

CHAPTER XII.

THE PERIOD OF PAPER MONEY AND FOREIGN WARS.

In 1727, the very year of the accession of George II to the English throne, Deputy-Governor Joseph Jenckes was chosen to succeed Cranston as Governor of Rhode Island. One of the first cares of his short administration, now that Rhode Island knew just how far her mainland extended, was to give to the recently added inhabitants a more ready access to the courts. To accomplish this, in June, 1729, the colony was divided into three counties. The Island of Rhode Island, with Jamestown, New Shoreham and other adjacent islands, were formed into Newport County, with Newport as the county town; Providence, Warwick, and East Greenwich were constituted as Providence County, with Providence as shire town; South and North Kingstown and Westerly were made into the third county, known as King's County, with South Kingstown as the chief town. The judicial system was then revised by providing for justices for each county, which, furthermore, was to have its own court house and jail.¹

This reconstruction of the courts was also made necessary by the increase in population. In 1730 a census, taken by order of the Board of Trade, showed that the population of the colony had increased to 17,935, of which 1,648 were negroes and 985 were Indians. Newport led with a total of 4,640, then came Providence with 3,916, North Kingstown with 2,105, Westerly with 1,926, South Kingstown with 1,523, East Greenwich with 1,223, Warwick with 1,178, Portsmouth

exposing the founders of Rhode Island to the charge of inconsistency in having planted liberty of conscience. Samuel Eddy, however, clearly showed in 1819 that this clause must have been introduced into the laws after 1688, and that its probable object was solely to win favor in England in the reign of William and Anne. (Walsh's *Appeal*, 428-435.) S. S. Rider, in a comprehensive monograph on the subject (Rider's *Hist. Tract*, 2nd ser. no. 1), goes more thoroughly into the matter and shows that the clause could not have been introduced prior to 1705, as it does not appear in the unprinted digest of that year. He further explains how this law was inserted into the 1719 Digest by the committee appointed to prepare it, and was made necessary by the severe English enactments against Roman Catholics. See also Arnold, II, 491.

¹R. I. C. R., IV, 427; 1730 *Digest*, 188-192.

with 813, Jamestown with 312, and New Shoreham with 290. A study of these figures discloses the fact that, since the preceding census, the towns in Narragansett country had experienced remarkable growth, undoubtedly due to the recent settled state of that territory, and that the small settlements of Portsmouth, Jamestown and New Shoreham had scarcely gained at all. Of the 1,648 colored slaves, over three-quarters were owned on the island and in the Narragansett country, Newport having 649 and the two Kingstowns 498. The Indians were settled nearly all in the southwestern corner of the colony. Other figures gathered at the time show that there were 5,000 tons of shipping and 400 sailors, that the value of the annual exports was computed at £10,000, and that the ordinary yearly expenses of the government were estimated at £2,000, and the extraordinary at £2,500, colonial currency.¹

The colony was indeed in a flourishing condition. There was as yet little luxury or display of wealth, but the inhabitants were intelligent and educated, and the better part of them had some fair degree of culture. There was great lack, however, of a literary centre, like the colleges at Cambridge and New Haven, or of a concerted effort towards a spread of liberal knowledge. Newport may be said to have experienced an intellectual awakening in the winter of 1729-30, when George Berkeley, Dean of Derry, afterwards Bishop of Cloyne and one of the greatest philosophers of the century, decided to visit Rhode Island's shores with the idea of founding a missionary college at Bermuda. He first visited Newport to purchase land as an investment, and also, as his biographer suggests, to establish correspondence with influential New Englanders. With him were several literary men and artists, among whom were Smibert, the famous portrait painter, and Peter Harrison, a prominent architect. Berkeley's first impressions of Newport were very favorable. He says in a letter to a friend: "The inhabitants are of a mixed kind consisting of many sorts and subdivisions of sects. There are four sorts of Anabaptists, besides Presbyterians, Quakers, Independents and many of no profession at all. Notwithstanding so many differences here are fewer quarrels about religion than elsewhere, the people living peaceably with their neighbors of whatever profession. The climate is like that of Italy and not at all colder in winter than I have known it everywhere north of Rome. The town of Newport contains about 6,000 souls and is the most thriving, flourishing place in all America for its bigness.

¹Callender's *Hist. Discourse* in *R. I. H. S. Coll.*, iv, 94, and Arnold, ii, 106.

It is very pretty and pleasantly situated. I was never more agreeably surprised than at the sight of the town and its harbor".¹

Berkeley lengthened his stay in Newport to nearly three years, purchasing a farm in Middletown and spending his spare hours



WHITEHALL, THE RESIDENCE OF BISHOP BERKELEY IN MIDDLETOWN.

