

Lorenzo Sears



JOHN HANCOCK

The Picturesque Patriot

Lorenzo Sears

John Hancock: The Picturesque Patriot

e-artnow, 2022

Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN 4066338127006

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I AN INSURGENT TOWN

CHAPTER II HOME AND SCHOOL

CHAPTER III IN HARVARD COLLEGE

CHAPTER IV BOSTON AND BUSINESS

CHAPTER V IN LONDON

CHAPTER VI BACK TO BOSTON

CHAPTER VII GROWTH OF HANCOCK'S PATRIOTISM

CHAPTER VIII ENTRANCE UPON PUBLIC LIFE

CHAPTER IX TAXED TEA

CHAPTER X PROVINCIAL CONGRESS

CHAPTER XI LOVERS IN LEXINGTON

CHAPTER XII ON THE ROAD TO CONGRESS

CHAPTER XIII IN THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

CHAPTER XIV A WEDDING

CHAPTER XV PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

CHAPTER XVI EXPEDITION TO RHODE ISLAND

CHAPTER XVII FIRST GOVERNOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION

CHAPTER XVIII TREASURER OF HARVARD COLLEGE

CHAPTER XIX LAST YEARS

CHAPTER XX AN ESTIMATE

CHAPTER I

AN INSURGENT TOWN

[Table of Contents](#)

Old Braintree on Massachusetts Bay, the birthplace of John Hancock, always had distinctions of its own in the direction of independence. Situated on the trail from Plymouth towards Boston, Wessagusset became a retreat for two early adventurers who were as unlike the settlers at Patuxet and Shawmut as these were different from the Cavaliers of England. The freedom which Pilgrim and Puritan came here to enjoy had its limitations, as all intruders discovered; but the interlopers who arrived between them, in place and time, stretched the principle of liberty to absurd license and to their own consequent discomfiture. Yet their presence in the neighborhood and their respective fortunes have a prophetic interest when later advocates of a more reasonable freedom are recalled, who thus gave the old town a nobler eminence. In an age of extremists two aliens in particular illustrated their own ideas of liberty in ways that had something of romance and picturesqueness in the midst of a grim generation.

Thomas Morton of Clifford's Inn, Gent., as he styled himself, was the first of these adventurers to settle in Wessagusset, where he became known as Morton of Merry Mount. The story of his doings there cannot be told so often as to lose its raciness amidst the dreary chronicles of the Bay. He brought with him two qualifications which his neighbors did not require of incomers. Such legal attainments as he possessed were not desired in a dispute

that was brewing about land ownership; and the religious inclination he manifested was not agreeable, since it was according to the rites of that established Church which the early settlers had abandoned. This might have been endured if he had kept good order on "Mount Dagon" and in adjacent territory. Instead, he surrounded himself with a gang of bond-servants left behind by Captain Wollaston when he took the rest of the lot to Virginia to serve out their indentures - a vagabond crew not unlike the shipload of emigrant adventurers which came to the Old Dominion with John Smith a dozen years before. With this motley crowd Morton, kingsman and courtier, set up a miniature commonwealth at Mount Wollaston in the autumn of 1626, not anticipating the Cromwellian pattern, except that he was to be a Lord Protector. Aside from this, there was not much provision for anything beyond an Arcadian state of jollity. It was worse than this when he invited Indians and their squaws into his roistering camp and at length began to trade guns and ammunition with them for food and furs.¹ Then it was time for Endicott and Standish to hew down the antler crowned May-pole, burn the common house, and leave Morton on a secluded island to the hospitality of savages, which he preferred to theirs; and finally to send him back to England as a warning to all who might mistake this land of modified liberty for a resort of license. Morton had his revenge in writing a spicy account of his sojourn in the wilderness under the title of "The New English Canaan," in which he extolled the country more than its colonists. His description of its pleasant hillocks, meandering streams, and abundance of game might have induced immigration if

his portrayal of the new inhabitants of the land had not been more repelling than his account of the aborigines. Yet it has appealed sufficiently to sundry descendants of the early fathers to become the basis of stories by Hawthorne and Motley, who have made the Merry Mount camp the one joyous feature in the first decade of colonial life in Massachusetts Bay.²

One reason, perhaps the chief one, for Morton's presence here has sometimes been overlooked. If it is true that he was one of Sir Ferdinando Gorges' son John's emissaries or agents, the misrule and riot of his stay were not so much the object of his adventure as incidents of a residence which otherwise might have been as prosy as in the other settlements. The Gorges' claim to a tract of New England some three hundred miles square, lying north of the Charles River, was disputed after the Massachusetts Company was granted by the crown the whole territory as far as the Merrimac, including the Gorges Concession. This, it was contended, had been secured to the Gorges by the settlement of Blackstone, Jeffreys, and others; whereupon Endicott made haste to send forty or fifty squatters there. Then it became desirable to have the Gorges' interest looked after by some one on the ground or near by, and Morton may have been sent for this purpose.³

