

## THE GREAT WINDHAM SCARE

»

THE following story has been variously related, as to details, but with a certain agreement as to the more essential facts. Miss Ellen Larned, in the " History of Windham," places the date of the occurrence in the year 1754, and attributes the scare to the feverish state of the people, under daily expectation of war with the French and Indians. Others fix a later date. We reproduce verbatim the account as printed in Barber s " Historical Collections of Connecticut/' which originally appeared in a newspaper with the title prefixed of " Lawyers and Bullfrogs."

"On a dark, cloudy, dismal night in the month of July, A. D. 1754, the inhabitants of Windham, a small town in the eastern part of Connecticut, had retired to rest, and for several hours all were wrapped in profound repose — when suddenly, soon after midnight, the slumbers of the peaceful inhabitants were disturbed by a most terrific noise in the sky, right over their heads, which to many seemed the yells and screeches of infuriated Indians, while others had no way of accounting for the awful sounds, which still kept increasing, but by supposing that the Day of Judgment had certainly come; and to their terrified imaginations, the awful uproar in the upper air seemed the immediate precursor of the clangor of the last trumpet. At intervals, many supposed they could distinguish the calling out of the particular names of Colonels Dyer and Elderkin, two eminent lawyers, and this increased the general terror. But soon there was a rush from every house (the tumult in the air still increasing), old and young, male and female, poured forth into the streets, 'in puris naturalibus,' entirely forgetful in their hurry and consternation, of their nether habiliments, and, with eyes upturned, tried to pierce the almost palpable darkness. My venerable informant, who well recollects the event, says that some daring spirits concluding there was nothing supernatural in the hubbub and uproar overhead, but rather, that they heard the yells of Indians commencing a midnight attack, loaded their guns and sallied forth to meet the invading foe. These valiant heroes on ascending the hill that bounds the village on the east, perceived that the sounds came from that quarter, and not from the skies, as at first believed, but their courage would not permit them to proceed to the daring extremity of advancing eastward, until they had discovered the real cause of alarm, and distress, which pervaded the whole village. Towards morning the sounds in the air seemed to die away. ... In the morning, the whole cause of alarm, which produced such distressing apprehensions among the good people of the town, was apparent to all who took the trouble to go to a certain mill-pond, situated about three-fourths of a mile eastward of the village. This pond hereafter, in the annals of fame, forever to be called the Frog Pond, in consequence of a severe drought, which had prevailed many weeks, had become nearly dry, and the Bull Frogs, with which it was densely populated, at the mill, fought a pitched battle on the sides of the ditch which ran through it, for the possession and enjoyment of the fluid which remained. Long and obstinately was the contest maintained : and many thousands of combatants were found defunct, on both sides of

the ditch the next morning. It had been uncommonly still, for several hours before the battle commenced, but suddenly, as if by preconcerted agreement, every frog on one side of the ditch, raised the war-cry ' Col. Dyer ! Col. Dyer ! 9 and at the same instant, from the opposite side, resounded the adverse shout of ' Elderkin too ! Elderkin, too ! ' Owing to some peculiar state of the atmosphere, the awful noises appeared to the distressed Windhamites to be directly over their heads."

The scare subsided, but not so the pleasantry indulged in at the expense of the crestfallen inhabitants of Windham :

Some were well pleased, and some were mad :

Some turned it off with laughter :  
And some would never hear a word

About the thing thereafter.  
Some vowed that if the De'il himself,

Should come, they would not flee him,  
And if a frog they ever met,

Pretended not to see him.