

this country, whose lineal descendants have possessed it down to this day. I regret that his only claim to peculiar distinction seems to have been in getting himself fined, in the sum of "one noble," for his part in that thirty-years war which shook the foundations of old Newbury church, the Parker-Woodman controversy. But he stood for the rule of the majority, and time has vindicated him. Three generations of my ancestors, and many more of my kindred, have mingled their bones with your soil. All of my name and family in America look to this spot as the cradle of their race in the new world. It is no unlineal hand that I extend to you in embracing the opportunity to acknowledge, if I cannot repay, the natural debt which we all owe to the home of our fathers.

It was an ancient superstition that great events are attended by storms and portents. Those who observe such things may like to recall that in the midst of the movements at the state capital which brought this city into existence, in the spring of 1851, a great tempest swept over this region, the like of which, according to local tradition, was never known here before. Probably most of us will agree that no special significance or effect upon the fortunes of Newburyport is to be ascribed to this convulsion of nature. There is another contemporaneous fact of more interest which did affect them. It was only a narrow chance, hardly more than an accident as it now appears, that gave birth to this city. It will not be without interest to relate how the event came about which furnishes the occasion for this festival.

On the fourteenth day of January, 1851, Abner Keniston and one hundred and eighty-four others, "inhabitants of that part of Newbury called Belleville parish," presented to the General Court their petition, praying that "the territory aforesaid, bounded southeasterly by New-

buryport, from the Merrimac river to Anvil Rock in common pasture, being the southwesterly corner of Newburyport, and thence by a straight line to the northeasterly corner of Newbury in Birchen meadow, may be set off from Newbury and incorporated into a town by the name of Belleville."

This was the latest in a long series of applications to the legislature by the people of Newburyport or adjacent parts of Newbury, indicating discontent with their situation under the act of 1764, by which Newburyport was made a town of an area variously stated at from six hundred and thirty to six hundred and forty-seven acres, the smallest ever known to the province or commonwealth. The prosperous village of Newburyport had soon overflowed these narrow borders. This overflow, bound to Newburyport in interest but to Newbury in law, was a disturbing element in the old agricultural town. There was jealousy and bickering in the management of its affairs, between the men who plowed the land and the men who plowed the sea. Petitions for annexation of parts of Newbury to Newburyport were presented to the legislatures of 1794, 1821, 1827, 1832, 1834, 1835, 1843, and 1847, without success. In 1828 some inhabitants of Belleville, or the "fifth parish," asked for incorporation as a separate town, to which Newbury assented; but others asked for annexation to Newburyport, and both movements were defeated. In 1846 the legislature was asked to reunite Newbury and Newburyport, but Newbury would not have you.

Upon the petition for the incorporation of the town of Belleville, in 1851, notice was ordered to Newbury, and on February 8th the town voted not to oppose it. In this petition, and this action of the town of Newbury upon it, there was a large possibility that Newburyport

might never come into existence as a city. The only surviving member of the legislative committee on towns of that year* is authority for the statement that upon first consideration of this petition it appeared that the differences of three-quarters of a century between Newburyport and Newbury were likely to be merged in the new town of Belleville. In this posture of affairs, a seemingly trifling intervention changed, in hardly more than a day, the whole course of events and of your future history.

The incorporation of cities in Massachusetts had been undertaken reluctantly and with many doubts, which even a constitutional amendment hardly quieted, and not until the town-meeting of Boston, with forty thousand inhabitants, had become an unmanageable body. But Salem and Lowell had followed in 1836, Cambridge in 1846, New Bedford in 1847, Worcester in 1848, Lynn in 1850, and by 1851 the movement was well under way. To Caleb Cushing, then representing Newbury in the legislature, it was suggested by the legislative committee that it would be more in line with current events to enlarge Newburyport and give it a city charter than to create another small town. It would seem that the committee suspended action upon the Keniston petition, that Mr. Cushing might seize the opportunity to make Newburyport a city.

Apparently he lost no time in acting upon this hint. On February 13th he presented a memorial of Jacob Merrill and twenty-two others, who had signed the Keniston petition, withdrawing from it their names and support; a remonstrance of Francis Lord and seventy-three other residents against it; and a similar remonstrance from Sarah Little and eleven other women residents, declaring that "although unused by our former habits

* Hon. James Dinsmoor, of Lowell.

and the customs of the country to active interest in political or municipal affairs, yet we believe it to be our right, and feel it to be our duty, to express our opinions and wishes upon this question." To this early but active assertion of woman's rights this city may owe its existence. Two days later these remonstrances were followed by a petition of Moses Pettingell and one hundred and one others, residents of the Ridge and Joppa, and two days later still by a similar petition of William Goodwin and forty-nine others, residents of the westerly part of Newbury, for annexation of their territory to Newburyport. February 19th, immediately following these petitions and remonstrances, and apparently in pursuance of an understanding with the committee, the petitioners for the town of Belleville were given leave to withdraw. Upon the petitions for annexation, notice was ordered to Newbury and Newburyport, which voted their assent. The annexation bill was reported April 3d, and became a law April 17th. One week later Newburyport appointed, in town-meeting, a committee of ten, headed by Mr. Cushing, to apply for a city charter. Their petition was presented the following day, and a charter was reported May 1st, which became a law May 24th by the approval of Governor George S. Boutwell, who remains among us, full of years and honors, to witness the fiftieth anniversary of the act. June 3d the charter was accepted by the inhabitants, June 16th city officers were elected, and June 24th, fifty years ago this day, the new government was organized, and Newburyport took her place among the cities of the commonwealth.

The new city paid her newly-annexed inhabitants the appropriate compliment of selecting from their number, as the first mayor, that remarkable man whose hand had been so active in procuring the charter. The

versatile genius of Caleb Cushing was never more strikingly illustrated than at this period when, within the space of a year and a half, he is found filling in succession the offices of representative in the legislature, mayor of Newburyport, justice of the supreme judicial court, and attorney general of the United States. Of his colleagues in the original city government of 1851, your esteemed fellow-citizen, Philip K. Hills, alone survives to join in this commemoration.

The city of Newburyport stands out against an historic background, the like of which, in richness of color and variety of interest, belongs to few cities even of this ancient and historic commonwealth. To the eye of the native or descendant it reflects all the hues of this radiant nimbus. The very sound of the name stirs the historic imagination. Without any artificial advantage, never a capital nor even a county-seat, the capital itself hardly excels this city in wealth of historic memories.

Fortunately it is not left to me to relate her history. It is written in the pages of Cushing, his first published work; in Coffin's history of the Newburys, that New England classic, to which all paths of antiquarian research finally lead; in the later work of Euphemia Vale Smith; in the "Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian," a picture, perfect as a cameo, of the actual daily life of the people of old Newburyport; and in that sumptuous volume in which a worthy son and citizen here present* has painted with the hand of affection, for the delight of posterity, the men and scenes hallowed by local tradition, now disappeared or disappearing. The muse of Whittier has cast her spell upon it. It has been sung in the verse of native

* Ex-Mayor John James Currier.