

FROTHINGHAM RICHARD

**THE COMMAND IN
THE BATTLE OF
BUNKER HILL**

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The preparation of a History of Charlestown – the occupation of leisure hours – led to large collections relative to the military events which occurred in the neighborhood of Boston at the commencement of the war of the revolution; but as a full account of them did not appropriately belong to so local a publication, and as no work had been issued containing a narrative, in much detail, of these interesting events, it was thought best to prepare the volume now before the public entitled History of the Siege of Boston. The old subject of the battle of Bunker Hill was so directly in my way that it could not be avoided; and as an apology

for adding another to the narratives of this event, I determined to construct it, as much as possible, from contemporary materials.

In a faithful history of the battle, the question of command cannot properly be avoided. If it is not of the importance which many attach to it, still it is a curious question, about which there is much interest. It may be well, in the outset, to state clearly the matter at issue. The point is, was there a general officer detached to exercise a general command in the battle? There is great incongruity in the statements relative to this. It is stated (by Dr Whitney) that the detachment that fortified Breed's Hill was first put under the command of Gen. Putnam, that with it he took possession of this hill, and "ordered the battle from beginning to end;" or as another (Hon. John Lowell) states it, "General Putnam was detached for the purpose of fortifying it (Bunker Hill,) and Colonel Prescott was placed under his orders." On the other hand it is stated, that the orders to fortify Bunker Hill were given to Colonel Prescott, that the redoubt was raised by troops under his command, and that at no time during the whole affair did he act under, or receive an order from, a general officer. These statements are conflicting and cannot both be true. It is these rival claims as to Putnam and Prescott that constitute the delicacy and difficulty of the question.

Whoever investigates this subject must determine the kind of evidence that will be allowed to influence, mainly, the decision. There are numerous statements of soldiers who were in the battle, which were made forty years or more after it took place;

after antipathy or gratitude had biased them against or for their old commanders; after what they had heard and had come to believe, had unconsciously become interwoven with impressions of what they saw; and at a time of life, too, when exactness as to details of what took place so long before in such a scene, could not reasonably have been expected. These relations bear, in some points, the characteristics of tradition. They mostly harmonize as to the movements of companies or regiments, but differ, irreconcilably, on points bearing on the question of command. An argument, or an array of evidence, of equal authority and of equal positiveness, may be drawn out of this large reservoir in favor of Putnam, or of Prescott, or that there was no general commander, or that there was no command at all in the action. A somewhat laborious study, and critical collation of these statements forced upon me the conviction, that they ought not to be relied upon as leading authorities, and that it was idle to expect to arrive at a satisfactory result by depending on such sources of information. Hence diligent search was made for contemporary matter. Much caution and discrimination, however, are necessary in using such material. The first rumors of events are as apt to be as inaccurate as reminiscences of those events prepared after years have elapsed. But these rumors are followed by relations more reliable, and it is material of this sort that is the most valuable for historical purposes. It was such material that was selected. There are, however, but few facts bearing on the question of command in

the many contemporary documents I have examined. Yet what is gleaned from them is important. Among the documents are letters from Generals Ward and Putnam, and Col. Prescott. The facts they supply are on some points conclusive.

Still, in a volume designed to be a simple record of authentic facts, and in a narrative of the battle prepared without conscious bias for or against either Putnam or Prescott as the commander, a labored argument on the question of command seemed neither desirable nor proper; and in disposing of it, it was thought best to state concisely, yet fairly, all the evidence of a contemporary nature relative to both that was known, state the conclusion it seemed to warrant, and leave the subject with the reader. This course, right or wrong, it is proper to say, after a remark of Mr Swett in the pamphlet which has occasioned this publication, was suggested solely by reflection on the authorities; and the gentlemen to whom he alludes are hereby exonerated from all responsibility, even for a suggestion, on this subject. And the "invincible prepossession," which seems to puzzle Mr Swett, it will be indeed "useless to inquire" into because it did not exist. One great reason for treating the subject in this way was, that the reader, with facts thus before him, might make up a theory to suit himself. This plan was, accordingly, carried out. And though Mr Swett is pleased to say that I labored "throughout a large portion" of the Siege of Boston to prove a certain "insignificant abstraction," yet, if so, it was unconscious labor, and to say so is ascribing to the effort far too much design. The evidence is

merely stated and left to speak for itself. The reader will find it to occupy seven pages.