Erected by him about 1730, and named after the residence of the early archbishops of England

writing philosophy. Soon after his arrival he aided in establishing a literary and philosophical society, whose collection of books a few years later formed the nucleus of the Redwood Library. In 1731, disappointed in the hopes of founding his Bermuda college, Bishop Berkeley left for England, leaving behind him a stimulus for literary and intellectual pursuits, a legacy which the colony could not too highly value.²

From this favorable view of the colony, as presented by Bishop Berkeley, and from the rather romantic period of his stay we must now turn, in contrast, to the evils that were rapidly arising from the issuing of paper money. When the time came for the expiration of the "banks", the government found it necessary to extend the payment and to create further issues to supply a currency. Thus, in May, 1728, they again lengthened the time of payment on the first bank of

¹Fraser's *Works of Berkeley*, iv, 160. Berkeley later modified these favorable views concerning Rhode Island religion, but with especial reference to the more recently settled towns. (See Fraser, iii, 242.)

²The best accounts of Berkeley's stay in Rhode Island are in Fraser's *Life*, iv, 154-190, and in C. R. Thurston's "Bishop Berkeley in New England" in *N. E. Mag.*, n. s. xxi, 65-82. See also Winsor, *Narr. & Crit. Hist.*, v, 141.

1715, one-tenth to be paid annually without interest from the date of passing the act. In the following month, giving as reasons the scarcity of money, the rebuilding of the colony fort and the preservation of commerce, the assembly issued a third bank to the amount of £40,000. In June, 1731, there arose a movement for the issue of another bank. Several of the merchants of Newport, realizing the dangers of depreciation and bankruptcy, presented a memorial to the assembly in which they attempted to show why the issue should not be made. They stated that the excessive emitting of bills of credit during the past few years had caused the value of silver coin to increase nearly three-fold as a medium of exchange. A few more years, and silver, and hence all means of redemption, would be driven from the colony. They further asserted that such action was in opposition to the royal act of 1720, which forbade the issuing of bills of credit unless confirmed by the King's consent, and to the King's instructions to Massachusetts ordering, that that province should not have out in bills more than £30,000 at one time. The outstanding bills of Rhode Island, the memorialists stated, amounted to £120,000, which, on account of the depreciation and the postponement of payment, stood little prospect of redemption. The memorial was doubtless favored by most of the merchants and traders of the colony, and also by the more disinterested and intelligent members of the community. The advocates of these large emissions, says an authority on the subject, "were the multitude who were indebted and distressed in pecuniary affairs and who thus expected to obtain for themselves some measure of relief. It was an easy way of paying old debts. Members of the general assembly were often inclined to favor the project, not only from the desire of popularity, but the less honorable motive of pecuniary interest".¹

The assembly refused to listen to the advice and warning of the memorialists, and at the June session, in 1731, passed an act emitting £60,000. This occasioned great protest, and Governor Jenckes, at the risk of losing his popularity, vetoed the act in these words: "His Honor the Governor dissents from the said vote." The Governor was besought to summon the assembly to take action on these matters. Upon his refusal Deputy-Governor Wanton convoked the assembly, which met on August 3, and declared the governor's veto "to be no part of said act of assembly; and that said act be in no wise encumbered thereby, but that the said dissent be deemed null and void". In giving their reasons for this vote they did not enter at all into the question of principle, but based their whole argument on the score

¹Potter's Account of Bills of Credit in Rider's *Hist. Tract*, viii, 33.

of technicality. They said that the veto had been entered on the records the day after the rising of the assembly, and before then, that that body had no knowledge of any dissent. It was argued that it was not in the power of the legislative authority for any single member to encumber any act by dissenting after the rising of the court. Thus having censured the governor's act they found another ground of complaint against him. Several of the inhabitants had requested from the secretary a copy of the assembly's original act, which that officer drew up and sent to the Governor to receive the colony seal. Immediately two of the assistants caused the news to be spread throughout the colony that the Governor had endangered the loss of the charter by ordering the colony seal to be set to a complaint against the government. These actions resulted in the sending of various letters and memorials to the King. Some of the Newport merchants gave an account of the over-issue of paper money and petitioned that His Majesty would command "this government not to emit any more bills of public credit; and that the bills of credit already emitted be paid in according to the several respective acts whereby they were first emitted, that thereby an end may be put to our sorrows, and the tranquillity of this your Majesty's colony re-established as in former times". Governor Jenckes, who had incurred considerable displeasure, asked, for his vindication, that the royal determination should be given upon the three following particulars:

"First, whether any act passed by the General Assembly of this colony may be judged valid, the governor having entered his dissent from it at the time it was voted.

"Second, whether or no the governor of this colony may with safety refuse or disallow setting the colony seal to copies taken out of the secretary's office, and attested by him, in order to be sent to Your Majesty.

