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Coffin, Chas.

Life and services of Major General John Thomas

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THE

LIFE AND SERVICES

OF

MAJOR GENERAL JOHN THOMAS.

COMPILED

BY CHARLES COFFIN.

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PREFACE.

HAVING long been satisfied, from the general history of the Revolution, that no officer deserved the esteem and respect of his country more than GENERAL THOMAS, I have been led to look more particularly into the grounds of the high estimation in which he was held by Washington, Congress, the Army and the Country; and am satisfied his fame was not ephemeral, but well founded.

In this inquiry, valuable letters from generals WASHINGTON, LEE and SCHUYLER, and JOHN ADAMS, never before published, have come to light; and are of such value, connected with the early movements of the Revolution, as to induce my consent that the whole should be published.

THE COMPILER.

New-York, July 1, 1844.

Source unknown

MAJOR GENERAL JOHN THOMAS.

The determination of the mind to relinquish the soft scenes of tranquil life for the rough adventures of war, is generally attended with the conviction that the act is laudable; and with the wish, that its honorable exertions should be faithfully transmitted to posterity.

These sentiments lead to the cultivation of virtue; and the effect of the one is magnified by the accomplishment of the other. In usefulness to society, the degree is inconsiderable between the conduct of him who performs great actions, and of him who records them; for short must be the remembrance, circumscribed the influence of patriotic exertions and heroic exploits, unless the patient historian retrieves them from oblivion, and holds them up conspicuously to future ages.

Whenever the images of the great men of the commonwealth are beheld, the mind is excited to virtue. It cannot be the wax or the marble which possesses this power; but the recollection of their great actions kindling a generous flame in the breast, not to be quelled, till by virtue equal fame and glory is acquired. Regretting as all do, that the names, much less the deeds, of some of the principal actors in our contest for Independence, are scarcely known by their posterity, I have been led to this my present undertaking with the hope of contributing in some degree to repair the effects of this much lamented indifference. With this view, I am about to write the memoirs of the person whose name is at the head of this article. It is at once discovered that

the task will not be easy in itself, nor will it be entirely satisfactory in the performance.

The causes which render it difficult in this case, are, no doubt, in some measure similar in all like attempts. The companions of General Thomas, in civil, professional and military life, have long since passed away, more than sixty-eight years having elapsed since his death. The confidential officers about his person, at his death, in a foreign province, overcome with the event, and occupied with the necessary attention to their official duties, in an army prostrate with sickness of the most malignant kind, and on a retreat in an enemy's country, pursued by a well appointed army, flushed with success, and commanded by a consummate general, did not, and could not have given that attention to the safe-keeping of the private papers of their general, which would have aided in the performance of the task imposed. On the part of his descendants it is admitted and regretted, that less care and attention have been given than should have been, to the preservation of those family records and traditions, which would have gone far to have made this memoir the more complete and interesting, and rendered the life and services of their ancestor more conspicuous and useful.

The apprehension which seems to have influenced them, that they might be considered desirous to blazon the fame of their ancestor, was not a sufficient reason or excuse, for they should have considered, as they must have known, that he was an honored and cherished son of the republic. They should have constituted themselves the guardians of his fame, as well for themselves, as for their country and future ages. But what would seem almost incredible, is, that not even a newspaper sketch has ever been published of the services of General Thomas, to which reference could be had. But the facts within reach, and which have come to hand, are such that they cannot mislead. With the materials which remain, the undertaking will proceed, with the assurance, that biography shall not be turned to eulogy, nor history to romance.

General Thomas' ancestors were of English descent, and among the first settlers of the town of Marshfield, in the County and Colony of Plymouth, where he was born in the year 1724. It is known that his grandfather and father both resided in this town; were substantial farmers and leading men in the town with the Winslows and Whites. After a suitable preliminary education, he became a medical student with Dr. Cotton Tufts, of Medford, in the vicinity of Boston, a distinguished physician; for at that time there were no medical colleges in Massachusetts or New England.

On completing his medical education, Dr. Thomas commenced practice in his native town, but in a few years removed to Kingston, in the same county, where he continued his professional practice till his death, except when connected with the army. As a physician he was not only skilful but eminently successful. In March, 1746, he was commissioned as second surgeon in a body of troops, raised to be stationed at Annapolis Royal. In February, 1755, he was appointed surgeon's mate in Shirley's regiment, but soon left the medical staff, and was appointed a lieutenant in the same regiment the same year.

In the year 1759, he was appointed a colonel, and re-appointed to the same office in 1760, by Governor Pownall. Whether he ever served in any of the intermediate grades in the army does not appear; it is however highly probable he did. It appears by his petition to the Governor and Council of Massachusetts, that he commanded his regiment part of both these years in Nova Scotia. In the year 1760, with his regiment, he joined the Anglo-American army at Crown Point, commanded by Sir Jeffry Amherst, commander-in-chief of all the forces in North America. After the many defeats of the British and American arms, in the first years of the old French war, under the command of Braddock, Shirley, Johnson, Abercromby, and Lord Laudon, the energetic Pitt, then Prime Minister of England, withdrew them all, and called Col. Amherst from the army in Germany, and promoted him to the

command in North America, with such men as Wolf, Monckton, and Townsend under him. Amherst afterwards became commander of all the armies of Great Britain. This year completed the conquest of Canada, and in his well-arranged plans and movements against Montreal, where the whole force of the French in that province were assembled, Col. Thomas had an honorable and important command. The celebrated Major Rogers, who commanded the partizan corps, called the Rangers, published a journal of all the campaigns of that war, which was printed in London, in 1764; the volume is now rarely to be found and should be reprinted. He says, "I remained at Crown Point with my people, without effecting any thing considerable, more than small parties reconnoitering the country about the fort, while every thing was got in readiness for embarking the army the 16th of August,(1760,) which was done accordingly, having one brig, three sloops, and four rideaus, which latter were occupied by the royal train of artillery, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ord. Our march was as follows, viz: six hundred Rangers and seventy Indians, in whale boats, in front, commanded by Major Rogers, as an advanced guard for the whole army, all in a line abreast, about half a mile ahead of the main body, followed by the light infantry and grenadiers in two columns, two boats abreast in each column, commanded by Col. Darby.

