

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS.

THE MASSACHUSETTS SPY.—ISAIAH THOMAS.—RIVINGTON'S ROYAL GAZETTE.—MAJOR ANDRÉ AND THE COW CHASE.—ETHAN ALLEN'S INTERVIEW WITH RIVINGTON.—FRENEAU'S SATIRES.

IMPORTANT events were now culminating in America. All the leading minds had become editors, pamphleteers, and agitators. All others readers and believers. The Press was the power and the fulcrum.

Quite a remarkable newspaper came into existence at this time, which, with the *Gazette*, and others then in circulation, gave great aid and comfort to the prevailing sentiment of the people. In July, 1770, Isaiah Thomas, in connection with Zechariah Fowle, issued the *Massachusetts Spy*, named after several of the earlier papers in England, which bore the title of *Spye*. We annex their prospectus :

#### TO THE PUBLIC.

IT has always been customary for Printers and Publifhers of new periodical Publications, to introduce them to the World with an Account of the Nature and End of their Design. We, therefore, beg Leave to obferve, That this small Paper, under the name of THE MASSACHUSETTS SPY, is calculated on an entire NEW PLAN. If it meets with a favorable Reception, it will be regularly publifhed THREE Times every Week, viz. *Tuefdays, Thursdays and Saturdays*, (on two of which Days no News-Paper is publifhed in this Town) by which Means, thofe who favour this Undertaking with their Subfcription, will always have the moft material of the News, which may from Time to Time arrive from Europe and from the other Parts of this Continent, on the Day of its Arrival, or the next Day following, (Sundays excepted) which will be fooner through this Channel than any other. Great Care will be taken in collecting and inferting the freffeft and choicett Intelligence from Europe, and the material Tranfactions of this Town and Province : Twice every Week will be given a Lift of the Arrival and Departure of Ships and other Veffels, alfo a List of Marriages and Deaths, &c. and occasionally will be inferted felect Pieces in Profe and Verfe, curious Inventions and new Difcoveries in Nature and Science. Thofe who choofe to advertife herein, may depend on having their ADVERTISEMENTS inferted in a neat and confpicious Manner, at the moft reafonable Rates. When there happens to be a larger Quantity of News and a greater Number of Advertisements than can well be contained in one Number, at its uſual Bignefs, it will be enlarged to double its Size at ſuch Times, in order that our Readers may not be difappointed of Intelligence.

This is a brief Sketch of the Plan on which we propofe to publifh this Paper, and we readily flatter ourſelves the Public will honour it with that Regard the Execution of it may deferve ; and doubt not, it will be executed with ſuch Judgment and Accuracy as to merit a favourable Reception.

Three months' experience led to a diſſolution of the partnership, and Thomas carried on the paper alone, increaſing its ſize to four

pages, and publishing twice a week. With three months more of trial it was changed to a weekly paper. On the 7th of March, 1771, it adopted for its motto, "Open to all parties, but influenced by none." Although the editor apparently made an effort to be neutral and impartial in the political character of his columns, and published communications from each side, it was evident to his readers that Thomas was a Whig, and with the people heartily and cordially. This soon became patent to his Tory patrons, and they withdrew their support. The *Spy* then came out fully and boldly for the Revolutionary Party. Mean attempts were made to crush the paper by threats of libel suits and personal violence, and the government officers refused to allow Thomas the privileges of the Custom-house to obtain the arrivals and departures of vessels. There were no news-boats or steam yachts in those days. In noticing this folly on the part of the authorities, the *Spy* contained the following card:

TO THE PUBLIC.

A Tyrant may be justly compared to a Polypus, of which the smallest portion broken off becomes almost immediately as big, as voracious, and as deformed a *thing*, as the original; entangling, plaguing, and engulfing every thing within its reach and power. How applicable this may be to our *petty lords*, the custom-house officers, every one is left to judge, after being informed that *THEY, to discourage this paper*, as they phrase it, have denied THIS Press the SHIP LIST, notwithstanding, according to the title, pieces from *all* sides have been inserted in it. The Printer conceives himself in no wise to blame if the Court side are now at a loss for writers, it being his province only to publish.

The office of the *Spy* was styled "the sedition foundery" by the Royalists, and Joseph Greenleaf was dismissed from the office of justice of the peace for writing for the paper. On the 8th of October, 1772, nearly three years before the fight at Concord, he closed an article in this bold manner:

Should the liberty of the press be once destroyed, farewell the remainder of our invaluable rights and privileges! We may next expect padlocks on our lips, fetters on our legs, and only our hands left at liberty to slave for our *worse than Egyptian taskmasters*, or—or—FIGHT OUR WAY TO CONSTITUTIONAL FREEDOM.