There was another and later instance of independent life, less noisy and obtrusive, which, however, did not escape the attention of the ruling spirits at Shawmut and Naumkeag. Not far from Mount Wollaston, to which Morton had found his way back at this date, appeared about the first of May, 1630, Sir Christopher Gardiner, Knight,

pretending that he was weary of wandering in the Old World and that he was seeking a retreat in the wilderness. His adventures suggest those of the martial John Smith, that soldier of fortune in strange lands. He had picked up a university degree somewhere, and had exchanged what Protestantism he possessed for the Roman faith.

Moreover he brought with him, besides a servant or two, one Mary Grove, whom he called his cousin, about whose degree of consanguinity the neighboring elders were in doubt, but concerning whose relations with Sir Christopher they were more positive in their opinions. His case was not so easy to manage as Morton's had been. The colonists' English reverence for titled persons and the absence of positive proof to confirm their strong suspicions held direct interference in check for a while. As he did not give magistrates the cause for complaint that Morton did in consorting with savages, the most they undertook at first was to make inquiry about two women in England who were each disputing the right of the other to call Sir Christopher husband. This was accordingly entered upon the records: "It is ordered that Sir Christopher Gardiner aM. Mr. Wright shall be sent as prisoners into England by the ship Lyon, now returning thither."⁴ When they came for the knight he took to the woods, leaving Mary Grove to be carried to Boston, where she was ordered to be sent to the two wives in England "to search her further." Meantime, while she was detained in Boston, Sir Christopher being in hiding, her doubtful relation toward him was disposed of by her marriage to one Thomas Purchase, who came out of the Maine woods to buy axes, ammunition, and incidentally to

find a wife. Gardiner may have heard of her good fortune, since he appeared in time to accompany the couple to the Androscoggin country, whence, after a year's stay in their home, he returned to England to assist in urging the Gorges' claim to the New England tract, which was finally disallowed. He then disappeared from view and was heard of no more.

These two romantic episodes in the early history of Braintree were not, to be sure, formal declarations of independence of the ruling order, but they were diametrically opposed to its temporal interests, its social regime, and its spiritual tone. The first were contested in the courts of the realm; the second was flouted by scandalous and disorderly living; the third was antagonized by the two forms of religion which the colonists came here to escape. All together, the contrast between the two renegades with their households at Wessagusset and the staid families at Plymouth, Salem, and Boston was vivid enough to give early notoriety to the town which afterward became famous as the birthplace of national independence, in so far as it was the native town of two of the most active early advocates and promoters of separation from the mother country.⁵ It might be imagined that there was something in the very air of the place to foster notions of protest against unwelcome restraint, by whomsoever maintained, since control of diverse nature had been contested there by men of different minds. At all events it became as famous in the latter part of the eighteenth century as in the first part of the seventeenth by reason of two men who were born there,

whose application of the principle of liberty differed radically from the lawlessness of Morton and Gardiner.

There was a third departure from the purpose of the Bay settlers which, while it did not violate their sense of morality and of what was safe, had nevertheless a divergence from their own religious polity, and was almost as offensive as the waywardness of Morton and Gardiner. As early as 1689 a little group of Church of England people lived in Braintree, and in one house at least prayers from the service book were daily read; probably by that Lieutenant Veazy who contributed one pound sterling toward building King's Chapel in Boston, where doubtless he and his friends occasionally worshipped, as it was only ten miles distant.⁶ Eleven years later, the London Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was formed, and soon after, annual encouragement of fifty pounds and a gratuity of twenty-five pounds for present occasion" was granted to "Mr. William Barclay, the minister of the Church of England at Brain tree in New England," with a collection of twenty books to form the nucleus of a church library. On account of the relaxation of Puritan discipline, and the support given to Episcopacy by royal governors, it was impossible to make such short work with this alien element as would have suppressed it in previous years; but it was regarded with scarcely more favor than a similar intent in earlier days when a supervising clergyman was sent to Plymouth, who discreetly held his peace, or when Morton himself upheld the rites of the Estabhshed Church two generations before. Yet toleration was not in vogue, and the earliest Episcopal church in New England outside of Boston and Newport was

not to be countenanced by the standing order. Neither was it to be ignored, particularly when tithes were to be collected; from the payment of which Church of England folk were by no means exempted. Down to 1704 Colonel Edmund Quincy had hopes of suppressing churchmen by a town vote, toward which he had sixteen names pledged at one time. After a ten-years' struggle the resident minister could say: -

