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A

CANDID REVIEW

OF THE

PROJECT OF ANNEXATION,

BY A

CHARLESTOWN MAN.



CHARLESTOWN:

DE COSTA & WILLIAMS.....PRINTERS.

1854.

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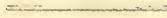
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Author, John Quincy Adams



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A CANDID REVIEW, & C.

“To be, or not to be, that’s the question.”

In that only fragment of American eloquence that is destined to any thing like an immortality, Mr. Webster declared that “When the mariner had been tossed for many days in thick weather, and on an unknown sea, he naturally availed himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude, and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course.” Let us, as far as we may, act upon this wisdom. There is to be no pause in the storm. No sky more benignant than that now above us, can be looked for until this question is finally settled. We are now in the sweep and hurry of the final discussion. We are like that unfortunate victim, who was drawn into the all-ingulfing gullet of Niagara; if we reach the shore *now*, it is well; if we proceed further, we are gone forever.

Let us, then, calmly review what we have done. Let us, as in our weakness we may be able, lift the curtain that enfolds the future.

The city we inhabit is no sickly municipality, to which independent life, is an untried experiment. She is not struggling for existence. She is in no danger of foes from without. She has no internal feud to distract, nor divide her. She is in no peril of her life from the ambition, or other wickedness of her citizens. She, therefore, is in no particular want of foreign aid. She is not compelled to call upon her overgrown, but younger brother, to aid her. She has attained already so many years of useful life, that she is hopeful of a most honorable old age. She yet exhibits no symptoms of decay. Her citizens are as industrious, as moral, as enterprising and as numerous as they were in 1845, when, in committee of the whole, it was resolved that the public health was such as to need nothing of this Boston nostrum of annexation. Her streets resound, from early dawn to the blackest night, with the busy hum of her industry. No blade of grass is suf-

ferred to peep through her paving stones; its life is crushed out by the hoofs of trade. No shipping rots at her wharves. Boston merchants do not scorn the endorsement of a Charlestown wharfinger "when he finds himself in a tight place." His banker, moreover, has often more confidence in the back than the face of that note. Her children are not growing up in ignorance. Few girls or boys can be found here, who cannot read and understand the best literature Boston prints. The superiority of Boston youth is so minute, that it has not yet been computed. Her High and Grammar Schools are, confessedly, as good as the same institutions in Boston. Competent judges claim that the instruction here is more practical and thoughtful, and less mechanical, than there. She has churches wherein is taught all of the Gospel that is considered at all popular or respectable in Boston. She has religious teachers who preach with as much ability and fervor as any elsewhere. They are like the Boston ministers, save in their wages—they preach for less "hire and salary." We are protected against all the elements, as in Boston. Never, in fact, since Boston sent over some fellows, whom she quartered in her best meeting-house, has this city been visited by any conflagration which the energy of her citizens could not stay within reasonable limits. Neither is this city a pauper in historic renown. Her soil is moistened by the earliest blood of the Revolution. The granite finger, from the sacramental ground of America, points to the resting place of her heroes. Take, indeed, from the history of the past the name of Charlestown, and it would be a meagre record that would remain.

And thus we might proceed and enumerate all the essentials, and most of the luxuries and extraordinary blessings, and many of the glories of life, that we here enjoy as fully as do the citizens of Boston. But we have said enough to make legitimate the inquiry we now propose to discuss, substantially started by Mr. Quincy, in his pamphlet, of *What is the occasion for the proposed change, and what are the reasons assigned for it?*

These reasons have been as various as they who have advanced them. We shall be pardoned, therefore, for going into a somewhat detailed enumeration thereof. They have changed, moreover, with the shifting exigencies of the controversy. For this statement will be required no corroboration by those familiar with the views expressed by the advocates of annexation within the last eight months. "See," says your ultra annexationist to a cab driver, "we must be annexed so as to have better streets." "Look," says the same man to old Grindstone, who, he knows, pays a large tax, "look, see what infernal extravagance our city has indulged in fixing Medford Street. Our streets

are too good now. We must go for annexation and put a stop to this business." Driven, indeed, by the laughter of the public, or the stubbornness of notorious facts, they have sought shelter from the consequences of one absurdity under the protecting wings of another. Thence they have again been expelled, till they have successively taken and abandoned every subterfuge that it is possible for the mind of man to conceive.