The government made great efforts to counteract the influence of the *Boston Gazette*, and such writers as the Adamses and the Quincys, and the *Spy*, with its staff of contributors equally bold and resolute. After the failure of the *Chronicle*, another paper, called the *Censor*, with Ezekiel Russell to manage it, was started, but it scarcely survived the year. The authorities then fell back entirely on the old *News-Letter*, which was called the *Massachusetts Gazette and Weekly News-Letter*. All the Tory writers concentrated their power on this paper. Andrew Oliver, William Brattle, Daniel Leonard, and Jonathan Sewall opened their batteries on the Whigs. Sewall and Leonard, in a series of articles over the signature of "Massachusettsensis," were considered the smartest and most important of their

contributors. These articles, as we have already stated, were answered by John Adams in the *Boston Gazette*. Some of the contributions in the *Spy* were very powerful. "Centinel," "Leonidas," and "Mucius Scævola" were terribly severe on the Tories. The *Spy*, as early as 1771, urged a recourse to arms. "Mucius Scævola" denounced Governor Hutchinson as "an usurper, and should be punished as such," and showed Lieutenant Governor Oliver to be a "recorded perjured traitor." Attorney General Sewall was directed to prosecute the printer for libel, but the grand jury refused to find a bill. So the thunders of the *Spy* continued to roll and mutter over the heads of the doomed authorities.

It was in 1774 that Thomas introduced the device, borrowed from the *Constitutional Courant* of 1765, which represented a snake divided into nine parts, one part denoting New England, and each of the remaining parts denoting the other colonies—the Immortal Thirteen in all. Over this, in large letters, extending the entire width of the page, was the motto, "JOIN OR DIE." This device had created a sensation in the streets of New York nine years previously. It increased the excitement in 1774.

More British troops having landed in Boston, the place became too warm for Thomas. Threats of personal violence were uttered against him by some of the red-coated soldiers. He was on the list of twelve, with Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who were to be summarily executed when taken. To avoid this difficulty and unpleasantness, and to do more good with more safety, he sent his type and press across the Charles River one night preceding the eventful day of the affair at Lexington and Concord, and had them conveyed to Worcester. The last number of the *Spy* printed in Boston was on the 6th of April, 1775.

It was Isaiah Thomas, the bold journalist, who was, on the 18th of April, 1775, concerned with that modest and determined patriot, Paul Revere, in conveying information, by his "midnight ride," to the inhabitants of the interior towns, of the crossing of Charles River by the unfortunate British troops, under Major Pitcairn, on their secret expedition to destroy the military stores which had been gathered by the rebel authorities, and stored at Concord. Thomas's own types and press had only a short time previously passed over the same historic stream. It was the opening incident of the Revolutionary drama, and is thus celebrated by Longfellow :

Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,  
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five ;  
Hardly a man is now alive  
Who remembers that day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march  
By land or sea from the town to-night,  
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch  
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,—  
One, if by land, and two, if by sea;  
And I on the opposite shore will be,  
Ready to ride and spread the alarm  
Through every Middlesex village and farm,  
For the country-folk to be up and to arm."

It was by Paul Revere's famous rides that the Sons of Liberty of New York and New England were kept advised of the important steps taken by those in Massachusetts. One of the New York papers of 1765 announced his arrival there with the action in Boston in regard to the Stamp Act. He was two days and a few hours in riding from one city to the other—

"To spread the alarm  
Through every New England village and farm."

On the 3d of May, 1775, the *Spy* made its appearance in Worcester. Its motto, in large type, over the title of the paper, was,

AMERICANS! LIBERTY OR DEATH! JOIN OR DIE!

In this number, with a fancy head, and a small device representing the cap of liberty, the following notice was printed:

*To the PUBLIC.*

THE good People of this County, at a Meeting some Time since, voted to encourage the Establishment of a Printing-Office in this Place: In Consequence thereof, Application was made to me, then in Boston, to issue Proposals for publishing a weekly NEWS-PAPER in this Town, to be entitled, The WORCESTER GAZETTE, or AMERICAN ORACLE OF LIBERTY: This I accordingly did; since that Time, Things have worn a different Face in our distressed Capital, and it was thought highly necessary that I should remove my Printing Materials from Boston to this Place, and instead of publishing the intended WORCESTER GAZETTE, &c. continue the Publication of the well-known MASSACHUSETTS SPY, or THOMAS'S BOSTON JOURNAL: I accordingly removed my Printing Utensils to this Place, and escaped myself from Boston on the memorable 19th of April, 1775, which will be remembered in future as the Anniversary of the BATTLE of LEXINGTON! I intend publishing this Paper regularly every Wednesday, and have made an Alteration in the Title, in order to take in Part of that intended for the Gazette.

