

THOMAS MIFFLIN.

In the front wall of the Trinity Lutheran Church, South Duke street, Lancaster, is a tablet containing the following inscription:

.....
: In perpetuation of the memory of :
: THOMAS MIFFLIN, ESQ., :
: Major General of the Revolutionary :
: War of the United States, :
: and late Governor of the State :
: of Pennsylvania. :
: A distinguished patriot and a zeal- :
: ous friend of LIBERTY. :
: Died January 19, 1800. :
.....

It is fitting, indeed, that the people of Lancaster—her patriotic sons and daughters—should feel an interest in the history of the distinguished man whose grave lies among them.

The Mifflins were Quakers, who came over from Wiltshire, England, in 1679, and located in the vicinity of Philadelphia, and were thus among the earliest, if not the first, English settlers in Pennsylvania. They were granted a patent by the representatives of the Duke of York of a fine tract of 300 acres of land on the east bank of the Schuylkill; here they built a beautiful home, which they called "Fountain Green," and which is now included in Fairmount Park. Thus, at least three years prior to the coming of William Penn, the Mifflins were settled on land which, being confirmed by grant from Penn, remained in the family for many successive generations.

Thomas Mifflin was a son of the Councillor, John Mifflin, and was born in Philadelphia, January 10, 1744. He entered the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), and graduated from that institution

when but sixteen years of age. It was intended that he should adopt a mercantile career, and he entered the counting house of William Coleman, one of the most upright men of the day, and one of whom Dr. Franklin spoke in terms of highest praise.

As was the custom with families of means in those days, Thomas Mifflin was sent abroad on reaching his majority, and went at once to London. Going from there to France, he spent some time studying the French language, and taking riding lessons, for which he had a master four times a week. Though he made the acquaintance of young Lord Murray and other prominent people, his letters, preserved in the family, show, even in that early day, the love of country which distinguished him in later life. He writes:

"I find myself as great a patriot for America as when I first left it. All the charms of that fine country (France) have had no other effect than in making me better pleased with the simple and honest manners of my own countrymen. The politeness and gayety of the French cannot stand the test with our sincerity, and I am sure they are as great, if not greater, strangers to true happiness as we are." After returning to America, Thomas Mifflin engaged in business with his brother, George, and was very successful. But he was not of the temperament to remain devoted to quiet business pursuits while the air was vibrating with the coming of the Revolutionary storm.

The city of Philadelphia was at this time represented in the Provincial Assembly by two Burgesses, of which Thomas Mifflin was one in 1771, and he was re-elected the following year. "Thus, though but twenty-seven years of age, he entered upon his public career, which only ended with his death."

At the time of the closing of the port of Boston, on account of the opposition to the duty on tea, Paul Revere was sent with letters to Joseph Reed and Thomas Mifflin, asking Pennsylvania to support the cause. Mifflin was in favor of sending the strongest messages of sympathy and aid. To secure the support of the public for a Continental Congress, it was decided that Dickinson, Thomson and Mifflin should make a tour of the frontier counties. They succeeded in their mission, and Mifflin was one of the delegates chosen to the First Congress. He was again elected to the Assembly in 1774, and was elected with Franklin in 1775.

Though Mifflin's services in the Congress were undoubtedly valuable, the call to arms for the Revolution opened another field. Although a Quaker, he had a warlike spirit, and accepted a commission as Major, and on the organization of the Continental Army he repaired to the encampment at Boston, where he became aide-de-camp to Washington. Irving, in his "Life of Washington," says: "Washington, though social, was not convivial in his habits. He would retire early from the board, leaving an aide-de-camp or one of his officers to take his place. Colonel Mifflin was the first person who officiated as aide-de-camp. He was a Philadelphia gentleman, of high respectability, who had accompanied Washington from that city, and received his appointment shortly after their arrival at Cambridge." Bancroft writes: "Mifflin charmed by his activity, spirit, and obliging behavior."

