

indebted to the burning appeals of that brilliant orator, and the fearless decision of that faithful jury.

THE NEGRO PLOT OF 1741.



POPULAR panics rank among the most fatal disasters that can overtake a people. The frenzy of wild and excited masses in a populous city, like the combustion of vast stores of inflammable material, is truly frightful. In such periods neither age, nor rank, nor sex, nor condition, can be said to afford any pledge of permanent security. Among others, the celebrated *Popish Plot* concocted by Titus Oates of England, and the no less singular *Witchcraft* delusion of New England, may be mentioned as examples. The New York negro plot of 1741 may be ranked with the preceding, and deserves a passing notice in this chapter on colonial history. The lapse of the one hundred and thirty years which have since intervened has thrown so dense a haze over the period that nothing can be certainly known concerning it, save what has been transmitted to us by successive historians. It is impossible for us to determine how many grains of truth found place in that storm of prejudice and passion, which resulted in the heartless slaughter of a multitude of ignorant and defenceless beings. The population of New York at that time amounted to about ten thousand, nearly two thousand of whom were colored slaves. Having grown up in ignorance and moral neglect, they were considerably addicted to pilfering and other vices, and often caused their masters considerable anxiety. The most stringent measures were adopted to prevent their assembling together; yet, as in all slave communities, a latent

fear filled the minds of the whites, which every now and then burst forth into a matter of public alarm. Some time in the winter of 1740-41, a Spanish vessel, manned in part with black sailors, was brought into the harbor as a prize, and the negroes sold at auction, having previously enjoyed their freedom, and not relishing their changed relations, it was but natural that some complaints and threats should fall from their lips which were not particularly heeded at the time.

On the 18th of March, 1741, the Governor's house in the fort was discovered to be on fire, and despite the efforts to save it the flames continued to rage until the building, the King's chapel, the Secretary's office, the barracks, and stables, were wholly consumed. The Governor, in reporting the matter to the Assembly, declared that a plumber had left fire in the gutter between the house and the chapel, and that from this circumstance the accident had probably occurred. Some days later the chimney of Captain Warren's house, situated near the fort, took fire, but no damage occurred. After a few days a fire broke out in the storehouse of one Van Zandt, and was said to have resulted from the carelessness of a smoker. Three days later a cow stable was discovered to be on fire, but this was soon extinguished; and the same day the house of Mr. Thompson was found on fire, the fire having begun in the chamber where a negro slave slept. Coals were discovered the next day under John Murray's stable on Broadway. On the day following two more fires occurred, one in the house of a sergeant near the fort, and the other on the roof of a house near the Fly Market, both of which were extinguished with slight damage. It now came to be believed that these fires were the work of incendiaries, and who the guilty parties were became a matter of earnest inquiry. Some wise head conceived that these Spanish slaves had undertaken to destroy the city, while others believed the whole colored population of the island had conspired to burn the city and massacre the whites. One of the Spanish negroes, living near where a fire had occurred, on being ques-

tioned, was considered a suspicious character; the demand for the arrest of the Spanish negroes became general, and they were accordingly thrown into prison. Another fire occurring during the afternoon, while the magistrates were in consultation, the panic became so general that negroes of all ages were arrested by the wholesale and thrown into close confinement. Search was now instituted for strangers, but as none were found many families concluded to escape from this threatened Sodom before it was consumed. The stampede to the suburbs and regions round about became general, and every available vehicle was drafted into service. On the eleventh of April the Assembly offered a reward of one hundred pounds and full pardon, to any one who would turn State's evidence and make known the plot and the names of the conspirators. This was far too tempting a bait for a class of terrified, ignorant negroes, who saw nothing but the dungeon and a frightful death before them, unless by some revelation they were to regain their liberty, and such wealth as they had never aspired to. For the investigation of the case the Supreme Court convened on the 21st of April, Judges Philipse and Horsmanden presiding. Robert Watts was foreman of the grand jury. It soon became evident that the liberal reward offered ten days previously was destined to be fruitful in results. Those days and nights had been spent by the wretched prisoners in gloomy meditation, and nearly every one was ready to make disclosures. Among the first examined was Mary Burton, a colored servant girl indentured to John Hughson, keeper of a squalid negro tavern on the west side of the island. Mary testified that Cæsar Varick, Prince Amboyman, and Cuff Philipse* had been in the habit of meeting at the house of Hughson, talking about burning the fort, the city, and murdering the people, and that Hughson and his wife had promised to help them, after which Hughson was to be the governor and Cuff king. She stated that no whites had been present at these times except her

