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The Kentish Guards

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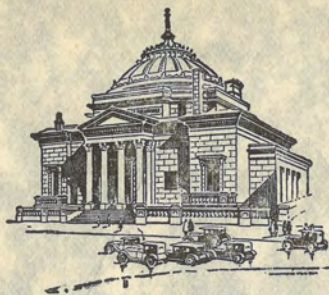
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“The Old Stone Bank”

Providence, R. I.



THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, known as "The Old Stone Bank," is one of the historic institutions of the State of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819, it has since that time been a vital factor in the life of this community.

Because of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" brings to light in its educational advertising, interesting facts of Rhode Island and national history.

The stories of Rhode Island that are told in the following pages are selected from local history that is one long narrative of romance, adventure and deeds of accomplishment. In the hope that the lives and works of famous men and women may be interesting to review, and that their biographies may serve as inspirations to both young and old, this book is presented with the compliments of

THE OLD STONE BANK

The Kentish Guards



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Providence, R. I.



The Kentish Guards

IN ADDITION to whatever military forces the Colonial government of Rhode Island equipped and maintained for purposes of defense, there were various independent military organizations which were founded during fluctuating waves of patriotic enthusiasm. While the desire to band together in clubs and associations has always been a strong human characteristic, the chaotic period of American history, which extended from the years just prior to the Revolution to those just following the War of 1812, provided unusual stimuli for the formation of many private organizations of a military nature. Among such Rhode Island military organizations of independent origin and maintenance, none was more famous than the Kentish Guards. It was in Kent County, more exactly in East Greenwich, that the idea of forming this organization was first conceived, and, in 1774, after a large group of patriotic citizens had drawn up a tentative charter and petitioned the General Assembly for an "Act of Incorporation," the charter was granted and the unit, called the "Kentish Guards," came into existence.

There were in the neighborhood of 180 men in the complete personnel of this unit.

Liberal funds had been raised privately to establish and outfit the Guards, and they were supplied with elaborate uniforms and equipment. In addition, they received excellent military training and rapidly became a competent and well-disciplined company. Many men, prominent not only in East Greenwich but in the Colony as a whole, were members of the Kentish Guards, and, during the Revolution, the organization gave more distinguished officers to the Continental Army than any other independent unit of its sort throughout New England. Of especial note were Major-General Nathanael Greene, who rose to be second only to Washington himself; Brigadier-General James Varnum, Colonel Christopher Greene, who defeated the Hessians at Red Bank, New Jersey; Colonel Archibald Crary, Major John S. Dexter and Captain Thomas Arnold. Many of lower rank also had especially commendable military careers, and in all over thirty-five of the Kentish Guards were in the Continental Army.

When, in the Battle of Lexington, in 1775, the sturdy Massachusetts patriots "fired the shot heard round the world," the echo of this commencement of hostilities with the British came swiftly and clearly to Rhode Island. The Kentish Guards, well-trained and eager for action, were not slow in responding to the call of their countrymen of

the Bay State. In little more than two hours after the news of the repulse of the British reached the Providence Plantations by rider, the guards were on the march northward. But the thrills of anticipation, the brave martial music, the excitement of marching out of East Greenwich, were evidences of a patriotic fervor that was doomed to disappointment. When the Guards, one hundred and ten strong, reached Pawtucket, they were halted and ordered back by Governor Joseph Wanton. While the fact that the British had returned to Boston and fortified themselves securely in that stronghold was given as a reason for this command, it is probable that the Governor was more than a little in sympathy with the British cause and was somewhat of a Tory. However, disregarding the order, Nathanael Greene and two companions marched on to Boston and offered their services to General Washington, in Cambridge. This act on the part of the staunch Rhode Islanders aroused the deep admiration of Washington, and it was this deed that was the foundation for his later great friendship and faith in Nathanael Greene.

After having returned to East Greenwich, the remainder of the Kentish Guards proceeded to erect a fort at the entrance to East Greenwich Bay as a protection for the town and surrounding countryside against the

British ships then in Narragansett Bay. This fortification, named Fort Daniels, was equipped with eight or ten cannon, which were taken to West Point after the Revolution. While a guard was maintained there for a long time and the fort had its day of importance, no trace of it now remains except in the town records.

If the main body of the Kentish Guards was disappointed in not being able to join Washington and the Continental Army at Cambridge, there was still plenty to keep it on the alert right in the vicinity of East Greenwich. Small details of men from the organization were often engaged in running down and capturing spies that appeared in the vicinity, the case of a man named Hart being a particular example. Quite frequently the Guards were called to Quidnesset Point, two or three miles below East Greenwich, to prevent the British ships from landing plundering parties. In many of these cases the British had been aided by Tories who knew the countryside well and helped the enemy in their raids.