The conclusion reached is that there was no general commander, other than Gen. Ward, of the Bunker Hill battle. After quoting the evidence that bears in favor of Colonel Prescott, the following statement is made: – "The conclusion warranted by this evidence is, that the original detachment was placed under the orders of Colonel Prescott, and that no general officer was authorised to command over him during the battle." In other words, there is not only no evidence that a general officer was detached to exercise a general command, but contemporary authorities bear decidedly against such a conclusion.

Mr Samuel Swett has published a pamphlet entitled – "*Who was the Commander at Bunker Hill. With Remarks on Frothingham's History of the Battle, with an Appendix,*" in which he labors to overthrow this conclusion, and to establish the position that General Putnam was the authorized and general commander. Mr Swett is one of the old partizan writers on this subject. He began to write at a time (1818) when there was much excitement relative to the battle. The *Analectic Magazine* for February of that year had an account of it; the *Port Folio* for March had General Dearborn's extraordinary article, which opened up the long, bitter, and not yet closed controversy about General Putnam; Daniel Putnam's able and interesting letter soon (May) followed, marked by curious anecdote as well as by the indignant rebuke which filial duty dictated; General

Dearborn (June) issued his "Vindication" with its imposing array of documents; in July, Hon. John Lowell made his thorough defence of Putnam's character, in the columns of the Centinel, and Hon. Daniel Webster, in the North American Review, contributed an invaluable article, drawing with indelible lines the characteristics of the battle, and defining, with remarkable accuracy, the positions of Putnam and Prescott; the subject had got mixed with party politics, and for six months the press had teemed with articles on one side or the other. It was, then, at an unfavorable period for healthy investigation, and after such a surfeit of the subject, that Mr Swett "from his attention to military subjects," "consented to describe the battle." He commenced his researches in July, finished them in August, and early in September was ready to favor the public with his "Historical and Topographical Sketch of the Battle of Bunker Hill." This account made up, in great part, from oral or written communications of actors in the battle, and framed with the theory that General Putnam was the commander, was regarded as of a partizan character. It was immediately criticised unfavorably in the Boston Patriot, in a series of essays which subsequently appeared in pamphlet form, in which the main object is to show that Putnam was not even in the battle. Mr Swett has continued his researches, printed two editions of his history, and several times appeared in defence of it. His statements relative to the formation of the army and the battle have found their way into most of the books. It is no injustice to the authors of

subsequent excellent accounts of the battle to remark – for it is acknowledged – that as to the details they do not go behind Mr Swett's account. The narrative in the *Siege of Boston* does. It is based, as much as possible, on contemporary documents, and, in its details, will be found to differ in many respects from those of the same period in Mr Swett's *History*. A study of the conflicting evidence relating to this subject, however, ought to excite charity rather than dogmatism; and it was no purpose in preparing the *Siege of Boston* to make of its pages a pillory of error for a respected pioneer enquirer. Let the language relative to him to be found there, say whether much was done at the poor business of disparagement, or whether just credit was withheld. Mr Swett, however, has had possession of this field so long, that, perhaps, it is not strange he should regard facts which fearfully disturb old opinions as errors; or that a conclusion as to the commander which conflicts with a prepossession which for thirty years has proved invincible, should be contested. But the spirit, tendency and object of the "*Remarks*" are too obvious to be misapprehended.

A publication thus by one who has made the Bunker Hill battle his special study, who has written more on it than any one, and whose opinions, hence, carry with them a certain authority, seems to demand a reply. Silence, under such circumstances, might either be construed into an insult to an older inquirer, or as doing myself the injustice of admitting the correctness of his strictures. Besides, those to whom I feel so deeply

indebted for criticism as gratifying as it was unlooked for, on a volume, which gradually and unexpectedly grew to the form in which it appeared, and who have thus kindly commended it to the public, have a right to expect, that, when its integrity is seriously impeached, its author should show his vindication. Still, I undertake a reply with the greatest repugnance to controversy.¹ In doing it, and doing it after all, mainly for the sake of history, what is merely personal will be set aside as of little account. It is not of so much consequence to the public how a writer carries his head, whether sometimes under his arm or always above his shoulders, as it is how he does his work. Besides, discourteous personal allusions do not strengthen a weak cause, and are sure to mar a strong one.

