

The Bunker Hill Celebration.

The material and outward part of the great Boston celebration of June 17th, 1875 was the procession and review of the militia. Being almost exclusively a militia celebration of a militia battle, we have placed the account in our National Guard columns where it belongs. The really important part of the day's doings is found recorded in the speeches of the representative men, soldiers and citizens at the various banquets given to visiting bodies, and it is worthy of remark that the best speech of the day was made by an ex-soldier, and that the distinctions of the day were largely accorded to soldiers of the late war, whether from the North or South. The speech of the day was that of General Devens, an effort by no means unworthy to be classed with the previous orations of Webster and Everett. As far as the occasion goes it was even more suitable, for it was mainly devoted to a review of the battle, its immediate causes, and its conduct, tactical and strategic. In this respect it excelled the previous efforts of orators, which from the necessity of the case were principally indiscriminate laudations of America, clothed in gorgeous rhetoric, and reviewing the political aspects of the Revolution. From this indirect comparison with previous efforts, General Devens wisely abstained. He could have gained nothing, and might have lost much. In the review of the military aspects of the case, he was more competent than either of the previous orators, from education and experience; and to that he principally confined himself. In that light his oration was a splendid effort.

Of course, on such an occasion and addressing an audience of Bostonians proud of their native place and its famous battle, the speaker was led into some laudation that will hardly bear the test of stern and impartial investigation. Had he spoken solely as a military critic, unbiassed by the feelings of an American, his work might have been more trustworthily for the impartial historian, but would hardly have been fitted for an oration. The orator necessarily appears in the light of an advocate, and what his speech loses in value as a critical review, it gains in glow and fervor, the antiquarian search after truth being commonly very dry.

He speaks of the redoubt and breastwork at Bunker Hill as being almost unconnected, and in the same speech tells of the British *enfilading the breastwork*, in this third attack, with artillery fire, when a reference to the plans of the battle will show that to have enfiladed the breastwork artillery must have executed a grand sweep to the left and in rear of the redoubt, isolating the latter and attacking on a new face. The real fact is, that every plan ever published of the battle of Bunker Hill comes from but one source, a map executed by Lieutenant Page of the British Engineers, who was on Howe's staff, and who made his plan on the ground. This map was first published in Frothingham's "Siege of Boston," and has only been stolen and altered by other writers. This map shows a clear line of defence, the redoubt being the salient to a nearly perfect right angle stretching back to the Mystic River. It was the *re entering line*, which connected the redoubt and the rail fence, that was enfiladed by artillery in the third assault, and it was the cross fire at the *re entering angle* that made the horrible slaughter of the British.

On the point of numbers on the American side he follows the two easy assumption of most American writers on the subject, except Frothingham. This assumption is, that though there were killed and wounded

from so many regiments, only small parties of those regiments were present. Frothingham, from contemporary private letters shows the presence of the colonels of almost all the regiments and many other officers, and we must remember that their is always in all troops a disposition to understate their own forces and exaggerate those of the enemy. There never was made an official report of the battle from the American side, for there was no one commander there. The estimates of numbers on the American side, in every history, are confessedly made on the vaguest surmises, with no official foundation.

We have condensed the oration of General Devens, giving only the historical part relating to the battle. It has been a labor of love for the benefit of our hardworked Army officers on the Plains, who see no dalices, and naturally wish to hear of the doings at home, while they are slaving away their lives in hard work and danger.

General Devens, once colonel of the Fifteenth Mass., afterwards a division commander in the Eleventh Army Corps, is now on the Massachusetts Bench. His Gettysburg speech at the New Haven Army Reunion, will be remembered by all Army officers. The General's delivery is, even outside of the matter of his speech, unexceptionable, being graceful and impassioned in action and accompanied by a voice of great compass and power, fully adequate to the calls made upon it for emphasis and expression. After welcoming the individual parts of the great gathering the orator proceeded to a review of the causes of the American Revolution, in which he trod well known ground, and advanced rapidly to the consideration of the immediate provocation to the battle itself, saying:

The occupation of Bunker Hill was resolved on at the suggestion of the Committee of Safety of Massachusetts, made with a knowledge that General Gage was about to take possession of the heights of Charlestown, and on the evening of the 16th of June the force destined for this formidable movement assembled upon the Common, at Cambridge. It consisted of some seven hundred or eight hundred men, drawn from the regiments of Prescott, Frye and Bridge, and some two hundred men of Connecticut, from the regiment of Putnam, under Captain Thomas Knowlton, the whole under the command of Colonel William Prescott. As they formed for their march, Langdon, the President of Harvard College, came from his study and implored the blessing of God upon their unknown and dangerous expedition.