Let us address ourselves now to the more permanent arguments urged by the friends of this project. These were fully presented to the Committee of the Legislature, both by witnesses and counsel.

First : It was said a consolidated government was better than separate local administrations. It is obvious this is mere assertion. It finds no support in the history of other cities ; it receives no nourishment from the theory of our political system. It is admitted, indeed, to be in direct conflict with the spirit of that system. It is conceded, by its advocates, to be centralization in its most odious form. It is, therefore, liable to all the objections that have been urged by the wise and good, in times past, against this dangerous policy. There is nothing in the political temper of Boston calculated to lessen this danger. She never has declined to grasp or wield power that came within her reach. And when she shall have grown more lusty, and of course proportionally more self-important, by the expansion of her territory, her greediness for political power will not be satisfied, but rather will her appetite be whet into greater craving. Already it is declared, that into the same capacious maw of hers a sweep of ten miles from the brokers of State Street shall soon go. Lynn shoes, it is absurdly contended, will meet with a readier sale, if pegged under the eye of a Boston Alderman. Waltham will suddenly expand, it is urged, into a young giant, if her citizens are obliged to make pilgrimage to Court Street, would they have their names on the check-list. How delightful it will be, if all the poor within a half day's journey of State Street are swept off down to Deer Island ! This pretence of increased business energy but feebly masks the real purpose of concentrating political power. The sarcasm that has heretofore spoken of the learned gentlemen who make laws every winter, at the State House, as the *Boston* legislature, will be more legitimate in the future, than in the past, if this measure succeed. And the act by which this annexation is to be consummated, has not sought to mitigate this evil. The interests of Charlestown, say the advocates of annexation, are all Bostonian, and will be more so when the marriage treaty is ratified. Yet this act of union, in conformity with the Constitution of the State, which never anticipated so wild a project, and which is fortified at all points against it, denies our citizens

all participancy in the election of that host of Representatives, and formidable body of Senators, who really control the legislation of the State. This pill that has been prescribed for us, then, is by no means sugar-coated. It comes in its bitterest form. It is as crude as the elements of which it is composed could make it. It has seen the alembic of no political chemist. It bears evident marks of haste in the preparation thereof. It throws the wealth and government of Charlestown into the lap and hands of Boston, reserving no share of political strength, and only saying "Take it all, O, State Street, deal with us as you will; we want a guardian; do what you can for us, and we *must* be satisfied; we *cannot* complain; we have closed up our mouth, and torn out our tongue."

Second: Reduced rates of taxation to the people of Charlestown, was urged as one of the strongest grounds of union. This vapor, that for a time blinded the eyes of some of our citizens, has been dissipated by the sudden uprising of the sun of truth. The statistics of the present year, upon this subject, are before the public. The tax payers of our city are rejoicing, at this stringent hour in the money market, in a light taxation; while our friends over the river, like the historic characters of old time, are calling upon us to come over and help lift their heavy burden. The city of Charlestown has passed its critical period in the matter of taxation. She has reached the "turn of life," so to speak. Her city government has been fully organized. Her schools are established. Her educational institutions are built and paid for. Her almshouse has been saved from the fiery furnace of a lawsuit, and in a somewhat more accessible place than Deer Island. And in the county of which she has heretofore formed so distinguished and important a part, she has been called on to contribute largely to expenses that cannot occur again for at least two hundred years. She has paid her part towards the erection of the three best court-houses that can be found in America. She has erected jails enough for all her criminals for the next twenty decades. She has built a house of correction that will accommodate, in comfort, all the vagabonds that will fall into misfortune during a longer interval than that named above. To all these, and other expenditures, she has largely contributed, and the fact has appeared in the tax bills of our citizens; but these can never come again. So that if Charlestown remains in Middlesex County, the hat of the publican will not again be thrust in her face for many long years. On the other hand, let her ally herself to Boston, and what will be the consequence in the way of taxation? Hear what one of the sturdiest advocates of annexation said, in answer to this question, less than a week ago. "Charlestown," in coming

