Washington in Christ Church, Cambridge

By SAMUEL F. BATCHELDER

"AS to the moral state of the Camp it is bad; I see no kind of seriousness; but on the contrary my ears are filled with the most shocking oaths, and imprications; and the tremendous name of the great God is taken on the most trifling occasions.—As to the preaching I am not able to judge. I heard Mr. Gordon last Sabbath and have not attended to our Chaplain; but from what I can guess, from his conversation etc., I shall be disappointed if it is of the best kind. Mr. Spring and Mr. Fish of Upton are here; indeed the Camp abound with Clergymen, many of whom are very boon companions." These are the opinions of Mr. James Cogswell, expressed in a letter from Camp in Roxbury, June 15, 1775. Conditions in the Cambridge Camp were probably about of a muchness. Efforts were not wanting, it is true, to attend to the religious needs of a citizen-soldiery accustomed to a plentiful diet of hot Calvinism. "Parson Boardman," writes a member of Captain Chester's company, who occupied Christ Church at the time of Bunker Hill, "Stands Chaplain for us." The orderly books of the Camp that have been preserved give ample proofs of the good intentions of the commander: June 7, 1775, "All officers to see that their men attend upon prayers morning and evening, also their service on the Lord's [day] with their arms ready to march on an alarm, that no drums beat after the parson is on the stage, and the men immediately attend." This has an open-air flavor; in fact, Lieutenant Colonel Storrs of Mansfield, Connecticut, notes in his diary "June 4, Lord's Day. Heard Mr. Leonard our Chaplain on the common." Mr. Leonard was a parson of no small ability. Washington writes to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut, whence Leonard had come, that "his departure will be a loss. His general conduct has been exemplary and praiseworthy; in discharging the duties of his office, active and industrious; he has discovered himself a warm and steady friend to his country, and taken great pains to animate the soldiers, and impress them with the important rights we are contending for." The gloomy opinions of Mr. Cogswell, already quoted, evidently must not be taken too generally.

The meetinghouse then stood about on the site of Dane Hall. It was the center of the grand parade ground, and the commanding officer of the picket guard is warned to "be particularly careful that no damage be done" it. It was used no doubt to a certain extent. In the following February we get a glimpse of it through the driving snow of a winter dawn. "The Officers commanding at No. 1 and No. 2 are directed after they turn out at Reveille that they march their men to Prayers at the Meeting house in Cambridge." Number one was at about the site of the Riverside Press. Number two was a little way down Putnam Avenue, on a gentle rise of land.

As to the form of services used at these occasions I cannot do better than to attempt a translation of part of a journal kept by a lively Gaul during a tour of the United States in 1777, the original of which is still preserved in the Royal