It was nine o'clock in the evening as the detachments with Prescott at their head moved from Cambridge. On arriving at Charlestown a consultation was held, in which it is believed that Putnam and perhaps Pomeroy joined, and it was determined to fortify Breed's Hill, not then known by the distinctive name it has since borne. Connected with Bunker Hill by a high ridge, these two eminences might not improperly be considered as peaks of the same hill, and for the same purpose of annoyance to the British at Boston Breed's Hill was better adapted.

Together they traverse a large portion of the peninsula of Charlestown, which connected to the main land by a narrow neck and broadening as it approaches Boston, is washed on the northern side by the Mystic and on the eastern and southern by the Charles River. As the line of retreat to the Neck, which was the only approach, was long, Breed's Hill could not be safely held

however without fortifying Bunker Hill also.

At midnight the work on the redoubt began, and at dawn the intronchments, as they were discovered by the British fleet in Charles River, which opened upon them at once, were about six feet high. Well sheltered within them the men, under a terrific cannonade from the ships and floating batteries aided by a battery on Copp's Hill opposite, continued to labor at the works until about 11 o'clock, when they were substantially finished. At about this time General Putnam reached the field, and recommended that the intrenching tools be sent to Bunker Hill, where he directed the throwing up of a breastwork, which, in the confusion of the day, was never completed.

Oppressed by their severe labor, the terrific heat and their want of water and provisions, some urged upon Prescott that he should send to General Ward that they might be relieved, but this he resolutely refused, saying that the men who had raised the works were best able to defend them. At Cambridge, however, much anxiety prevailed, and Gen. Ward, who was of opinion that Gen. Gage must attack at once, and would make his principal attack at Cambridge; was unwilling to weaken the main army until his intentions should be developed, but yielding partially to the energetic remonstrances of the Committee of Safety through Mr. Richard Devens, consented to order to Charlestown the regiments of Stark and Read, which were under his control.

The consultation at Boston, begun at the announcement made by the cannonade from the British ship, was spirited and long. It was the opinion of Sir Henry Clinton that troops should be landed at the Neck and the evidently small force upon the hill then taken in reverse would easily be captured. But this plan had been rejected by General Gage, as the force thus landed might be placed between two forces of the enemy, in violation of the military axiom that troops should be compelled to deal only with an enemy in front. While the rule is sound, its application to this case might well be doubted, as by concentrating the fire of the British ships and batteries it would have been impossible that any organized force could have crossed the Neck had the British forces been landed near this point, and thus imprisoned the Americans in the Peninsula. To attack the works in front, to carry them by main force, to show how little able the rabble that manned them were to compete with the troops of the king, and to administer a stern rebuke that should punish severely those actually in arms and admonish those whose loyalty was wavering, was more in accordance with the spirit that prevailed in the British army. Its officers were smarting under the disgraceful retreat from Lexington and Concord, and would not yet believe that they had before them foemen worthy of their steel.

It was soon after 12 o'clock when the troops commenced their movements from the No. 1 Battery, and Long Wharf of Boston, landing at one o'clock, without molestation, at the extreme point of the peninsula known as Moulton's Point. On arriving, Major General Howe, by whom they were commanded, finding the work more formidable than he had anticipated, determined to send for reinforcements. This delay was unwise, for the interval, although it brought him additional troops, proved of far more advantage to the Americans.

When the news of the actual landing arrived at Cambridge a considerable body of Massachusetts troops were ordered toward Charlestown, while General Putnam