over to us, said the Boston Journal, uttering nothing but the truth, "*will assist us in defraying the principal of the Water Debt, and in meeting the necessary expenses for repairs and interest, which last year exceeded the income of the Water Works by the sum of one hundred and thirty-one thousand and forty dollars.*" This "principal," which Charlestown "will assist in defraying," is near SIX MILLIONS OF DOLLARS! It is refreshing to contemplate this, especially if one has already a morbid imagination on this matter of taxes. To any one who grumbled at his last year's tax bill, it will be a particularly interesting subject of thought. To such a mind, fatally bent on annexation, we would commend two other matters of profitable contemplation. In the first place, look at the enormous debt of Suffolk County, which, like the water investment, we "must assist in defraying." That Jail, for instance, built after an unheard of and extravagant style of architecture, which in winter punishes its inmates by freezing, and by suffocation in summer, has made a mark on the assessor's book that will reappear on the tax bills for many a long year. In the second place, see what lurks in your own Act of Annexation; see what poison has been strewn in the "bill of fare," by way of dessert. Middlesex County, it seems, is to have a parting hand grip with us, just by way of future remembrance. Like absconding insolvents, we are to be arrested for debt, because we are "fleeing the jurisdiction." "Great cities," generalizes Mr. Jefferson, "are great sores." Little cities are small festers, in the way of crime, we continue. Lowell, Charlestown and Cambridge, in that sense, are festers in the County of Middlesex. Their existence rendered it necessary to build the jails and houses of correction we have named. Charlestown was largely responsible for the erection thereof.

There are other county expenses, of which she was the occasion, if not the immediate cause. Now it is well settled, that if a guest seat himself at the table, and nibble at all, though he leave before the entertainment is concluded, he must, nevertheless, settle with his host. It is a sound principle. The Act of Annexation is to "try it on" to our city. If she goes over, she has got to leave a large share of her treasure behind her, to repair the damage she has done, and to pay the expenses she has been partly the occasion of. This is to be done at once, not by instalments. The cold, hard hand of an old companion, that has always treated us well, but whom we have ignominiously deserted in her old age, will be searching in the pockets of our tax payers for a quantity of dollars equal to all the expense we have caused. It will be a profoundly "dead horse," too, that we shall be paying for. Dissolution is so apparent that even Coroner Pratt would "deem an

inquest unnecessary." We shall be paying for court-houses in which we shall not be permitted to quarrel; for jails, in which we shall have no right to be shut up ourselves, or have our children incarcerated; for houses of correction, wherein we can find no wholesome discipline, when we fall into error. Can any horse-flesh, then, we would like to ask, be more decayed than that? Could any taxes be thrown wider away? See, then, how mightily our rates will mount up as soon as this measure is adopted! We shall be like the tenant who leaves one house and goes into another before his lease of the former has expired. He pays double rent. Middlesex County will hold out her slouched hat, not for alms, but for dues, and the Supreme Court will *compel* us to pay. Boston, with her Water Debt, and Suffolk County, with her burden, will hereafter, as now, invite us to help them carry a load that causes their unassisted strength to stagger not a little. In a word, we shall be beset by two pick-pockets; the one, not in the most amiable temper, because we have cut her acquaintance rather unceremoniously; the other, feeling like a hostess who has a guest that has come prematurely and uninvited to dinner.