"Third, whether it be the governor's duty to examine all such copies before he orders the colony's seal to be set thereto; the secretary which attests them being an officer under oath."¹

This application was referred to the law officers of the crown, who reported August 5, 1732. As to the last two questions, they confirmed the Governor in his action, asserting that it was "the duty of the Governor to set the colony's seal to such copies of acts as were attested by the secretary in order to be sent to His Majesty; and that the examination and attestation of the Secretary are sufficient without the personal examination of the governor". In regard to the question of the governor's veto power they reported decisively: "In this

¹R. I. C. R., iv, 456-461. The first memorial is dated Aug. 30, 1731, and the petition of the Governor Aug. 20.

charter, no negative voice is given to the governor, nor any power reserved to the crown of approving or disapproving the laws to be made in this colony. We are therefore of opinion that though by the charter the presence of the governor, or in his absence of the deputy governor, is necessary to the legal holding of a general assembly; yet, when he is there, he is a part of the assembly and included by the majority; and consequently that acts passed by the majority of such assembly are valid in law, notwithstanding the governor's entering his dissent at the time of the passing thereof." They further rendered as their opinion upon the additional question, "whether His Majesty hath any power to repeal or make void the above mentioned act of assembly, we humbly conceive that no provision being made for that purpose the crown hath no discretionary power of repealing laws made in this province; but the validity thereof depends upon their not being contrary, but as near as may be agreeable to the laws of England, regard being had to the nature and constitution of the place and the people. Where this condition is observed the law is binding; and where it is not, the law is void as not warranted by the charter."

This last decision was of considerable importance to Rhode Island, as it confirmed the fact that the colony, according to the charter, had virtually an absolute and unrestricted control of its own legislation. Although producing an opinion in Rhode Island's favor, these petitions inquiring about the right of veto and narrating the assembly's troubles were very dangerous to the welfare of the colony. Partridge, the London agent, realized this, and strove his best to prevent such grievances from being aired before the Board of Trade. He wrote that the governor's query concerning his power of veto was "like to prove of very ill consequence to the colony", and might not only "prejudice the colony in general but even those particular persons themselves who joined with the governor in it". He also wrote to Deputy-Governor Wanton deprecating that such differences should arise among the inhabitants who were scarcely "sensible of the valuable privileges which they enjoy above many provinces in our Plantation". In fact, it was only a few years before that the Privy Council had been anxiously inquiring what rights were reserved to the King in the Rhode Island charter, and, as Partridge said, appeals to the King to settle such disputes "will be a means of laying ourselves open and be attended with ill consequences from such as are no friends to the northern colonies".¹

¹The letters of Partridge, dated in February, 1732, are in *Moses Brown Papers*, xv, 4, and *Foster's Coll. of Papers*, ii, 147, in R. I. H. S. Library.

Thus this important controversy resulted in the complete triumph of the paper money party led by the various members of the Wanton family. In the May election of 1732 Governor Jenckes was displaced by William Wanton, and John Wanton was re-elected Deputy-Governor. Secure in its position, the party was now ready to flood the colony with further issues. In July, 1733, the assembly ordered another bank of their irredeemable paper, this time to the amount of £104,000, giving as reasons the need of repairs to the Colony fort, the encouragement of fisheries and the construction of a pier at Block Island. This issue not only affected Rhode Island, but also helped to depreciate the currency of neighboring colonies, which themselves were struggling with the same question. Massachusetts attempted to prevent the circulation of Rhode Island's bills in her province, and a number of Boston merchants in retaliation issued a private loan of £110,000 secured by their joint credit.¹ But such action only resulted in further depreciating the currency of both colonies.

The Wanton influence still presided over the paper money party. When Governor William Wanton died in office, he was succeeded in the election of 1734 by his brother John. Gideon Wanton filled the important and responsible position of general treasurer. By 1738 the "want of a sufficient medium of exchange" necessitated the issue of the "sixth bank", with the familiar excuses of promotion of trade, encouragement of manufactures, and colony repairs. The framers of this act egotistically imagined that the creation of this loan, which amounted to £100,000, was to benefit the surrounding colonies. "Connecticut carries on but a small trade", says Richard Ward, "and stands in need of a very small medium, which, with a quantity of our bills passing there, hath rendered it unnecessary for them to make any large emissions of bills of credit; and the province of Massachusetts Bay having their hands so tied up that, notwithstanding a great number of our bills is circulating among them, the merchants of Boston have been forced to emit a round sum of negotiable notes of hand, to supply the want of money and prevent business from stagnation".² Verily, as the good Doctor MacSparran later remarked, "The Nova Anglians in general, the Rhode Islanders in particular, are perhaps the only people on earth who have hit on the art of enriching themselves by running in debt."³

The report of commissioners made in 1739 did not present a very cheerful view of the colony's financial condition. They showed that

¹See Felt's *Mass. Currency*, p. 88, and Palfrey, iv, 549.