"The whole province has been very much disturbed on account of my coming to this place, in 1713, and accordingly have not failed to affront and abuse me-" 'atheist and 'papist' is the best language I can get from them. The people are independents, and have a perfect odium to those of our communion. These few are taxed and rated most extravagantly to support the dissenting clergy."⁷

On the other hand, it appears that the Venerable Society had not been fortunate in the choice of their second missionary to Braintree. And the church warden had been fined for plowmg on the day of Thanksgiving," while the Puritan persuasion "cohorted their families from Christmaskeeping and charged them to forbear." Evidently the exceptional placing of an Episcopal church in a separatist settlement was an episode of sufficient importance to be classed with the earlier provocations which had stirred the village. It was another instance of independence of the primitive order which was not to be overlooked, and to be repressed if not suppressed, by the town-meeting if possible, or by such methods of ostracism as villagers can devise and make effective.

But the spirit of independence came with the wind from off the ocean, inhaled by every inhabitant; and though Judge Sewall in his time was glad to note that "trade went on as usual in Boston on Christmas Day, 1727," he also observed that "Mr. Miller kept the day in his new (Episcopal) Church at Brain tree, and the people flock thither" ; as they do to-day in greater numbers, since the prejudice and opposition have vanished after two centuries of varying persistence and strength.⁸

A town which was remarked beyond its neighbors for radical doings in its pristine days might naturally be expected to distinguish itself further in the same direction in the progress of time and events. At least it would be regarded as a fitting birthplace of leaders in new movements and departures. The traditions of the place were those of protest if not of successful revolt; the environment of the inhabitants was the spirit of freedom. Reverence for custom and public sentiment had been lacking in notorious instances, and an established order had not always been accepted by universal consent. If the atmosphere of a neighborhood, its known history, and common talk are recognized molders of disposition and temper, such men as Adams, Hancock, and Quincy seem to be the inevitable product of Old Braintree, and the political changes they were forward in bringing about were the legitimate result of their environment.⁹

CHAPTER II

HOME AND SCHOOL

[Table of Contents](#)

The Reverend John Hancock, minister of the First Church in the North Precinct of Braintree, made the following entry in the parish register of births: "John, son of John Adams, October 26, 1735." About fifteen months later he made this one: "John Hancock, my son, January 16, 1737-" An eminent jurist and writer on New England origins has remarked that if one is looking for the aristocracy of the Puritan period, he must inquire for the ministers and deacons: an observation whose truth colonial history abundantly confirms. It has also been shown, contrary to the common supposition, that there are fewer scapegraces among the families of these worthies than elsewhere: another genealogical conclusion which the two boys who began life so near together exemplified in their respective careers.

Of the Hancock genealogy it may be said that a Nathaniel Hancock was in Cambridge as early as 1634. He died in 1652. An eldest child may have been born before he came to this country. A son, Nathaniel, was born in 1638 ; his son John, " Bishop" John, pastor of the Lexington Church, was born in 1671; his son John, pastor of the Braintree Church, was born in 1702; and his son, John Hancock the patriot, was born on the 16th of January, 1737. A daughter, Mary, was born on the 8th of April, 1735; a son, Ebenezer, on the 5th of November, 1744.

Two children were born to John Hancock the 3d: Lydia Henschman, born in January, 1777, who died in the following

summer, and John George Washington, born May 21, 1778, who died from an accident in 1787 while skating.

The Hancock coat of arms consists of an open hand, raised as if in protest, above which in the chief are three fighting-cocks. Perhaps it was with this blazonry in mind that John's father-in-law used to write of him as Mr. Handcock. Such devices of "canting arms," allusive to one's name or occupation, sometimes have been taken as indicating recent fabrication, not unknown in a new country; but trustworthy authorities in heraldry state that such descriptive display is proof of antiquity and is of highly honorable character. The crest is a chanticleer in bellicose attitude, made more terrible by the metamorphosis of postern plumes into the tail of a dragon. Appended to the whole runs the motto, — not without fitness in the life of a sumptuous liver, — *Nul Plaisir Sans Peine*.