The activities of British warships, one of twenty-five tons in command of Captain Wallace and another of twenty tons commanded by Captain Ascough, were especially watched, particularly after the former commander had landed at Canonicut Island, burned many houses, carried off cat-

tle and provisions, and even killed some of the inhabitants. At one time, when a ship was driven ashore near East Greenwich and captured by the enemy, the Kentish Guards sent a detachment to retake the vessel. A short but sharp skirmish ensued, but the patriots were victorious.

On a later expedition against the British, the guards sailed a sloop to Prudence Island. In the midst of the work of landing supplies and provisions they were interrupted by a runner from the other end of the island who informed them that the British were landing two hundred men at a point only three miles away. Although the Kentish Guards were only eighty in number, the rest of their unit being still on the mainland, they made a brave show with flags and drums (for their guns and ammunition had not been landed) and succeeded in scaring off the enemy. Again, in 1778, the guards attempted to go to the aid of General Sullivan on Newport Island, but their transport was cut off by an English warship, and they were forced to land at Pappoosesquaw Point, opposite Bristol. While there they received orders not to go on, so they encamped and took care of the wounded from the Battle of Rhode Island.

After the Revolution the Kentish Guards entered upon an era of non-activity until the advent of the War of 1812. Again men

from their ranks joined governmental forces and gave good account of themselves. However, the real high-point in the career of the Guards as an organization came in 1842 when they played a prominent part in what was known as the Dorr War. Answering a call from Governor King, they marched to Providence, under the command of Colonel Allen. This was at a time when Dorr himself with his followers attempted to capture the Cranston Street Arsenal. However, the threatened attack failed, and the Guards did not have any real work to do. A month intervened before Governor King again called for the Guards, this time sending a special train to bring them directly to Pawtucket. After the Dorr affair, trouble and rebellion had been brewing among the people, until it had broken out in rioting in Pawtucket.

The Kentish Guards, about fifty or sixty in number, took up their posts at a bridge over the Blackstone River and at Main Street opposite Mill Street. Mobs, who assembled to watch, taunted the soldiers and even threatened them with violence. Attempts were made to break the line of guards, and one man with a horse and carriage was encouraged to break the ranks. His persistent attempts made it necessary for the Guards to fire at the horse, an action which stirred the mob into throwing bricks

and missiles of all sorts. When the soldiers fired with blank cartridges to frighten the enraged multitude, the latter only became more furious. Despite all the taunts and the more serious danger from the flying missiles, the Kentish Guards refrained from attacking and maintained perfect discipline. So reluctant were they to cause injury to anyone that they elevated their guns above the heads of the people when ordered to fire. Matters had to reach a climax, however, and after a more threatening advance upon the part of certain body of men, the Guards shot in earnest, killing the ring leader. This seemed to bring the people to their senses, and they dispersed immediately. The fact that it was a rainy day, and consequently one calculated to dampen the most violent spirits, was, perhaps, instrumental in reducing the number of casualties that might otherwise have occurred.

After this engagement, the Kentish Guards again returned to East Greenwich and were highly honored by their fellow townsmen. Resolutions of thanks were drawn up and sent to them by citizens of Pawtucket, while in addition, they were presented with a handsome blue silk flag by ladies of Providence. The episode was concluded with a highly laudatory sermon preached in their honor by Reverend Crane of East Greenwich.



A Predecessor of Roger Williams

HISTORIANS, writing of Rhode Island, are sometimes prone to forget that there was a white settler in Rhode Island territory before the advent of either Roger Williams in the north, or William Coddington in the south. Yet this settler has given a name to a valley, a river, a town, and a canal. William Blackstone, an eccentric religious recluse, had lived a whole year at Study Hill in the vicinity of what is now known as Cumberland, before Roger Williams, in 1636, and William Coddington, in 1637, with their respective bands of followers, came from the Massachusetts Colony to settle in the wilderness, one at the head and the other at the mouth of Narragansett Bay. Nor did the coming of these two groups of settlers at all affect the status of their predecessor. Once settled at Study Hill, he fairly rooted himself to the spot as if to follow in part the example of his apple trees. But he did make occasional pilgrimages to Boston and to Providence, journeying to the former settlement with a predominance of personal motives but to the latter with only the highest spirit of altruism. Though he was by nature (being in advance of his time) a voluntary recluse, he did not

become feeble in intelligence or lax in ideals, but remained an astute philosopher and tolerant clergyman.

Nothing is known of William Blackstone's early life in England. Even the date of his birth has been lost in the shadow of the more famous Sir William Blackstone of legal fame who may or may not have been a blood relation. The first records of this earliest Rhode Island settler are those which state that he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Emanuel College, Cambridge, in 1617 and his Master of Arts degree in 1621. Just when or how he came to New England (called then New Virginia) is not known but the year of his arrival in America has been estimated as 1625. He settled first in Boston on what was then called Shawmut Point. The area included that now known as Beacon Hill and extended along the south side of the Charles River. Blackstone lived here alone through 1629.