The right wing was composed of Provincials, commanded by Brigadier Ruggles, who was second in command of the whole army. The left was made up of the New Hampshire and Boston (Massachusetts) troops, commanded by Col. Thomas. The seventeenth and twenty-seventh regiments, with some few of the royals that formed the centre column, were commanded by Major Campbell, of the seventeenth regiment. Col. Haviland was in front of these divisions, between that and the light infantry and grenadiers. The royal artillery followed the columns and was commanded by Colonel Ord, who had for his escort, one Rhode Island regiment of Provincials, The sutlers, &c., followed the artillery.

In this manner we rowed down the Lake (Champlain) forty miles the first day, putting ashore where there was good landing on the west side, and there encamped.

The following day we lay by. The 18th the wind blowing at south, orders were given for embarking, and the same day reached a place on the west shore, within ten miles of the Isle à Mot, where the army encamped. It having blown a fresh gale most part of the day, some of my boats split open by the force of the waves, and ten of my Rangers were thereby drowned. The 19th, we set sail early in the morning, and that night encamped on the north end of the Isle à Mot. The 20th, before day, the army was under way with intention to land; having but twenty miles to go, and having the advantage of a fair wind, we soon came in sight of the French fort, and about ten in the morning, Col. Darby, with the grenadiers and light infantry, and myself with the Rangers, landed on the east shore, and marched and took possession of the ground opposite the fort on that side, without the least opposition."

Thus far, Rogers, who is minute in the further advance of the army to Montreal, and the opposition it met with till its arrival at that place, on the 8th of September, when Amherst was joined by General Murray, from Quebec. His force was so imposing and all his arrangements so well made, that the French governor, Vaudreuil, surrendered his army and the town on the first summons. This event closed the war in North America. The Provincials and Rangers were never better commanded than on this occasion, by Ruggles, Thomas and Rogers. The two former were from Massachusetts, the one a distinguished barrister at law, the latter equally distinguished as a physician. Rogers was a native of New Hampshire, and commander of the Rangers through the whole war, and the most celebrated partizan this country ever produced.

Ruggles and Rogers both joined the mother country in the contest for Independence. From this time to 1775, Col Thomas continued engaged in his profession at Kingston, where the revo

lution found him, in the enjoyment of domestic happiness, professional distinction, and well earned military fame.

In the month of February, the Provincial Congress passed the following resolutions: "In Provincial Congress, Cambridge, February 9th, 1775:—Resolved, That the Hon. Jedediah Preble, Esq., Hon. Artemas Ward, Esq., Col. Seth Pomeroy, Col. John Thomas, Col. William Heath, be and hereby are appointed General Officers."

The gallant and veteran General Preble, of Portland, father of the distinguished naval commander, Edward Preble, declined the service. It is believed he was induced to this course from his advanced age; the others all accepted. The accurate biographer, Dr. John Eliot, in a note to a memoir of Gen. Sullivan, says of Gen. Thomas, "he was an officer who had acquired reputation in the French war. He was one of the best officers in our army in 1775, and commanded the division nearest the British lines in Roxbury. A more brave, beloved and distinguished character did not go into the field, nor was there a man that made a greater sacrifice of his own ease, health and social enjoyments."

Previous to the battle of Lexington, the Provincial Congress created the office of Lieutenant General, and appointed Thomas to the office, which gave him rank of Pomeroy. After the battle of Lexington, Ward was commander-in-chief, and had his head quarters at Cambridge, while Thomas commanded on the Roxbury side as Lieutenant General.

Soon after this, the Continental Congress asssumed the army assembled at Cambridge, as the army of the United Colonies, and appointed the general officers to command the same. Among these, after Washington, were four Major Generals, eight Brigadiers, and an Adjutant General. Ward being the only Major General Massachusetts was entitled to, Thomas should have been the first Brigadier of the army, and is so called in his commission, but the dates of the commissions gave Pomeroy and Heath precedence.

This difficulty, with others of a similar character, and the result of them will be explained by Washington, in his first letter to Congress, from Cambridge camp, of July 10th, 1775, "I am very sorry to observe, that the appointment of General officers, in the provinces of Massachusetts and Connecticut, has not corresponded with the wishes or judgment either of the civil or military. The great dissatisfaction expressed on this subject, and the apparent danger of throwing the whole army into the utmost disorder, together with the strong representations made by the Provincial Congress, have induced me to retain the commissions in my hands until the pleasure of the Continental Congress should be further known, except General Putnam's, which was given him the day I came to camp, and before I was apprised of these disgusts. In such a step, I must beg the Congress will do me the justice to believe, that I have been actuated solely by a regard to the public good. I have not, nor could I have, any private attachments—every gentleman in the appointment was a stranger to me, but from character; I must therefore, rely upon the candor and indulgence of Congress, for their most favorable construction of my conduct in this particular. General Spencer's disgust was so great at General Putnam's promotion, that he left without visiting me, or making known his intention in any respect. General Pomeroy had also retired before my arrival, occasioned, as it is said, by some disappointment from the Provincial Congress.

"General Thomas is much esteemed, and most earnestly desired to continue in the service; and as far as my opportunities have enabled me to judge, I must join the general opinion, that he is an able, good officer, and his resignation would be a public loss.

"The postponement of him to Pomeroy and Heath, whom he has commanded, would make his continuance very difficult, and probably operate on his mind as the like circumstances did on that of Spencer."

Washington, in a letter to General Schuyler, of July 28th, says, "The arrangement of the general officers in Massachusetts and

Connecticut, has been very unpopular, indeed I may say injudicious It is returned to Congress for further consideration, and has much retarded my plan of discipline." Generals Wooster and Spencer were both senior to Putnam in the Connecticut State appointment, and by what fatality he was placed over them by the Continental Congress, is hardly necessary to inquire at this time, and in this place. Wooster and Spencer, probably, were never reconciled to their degradation, as they both eventually resigned and left the service.

