battle of the legislature, therefore have a right to expect an almost unanimous support. After a ministerial triumph on the 1st of November, his majesty wrote to express his hope that the "very handsome majority would have the effect of shortening the debates. The House cannot possibly hear the same speeches frequently repeated, or the House of Commons must be composed of more politeness than formerly." It was difficult to treat this great question with any novelty of argument. The controversy had gone out of the region of argument into that of brute force. Nevertheless, in spite of the sanguinary conflict of the 17th of June, the Congress assembled at Philadelphia had on the 8th of July confided to Richard Penn, governor of Pennsylvania, a petition to the king, to be presented on his arrival in England. The petition, according to Mr. Jefferson, was adopted merely to please its mover, Mr. Dickinson; but "the disgust against its humility was general." This document, denominated the Olive Branch, was delivered to lord Dartmouth on the 1st of September, and in three days, Penn and his companion, Arthur Lee, were informed by letter that no answer would be given to it. This contemptuous rejection of the humble petition of Congress

\* MS. Memoirs.

went upon the ground that the body petitioning had no legal existence. The Americans,—who knew that the deputies of thirteen States, who signed the petition, were real representatives of the opinions of the majority of the people,—from the time of that rejection of their last humble effort at pacification held that to British councils, and not to American, all the bloodshed and guilt of the war were to be ascribed. The British government considered, or professed to consider, that with "vague expressions of attachment to the parent state," the rebellious war was "manifestly carried on for the purpose of establishing an independent empire."\* The Americans maintained, up to that period, that they entertained no such purpose. In the House of Lords, on the 7th of November, the petition of the Congress to the king was to be taken into consideration, and having been read, the duke of Richmond moved that Mr. Penn be examined. That examination, which took place on the 10th, was a very important testimony to the state of opinion in the Colonies.

The questions proposed to Mr. Penn, as he stood at the bar of the House of Lords, were chiefly those of the duke of Richmond and other supporters of the opposition; but he was subjected to a cross-examination by the earl of Sandwich and others of the ministry. He had resided four years in America; he was two years in the government of Pennsylvania. He thought the members of Congress were men of character, and capable of conveying the sense of America; they undoubtedly convey the sense of the provinces they represent, and he firmly believed the provinces would be governed by their decisions. He was acquainted with almost all the members of the Congress. "Do you think," he was asked, that "they levy and carry on this war for the purpose of establishing an independent empire?" His answer was, "I think they do not carry on the war for independency; I never heard them breathe sentiments of that nature." He was asked, "For what purpose do you believe they have taken up arms?" Brief and emphatic was his answer: "For the defence of their liberties." At the close of his examination Mr. Penn distinctly stated that the most opulent inhabitants of the American provinces would prefer freedom under this country to any other state of freedom; and that while supporting the measures of the Congress they wished at the same time a reconciliation with Great Britain.† The opinions of Mr. Penn on the subject of independence have been confirmed by those held by Washington, Madison, Franklin, and

\* King's Speech, October 26.

† "Parliamentary Debates," vol. xviii. cols. 611 to 661.