

ILLUSTRATED AMERICANA OF THE REVOLUTION.

BY JAMES F. HUNNEWELL.

OF all the four hundred years that have passed since Columbus made the Western world known to civilized man, the most important in their history and its results are the eight years of the Revolution in our own country. In the long extent of time and material covered by what we call "Illustrated Americana," it is a very short period, and the engravers who then treated its subjects have left us a scantily furnished gallery of their art. To look quite through the whole range of plates that illustrate the two continents since the days of the great discoverer, we must examine thousands, if we would form any adequate idea of their actual and relative character. Fewer hundreds are all we can find, contemporaneously made, to show, in their way, how we grew into a nation, and who helped the growth. No great amount of Art as well as few pieces, we also find. It is, altogether, a lot of old plates, some good, more of them queer, sought for by petty antiquaries, and not worth any profound attention from the masters of thought and of history. That may be what they look like when glanced at, but they mean a great deal more than they at first show. A few notes and remarks about them may be added to a necessarily brief mention of them in a former paper.

They may fairly be considered a class by themselves. Every one of them is now uncommon or rare; every one cannot be mentioned here, for this is not a bibliography. Conclusions after looking at them, and speaking of some of them are all that can be stated here.

When the war impended, or began, the earliest demand was for maps of our country, especially of the coast. Almost as soon there was a call for portraits of the chief actors; and views of places, or illustrations of events soon followed. Each sort, largely the portraits, was supplied until peace came.

The maps are distinct from the engravings, and of them it may briefly be said that not a few are large, finely executed, and valuable. On the whole they show a great deal of the good work, and give us great help in history. Early in the war, London publishers issued sheet-maps; the *Gentleman's Magazine* furnished others, still interesting, to the middle and higher classes; and the Government supplied the navy with the imposing and elaborate "Atlantic Neptune," issued from 1775 to 1782.

Most of the plate engravings were in books. We wish there were more of these plates showing actions, and especially places, for lands, buildings and towns have very much changed. Europe then furnished most of the finer artificial things used here, and it is not strange that most of the plates had their origin there. Art was not really at home here, and little here taught it.

War, however, quickens most things, and brings out men to exercise any required skill otherwise dormant. Engraving had hardly been attempted here, but the times inspired novel efforts. While soldiers came from town and farm, so also, although in numbers relatively less, appeared pioneers of the art.

In the great world abroad it was a Golden Age of engraving. Works were produced in France and Italy that are still admired and eagerly sought. England was then the home of Strange,¹ Bartolozzi,² and Earlom.³ Mezzotints were favorites, and very many then produced are superb. Some of the earliest plates in our Revolutionary Americana are in

¹ Sir (1787) Robert, 1721-92.

² Franceso, 1730-1816; in Eng. 1764-1802.

³ Richard, 1742-1822.

this style, a large portrait of Gov. Pownall (1777),¹ by Earlom, among them. The early demand for portraits was met by over a dozen large mezzotints of prominent men published on sheets in London during 1775, and the three subsequent years. Some of them were, however, engraved at Augsburg. Over a dozen more, of smaller size—all with a remarkable family likeness and rude in workmanship—appeared with German lettering.

As early as April, 1775, Samuel Okey, Newport, R. I., emulous of metropolitan achievements, produced a striking mezzotint of "Mr. Samuel Adams." Some patriotic Rhode Islander may be able to tell us more about the engraver.

A thin little quarto beside the writer shows in a notable way some of the exigencies at the opening of the Revolution. It is the "Manual Exercise" for instructing troops in the Royal, or Loyal, service, issued in Boston in 1764. When training for "rebel" service was started, there was a lack of text-books as aids. Copies of this work appear to have remained unsold, and were adapted to the occasion. The title was suitably altered, and in a heading on page 3, appeared the words "The Manual Exercise as ordered" [by the Provincial Congress] followed by a neat bit of white paper pasted over the original words "by His Majesty." Two folding plates that show military forms were retained. The treatise then became an aid to something very different from the original intent, and the advantages of thrift were in due time apparent.

When soldiers gathered near Boston to begin the war, Ralph Earle, later a well-known artist, and Amos Doolittle, afterwards an engraver, came in a company from New Haven. They visited the sites of the early engagements; the former drew, and the latter cut on copper, two views of the fight at Lexington, and two of that at Concord. All were about 12 x 18 inches in size. Two of them give a little information about buildings, two show the position

¹ Gov. of Mass. 1757-60.

and shape of those at the centre of each town, but scanty details; more is given of costume. Of portraiture there is nothing, although in the view of Concord town Earl Percy and Colonel Smith are in the foreground. The importance of three other British officers is proved by showing them, on horseback, as high as a two-storied house.