The difficulty in Massachusetts was entirely healed. General Pomeroy did not return to the army, and never received his commission, and the Congress passed a special resolve, that General Thomas should have precedence of all the Brigadiers in the army, in which decision, the army and the public fully acquiesced.

But previous to the decision of Congress, Thomas had withdrawn from his command at Roxbury, concluding that he could not in honor serve in an army and be commanded by those whom he had so recently commanded. His intentions being made known, efforts from various quarters, to retain him in the army, were made, which have no parallel in the military annals of this country or Europe.

"*House of Representatives, Watertown, July 22d*, 1775.

SIR,

This House approving of your services in the station you were appointed to in the army by the Congress of this Colony—embrace this opportunity to express their sense of them, and at the same time to desire your continuance with the army, if you shall judge you can do it without impropriety till the final determination of the Continental Congress shall be known with regard to the appointment of General Officers. We assure you that the justice of this House will be engaged to make you an adequate compensation for your services. We have such intelligence as affords us confidence to suppose, that a few days will determine

whether any such provision shall be made for you as is consistent with your honor to accept, and shall give encouragement for you to remain in the service.

By order of the House,

JAMES WARREN, *Speaker.*"

General Thomas."

The next effort to prevent General Thomas from resigning, was made by General Lee, who at that time, as a military gentleman, was considered by many as superior to Washington; and it was the first time in his life he ever condescended to address any one in the language of entreaty.

"*July* 23, 1775.

Sir,

It is with the greatest concern that I have heard of your intention to quit the service of your country at a crisis when men of merit can be so ill spared. You think yourself not justly dealt with in the appointments of the Continental Congress. I am quite of the same opinion, but is this a time sir, when the liberties of your country, the fate of posterity, the rights of mankind are at stake, to indulge our resentments for any ill treatment we may have received as individuals?

I have myself, sir, full as great, perhaps greater reason to complain than yourself. I have passed through the highest ranks, in some of the most respectable services of Europe. According then to modern etiquette notions of a soldier's honor and delicacy, I ought to consider at least the preferment given to General Ward over me as the highest indignity, but I thought it my duty as a citizen and asserter of liberty, to waive every consideration.

On this principle, although a Major General of five years standing, and not a native of America, I consented to serve under General Ward, because I was taught to think that the concession would be grateful to his countrymen, and I flatter myself that the concession has done me credit in the eye of the world; and can

you, sir, born in this very country, which a banditti of ministerial assassins are now attempting utterly to destroy with sword, fire and famine, abandon the defence of her, because you have been personally ill used?

For God Almighty's sake, for the sake of every thing that is dear, and ought to be dear to you, for the sake of your country, of mankind, and let me add, of your own reputation, discard such sentiments. Consider well the dreadful mischief such a pernicious example may occasion; consider well whether such a proceeding may not bring down upon your head the contempt and abhorence of that community which has hitherto most justly held you in the highest respect.

I beg you will excuse the liberty I take in thus addressing you; and ascribe it to its true motive—a zeal for the public good, and the great regard I have for your personal self, and that you will believe me to be most sincerely yours,

CHARLES LEE."

General Thomas."

The next effort made to retain General Thomas in the army, was by our own Washington, and he never made a greater.

Cambridge, July 23, 1775.

Sir,

The retirement of a general officer, possessing the confidence of his country and the army, at so critical a period, appears to me to be big with fatal consequences, both to the public cause, and his own reputation. While it is unexecuted, I think it my duty to make this last effort to prevent it; and after suggesting those reasons which occur to me against your resignation, your own virtue and good sense must decide upon it. In the usual contests of empire, and ambition, the conscience of a soldier has so little share, that he may very properly insist upon his claims of rank, and extend his pretensions even to punctilio: but in such a

cause as this, where the object is neither glory, nor extent of territory, but a defence of all that is dear and valuable in life, surely every post ought to be deemed honorable in which a man can serve his country. What matter of triumph will it afford our enemies, that in less than one month, a spirit of discord should show itself in the highest ranks of the army, not to be extinguished by any thing less than a total desertion of duty? How little reason shall we have to boast of American union, of patriotism, if at such a time, and in such a cause, smaller and partial considerations cannot give way to the great and general interest? These remarks not only affect you as a member of the great American body, but as an inhabitant of Massachusetts Bay, your own province, and the other colonies have a peculiar and unquestionable claim to your services; and in my opinion you cannot refuse them, without relinquishing in some degree that character for public virtue and honor which you have hitherto supported. If our cause is just, it ought to be supported; but where shall it find support, if gentlemen of merit and experience, unable to conquer the prejudices of a competition, withdraw themselves in an hour of danger? I admit, sir, that your claims and services have not had due respect—it is by no means a singular case: worthy men of all nations and countries have had reason to make the same complaint; but they did not for this abandon the public cause—they nobly stifled the dictates of resentment, and made their enemies ashamed of their injustice. And can America show no such instances of magnanimity? For the sake of your bleeding country, your devoted province, your charter rights, and by the memory of those brave men who have already fell in this great cause, I conjure you to banish from your mind every suggestion of anger and disappointment; your country will do ample justice to your merits; they already do it, by the sorrow and regret expressed on the occasion, and the sacrifice you are called to make, will, in the judgment of every good man, and lover of his country, do you more real honor than the most distinguished victory.

'You possess the confidence and affection of the troops of this province particularly; many of them are not capable of judging the propriety and reasons of your conduct: should they esteem themselves authorized by your example to leave the service, the consequences may be fatal and irretrievable. There is reason to fear it, from the personal attachments of the men to their officers, and the obligations that are supposed to arise from those attachments. But, sir, the other colonies have also their claims upon you, not only as a native of America, but an inhabitant of this province. They have made common cause with it, they have sacrificed their trade, loaded themselves with taxes, and are ready to spill their blood in vindication of the rights of Massachusetts Bay, while all the security and profit of a neutrality has been offered them. But no arts or temptations could seduce them from your side, and leave you a prey to a cruel and perfidious ministry. Sure, these reflections must have some weight, with a mind as generous and considerate as yours.