It is not difficult to imagine what was the boyish life of the two playfellows. Doubtless they were more carefully watched and commented upon than their companions, since they belonged to households that were expected to be patterns to the rest of the community; and for this reason it is likely that they suffered some superfluous restraint at home which they might otherwise have escaped. The noblesse oblige of their day and station was largely negative. Thou shalt not do all that other boys do, for thou art the minister's son, or the deacon's; which was restrictive enough to cramp the spirit of freedom in any natural boy, unless it should be too strong to be bound by convention. If such was the tendency of the Hancock lad's training it did not last many years, for when he was seven his father died,

leaving a widow and three children no larger inheritance than is usual with clergymen whose parishioners have not exposed them to the deceitfulness of riches. Had he lived longer he would doubtless have fitted the boy for college, as ministers of that time could, and would have expected the son to follow in his steps, as he himself had in his father's, the noted "Bishop Hancock," as he was called for his masterful efficiency as pastor of the Lexington church and as a presiding officer. Even in his father's lifetime the lad fell into other hands when, in company with John Adams, he was taught by Joseph Marsh, the son of the elder John Hancock's predecessor in the Braintree pastorate. Upon his father's death, an important change awaited the son.

An uncle, Thomas Hancock, was accounted the richest merchant in Boston and the most enterprising in New England at a time when colonial commerce made many opulent, notwithstanding demands from the home government across the sea. Besides, it did not then require millions to make one rich. On the other hand, personal ability was not supplemented by combinations of capital and venal legislatures. Success was won by single-handed effort in an open field for all comers, in which there was nothing worse than evasion of oppressive revenue laws by everybody who dared to defy them. Furthermore, Thomas Hancock had married a daughter of Henchman, a prosperous bookseller and stationer of Boston, and her inheritance eventually augmented the fortune of the childless aristocrat, making the prospect golden for an adopted heir. Doubtless the uncle had his reasons for choosing only one out of the three children at the Braintree

parsonage as the object of special favor, although he did not neglect the other nephew and the niece. The widow was provided with a husband and home not long after her bereavement, as was apt to be the case with clergymen's "relicts" in colonial days.

The favored son John was transferred from a country village to the chief town of the province and the busiest seaport along the coast, where the descendants of gentry who came over in the decade before Cromwell's rise had lived and thrived for a hundred years, now numbering about 17,000 inhabitants, including alien mixtures. The swift and slow ships that carried oil and timber, fish and furs to London brought back silks and velvets, wines and spices, costumes and equipages, with the fashions of court and hall to be followed by citizens whose simplicity was by no means republican, as their politics also were not at this time adverse to the crown. Moreover the boy was ushered into the best house in Boston. Great prosperity had followed Thomas Hancock after he left his future father-in-law, married the daughter Lydia, and set up for himself as bookbinder and bookseller at the Stationers' Arms on Ann Street in 1729. Within seven years he began to make contracts for a mansion to be built on the sunny side of Beacon Hill, a large part of which he had acquired for nothing.¹⁰ Granite blocks, squared and hammered, came from Braintree, and brownstone trimmings from Hartford, at a cost of 300 pounds sterling "in goods." The best crown glass, 480 squares, 12 by 18 and 8 by 12, were ordered from London, with wall papers on which there should be "peacocks, macoys, squirrel, monkeys, fruit and flowers,"

which the merchant thinks "are handsomer and better than paintings done in oyle." Also, for the kitchen, "a Jack of three Guineas price, with a wheel-fly and Spitt-Chain to it," suggestive of generous living, as also are subsequent orders for Madeira wines " without regard to price provided the quality answers to it" ; to be accompanied by "6 Quart Decanters and 6 pint do., 2 doz. handsome, new fash'd wine glasses, 6 pr. Beakers, 2 pr. pint Cans, and 1-2 do., 6 Beer glasses, 12 water glasses, and 2 doz. Jelly glasses." Well he might write a friend, "We live Pretty comfortable here on Beacon Hill," as he continued to for twenty-five years.

The minister's son must have had awesome thoughts as he climbed the grand steps and entered the panelled hall with its broad staircase adorned with carved and twisted balusters and a " Chiming Clock" surmounted with carved figures "Gilt with burnished Gold," the case "to be 10 foot long, the price not to exceed 50 Guineas," — so the order for it ran. Then there were portraits of dignitaries on the walls of the great drawing-room where still more notable men were soon to assemble, incidentally for a boy's education in things not taught at school.

To be transplanted from the country parsonage to a lordly mansion on Beacon Hill was an event whose importance a lad of seven years could not be expected to appreciate immediately, as he could not foresee all its consequences. The loss of his childhood's home would not be made up to him at once by the grandeur of his uncle's house, but it was an exchange which had the fewest possible drawbacks. An envied position among his playmates was established at once, with predictions of an assured fortune in the future.