I beg the Assistance of all the Friends to our righteous Cause to circulate this Paper.—They may rely that the utmost of my poor Endeavours shall be used to maintain those Rights and Privileges for which we and *our Fathers have bled!* and that all possible Care will be taken to procure the most interesting and authentic Intelligence.

I am the Public's most obedient Servant,  
*Worcester, May 2d, 1775.*

ISAIAH THOMAS.

When Boston was evacuated by the English troops in the following year, it was proposed to remove the *Spy* to that city; but on the 21st of June the establishment was taken by William Stearns and Daniel Bigelow "under a lease from the proprietor." With a fresh motto, "Undaunted by Tyrants, we will die or be free," and some very wholesome views on journalism, these new publishers managed the paper about a year. They said:

The liberty and free exercise of the Press, is the greatest temporal safeguard of the State. It assists the civil magistrate in wielding the sword of justice—holds up to public view the vicious, in their truly odious colors—and “is a praise and encouragement to them that do well.” It detects political impostors, and is a terrific scourge to tyrants. None can notoriously transgress the line of duty, who may not be hereby subjected to public contempt and ignominy. It is one grand mean of promoting public virtue. It conveys knowledge to mankind, by acquainting them with the state of the community to which they belong, whereby they are better able to regulate their police—to supply its defects, or lop off its excrescences. It serves to increase *the majesty of the people*, by giving them understanding in the times, and conveying to them “the knowledge of what Israel ought to do.” In fine, it is capable of being made the source of general literature.

Then Anthony Haswell carried on the establishment for a year. Then Thomas returned to Worcester and resumed the management of the *Spy*, with another new motto: “Unanimity at Home, and Bravery and Perseverance in the Field, will secure the Independence of America.” These mottoes seemed to be the very concentration of the thought and feelings of the people—a series of strong patriotic editorial articles, illustrative of the time, compressed into a few words—into pointed revolutionary epigrams, that became the watchwords throughout the colonies.

What better appeal than the following could an editor make to the public? Its refreshing quaintness ought to have increased his subscription-list largely:

TO THE LOVERS OF LITERATURE IN THE COUNTY OF WORCESTER.

PRINTING OFFICE, Worcester, Nov. 1, 1780.

For twelve months past the number of customers for this paper has been so small as to be no ways adequate to the support of such a work, by which means the printer has absolutely sunk money by its publication. Books, Newspapers, and schools, are become too much neglected, and of consequence the rising generation will be great sufferers thereby, if these necessary things, which tend to learning, are not more encouraged.

Many people are so mistaken that they image that there will be but little intelligence of consequence contained in News-Papers in winter and therefore cease to become customers for them in that season of the year, not thinking that it is, on many accounts, a public benefit for News-Papers to circulate. It is an understood fact, that the expence to a Printer in publishing a News-Paper weekly, is very great, and more so in the winter than in the summer; and it is also true, that such a publication cannot be laid bye and taken up again, at leisure. The Printer of this paper, therefore, begs leave to request all those who are desirous of having the Press and the publication of a News-paper continued in this town, to be so kind as to procure as large a number of customers for the Massachusetts *Spy*, as they conveniently can (by the last Thursday in this month) in the several towns where they reside, who will take said News-Paper for six months to come; and if the number shall then appear only barely sufficient to defray the necessary expences of publishing said News-Paper, through the winter, it shall be continued; otherwise, said publication must cease in this town, and the press of course be removed out of this county to another where it has been solicited.

Should proper encouragement appear for continuing the publication of the Massachusetts *Spy* in this place, the Printer engages on his part to do all in his power to make it worthy of perusal and support.

ISAIAH THOMAS.

The title of the paper was changed in 1781 to *Thomas's Massa-*

*chusetts Spy*, or the *Worcester Gazette*, with yet a new device and another motto: "The noble Efforts of a Virtuous, Free, and United People, shall extirpate Tyranny, and establish Liberty and Peace." One of the new devices represented a chain of thirteen links, with a star in each link, the Union of the thirteen states: the chain is placed in a circular form, leaving an opening for the *fleur de lis* of France, to which the ends of the chain were attached. Above the arms of France were two hands clasped, and over them a sword with its hilt resting on the hands.