'How will you be able to answer it to your country and your own conscience, if the step you are about to take should lead to a division of the army, or the loss and ruin of America be ascribed to measures which your councils and conduct could have prevented? Before it is too late, I entreat, sir, you would weigh well the greatness of the stake, and upon how much smaller circumstances the fate of empires has depended. Of your own honor and reputation you are the best and only judge; but allow me to say, that a people contending for life and liberty, are seldom disposed to look with a favorable eye upon either men or measures whose passions, interests, or consequences will clash with those inestimable objects. As to myself, sir, be assured, that I shall with pleasure, do all in my power to make your situation both easy and honorable, and that the sentiments here expressed flow from a clear opinion that your duty to your country, your posterity, and yourself, most explicitly require your continuance in the service.

'The order and rank of the commissions is under the considera-

tion of the Continental Congress, whose determination will be received in a few days. It may argue a want of respect to that august body not to wait the decision: but at all events, I shall flatter myself that these reasons with others which your own good judgment will suggest, will strengthen your mind against those impressions which are incident to humanity, and laudable to a certain degree; and that the result will be, your resolution to assist your country in this day of distress. That you may reap the full reward of honor and public esteem which such a conduct deserves is the sincere wish of

Sir,

Your very

Obed. and most humble Servant.

GEO. WASHINGTON."

GEN. JOHN THOMAS."

"THE ADDRESS OF THE FIELD OFFICERS OF THE SEVERAL REGIMENTS BELONGING TO THE CAMP IN ROXBURY.

To the Honorable John Thomas, Esq.

SIR,

Your appointment as Lieut. General by the Provincial Congress, in consequence of which you took the supreme command in this camp, gave singular satisfaction to all acquainted with your character, both on account of your inflexible attachment to the liberties of your country, and your knowledge and experience in military movements; and to your vigilance, prudence, and skilful management is to be ascribed in a great measure, that order and regularity for which this camp has been celebrated, and which are essentially requisite to the very being of an army. To these important services you have the purest incense to a great and good mind, the unfeigned thanks of the officers and soldiers under your immediate command, as well as of every friend to his country, and the rights of mankind. We are penetrated with the deepest concern, that by an unfortunate concurrence of events, an arrange-

ment is made, which leads you to think, that you cannot continue in the army, consistent with those delicate and refined sentiments of honor which are peculiarly and fitly characteristic of the soldier. We would not solicit you to do any thing derogatory to your reputation, or the rank you have formerly sustained; but as no man has so much endeared himself to the regiments which compose your brigade, as yourself, we earnestly request, that you would assume the command of it:—that vast dignity and consequence of the cause we are contending for, may be more than a counterpoise to other considerations, of what nature soever, that your country may still be advantaged by your abilities; and though mistakes are entailed to humanity, we doubt not the gratitude and justice of your countrymen, will reward you in some degree adequate to your merit.

After all we submit the matter to your Honor's decision, assuring you that although we shall part with you with regret, yet we will demean ourselves as becomes the soldier.

In behalf of the within mentioned officers.

THEO. COTTON, *President.*"

Roxbury, July 25th, 1775."

If the above resolves, letters and addresses, had been unavailing to have retained Gen. Thomas in the service, or prevented his resigning until the decision of that august body, the Continental Congress, should be known, he must have been much more or much less than man. But being what he was, an honest man, an ardent patriot, and good officer, the means applied were effectual, and the result as we have seen, a restoration to rank and command. In the battle of Bunker's Hill, in June, Thomas took no direct part, although his post at Roxbury, on the south of Boston, was cannonaded during the whole day of the battle; and the original plan of the British was to approach his command, and take possession of Dorchester Heights.

For on the augmentation of his force in May, 1775, General

Gage determined to occupy the heights of Dorchester to the south, and those of Charlestown to the north of the town; the occupation of these was not only necessary to the extension of his quarters, but indispensable to his holding of them. It was therefore determined in the first instance to seize upon Dorchester Heights, as they were the most commanding, and of easiest access to the Provincials. Agreeably to the plan concerted, Howe was to have landed at the point of the peninsula nearest to the castle; Clinton on the flat, between that place and Nook's Hill, whilst Burgoyne was to take post on the neck, and keep up a heavy cannonade on the camp at Roxbury, commanded by Thomas.

From the strength, disposition and equipments of those corps, no effectual opposition could have been made to this operation of the royal army, and a few days more would have put it in possession of Bunker's Hill. The arrangements of General Gage, preparatory to those meditated operations, necessarily attracted the attention of the inhabitants of Boston, and being communicated to the Provincial Congress, they became jealous of some hostile movement, without being able to penetrate the object of it. They recommended to the council of war the fortification of Dorchester Neck and Bunker's Hill.

The resolution of the council of war being taken, Col. William Prescott, the hero of Bunker's Hill, was ordered to take possession of that height, which brought on the battle of the 17th of June, and prevented their taking possession of Dorchester Heights, which left that point open, and which Thomas afterward occupied with the happiest effect.

From this time to March, 1776, General Thomas commanded the most exposed camp of the besieging army, at Roxbury, and by constant vigilance preserved it from insult or injury. It having been determined to take possession of Dorchester Heights, which would bring on an action or produce the evacuation of Boston by the British army; on Monday the 4th of March, in the evening, these Heights were taken possession of by General Thomas with

about twenty-five hundred men, and between three and four hundred carts with entrenching tools, and a train of carts with facines and screwed hay. The whole moved in solemn silence, and with perfect order and regularity, while a continued roar of artillery from our lines served to engage the attention and divert the enemy from the main object. The amount of labor performed during the night, by this party, considering the earth was frozen eighteen inches deep, was almost incredible.