It is difficult to observe method in dealing with this medley of accusation. Mr Swett's zeal for his hero is so ardent, and his imagination is so brisk, that he seems to have misapprehended the simplest language; and hence, quite unintentionally it may

¹ Mr Swett, on the publication of the Siege of Boston, favored me with the following note, which, in another note written subsequently to the publication of his pamphlet, he informed me was intended for publication. Under the present circumstances I hope to be excused for printing it:—"Richard Frothingham, Jr., Esq., —My dear Sir: For your history of the Siege of Boston I am very much obliged to you. Without time to have read it critically, I find it a remarkable monument of diligent and successful research, candor, impartiality and judgment. It is a very valuable addition to history. The subject of Bunker Hill battle I thought I had exhausted thirty years ago, but your additional information is interesting and important. We differ on one point only I believe worth mentioning, and that important only as a matter of curiosity, the commander in the battle, which we may discuss hereafter. With friendly regard and respect, With friendly regard and respect, S. Swett."

be, he ascribes to me views I do not express, facts I do not state, and opinions I do not hold. He is merry over mistakes that have not been committed, and is indignant at charges that have not been made. Where, for instance, in the Siege of Boston, is it written that the "great battle of Bunker Hill was fought on our side by a headless mob?" Where do I say that it is difficult to assign a "motive" for this conflict? Where is adduced "the most incontrovertible argument in the world," or is it even stated, that the army at Cambridge was "itself a mob?" What "mistake of law" is made where it is said that Warren had not received his commission? What charge is made against Col. Sargent? Where is it stated or intimated that General Putnam was "a mere volunteer" in the army at Cambridge? Where is it said that "he could not possibly" command at Bunker Hill, because it was an army of allies? Where is the sentence which reads that, had he been the commander, he would have "boasted of it," or have "publicly claimed" it? Where is that "large portion" which contains the attempt to prove that "General Putnam had no right to command Col. Prescott?" These allusions, and they might be increased, are to instances where the meaning has been misstated. Mr Swett does not quote the language he comments on, and I prefer to be judged by what is written rather than by what he *says* is written. Besides all this, and considerable attempts at ridicule, Mr Swett makes the serious allegations that I have been "grossly regardless of known facts," and have even "manufactured" history! Though age, among its privileges,

cannot claim exemption from rebuke for such injustice, yet I deeply regret the occasion which requires controversy with one, relative to whom I had felt only respect, exchanged only courtesies, and written only commendation.

Before going to the question of command, it may be well to examine some of the errors which Mr Swett alleges the History of the Siege of Boston contains.

1. On page 166 it is related that "when General Warren entered the redoubt Colonel Prescott tendered him the command; but Warren replied that he had not received his commission, and should serve as a volunteer." Mr Swett remarks on this as "Frothingham's mistake in supposing that Warren told Prescott, as a reason for not assuming the command, that he had not received his commission. This is a mistake of fact and law; Warren, according to General Heath, said not one word about his commission, and his want of one did not diminish his rights of office – a point that has been settled by the Supreme Court of the United States," p. 7. Mr Swett does not quote my language, and the reader cannot find any such "mistake of *law*" as he comments on in the Siege of Boston. This "point," therefore, need not be discussed. Now for the mistake of *fact*. Mr Swett had before him, when preparing his pamphlet, President Sparks's MS. copy of Judge Prescott's memoir of the battle, and knew this was my authority for the anecdote. But what does he mean? Who would expect, after such a charge, to find on page 32 of *Mr Swett's own history*, the following account of what took place when Warren