However, in 1630, Winthrop and his group of colonists arrived from England and established themselves on the north side of the Charles at a spot where Charleston is now located. But when many of the little Colony fell sick because of a lack of pure water, Blackstone crossed the river and invited them to make their homes within his territory where there were several large and untainted springs. It must have

been with a good deal of surprise that these new settlers from England greeted this hospitable stranger, for they hardly expected to find another of their kind already established in the land they had supposed to be an absolute wilderness. But while William Blackstone had also left England to escape the tyranny of the potentates of the English Church, he was not at odds with the original principles of the English Episcopal Church. He still wore, in America, his English clergyman's costume and for that reason gave offense to the Puritans who later came to Boston. There is a tradition that Winthrop and his party at first had planned to oust Blackstone from his territory at Shawmut on the pretext of having a grant to the land from the king. Blackstone replied to their contention: "The king asserteth sovereignty over this New Virginia in respect that John and Sebastian Cabot sailed along the coast without ever landing at any place; and if the quality of sovereignty can subsist upon the substratum of mere inspection, surely the quality of property can subsist upon that of actual occupancy which is my claim." Whether Blackstone made such a statement or not, the words are characteristic of both his ingenious logic and his independence. At least, in 1634, the members of the Boston Colony finally paid him six shillings apiece for his rights to the land,

although he retained six acres for his own use. On this bit of land he had his home where he raised apples and roses brought over from England. Surrounding the house was his park, now Boston Common, and here he used to walk in the afternoons.

Although Blackstone remained in the Boston Colony for five years, he finally had to leave, not because of any open outbreak with the colonists but because he would not join with them. He was literally frozen out, though he is never mentioned harshly in the records. According to Cotton Mather, Blackstone said: "I came from England because I did not like the lord-bishops, but I cannot join with you because I would not be under the lord-brethren."

Blackstone saw that there was intolerance both within and without the church, and wished to follow his sequestered life of contemplation and study. In 1635, he invested his small capital in cattle, and dressed in his "canonical Coate" and carrying his beloved books, set out through the wilderness with but one companion, a servant, named Abbot, from whom Abbot's Run in Cumberland takes its name.

He finally came to a place which the Indians called Wawepoonseag. Here he settled in a territory which was without a white inhabitant. In what was then a part of Rehoboth but is now Cumberland, near

Lonsdale, he built a home. It was located at the foot of a three-terraced hill. On the second terrace he dug a well, and at the top built a shelter which he used as a study. Consequently the hill became known as Study Hill. He further named the section "Attleborough Gore." Always a lover of gardens and orchards, he here planted fresh shoots from his Boston apple trees and slips from his English rosebushes.

As a recluse he pursued his philosophical bent thoroughly. He had a very large library for the times, consisting of 86 volumes. The books, as well as his own philosophical writings, were destroyed when the Indians burned his home during their uprising after his death in 1675. He had no trouble with the Indians during his whole lifetime of eighty years. At his death there were 160 inhabitants in the vicinity of Study Hill, and it is supposed that he preached for their church services. But, in the main, Blackstone remained absolutely alone in regard to church affiliations, and it is probably for that reason that he is neglected in many histories. His motto always was "tolerance" in the real sense of the word, and even Roger Williams could not measure against him in that respect. A singular man, he might, under different circumstances, have been a great leader in New England. Ahead of his time, he would

probably have been a close friend of Bishop Berkley, another deep philosopher.

Blackstone, despite his eccentricities as a recluse, did not remain single all his life. He frequently made journeys to Boston, riding on a bull, and finally won the hand of Sarah Stevenson, the widow of John Stevenson. In 1659, they were married by Governor Endicott, Blackstone preferring a magistrate to a minister of the Boston Church to which he would not join. Mrs. Stevenson already had one son named John, and when she gave the name John to the son of her second marriage, she caused much later confusion of records. John Stevenson, Blackstone's stepson, was given 50 acres of Blackstone's 200 acre farm at Study Hill after the latter's death. The other son, John Blackstone, became somewhat dissipated for a while, squandering his heritage of land, but he finally settled down to a respectable life in Branford, Connecticut, where his descendants acquired a high place in public esteem. There is an unsubstantiated report that a grandson of Blackstone's was killed at the siege of Louisburg.

Mrs. Blackstone died in 1673, two years before her husband, and both were buried at the foot of Study Hill, where, in 1836, two rude stones marked their graves. The personal estate of Blackstone was meager, being but forty pounds. He had never ac-

quired a great amount of money, but his simple tastes and his mental tranquillity were never disturbed by a lean larder.

Stephen Hopkins, writing for the *Providence Gazette*, said: "Mr. Blackstone used frequently to come to Providence to preach the Gospel." This, however, was when he was quite old. He could not walk easily and again used a bull in these journeys. Though a radical in the eyes of many of the old, he was much beloved by the children to whom he used to bring sweet apples, the first they had ever seen, from his orchard at Study Hill. Governor Hopkins, again writing of Blackstone, in 1765, said: "Many of the trees which he planted about 150 years ago are still pretty, thrifty fruit-bearing trees."