²Rider's *Hist. Tract*, viii, 153.

³Udike's *Narragansett Church*, p. 515.

up to October, 1739, there had been issued for the supply of the treasury about £114,000 in bills of credit, of which over £11,000 were still outstanding. This deficit was but of small consequence when compared with the outstanding amount of the six public loans or banks. By this method £384,000 had been emitted, of which probably only a small amount had been repaid by the borrowers. If the population of the colony at the time was 20,000, the public debt would be about £15 per capita.¹ But we must leave this subject of paper money for a short time to take up other important matters that were rapidly engaging the closest attention of the colony. When the subject again arises for discussion, it will be found that foreign wars, English interference and the adoption of a specie system by other governments will have so affected Rhode Island's policy as to subject her name to ignominy both at home and abroad.

One of the most significant facts in connection with the later history of the colony was the restriction which the English authorities attempted to place upon New England trade. Early in the century, Newport, in common with the other large commercial towns, learned the profit of importing from the West Indies sugar and molasses, and of distilling the latter into rum. The London merchants, always eager to suppress any manufacturing enterprise that interfered with their own markets, sought to embarrass this trade by various restrictive acts. They used their influence so well that in 1733 an act was passed, known as the "Molasses Act", laying a heavy duty on West India products imported from foreign islands into the northern colonies. Partridge, the Rhode Island agent, led in opposing this act. As he wrote home to Rhode Island, "The West India gentlemen are not quiet yet, but as we expected have begun again in the House of Commons, who have already ordered a bill to be brought in for the better securing and encouraging the trade of the sugar colonies. In the present bill they have left out the restriction of sending horses and lumber to the foreign Plantations, but we think in a manner this is as bad as the old bill; for to what purpose will it be to have liberty to send away our commodities, if we cannot have returns for them?"² In his petition to the Board of Trade he claimed that the bill deprived the colonies of their rights as Englishmen in laying taxes against their consent and without their being represented in Parliament. As Arnold says, "This war cry of revolution, which was ere long to rally the American colonies in the struggle for independence, was here first sounded by

¹Rider's *Hist. Tract*, viii, 51, 175.

²Letter to Wanton, Feb. 4, 1732, in *Foster MS. Coll. R. I. Hist.*, ii, 149, in R. I. H. S. Library.

the Quaker agent of Rhode Island, to cease only with the dismemberment of the British empire".¹

The act, however, was passed, and although it seems to have affected Newport less than her rival, Boston, it prevented the distilling of molasses into rum from becoming, as it had promised, the most important colonial manufacture. In 1739, when it was learned that further restrictions on colonial commerce were intended, the Rhode Island assembly voted that the Governor should write to the London agent to oppose strenuously the making of any addition to the sugar or molasses act, "that so much affects the northern Plantations"; and also that his Honor should ask the neighboring governments to join in opposing such legislation. The colony showed its jealousy of royal interference in other ways than in those relating to restrictions upon commerce. When one Leonard Lockman, in 1743, produced a commission as naval officer, said to have been granted by royal authority, the assembly decided that "his Majesty was mistaken in said grant", since the office of naval officer had always been under the appointment of the Governor. They further drew up in the same year a table of fees for the English court of vice-admiralty, asserting the undoubted right of the general assembly to state the fees of all officers and courts within the colony.²

Colonial watchfulness for what was regarded as an infringement of rights, was temporarily obliterated by the patriotic spirit caused by a foreign war. England, jealous of the commercial power of Spain and offended by her pretensions of supremacy, declared war upon that country in October, 1739. The news of a break in the long peace was quickly sent to the colonies. The Rhode Island assembly immediately met in February, 1740, and made necessary preparations in case of invasion by the enemy. Fort George was garrisoned, Block Island was provided with a company of soldiers, watch towers and beacons were erected, and a large sloop built expressly for the use of the colony. In May, in obedience to the King's orders, steps were taken towards the enlistment of soldiers for the expedition under Admiral Vernon against the Spanish West Indies, and two companies of one hundred men each were soon transported to New York to join the grand squadron at Jamaica. They were among the one thousand New England volunteers who aided in the disastrous attack upon Cartagena in March, 1741, and of whom scarcely one hundred ever returned to their native colonies. Although Rhode Island assisted in the abortive expedition upon Santiago a few months later, it was in

¹Arnold, II, 124.