On the morning of the 5th the British saw at once, there was no time to deliberate, Thomas must be removed or Boston evacuated. The former was immediately determined on, and a tremendous cannonade was commenced on our works from the forts in Boston, and the shipping in the harbor. During the forenoon an attack was hourly expected; and nothing less than the carnage of Breed's Hill anticipated. During this time Thomas was reinforced with two thousand troops, and the Commander-in-Chief, arrived, and animated and encouraged the soldiers, by reminding them that it was the 5th of March, the day of the Boston massacre, which he recalled to their remembrance as a day never to be forgotten; in his own words, "an engagement was fully expected, and I never saw spirits higher, or more ardor prevailing."

Our breast-works were strengthened, and among the means of defence were a great number of barrels, filled with stones and sand, arranged in front of our works, which were to be put in motion and made to roll down the hill, to break the ranks and legs of the assailants as they advanced. The anxious day passed without an attack; the next day the British made preparations for an assault, but a most violent storm obliged General Howe to abandon the enterprize.

On the 7th, there were indications in Boston that the British were preparing to evacuate the town, and on the 8th they sent a flag of truce with the following paper, signed by the select men of the town.

"As his Excellency, General Howe, is determined to leave the town with the troops under his command, a number of the respectable inhabitants being very anxious for its preservation and safety, have applied to General Robinson, who at their request has communicated the same to General Howe, who has assured him that he has no intention of distressing the town, unless the troops under his command are molested during their embarkation, or at their departure, by any armed force without, which declaration he gave General Robinson leave to communicate to the inhabitants.

If such an opposition should take place, we have the greatest reason to expect that the town will be exposed to entire destruction. As our fears are quieted with regard to General Howe's intentions, we beg that we may have assurances that so dreadful a calamity may not be brought on by any measure without. As a testimony of the truth of the above, we have signed our names to this paper; carried out by Messrs. Thomas and Jonathan Amory, and Peter Johonnet, who have the earnest entreaty of the inhabitants, through the Lieutenant Governor, who solicited a flag of truce for this purpose.

JOHN SCALLY,
TIMOTHY MARSHALL,
TIMOTHY NEWALL,
SAMUEL AUSTIN."

Boston, March 8th, 1776."

Washington gave no answer to this informal declaration of Howe's, or any assurances to the wishes of the inhabitants of Boston, but acted in conformity to both, by letting Howe depart unmolested. General Thomas' own account of this transaction, in a letter to his wife, will be more acceptable to the reader, than any thing that can be said by another.

"Dear Mrs. Thomas,

We have for some time been preparing to take possession of Dorchester Point, and last Monday night, about seven o'clock, I marched with about three thousand picked men, beside three hundred and sixty ox teams and some pieces of artillery. Two companies of the train of teams were laden with materials for our works. About eight o'clock we ascended the high hills, and by day light got two hills defensible.

About sun rise, the enemy and others in Boston, appeared numerous on the tops of houses and on the wharfs viewing us with astonishment, for our appearance was unexpected to them. The cannonading which had been kept up all night from our lines at Lamb's Dam, and from the enemy's lines likewise, at Lechmere's Point, now ceased from these quarters, and the enemy turned their fire towards us on the hills, but they soon found it was to little effect.

About ten o'clock we discovered large bodies of troops embarking in boats with their artillery, which made a formidable appearance. After some time they were put on board transports, and several of the ships came down near to the castle, as we supposed, with a design to land on our shore.

Our people appeared in spirits to receive them. We were now in a good posture of defence, and had two thousand men added to our number. The enemy viewed us critically, and remained in that situation that night. The next day they came to sail, and returned to town and landed their troops. On Friday, about two o'clock, P. M., they sent a flag of truce with a paper, a copy of which I enclose.

I have had very little sleep or rest this week, being closely employed night and day. But now I think we are well secured. I write in haste, thinking you may be anxious to hear, as there is much firing this way. We lost but two men killed in all this affair. How things are in Boston, or what loss they have sustained from our shot and shells, at present, we are not informed, but I am sen-

sible we distressed them much, from appearances. I have wrote you enclosed by the same hand, and am in haste.

JNO. THOMAS.

Dorchester Hills, in a small hut, March 9, 1776.

Your son John is well and in high spirits. He ran away from Oakeley privately, on Tuesday morning, and got by the sentries and came to me on Dorchester Hills, where he has been most of the time since."

Mrs. Thomas' disobedient son John, had been left by his father, on Monday evening, when he marched for Dorchester Heights, in the care of his colored servant Oakeley, who, no doubt, was instructed to keep him from mischief and danger, he being but ten years old. On Tuesday morning he found every thing in motion, and battle expected, where his father was to act a conspicuous part, considered it dishonorable for him to remain in retirement, hazarded his father's displeasure, and sought the post of danger.

Years had passed, young as he was, since he had heard his parents and neighbors express their indignation at every kind of oppression, whether civil or religious. He might not have thought favorably of religious worship dictated by act of parliament, or of taxation without representation ; he might even have been so heretical as to have believed "that there might be a government without a king, and a church without a bishop." Whatever John's train of thinking was at the time, which induced action, he made his appearance on Dorchester Heights, and it is hardly worth the conjecture in what manner he was received by a gallant and affectionate parent. John can now say more perhaps than any man alive, that in the hour of danger, and in expectation of close and stubborn action, "I stood fearless, by the side of George Washington and John Thomas." Of all Washington's military plans, none were better formed, or more skilfully executed than that of taking possession of Dorchester Heights, which drove the British from Boston. The selection of the officer and troops to carry it into

effect were the best possible; and nothing, however minute, was omitted to secure complete success.