entered the redoubt: – "Prescott offered him the command; *but he had not yet received his commission*, and tendered his services to the colonel as a volunteer!" And Mr Swett says that he got this conversation from Colonel Putnam and Dr Jeffries. After three editions of his history has he concluded that he mistook those gentlemen? Does he mean to ignore his own authorities? If so, the fact must not be given up, for Judge Prescott states it as from his father, and it harmonizes with the records relative to Dr Warren's appointment, as will be seen in another place. Is this the way my narrative is to be pronounced incorrect and then ridiculed? As Mr Swett makes himself merry at what he calls my mistakes, he remarks – "He sometimes, like St. Patrick, carries his head under his arm instead of wearing it on his shoulders," p. 13. We know it is said that *St. Denis* carried his head *in his hands*, and that the Anthropophagi had heads, but it would seem that *St. Patrick's* head must have been right when he did his great work for Ireland. Letting this pass – how was Mr Swett's head located when it worked out this double "*mistake of fact and law?*"

" – grow beneath their shoulders,"

2. Mr Swett accuses me of charging Colonel Sargent "with disobeying Gen. Putnam's order for him to go on to Bunker Hill. This injustice to the reputations of Putnam and Sargent arises from the most inconceivable misconstruction of Col. Sargent's letter to us," &c. &c, p. 11. And after considerable indignant

comment – nearly two pages of it! – Mr Swett returns to the charge, and says: "These are all the facts the author has for the assertion, that Sargent disobeyed Putnam's order to go on to Bunker Hill," p. 12. Now *where* is such an "assertion" made in the Siege of Boston? The reader *cannot find it!* Mr Swett refers to a note at page 168, but without quoting it. This note occurs where, in the text, an attempt is made to give a definite idea of Gen. Putnam's service throughout the whole affair, from the laying out of the works on Breed's Hill, to his retreat to Prospect Hill. One sentence reads – "Some of the officers not under his immediate command respected his authority, while others refused to obey him." It is to sustain this remark that reference is made to the following note: – "Captain Trevett, (Mass.) for instance, applied to Gen. Putnam for orders; while Colonel Sargent, (N. Hampshire) in a letter, MS., dated Dec. 20, 1825, writes that Putnam 'sent an officer to order me on to the hill, but finding I did not attend to his order he sent a second, who I took no notice of. A third came open-mouthed, saying,'" &c. This is the note referred to, *and this is all that is stated* about Colonel Sargent. Now who but Mr Swett names *Bunker Hill*? And *what charge* is made here? Let the reader look at p. 92 of the Siege of Boston, and say whether there was any disposition to do injustice to this brave officer. No such charge was ever thought of, much less made. It is one of Mr Swett's inferences. His indignation is gratuitous.

But the "*injustice*" I have been guilty of, Mr Swett says "arises

from *the most inconceivable misconstruction*" on my part of Colonel Sargent's Letter. Now to show fully the height of this "injustice" and the depth of this stupidity, it may be well to let Colonel Sargent speak for himself. He was applied to by Mr Swett for information about the battle; and, in a letter dated Dec. 20, 1825, gives his story. Mr Swett, in this pamphlet, (Appendix,) quotes from the conclusion of this letter, but does not quote from the commencement of it, — doubtless relishing its details about fighting among the islands in Boston harbor far better than its details about Putnam and Prescott, and the Bunker Hill battle. It is proper now that the latter should be printed. I put a few words in italics. Colonel Sargent writes —

"Had General Ward marched the whole of his troops then in Cambridge to Charlestown not one of the enemy would have escaped, but instead of that he only walked Hastings's front yard the whole day. He ordered Stark and Reed from Medford, and those two regiments did all that was done that day, of any consequence, although the fatigue party stood their ground better than could be expected after a hard night's labor. *In my opinion, Col. Prescott is entitled to the honor of having the command* in his calico gown. *I doubt much if General Putnam was on the ground of battle for the whole day*, and that he had no regiment that I ever heard of. I made application three times that day to be permitted to march my regiment to Charlestown, but General Ward feared my post would be attacked, and for once judged right, for a large schooner, with from five to six hundred men, attempted to gain