The flattery which boys have their own way of conveying would not tend to diminish his native vanity. He would have exhibited an alarming precocity in goodness if he had not developed some boyish sense of NewEngland caste even while living in his father's house, which would not be lessened in the stately domicile of his uncle, whose tastes and sympathies were of a kind to direct the nephew into the upper walks of life. For Thomas Hancock had a keen appreciation of social values and a high estimate of education and literature according to the somewhat narrow standards of his time, as shown by his gift of books to the value of five hundred pounds sterling to Harvard College, and by founding a professorship of Oriental Languages and of Hebrew in a day when this language was one of the useful and elegant accomplishments of the ministry, as it had been of queens in Shakespeare's day.

Whether there was anything more attractive to a boy than the Hebraic literature, which like Israelitish names had prevailed in the Puritan period, cannot with safety be asserted of volumes in the library in the Hancock house; but if there was a collection large or small of current and classic British authors in any Boston home, it should have been in that of the bookseller Henchman's son-in-law, himself an importer of books. Doubtless it had theological tomes enough for a layman's drowsy perusal after the Sunday dinner, but if English classics in bookstores followed Berkeley's gift of them to Yale College in 1733, Milton, Addison, Steele, Cowley, and Waller would come to Boston also, with Swift, Cervantes, and even Butler and his "Hudibras." "The Lamentations of Mary Hooper" and

"Remarkable Providences," "The Folly of Sinning" and the "Practice of Repentance" might be handed down from Michael Perry's ancient stock, along with the scandalous item of "nine packs of playing cards," showing incidentally that Boston people were not all so straight-laced that they might not with equal propriety have read, say, Richardson's "Pamela," even if it were supposed to be the novel which drove Jonathan Edwards from Northampton to the Stockbridge Indians. One cannot imagine that Boston escaped the literary awakening which followed Ben Franklin's raising of the blockade of current classics in 1730 by baiting the country with scraps in his almanac from world literatures, and creating an appetite for something besides "The Calling of the Jews," "Ornaments of Sion," "Sermons of Glory," and the rest of that "New England Library" which Judge Samuel

Sewall's son had gathered in the Steeple Chamber of the Old South Church, whose most entertaining volumes were "Whale Fishing in Greenland," "Purchas His Pilgrimage," and Ward's "Simple Cobler of Agawam."

By the year that young John Hancock came to live with his uncle and aunt it was her fault if she did not bring lighter books from her father's shop or her husband's for her bright nephew to read, and his fault if he did not read them in the winter evenings of 1745 and after. The "Tatler," "Spectator," and "Guardian" had been printed long enough to get between board covers. Richardson was turning out his stories, to be followed by Fielding, Smollet, and Sterne. If fiction was under a ban in Boston, Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" should not have been debarred, as Bunyan's

"Pilgrim's Progress" was not, with its strong human interest and religious teaching. If the lad did not come in contact with some of the best books that have been written in English, it was because they were not in the Boston market nor brought out of London with other luxuries for people who could well afford them. Therefore, unless he showed a greater repugnance to reading than his later life disclosed, it may fairly be inferred that the home education in his new environment was as good as the literary taste of the period permitted.

As a matter of course he was sent to the Boston Public Latin School, the oldest educational institution in the country, known first as the South Grammar School, standing behind King's Chapel for a hundred and thirty-three years. The Puritan fathers soon after their settlement provided, in 1635, a school for teaching the higher branches, with special reference to advanced studies in the college to be founded at Newtown (Cambridge) a little later. John Cotton, minister of the First Church, had in mind the High School of his Lincolnshire Boston, founded by Philip and Mary in 1554, and with his love for both the school and college here he divided his estate between them. So John Winthrop and his companions determined that "for the common defence and for the general welfare the classical languages should be taught at the common charge"; and the General Court added, "that learning be not buried in the graves of our fathers."

Philemon Pormont was the first master. As a London boy he might have stolen into the Globe or Blackfriars theatres, unknown to his Puritan father, to see Shakespeare in one of

his own plays. Daniel Maude, the second master, was an old graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, nearly fifty years of age when young John Milton took his degree at Christ Church three years before Maude came to America. Even Ezekiel Cheever, who gave the Latin school a great name in the thirty-eight years of his teaching, was only six years younger than the great epic poet, who as Deputy Grecian might have heard Ezekiel translate Erasmus in St. Paul's School, London, where tradition has placed in his boyhood the famous master, who died in the harness at ninety-four and was buried from his schoolhouse; a funeral oration being pronounced by his successor, and a sermon delivered later by Cotton Mather, the Magnalian and the Magnificent.