The *Spy* continued its powerful support of the Union, and the patriotic measures of the people and of the Revolutionary Party, till it saw the independence of the country acknowledged and its journalistic efforts fully secured and rewarded. As this paper is still in existence, and known as the *Worcester Spy*, we shall have occasion to speak of it again.

The Robertsons, who published the *Chronicle* in New York in 1768, established the *Post-Boy* in Albany in 1772. It was in circulation in 1775, at the beginning of the War of the Revolution.

In speaking of the *New York Journal* and its controversy with the *Royal Gazetteer*, it was stated that the publication of the latter was commenced in 1762. It became notorious in the colonies, and especially in New York, during the Revolutionary conflict. It was first called *Rivington's New York Gazetteer, or the Connecticut, New Jersey, Hudson River, and Quebec Weekly Advertiser*. It was established in April, 1762, by James Rivington. He had been a successful printer and bookseller with his brother John in London, where he made about \$50,000. After losing most of this in his love for horses and horse-racing, he came to America in 1760, when he settled first in Philadelphia, and afterward in New York. The *Gazette* was a zealous Royalist organ, and had its office twice mobbed for its zeal, once by the Sons of Liberty, as we have already described, and once by a party of Connecticut militia. After this Rivington returned to London and obtained the appointment of king's printer for America, when he came back with new type, new presses, and renewed energy, and re-established his paper under the name of *Rivington's Royal Gazette*.

In the early part of the Revolution Rivington conducted his paper with as much impartiality and fairness as most of the editors did in that period, and it may be added that no newspaper in the colonies was better printed, or more copiously furnished with foreign intelligence. In October, 1773, Rivington informed his readers that each impression of his weekly *Gazette* amounted to 3600 copies. In that year a census of the city was taken, and showed that it contained a population of 21,876 inhabitants. In Boston, with a population

of 8000, Campbell succeeded in selling but 300 copies of his *News-Letter* when it was the only newspaper printed in America.

While New York was occupied by the British troops four papers were published there. In order to have a newspaper issued daily, the proprietors made an arrangement by which one was published every day, except Sunday and Tuesday of each week, in the following manner :

Rivington's *Royal Gazette*, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Hugh Gaine's *Gazette, or Mercury*, Mondays.

Robertson, Mills, and Hicks's *Royal American Gazette*, Thursdays.

Lewis's *New York Mercury and General Advertiser*, Fridays.

And, according to another authority, one of these papers was published on Tuesday. These papers were all published under the sanction of the British commander-in-chief, but none of the printers assumed the title of "printer to the king" except Rivington, who had a government appointment.

Major André was a frequent contributor to the columns of Rivington's paper. In his leisure moments he would employ his time in lampooning the American generals. He was the author of the famous satire "The Cow Chase," which appeared in the *Gazette*. It was in three cantos, and contained a few specimens of genuine humor. It was soon after the completion of the third canto that André left New York on his fatal visit to Arnold at West Point. It was published in the *Gazette* on the very day of his capture.

"And now I've clos'd my epic strain,  
I tremble as I show it,  
Lest this same warrior-drover, Wayne,  
Should ever catch the poet."

Before the three thousand subscribers of the *Gazette* had read this canto the poet was indeed caught, and in the hands of these very "warrior-drovers" and "dung-born tribes" that he had been so facetiously lampooning.

The *American Literary Gazette* relates the following incident in Rivington's journalistic career :

The wit of Rivington's *Gazette* appears to have been very offensive to some of the Americans, and they were very liberal of their promises as to what they would do when they got him into their power ; but he had a large amount of tact, and we suspect was very much of the gentleman also. He used to tell a capital story of his interview with Ethan Allen, one of the republican heroes who paid him a visit for the purpose of administering a "licking." He says, "I was sitting alone, after a good dinner, with a bottle of Madeira before me, when I heard an unusual noise in the street and a huzza from the boys. I was in the second story, and stepping to the window saw a tall figure in tarnished regimentals, with a large cocked hat and an enormous long sword, followed by a crowd of boys, who occasionally cheered him with huzzas of which he seemed insensible. He came up to my door and stopped. I could see no more, my heart told me it was Ethan Allen. I shut my window and retired behind my table and my bottle. I was certain the hour of reckoning had come. There was no retreat. Mr. Staples, my clerk, came in paler than ever, and clasping his hands, said, 'Master, he has come !'