the landing, but the wind against her and the tide turning, she returned. *About 4, P. M.*, General Ward permitted me to march my regiment with one called his own to Charlestown, but too late to do any good. *Gen. Putnam, then on Prospect Hill, sent an officer to order me on to the hill, but finding I did not attend to his order, he sent a second, who I took no notice of. A third came open-mouth, saying Gen. Putnam says the devil of hell is in you all, you will be all cut to pieces.* The words were scarcely uttered when I was left with Lieut. Col. Ward and my waiter. I had before this received a scratch from a four pound shot – the same shot took off Lt. Col. Ward's cartouche box, and knocked down a subaltern behind him. I returned to headquarters."

This, Mr Swett confesses, is the only document relating to Colonel Sargent. Now with this as authority, what right has Mr Swett, as he does in his history, to put Col. Sargent under the immediate command of Gen. Putnam? What right has he to say, as he does in his pamphlet, that "Sargent found Putnam" on the top of Prospect Hill? As I read this authority, Putnam sent successively three officers to Sargent with an order which Sargent "refused to obey," but instead of joining Putnam, on Prospect Hill, he went to headquarters. It was a case where a *New Hampshire* officer declined to acknowledge the superior authority of a *Connecticut* officer; Sargent applied directly to General Ward for orders, but would not respect the orders of Putnam. The last point is the fact stated in the Siege of Boston. So much for the "injustice done to the reputations" of these two

officers! So much for my "most inconceivable misconstruction of Col. Sargent's letter!!"

But there is more to be said about *Prospect Hill*, and here it is necessary to carry a bit of war into Africa. Mr Swett in his history (Notes p. 4) quotes from a letter by Rev. Joseph Thaxter, in which this hill is mentioned, though in the quotation it appears as "*one of the neighboring hills*"!! This letter was dated "Edgarton, June 15, 1818," and was addressed to Messrs Monroe & Francis. It will do no harm to print, for the first time, the whole extract. It reads —

"The writer yesterday saw Thos. Cooke, Esq. In 1775 he was a member of the Provincial Congress, and one of the signers of the sword in hand money. He was on the day of the Bunker Hill fight at Cambridge. He went down to Prospect Hill and saw the whole transaction of the day. He says that all was confusion, there was no command. That he saw Gen. Putnam, who did all that man could do to get on the men to Breed's Hill; that he appeared firm and resolute, thoughtless of personal danger, and that his praise was in the mouth of every one; that at that time nor ever after did he ever hear any one speak a disreputable word against him."

Mr Swett, in his history, besides suppressing the *name* of the hill, suppressed also the significant remark, "*all was confusion, there was no command.*" And he suppresses also Mr Thaxter's own opinion in the same letter, viz: — "As to military discipline and command there was none." Neither suited his purpose! To fit his theory exactly this letter of Thaxter's must be *garbled!*

On these two letters of Sargent and Thaxter, I remark, 1. They serve to show the character of this sort of authority, and how cautiously it must be used. 2. Here two manuscripts, so long unpublished, harmonize on one point. Sargent (1825) says that about 4 P. M. Putnam was on Prospect Hill: Thaxter's letter (1818) says that Thomas Cooke went on to Prospect Hill and saw Putnam, who did all man could do to induce men to go to Breed's Hill. Now Stiles (June 23, 1775) states that towards night Putnam went away from the action "to fetch across reinforcements, and before he could return our men began to retreat." 3. Sargent says Prescott was the commander, while Thaxter and Cooke say there was no command.

3. Here as well as any where, another charge of Mr Swett may be noticed, because it serves to show how far partizan feeling has carried him. He has nearly a page of disparaging remark on the history, because the name of *this same* Rev. Joseph Thaxter is not mentioned in it, and especially in connection with the celebration of the fiftieth Jubilee (1825) of the battle, when he made the prayer. Mr Swett, after remarking that he "looked in vain to find his name," says (p. 27) that, "The author has devoted twenty-two pages to this jubilee and monument, without one syllable to spare for the patriotism, eloquence, and unction of this most interesting relic of olden time, or for the mention of any religious service whatsoever on the occasion;" and again he remarks that, though I "dwell on Webster's eloquent address," yet there is "*not the slightest notice*" of any prayer; and *finally*, his pious indignation