Washington had been eight months in command, and no successful or brilliant operation had taken place under his immediate superintendance. People began to complain audibly, that he was not so desirous to take Boston as to prolong his command. They then did not know that he had frequently laid plans before his military council, to drive the British from that town, which were rejected on account of the too great hazard supposed to attend them. This was the first of his plans which was adopted. The first part of it, was, to compel retreat before the works at Dorchester; the second, to enter the town of Boston by another body of troops, while the first part was in execution. In a letter to Col. Joseph Reed, he says, "The four thousand men destined to take possession of Boston, on the 5th, if the ministerialists had attempted our works at Dorchester Heights, or the lines at Roxbury, were to have been headed by General Putnam. But he would have had an easy time of it, as his motions were to have been regulated by signals, and those signals by appearances. He was not to have made the attempt, unless the town had been drained, or very considerably weakened of its force."

Congress were now looking for an officer to command the troops led into Canada by Montgomery and Arnold, and having been cautioned by Washington not to appoint a Major General, whom he named to them, for that service, they, on the 6th of March, promoted General Thomas to the rank of Major General, and sent him to command in Canada. A letter from John Adams, then at Philadelphia, of March the 7th, to General Thomas, gives so correct a view of American affairs at that time, in that quarter, that it is here inserted.

"Dear Sir,

The Congress have determined to send you to Canada. They have advanced you one step, by making you a Major Geno-

ral, and have made a handsome establishment for a table. Your friends, the delegates from your native province, were much embarrassed, between a desire to have you promoted and placed in so honorable a command on the one hand, and a reluctance at loosing your services at Roxbury or Cambridge on the other. But all agreed that you ought to be placed where you could do the most service, and Canada was thought by all to be very important, and by some the most important post in America. You will have excellent advice and assistance in the committee we are sending, Franklin, Chase and Carrol.

Walker, Price and Bendfield, will be in Canada too, as soon as you. Generals Wooster and Arnold will give you the best information. The department to which you are destined has been in great confusion, and every gentleman who has come from them has a different account. General Schuyler, who is an honest man and a good patriot, has had a politeness about him towards Canadian and British prisoners, which has enabled them and their ministerial friends to impose upon him in some instances.

This has occasioned some altercation between him and Wooster. Schuyler's head quarters will be at Albany, I suppose, and he will be of vast service, in procuring and forwarding supplies, and in many other ways in promoting the service.

But his health will not permit him to go into Canada. I wish I could write you a volume, for to give you the characters of persons in Canada of whom we have heard, and some of whom we have seen, which would fill one. But these hints must suffice.

Your humble servant,

JOHN ADAMS.

Let me beg of you to write me if you can spare time. It is of great importance that the delegates from New England should be truly informed of the course of things in Canada."

General Thomas, while in his proud command at Dorchester, was promoted, and appointed to a more extensive and important

command, which proved disastrous to his country, and fatal to himself. After seeing the British army and fleet leave his native province, he took his departure for Canada, and the difficulty of travel at that season of the year, may be conceived, but a letter from the good patriot, General Schuyler, will more fully reveal.

Saratoga, Friday Evening, 8 o'clock, March 29th, 1776.

SIR,

By a letter this moment received from my secretary, I have the pleasure to learn you have arrived at Albany. Lest you should be induced by the hopes of still being able to cross the lakes on the ice to leave Albany, I send this by express to advise you of the impossibility. Four companies are now lying about forty miles north of Ticonderoga, without being able to proceed, as a great part of the lake is open. I hope a few more warm days and high southerly winds will remove the obstacles.

The first of the cannon will arrive at Fort George to-morrow, and I hope the whole will be there by the middle of next week. Had a sufficient number of carriages been procured by the persons to whose charge they were committed at New-York, they would have been at Fort George on Monday. I propose doing myself the pleasure to see you on Sunday, or Monday at farthest, by which time I hope all will be in such a train as to leave me to return without anxiety.

I am sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

PH. SCHUYLER."

GENERAL THOMAS."

We see what Mr. Adams had so recently foretold, that Thomas might rely on "the vast service Schuyler would render in procuring and forwarding supplies, and in promoting the service in many other ways. The promptness with which the above letter was written and forwarded by express, in the night, the important in-

formation given, and his determination to wait upon his junior, for the purpose of giving further information, and congratulating him on his new and high command, as well as on the part he had recently taken in driving the enemy from the capital of New England, must have been highly gratifying to General Thomas, and cheered and consoled him in the anticipated roughness of his new and trying situation.

The accurate and faithful historian Judge Marshall, will be followed, in substance, in what relates to every thing of the army in Canada and General Thomas, until his death. "In the month of April, General Wooster arrived at Quebec, at which time Arnold's horse fell with him, and injured his leg which had been wounded, and confined him for some time. Believing himself neglected, he obtained leave of absence, and took command at Montreal.

A considerable part of the army being entitled to a discharge in April, no inducements could prevail on them to continue longer in so severe a service. This deduction of General Wooster's force was the more felt, because of the present state of the roads; the lakes and the St. Lawrence, impeded for a time, the arrival of reinforcements destined for his aid.

Among the first who reached camp, in this state of things, was General Thomas, who had made great exertions to join the army. He arrived on the first day of May, and found his whole force to consist of nineteen hundred men, and less than one thousand, including officers, fit for duty. Among the effectives were three hundred entitled to a discharge, who refused to do duty. The sick were generally ill of the small pox, in the hospital. And this force was necessarily divided so as to occupy different posts which had been deemed necessary to maintain, at great distances from each other, and on different sides of the St. Lawrence, so that not more than three hundred men could be brought together at one point, which might be attacked by the whole force of the enemy; and only one hundred and fifty barrels of powder and six days provisions.

Amidst these unpromising circumstances, the hope of taking Quebec, appeared to General Thomas chimerical, and the longer continuance before the town useless and dangerous. The first reinforcements which should arrive from England, would deprive him entirely of the use of the river, and embarrass the removal of his sick and military stores. No existing object remained to justify the hazard. Under these impressions, General Thomas called a council of war on the 5th of May, in which it was determined, that they were not in a condition to risk an assault, and that the sick should be removed to the Three Rivers, and the artillery and other stores embarked in boats, in order to move with the army higher up the river to a more defensible position.