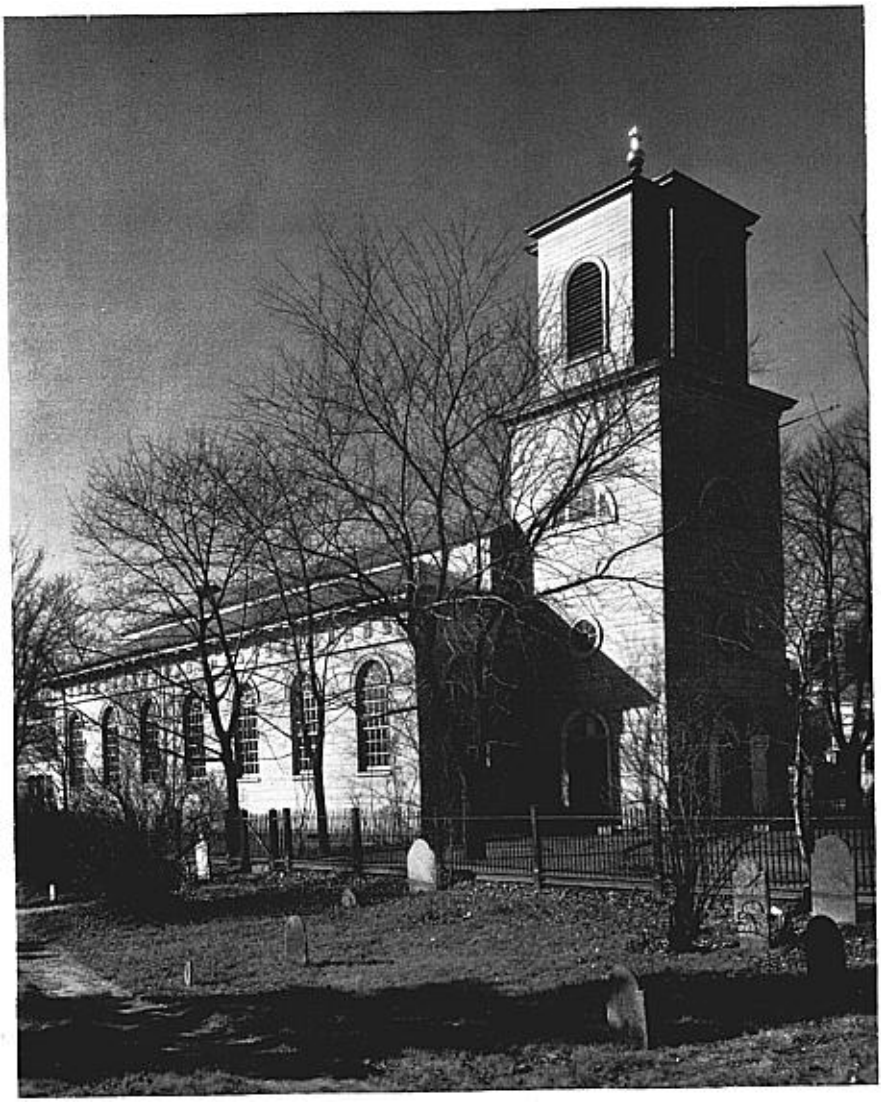
Library at Paris. "Imagine an oblong building, most usually without a vestibule, pierced with windows enough to light the interior, two or three doors on the sides with steps for ascending to the height of the main floor, a belfry with a most attenuated spire most remarkably ornamented stuck on the back end of the building, the ceiling and inner walls well whitewashed or wainscoted on all four sides, the pews so high that, when seated, you can see neither your neighbors nor the passers, and you have the usual body of the Church and the nave. Now imagine a piece of wainscoting still higher, with candles or lusters hung over a table or pulpit all of a piece, and you have what we call the sanctuary. As to the choir, imagine at one end of the church and in the same pulpit of which I have just spoken, an individual without the least distinction from the rest of those present, seated so as to face the assembly, who intones a line of the Psalms set to English verse, and from the other end the company, who answers him antiphonally to the end of the psalm. That is about all of the service, and really nothing is more impressive than that noble majestic simplicity; but as one must always pay tribute somehow to human frailty, when one, two, or three men of the same zeal as the Intoner, or often when he himself has sung a certain number of Psalms, behind a piece of woodwork which looks like a mere ornament, at the place where it seems to finish you see all at once, without knowing how nor whence he got in, a personage in black with a huge wig, who has the perfect get-up of an attorney-general. He starts off to harangue the meeting hotly, and for ¾ hour or more, without a pause, a cough, a spit, nor a blow of his nose improvises or reads a discourse on the gospel and its morals, often very fine and very well conceived, and often also as fanatical as some of ours. When he has ended, or feels himself ready to stop, at a sign apparently understood between himself and one of his hearers, he stops a moment, and a man comes holding a sort of long fish-pole, at the end of which is hung the square cap of the preacher, which he offers to everyone, recommending the orator to their generosity. When his hunt, successful or not, is done, he retires to his place and signals the Chaplain to go on, which he does not by any means do, I suspect, without having taken due regard to the number of hands which have been stretched out to overshadow the cap, and the discourse ends accordingly sooner or later. At the moment when you fancy he is to regain his breath or to collect new matter for the peroration you are mightily astonished to find he is gone without your seeing him go, so smoothly and so suddenly has he disappeared."[1]

