

THE REV. AMOS ADAMS, A.M.
(1728-1775)

PATRIOT MINISTER

OF ROXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

AND HIS AMERICAN ANCESTRY

BY

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THE PARSONAGE OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN ROXBURY, MASS., 1912

All civic virtues, all the heroism and self-sacrifice of patriotism, spring ultimately from the habit men acquire of regarding their nation as a great organic whole, identifying themselves with its fortunes in the past as in the present, and looking forward anxiously to its future destinies.

WILLIAM E. H. LECKY

History of England in the Eighteenth Century

The Rev. Amos Adams, A. M.

On the sole evidence of an ancient heraldic parchment-roll of the time of Charles I, the pedigree of the Adams family has been traced from a certain nobleman named Ap Adam, who "came out" of the marches or borders of Wales into Devonshire about the middle of the thirteenth century.

Henry Adams (first), of the sixteenth generation from Ap Adam, was the great-great grandfather of John Adams, second President of the United States, and also of the Rev. Amos Adams of Roxbury, Mass. Henry Adams came over from England about the year 1633, with his eight sons and daughter Ursula, and settled at Mount Wollaston, afterwards Braintree, where he was allotted forty acres of land by the Boston authorities. He was, we are told, a yeoman and maltster, a plain, unpretentious man of tact and good ability. He died at Braintree, October 6, 1646.

Lieutenant Henry Adams, (second), (great grandfather of the Rev. Amos Adams,) born in England, 1604, came to this country in 1633. He married at Braintree, Mass., November 17, 1643, Elizabeth, daughter of Moses Paine. In 1646 he became a resident of Medfield, at that time a part of Dedham, but incorporated as a separate town in 1650. Lieutenant Henry Adams was the first town clerk of Braintree and also of Medfield. He was a representative to the general court four years, a member of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, and the chief military officer, as well as a selectman, of Medfield. In the Medfield town records we find this item: "Henrie Adams was slaine by ye Indians, Feb. 21, 1675-6."

The circumstances of this event seem to warrant a somewhat detailed account, derived from various sources.

During King Philip's War, on the morning of Monday, February 21, 1676, Samuel Morse of Medfield arose very

early, and going to the barn to feed his cows, discovered an Indian hidden in the hay. With rare presence of mind, he affected ignorance of the latter's presence, and hurriedly turning out his cattle, hastened with his family to the garrison. On his way thither, he saw the flames arise from his burning buildings.¹

Then were heard the yells of some three hundred cruel savages, the shouts of alarmed settlers and the rattle of musketry on the early morning air. The Indians, upon a given signal, started fires in all parts of the town. While many of the inhabitants were able to reach the garrison, where thirty soldiers were stationed, eighteen persons were shot down, as they rushed from their houses.

We quote here from "The old Indian Chronicle," p. 214: "The Town of Medfield was begirt with a Regiment of resolute Indians, who assail'd it so briskly that maugred [in spite of] all the Resistance made by Capt. Jacobbs, who was then Ingarrisoned there with a hundred Souldiers for its security, the enraged Heathens never desisted their desperate attempts, Battering the Walls, and powering Showers of Arrows into the Bosome of the Town, [until] they had distroyed about 50 of her Inhabitants, and burnt 30 of her Houses."

Lieutenant Henry Adams, a prominent citizen who was said to have been somewhat "severe against the praying Indians," and who commanded the train-band of one hundred men, was killed at his own door.

Besides the train-band and a foot-company of eighty men under Captain John Jacob, of Hingham, twenty horsemen, commanded by Lieutenant Edward Oakes, were quartered in the village. The main guard, posted near the meeting-house, fired a cannon several times, and

¹ Samuel Morse, a son of Samuel the emigrant, was a younger brother of Joseph Morse, who married Hannah Philips in Watertown, September 1, 1638. Their third child, Sarah Morse, married, at Sudbury, Mass., March 13, 1660-1, Deacon Nathaniel Lawrence, of Groton. She was therefore the great-great grandmother of Amos Lawrence.

this aroused the towns-people, who had fancied themselves secure, in the presence of the armed forces assembled for their protection.

