



Howe's Masquerade

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North American

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During the siege of Boston Sir William Howe undertook to show his contempt for the raw fellows who were disrespectfully tossing cannon-balls at him from the batteries in Cambridge and South Boston, by giving a masquerade. It was a brilliant affair, the belles and blades of the loyalist set being present, some in the garb of their ancestors, for the past is ever more picturesque than the present, and a few roisterers caricaturing the American generals in ragged clothes, false noses, and absurd wigs. At the height of the merriment a sound of a dirge echoing through the streets caused the dance to stop. The funeral music paused before the doors of Province House, where the dance was going on, and they were flung open. Muffled drums marked time for a company that began to file down the great stair from the floor above the ball-room: dark men in steeple-hats and pointed beards, with Bibles, swords, and scrolls, who looked sternly at the guests and descended to the street.

Colonel Joliffe, a Whig, whose age and infirmity had prevented him from joining Washington, and whose courtesy and intelligence had made him respected by his foes, acted as chorus: "These I take to be the Puritan governors of Massachusetts: Endicott, Winthrop, Vane, Dudley, Haynes, Bellingham, Leverett, Bradstreet." Then came a rude soldier, mailed, begirt with arms: the tyrant Andros; a brown-faced man with a sailor's gait: Sir William Phipps; a courtier wigged and jewelled: Earl Bellomont; the crafty, well-mannered Dudley; the twinkling, red-nosed Shute; the ponderous Burnet; the gouty Belcher; Shirley, Pownall, Bernard, Hutchinson; then a soldier, whose cocked hat he held before his face. "Tis the shape of Gage!" cried an officer, turning pale.

The lights were dull and an uncomfortable silence had fallen on the company. Last, came a tall man muffled in a military cloak, and as he paused on the landing the guests looked from him to their host in amazement, for it was the figure of Howe himself. The governor's patience was at an end, for this was a part of the masquerade that had not been looked for. He fiercely cried to Joliffe, "There is a plot in this. Your head has stood too long on a traitor's shoulders."

"Make haste to cut it off, then," was the reply, "for the power of Sir William Howe and of the king, his master, is at an end. These shadows are mourners at his funeral. Look! The last of the governors."

Howe rushed with drawn sword on the figure of himself, when it turned and looked at him. The blade clanged to the floor and Howe fell back with a gasp of horror, for the face was his own. Hand nor voice was raised to stay the double-goer as it mournfully passed on. At the threshold it stamped its foot and shook its fists in air; then the door closed. Mingled with the strains of the funeral march, as it died along the empty streets, came the tolling of the bell on South Church steeple, striking the hour of midnight. The festivities were at an end and, oppressed by a nameless fear, the spectators of this strange pageant made ready for departure; but before they left the booming of cannon at the southward announced that Washington had advanced. The glories of Province House were over. When the last of the royal governors left it he paused on the threshold, beat his foot on the stone, and flung up his hands in an attitude of grief and rage.

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