culminates in asserting that, "The neglect of all religious services on the occasion will be considered by all those who give credit to the author's history as a serious imputation on our national character"!! Well, our national character *certainly* ought to be looked after. But 1. As to the twenty-two pages of matter. The reader will find in them accounts of the early celebrations of the battle; of the first monument on Breed's Hill; of the origin and progress of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, and the only account of much length there is existing; a history of the building of the monument; a general view of the two great celebrations of 1825 and 1843, and of the Ladies' Fair; the cost of the monument, and a minute description of it! So much for this twenty-two pages about "this jubilee and monument!" Cannot Mr Swett state a thing right? 2. "A faint outline" only is presented of the great celebration of 1825; and of this, *the whole notice* in the text of the ceremony of laying the corner stone, and of the oration, *including* where I "dwell on Webster's eloquent address to the sovereign people," and even quote his splendid words, *makes ten lines!* But it is not true that, in them, there "is *not the slightest notice of religious services;*" for the account concludes, (p. 345) – "*When the exercises here were concluded,*" &c. One definition of "*exercise*" is "act of divine worship," and Mr Swett may look into either Webster's or Worcester's dictionary as authority! Now the "Address" had been mentioned, and "exercises" after it, *manifestly*, do not refer to wheeling regiments, but imply, in *addition* to the address, *the*

acts of divine worship that, in this Christian land, are common on such occasions. Even the language itself must be perverted to sustain such libel as Mr Swett has written! And those who wring out of this account "a serious imputation of our national character," must hate this character intensely, be most inveterate word-catchers, and twist language from its obvious import. 3. It might have been better to have stated that Rev. Joseph Thaxter made the prayer, but no want of respect for the memory of this venerable veteran occasioned the "neglect." Better this omission, however, than to have been guilty of garbling and falsifying the account of the battle the patriot left behind him.

4. The next alleged error relates to the case of Captain Callender. Mr Swett lets his pen run as follows: "If any thing could be more wonderful than the author's mistaking one hill for another, when both have been before his eyes from his birth, it would be his adducing this case as one of disobedience, or a case of any kind to disprove that Putnam was the commander," p. 12. This indeed would be wonder upon wonder – if it were only true. But that I mistook Prospect Hill for Bunker Hill is one fancy; that this case of Callender is cited to disprove that Putnam was the commander, is another fancy. *Where* is it so "adduced?" Really Mr Swett's devotion to his hero leads him into strange misapprehensions. The reader will *look in vain* for such mistakes and citations in the pages of the Siege of Boston. Once more I ask, what in the name of common sense *does* Mr Swett mean? On page 164 of the Siege *this very case* is "adduced"

among the things that bear *in favor* of Putnam, and *no where* is it cited against his "claims!" *The very report* made to the provincial congress, which Mr Swett accuses me of *neglecting*, was thoroughly studied, (*and Mr Swett knew it*) and is fairly quoted, and in favor of Putnam! Indeed this report, and the evidence given on the trial of Colonel Scammans were the main authorities for stating that General Putnam *gave orders* to the reinforcements.

But the strictures on pages 12, 13, relative to Callender, were not enough, and so Mr Swett (p. 22) adverts to this case again, and says: – "But allow the gentleman, as in regard to Callender, to manufacture his own case, grossly regardless of all known facts." *What case* have I manufactured? What "*known facts*" have I been regardless of? The chief thing that appears to be specified in this case is this: – "The author's declaration that Callender was tried for disobedience 27th June, seems to be a poetic license. Ward orders the court martial at that time, without the slightest intention of such a charge," p. 13. Why does not Mr Swett quote my language? But 1. He alludes here, I presume, to a remark (p. 185) of the Siege, when *the question of command is not alluded to*, but where an account is given of Callender, and it reads – "Capt. Callender, for disobedience of orders *and alleged cowardice* was tried June 27th." And again I say – "Captain Callender despised the *charge of cowardice*, and determining to wipe out the *unjust stigma*," &c. Now what sort of "license" has Mr Swett taken with my "declaration"? Something more than

a poet's license, I fancy! 2. Any one would suppose, from Mr Swett's words, that Ward's order for a court martial specified what the charge was. Here it is – June 27, "The general orders that a general court martial be held this day at the lines, to try Captain Callender of the train of artillery. Witnesses on both sides to be duly summoned to attend a court which is to sit at 8 o'clock A. M., Col. Little president, Capt. Mosely judge advocate." What light does this throw on the matter? And *what must be said of the character of Mr Swett's appeal to it?*