Third: The next grand reason pressed was, that Charlestown needed water, purer and more of it. As to some portions of the city, the premise is granted. But what then? Will annexation give it at a cheaper rate, or more speedily than it may otherwise be obtained? Surely not, unless all signs fail more fatally in this dry time than ever before. This cry of "water," and this general thirst, may be readily appeased by the Legislature, and will be, unless the "Boston" General Court refuse aid to any measure not for the immediate benefit of the three hills. It cannot be had without paying for it. But the price at which it may be had, will be less without than with annexation. Joining with Cambridge in her project, or obtaining it by legislative aid from the Boston pipes that now pass through our city, without annexation, we shall have it freed from the enormous burden of that water debt. And this expense could not be heavy, for the greater portion of Charlestown needs no better water than the wells and heavens afford. And this supply is inexhaustible, and by no means expensive; for the wells disappoint no man's expectations in the driest heat of summer, and "the most ancient heavens are fresh and strong," distilling their blessings freely without the exaction of salaries or water tax. And the clamor of "poor water," that is now raised for the first time, though well founded in regard to some localities, is false and hollow in respect of others. There is more good water here now than is drank; and cold water is not unfrequently traduced in order to make the transition to gin less violent and indefensible. From the time Thomas Walford

built his "palisadoed and thatched house," on the slope of Town Hill, more than two centuries ago, down to the present hour, the health of our people has suffered more from average rum, than poor water. It will be so in the future. But the evil of poor water, as we have seen, so far as it is an evil, is easily remedied. It would have been done by the last Legislature, had it not been for the determination, in certain high quarters, to compel us to annexation by heavy tolls on our bridges, and by shutting out the water from our citizens.

Fourth: Annexation, it was again said, will give further and better protection against fires. Herein the Fire Department was foully traduced. It was hinted, in direct terms, that it was inefficient by reason of the rowdyism of those who composed it. The proof signally failed to establish this point. Its efficiency is known and respected here and elsewhere. Neither in Boston, nor in any other city, can, in fact, its equal be found. It is not composed, as in some other places, of citizens without character or reputation; but the most valuable men we have among us, are embodied in it. We say most valuable, because they are the men by whom the business of the great active world is done. And upon these depends any city for its prosperity or its misfortunes. If they are unworthy, it is soon seen and felt in the reputation in which that city is held at home and abroad. Superannuated and inactive men are useful, undoubtedly, to hold the world together; but a community made up of such would scarcely be desirable. But the Fire Department comprises the muscle, and not a little of the mind of our city. The people here are largely indebted thereto, for that exemption from loss, by fire, which they have so long enjoyed. And it was certainly an ill-advised attack, which was made upon it in the hope of advancing this scheme. For if its annihilation be one of the main objects of union, the prayer of every good citizen should be that it be forever averted.

Fifth: A rise in real estate, it was said, would be the next consequence. Why would this be so? it was demanded. Annexation brings her physically no nearer Boston. The same *bridge* will separate the cities then, that divides them now. Yes; but, said the annexationist, the traders in real estate, the brokers and speculators therein, will demand more for it, by a general conspiracy among themselves and the great land proprietors, and it must go up as coal, and flour, and the other essentials of life have gone up. Now this reply proves too much. The whole argument proves too much. It shows that ninety-nine one-hundredths of our population are to starve by it. It shows that no man is to gain by it, unless he is the owner of at least a whole street of houses, unincumbered by mortgage. For if the price of real estate is to be thus enhanced, it necessarily follows that the rents and taxes of these houses rise also. He, therefore, who now pays two hundred dollars and taxes for the house that shelters himself and his family, and has hard work to pay that and keep the wolf of hunger from his door, with nine dollars per ton for his coal, and thirty cents per pound for grey or striped butter, will find old Skinflint, his landlord, demanding two hundred and fifty dollars and higher taxes than before.