The next master to achieve distinction was John Lovell, who was in full sway when the Hancock boy was sent to mingle with a hundred others who forgathered at seven o'clock every morning in the old building on School Street. For ten years Lovell had been the embodiment of a despotism found in the schoolhouses of New England, and for thirty-two years more he was to rule as with a rod of iron. His portrait in Harvard Memorial Hall, drawn by Smibert, his pupil, "while the terrific impressions of the pedagogue were yet vibrating on his nerves," betokens a master of Young Americans. Yet, loyalist as he was, with high notions of the divine right of kings and schoolmasters, he did not entirely suppress mutterings that were to grow louder before he laid down his sceptre on April 19, 1775, when, with Earl Percy's brigade drawn up at the head of the street ready to start for Lexington, he dismissed the boys

with a final command, "Deponite libros: war's begun and school's done." His son James, assistant at the other end of the room, was on the Patriot side, and a daughter so fascinated a British officer of ordnance that in love's absentmindedness he sent to Bunker Hill twelve-pound shot for the sixpounder guns that were to open the fight, and repeated the blunder when the disgusted commander sent orders to correct it.¹¹

To return to that morning when young John faced the tyrant pedagogue. His admission examination had been easy enough, — a few verses read from the King James Version of the Bible. The text-books of the first year were more formidable: "Cheever's Accidence," on its way to the eighteenth edition, "Nomenclatura Brevis," "Corderius' Colloquies," — an early start in Latin for a boy of eight. The next year came "Esop's Fables," "Eutropius," and "Lilly's Grammar"; and so on until the fourth year, when, furnished with a desk, the boy was expected to write Latin, read Caesar, then Cicero, Virgil, and in the sixth year the Greek of Xenophon, Homer, and the New Testament. Linguistic knowledge in that day, like sap, went from the roots upward, and language was not acquired at sight; but it became a permanent possession which scholars carried with them to use throughout a lifetime on great occasions. From seven o'clock, or in winter eight, declensions and conjugations, accent, quantity, and versification prepared the way for the humanities and the study of divinity, which had been the main purpose of early education in the Province. After the long day of classics came an hour in penmanship, with the making and mending of quills, now a lost art in these days

of "iron pens," as Carlyle called them with maledictions on their sputter, and of intermittent fountains: One autograph which became historic shows that John Hancock learned to point, nib, and handle the quill.¹²

It would be halving the story of the Latin School to drop it with the Evacuation of Boston. Men of less distinction than Cheever and Lovell followed them until Benjamin A. Gould restored much of its renown between 1814 and 1828, after which names still familiar appear among its instructors, — Bishop Wainwright, Professor Henry W. Torrey, Rev. Edward E. Hale, Dr. John P. Reynolds, and Phillips Brooks, who needs no title. Among its graduates are names of similar eminence, — Presidents Leverett, Langdon, Everett, and Eliot of Harvard, Pyncheon of Trinity; Professors Childs, and Cooke; Governors, Judges, and Mayors; Robert C. Winthrop, Charles Francis Adams, Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, Emerson, Motley, and Parkman, with others who have been an honor to the School which started them toward distinction. Four graduates wrote their names after that of the first, whose bold signature heads the illustrious roll of Signers of the Declaration of Independence; and many others are found in the army and civil lists of the Revolution, and others still in the annals of Americans who were loyal to the royal government which had persisted here for one hundred and seventy years. And in the years of a later rebelHon two hundred and seventy-six filled posts in the military and naval service, of whom fifty fell.

CHAPTER III

IN HARVARD COLLEGE

[Table of Contents](#)

It was almost as inevitable that a Latin School graduate in the seventeenth century should enter Harvard as that the Charles River should flow into the Back Bay. In those days of the unbridged river the college was so inconveniently distant from Boston that a town boy might consider himself away from home and as far from urban attractions as he could wish to be, since to go or return he would have to take the circuitous path through Brookline, Roxbury, and the Neck or risk the uncertainties and delays of Charlestown ferry with the customary assortment of winds and weather the year through.¹³ To be sure, there were fortifications against chills to be had at the Royal Exchange and other taverns, which might or might not lessen the discomforts of the way back to college after such primitive entertainments as the town then afforded, of which the Thursday Lecture was the only one sufficiently recognized by the community to cause the closing of the schools at ten o'clock on that day of the week. No great hilarity, however, was encouraged, and the half-holiday was considerably shortened by the length of the semi-political, semi-religious discourse which had been the one dissipation of the Province for a century and a half, with high days of ordination, general muster of the Militia, and an occasional execution, accompanied by a sermon.

