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Abigail Adams and Her Times



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**Laura Elizabeth
Howe Richards**

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For much of the local and contemporary color in this little book, the author is indebted to the admirable works of the late Mrs. Alice Morse Earle.

CHAPTER I

BEGINS AT THE BEGINNING

SEVENTEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR! George the Second on the throne of England, "snuffy old drone from the German hive"; Charles Edward Stuart ("bonnie Prince Charlie") making ready for his great *coup* which, the next year, was to cast down said George from the throne and set Charles Edward thereupon as "rightful, lawful prince – for wha'll be king but Charlie?", and which ended in Culloden and the final downfall and dispersion of the Scottish Stuarts.

In France, Louis XV., Lord of Misrule, shepherding his people toward the Abyss with what skill was in him; at war with England, at war with Hungary; Frederick of Prussia alone standing by him. In Europe, generally, a seething condition which is not our immediate concern. In America, seething also: discontent, indignation, rising higher and higher under British imposition (not British either, being the work of Britain's German ruler, not of her people!), yet quelled for the moment by war with France.

I am not writing a history; far from it. I am merely throwing on the screen, in the fashion of today, a few scenes to make a background for my little pen-picture-play. What is really our immediate concern is that on November eleventh of this same

year, 1744, was born to the wife of the Reverend William Smith of Weymouth, Massachusetts, a daughter, baptized Abigail.

Parson Smith was a notable figure of the times; not a great man, but one of character, intelligence and cultivation. He married a daughter of Colonel John Quincy, so my heroine was a cousin – I cannot tell in what precise degree – to Dorothy Q. of poetic-pictorial fame; cousin, too, (her grandmother having been a Norton) to half Boston, the cultivated and scholarly half.

Parson Smith kept a diary, as dry a document as I have often read. He had no time to spare, and his brief entries are abbreviated down to the finest possible point. For example, we read that

"By my Gd I am as'd and Ev. am as'd at my S and do now ys D Sol prom By Thy God never to T. to s. ag."

This is puzzling at first sight; but the practiced reader will, after some study, make out that the good Parson, writing for himself alone, was really saying,

"By my God I am assured and Even am assured at my Strength, and do now this Day Solemnly promise By Thy God never to Tempt to sin again."

Even this is somewhat cryptic, but we are glad of the assurance, the more that we find the poor gentleman still troubled in spirit a week later.

"Lord g't me S to res the e. so prej'd to me. Lord I am ashamed of it and resolve to s. e. T. by thy S."

Which being interpreted is: "Lord, grant me Strength to resist

the evil so prejudicial to me. Lord, I am ashamed of it and resolve to shun evil Temptation by thy Strength."

What the temptation was, we may not know. Possibly he was inclined to extravagance in certain matters of personal dignity and adornment: we read of his paying fifteen pounds "for my wig"; and again, "At Boston. Paid Mr. Oliver for a cut whigg £10.00." But this is nothing. Parson Smith came of "kent folk," and may have had private means beside the salary of eight hundred dollars. Do we not read that Samuel Adams' barber's bill "for three months, shaving and dressing," was £175, paid by the Colony of Massachusetts?

Necessary expenses were also heavy. "Dec. 4th, 1749. Paid Brother Smith for a Barrel of Flower £15.11.3." But on the other hand, he sold his horse to Mr. Jackson for £200.

1751 was an eventful year. On April 23d we read, "Weymouth Meeting House took fire about half an hour after 10 o'clock at night and burnt to the ground in abt 2 hours."

This is all Parson Smith has to say about it, but the *Boston Post-Boy* of April 29th tells us that:

"Last Tuesday Night the old Meeting-house in Weymouth was burnt to the Ground: and three Barrels of Gunpowder, the Town-Stock, being in the Loft, blew up with a great noise. 'Tis uncertain by what Means the Fire happen'd."

Paul Torrey, the town poet, says of it:

Our powder stock, kept under lock,
With flints and bullets were

By dismal blast soon swiftly cast
Into the open air.
The poem hints at incendiaries.

I'm satisfied they do reside
Somewhere within the town:
Therefore, no doubt, you'll find them out,
By searching up and down.

On trial them we will condemn,
The sentence we will give:
Them execute without dispute,
Not being fit to live.