On the evening of the same day, certain intelligence was received that a British fleet was below, and the next morning five ships, which had with much labor and danger made their way up the river through the ice, before it was deemed practicable, appeared in sight. They soon entered the harbor, and landed some men, whilst the Americans were assiduously employed in the embarkation of their sick and stores, an operation carried on the more slowly, because the first appearance of the ships in the river deprived them of the aid expected from the teams and carriages of the Canadians.

At about one o'clock Carlton made a sortie at the head of one thousand men, formed into two divisions, and supported by six field pieces. No entrenchments had been thrown up for the support of the camp, and not more than three hundred men with one field piece, could be brought into action. Thus circumstanced, victory was scarcely possible, and could have produced no important effect, as the enemy would immediately retire under the cannon of the town; while defeat would certainly annihilate this little army. General Thomas therefore with the advice of the field officers about him determined not to risk an action, and ordered his troops to retreat up the river. This was done with much precipitation, and many of the sick with all the military stores, fell into the hands of the enemy.

Unfortunately, to their quantity were added two tons of powder just sent down by General Schuyler, and five hundred stand of small arms. The army continued its retreat to De Chambeau, where on the seventh, another council of war was called, in which it was agreed they should retire to the mouth of the Sorel. In pursuance of this advice, the remaining sick were moved up the river; but General Thomas was determined to continue in his present position some time longer, by the information that large reinforcements were now passing the lakes, and might daily be expected; but those reinforcements not arriving as his intelligence induced him to hope, and the enemy advancing in force, he was obliged to retreat to the Sorel, where he was seized with the small-pox, of which he died.

The Americans in general were by no means satisfied with the conduct of this gentleman. To him, in some measure, they attributed the disasters which ruined their affairs in Canada: but this censure was unjust; he took command of the army when it was too weak to maintain its ground; and when the time for saving the sick and military-stores had passed away. The seige of Quebec instead of being persevered in longer, ought certainly to have been abandoned at an earlier period.

This was the real fault of those who commanded at this station. It is to be ascribed to the reluctance always felt by inexperienced officers to disappoint the public expectation, by relinquishing an enterprise concerning which sanguine hopes have been entertained, even after every reasonable prospect of success had vanished; and to encounter the obloquy of giving up a post, although it can no longer with prudence be defended."

In April, when the troops left General Wooster, on the expiration of their enlistment, it seems surprising that he did not immediately secure his sick and stores by a retreat up the river, take a strong position, and await the arrival of General Thomas. An unwillingness to disappoint public expectation, and the fear of meeting their temporary displeasure, seems to have been the only reason, as Judge Marshall conjectures.

On the death of General Thomas the command devolved upon General Thompson ; but soon after Gen. Sullivan arrived in the American camp, with reinforcements which increased the army to four or five thousand, and assumed the command. From this time retreat, defeat and misfortune followed the army in quick succession. After destroying some armed vessels on the Sorel and St. Lawrence, and burning the fortifications at Chamblee and St. Johns, he left Canada, and by order of General Schuyler took post at Crown Point, and was there superseded by General Gates. Thus terminated the enterprise against Canada ; it was bold and at one period promised success.

Had a few incidents turned out fortunately ; had Arnold been able to reach Quebec a few days sooner ; or to have crossed the St. Lawrence on his first arrival, or had the gallant Montgomery not fallen on the 31st of December, it is probable the expedition would have been crowned with success. But as it would have required ten thousand troops to have retained possession of it, the expedition must be now viewed, as partaking more of the romantic than the useful. As it resulted it was unfortunate in every aspect in which it can be viewed. The loss of men by sickness and battle was great, as well as the munitions of war ; to which may be added the loss of the two best generals Congress sent into the field. Green was then unknown to fame.

On the 8th of May General Thomas wrote to Washington, communicating the intelligence of his having raised the seige of Quebec, and commenced his retreat. On the 24th of the same month Washington replied, " I received your favor of the 8th instant with its enclosures, confirming the melancholy intelligence I had before heard, of your having been obliged to raise the seige of Quebec, and to make a precipitate retreat with the loss of the cannon in the batteaux, and interception of the powder going from General Schuyler.

This unfortunate affair has given a sad shock to our schemes in that quarter, and blasted the hope we entertained of reducing that

fortress and the whole of Canada to our possession. From your representation, things must have been found in great confusion and disorder, and such as to have made a retreat almost inevitable; but nevertheless, it is hoped you will be able to make a good stand yet, and by that means secure a good part or all the upper part of the country. That being a matter of the utmost importance in the present contest, it is my wish and that of Congress, that you take an advantageous post as far down the river as possible, so as not to preclude you from a retreat, if it should be necessary, nor from getting proper supplies of provision. The lower down you can maintain a stand, the more advantageous will it be, as all the country will most probably take part with us, from which we may draw some assistance and support, considering all below as entirely within the power of the enemy, and of course in their favor. This misfortune must be repaired, if possible, by our more vigorous exertions; and I trust that nothing will be wanting on your part or in your power to advance our country's cause." This was the last communication ever directed to General Thomas by his beloved Commander or Congress, and it is doubtful if this was ever received by him. It admits the retreat from before Quebec to have been inevitable, but at the same time must have renewed in Thomas' mind what he knew before, the great mortification such a step occasioned in the minds of Congress and his countrymen. This information, from such a quarter, must have been keenly felt by a mind like his, and at the same time, utterly beyond his power to apply an effectual remedy. With all the wisdom and firmness of Congress during our whole contest for independence, there seemed to be a delusion in their determination to take and keep possession of Canada. And Thomas must have felt that retreat, however inevitable, would be viewed by them as disgrace.

On the 2d of June, at Chamblee, on the river Sorel, while anxiously awaiting the expected reinforcements, he died of the small-pox, aged fifty-two years. The disease was so malignant that he was entirely blind some days before his death. And what

is remarkable, he had in the course of his professional life, been familiar with the disorder, and uncommonly skillful in its treatment, and yet had never taken it either by innoculation or otherwise. He attained an enviable eminence in his profession in the section of the country of his residence.