This, then, is the story of William Blackstone, the first white inhabitant of Boston, and later of Rhode Island. A keen thinker, a true apostle of the highest religion, of rugged character and unflinching purpose, he maintained his ideals in the face of obstacles to which a weaker man might have succumbed. A truly great man of God, despite his eccentricities, he may well be proudly hailed by Rhode Island as her first settler. A friend of Roger Williams, of the Massachusetts magistrates, and of the Indian chieftains, Massasoit and Miantanomi, he held to his inspired conception of tolerance unto his death.



A Great Colonial Architect

DURING the "Golden Age of Newport," that brilliant period in the cultural history of Rhode Island, there were many who helped the little seaport and social resort to gain real prestige in the fields of literature, philosophy, and art. The years of commercial success had brought to Newport that degree of wealth which, through its creation of a leisure class, often proves to be a fertile ground for the seeds of intellectual and artistic advancement. In 1729, Newport was wealthy and was adding yearly to her material riches. Thus, when George Berkeley, Dean of Derry, brought his idealistic philosophy to Newport in that year, he found the town ready to respond wholeheartedly to any cultural stimuli. Although the Dean remained in Rhode Island only three years, his influence extended far into the century. This was the beginning of the "Golden Age." Worthy successors to Berkeley held to the intellectual and artistic standards he started until the Revolution. There were leaders in all fields.

As patrons of art and architecture there were Henry Collins and Abraham Redwood; as painters, there were John Smibert (who came with Berkeley), Robert Feke, Samuel King, Cosmo Alexander, and Gil-

bert Stuart; as men of letters and theology, there were James Honyman, Isaac Touro, Samuel Hopkins, Ezra Stiles, John Comer, John Callender, and Nathaniel Clap; as men of science, there were Dr. Thomas Mofatt, Dr. Thomas Brett (a graduate of Leyden), and Dr. William Hunter; and finally, as architects, there were Richard Munday and Peter Harrison. It is of the last two, the architects, of which this brief survey is made.

Richard Munday was a predecessor of Peter Harrison and a worthy one in every respect. Before Peter Harrison had even thought of coming to America, Munday had designed beautiful Trinity Church, and had just finished with the Colony or State House when Harrison arrived. Both of these structures reflect the touch of a master in their perfect proportions. Trinity Church was hailed as the finest example of ecclesiastical architecture in Rhode Island until 1775, the year in which the First Baptist Church in Providence was erected. The Colony House was by far the finest building of its kind in all the Colonies. These, then, were the exceptional public buildings which Peter Harrison found already standing in Newport. He was to add three more of equally fine lines and proportions, of which one was to be called by many the best single example of colonial art in the country.

There is practically no information about the early life of Peter Harrison. He was born in 1716, the son of one Thomas Harrison of Grimston, Yorkshire. However, the name, Harrison, was as common in Yorkshire as Smith now is in America, and in the county there were no less than five towns named Grimston. We do know, however, that his mother was Elizabeth Dennison, a descendant of the great house of Roxburghe, and the old *Connecticut Journal* commended his lineage by stating that "in point of family [he was] second perhaps to very few in America." Peter, himself, later married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward Pelham, Jr., of Newport, then the owner of the Old Stone Mill and "of the same family as the late Duke of Newcastle."

Tradition has it that Peter Harrison received a portion of his architectural training by working under Sir John Vanbrugh on the plans for Blenheim House, but, as a matter of fact, it was more probably his brother (who was also an architect). Why Peter Harrison decided to leave the Old World and come to America is a mystery, but, in 1740, he appeared in Rhode Island as "a passenger with Captain Patterson." With him came his brother, Joseph. It is probable that these two came to the Colony as surveyors or draughtsmen, hoping to find plenty of work in settling boundary dis-

putes. Peter gained his first recognition in that capacity by drawing up a plan of Cape Breton which facilitated its capture in 1745. Later, aided by his brother, Joseph, he made "a handsome draught of Fort George and the harbor of Newport." With this piece of work the General Assembly was so pleased, that its members voted to present him with a piece of plate, valued at £75. In 1750, Peter made new plans of the fort and harbor by himself, and it is these drawings, preserved in London, that are the only known examples of his craftsmanship in existence. In all this early work, as in his architectural plans, he showed an Old World finish that was unique in colonial times.

Both the brothers, after drifting about for a number of years, settled in Newport. Despite the era of wealth and culture, there was little opportunity for them to earn a living by their talents, and they were forced to become merchants. Their advertisement offered "a variety of European goods, just imported and to be Sold at their Store near the wharf of Captain John Brown." This stock certainly was varied, for it ranged from "black Sagathee" to "oyinions."

Peter Harrison came into a lot of valuable Newport property through his marriage, and an especially fine section, located on the Neck, was long known as Harrison

Farm. Here the potential architect turned farmer, becoming an expert in agriculture and selling as much as £175 worth of produce a year. Harrison Avenue takes its name from this farm.

