

# Boston

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

[sidenote: Dec. 16, 1773] *This poem was read in Faneuil Hall, on the Centennial Anniversary of the "Boston Tea-Party," at which a band of men disguised as Indians had quietly emptied into the sea the taxed tea-chests of three British ships.*

The rocky nook with hill-tops three  
Looked eastward from the farms,  
And twice each day the flowing sea  
Took Boston in its arms;  
The men of yore were stout and poor,  
And sailed for bread to every shore.

And where they went on trade intent  
They did what freemen can,  
Their dauntless ways did all men praise,  
The merchant was a man.  
The world was made for honest trade,—  
To plant and eat be none afraid.

The waves that rocked them on the deep  
To them their secret told;  
Said the winds that sung the lads to sleep,  
"Like us be free and bold!"  
The honest waves refuse to slaves  
The empire of the ocean caves.

Old Europe groans with palaces,  
Has lords enough and more;—  
We plant and build by foaming seas  
A city of the poor;—  
For day by day could Boston Bay  
Their honest labor overpay.

We grant no dukedoms to the few,  
We hold like rights and shall;—  
Equal on Sunday in the pew,  
On Monday in the mall.  
For what avail the plough or sail,  
Or land or life, if freedom fail?

The noble craftsmen we promote,  
Disown the knave and fool;  
Each honest man shall have his vote,  
Each child shall have his school.  
A union then of honest men,

Or union nevermore again.

The wild rose and the barberry thorn  
Hung out their summer pride  
Where now on heated pavements worn  
The feet of millions stride.

Fair rose the planted hills behind  
The good town on the bay,  
And where the western hills declined  
The prairie stretched away.

What care though rival cities soar  
Along the stormy coast:  
Penn's town, New York, and Baltimore,  
If Boston knew the most!

They laughed to know the world so wide;  
The mountains said: "Good-day!  
We greet you well, you Saxon men,  
Up with your towns and stay!"  
The world was made for honest trade,—  
To plant and eat be none afraid.

"For you," they said, "no barriers be,  
For you no sluggard rest;  
Each street leads downward to the sea,  
Or landward to the West."

O happy town beside the sea,  
Whose roads lead everywhere to all;  
Than thine no deeper moat can be,  
No stouter fence, no steeper wall!

Bad news from George on the English throne:  
"You are thriving well," said he;  
"Now by these presents be it known,  
You shall pay us a tax on tea;  
'T is very small,—no load at all,—  
Honor enough that we send the call."

"Not so," said Boston, "good my lord,  
We pay your governors here  
Abundant for their bed and board,  
Six thousand pounds a year.  
(Your highness knows our homely word,)  
Millions for self-government,  
But for tribute never a cent."

The cargo came! and who could blame  
If *Indians* seized the tea,  
And, chest by chest, let down the same  
Into the laughing sea?  
For what avail the plough or sail  
Or land or life, if freedom fail?

The townsmen braved the English king,  
Found friendship in the French,  
And Honor joined the patriot ring  
Low on their wooden bench.

O bounteous seas that never fail!  
O day remembered yet!  
O happy port that spied the sail  
Which wafted Lafayette!  
Pole-star of light in Europe's night,  
That never faltered from the right.

Kings shook with fear, old empires crave  
The secret force to find  
Which fired the little State to save  
The rights of all mankind.

But right is might through all the world;  
Province to province faithful clung,  
Through good and ill the war-bolt hurled,  
Till Freedom cheered and the joy-bells rung.

The sea returning day by day  
Restores the world-wide mart;  
So let each dweller on the Bay  
Fold Boston in his heart,  
Till these echoes be choked with snows,  
Or over the town blue ocean flows.

Let the blood of her hundred thousands  
Throb in each manly vein;  
And the wit of all her wisest  
Make sunshine in her brain.  
For you can teach the lightning speech,  
And round the globe your voices reach.

And each shall care for other,  
And each to each shall bend,  
To the poor a noble brother,  
To the good an equal friend.

A blessing through the ages thus

Shield all thy roofs and towers!  
*God with the fathers, so with us,*  
Thou darling town of ours!

Source:

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Boston." *Poems of American Patriotism*. Ed. Brander Matthews.  
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