In his person he was six feet high, erect and well-proportioned, so that his appearance was commanding. In his manners, affable, gentlemanly and of unaffected sincerity He never lessened his character or martial fame by arrogance or ostentation. Granting to all the applause due to their merit, he enjoyed that due to himself with universal assent. As a disciplinarian he was correct, as the whole army bore witness. Among a body of undisciplined countrymen, assembled at the seige of Boston, he was the first to introduce ordor and regularity without severity. He married Hannah Thomas, of Plymouth, a woman distinguished for intelligence and accomplishments.

At the time of his marriage he was rather advanced in life. He left a wife, daughter and two sons, both the latter still survive; one of them was with him at Dorchester Heights. His wife lived to an advanced age, and died in 1819, universally respected It does not appear, after he was advanced to high command, either in the French or revolutionary wars, any opportunity was afforded him of being engaged in close action with the enemies of his country. But by the testimony of officers with him in both wars, he was cool and self-possessed in every emergency. And when action was fully expected as at Dorchester Heights, his coolness and self-possession inspired his troops with confidence, ardor and zeal for action, which Washington said he never saw surpassed. His perfect collection and soundness of mind to the end of his last sickness, was noticed by all his attendants, as has often been remarked by the late Hon. Joshua Thomas, of Plymouth, then one of his aids, and long after distinguished as an able and upright judge.

But further particulars of his character are unnecessary, when

it is recollected that he received particular marks of favor and confidence from two of the first Generals of the age, Sir Jeffry Amherst and George Washington.

This imperfect sketch is not only due to the memory of General Thomas on his own account, and the character of his respectable ancestors and descendants, but to the whole of the Union, and especially to the old colony of Plymouth, his native place. No section of New England was more distinguished for intelligence, patriotism and unanimity in the cause of self-government in church and state, and for its able defenders in the cabinet and field, as the Cushing's, Otis', Payne's, and Warren's in the councils of the nation, and the Thomas' and Lincoln's in the field, bear witness. Nothwithstanding the loss of Thomas, the old colony preserved its standing, for his mantle fell and rested upon the brave and virtuous Lincoln.

They were personally and intimately acquainted, as appears from business transactions between them a few days before the former left Cambridge for Canada, his last field. They were similar in manners and character, and attained an equal standing in the estimation of their countrymen. Lincoln's military career was longer and more variant; but when vanquished and compelled to surrender an army and city, so well established was his spotless reputation that he continued to enjoy the undiminished respect and confidence of Congress, the army and the commander-in-chief, as fully as when he received the surrender of a well appointed British army at Yorktown. The offices he held in civil life, were, Secretary of War, under the Continental Congress, Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, when Hancock was chief, and Collector of Boston, from Washington, which he resigned under the fourth President of the United States. The income of the last office enabled him to re-purchase that part of his patrimony which he had been compelled to sell for the support of his family.

But the last and highest office he ever held was that of Deacon in the church of his divine Master, the pastor of which was the

learned and pious Dr. Shute. This office he held, till his death, in the same church, formed on primitive, apostolic, Congregational principles, in which the Elder or Teacher was considered and treated, only as first among equals. General Lincoln was elected to this office by the brethren of the church, for his good report and wisdom, and his humility enabled him to perform all the duties of the office to the acceptance of the brethren, and doubtless to that of his Divine Master. He would not have received this office from any source less pure. He and his departed friend had hazarded their lives in defence of this principle in the church, as fully as for the right and ability of the people to govern themselvs in civil affairs. They had no reverence for the assumed power of kings or prelates. "Church and State! what calamities has not their union brought on earth? It has proved the greatest misfortune to both, followed by woes, crimes, cruelties and bloodshed. It has made the ministers of the former, hirelings and courtiers. It has not been the chaste bride of Christ, but the prostitute of the world. Its legitimate position is one of conflict with the world; till that shall be brought under subjection, and the spirit and principles of christianity are completely triumphant. Christianity, in this union, is made to dance attendance on kings, to subserve their designs against the rights, welfare and dignity of man. The church and the world met together and kissed each other. In that kiss was poison and death. She that was to lead captivity captive, is herself a captive; she has accepted terms, thrown down her arms, and hushed her voice of censure and denunciation. She speaks only in silken tones. When she ascended the throne of the Cæsars, she deserted her own. When a temporal sceptre was placed in her hand, she let fall that in which resided a portion of omnipotence.

What propriety is there in this union? Has not the church within itself all the resources requisite to fulfil its mission? Why look for human aid, as though there was cause to fear for its security? It is built on the rock of ages; what need then of the sandy

foundations of earth? Are not their proper spheres different? One is instituted to protect man's temporal interests, the other to promote his spiritual welfare; one to suppress crime, the other to subdue passion and purify the heart; one deals with external acts, the other with inward feelings and emotions. The ends therefore proposed to be effected by each being so diverse, there seems as much impropriety in their union, as there certainly has been evil and misfortune proceeding from it.

This union has filled the world with infidels and scorners, associated the Saviour with the scourgers of mankind, and excited against his religion the hatred of millions!" Such patriots as Thomas and Lincoln, contended only against tyranny of the State, for they had been educated in the principles of religious freedom, and no part of the United States has preserved the simplicity of church government, together with the right of private judgment in religious concerns, and the sufficiency of the scriptures in every thing connected with religion, than the people of the old colony of Plymouth. They believe that congragationalism in church government, and republicanism in civil government, are in perfect harmony, and consistent with each other. How then must these good men, long since ascended, have been moved, to have known that the declaration had been publicly made, in presence of their descendents, and by a prelate, "That there could not be a church without a bishop," and that bishop to prove his regular descent from papal Rome. To return from this seeming digression, and to close—it is not only safe to imitate such men as Thomas and Lincoln, but praiseworthy to emulate their virtues and patriotism.

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