

The Story of Massasoit.



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The great benefactor of the Pilgrims at Plymouth was an Indian chief. For more than forty years, when the colony was weak and defenceless, encountering sickness, famine, and peril on every hand, he was its defender and protector. His influence saved it from destruction by the Narragansetts. If any hero deserves a noble monument in New England, it is Massasoit.

This great and good chief dwelt at Sowamset, now Warren, Rhode Island. Massasoit's spring is still to be seen near one of the wharves of that town. Another of his favorite residen-

ces was Mount Hope, a lovely hill overlooking the Narragansett Bay, where was the principal burying-ground of his race.

Morton in his "Memorial" describes Massasoit as a portly man, grave of countenance and spare of speech. He loved peace and friendship, and had a great veneration for the wisdom of the Pilgrims.

His tribe and most of the New England tribes had been depleted by a great plague which had prevailed in New England a few years before the landing of the Pilgrims. We are told that the "savages died in heaps," that their bodies turned yellow after death, and that their unburied bones were often seen in depopulated villages by the first settlers in their explorations. But for this destruction of once powerful tribes the colonists must have been early overpowered in the Indian wars.

On Thursday, March 22, 1621, one hundred and one days after the landing of the Pilgrims, Massasoit, accompanied by his brother and sixty warriors, came to Plymouth to make a league of friendship with the colony. He had sent word of his coming, but on that day he suddenly made his appearance on Watson's Hill, which overlooked the settlement, and drew up his braves in a most imposing array. The latter were painted and fantastically dressed. The Pilgrims desired to receive the chief with due honor, but the distressing winter had rendered half their number unfit for such service. But Edward Winslow approached Massasoit with a present, and remained with the warriors as a hostage, while the good chief and a body of unarmed men went down the hill to the settlement. Captain Miles Standish, who had mustered a military company of six musketeers, met him.

It must have been much like an exploit of Baron Steuben, — that March day's reception on the wild Plymouth hillside. The Captain gave his orders in deep tones, and the men faced, and wheeled, and saluted their guest. A drum

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was beaten, and a trumpet sounded ; then came Governor Carver to the sachem and kissed his hand, and the two sat down on a rug and made a treaty of peace which protected the colony for nearly a half century.

Edward Winslow returned the visit of Massasoit during the following summer. In March, 1623, news came to Plymouth that the chief was dangerously sick. Mr. Winslow was sent by the colonists to visit him. He was accompanied by Mr. Hamden, and by Hobomok, an Indian interpreter.

Hobomok greatly loved his chief: On the way to Sowamset in Pokonoket, the residence of Massasoit, he would break out into exclamations of grief : —

“ My loving sachem ! O my loving sachem ! many have I known, but never any like thee. Whilst I live I shall never see his like among Indians ! ”

Mr. Winslow in his journal has left a most interesting account of this visit to Massasoit. He says : —

“ When we came to the house we found it so full of men that we could scarcely get in, though they used their best endeavors to make way for us. We found the Indians in the midst of their charms for him, making such a noise as greatly affected those of us who were well, and therefore was not likely to benefit him who was sick. About him were six or eight women, who chafed his limbs to keep heat in him.

“ When they had made an end of their charming, one told him that his friends, the English, were come to see him. Having understanding left, though his sight was wholly gone, he asked who was come. They told him, Winslow.

“ He desired to speak with me. When I came to him, he put forth his hand and I took it. He then inquired : —

“ ‘ *Keen* Winslow ? ’ which is to say, ‘ Art thou Winslow ? ’

“ I answered, ‘ *Ahhe* ; ’ that is, ‘ Yes. ’

“ Then he said, ‘ *Matta neen wouckanet namen*, Winslow ; ’ that is to say, ‘ O Winslow, I shall never see thee again. ’

“ ‘ Now I see that the English are my friends, and love me, and whilst I live I will never forget this kindness which they have shown me.’

“ As we were about to come away he called Hobomok to him and revealed to him a plot the Massachusetts had formed to destroy the English. He told him that several other tribes were confederate with them ; that he, in his sickness, had been earnestly solicited to join them, but had refused, and that he had not suffered any of his people to unite with them.”

Massasoit died, as is supposed, in the autumn of 1661, forty-one years after the landing of the Pilgrims. In 1662, his two sons, Wamsetta and Metacom, came to Plymouth to renew the treaty of peace he had made, and desired that English names should be given them. The court named them after the two heroes of Macedon, Alexander and Philip.