* Slaves then bore the surname of their masters invariably.

master and mistress, and Peggy Carey, an abandoned Irish woman living at Hughson's. Peggy was next brought before the court and promised pardon on condition of general confession. She, however, denied all knowledge of any conspiracy, or of the origin of any of the fires, and said that to accuse any one would be to slander innocent persons and blacken her own soul. The law at that time was that no slave could testify in a court of justice against a white person. Yet Mary Burton, a colored slave, here testified to matters implicating Peggy Carey, a white woman, which she, Peggy, emphatically denied. But the city had gone mad, and Mary Burton, who a month previous would have been spurned from a court-room, had suddenly become an oracle, and on her testimony poor Peggy and the negroes named were found guilty and sentenced to be executed. Death now staring Peggy in the face, she became greatly alarmed, and begged for a second examination, which was readily granted. She now testified that she had attended a meeting of negroes held at a wretched house near the battery kept by John Romme, and that Romme had promised to carry them all to a new country and give them their liberty, on condition that they should burn the city, massacre the whites, and bring him the plunder. This ridiculous twaddle, evidently fabricated for the occasion, was received as proof positive, and the persons named (except Romme, who fled for life, though his wife was arrested) were severally brought before her for identification. The work of public slaughter began on the eleventh of May, when Cæsar and Prince were hanged, denying all knowledge of any conspiracy to the last. Hughson and his wife having been found guilty, were shortly after hanged, in connection with Peggy, who had been promised pardon for her pretended confession, every word of which she solemnly retracted with her dying breath. We will not follow the details of this strange investigation further. Suffice it to say that, finding confession or some new disclosure the only loophole through which to escape, nearly every prisoner prepared

a story which availed him nothing in the end. Every attorney volunteered to aid the prosecution, and thus left the terrified slaves, without counsel or friend, to utter their incoherent and contradictory statements and die. From the 11th of May to the 29th of August, one hundred and fifty-four negroes were committed to prison, fourteen of whom were burned at the stake, eighteen hanged, seventy-one transported, and the remainder pardoned or discharged. The loquacious Mary Burton continued the heroine of the times, deposing to all she knew at the first examination, but able to bring from her capacious memory new and wonderful revelations at nearly every sitting of the court. At first she declared that no white person, save Hughson, his wife, and Peggy, was present at the meeting of the conspirators; but at length remembered that John Ury, a supposed Catholic priest and schoolmaster in the city, had also been implicated. He was at once arrested, and on the 29th of August hanged. The panic now spread among the whites, twenty-four of whom being implicated were hurled into prison, and four of them finally executed. Personal safety appeared now at an end; everybody feared his neighbor and his friend, and the Reign of Terror attending the Salem Witchcraft was scarcely more appalling. We cannot conceive how far this matter would have extended if the incomprehensible Mary Burton had not, inflated with former success, begun to criminate many persons of high social standing in the city. While the blacks only were in danger, these persons had added constant fuel to the fire; but finding the matter coming home, they concluded it was now time to close the proceedings. The further investigation of the case was postponed, and so the matter ended. That some of the fires were the work of incendiaries (perhaps colored) there appears to us but little doubt; but that any general conspiracy existed is not probable. The silly story that a white inn-keeper should conspire with a few negroes to massacre eight thousand of his own race, that he might occupy a subordinate position under an

ignorant colored king, is simply ridiculous; yet for this he and his wife were hanged. The trials and executions were a frightful outrage of justice and humanity, presenting a melancholy example of the weakness of human nature, and the ease with which the strongest minds are borne down in periods of popular delusion.

 TRIUMPH OF THE ANGLO-SAXON.