William Rawle, LL.D., when President of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, delivered an address on the life of Thomas Mifflin, and gives the following account of him when the army was before Boston: "Destitute of materials for besieging a place

even slightly fortified, the Americans could only restrain the excursions of General Gage and intercept his supplies. A detachment had been sent by the British for the purpose of collecting cattle, and Mifflin solicited and obtained the command of a party to oppose them. He succeeded, and an eye witness, the venerable General Craig, declared that 'he never saw a greater display of personal bravery than was exhibited on this occasion in the cool and intrepid conduct of Colonel Mifflin.' "

In 1775, Washington appointed Mifflin Quartermaster-General, because (as he writes to Richard Henry Lee) "of a thorough persuasion of his integrity, my own experience of his activity, and, finally, because he stands unconnected with either of these governments, or with this, that, or the other man."

In 1776, when but thirty-two years of age, Mifflin was made a Brigadier-General, and entered upon his duties in the field.

Mr. Sydney George Fisher, in his "Pennsylvania Colony and Commonwealth," says: "Like most Quakers who took to fighting, Mifflin made an excellent soldier. He commanded the best-disciplined brigade in the Continental Army."

It is related that even the army was not enthusiastic over the Declaration of Independence, and, on an occasion of the reading of the document to the soldiers at Fort Washington, they received it in perfect silence. General Mifflin, knowing this was no time for hesitation, sprang upon a cannon, and, in a clear voice, exclaimed: "My lads, the Rubicon is crossed. Let us give three cheers for the Declaration!" The effect was electrical.

On the retreat from Long Island, General Mifflin desired that his brigade be the last to leave the lines: this was granted, and this young Gen-

eral had the post of honor in an action, of which General Greene wrote: "Considering the difficulties, the retreat from Long Island was the best effected retreat I ever heard or read of."

Thomas Mifflin's services as a recruiting officer were invaluable, and Keith says "that the cause of America was more than once saved by his powers of persuasion over a colony of shopkeepers or husbandmen." Congress saw his ability and informed Washington that they wished to retain him in their service.

Mifflin was directed to proceed through various parts of the State to arouse the militia to "come forth in defense of their country." A committee was appointed to accompany him. Mifflin was a most eloquent speaker, and, with his fine address and appearance, was well calculated to impress his hearers. Full of enthusiasm for the cause himself, he was best prepared to present it to others. Bancroft says: "He fulfilled his mission with patriotism and ability." Everywhere meetings were called, and Mifflin addressed the people, from pulpits, the Judges' bench, and from public resorts.

They succeeded in bringing out the militia of Lancaster county and the frontier region; and "Mifflin, by his almost unaided efforts, had the satisfaction of marching to New Jersey with some eighteen hundred men, and in the picture of the battle of Princeton by Col. Trumbull, Gen. Mifflin occupies a prominent place."

On February 19, 1778, Congress made him a Major-General. General Mifflin's actions as Quartermaster-General having been criticised, he offered his resignation, but Congress would not accept it; and instead showed their perfect confidence in him by placing in his hands a million dollars with which to settle the claims of his administration as Quartermaster-

General, and in 1780 appointed him a member of a board to devise means for retrenching expenditure. Such is the statement of Keith in his "Provincial Councillors of Pennsylvania."

In 1782 Mifflin was again sent as delegate to the Continental Congress, and became in 1783 President of that body. He thus occupied at that time the highest office in the nation. In this position he received the resignation of Washington as Commander in Chief of the Army. This was an impressive occasion. After an affecting address, Washington advanced to President Mifflin and handed him his commission and a copy of his address, to which President Mifflin replied in beautiful and impressive language. This event is commemorated in a picture which hangs in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington.

After Mifflin's retirement from Congress he was appointed Speaker of the Assembly of Pennsylvania, and in 1787 was a member of the convention which framed the Constitution of the United States. Keith writes of Gen. Mifflin: "He was chosen in 1788 to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, and was made its President. He continued under that title the head of the State until the Constitution of 1790 went into effect, being also President of the Convention which framed that Constitution. When the popular election was held to choose the first Governor, Thomas Mifflin received a large majority of votes, General Arthur St. Clair being his opponent." Mifflin was inaugurated in Philadelphia with much ceremony, December 21, 1790, and by re-elections served nine years, the greatest length of time, according to the Constitution, that one man could retain the office.

During the period of his administration as Governor the "Whisky Insurrection" occurred, and Mifflin took ac-

tive part in its suppression, going himself with a command of troops.

When Governor Mifflin's term of office expired he was again sent to the Assembly, then in session at Lancaster. "He began to attend the meetings, but was taken suddenly ill, and on the 20th of January, 1800, in the fifty-seventh year of his age, breathed the last breath of an eventful life."