Whether Christ Church was used by the Continentals for services seems extremely doubtful. After Captain Chester's company moved out of it and before the arrival of Price's riflemen on August 9 there may have been a time when it was not in use as a barrack. To this time may belong the order of August 5 in Henshaw's orderly book. "The Church to be cleaned out forthwith, as the Rev. Mr. Doyle will perform divine services therein tomorrow morning at ten o'clock." Whether this use of the word *Church* is an intentional differentiation from the rest of the references to the meeting-house, or means the same thing, might be

[1] "Journal of a Tour in the U. S. by a Frenchman, 1777," copied from the original in the Bibliotheque du Roi, Paris, 1841, by Jared Sparks.

decided if we knew the tenets of the Reverend Mr. Doyle. As this reference to him seems to be his only entrance upon the stage of history, however, we are left in misty uncertainty. This uncertainty is not decreased by a reference in Fogg's orderly book to the unlawful act of "keeping Lieut. Craige in the meeting House Guard all night," about the middle of November. The Reverend Winwood Serjeant, last of the anti-Revolutionary rectors of Christ Church, refers in one of his letters, August 3, 1775, to the church being used as a guardhouse; but he wrote from Newburyport and in a state of mind which put the worst possible construction upon all rumors. The use of the Old South in Boston as a riding school for the British Army, however, may have prompted retaliatory measures by the Continentals in Cambridge toward the nearest Royalist Church at hand. It certainly seems unlikely that the real meetinghouse should have been thus degraded. One other bit of evidence is found in a letter from Dr. Caner of King's Chapel, Boston, sent to England with the convoy escorting General Gage, dated October 9, 1775. "Mr. Serjeant indeed as I am informed is returned to his church and officiates in it, but upon what terms I know not, as we have no correspondence without the lines that defend the Town." This hearsay evidence would be of great interest if corroborated, but it denotes a state of things unlikely to the point of grotesqueness. The Reverend Mr. Serjeant had held no services in the church for a year at least, and by his own accounts had been the object of special resentment from the mobs of the previous September, and "Lost not less than £300 in household furniture and books destroyed and pillaged," and had been obliged to retire to Kingston, New Hampshire. Who could have made up his congregation in October, 1775, seeing that the proprietors had scattered like the other Tories, is another interesting problem.

General Washington's arrival seems to have worked no immediate change in the official attitude of the camp toward things of the other world. The general was a good churchman, but of the decidedly unpopular faith of the Tories. Moreover, the amazing confusion of the times and the demands made upon him on all sides, from formulating a plan of campaign to cleaning out the main guardhouse, left him excusably negligent of spiritual action for the time being. He states officially in general orders that "the great variety of Occurrencies and multiplicity of Business in which the General is necessarily engaged may withdraw his attention from many Objects." He showed greater interest in religious affairs, as still occasionally happens to great men, upon the arrival of his wife. Then we find him writing to the Provincial Congress to urge the appointment of regular chaplains for the army, and making arrangements for holding regular services in Christ Church. It was the end of December before preparations were complete. It was by that time obviously impossible to get Mr. Serjeant or any other regular Church of England clergyman to officiate, because Colonel Palfrey records in a letter: "What think you of my———." The prayer follows: "O Lord our Heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings and Lord of lords, who hast made of one blood all the nations upon earth, and whose common bounty is liberally bestowed upon thy unworthy creatures; most heartily we beseech Thee to look down with mercy upon his Majesty George the Third.



CHRIST CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Photograph by Arthur C. Haskell.