'I know it.' 'He entered the store and asked if James Rivington lived there. I answered yes, sir. Is he at home? I will go and see, sir, I said, and now master what is to be done? There he is in the store and the boys peeping at him from the street.' I had made up my mind. I looked at the Madeira—possibly took a glass. Show him up, said I, and if such Madeira cannot mollify him he must be harder than adamant. There was a fearful moment of suspense. I heard him on the stairs, his long sword clanking at every step. In he stalked. 'Is your name James Rivington?' It is, sir, and no man could be more happy to see Colonel Ethan Allen. 'Sir, I have come —' Not another word, my dear Colonel, until you have taken a seat and a glass of old Madeira. 'But, sir, I don't think it proper —' Not another word, Colonel; taste this wine, I have had it in glass for ten years: old wine you know, unless it is originally sound, never improves by age. He took the glass, swallowed the wine, smacked his lips and shook his head approvingly. 'Sir, I come —' Not another word until you have taken another glass, and then, my dear Colonel, we will talk of old affairs, and I have some queer events to detail. In short, we finished two bottles of Madeira, and parted as good friends as if we had never had cause to be otherwise."

When the war was about to close Rivington threw away the appendages of royalty. The arms of Great Britain no longer appeared on his office. It was no more the *Royal Gazette*, but a plain Republican newspaper, entitled *Rivington's New York Gazette and Universal Advertiser*. But the people put very little trust in its editor; the public patronage fell off, and the paper ended in 1783. There were few men better qualified in energy and enterprise than Rivington to publish a newspaper. His sagacity during the war in keeping clear of difficulties, after King Sears and his men had destroyed his types before the Revolution, was remarkable. The following appeared in the *Gazette* of July 10, 1782, when there was a prospect of peace, as an instance of the tact of its editor:

*To the Public.*

The publisher of this paper, sensible that his zeal for the success of his Majesty's arms, his sanguine wishes for the good of his country, and his friendship for individuals, have at times led him to credit and circulate paragraphs, without investigating the facts so closely as his duty to the public demanded, trusting to their feelings, and depending on their generosity, he begs them to look over past errors, and depend on future correctness. From henceforth he will neither expect nor solicit their favours longer than his endeavours shall stamp the same degree of authenticity and credit on the *Royal Gazette* of New-York, as all Europe allow to the *Royal Gazette* of London.

Freneau, who was then editing a paper in Philadelphia, frequently satirized Rivington and his *Royal Gazette*. On one occasion, when the title to the *Gazette* was scarcely legible, Freneau wrote:

Says Satan to Jemmy, "I hold you a bet,  
That you mean to abandon our *Royal Gazette*;  
Or, between you and me, you would manage things better,  
Than the title to print in so sneaking a letter.  
Now, being connected so long in the art,  
It would not be prudent at present to part;  
And the people, perhaps, would be frightened, and fret  
If the devil alone carried on the *Gazette*."  
Says Jemmy to Satan (by way of a wipe,)  
"Who gives me the matter, should furnish the type;  
And why you find fault I can scarcely divine,  
For the types, like the printer, are certainly thine."



After the *Gazette* had somewhat improved in its typographical appearance, Freneau proceeded :

From the regions of night with his head in a sack  
Ascended a person accoutred in black.

\* \* \* \* \*

"My mandates are fully complied with at last,  
New arms are engraved, and new letters are cast ;  
I therefore determine and fully accord,  
This servant of mine shall receive his reward."

Then turning about, to the printer he said,

"Who late was my *servant*, shall now be my *aid* ;

Kneel down ! for your merits I dub you a knight ;

From a passive subaltern I bid you to rise—

The inventor, as well as the printer, of lies."

Although Rivington discontinued the *Gazette* soon after the peace of 1783, he uninterruptedly traded largely in books and stationery for several years subsequent to that period. He finally failed in that business, and retired. He died in July, 1802, at the age of seventy-eight. One of the old thoroughfares of New York City is still named Rivington Street.

In August, 1773, the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* appeared. It was published by William Goddard, the old printer of the ephemeral and sensational *Constitutional Courant* at "Peter Hasenclever's Iron Works," and the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* in 1767. Goddard was one of the itinerant journalists of his day.

The *Norwich* (Connecticut) *Packet* was published for the first time in October, 1773.

Isaiah Thomas, like Franklin, and Goddard, and Parks, and Rind, did not confine his enterprise to one paper. He established others wherever he thought he could accomplish any thing. On the 4th of December, 1773, he issued the *Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet, or the Massachusetts and New Hampshire General Advertiser*. It was published in Newburyport. Thomas had for partner in this enterprise Henry Walton Tinges. In a few months Thomas sold his share to Ezra Lunt, and in two years and a half the whole concern passed into the hands of John Mycall, who published the paper for a number of years—twenty or more.