This was a heavy blow to minister and congregation, in fact to the whole community; for the meeting-house was the centre and core of the village life.

Meeting-house: (Cotton Mather found "no just ground in Scripture to apply such a trope as 'church' to a home for public assembly.") Sabbath, or more often Lord's Day: these are the Puritan names, which happily we have not yet wholly lost. The early meeting-houses were very small; that of Haverhill was only twenty-six feet long and twenty wide. They were oftenest set on a hilltop, partly as a landmark, partly as a lookout in case of prowling Indians. The building or "raising" of a meeting-house was a great event in the community. Every citizen was obliged by law to share in the work or the expense. Every man must

give a certain amount of "nayles." Contributions were levied for lumber, for labor of horses and men, and for "Rhum and Cacks" to regale the workers. "When the Medford people built their second meeting-house, they provided for the workmen and bystanders, five barrels of rum, one barrel of good brown sugar, a box of fine lemons, and two loaves of sugar. As a natural consequence, two-thirds of the frame fell, and many were injured. In Northampton, in 1738, ten gallons of rum were bought for £8 'to raise the meeting-house' – and the village doctor got '£3 for setting his bone Jonathan Strong, and £3 10s. for setting Ebenezer Burt's thy' which had somehow through the rum or the raising, both gotten broken."¹ Finally it was realized that rum and "raising" did not go well together, and the workmen had to wait till night for their liquor.

Once up, the meeting-house became the centre of village life. On the green outside stood the stocks, the whipping-post, the pillory, the cage. We are told that the first man to occupy the Boston stocks was the carpenter who made them, his charge for the lumber used being considered over high. The pillory was much frequented by Quakers and other non-orthodox persons. Here, too, were horse-blocks, and rows of stepping-stones for muddy days. The Concord horse-block was a fine one; it was erected by the women of the town, each housewife giving a pound of butter toward the expense. On the walls and door of the meeting-house were nailed grinning heads of wolf and bear,

¹ "The Sabbath in Puritan New England." Alice Morse Earle.

killed partly for safety, possibly more for the reward: fifteen shillings for a live wolf, ten for a dead one. We are not told what was done with the live wolves. A man in Newbury killed seven wolves in one year; but that is nothing. We learn from the history of Roxbury that in 1725, in one week in September, twenty bears were killed within two miles of Boston! Wolves were far more dreaded than bears, and save in this one remarkable instance, far more abundant. In 1723, Ipswich was so beset by wolves that children could not go to meeting or to school without a grown attendant.

In the early days, the meeting-house was unpainted; paint would have been thought a sinful extravagance. The eighteenth century, however, brought laxer ideas; brought also cheaper paint, and the result was a sudden access of gayety. Pomfret, Connecticut, painted its meeting-house bright yellow. Instantly Windham, near by, voted that its meeting-house be "colored something like the Pomfret meeting-house." Killingly, in turn, gave orders that "the cullering of the body of our meeting-house should be like the Pomfret meeting-house, and the Roff shal be cullered Read." But Brooklyn carried off the palm, with a combination of orange, chocolate and white, which must have been startling even in 1762, and which would surely have sent Cotton Mather into convulsions, had he been alive to see.

Wolves' heads outside the meeting-house; inside, the village powder magazine! It was the safest place, because there was never any fire in the meeting-house. Sometimes in the steeple,

sometimes under the roof-beams, there the "powder-closet" was. If a thunder-storm came on during service, the congregation ran out, and waited under the trees till it was over.

Few meeting-houses boasted a bell. The shrill toot of a horn, the clear blast of a conch-shell, or the roll of a drum, gave the signal for prayer, and brought the villagers hurrying from their doors and across the green to the meeting-house. In East Hadley, the man who "blew the cunk" received three dollars a year for his services. The drummer was better paid, receiving fourteen shillings of the town's money.

This digression on meeting-houses (drawn from Mrs. Alice Morse Earle's delightful "Sabbath in Puritan New England") may be pardoned if it gives some idea of the disaster so briefly recorded by Parson Smith. Neither parson nor parishioners were one whit discouraged, however. On May 16th, it is true, they kept a "Fast, to bewail the burning of our Meeting House": but on August 7th we read: "Began to raise Weymouth Meeting House, 3 days and half about it." And on September 1st: "Met in our New Meeting House. I p(reache)d."