Occasionally Peter Harrison made trading voyages and always kept well informed on maritime matters. He received the ambiguous title of "Captain" and enjoyed somewhat of a reputation as an authority on ship-building. He records, in one of his diaries, that he even "sought out Leviathan" in his "whale Sloope, Jenkins, master." When difficulties arose in connection with the operation of the first lighthouse at the mouth of Newport Harbor, it was Peter Harrison who corrected its faults and put it in good running order.

Joseph Harrison returned to England in 1755 in hopes of bettering his condition, but he came back to New England twice more, once, in 1760, as Collector of Customs at New Haven and again, in 1764, as Collector at Boston. When he left New Haven he prevailed upon the authorities to give his position to his brother, Peter, and, in 1766, the latter became the Collector of Customs for New Haven.

The acceptance of a royal post was a fatal move for Peter Harrison to make, and it led him indirectly to his death. With the advent of the Revolution, the full hatred of

the people turned upon all Crown officers, and Peter Harrison was no exception. It is true that he was a staunch loyalist, reputed even by his friends as being "preeminent for his loyalty to the King." His position in New Haven became so precarious that he was obliged to leave the town for a time until the fierce agitation had passed. In his absence his house was wantonly looted by an unprincipled mob and his beautiful library and all of his professional papers were destroyed. Such barbarous treatment probably had much to do with hastening his death, for he died only a few days after the Battle of Lexington.

Peter Harrison's architectural work will be remembered forever, but during his life it was only a sideline. His artistic activities fall into two periods with a gap of ten years between them. He collaborated with his elder brother in the designing of Redwood Library in 1748, but in reality it was a case where the brother started the job, made a mess of it, and left it for Peter to finish as best he could. The result was not as good as it might have been had he done the work alone. In 1749, he completed his best piece of work, King's Chapel in Boston, and then went for a decade before designing a new building for Newport, the Jewish Synagogue. In the interior of this building, Harrison's genius was displayed to the full.

Later in the year he finished work on Christ Church in Cambridge, Mass., which was more or less of a replica of King's Chapel in wood. Herein, however, in the organ loft itself is without doubt Harrison's finest single specimen of Georgian architecture. In 1761, he drew the first sketches for the Brick Market House in Newport. He modelled the exterior after the English market houses of the day. As a classic in brick, it is probably unrivalled in the entire country, and the exterior shows Harrison at his best. Just prior to his death he was consulted concerning the construction of a first hall for Dartmouth College, but he died before he had had a chance to develop any plans.

All of Peter Harrison's architecture remains as a monument to him today, although much of it has been sadly misused. In many cases, however, they are now being restored to their original condition, and will be kept as historical shrines for the future. Even in this day he is recognized as a "masterly architect," and he has had a profound influence on architectural art in America. A Rhode Islander by adoption, he has left treasures of Colonial architecture which have never been surpassed.



The "Dr. Johnson" of Narragansett

WHEN Goodwin, the editor of "The MacSparran Diary," in an excellent preface called the distinguished divine of the Narragansett Church a "kind of Dr. Johnson in clerical garb," he made an apt characterization of the Reverend James MacSparran that will doubtless be associated with his name in history always. In the prime of his years, portly of stature, his head covered by a huge wig, this worthy Episcopal churchman with his righteous air of authority and dignity closely resembled Boswell's idol. He typified the finest sort of cultured parish priest, presiding over his somewhat unruly aristocratic flock with ability, firmness, and true religious zeal. Nor did his normal parochial boundaries limit the extent of his ministrations and activities, for he not only aided other parishes and clergymen throughout Rhode Island and Connecticut and sat as an advisor in the ecclesiastical councils of Newport and Boston, but even carried on a constant correspondence with the foremost churchmen of New York and the highest dignitaries of the Church of England.

There is no positive evidence that James MacSparran was born in Dungiven, County

of Derry, Ireland, yet the date of his birth, September 10, 1693, is often associated with that town. It is more probable that he was born in Scotland, as his distinct Scottish lineage suggests, and that he was afterwards brought to Ireland by a favorite uncle. At least he lived in Ireland long enough to acquire the warm heart and the fiery temper so paradoxically characteristic of the sons of Erin, and also became enough of an Irishman to give way occasionally to those delightfully incongruous slips of the tongue known as Irish bulls. Later in his life, when he sent the diplomas of his Master's and Doctor's degrees to be recorded in the parish register of Dungiven, he voiced a desire to have his name "preserved in his native country," a request that would seem to give credence to the more popular theory of his birth.

The name of the MacSparran family, a branch of the MacDonalds of the Isles, supposedly originated from a habit of the founder of the family of wearing a sack-like apron, called a "sporrán," in which he carried money to pay his retainers. Because of this eccentricity, the name MacSparran—Son of the Purse—not only became his clan name but afterwards the surname of his descendants. The MacDonalds resided in the Mull of Kintyre, part of Scotland nearest to Ireland, and Kintore, a recorded Scot-

tish home of the MacSparrans, has probably been misspelled.