The consequence will be, he will either be obliged to retreat into a smaller and less commodious tenement, in a poorer neighborhood in the city, or else he will be obliged to remove his loved ones, and his household gods, to some suburban district, on some railroad, or at the head of omnibus navigation, and to wear out his life by too early breakfasts, and too late suppers, in order to attend to his business in *North Boston*, which, by the way, is gradually growing less by reason of his absence therefrom. If this theory, therefore, of your ultra annexationist, be sound, it is most obvious what its tendency is—"It makes the rich richer, and the poor poorer." And those like ancient *Agur*, having neither poverty nor riches, it loads with heavier burdens. It crushes the life out of industry and enterprise, without capital. It depresses the man, and elevates the dollar. It helps those who need no help; it destroys them that are struggling to live. It lays its curse heavily upon all young men, unless they are large inheritors of landed estates. It extinguishes and "crushes out" *Young America*, and elevates *Fogie America* instead. It leads, directly and distinctly, to the formation of two classes in society—the very rich and the very poor. It lays the burden of life upon the industry and enterprise of the city. It makes that burden so great that no man can bear it and do more. He must be either "rich or a bachelor," to sustain it. Under its operation, in full swing, in ten years, there would be no "middling interest" left on *Bunker Hill*. *North Boston* will, indeed, have her *Beacon Street* about the *Monument*, and her "*Half Moon Alley*" at the *Neck*, and elsewhere all over the peninsula; but she will not have, as now, her thrifty laborers, her enterprising mechanics, her snug tradesmen, her happy and prosperous families of the middle station of life. And in this middle station the city now finds the sinews of her greatest strength. "Temperance, moderation, quietness, health, society, all agreeable diversions, and all desirable pleasures, are the blessings attending the middle station of life," said *Robinson Crusoe*, Sen., in the admirable fiction of *Defoe*, to his wayward son. Let the policy of the annexationist be carried out, this class and its blessings will be measurably banished from our midst, by the stringent necessity that will be induced.

Sixth: Another great point with the earlier friends of this measure was, that a union of the police and watch of the two cities, would furnish greater protection against crimes and criminals. In support of this view it was claimed, that it would prevent the escape of prisoners from *Boston* into another jurisdiction. No man lives who has ever heard of a single defeat of justice from the grievance complained against. The annals may be searched with the closest eye, but no such case can be found. When an isolated instance is heard of, it will be quite time to look for a remedy. Let us not call a doctor, until at least some indication of present or approaching ill health be apparent. And more especially let us cease to vex so important a question as this of annexation, with such trivial reasons. A *Boston* constable may now pursue a *Boston* malefactor upon our soil, "exult in his successful game," and be protected by the law in so doing. And how idle it is, therefore, to make such complaints as the above, or like that of one of the main witnesses before the *Legislative Committee*, whose reason for

annexation was, that there was a scarcity of constables in Charlestown, although he admitted that such as we had were of the first quality ! The plain truth about this matter is this : if we were a part of Boston, we should be obliged to pay for their day and night police, which is of no earthly consequence to any man, woman or child, on this side of the river.

Seventh : We thus have glanced at the most prominent reasons that have been urged in favor of this project. We have not, and shall not, go into a detailed statement of others, which, whatever may have been the original purpose of their utterance, only served to move the mirth of those who listened to them. But an attempt has latterly been made to promote this cause by holding out the idea that the Navy Yard, in the event of annexation, may be removed from our soil. If respectable presses had not published the correspondence upon this subject, we should have made no allusion to it here, for, at present, it really seems too ridiculous for comment. The evidence, pointing to such removal, is distinctly this, and nothing more :—

