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CONSIDERATIONS

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED TO THE

1894 *5-10-1894*
CITIZENS OF BOSTON AND CHARLESTOWN,

ON THE

PROPOSED ANNEXATION OF THESE TWO CITIES.

BY

JOSIAH QUINCY, SEN.



BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SON,
22, SCHOOL STREET.

1854.

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CONSIDERATIONS.

THE question of the annexation of Charlestown to Boston is to be decided on the 25th day of this instant September, *finally*, so far as respects this metropolis, by the votes of its inhabitants. It is a subject of some surprise, considering the nature and importance of this question, to perceive the comparative silence of the newspapers, and the apparent apathy of the citizens. This surprise has been increased by the fact, that every thing bearing the semblance of argument in favor of the project has been drawn from local pride, pecuniary interest, or territorial accommodation, — all of them the last, the least, and the lowest considerations which, on a question of this character, ought to enter the minds of statesmen and patriots.

I have carefully read and considered all the arguments adduced by the advocates of this measure, as they have appeared in the newspapers of most general circulation; and I have not found one of a solid, practical character. All of them are so far-fetched, so

forced in their application to the design, and so shadowy in their development in the advantages resulting from it, that it is scarcely possible to reply to them seriously. One writer says, that "Boston is so restricted in point of territory, that all the businessmen are moving out of it." Suppose this is the truth, how does the annexation proposed help us in the difficulty? Would they, in such case, move into Charlestown? Cannot they do this now, if they could find their convenience in it? Another: "The gigantic granite stores building in Boston evidences the want of space. If Boston had more space, its stores would be lower, spread over more surface, and be more convenient." As if the height of these stores was not the consequence of the natural concentration of business in particular localities! By uniting with Boston, would Charlestown concentrate in itself these natural advantages, or approximate one rod nearer those desirable localities? Another writer urges, that, "if Boston had a wider space, its money-capital would have a wider sphere in which to act." How will annexation make Charlestown a more eligible place for Boston capital to act in than it is at this moment? But it is suggested there is a great power in the name of Boston. "After annexation, the lands of Charlestown will be in Boston." What then? Is a rose made sweeter by changing its name? It is useless to recapitulate other of these arguments: the above is a fair example of them all, with only one exception, which presents a key to the whole project. It is said that "nature has limited the territorial expansion of Boston; that her dignity suffers by having so few numbers; that foreigners would regard

Boston with greater respect and interest, if her numbers were greater, and if she occupied a wider space." As if the weight and value of cities were to be ascertained, like those of beef-cattle, by the scales! — as if the intelligence, activity, social and moral qualities, their punctuality in business, the wealth they manage and command, were not the real elements by which cities are honored, valued, trusted, and compared! And what city stands higher in these respects at this moment, or has stood through the entire period of its existence, than the city of Boston?

The project has been openly avowed, and it is confidently expected, that, when Charlestown is joined to Boston, Roxbury, Brookline, Cambridge, and Chelsea will follow, and perhaps Dorchester. How far this territorial aggrandizement shall extend, its projectors have not specified; but they unquestionably intend, if possible, to rear about Charles River a gigantic metropolis, vying in numbers and extent with New York and Philadelphia; from which they anticipate a proportionable increase of wealth, wisdom, strength, and influence. The superior magnitude, extent, and population of New York are not the result of the choice and policy of its inhabitants, but have been the effect of the unexampled commercial advantages of its position; and the recent augmentation of the size of Philadelphia, by the absorption of her suburbs, and of territory in her immediate vicinity, was not the result of her unbiassed choice. Those suburbs were not included in her ancient jurisdiction, and were some of them separated only by the width of a street; and, though beyond her control, she became responsible for their riots, and consequently subjected

to loss of peace and character. A friendly rivalry, which has existed from time immemorial between those cities, may also have favored the extension of Philadelphia; but the example of neither can be judiciously cited or applied as a precedent for the city of Boston.

The inhabitants of Massachusetts, especially those of Boston and its vicinity, ought never to let the example of any mass of population, whose antecedents have no affinity with those of New England, to make population and extent the criterion of their character and dignity. Great cities Mr. Jefferson long ago denominated "great sores;" and, undoubtedly, their tendency is not conducive to the morals or health of the body politic; and they were, therefore, prevented from multiplying through the wise organization of their society by the founders of New England.

It remains for the present generation to decide whether they will continue to walk in the paths marked out by the intelligence and foresight of their ancestors, and maintain that happy division of their population into small communities with limited powers, of a size and extent easily to be watched over and managed by the people themselves, whereby any one collection of men has been prevented from acquiring, from its magnitude, its wealth, and its numbers, a controlling and overwhelming influence.

On the manner in which this question of annexation with Charlestown shall be decided by the votes of the city of Boston, will materially depend the future prosperity and character of the State of Massachusetts, not less than those of the inhabitants of this city. It will unavoidably lead the State to new social organi-

zations. If a great city grows up in one locality, the real or apparent increase of its influence and power will require to be counteracted by the establishment of one or more great cities in other localities. Political contests will thenceforth be conducted by great municipal corporations, abundant in wealth, and unscrupulous in their use of it for obtaining political supremacy for their own interests; and, in consequence, taking political influence and power out of the hands of the honest and virtuous many, and placing it in those of the intriguing and unprincipled few.