5. Mr Swett, in denying that a portion of the troops refused to obey General Putnam, writes as follows: – "Now, we say with the utmost confidence, that, any few cases of cowardice out of the question, no military despot was ever obeyed with more implicit subjection than Putnam was throughout the battle, by every one, officers and men," – p. 10. This, coming from so thorough an investigator, from a thirty years' student of the battle, is worth examination; though, had it come from another, it might be passed over with the simple remark, that it indicated more dogmatism than knowledge. Mr Swett, however, confesses that he is leading "a forlorn hope."

Now General Putnam had little or nothing to do with the original detachment, if the two hundred Connecticut men, after they got to the rail fence, be excepted. There is no proof that he gave an order to it throughout the whole affair, but on the contrary, this is denied in the strongest terms. But his principal service was rendered in connection with the reinforcements,

which arrived at the scene of action in the afternoon. After the first attack, he rode to Bunker Hill, and to the rear of it, to urge them forward. But they hesitated. He used every effort, especially, it is stated, at Charlestown Neck and on Bunker Hill, to overcome this reluctance. He ordered, entreated, encouraged and threatened, but all in vain. "The plea was" – I quote a report made in 1775 – "the artillery was gone, and they stood no chance for their lives in such circumstances, declaring they had no officers to lead them." They could not be prevailed upon to go where fighting was, and so large bodies of the troops remained out of the action. This fact is one of the most reliable, as well as most discreditable, relative to the battle. In truth, the state of things on Bunker Hill and in the rear of it, during the afternoon, was more like positive disobedience, than like "implicit subjection." However it may have been at Prescott's post there was no such efficient command in other parts of the field as is expressed in Mr Swett's language, anything he has written, or may write, to the contrary notwithstanding. There was confusion when he leaves the inference that there was order. The evidence on this point is conclusive – overwhelming.

Thus Captain Chester (1775) states: – "Those that came up as recruits were most terribly frightened, many of them, and did not march up with that true courage that their leader ought to have inspired them with." William Tudor (1775) says – "They were discouraged from advancing." Rev. John Martin (1775) says – "During the whole or most of the action Colonel Gerrish,

with one thousand men was at the bottom of Bunker Hill and ought to have come up but did not." Contemporary authority as decisively connects General Putnam with the reinforcements. This is not denied. Thus Daniel Putnam, his son, states that he rode to the rear "to urge on reinforcements;" and Stiles states that he left the field to urge them on. Mr Swett, in his history, has no such "implicit subjection." He relates (p. 35) the efforts Putnam made at Charlestown Neck to induce the reinforcements that reached there to pass across; and although he "*entreated, encouraged, and threatened,*" he could only get "*some of the troops*" "to venture over." Again, when Gerrish was on Bunker Hill with part of his regiment, the men disorganized and dispersed, "Putnam" —*it is Mr Swett* who writes this — "*ordered them on to the lines; he entreated and threatened them, and some of the most cowardly he knocked down with his sword, but all in vain!*" Once more, p. 41, he says — "Putnam rode to the rear and exhausted every art and effort to bring them on. Capt. Bailey only reached the lines." The evidence as to the confusion is equally clear. John Pitts (1775) says — "There never was more confusion and less command." In Major Gridley's sentence (1775) emphatic allusion is made to "the great confusion that attended" the transactions. Captain Chester (1775) says of things on Bunker Hill near the close of the battle — "When we arrived there was not a company in any kind of order." But why multiply testimony on this point? Mr Swett himself says, in his history, p. 50 — "Great allowance must be made for those unable, and those

unwilling to go on; the men went on or off as they pleased and when they pleased!"