²*Digest of 1745*, p. 268, Arnold, II, 142.

the field of privateering that her services were chiefly used for the remainder of the war. The habitual daring and boldness of her inhabitants and her peculiar ability to make her power felt wherever individuality was a potent factor, combined to make the colony especially successful in this branch of warfare. Massachusetts, for instance, where the individual had always been subordinated to the will of the community, was often compelled to offer extraordinary inducements to make vessels go as privateers. It is told how a Massachusetts preacher "berated the fisher folk and men of Gloucester so that they quaked in their beds when they might be manning their vessels and chasing the one French privateer that held the whole coast in terror". Sewall, when he paused in one of his Narragansett journeys at Bristol, heard of a French privateer in Vineyard Sound, but added that the Rhode Island men were after him.¹

The profits arising from privateering were quite large and benefited a greater part of the population than would generally be supposed. The Boston News Letter of March 20, 1740, records how Captain Hull of Newport took a prize of so great value that each man's share was more than 1,000 pieces of eight. And a few weeks later it stated that Hull's exploits were so extraordinary that his owners designed "to have his statue finely cut out of a block of marble, to stand upon a handsome pedestal, with each foot upon a Spaniard's neck".²

But the operations of the Spanish war were soon overshadowed by the approach of a greater struggle, occasioned by France espousing the cause of Spain and declaring war upon England. In March, 1744, Parliament immediately proclaimed war with France and instructed the colonies to make ready for the contest. Again did Rhode Island make the necessary preparations, spending the two sessions of May and June in providing for the defence of the colony and in obtaining munitions of war. When the news came of the scheme for the reduction of Louisburg, the assembly voted to equip the colony sloop *Tartar* with 130 men, to provide a land force of 150 men, and to raise a regiment of 350 men to be under the pay of Massachusetts. This expedition, forwarded with great zeal by Governor Shirley of Massachusetts, and commanded by William Pepperell of Maine, was wonder-

¹Weeden, *Econ. and Soc. Hist. of N. E.* II, 601.

²*Idem*, p. 602. These privateering expeditions, however, were not always so successful. In December, 1745, two large ships, with over 400 men, sailed from Newport for the Spanish Main. A tremendous hurricane ensuing, they undoubtedly succumbed to disaster, for they were never heard from again. Such catastrophes as this or the almost total loss of 200 Rhode Island troops at Carthagen in 1741 would account for the sudden and unexplained removal of many an ancestor at this specific period.

fully successful. In June, 1745, Louisburg surrendered, thus completing the most important achievement of the war. One-half of the Rhode Island troops unfortunately arrived too late to aid in the attack, but remained among those who held the garrison until relieved by regular English troops. On the sea, however, the colony showed her especial pre-eminence. Captain Fones, with a small fleet, dispersed a body of several hundred French and Indians sailing to the relief of Louisburg; and Rhode Island privateers captured more than twenty prizes during the year. These various services, together with her furnishings of transports and supplies, caused the home government to grant her £6,322 as her part of the subsequent indemnity to the colonies.¹

Throughout the remainder of the war Rhode Island took her proportionate share with the other New England colonies. She entered actively into the abortive scheme, in the summer of 1746, for the invasion of Canada, which was defeated by the threatened arrival of a French fleet and the dilatory policy of the English ministry.² Although praised for the "ready spirit which both the government and the troops had shown", the colony agreed with Connecticut in refusing to enter into Shirley's rashly planned expedition upon Crown Point. But the war was rapidly drawing to a close, both England and France wearying of the martial activity and dragging expenses. There was a cessation of attacks and campaigns, and Rhode Island used the time to good advantage in her favorite pursuit of privateering. One of the most daring commanders, Capt. John Dennis, was so particularly successful that the French at Martinique sent out a well-equipped war vessel especially to capture him. One may easily imagine that his would-be captors were surprised, when after an action of four hours they were compelled to surrender and be taken as a prize by this redoubtable Rhode Islander. The papers of the day have frequent reference to similar captures. Indeed, it would be safe to say that surely one hundred French vessels, some with cargoes worth over \$50,000, were taken by Rhode Island privateers during the war.³ But on October 7, 1748, the struggle between the two nations

¹The documentary reference to most of the above facts is in *R. I. C. R.*, v, 106-127. The details of Rhode Island's share in the indemnity is given in footnotes in Arnold, II, 170-171; and her part in naval operations is best narrated in Sheffield's *Privateers*, p. 11-23. The fullest documentary history of the war is in Winsor's *Narr. and Crit. Hist.* v, 434-449.

²In the *Rice Papers*, p. 20, in the R. I. H. S. Library, is a journal of this expedition written by Capt. William Rice, from May 26 to Dec. 25, 1746. There are also several rolls of Melvin's and Chenery's Massachusetts companies, 1746-47, in *R. I. H. S. MSS.*, vol. 1.