The social organization established by the wisdom of our ancestors in New England was as true to principle as it has been happy and prosperous in result. It was democratic in its character and influence. The whole population was divided into small political municipalities, called "towns;" each of them, in fact, small republics, with limited powers, out of which emanated the political leaders of the great republic called "the State or Commonwealth," who came prepared and educated for the management of the greater, by the knowledge they had acquired, and the skill they had exemplified, in the less. In these small municipalities, each inhabitant was taught to know something of the public interests, to exercise a watchfulness over them, to require of those conducting them purity of motive, honesty of purpose, skilfulness in management of those interests; thus creating and exemplifying in each locality those qualities and virtues which, when transferred to the counsels of the Commonwealth, infused into them that intelligence, wisdom, practical skill, and those virtues, which are

adapted to render a people prosperous, happy, and progressive.

Now, can these happy influences and qualities be continued and preserved, when these municipalities are lost, by being crushed into one gross, mighty mass, including great and numerous rival, personal, and local interests; each striving for ascendancy, every moment tempting the managers of the municipality to selfish intrigues and vicious compromises for particular success? Can the interests of such great municipalities be understood or comprehended by the multitude of inhabitants of which it is composed? Is not the effect, necessarily, of such great political communities, to remove the people, who constitute their inhabitants, from any distinct knowledge of their concerns, and from any efficient opportunity to influence measures often vital to their true interests, except through the medium of election of rival parties, which often only leaves them the choice of being crushed by the upper or the lower millstone? Is not the existence of these great cities as little reconcilable with the spirit of republicanism as it is with the predominancy of sound principle? Is not the direct tendency of thus bringing into one concentrated power, wealth, numbers, and territorial extent, to encourage and excite into action the artful, the intriguing, the unprincipled, and the desperate? Does the history of New York, during the few years past, give any encouragement to the belief that cities overweeningly great are hot-beds adapted to promote the propitious growth of public virtue, personal honesty, or political integrity? Are we not called upon daily to witness the recklessness of public men entrusted with the

management of great funds, and to be astonished at the boldness with which they transcend their powers, and the audacity with which they endeavor to hide their responsibility? And are the people of this commonwealth, by establishing mammoth cities, prepared to withdraw from their own superintendence their most important concerns, and to place them still farther under such control? I speak to wise men. I call upon the prudent to consider.

If this proposed union of Boston and Charlestown be, in fact, intended to be confined to those two cities, and is not to proceed farther, then I ask first of the citizens of Boston, can they see any substantial benefit from multiplying the objects of the care of our city authorities? Have our mayor and aldermen at present so few objects of attention as to make it desirable to increase them? Have not those officers at this moment as much to do as they can do well, or as it is reasonable to require of them? Or have our citizens become so incompetent, that it is expedient to call in aid from abroad to assist in the management of our concerns? As the affairs of a city become complex and involved, are they not proportionably placed beyond the reach of the oversight of the mass of its citizens? Are our taxes now so light that it will be wise in us to increase them for the purpose of extending a helping hand to our neighbors?

Many other questions, of like bearing, might be asked; but these are sufficient to excite the thoughts of my fellow-citizens of Boston.

I next ask the citizens of Charlestown to consider what real benefit the mass of them can reasonably anticipate from this annexation. I can easily believe,

that there are many talented, active, aspiring young men in Charlestown, who have taken it into their heads that their sphere of influence would be enlarged, their chances of greatness multiplied, by the union proposed; and who, in their dreams, realize the mayoralty of Boston, with four thousand dollars a year. But—these dreamers out of the question—how any citizen of Charlestown can even endure the thought of this annexation, is to my mind mysterious. Is it possible that a majority of its intelligent, thoughtful, high-minded citizens can be found willing to sink the individuality of the ancient, highly respected, independent city of Charlestown, and consent to become a small, lower appendage to a great corporation in their neighborhood? Can it be believed that such men will throw away for ever, under any pretence of pecuniary advantage, the name of Charlestown,—a name bestowed by Winthrop, before Boston had existence,—a name associated with the first martyrs, and the most glorious monument of our Revolution;—Charlestown, the greatest sufferer in the cause of national independence, the mansions of whose citizens stand on the ruins of the dwellings of their fathers, which perished in flames enkindled in the cause of freedom? By the energy of her sons she has risen, like a phoenix, from her ashes; and now enjoys not merely the hope, but the actual possession, of historic immortality. Can the inhabitants of a city, crowned with such numerous and rare glories, throw them away as though they were common dust, to become a small, undistinguished part of a gigantic corporation, perhaps destined to absorb other communities? For my part, I believe that, when the subject

is presented for immediate and conclusive action, a majority of those inhabitants will start back with instinctive shame, if not horror, at the act they are about to commit. Some of them, I believe, would almost commit suicide as be guilty of it.

It is well known that this project had its origin with a few active citizens of Charlestown, who imagined they saw certain prospective advantages from it, either to themselves or to that city. As it was chiefly got up for the benefit of Charlestown, it might have been anticipated that the inhabitants of that place would have been called first to act upon the question. A like proposition, I am told, having been rejected under the town government, the managers of the scheme were apprehensive it would now meet with the same fate. They therefore have adroitly thrown the responsibility of first voting on the subject on the town of Boston, in the expectation that, if this city accepted the proposition, it would crush down all opposition in Charlestown, whose inhabitants would be thus left afterwards to accept or reject the project at their pleasure.

In this state of things, it behoves the citizens of Boston to reflect in what situation they will be placed, and how they will look and feel, if, after having deliberately voted an union, the citizens of Charlestown should coolly reply that they thanked them for the offer, but that they had thought better on the subject, and should vote to reject it. Could any thing be more humiliating? Are the citizens of Boston prepared to take the chance of becoming a jest and a by-word to all future generations?

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