The young James MacSparran, whether Irish or Scotch, attended the University of Glasgow, from which, in 1709, he received the degree of Master of Arts. He continued by studying for the Presbyterian ministry and, within a few years, obtained his credentials as a licentiate of the Scotch Presbyterian. Just why he decided to come to America is unknown, but, in 1718, he landed in Boston at a time when Cotton Mather was its religious dictator. The two clashed for some reason, and the young MacSparran left Boston to visit a relative in Bristol.

Inasmuch as the Congregational pulpit was vacant when he arrived in the Rhode Island seaport, he was asked to occupy it on the first Sunday. His physical appearance, brilliant rhetoric, and youthful ardor so impressed the parishioners that they invited him to remain as the regular pastor at a stipend of £100 per annum. Soon, however, a fierce controversy, probably started through jealousy, made him a temporary victim of slander. Although he was partially exonerated in town meeting, his credentials were still questioned, and in 1719 he left for Ireland to obtain their confirmation. His pastorate expected his return the following June, but when, in 1721, he did come back it was not to Bristol and it

was as a presbyter of the Church of England and a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. His only allusion to this change of status appeared in "America Dissected," written in the later years of his life, when he says: "I have great reason to thank God, that I was afflicted and abused by a false charge in my youth, as that opened me a way into the Christian priesthood in the most excellent of all churches." This statement and his long blameless career at Saint Paul's, in Narragansett, eliminates the suspicions originated at Bristol. While in England, in 1720, he had been ordained to the diaconate in the Church of England by the Bishop of London and to the priesthood by the Archbishop of Canterbury, receiving a license from the former to assume his ministerial office in the Province of New England.

He came to Narragansett, but was also commissioned to "officiate, as opportunity shall offer, at Bristol, Freetown, Swansey, and Little Compton, where there are many people, members of the Church of England, destitute of a minister." The parish of Saint Paul in Narragansett, organized fifteen years before his arrival, was practically dissolved, and at his first communion he administered to but seven followers. Yet by 1727 he had built up a congregation of over three hundred members. Like Dean Berke-

ley, who later came often to Narragansett as a guest pastor, he was especially zealous in his ministrations to the Indians and negroes of the vicinity and instructed them regularly each Sunday before his service.

His marriage, in 1722, to Hannah Gardiner, his baptism of Col. Daniel Updike, Attorney-General of the Colony, and the adhesion to the church of Judge Francis Willet were three events which marked the steady rise of his church in social status. Hannah Gardiner, only seventeen at the time of her marriage, was a beautiful and gifted member of a powerful family, allied by marriage to the even more influential Robinson and Hazard families, and the young preacher found himself welcomed and adopted into the highest social circles of the Colony. His young wife possessed exceptional qualities of mind and heart which especially fitted her to be his intimate companion and, in 1755, after her tragic death in London, he writes of her as "the most pious of women, the best of wives in the world."

Early in his ministry, Dr. MacSparran procured land on the east side of what was later known as MacSparran Hill in South Kingston and built the mansion known as Glebe House. It was a spacious, gambrel-roofed structure with a long family room wherein the Sunday services were often

held during the stormy days of winter. In the south wing of the house was the doctor's study and his beloved library.

This home was a veritable shrine of hospitality. Guests were always welcome, even when, as it occasionally happened, as many as nine arrived unexpectedly at dinner time. In the "Great Room" Dean Berkeley was often entertained and John Smibert, the artist, fresh from a sojourn in Italy, who brought the sunshine and culture of that Latin country to the MacSparran home in his fascinating discourses on art and poetry. It was he, too, who later painted portraits of both the Doctor and his charming wife. These two, Berkeley and Smibert, were among the outstanding visitors to this hospitable home, yet many from the parish and social circles of Narragansett always found a welcome at its door.

Doctor MacSparran was a man of diversified temperament, but his virtues were predominant. He despised lay-reading and the preachers who had not been born in Ireland or England, and was rather narrow and bigoted in his belief in the exalted station of his church and his religion. However, his diary reveals him as a very human person, warm-hearted, sincere in his zeal, and faithful both to earthly ties and the greater bond with God. He highly deserved the praise which the University of Oxford

gave him in the form of an honorary doctor's degree in 1736.