³Sheffield in his *Privateersmen of Newport*, p. 48, found reference to nearly

was finally concluded by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, by the terms of which each side agreed to restore all territory as it had been before the war. Thus the stronghold of Louisburg, which had been won by the colonists themselves, at their own risk and for their own security, reverted to their enemy, the French. It has been said that the British ministry restored this fortress to France that it might remain as a menace to possible colonial independence, but they were also surely aware of its usefulness to England herself as a means of overawing the colonists. Shirley reminded them of this fact and remarked that "it would by its vicinity to the British colonies and being the key of 'em, give the Crown of Great Britain a most absolute hold and command of 'em if ever there should come a time when they should grow restive and disposed to shake off their dependency upon their mother country, which", he added, "seems to me some centuries further off than it does to some gentlemen at home".¹ At all events, however discouraging the results of the treaty were to the New England colonists, it gave them a knowledge of their own power. The lesson that untrained provincials could defeat the well-equipped European troops was not forgotten when the time came for the more momentous struggle.

During all this period of war, Rhode Island had met her heavy expenses by further issues of paper money. The English government, however, was beginning to realize to what an extent the colonies had gone in this direction, and in August, 1740, warned Rhode Island that instructions had been sent to the colonies more subject to the home rule, not to enact further issues of paper money unless they were approved by the King. Parliament was much apprehensive, the communication stated, that "the commerce of Great Britain had been affected by the large and frequent emissions of paper currency, in which Rhode Island has had too large a share". Orders were also given that Rhode Island should prepare a complete account of previous issues, amounts then outstanding, value of such paper in English coin, and possibility of sinking all the bills.² Although thus advised as to the King's wishes, the assembly decided that the expenses of the war necessitated more bills, and in September, 1740, issued a seventh "bank" of £20,000, to be loaned at four per cent. for ten years and to be equivalent to silver at six shillings nine pence per ounce. Since the attempt was thus made for the first time to fix their value in

seventy captures between 1741-1748. The above account of Captain Dennis is quoted from the *Boston Post Boy* in the same monograph, p. 24.

¹Quoted in Palfrey, v, 93.

²*R. I. C. R.* v, 7.

specie, these bills were styled "New Tenor Bills". In addition to this public loan, an issue of £10,000 of the old tenor bills was made to supply the treasury, but this high-handed act was not favored by all the members of the assembly. Two of the assistants and five deputies entered protests on the records and gave substantial reasons why the issue was injurious. It would depreciate what was already out, they said, thus defrauding creditors of their just dues, encouraging idleness and extortion, and providing in the end a really less medium of exchange. All extraordinary expenses of the war could easily be paid out of the interest from the previous "banks", and could not anyway be met by the present bank, which would not mature interest in two years. The act, furthermore, was undutiful and presumptuous in view of the expressed attitude of Parliament upon the subject. The signers thus conclude their protest to the said act, asserting their opposition, "because the ruin of this flourishing colony will probably in a great measure be owing to this fatal act; we would have the whole colony and posterity know we have not deserved their imprecations on this occasion, but have endeavored to preserve and deliver down to posterity the privileges and the property which our ancestors earned with so much hazard, toil and expense".¹

In January, 1741, Richard Ward, who had succeeded as Governor upon the death of Wanton in 1740, prepared the report upon bills of credit required by the Board of Trade. It was a lengthy document, going thoroughly into the reasons for each issue, giving the current comparative value of English coin and concluding that the present "flourishing condition" of the colony was entirely due to paper money. It reveals the information that the outstanding amount of bills was £340,000, or, reduced to sterling money, £88,000, and blames the depreciation chiefly upon the Boston merchants. Having thus vindicated themselves before the English authorities, the paper money party proceeded to carry out its policy as it saw fit. In February, 1744, came another public loan, the eighth "bank", this time of £40,000. This caused two protests to be entered by members of the assembly, both very similar in tone to the protests against the previous "bank".

Such large issues, exactly as the signers of the protest had predicted, only resulted in depreciating all previous issues. The bank of 1740 had already depreciated to one-fourth of its original value, and by 1748 the present bank of 1743 was worth in specie exchange about one as to ten. Depreciation was not the only evil arising from this worthless currency. The non-payment of interest and the continual

¹For the act itself see the *Digest of 1745*, p. 230. See also *R. I. C. R.* iv, 580.

counterfeiting made the general treasurer's lot no happy one. The difficulty of collecting the banks as they came due caused the frequent foreclosing of mortgages and bonds.¹ The property qualification for freemen had to be raised in 1746 from £200 to £400, since the rapid depreciation of the currency had so cheapened the elective franchise that persons of very little estate were admitted as freemen. The ease with which voters could be obtained brought the assembly to fear "that bribery and corruption hath spread itself in this government, to the great scandal thereof, so that the election of public officers hath been greatly influenced thereby".²