Soon after the assault, the wife of Henry Adams, Elizabeth Paine Adams, who had taken refuge in the house of the minister, Rev. John Wilson, Jr., was killed while lying in bed in her chamber, by the accidental discharge of a musket in the hands of Capt. Jacob The people had ample warning, for a few days before the attack, Indians were seen on Mount Nebo, about a mile eastward of the town, and on Noon Hill, to the south, and the Rev. Mr. Wilson had charged his parishioners to be vigilant against surprise. On their retreat, the red men burned a bridge in the south-west part of the town, and retired, to enjoy a barbecue and revel in savage glee on a neighboring hill. The Rev. Daniel Clarke Sanders, D.D., in a sermon preached at Medfield, January 5, 1817, stated that King Philip himself was seen on that occasion, riding upon a black horse, and exulting in the havoc he was making.

Henry Adams, (third), grandfather of Rev. Amos Adams, and seventh child of the preceding, born at Medfield, November 15, 1657, was the first town treasurer. He also served as selectman eighteen years, and as representative to the General Court during several sessions. He likewise held the office of town-clerk for a considerable period. He married, December 19, 1679, Prudence, daughter of John F. and Elizabeth Adams (Harding) Frary, a woman of sterling traits, and "cherished memory." He died in 1733, and his widow survived until February 20, 1750.

Henry Adams, (fourth), youngest child of the above, and father of the Rev. Amos Adams, was born at Medfield, May 24, 1702. He married August 15, 1726, Jemima, daughter of Hon. Joshua and Elizabeth (Penniman)

Morse, of Medfield. Like his forebears, he was a selectman, and was also appointed Coroner for Massachusetts Bay by King George III in 1743. His Bible, published in Edinburgh, Scotland, became the property of his great-grandson, Henry S. Adams, of Paola, Miami County, Kansas. Henry Adams died in 1782, and his wife Jemima died February 15, 1785.

The Rev. Amos Adams, A.M., (eldest of eleven children of Henry Adams, Esq., and Jemima Morse Adams; and great-grand-father of William Richards Lawrence, Amos Adams Lawrence and Susanna Lawrence Mason,) was born in Medfield, Mass., September 1, 1728. Of his boyhood we have no particulars, but his early education was probably received in the schools of his native town. At the age of twenty, he entered Harvard, being next to the oldest of the thirty-two members of his Class. A careful examination of the records of the College Faculty during the years 1748-1752, reveals the fact that his name does not appear in the long list of students who were fined or otherwise disciplined for divers misdemeanors. From this negative evidence it appears that his conduct during his college course was exemplary. His name is to be found, under date of October 10, 1748, in a list of Freshmen who received Hebrew grammars, "by vote of the President and Tutors." Amos Adams graduated at Harvard in 1752 and later received the degree of Master of Arts. At a meeting of the First Parish, of Roxbury, Mass., holden February 28, 1753, the congregation unanimously approved the choice of Mr. Amos Adams as pastor.

It was voted, moreover, to give him as a settlement 1200 pounds, old tenor, being £400 for each year, for three years, and "£90 as a Sallery, with 20 cords of wood, and that the loose money put into the box be annually granted, so soon as he shall settle with us and have a family."¹

¹ WALTER ELIOT THWING, *History of the First Church in Roxbury, Mass.*

Mr. Adams did not long delay his compliance with these terms. For on September 12, 1753 he was admitted to full Communion and ordained pastor. And on October 18, following, he married Elizabeth, fifth child of Deacon Henry and Elizabeth (Rand) Prentiss, of Cambridge, Mass. They had eight children, of whom the youngest, Sarah, was born at Roxbury, March 26, 1769. She married Giles Richards, at Pepperell, Mass., October 6, 1789, and their eldest child, Sarah Richards, (who was born in Boston, July 25, 1790,) married Amos Lawrence, June 6, 1811.¹ The first wife of Amos Adams died August 10, 1769, (soon after the birth of her daughter Sarah,) and he married (2) February 15, 1770, the widow, Abigail Mears, who survived but a short time.