It is easy to say that these views are the most accurate and valuable that we have of the scenes, for there is nothing with which to compare them. As early American engravings they have an interest and value not theirs as works of art, in which they are surpassed by the earliest Italian plates on metal made before 1492. By reason of their subjects and the little illustration these had at the time, they are, however, as Mrs. Stowe's old woman said of men in general, "enough sight better than nothing." John Norman was another pioneer: he gave us portraits. We are aware that our Revolutionary heroes were remarkable men: he and Doolittle made them supernatural, with large heads, long bodies and dwarfed legs. The latter, it has been said, was caricaturing Earl Percy, but with the same peculiarities, and more elaboration, Norman shows us John Hancock. His full-length of General Warren is better; in a view of that hero's death he has again proved that extraordinary shapes, faces and attitudes are not, in early American plates, caricatures, but evidences of style and capacity in drawing.

At a later date, Norman delineated some allegorical young women engaged in commemorating the earlier battles, who, notwithstanding their looks, were probably not afflicted with the mumps.

Bunker Hill and the battle there, formed a subject for at least three remarkable plates. The first, a large one (12 x 17 inches), was by Bernard Romans, a Dutch engineer in the American service. Reduced in size, this view appeared in the "Pennsylvania Magazine" of 1775. Another (7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$) was published with Cocking's poem, "The American

War," in 1781, and the third (11 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 8 in.), "drawn by Mr. Millar," in Barnard's *History of England*, 1783. The latter two are evidently from the same drawing. In each of the three views there is a river, and at one side a hill; otherwise the topography is impossible, the architecture more than dubious, and the action defiant of printed accounts. They appear to have been drawn by the help of a certain map and a lively imagination.

While the war continued, the portraits outnumbered the views, yet even this number is far from being excessive.

A rival, if not a superior, had preceded, and was contemporaneous with Doolittle and Norman. Paul Revere's plates, so far as they relate to the Revolution, largely treat of subjects that were its precursors several years before it began. The Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre, scenes of events, as his views of Boston, the North Battery, and Harvard College, or portraits, like that of Samuel Adams, or political caricatures, show the versatility of his talents and his industry. It is a question whether he was not more an artist, as well as a more skilful engraver, than any other man in the Colonies during his time; and also whether in historical value, as well as in variety of subjects, his are not the most important American plates of their date.

In the meantime, busy as he was in political or military affairs, he showed that his skill had not been exhausted years before, but was used to no little effect in matters of importance every day through the Revolution. He engraved plates for the paper that passed as money, and while his work might have well been far better, it was a great deal better than the "money."

The later portraits, like the earlier, were as good as many of those that appeared during our last war. The Rev. James Murray wrote an "Impartial History" (London and Newcastle, 1778, 1780), in which there were twenty-six busts in small, oval frames. Some years later, John Andrews (LL.D.), prepared a history including operations in Europe.

This work (1785-6) had twenty-four portraits of various shapes, generally a little round, set in a sort of wall, that are better than Murray's. Histories by Gordon, Ramsay and Stedman contained maps or plans. In 1781, "Impartial History" appeared at Boston, in parts making three volumes, 8°, with portraits by J. Norman, notably like those in Murray.

A long article would be required for a description of the engraved portraits of Washington. Assiduous collectors have found some five hundred specimens — good, bad, or indifferent. Of really good, or in some way important, there are perhaps a hundred, few of which were made before 1783; indeed of the five hundred, a very large part date from this century and from its latter half. From the heading of a handbill, a bust on a postage-stamp or a bank-note, to large, full-length plates, we find these presentations of the Father of his Country.

Caricature has a part in history and politics. It appeared with some rather striking plates early in the war, but when both parties settled to earnest work there was less. Lord North is shown with a teapot pouring its contents into the mouth of a buxom America held down by Lord Mansfield. At a later date, Lord North is pumping water on a prostrate Britannia to revive her in her troubles. Some of the caricatures issued in London were, indeed, as severe as the most radical American patriot would desire. A large plate, with French lettering, dedicated to "Milords" of the English Admiralty, by a member of the American Congress, shows an Admiral — an eagle dressed as a man — tied to a tree, while Congress clips his claws, another party his wings and one Dutchman plucks his feathers that a second carries away for sale. The drawing is said to be from nature at Boston by Corbet in 1778, and the engraving at Philadelphia. Gilray left only one (?) large caricature of events in the Revolution: Rodney presenting Grasse to George III.

Of views, one of the earliest is a large and magnificent

plate in the "Atlantic Neptune," Boston as seen from Dorchester. The same huge work has five colored views of the harbor. It is very much to be regretted that the skilled engravers who made them could not have shown us the sites or scenes of the early and later battles. Little similar comparable work followed. Perhaps the best was "a collection of [16] plates representing the different events of the war," engraved by Ponce and Godefroy, and issued in Paris. The most extraordinary was a series issued at Augsburg, about 1781, purporting to show Boston and other places. The full size of the plates was $12\frac{1}{2}$ by 17 inches—the boldness of the draughtsman was boundless. German architecture of the last century was applied in a way it never was in America, and although the places were made to look as unlike as well could be, anything that existed here, the "views" are valuable and curious evidences of the manner in which our country was then presented to Europe.

Moderate as is the number of plates produced before 1784, all of them cannot be mentioned here, nor can more than an allusion be made to the far greater number illustrative of the Revolution issued during the present century, most of them during its last half. As plates, the majority are the best on the subjects, and as portraits and views, the same may be said. By their quantity, and often by their quality, they show us not alone what we desire to see, but also the regard in which the men of the war and their acts have been held by their successors, and the importance since attached to each.