THE scheme of kingcraft to make the authorities independent of the people, by securing a permanent revenue, was again and again introduced by the Colonial Governors, but as often resisted by the Assembly. Sir George Clinton, having alienated the people by his unfortunate administration, was superseded in 1753 by Sir Danvers Osborne, who had received royal instruction to insist on a permanent revenue. This being emphatically resisted, the dispirited Governor, who had just buried his wife, seeing nothing but trouble and failure in the future, terminated his existence by hanging himself with a handkerchief from the garden wall of John Murray's house in Broadway. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Governor James Delancey, whose accession was hailed with delight. It was under his administration that Kings (now Columbia) College was founded, the charter being signed by Delancey, October 31, 1754. The same year the scheme for a public library was projected, and the Walton House, long the palace of the city, erected. This building, erected by William Walton, a son-in-law of Delancey, was four stories high, built of yellow Holland brick, with five windows in front, and a tiled roof encircled with balustrades. This edifice,

which would attract no unusual attention now in a country village, was then considered the wonder of America, and had a wide European fame. It is still standing on Pearl street, and contrasts sadly with the magnificent iron-fronted business palace of the Harpers, now nearly opposite. The city was now being enlarged; new streets were laid out and constructed, and piers and ferries established. But the most exciting topic of this period was the war with France, which resulted finally in the conquest of Canada. The establishment of French and English colonies on this continent resulted in incessant friction between these rival powers, and led ultimately to a gigantic struggle between the two most warlike nations of the world. The English, having planted themselves on the Eastern seaboard, advanced westward, claiming all between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, while the French, possessing Canada in the north, and the mouth of the Mississippi in the south, claimed all lying between. These incessantly interfering claims for rich territory, which neither owned, led to numerous bloody wars, extending in their influence from the St. Lawrence to the Ganges, for the possession of a country which, twenty years after the cessation of these struggles, passed from under the control of both. The peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1748, closed the third colonial war, which had been prosecuted with great vigor, and which had resulted in the capture of Louisburg by the English arms. By the treaty, however, this captured territory was restored to France, leaving things again in *statu quo*, and ready for new hostilities. In 1749, George II. chartered the Ohio Company, granting six hundred thousand acres of land, in the vicinity of the Ohio river, to certain persons of Westminster, London, and Virginia, thus paving the way for new national troubles. It was in 1753, to avoid an open rupture which was rapidly approaching, that a young man of Virginia, destined to be heard from (George Washington), volunteered to carry a letter of ineffectual remonstrance, several hundred miles through a dangerous

country, to the French commander. In 1755 three expeditions were fitted out against Canada—one under General Braddock, to dislodge the French from Fort Duquesne; one under General Shirley, for the reduction of Niagara; and one under William Johnson, a member of the Council of New York, against Crown Point. All three signally failed, though Johnson, gaining a slight advantage over the French, wounding and capturing their commander, magnified it into a victory, for which he was rewarded by the English Government with £5,000 and the title of baronet.



WASHINGTON AT THE AGE OF FORTY.

The preparations of 1756 were more extensive than in the preceding year, the Governors of Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland uniting in the campaigns, and pledging nineteen thousand American troops. This year closed also with the success of the French arms. Preparations for war were renewed in 1757, on a greatly enlarged scale. Four thousand troops were pledged from New England alone, and a large English fleet came over to take part in the struggle. Yet this year ended again in disaster, with a loss to the English of Fort Henry and three thousand captured troops. The affairs of the English colonists had now become very alarming, filling New York and the whole country with intense anxiety. The English colonists outnumbered the French by nearly twenty to one; yet, as they were divided in counsel, their expeditions had either

been overtaken with disaster, or beaten by the French, who, united under a single military Governor, had so wielded their forces, and attracted to their ranks the Indians, as to have spread general disaster along the whole frontier.

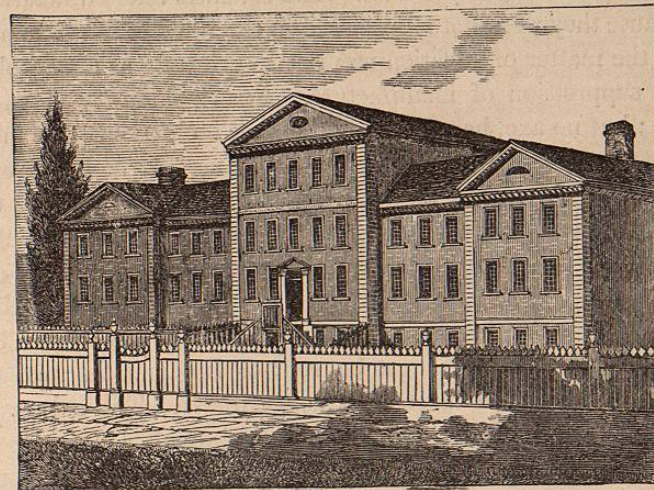
It was in this critical exigency that William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, was called to the helm of State, and so rapid were his movements, and comprehensive his plans, that the three years of disaster were followed by three of brilliant victory, culminating in the reduction of Louisburg, Frontenac, Crown Point, Ticonderoga, Niagara, and Quebec, thus obliterating forever, after a doubtful struggle of one hundred and fifty-six years, the French dominion from the country. The triumphant conclusion of this long and anxious struggle was the occasion of great and universal rejoicing in New York. The merchants had long looked for the enlargement of their commerce, and the citizens for the expansion of the city.