Open his eyes and enlighten his understanding, that he may pursue the true interest of the people over whom Thou in thy Providence hast placed him. Remove far from him all wicked, corrupt men, and evil counsellors, that his throne may be established in justice and righteousness; and so replenish him with the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that he may incline to thy will and walk in thy way. Have pity, O most merciful Father, upon the distresses of the inhabitants of this western world. To that end we humbly pray Thee to bless the Continental Congress. Preside over their councils, and may they be led to such measures as may tend to thy glory, to the advancement of thy true religion, and to the happiness and prosperity of thy people. We also pray Thee to bless our provincial assemblies, magistrates, and all in subordinate places of power and trust. Be with thy servant the Commander-in-Chief of the American forces. Afford him thy presence in all his undertakings; strengthen him that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies; and grant that we may in due time be restored to the enjoyment of those inestimable blessings we have been deprived of by the devices of cruel and bloodthirsty men, for the sake of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The peculiar interest that thus attaches to the name of Palfrey in connection with Christ Church warrants perhaps a little more extended notice of him than the facts supplied by the curiously insufficient inscription on his monument in the Church. He was a Boston boy, and was educated for a merchant under John Hancock, Esq. Returning from a voyage to England a few days before Washington took command in Cambridge, he was at once appointed, at the age of thirty-four, to positions of trust and importance in the army. He rose to the post of paymaster general, and filled it for four and one-half years with the greatest ability. He was taken from it to become consul general to France, whence came our foreign supplies and military stores. He took passage thither, but his vessel was never heard from again.

Colonel Palfrey's account of the service Washington attended, as will have been observed, though unquestionably authentic, is but brief. In the Boston *Daily Advertiser* of December 30, 1875, was published a long rambling letter said to have been found in a dusty box with other manuscripts of interest for the centennial celebrations then in progress. It was signed by "Lydia Biddle," a supposed relative of Dr. Morgan of Philadelphia, addressed to Mrs. Sarah Morris Mifflin, Philadelphia, and dated "Cambridge, New Years day, 1776."

Now, most unfortunately, from later developments it appears pretty conclusively that this letter was merely a clever piece of historical fancywork, of a piece, and perhaps of the authorship, with "Dorothy Dudley's Diary," "The Cambridge of 1776," and other entertaining pictures of Revolutionary days, called into being by the centennial craze then sweeping over this community. Indeed, it bears internal evidence of its fabrication. For instance, the writer makes Miss Biddle speak of the morning as bright and cold, whereas by diaries and orderly books we know in reality it was so rainy that even the hardy country soldiers did not go to meeting, and a regiment ordered to parade in Roxbury to be mustered out returned to their barracks without receiving any instructions at all.

Of other services which Washington attended in Christ Church we have no

record. There has always been a tradition in Cambridge that he worshipped there regularly, but taking into account the disfavor with which the Tory Church was looked upon, it seems probable that the general was too politic to have adopted a course so little in accord with the views of the main body of the army. There are several occasions mentioned upon which he continued to attend the "meeting-house" and listened to the Reverend Mr. Leonard's preaching to the troops. Yet, as Dr. Hoppin has pointed out, Mrs. Washington doubtless requested a copy of Colonel Palfrey's prayer for use on similar occasions; and as both armies remained inactive during the winter, there were plenty of opportunities for service in Christ Church.

We now come to the most interesting detail of the whole matter, the detail that has prompted the preparation of these notes, as an attempt to answer the question so constantly asked—Where did Washington sit in Christ Church? There would seem to be no inherent importance in this point. Southern races are more accustomed to lying, in all senses, but the Anglo-Saxon has always attached a curious reverence to the seats of the mighty, from "Arthur's Seat" down. It is therefore exceedingly awkward to confess that nobody quite knows today to what pew in Christ Church the father of his country was assigned on that rainy December morning. We must remember that for generations after that time, loving hands and self-denying hearts have been busy with consecrated endeavor to improve and beautify the old fabric, till scarcely a stick or a stone remains as it was in the beginning. The pews in particular have been the object of a discouraging amount of sacred but iconoclastic zeal.