The queen of New England festivals was Commencement Day, a high day in Cambridge and a holiday in the

neighborhood, shops being closed in Boston and business generally suspended. During an entire week Cambridge Common was covered with lanes of booths, inviting visitors from town and country to behold exotic wonders, to take a hand in sundry ventures of chance, to eat substantial viands, and to drink liquors of foreign and domestic brands until the result was far from Puritanic, or even classic and academic, as these terms are commonly understood by the unlearned. In fact, hilarity had reached such extremes the year before John Hancock's entrance into college that three gentlemen whose sons were to be graduated offered the authorities a thousand pounds, old tenor, if a Commencement should be held "for that year in a more private manner"; and in consideration of "the low state of the college treasury, the extravagant expend and disorders attending upon graduation," the offer was accepted by the Corporation vote — which the Board of Overseers straightway negatived, with an eye to the popular protest that would be sure to follow so radical a measure as the sudden discontinuance of the general and extended holiday. With the thousand pounds in view the Corporation changed its tactics and voted that "on account of the high price of provisions and the extraordinary and depressing drought, which we apprehend to be such a judgment of God as calls for fasting and mourning and not for joy and festivity, the Commencement for the present be private." Not even so were the Overseers to be defrauded of their annual outing, and the proposed substitution of a fast day got a crushing defeat. In turn the Corporation appealed to parents of the graduating class to retrench their sons' Commencement

expenses "so as may best correspond with the frowns of Divine Providence, and to take effectual care to have their sons' chambers cleared of company, and their entertainments finished on the evening of said day or at furthest by next morning."

But matters did not mend for six years, when the Overseers themselves in their turn recommended to the Corporation "to take effectual measures to prevent undergraduates from having entertainments of any kind, either in the College or in any house in Cambridge after the Commencement Day" that is, during the academic year opened by that day with unbecoming festivity. Then the Corporation took its revenge by paying no more heed to this recommendation than to advise "the Bachelors to endeavor to get away with their goods on Thursday and not to continue in College after Friday," finally shortened to " after dinner on Thursday." Thus the two branches of government tossed the question back and forth till at length the need of a fast became so evident as to secure a vote that, " Whereas in the providence of God there hath been a distressing drought whereby the first crop of hay hath been greatly diminished and is now past recovery, and a great scarcity as to kine feeding at this time, and a dark state of Providence with respect to the war we are engaged in calling for humiliation and fasting; therefore it is voted that degrees be given to candidates without their personal attendance." Later, dancing was forbidden during the week; and to the President was assigned the duty of expunging all exceptional parts from Commencement exercises, and

particularly "to put an end to the practice of addressing the female sex."

It was to such features of college life that the Hancock boy was introduced on the Commencement Day when he rode over to Cambridge with his uncle Thomas and aunt Lydia in the family coach, and was presented by the uncle, a dignitary who was of sufficient importance to be invited on one occasion at least to dine with the college authorities as a distinguished guest. It must be admitted that Freshman Hancock might have had glimpses of "exercises" on the opening day such as would not contribute to a thirst for knowledge so much as for more material delights; yet if the domestic beverages in the days of a thriving West India trade be considered, and what quantities of native and imported liquors were consumed at tavern dinners after ordinations, some allowance must be made for the celebration of the one hundred and fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the College. Indeed, the authorities relaxed somewhat after the fasting year, recommended a "repeal of the law prohibiting the drinking of punch," and passed a vote that "it shall be no offence if any scholar shall, at Commencement, make and entertain guests at his chamber with punch"; and a year later it was voted by both Boards that "it shall be no offence if the scholars, in a sober manner, entertain one another and strangers with punch, which as it is now usually made, is no intoxicating liquor." The historian-president adds with a judicial pronouncement which is delicious: "A reason more plausible than satisfactory, as neither Board could extend its control to the ingredients or proportions of the mixture;" suggesting that

there are some things which even a College Corporation cannot regulate.

It must not be supposed that the festive side of Commencement was all that the boy of thirteen saw and heard. Early in the forenoon there was an imposing procession from Hall to Meetinghouse in the order of increasing importance from Freshmen upward to the President walking alone in his majesty, followed by the Governor and his troop, who on a circuitous route to Cambridge had advertised the performances as effectually and needlessly as the street parade of the later circus announced what might be expected in the mammoth tent. Assembled on the platform built around the pulpit on the north side of the ancient edifice, civil, military, and academic dignitaries, resplendent in British uniforms of red and gold, or in ermine, velvet, and silk, presented an array of color to which the modern display of collegiate regalia is as sombre as the last leaves of autumn. Nor was there an entire absence of decoration in the audience. Indeed, color was becoming so rampant and extravagant that a law was made only four years later that "on no occasion any of the scholars shall wear any gold or silver lace or silver brocade in the College or town of Cambridge; and on Commencement Daye every candidate for his degree who shall appear dressed contrary to such regulation may not expect to receive his degree."