TROUBLOUS TIMES APPROACHING.



THE year 1760, which so honorably closed the war, was also marked by the death of Lieutenant Governor Delancey, who was succeeded by Cadwallader D. Colden, a zealous royalist, who continued in power five years. It was during this term that the noted *Stamp Act* was passed, which rendered his administration a very stormy and unpleasant one. The news of the passage of this Act was followed in New York by the issue of a new paper called the "Constitutional Courant," which first appeared in September, 1765, by the placarding of the streets with "The Folly of England, and the Ruin of America;" by the organization of the

"Sons of Liberty," and the appointment of a "Committee of Correspondence," to secure unanimity of action among all the merchants of the country in resisting the aggressions of England.



THE OLD BRIDEWELL.

While there existed in the nature of the case many reasons why these colonies should eventually rise to independency, it is also certain that proper treatment on the part of the mother country would have long delayed such an event. The colonists had no desire to sever their connection with the home government; indeed, they long clung to its usages and authority. In the bloody campaigns against the French they had sacrificed the lives of thirty thousand of their sons, and burdened themselves with a debt of thirteen million pounds, sterling. An honorable acknowledgment of their undoubted interests and rights would have permanently cemented them to the English crown: but these were persistently denied. The colonists were regarded as greatly inferior to the people of England. Pitt, the friend of America, once said in Parliament, "There is not a company of foot that has served in

America out of which you may not pick a man of sufficient knowledge and experience to make a governor of a colony there." This underrating of the American intellect led to the appointment of weak and tyrannical Governors, which yielded at length its legitimate fruit. The colonists resisted taxation because they were not represented in the English Parliament; but the matter of taxation was not so grievous as the wholesale suppression of manufacture. America abounded with iron; but no axe, hammer, saw, or other tool, could be manufactured here without violating the crown law. Its rivers and marshes teemed with beaver, but no hatter was allowed to employ over two apprentices, and no hat of American manufacture could be carried for sale from one colony to another. No wool could be manufactured save for private use, and the raw material could not be transported from one colony to another. Everything must be sent to England for manufacture, and return laden with heavy duties. The colonists were prohibited from opening or conducting a commerce with any but the English nation, and every article of export must be sent in an English ship.

The repeal of the Stamp Act was followed by the duty on tea, glass, etc.,—legislation equally obnoxious to the colonies. The British naval officers were petty lords of the American seas. They compelled every colonial vessel to lower its sails as it passed, fired into them for the slightest provocation, boarded them at pleasure, and rudely impressed into their service sailors who were never allowed to return to their families. These things could but yield a bloody harvest. The failure of the Governors to secure a permanent revenue was followed by the quartering of troops in New York, which the populace felt was another scheme for the destruction of their liberties. The citizens of New York were first to resist these aggressions. It was here that the Sons of Liberty first organized, and raised the first liberty pole. The Manhattan merchants were first to cease the importation of English goods—a contract grossly violated by other merchants in

America, but rigorously adhered to in New York, to the ruin of many strong houses. Here the first blood was shed in behalf of liberty. It occurred in a conflict between the citizens and the English soldiers, January 20, 1770 (over five years before the battle of Lexington), on a little hill near the present John street. It was in relation to the liberty pole, and long known as the battle of Golden Hill. New York was the scene of the greatest suffering during the Revolution. Early captured and partly burned, it lay seven years in ruins under the heel of the conqueror, who had here established his principal headquarters, and monopolized all its churches, public buildings, and many private residences. Here the first Federal Congress was organized in 1785, the federal constitution adopted in 1788, and President Washington inaugurated in 1789. First to espouse the cause of independence and organize defence, though its commerce was wholly ruined, and its inhabitants lay starving and bleeding through perilous years, it uttered no murmur of complaint; and since the establishment of independence its citizens have been second to no others in promoting the interests of their country and of humanity.