The currency question had become the controlling factor in party contests, giving occasion for much political vehemence and personal abuse. The learned Dr. William Douglass, writing in 1750, thus alludes to conditions in Rhode Island: "Formerly the parties in elections and public transactions were upon sectary footings; but for some years past, the opposite parties are they who are against multiplying a fraudulent paper currency, and they who encourage it for private iniquitous ends. . . The habitual practice of this paper money cheat has had a bad influence, not only upon profligate private persons, but also upon the administration of some of our New England governments; for instance, one of the legislature, a signer of the Rhode Island colony bills, was not long since convicted of signing counterfeit bills. Men are chosen into the legislative and executive parts of their government, not for their knowledge, honor and honesty, but as sticklers for depreciating, for private ends, the currency by multiplied emissions. This year, 1750, the parties amongst the electors of assemblymen were distinguished by the names of the paper money makers and the contrary. . . Massachusetts Bay, where the bulk of their bills were lodged, have sent them back accompanied with the bills of New Hampshire; their design is by quantity to depreciate the value of their bills, and lands mortgaged for public bills will be redeemed in those minorated bills at a very inconsiderable real value".³

Rhode Island's reckless management of her financial system, whether excusable or not, was sure to receive its retribution in the end. When the reimbursement for the war expenses came from England in 1749, Massachusetts was able, by the aid of a tax of £3 per capita, to sink all her outstanding bills. But Rhode Island, although she

¹In 1741 there were 539 such suits in the six towns of Providence county, and in 1742 there were 1,040 more actions instituted in the same towns. (Rider's *Hist. Tract*, viii, 56.)

²1752 *Digest*, p. 12.

³Douglass, ii, 86. This author, though learned, is not always a reliable authority.

received £12,000 specie from England, used only £7,800 of this amount to redeem £89,000 of her great outstanding amount of bills. The smaller proportionate indemnity that she received from England, the excesses of her previous over-issues, and her present apparent unwillingness to use all that she could in the right direction, kept her from imitating the example of Massachusetts and placing her financial system on a sound specie basis. The immediate results of this inability were exhibited in the decline of her business and commerce. Her valuable West Indian trade quickly reverted to Massachusetts,¹ and her currency depreciated to nearly one-half of its specie value. Failures and bankruptcy acts were the natural consequences.

The closing decade of the first half of the eighteenth century was a most important period for Rhode Island history. In addition to the spectacle of a wasting foreign war and of a ruinous and prostrate currency, the colony witnessed the completion of another boundary dispute that vitally affected her future growth and prosperity. She had settled the northern boundary line with Massachusetts in 1719, but the eastern boundary dispute, which resembled the earlier Connecticut controversy in its bitterness and protraction, remained unsettled for many years. A brief abstract of the present dispute may well be given here. The Plymouth Council, by letters patent of 1629, granted to Bradford and his associates territory as far as Narragansett River, but this grant conveyed only right of estate and not of jurisdiction. The first royal grant of the territory was in the Rhode Island charter of 1663, when the colony was given land extending "three English miles to the east and north-east of the most eastern and north-eastern parts of Narragansett Bay". In 1665 the King's Commissioners had made a temporary order favoring Plymouth, but leaving final determination as to right and title to the King. In 1691 Plymouth was absorbed in the Massachusetts charter, and henceforth the dispute was held with the latter government. Rhode Island, having attempted in vain to assert her right to the territory, finally resolved in 1733 to petition the King for a settlement. She claimed two strips of land, first the triangular piece of land in the extreme northeastern corner of the colony, called "Attleboro Gore", and virtually corresponding with the present town of Cumberland, and secondly, the confirmation of the country towards the east according to the three mile clause of her charter.² Massachusetts put in a claim for all the country as far as Narragansett Bay, based chiefly on the

¹Rider's *Hist. Tract.*, viii, 68. For a more detailed discussion of the indemnity money, see the chapter on Financial History.

²Douglass, in 1750, stated that "if Massachusetts Bay had quitclaimed to

Plymouth grant, which petition the Board of Trade denounced as "frivolous and vexatious, preferred only with intent to delay and prevent the settling of the boundaries". Finally, upon their advice, the privy council directed that the controversy be adjusted by a body of commissioners from New York, New Jersey, and Nova Scotia. In 1741 this commission sat in Providence, and on June 30 decided that the Rhode Island eastern line should run from the Massachusetts southern boundary by a meridian line to Pawtucket Falls, then southerly along the Seekonk and Providence Rivers to Bullock's Neck, then following a line three miles away from the shores of Narragansett Bay and the Sakonnet River until it reached the ocean. This gave to Rhode Island the "gore" in question, and a strip of land three miles wide from Bullock's Point to the ocean; but she had claimed almost as much again, from a point three miles east-northeast of the Assonet Bridge, west to Fox Point and due south to the ocean. Accordingly she appealed from this judgment to the King. Massachusetts, no part of whose claim had been recognized, also made appeal "from every part of it, without specifying anything in particular". In May, 1746, after listening to all the arguments, the privy council ordered that the commissioners' award be confirmed. Massachusetts, wholly defeated in her claim, refused to aid in surveying the line; so Rhode Island was compelled to run the line *ex parte*, thus giving rise to minor disputes which it required another century to settle.¹

