

DR. JOSEPH WARREN

Dr. Joseph Warren is a significant character in Johnny Tremain. In the story, Warren actually knows Johnny, both as a fledgling member of the Sons of Liberty and as a patient whose badly disfigured and useless hand he eventually repairs through surgery. Dr. Warren is directly involved in the planning for the Boston Tea Party at the meetings of the Boston Observers. Paul Revere consults with Warren and others about how to improve the “spy system” so the movements of British forces will be reported to the members of the Sons of Liberty, as well as to the Minutemen living both in and outside of Boston. Further, James Otis in his final speech to the Observers, notes that Dr. Warren may well forfeit his life, and leave his children destitute. This does indeed happen, for Warren was killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill not long after.

Born in Roxbury on June 11, 1741, Joseph Warren graduated from Harvard in 1759, at eighteen years of age. He studied medicine under his uncle, Dr. James Lloyd. He married Elizabeth Hooten in 1764, and they had four children. Warren joined the Masons in 1761, and was Grand Master in 1769. (Many Masons were active Whigs, including Paul Revere.) Besides working on his growing medical practice, Warren managed to find time to belong to the Long Room Club, the North Caucus, the Boston Committee of Correspondence, as well as St. Andrew’s Lodge of Masons.

Dr. Warren’s activities in politics were impressive. He was on the committee appointed by the Boston Town Meeting to request that the British troops be removed from Boston after the Boston Massacre in 1770. He was a member of the Committee of Safety, helped draw up a report called A State of the Rights of Colonists in 1772, and drafted the famous Suffolk Resolves, which Revere took to Philadelphia. Warren was also a well-regarded public speaker, especially for his 1775 speech on the fifth anniversary of the Boston Massacre. Warren also acted as a spy, for he was able to gather the information that told precisely when and how the British soldiers were going to move toward Lexington and Concord, and what their objectives were. He became a member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, including president pro tempore, and was head of the committee to organize the army forming in Massachusetts. Although commissioned a major general in June of 1775, he was shot while fighting as a common soldier at the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775.

Letter from Joseph Warren to Arthur Lee, 21 December 1773

Boston, Dec. 21st, 1773.

Sir,

My respected friend, Mr. Adams, informs me of the honor he has done me by mentioning my name to you in his letters. I can by no means lose so fair an opportunity of opening a correspondence with one to whom America is under such great obligations. Be assured, sir, we are not insensible to your merits. The clear manner in which you have treated the dispute between Great Britain and this country has, we doubt not, enlightened many in the parent State as well as in this country. But nothing seems able to penetrate the Egyptian darkness which is so palpable in the court atmosphere. We have long waited for something wise and good in the public counsels of the nation; at least we hoped that chance would lead to some measures, which, if not so designed, might eventually have produced some agreeable effects. But hitherto the unpropitious star which rules unhappy Britain has disappointed our wishes; every step taken by the Administration has increased the distance between her and the colonies; and I fear, that, unless a speedy alteration is made in the system of American policy, a few years will render us as indifferent to the interests of the mother-country as to that of any other State in Europe. However, as it is my firm opinion that a connection upon constitutional principles may be kept up between the two countries, at least for centuries to come, advantageous and honorable to both, I always respect the man who endeavors to heal the wound, by pointing out proper remedies, and to prevent the repetition of the stroke, by fixing a stigma on the instrument by which it was inflicted. This country is inhabited by a people loyal to their king, and faithful to themselves; none will more cheerfully venture their lives and fortunes for the honor and defence of the prince who reigns in their hearts, and none will with more resolution oppose the tyrant who dares to invade their rights. From this short but true character of this people, it is easy to see in what manner a wise king or a sagacious minister would treat them. But — !

Mr. Adams will give you a full account of the tea shipped by the East-India Company for this place. It now is in the power of that company to make the use of Dutch tea as unpopular in this country as they can desire. They may easily, by a proper application to an all-powerful ministry, lay the colonies under such obligations as would be greatly to the company's advantage. But it is certain the whole navy of Britain will not prevent the introduction of Dutch tea; nor will her armies prevail with us to use the English tea, while the act imposing a duty on that article remains unrepealed. I congratulate you on the honor conferred on your brother by the city of London: in distinguishing merit, they honor themselves.

This will be presented to you by Dr. Williamson, who has labored abundantly in the glorious cause in which we are engaged. I hope soon to be convinced, that the freedom I have taken in writing to you is not disagreeable.

I am, sir, with great esteem, your most obedient humble servant,

Joseph Warren

Letter from Joseph Warren to Arthur Lee, 20 February 1775

Boston, Feb. 20, 1775.