What heroic labor, what depth and height of earnest purpose, what self-denial and sacrifice, these eight brief words represent, we may well imagine, but Parson Smith gives us no help. The thing was done: there was no more to say.

About this time, we begin to find ominous entries in the diary, following one another in quick and grievous succession. On the same page that records (August 15th) "P'd £15 for my

wig," we read, "Mr. Benjamin Bicknells Child Died of the throat Distemper." Two days later: "Mr. Pettee's Daughter Died of the Throat D. aged 5. Paid £4 for a hat for my Son."

Every day through the rest of the year they were dying, the little children, of what we may suppose was diphtheria, or some kindred affection. It was a dreadful time. On November 21st we read:

"Fast Day at Mr. Bayleys Parish on account of the throat Distemper prevailing there. Mr. Colton p'd from 2 Jer. 30 'In vain have I smitten yr c(hildre)n ye rec'd no Correction.'"

There had been a similar epidemic in 1735-6. In twelve months, nine hundred and eighty-four died of the distemper, by far the greater part under ten years of age – "the woful effects of Original Sin," remarks a pious writer of the time.

All this time little Abigail Smith has been waiting patiently in her cradle; now her turn has come. Remarkable woman as she was, perhaps the most striking fact in her life was that she *lived*. Why or how any Puritan baby survived its tribulations, one hardly knows; that is, any baby born in winter, and late November is winter in New England. Within a few days of its birth, the baby was taken to the meeting-house to be baptized; the meeting-house, unwarmed, as we have seen, from year's end to year's end, the wolf Cold waiting to receive the poor lamb, with jaws opened wider than those that grinned on the outer walls of the building. This expedition often completed the baby's earthly career. "Of Judge Sewall's fourteen children but three survived

him, a majority dying in infancy; and of fifteen children of his friend Cotton Mather, but two survived their father."² We are not actually told that the christening expedition killed them, but we may infer it in many cases.

The baby slept in a hooded cradle; before going to his christening, he must be carried upstairs, with silver and gold in his hand, and "scarlet laid on his head to keep him from harm." If he had fits or rickets, he was largely dosed with snail-water. To make the "admirable and most famous Snail-water" you must "take a peck of garden Shel Snails, wash them well in Small Beer, and put them in an oven till they have done making a Noise, then take them out and wipe them well from the green froth that is upon them, and bruise them shels and all in a Stone Mortar, then take a Quart of Earthworms, scower them with salt, slit them, and – "³ but perhaps you do not wish to make Snail-water, even the most admirable and famous; and after all, we have no reason to think that Abigail Smith had rickets, though she was a delicate child. She was not thought strong enough to go to school; possibly in any case it might not have been thought necessary for her. The education of woman was little thought of in those days; indeed, she herself says in one of her letters that it was fashionable to ridicule female learning. In another letter, written the year before her death, she says:

"My early education did not partake of the abundant

² "Customs and Fashions in Old New England." Alice Morse Earle.

³ *Ibid.*

opportunities which the present days offer, and which even our common country schools now afford. *I never was sent to any school.* I was always sick. Female education, in the best families, went no further than writing and arithmetic; in some few and rare instances, music and dancing."

How, then, did Abigail get her education? Easily enough; school was not necessary for her. She loved books, and there were plenty of them, not only in Parson Smith's study, but in the home of her grandfather, Colonel John Quincy, then living at Mount Wollaston, not far from Weymouth. A great part of her childhood was spent with her grandparents, and to her grandmother Quincy, in particular, she always felt that she owed a great deal.

"I have not forgotten," she writes to her own daughter in 1795, "the excellent lessons which I received from my grandmother, at a very early period of life. I frequently think they made a more durable impression upon my mind than those which I received from my own parents. Whether it was owing to the happy method of mixing instruction and amusement together, or from an inflexible adherence to certain principles, the utility of which I could not but see and approve when a child, I know not; but maturer years have rendered them oracles of wisdom to me. I love and revere her memory; her lively, cheerful disposition animated all around her, whilst she edified all by her unaffected piety. This tribute is due to the memory of those virtues the sweet remembrance of which will flourish, though she has long slept with her ancestors."