The territory thus confirmed to Rhode Island amounted to about 122 square miles, contained over 4,500 inhabitants, and comprised the towns of Cumberland, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton, and Little Compton.²

them Attleboro Gore, Rhode Island would have given a general quitclaim in all other concerns, and prevented the loss of Bristol, and some part of Barrington, Swansey, Tiverton and Little Compton. But the influence of a few ill-natured, obstinate, inconsiderate men prevailed in the legislature to the damage of the province of Massachusetts Bay." (*Hist. and Polit. Summary*, 1, 397.)

¹The voluminous evidence taken by the commissioners in 1741 occupies a large volume in the British State Paper Office. A transcript of this, 420 pages, is in the J. Carter Brown Library. (J. C. B. Cat. iii, no. 692.) The important documents are in *R. I. C. R.* iv, 586, and v, 199-201, and detailed references are in Arnold, ii, 131. See also Douglass, *Hist. and Polit. Summary*, 1, 397-400. A map of the disputed territory, according to the survey of 1741, is published in Arnold, ii, 132, and a slightly differing original is in the J. Carter Brown Library. A poetical journal of this survey is reprinted from a rare broadside in the *Narr. Hist. Reg.* iv, 1, and in Miss Kimball's *Pictures of R. I. in the Past*, p. 41. An excellent summary of the controversy up to 1742 is in the printed appeal of R. I. for that year (a copy of which, 4 pages folio, is in the R. I. H. S. Library. The instrumentality of Sir Charles Wager in favoring Rhode Island's claim is pointed out in Sheffield's *Privateersmen of Newport*, p. 11.

²The early history of these towns properly belongs to a study of Plymouth

The first few months in 1747 were spent in organizing the large accession to her jurisdiction. The five towns were legally incorporated, justices of the peace were appointed, and the inhabitants having the necessary qualifications were declared freemen of the colony. For judicial purposes Bristol and Warren were joined into one county called Bristol County, Tiverton and Little Compton were annexed to Newport County, and Cumberland joined to Providence County. This increase in population also brought the long needed change in the composition of the highest judicial body. Where formerly the supreme court consisted of the governor or deputy governor and the assistants, in February, 1747, it was enacted that a chief justice and four associates should be chosen annually, as the highest court, by the general assembly, thus abandoning the unwise union of legislative and judicial powers.

By this annexation of the eastern towns, Rhode Island, for the first time in her existence, could deem herself practically complete, according to the terms of her charter. Vexatious boundary disputes were no longer to sap her energies and strength, and thus freed from the strife for existence, she could turn her attention more vigorously to those matters that were rapidly becoming of great importance to the American colonies. With a population of 33,000,¹ and with a tried strength in military operations her aid was henceforth to be considered as an important factor in New England's struggles.

and Massachusetts. See also under the town names in the bibliography at the end of the last volume. Cumberland, previously called Rehoboth North Purchase and Attleboro Gore, embraced about 34 square miles and had 806 inhabitants. Warren, which then included the present Barrington, had an area of about 14 square miles and a population of 680. Bristol's area was about 10 square miles and population 1,069. Tiverton's area was about 43 square miles and population 1,040. Little Compton's area was about 21 square miles and population 1,152. These population figures are all according to the census of 1748.

¹These figures are according to the census of 1748, taken by order of the Board of Trade. Douglass, *Summary*, II, 89, is the printed authority for this census, giving a total of 32,773—28,439 whites, 3,077 negroes, and 1,257 Indians. (Also copied in *R. I. C. R.* v, 270.) These figures differ, however, from those obtained by Arnold, *Hist. of R. I.* II, 173, from English records, where the total is given as 34,128, with 29,750 whites, and the remainder blacks and Indians.

The growth of population had caused most of the towns to be divided. West Greenwich was set off from East Greenwich in 1741, Coventry from Warwick in 1741, Exeter from North Kingstown in 1743, Middletown from Newport in 1743, and Richmond from Charlestown in 1747. Providence had previously been quartered in 1731 into Providence, Smithfield, Gloucester and Scituate. The increase of the number of towns had also made it necessary that the proceedings of the assembly, which had always been copied by the secretary and sent to each town, should henceforth be printed. The first issue, a six page folio printed in Newport, is that for the session of October, 1747.