When the church was set in order after the Revolution, there seem to have been various changes made in the pews. Some new ones were added, many were rebuilt, and all were renumbered, apparently on a different scheme. The square box pews (with doors) of the nave were altered into the present long "slips" as early as 1825. The wall pews survived to 1854, when they were all taken down and modern slips six by three put in. For these the old panels were used as far as possible, to save expense. At this date also the two warden's seats at the entrance to the nave were done away with. In the next set of changes the church was cut in two just behind the first pair of pillars from the front, and the chancel and moved twenty feet away, leaving a space of two bays, which were built in and filled with slip pews. After all these doings, and in the absence of any plans of the pews before the Revolution, it would require the acumen of a Cuvier or an Agassiz to reconstruct the original fabric. A few faint traces remain still visible, however. Chief among them is the obvious difference in the paneling of the third bay from the bottom of the church on the eastern wall. All this paneling was originally nearly a foot higher, to correspond with the original height of the pew partitions, which before the alterations rose nearly to the level of the window sills. But even in its diminished state there is no denying the fact that the woodwork of the bay in question contains but five large panels, while all the other bays of the old portion have six small ones to occupy the same space. Six panels would give three to each of the two box pews which formerly occupied one bay, but five would bring the dividing partition against the middle of the center panel. That this was the case may be seen from

the paint scar or mark still there. It seems fair to suppose therefore that this particular partition was not a part of the original plan, but was put in at a post-Revolutionary date. If so, we have at once a vision of a pew at this point of double the size of all the rest. The Royal pew at King's Chapel, designed by the same architect, and erected a few years before Christ Church, was of this kind. Today, it too is divided, and its paneling hidden beneath a cloth lining. Like the Christ Church pew, again, it was against the walls, whence a general view of the congregation was afforded. But in King's Chapel the south wall was chosen. Why then the east wall in Christ Church? Is it too fanciful to explain that in the early days, when the sole means of artificial heat in church was by means of charcoal foot warmers, considerable practical importance attached to the poetically cheering rays of the morning sun, and that in both buildings the sunny side of church was naturally most popular.

To return to what little evidence we have on the problem before us, mention must be made of the list of pews and their occupants still preserved in the original account book. From it we learn that the number of pews was then forty-four. Apparently, this made no reckoning of the warden's seats, a pair of small, elevated pews guarding the entrance to the nave, which are in the records both before and after the Revolution. Certain of these forty-four pews were taken as soon as the church opened, and occupied steadily till 1774 by gentlemen of the highest stations and of ample fortunes. Others were used for a time, others taken by humbler individuals, and still others never taken at all. The temptation is irresistible to try one's hand at constructing a pew plan that will conform with these lists, giving the best pews the numbers that seem to call for them.

If this plan is right, we have the double pew on the east wall numbered seventeen. It may be merely a meaningless coincidence, but in the records of the meetings of the proprietors we find that it was voted on July 8, 1770, "that Sir Francis Bernard be charged with the tax of the Pew No. 17." This was merely locking the stable door, however, for Governor Bernard, who had been present when the cornerstone of the church was laid, had already found Boston too hot for him, and had gone far out of reach of any such genteel votes, leaving Thomas Hutchinson, Esq. as acting governor of the province. Nevertheless, here is an obvious hint of number seventeen's use, actual or intended, as a state pew.

Tradition may also be allowed to contribute a word, though an untrustworthy one, on this problem. The writer of the "Lydia Biddle Letter" has crystallized the often-repeated story that Washington sat in a pew on the east wall, near the vestry door. The third pew from the front has long been pointed out as the exact location. That this is an error is manifest from the fact that owing to the enlargement of the church in 1857 the third pew now stands in the new part of the building. Number seventeen, before the alteration, seems to have been the fifth from the front, and with this slight rectification tradition can be induced to act gracefully as an additional cushion in bolstering up the theory here advanced.

This theory, in short, then, is that Washington sat, as he naturally would sit, in the state pew of the church, a fine double-sized enclosure half way up the sunny side, distinguished by special woodwork, and probably raised a little above

its neighbors, with curtains and perhaps a canopy, like other state pews of the period.

If this theory seems not too fanciful, and sufficiently borne out by facts, a silver plate may some day be affixed to the ancient wainscot there, marked merely with these words, "Near this spot —George Washington—worshipped."