

BISHOP BOWMAN'S POEM*

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

IN view of the fact that Americans are celebrating, during the year 1932, the bicentenary anniversary of the birth of General George Washington, the "Father of his Country," especial interest attaches to the publication of a bit of poetry written many years ago by the Right Rev. Dr. Samuel Bowman, assistant bishop of Pennsylvania and beloved rector of St. James's Protestant Episcopal church, Lancaster, from 1830 to 1861.

James Damant, organist of St. James's church and an excellent scholar, taught a school for young ladies, which was quite famous in its day, and which was attended by girls of the best families in Lancaster. Some of our older citizens will doubtless remember that this seminary stood on the site 42-44 West Orange street, now occupied by the American Seed company.

Mr. Damant was a fine man, but being an Englishman, he could hardly have been expected to sympathize with Americans in their reverence for the illustrious Washington, who was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." His pupils were indignant and disappointed to learn that their cherished dream of having a holiday on the twenty-second of February was to be denied them as it did not meet with the least favor from him. But Lancaster girls in those days were not so profoundly impressed with the idea that everything "English," was correct, as some girls of the present seem to be, and they vigorously protested against the possibility of losing their anticipated holiday. A committee from the school was appointed to seek Bishop Bowman for counsel and assistance; and he, with the tact and kindness for which he was noted, enabled the young ladies to accomplish their desire by composing for them the following simple lines:

"The day has dawned, the glorious day
That saw Columbia's hero born,
Our country's hope, our country's stay,
When war's dark clouds were o'er us thrown.

"The first in war, in honor, peace!
We hail with joy his natal day;
And from our studies beg release
To spend it as a holiday."

This poem was signed by the scholars as a petition, and upon its presentation to Mr. Damant he very wisely granted the request, and doubtless saved himself from much unkindly criticism.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Damant in addition to being a good teacher, possessed a scientific mind and helped to introduce the daguerreotype to citizens of Lancaster, if we are to believe the account which appeared in the Lancaster Intelligencer and Journal of Tuesday, January 4th, 1842:

"We invite attention to the advertisement of James Damant and Dr. William B. Fahnestock, two gentlemen well-known in this city for their scientific attainments, proposing to take likenesses by the new daguerreotype process. We have seen several miniatures taken by these gentlemen—one a likeness of Dr. George Barrett Kerfoot and the other of Mr. Damant, and in both cases the resemblance is perfect, even to the most trifling feature. We understand that they have acquired a knowledge of this astonishing process unaided by any instruction, save such as they were enabled to glean from published accounts; and the result is that they have brought it to a state of more perfection than any we have seen in the cities. These gentlemen are our fellow-citizens, and it behooves us to encourage what is emphatically native talent."

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