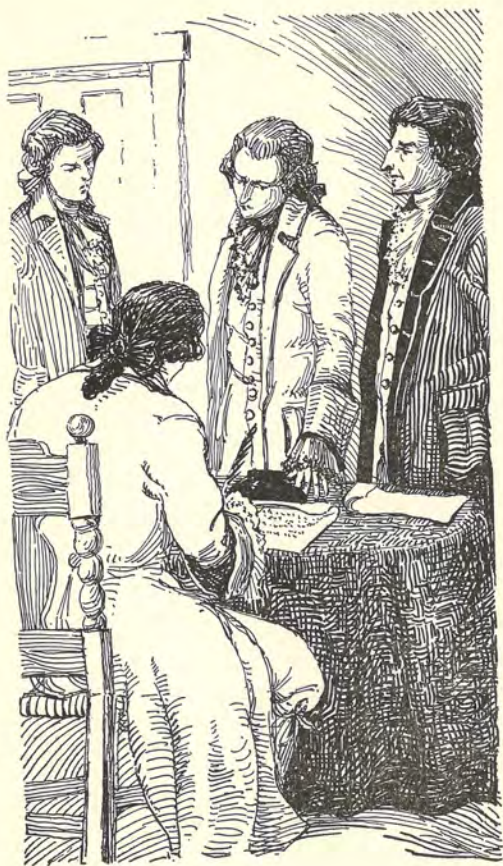
His labors were not entirely confined to religion, for he acquired quite a reputation as a doctor in the medical sense of the term. He worked (when there was need) in the fields along with some of his servants and parishioners and was not above aiding in many kinds of menial labor, although his aristocratic tendencies did not make such occasions too frequent. In 1751 he preached the sermon before the court on Tower Hill, vigorously indicting the murderer, Thomas Carter.

England, which he had left behind, was always in his mind—the promised land to which he hoped to return, and, in 1754, he made a second trip to the British Isles, taking his wife with him and hoping to make some provision for remaining there the rest of his life or for becoming a bishop. The journey was totally disastrous in all respects. There, in London, in 1755, his beloved wife succumbed to smallpox and was buried in the little Broadway Chapel burying ground near Victoria Street in Westminster. He could not gain a place in England and the dignitaries of the church were not yet ready to ordain a bishop in America.

Sad, broken in spirit, and with only the shadow of his former vigor, he returned to his Narragansett parish, dying there about

two years later. And, after the manner of his diary, some kindly hand wrote on the Narragansett Parish Register: "On ye 5th day of December A. D. 1757 ye Rev. Doctor James MacSparran died at his house in South Kingston, who was minister of St. Paul's Church in ye Narragansett for ye space of Thirty Seven years, and was decently interred under ye Communion Table in said Church, on ye sixth day of said month, Much Lamented by his Parishioners and all whom he had Acquaintance with."





A Gentleman of Newport

TO HAVE been a signer of the Declaration of Independence is not in itself a distinction which should entitle a man to fame. That the men who did sign this stirring declaration were distinguished is another matter. William Ellery, Jr., himself, in speaking of the case of another correspondent, who had publicly vindicated his slighted claim of being among the signers, said, "My name is there and, I believe, in every list that has been printed. If it had not been inserted in any of them, I question whether I should have taken the same pains to establish the fact as he has done. I should have left it to others, I believe, to prove it." This evidence of reticence is exceedingly commendable to this sturdy Rhode Islander and should have the effect of making us anxious to know more about him.

The first of the Ellerys settled in Bristol, Rhode Island, near the close of the 17th century. Here William Ellery, Senior, was born in 1701. After graduating from Harvard College in 1722, he took up his residence in Newport, becoming one of its leading merchants and a close friend of such men as Abraham Redwood, Peleg Brown, Nathaniel Kay, Henry Collins, Thomas Hazard, and Abraham Whipple. That he

was a man well-liked in the prosperous and popular seaport was evident, for he was chosen to fill such offices as Judge, Assistant Governor, and Deputy-Governor. His love of civil and religious liberty was the key-note to his whole character.

William, his second son, was born in Newport, December 22, 1727, and lived in that town until 1743, the year in which he, too, entered Harvard College. While little enough is known of his college career, it was there that he acquired his first love for the classics, Greek, Latin, and French, and there he laid the foundation for that tempered philosophy of life that was to be his mark of distinction. Due to the social prominence of his own family in Newport, he was well-received in the social circles of Cambridge. In the four years of study he grew to love both his Alma Mater and the charming society which had adopted him, and Cambridge became his "second" home throughout the rest of his life. After having returned to Newport and established himself as a merchant there, he went back to Cambridge in 1750 to marry Ann Remington, a daughter of one of the justices of the Massachusetts Superior Court. His family life was always very beautiful, for he was a devoted husband and father.

However, this first wife died in 1764, and three years later William Ellery, Jr., mar-

ried again. He engaged in many pursuits in the town of Newport, being at one time Naval Officer of the Colony, but it was not until 1770 that he began to practice law.

William Ellery had no outstanding qualities other than those which ever mark the true gentleman. He was sincere, sound of sense, and thorough in his love of freedom. Although "freedom" was the general demand of all the colonists at that time, his love of liberty was not built upon the shifting sands of public sentiment but upon the firm resolutions deduced from his own reflections and experiences. For that reason he placed his own obligations to uphold liberty as high as those which bound him to his wife and children. He was no dreamer, but believed that rights went hand in hand with duties. Although he joined in the agitation against the Stamp Act, knew the leaders of the movement toward independence, and served on important committees to procure the repeal of oppressive English revenue acts, his active political life did not rightly begin until 1776.