Dear Sir,

My friend, Mr. Adams, favored me with the sight of your last letter. I am sincerely glad of your return to England, as I think your assistance was never more wanted there than at present. It is truly astonishing that Administration should have a doubt of the resolution of Americans to make the last appeal rather than submit to wear the yoke prepared for their necks. We have waited with a degree of patience which is seldom to be met with: but I will venture to assert, that there has not been any great alloy of cowardice; though both friends and enemies seem to suspect us of want of courage. I trust the event, which I confess I think is near at hand, will confound our enemies, and rejoice those who wish well to us. It is time for Britain to take some serious steps towards a reconciliation with her colonies. The people here are weary of watching the measures of those who are endeavoring to enslave them: they say they have been spending their time for ten years in counteracting the plans of their adversaries. They, many of them, begin to think that the difference between [them] will never be amicably settled; but that they shall always be subject to new affronts from the caprice of every British minister. They even sometimes speak of an open rupture with Great Britain, as a state preferable to the present uncertain condition of affairs. And although it is true that the people have yet a very warm affection for the British nation, yet it sensibly decays. They are loyal subjects to the king; but they conceive that they do not swerve from their allegiance by opposing any measures taken by any man or set of men to deprive them of their liberties. They conceive that they are the king's enemies who would destroy the Constitution; for the king is annihilated when the Constitution is destroyed.

It is not yet too late to accommodate the dispute amicably. But I am of opinion, that, if once General Gage should lead his troops into the country, with design to enforce the late Acts of Parliament, Great Britain may take her leave, at least of the New-England colonies, and, if I mistake not, of all America. If there is any wisdom in the nation, God grant it may be speedily called forth! Every day, every hour, widens the breach. A Richmond, a Chatham, a Shelburne, a Camden, with their noble associates, may yet repair it: and it is a work which none but the greatest of men can conduct. May you be successful and happy in your labors for the public safety!

I am, sir, with great respect, your very humble servant,

Jos. Warren.

Joseph Warren to Arthur Lee. 20 February 1775, *The Life and Times of Joseph Warren*, ed. Richard Frothingham (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1865), 418-419.

Joseph Warren, *Oration*, 6 March 1775 [excerpt]

Our country is in danger, but not to be despaired of. Our enemies are numerous and powerful, but we have many friends, determined to be free, and heaven and earth will aid the resolution. On you depend the fortunes of America. You are to decide the important question on which rest the happiness and liberty of millions yet unborn. Act

worthy of yourselves. The faltering tongue of hoary age calls on you to support your country. The lisping infant raises its suppliant hands, imploring defence against the monster, slavery. Your fathers look from their celestial seats with smiling approbation on their sons who boldly stand forth in the cause of virtue, but sternly frown upon the inhuman miscreant, who, to secure the loaves and fishes to himself, would breed a serpent to destroy his children.

But, pardon me, my fellow-citizens, I know you want not zeal or fortitude. You will maintain your rights, or perish in the generous struggle. However difficult the combat, you will never decline it when freedom is the prize. An independence on Great Britain is not our aim. No: our wish is, that Britain and the colonies may, like the oak and ivy, grow and increase in strength together. But, whilst the infatuated plan of making one part of the empire slaves to the other is persisted in, the interest and safety of Britain as well as the colonies require that the wise measures recommended by the honorable, the Continental Congress be steadily pursued, whereby the unnatural contest between a parent honored and a child beloved may probably be brought to such an issue as that the peace and happiness of both may be established upon a lasting basis. But, if these pacific measures are ineffectual, and it appears that the only way to safety is through fields of blood, I know you will not turn your faces from our foes, but will undauntedly press forward until tyranny is trodden under foot, and you have fixed your adored goddess, Liberty, fast by a Brunswick's side, on the American throne.

You, then, who nobly have espoused your country's cause; who generously have sacrificed wealth and ease; who have despised the pomp and show of tinsel greatness; refused the summons to the festive board; been deaf to the alluring calls of luxury and mirth; who have forsaken the downy pillow to keep your vigils by the midnight lamp for the salvation of your invaded country, that you may break the fowler's snare and disappoint the vulture of his prey, you then will reach this harvest of renown which you so justly have deserved. Your country shall pay her grateful tribute of applause. Even the children of your most inveterate enemies, ashamed to tell from whom they sprang, while they in secret curse their stupid, cruel parents, shall join the general voice of gratitude to those who broke the fetters which their fathers forged.

Having redeemed your country, and secured the blessing to future generations, who, fired by your example, shall emulate your virtues, and learn from you the heavenly art of making millions happy, with heartfelt joy, with transports all your own, you cry, 'The glorious work is done!' Then drop the mantle to some young Elisha, and take your seats with kindred spirits in your native skies."

Joseph Warren, "An Oration delivered March sixth, 1775, at the request of the inhabitants of the town of Boston: to commemorate the bloody tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770," *The Life and Times of Joseph Warren*, ed. Richard Frothingham (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1865), 435-436.