Now with such evidence – and this is but a tithe of what may be adduced – is it not surprising that such a claim of efficient command should be set up at this late day, with nothing but bare assertion to support it? If it were so, if there were this implicit subjection, this ready obedience, the enemies of General Putnam might ask with force, what they have asked in weakness – 'Why, if he was so obeyed, were not the troops at the lines? Could he not have *led* them up?' To affirm that he was *obeyed implicitly*, by officers and men, and then to be obliged to admit that *those he commanded* were not in battle raging *a stone's throw off*, is to place the brave old general in an awkward position, a position he never filled in his life time. Mr Swett's zeal here lacks discretion.

6. Another mistake seems to astonish Mr Swett "by its magnitude, nay its sublimity." He says – "According to him, the great battle of Bunker Hill was fought, on our side, by a headless mob; and, to prove this, he adduces the most incontrovertible argument in the world, were it true, that the army at Cambridge, which had been for two months collecting and organizing under the able and experienced Gen. Ward, assisted by a host of accomplished veteran officers, was itself a mob," – p. 3. No quotation is made to sustain these remarks, and *none can be made*. Nothing to warrant it can be found in the book, and it is enough to stamp it as glaring misrepresentation. I hold no such opinion. I adduce no such argument. It may be cruel to annihilate

so much "magnitude" and "sublimity," but I must state that they have no better basis than Mr Swett's imagination.

In opposition to this "mob" theory, Mr Swett goes to the other extreme, and affirms, p. 18 – "That the army at Cambridge was regularly organized and consolidated under Ward, Warren, Putnam, and other officers in regular gradation, without any distinction in regard to the colonies whence the troops came." And this is repeated on p. 21, and again on p. 29. In fact this constitutes the foundation of one of Mr Swett's "incontrovertible" proofs that Putnam was the commander. It is strange that Mr Swett should venture upon such assertions flatly in the face of the most positive evidence. He makes no attempt to disprove the facts, first brought together in the Siege of Boston, (pp. 98 to 104) relative to the action of the colonies, and which were drawn entirely from contemporary MSS. and authorities. It is not necessary to repeat them here. They show that each of the four colonies commissioned its troops, supplied them with provisions, directed their disposition, and that it was not until after the battle of Bunker Hill that the Committee of War of Connecticut ordered Generals Spencer and Putnam, while their troops were in Massachusetts, to obey General Ward as commander-in-chief, in order that there might be "a due subordination;" and also advised the colonies of Rhode Island and New Hampshire to do the same respecting their troops. That the army (June 17, 1775) was regularly organized and consolidated is not true.

The evidence in relation to the want of organization in the Massachusetts army is ample. This army certainly cannot be said to have been settled under officers in "*regular gradation*." I have a report made to the provincial congress of Massachusetts, dated June 15, 1775, by a committee appointed "to consider the claims and pretensions of the colonels," which goes with much particularity into many cases, and recommends several to be commissioned, which was not done, however, until after the battle. *On the 21st of June* an important committee was raised "to inquire into the reason of the present want of discipline in the Massachusetts army, and to report to this congress what *is the proper way to put said army into a proper regulation*;" and on the next day, the congress ordered the committee of safety to present lists of persons worthy to be commissioned, "*that so our army may be organized as soon as possible*." The army regularly organized and consolidated! I beg Mr Swett will make himself acquainted with the facts, from authentic sources, before he writes again.

The old soldiers gave Mr Swett, when he prepared his history, better information than he writes in his last pamphlet. On page 11 (edition of 1826) he says: – "They (the troops) were strangers to discipline and almost *to subordination*. Though nominally organized into regiments, these were deficient in numbers, many of them only skeletons, *and their respective ranks not ascertained*. Some of the troops were yet serving as minute men, and the officers in a number of regiments *were not yet commissioned*."

Again, p. 14: The Americans "were unable to appreciate the necessity of discipline or to understand the unorganized state of the army in every department!!" But in 1850 the same writer has it that this same army was "*regularly organized and consolidated*

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