As for the ladies who had anticipated this high day for a year — but without co-educational ambitions— it is recorded that in 1758 one at least sat up all night lest the arrangement of her coiffure should be disturbed; and that

such was the towering height of these structures that they had to be protruded outside the carriage windows; while hoop skirts were of so "wide circumference" that the roomy family coaches could contain only two of them. On the floor the scene was little less brilliant. Coats of peach-bloom and lavender, waistcoats of satin, gold-laced and embroidered; small clothes of velvet, ending in stockings of silk in rainbow hues, with shoes whose silver buckles flashed responses to their like at knee and stock. Certainly Commencement in the middle of the eighteenth century outshone in externals the scriptural splendor of "an army with banners."

When silence was secured President Holyoke arose from his triangular throne of turned wood behind the pulpit canopied by a sounding-board to pronounce an invocation, whose solemnity was not succeeded by a brazen blare, called "Music" in the programmes of to-day. Instead, a salutatory oration followed in Latin, addressing principalities and powers of Church and State present, with unflinching mention of lower college classes in condescending terms, and an irrepressible allusion to feminine spectators in the south gallery who, if they did not understand the unknown tongue, knew by the constricted smiles of the elders and the broader ones of the students that something interesting was being said, and they fanned themselves with mingled vexation, approbation, and violence. In the recorded order of names and theses Nathaniel Cotton should have maintained that "*Rerum mudanum, in propriis earum Dispositionibus Conservatio, non est quotidiana Creatio.*" He was closely followed to detect any Arminian digression from Calvinism, or divagation towards that antipaedobaptist

heresy which had dethroned President Dunster a hundred years before; or again, if he had been tainted by those "dregs of papistrie," which in the guise of Episcopacy had captivated Rector Cutler of the class of 1701, President of Yale, and removed him to the pastorate of Christ Church, Boston. Whatever complexion the pronouncement had it would not meet with unqualified commendation, since theological lines were sharply drawn and there were searchings of heart for the divisions of Reuben. So likewise when John Wendell maintained that "Rhetorica est Ars alios inducendi ut Credant quidquid vult Rhetor," — with an unconscious application to a graduate who should bear his name eighty-one years later, — there were aristocratic ears that listened for allusions to "the loyal subjects of the best of monarchs," and also uneasy auditors who had hopes for his future if he should venture to mention "the sacred rights and liberties bequeathed to us by our pious fathers;" for some were beginning to have leanings toward an independence about which they said little at present. After further

discourse in Latin, degrees were conferred upon the graduating class in groups of four, and upon Bachelors of three years' standing; but honorary degrees were as rare as the return of comets, only two in one hundred and thirty-five years.

Exercises finished, the learned portion of the assembly betook itself in reverse order to the Commons Hall for substantial refreshment, and the rest departed in relaxed order to their homes or to the tents on the Common, while the undergraduates convoyed friends to their rooms, where

were set forth solids and fluids whose character and strength from time to time received legislative attention from the government of the College. By nightfall the entire population of the town and strangers within its gates had attained to various degrees of their annual exaltation of spirit, academic and alcoholic.

The contrast of term days when they immediately followed Commencement must have been chilling to a Freshman like the Hancock youth. At six in the morning he had to take his seat in the front row in Holden Chapel and listen to the Scriptures read in Hebrew or Greek by the upper classes and to an exposition by President or Professor, followed by a prayer of some length. If there was a psalm sung its tune was as lugubrious as that York which Judge Sewall so loved to set. By half-past six relief came in recitation rooms, and in more welcome guise an hour after, when a clamoring crowd jostled one another at the buttery hatch for biscuit and beer, coffee, chocolate, or milk according to their orders, given on the first Friday of the month, for the ensuing weeks.

These "sizings" or rations dispatched, in the yard or in their rooms, there were hours of study and recitation, interrupted by "bevers," between meals bites, until dinner when all assembled in Commons Hall, sixteen at a table, to be served each with a pound of meat and vegetables in their season, brought by classmate waiters. They also kept two pewter mugs replenished with cider, circulated after the manner of loving cups, for bacilli had not then been discovered. Still, it was enjoined that drinking vessels should be scoured once a week and plates twice a quarter. With an