One of the briefest of the “briefless barristers” of Court Street, who was not known as a member of the Bar out of the entry in which his name was found, upon a piece of painted tin, one afternoon wrote a letter to Hon. Charles Sumner, characterized by self-inflation more than any apparent wisdom, and asking his opinion of the practicability of such removal. Giving it a hurried reading, Mr. Sumner mistook the name of the writer for that of a commission merchant, who does quite a business in various traffic. So he thought he would answer it. Accordingly, to the next man he meets, who happened to be the present Naval Secretary, he casually inquires whether he considered such an event as at all possible. The Secretary, in substance, replied, that personally, he had no objections. Thereupon Mr. Sumner wrote back to his querist, reporting progress, not supposing the matter would ever again be heard of. The next thing, however, to his great chagrin, that he hears, is that his unfortunate correspondence is printed in all the papers of Boston, and the community is convulsed with laughter at the young Hercules, who had, in advance of all the rest of mankind, conceived the notion of removing that Navy Yard to Newport. Here, then, is the whole of this matter plainly stated. The public can judge of the probability of the success of the measure at present. We shall not be in a hurry to bet our money on that particular “bob-tailed nag.” How far annexation is connected therewith, is also readily seen.

With a few general considerations we must bring to a close this already expanded review.

To him who thinks annexation will at some time be beneficial, we have this to say. That time has not yet come. Boston has, indeed, feebly invited us. But it is notorious that all the *courting*, so to speak, up to last Monday, was done by us. On that day, dressed in her dirtiest, every-day clothes, and making no particular account of the matter, the old lady gave a reluctant assent, in the evident hope that we shall back out. The invitation she sends, indeed, seems to “*come within an inch of her life.*” It is as much as ever that it amounts to a feeble welcome. So that Charlestown is like one who suggests that it would be entirely agreeable to dine out. Boston is like the hostess

who says, "if you want to come, come, but I had as lief you would stay at home, after all." The cry from the kitchen, in the south L of Boston, is, "stay at home, by all means; you will only be made a scullery of in the north wing of our overgrown edifice." And so we think if annexation be ever, or at all desirable, it can be had on more advantageous terms than those now offered us. We confess, though perhaps it is ill manners in an almost uninvited guest, our dissatisfaction with the bill of fare. It is skilfully drawn to rob us of all our rights and power. It "evinces a more deliberate and settled disregard" of those rights than any other Act that could be passed. It could not have been framed with subtler ability to put us beyond the power of interfering at all with the will of Boston in respect of our affairs. And all this, by the rejection of the present Act, may be remedied hereafter.

The burden of proof in this matter is manifestly upon those alleging the expediency of the new project. Unless a clear case is established, the measure should be rejected. "Let well enough alone" is a morsel of wisdom which all of us have had salted down from our earliest boyhood.

"Let us rather bear the ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of."

They that ask us to enter upon an entirely untried experiment, in the face of formidable opposing considerations, should give us reasons that cannot be shaken. But South Boston, which knows how Boston proper treats her suburban friends, has honestly declared to us her opinion of the alliance we are asked to join.

We have purposely said nothing herein of those feelings of patriotism that must be aroused against this measure. The eloquent words of Mr. Quincy have anticipated our poor speech. No man here can be insensible of the considerations he has urged. It is, indeed, incredible that such a project should originate upon this soil. The memory of the past would seem to be stronger than adamant against the deed. Every argument in favor of it is the cry of a pedlar, rather than of a patriot. It bottoms upon some paltry, selfish consideration. It is in defiance of the instincts of true manhood. It is a manifestation of a spirit that would sell the monument that marks our earliest glory, for a sea-wall, and the cannon that belched its hot breath into the bosom of the foe, to the nearest junk dealer.

"By our fathers' ashes,
Where's the spirit of the free-hearted gone!"

Shall these ignominious footsteps, O men of Charlestown, be left by us
"on the sands of time?"

"By Warren's ghost, by Prescott's shade,
By all the memories of our dead;
By their enlarging souls, which burst
The bands and fetters round them set;
By the free Pilgrim's spirit nursed
Within our inmost bosoms yet,—
By all above, around, below,
Be ours the indignant answer—NO!"

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