Mr. Adams married (3) July 16, 1771, Sarah, the youngest child of the Rev. Charles Chauncy, D.D., of Boston. She died at Cambridge, Mass., in July, 1799. During a pastorate of twenty-two years Mr. Adams ministered faithfully and acceptably to his people, and was favorably known in the Community. As his family grew larger, he found his salary insufficient, and was constrained to ask that it be increased. In a letter to the members of his church, under date of March 29, 1762, he wrote: "would it not be hard, in so antient and able a parish as this, to be obliged to live in a pinching manner, and notwithstanding, be unable to lay up anything for my family? Forgive the Tho't; I am persuaded you are unwilling this should ever be the Case." In consideration of the prevalent high cost of provisions, the parish voted to give their pastor an additional £10, and £16 for firewood. Owing to his ability as an orator, it was natural that Mr. Adams should be prominent on public occasions. He preached the Artillery Election Sermon in 1759. And in the Harvard College Book, No. 7, is the following entry: "At a meeting

¹ Further particulars regarding the Adams and Richards families may be found in the writer's volume, "The Descendants of Major Samuel Lawrence." pp. 29-40.

of the Trustees of the Dudleian Lecture, Oct. 3, 1769, the Sd Trustees now brought in their written Votes for the Person that should preach the next Dudleian Lecture, viz.; on the Second Wednesday of May next, the fourth Lecture on the Validity of Presbyterian ordination; whence it appeared that the Rev. Amos Adams of Roxbury was chosen to preach Sd Lecture." This he did, styling his discourse "Diocesan Episcopacy." The manuscript of this address is preserved in the College Library.

Mr. Adams was noted for his energetic and faithful discharge of the various duties which devolved upon him during the trying period before the Revolution. He never wavered in his patriotism and it was said of him that "he could both pray and preside at meetings of the townspeople and militia." While regarded as an accomplished and forcible preacher, his great plainness of speech sometimes occasioned resentment, which the length of his discourses did not tend to abate. "To speak with such pitiless directness against each human sin, must occasionally make the hearer feel that the preacher is unpleasantly personal." Mr. Adams was steadfast in his principles, and conspicuous for unselfish devotion in striving to cheer and comfort his people in those days of gloom and anxiety. And what more could any man do? Who more deserving of honor than such a patriot? Until the outbreak of the war, he occupied, with his family, the parsonage, on the north side of Eliot Square, which was built in 1750. A bronze tablet placed upon the house in 1905 by the Sons of the Revolution, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, bears the following inscription:

"This tablet marks the site of the house built by the Rev. Oliver Peabody, for the Parsonage of the First Church; occupied by the Rev. Amos Adams, patriot minister of the Church; Chaplain in the Continental

Army; Scribe of the convention of ministers at Watertown, whose appeal to the people was for war. . . . For more than a century and a half the abode of high ideals in learning, patriotism, and righteousness.”

Upon the beginning of the Siege of Boston, Mr. Adams and his family were obliged to leave the parsonage, which was then occupied by General John Thomas as his headquarters. Meeting House Hill was an important strategic point, and the church was used as a signal station by the soldiers. No religious services could be held there while the British forces were in Boston. The meeting-house was a prominent target for their artillery, and suffered considerable damage therefrom. The pews and bell had been removed, and the Communion Service was carried to Medfield by Mr. Adams. The brave, militant pastor, whose people were widely dispersed by the exigencies of warfare, served as chaplain of the ninth regiment of the Continental Army. He regarded the soldiers who were stationed in the neighborhood, as his parishioners, and ministered to them unweariedly. His zeal in this service overtaxed his strength. The fatigue and exposure of preaching to the soldiers in the open air, in addition to his usual parochial work, rendered him the more susceptible to an attack of typhus fever, then prevailing as an epidemic. His death occurred October 5, 1775. In the Meeting-House of the First Parish, at Roxbury, a memorial tablet bears the following inscription;

AMOS ADAMS

Scholar, Patriot, Man of God

Led his flock through stormy days preceding the
Revolution.

Reproved, rebuked, exhorted, with all long-
suffering and doctrine.

Death came from exposure in preaching to the
army in front of the church.

Born 1728 Ordained 1753 Died 1775

About a dozen of Mr. Adams' sermons were published. Following are the titles of some of the more important ones:

- I. The Expediency and Utility of War, in the present State of Things, Considered.