His biographer, William Rawle, LL.D., says of him: "In patriotic principle never changing, in public action never faltering, in personal friendship sincerely warm, in relieving the distressed always active and humane, in his own affairs improvident, in the business of others scrupulously just."

Thomas Mifflin married, in 1767, his cousin, Sarah Morris, daughter of Morris Morris, of Philadelphia.

In his country seat on the Schuylkill and in his town house Gen. Mifflin extended hospitality to the leading men of his day; and many times Washington was entertained under his roof.

Mr. Sydney George Fisher says: "Mifflin was a thoroughbred Philadelphia Quaker; a man of some wealth, living in a large, handsomely furnished house, where he entertained with the liberality that was then fashionable. He appears to have been a very vigorous and handsome man." Another describes General Mifflin as remarkably handsome, of athletic frame. His manners were cheerful and affable. His elocution open, fluent and distinct. A man of ready apprehension and brilliancy."

The portrait of General Mifflin in full uniform, painted by Gilbert Stuart, and now in the possession of the family of George Mifflin Dallas, shows him to be a man of fine appearance.

Mr. Fisher calls Gen. Mifflin "one of the neglected Pennsylvanians."

This brief record of the life and actions of this distinguished man cannot be closed without a reference to the

charge made against him of a desire to see Washington supplanted as Commander in Chief. A prominent statesman once remarked to the writer of this article "that, while we all honor and revere the character of Washington, yet had he lived in this day to command the armies, we would undoubtedly object to his methods as being too slow, and he would have been superseded by some one more prompt in action." The impetuous Mifflin no doubt felt that the conduct of the war, according to Washington's methods, would not lead to success. Fortunately, he was mistaken, and no doubt he regretted his action; but he can never be accused of want of patriotism or energy.

I cannot do better than quote Keith on this subject. He writes: "Bancroft, in his celebrated History of the United States, has pierced the halo which surrounded every Revolutionary leader, and has brought them with all their incapacity and their intrigues into public gaze; but it may be doubted how far the character of any individual deserves the strong terms of the rhetorician. Mifflin is severely attacked. But any honest man could have believed in the expediency of a change of commanders; the gloom over America after the loss of Philadelphia was such as to make people lose all confidence in Washington, and when the brilliant victory of Gates at Saratoga came to brighten the prospect, it was natural to suggest that Gates was more competent."

"It is certain that Washington bore General Mifflin no malice, and their relations in public and private life after the Revolution gave no indication that Washington placed any trust in the charges made against Mifflin."

In this day, when so much interest is shown in the history of our patriots, and an effort made to keep their memory fresh and green in the hearts of

the present generation by the Daughters of the American Revolution and by historical and other societies, would it not be well to do something to mark appreciation of the distinguished services of this "neglected Pennsylvanian?"

MARTHA J. MIFFLIN.

MAJOR GENERAL THOMAS MIFFLIN.
1744—1800.

Intrepid orator and statesman bold,
At whose impetuous and impassioned
words
Men dropped the plowshares and took
up their swords
To fight for Freedom, in the days of
old—
Forgotten art thou in this lust for gold,
Although thy strong and stirring life
records
Deeds that were noble. But this age
rewards
With calm neglect thy labors manifold.
Champion of Liberty and of the Right;
Brother in perilous arms, to Washing-
ton;
Thou zealous Ruler of a glorious State—
Is there no way thy service to requite?
Sleep, Patriot, Sleep! nor wish to know
thy fate—
Th' ingratitude of Freedom for her son!
—Lloyd Mifflin.

In Memoriam.

The committee appointed at the April meeting to prepare a minute on the death of our fellow-member, Hon. H. C. Brubaker, presented the following:

That in commemorating the death of the Hon. H. C. Brubaker we recognize his eminent ability as a jurist and his devotion to the best interests of Lancaster county. The Historical Society appreciates the fact that he was interested in the special work in which we, as a society, are engaged, and sincerely mourn his death, in the midst of a career of eminent usefulness. We suggest that the Secretary be directed to transmit to the family of the deceased the present minute and to express to them our profound sorrow in their sad bereavement.

S. M. SENER,
JOS. H. DUBBS,
W. A. HEITSHU.

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