In that year he went to Congress as a delegate from Newport, Rhode Island. On the 14th of May, he, along with Stephen Hopkins of Providence, Rhode Island, became one of that distinguished group of gentlemen who set their signatures after the Declaration of Independence. He real-

ized to the full the responsibility involved in such an act but was cheerfully prepared to face it. While the others came up to affix their signatures, he stood by the side of Secretary Charles Thomas, watching the expressions on their faces, and felt that those sturdy Americans, his compatriots, were equal to the crisis.

From 1771 to 1786 with the exception of the years 1780 and 1782, he remained in Congress. At that time a delegate to Congress did not have any more dignity or power than that which he already held in his own right. Perhaps, because his political career was not in any way extraordinary, not much is known about this period of his life. He served on many committees, the most important being the Marine Committee and the Board of Admiralty of the Navy Department, a board made up of three commissioners and two delegates from Congress, whose duty was to supervise the naval and marine affairs of the young United States.

But a complete knowledge of the political career of William Ellery, Jr., is not necessary to an appreciation of the man himself. He lived a full life outside of politics in which his character was perhaps more truly revealed.

During the years he passed in Congress he kept a minute diary of his journeys

(made on horseback) to and from Washington, noting everything of importance about the inns, roads, fees, and all that happened on the way.

In 1776, after having reached an inn which he and his companions thought might be attacked by the English, he writes: ". . . In the first place, we fortified our stomachs with beef steaks and some strong drink and then went to work to fortify ourselves against an attack. . . . W. E. was so solaced with the beef, etc., that every trace of fear was utterly erased from his imagination, and he slept soundly."

Again, in speaking of the condition of one of these wayside taverns, he notes in his journal: "The room admitted cold air at 1000 chinks, and our narrow bed had on it only one rug and one sheet. We went to bed almost completely dressed, but even that would not do . . . Our fellow lodgers suffered as much as we did; and, if they had read Tristram Shandy's chapter of curses and had remembered it, would have cursed our landlady through his whole category of curses."

But to proceed with a characterization of the man. In person, he was a man of moderate height with a large forehead, well-formed head, and features. His countenance was thoughtful and attentive; his

speech quiet and impressive, and his step measured and slow. His dress was very plain yet becoming, being neither in the extreme mode nor yet old-fashioned for the times. His manners were cordial and delicate without the hindrance of excessive formality.

Besides being a trusted man, intelligible in word and deed, prudent, straight-forward, practical, independent, and consistent, he was also witty, extremely good-humored, an easy conversationalist and a clever satirist. When Congress needed some good wit to ridicule its arrogance or to suppress its useless argument, William Ellery, Jr., was most emphatically required, and more than one bored delegate from another State was not slow to say so. He was not a born speaker and at first was the victim of his own diffidence. However, after repeated efforts to improve himself, he became a good debater if not an orator. Writing, in 1815, of this period of his life, he says: "You have discovered a large bundle of letters, written by me to your father (from Congress). Have mercy upon them! I was a Whig then. Now I am called a Tory. They must be shown to no one. I am afraid they are full of fire. I am glad to find that, having passed through many fiery trials, I am now happy in my tranquil apartment with but little of the inflammability which my

Whiggism excited, but still a staunch friend to political liberty and that liberty with which the Gospel has made us free." He was, in fact, a Whig during the Revolution and a Federalist thereafter.

In 1786 he left Congress and political life. During the war his home had been burned and his family driven back to the mainland. He returned to a Newport whose trade, wealth, and renown had been shattered, and at the age of 60 began business anew, starting out in the closing years of his life to provide for his children. He held the office of Collector of Customs for the District of Newport from 1790 until his death.

After retiring from active participation in politics, he spent a great deal of time writing in behalf of public faith and efficient government, thereby causing much argument and attention. Yet, he soon relinquished even that slight interest in politics. He was an astute theologian, yet advocated no fixed creed. While he was a diligent student of the Bible, a supporter of charity and religious freedom, he belonged to no church, but worshipped with the Congregationalists. "I believe," he said, "If party names were entirely disused, there would be more harmony among Christians."

War he abhorred, although in Congress he recommended that General Greene receive appropriate recognition for his gal-

lant services in the Revolution and, later on, applauded Perry's victory. Yet he was not a hero worshiper for he believed that "money raised for celebration for heroes, where towns were merely trying to outdo each other in splendor, might better be given to the families of the dead or disabled." Referring to Napoleon, in 1812, he writes: "How long this dreadful scourge will be suffered to lay waste and destroy, the Lord only knoweth."

The best and closing years of his life were spent in his beloved literary pursuits. His moderate and well-sustained habits, the result of self-discipline, begun late in his life, carried him in full vigor to the end of his life when he died, in 1820, at the age of ninety-three.

Modest, composed, retrospective, a man beloved of the young and old, strong in his beliefs yet open-minded, he was not content with superficiality in either his most personal or impartial opinions and research and typified always the splendid type of quiet-tempered and cultured gentleman who is a joy and an asset to any generation or century.

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