A DISCOURSE
Before, and at the
Desire of the
Ancient and Honourable
Artillery Company
at Boston.
June 4, 1759.

- II. Songs of Victory directed by human Compassion, and qualified with Christian Benevolence.

A SERMON
Delivered at Roxbury,
October 25, 1759.

On the general Thanksgiving for the Success of His Majesty's Arms, more particularly in the Reduction of Quebec, the Capital of Canada.

Extracts from the above-named Sermon.

"It is not unlawful for a people to rejoice when God has given them Victory over their Enemies. . . . It is so far from being sinful to rejoice in the Ruin and Downfall of an unreasonable and implacable enemy, that 'tis our Duty to praise God when we are able to set our Feet upon their Necks. . . . [But] we must not be glad when our Enemies fall, merely from the Hope and Desire of enriching ourselves with their Spoils."

III. Religious Liberty an invaluable Blessing.

Illustrated in two Discourses

Preached at Roxbury, Dec. 3, 1767.

Being the Day of general Thanksgiving.

IV. A concise, historical View of the perils, hardships, difficulties, and discouragements, which have attended the planting and progressive improvements of New England; with a particular account of its long and destructive wars, expensive expeditions, etc. with reflections, principally moral and religious.

Two Discourses Preached at Roxbury on the General Fast, April 6, 1769, and published at the general Desire of the Hearers.

Republished in London, Eng; 1770.

[In manuscript]

V. Diocesan Episcopacy, as Founded upon the Supposed Episcopacy of Timothy and Titus.

A SERMON

preached at

Harvard College.

May 9th, 1770.

At the Lecture Founded

By the Hon. Paul Dudley, Esq.

By Amos Adams, A.M., one of the Trustees of said Lecture.

- VI. A Sermon upon the Death of Mrs. Lucy Dudley, Relict of the Honourable Paul Dudley, Esq.; who died October 24, 1756, Aet. 72.

Preached at Roxbury, October 31, 1756.

Boston. Printed and Sold by Edes and Gill.

- VII. A Sermon preached at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. Samuel Kingsbury to the Pastoral Care of the Church at Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard, November 25, 1761.

Boston, New England. Printed by J. Draper, 1762.

- VIII. A Sermon preached at the Ordination of the Reverend John Wyeth to the Pastoral Care of the Third Church in Gloucester, February 5, 1766. By Amos Adams, A.M. Pastor of the First Church in Roxbury.

James III, I. "My Brethren, be not many Teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater Condemnation."

Boston. New England. Printed by Richard and Samuel Draper. 1766.

- IX. The only Hope and Refuge of Sinners, and a Strong Consolation for the Heirs of Promise, pointed out in a Sermon preached at Roxbury, February 22, 1767. "Turn ye to the Strong Hold, ye Prisoners of Hope."

Boston. N. E. Printed and Sold by Kneeland and Adams at their Printing-Office in Milk Street. MDCCLXVII.

X. Ministerial Affection, recommended in a Sermon preached at Roxbury, October 25, 1769, at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. Caleb Prentice.

2 Cor. VI., 11. "O ye Corinthians, our heart is enlarged."

Boston, New England. Printed by Thomas and John Fleet. 1769.

From the *New England Chronicle* or *Essex Gazette*, October 12, 1775.

"Last Thursday morning, after a short Illness, died at Dorchester, the Rev. Amos Adams, Pastor of the First Church of Christ in Roxbury, in the 48th Year of his Age, and the 23d of his Ministry. In this Gentleman were united the obliging Friend, the affectionate Husband, and the indulgent Parent.

Having in early life devoted himself to the Work of the Ministry, he laboured in it to the last with unabating Vigour.

He was fervent in Devotion, and his Discourses, always animated by a lively and expressive Action, were calculated to warm the Heart and persuade the Judgment; nor was he less remarkable for the Pathos with which he uttered divine Truths, than for his Sincere and Stedfast Principles, unwearied Industry, universal Benevolence, and an amiable Disposition. As he lived, so he died, the Ornament of Religion and Friend of Mankind."