In contrast, while we look over the early plates, we realize to what a limited extent our country was then a home of art, notably at a period when engraving had reached great development and diffusion abroad. We realize, as we do when examining the cuts made between 1492 and 1550, to what a small degree subjects furnished by America were treated by art. The educated and refined world outside

does not seem to have been interested in us to a flattering extent or to one commensurate with the attention given to political and military affairs. We realize, also, the stern demands of war on our people, and how little time and money they had to spend on illustrations of it.

But matters are comparative as well as positive. Let us see if we were alone in certain respects. A nearly parallel case has, of late been presented.

Two years ago a great nation celebrated on an immense scale the centennial of a revolution that utterly changed its history. There was a vast and magnificent display of not only its own arts and industries, but also those of other nations. None of the "World's Fairs," or national exhibitions, during the past thirty years was as large and extraordinary. It seems as if no other country could surpass, rival or equal the Exposition of 1889; and the writer makes this remark after having seen nearly all the imposing demonstrations of the sort. France fully and impressively showed her position at the close of a hundred years following the events of 1789.

Apart from this, yet with important illustrative connection, there was in a hall at the Louvre a comparatively small exhibition of objects associated with the beginning and the first twenty of the hundred years. There were gathered all obtainable portraits, views, painted dishes, flags, personal relics, pertaining to the French Revolution, and contemporary with it. They were produced when France was distinguished for the skill of her engravers, and of her workers in fine porcelain and tapestry. For the arts she was a home, not a desert.

Great care had evidently been used to make the collection, and what was it? Large, if we take into the account the waste by war, political changes, and heedlessness; not large, estimated by the number, industry and active fancy of the French. Still, if smaller than might be thought or wished, there was probably more than could be gathered about our Revolution, or that of England in 1649, or in

1688. In quality, there was little of the finer art of the country, and much that was rude. It was here also shown that the most and the better engraved illustrations follow, at a distance, the war times to which they refer.

But another, a deeper, a different impression was also made—that there was so little about a very marked period in the French Revolution. There were numerous portraits, but as to what the originals did, it was suggested that there really never was a Reign of Terror.

A few touching personal relics there were, indeed—mute yet eloquent evidence—a cloth dipped in the blood of the Queen, a little suit of clothes made for the Dauphin—some of the chief souvenirs that diligent search could procure to show that a family sovereign through centuries lived and died in Paris. But, if not there, engravings showing the Terror exist.

An American feels very thankful that the great struggle, when a new life for his own country began, cannot show certain subjects. Rough acts there were—it was time of war—but Boston Massacres, or Tory confiscations, were local by-play in comparison. Wise, patient heads of leaders, strong hands of plain folks from shop or farm, in a manly fashion worked out our problem—there was not submission to a godless rabble of a Lyons, Nantes, or Paris. Sins enough here, may be, among individuals, poor enough some of our art in our Revolution, but then as now, there was that simple yet noble characteristic of the genuine American—respect and regard for woman. Not here by the current national authority died a beautiful and great-hearted woman—most exalted in the land; not here by like authority did barbarism slowly grind to death a small, helpless boy—whose crime was that he was his father's son—the descendant of Saint Louis.

We could not soar in art, but we did not sink to certain depths in founding our Republic.

Let our Revolutionary plates be scanty, or poor, so long as we had with them the calm, wise heads that made us a

nation, and along with those heads the plain folks. After all, better the Yankee, plain as his own barn-door, but going to hear the minister preach on a Sunday, and on a week-day doing some talking himself in town-meeting.

When exhaustive search gathers and shows our Revolutionary illustrations, we are glad to feel that there will be no important portion of the subject with a national character that is to be veiled or avoided.

But there will be one cause for reflection that we may well heed. Judging from the rate at which they have already disappeared, we are forced to think that by the end of another century the illustrations made before 1784 may have altogether disappeared. Our patriotic ancestors, in many a place and year, heard orations filled with ardent eloquence; they printed these with explosions of caps., great and small, of italics and exclamation points; and then they made waste-paper of the illustrations. In our time, the early patriots are eulogized in resounding rhetoric; the bold and graceful signature of the great signer of the Declaration of our Independence is lavishly reproduced—and the house of John Hancock—one of the most solid, picturesque, and historic throughout our wide land—is sold for old junk. The libraries of the collectors who take care of books are one by one dispersed. By the increase of wealth, and the spread of enlightenment, the volumes are gathered elsewhere; public thirst for knowledge—and amusement—is satiated; and after awhile the plates are missing.

A hundred years hence when the manners and customs, the enterprise and modesty of our times are talked about, there will be a chance for tributes not those of flattery. Debts are liberally contracted for posterity; it may prove well that we take better care of certain things we have left, if we would wish to have it then decided that we, in our day, with our means, make our bequests as valuable as those left by the men of the Revolutionary time, even in their scanty legacies of *Illustrated Americana*.

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