We can fancy the child sitting by the delightful grandmother, imbibing instruction and amusement, working the while at her sampler, or setting delicate stitches in a shirt for father or grandfather. Girls do not make the family shirts nowadays; but I know one dear lady who at seven years old was set down at her grandmother's side to cut and make a shirt for her grandfather, taking every stitch herself. We can see Abigail, too, browsing among Colonel Quincy's bookshelves; reading Shakespeare and Dryden and Pope and Prior; the *Spectator*, too, and all the history she could lay her hands on, and perhaps the novels of Mr. Richardson, Mr. Fielding, Mr. Smollett, three young men who were making a great stir in those days. She wrote letters, too, in the fashion of the time; endless letters to girl friends in Weymouth or Boston, "hifalutin" in language, but full of good sense and good feeling. We elders are always sighing, "Give us, ah! give us but yesterday!" and I cannot help deploring the decay of letter-writing. Says Charles Francis Adams, in the admirable Memoir with which he prefaces his collection of the letters of John and Abigail Adams:

"Perhaps there is no species of exercise, in early life, more productive of results useful to the mind, than that of writing letters. Over and above the mechanical facility of constructing sentences, which no teaching will afford so well, the interest with which the object is commonly pursued gives an extraordinary impulse to the intellect. This is promoted in a degree proportionate to the scarcity of temporary and local

subjects for discussion. Where there is little gossip, the want of it must be supplied from books. The love of literature springs up where the weeds of scandal take no root. The young ladies of Massachusetts, in the last century, were certainly readers, even though only self-taught; and their taste was not for the feeble and nerveless sentiment, or the frantic passion, which comes from the novels and romances in the circulating library of our day, but was derived from the deepest wells of English literature. The poets and moralists of the mother country furnished to these inquiring minds their ample stores, and they were used to an extent which it is at least doubtful if the more pretending and elaborate instruction of the present generation would equal."

However this may be, (and I believe every word of it myself!) we must all be thankful that Abby Smith formed the letter-writing habit early in life; if she had not, we might have lacked one of the most vivid pictures of life in Revolutionary times. Her girlhood letters (those at least to her girl friends) were signed "Diana," and were addressed to Myra, Aspasia, Calliope, Aurelia. Later, in writing to her faithful friend, lover and husband, "Portia" was the name she chose, a name that suited her well. Here is a letter, written in her girlhood, to her friend, Mrs. Lincoln:

"Weymouth, 5 October, 1761.

"My Dear Friend,

"Does not my friend think me a stupid girl, when she has kindly offered to correspond with me, that I should be

so senseless as not to accept the offer? Senseless and stupid I would confess myself, and that to the greatest degree, if I did not foresee the many advantages I shall receive from corresponding with a lady of your known prudence and understanding.

"I gratefully accept your offer; although I may be charged with vanity in pretending to entertain you with my scrawls; yet I know your generosity is such, that, like a kind parent, you will bury in oblivion all my imperfections. I do not aim at entertaining. I write merely for the instruction and edification which I shall receive, provided you honor me with your correspondence..

"You bid me tell *one* of my sparks (I think that was the word) to bring me to see you. Why! I believe you think they are as plenty as herrings, when, alas! there is as great a scarcity of them as there is of justice, honesty, prudence and many other virtues. I've no pretensions to one. Wealth, wealth is the only thing that is looked after now. 'Tis said Plato thought, if Virtue would appear to the world, all mankind would be enamoured with her, but now interest governs the world, and men neglect the golden mean.

"But, to be sober, I should really rejoice to come and see you, but if I wait till I get a (what did you call 'em?) I fear you'll be blind with age.

"I can say, in the length of this epistle, I've made the golden rule mine. Pray, my friend, do not let it be long before you write to your ever affectionate

"A. S."

One feels sure that Abigail was a good child, as well as

a bright one. She was not an infant prodigy, one is glad to think; parents and grandparents were too sensible to play tricks with her mind or her soul. One sighs to read of the "pious and ingenious Jane Turell," a Puritan child who could relate many stories out of the Scriptures before she was two years old. "Before she was four years old, she could say the greater part of the Assembly's Catechism, many of the Psalms, read distinctly, and make pertinent remarks on many things she read. She asked many astonishing questions about divine mysteries." It is comforting to know that Jane liked green apples; her father, at the end of a pious letter adjures her "as she loves him not to eat them," but it shows that after all she was a human child.

We do not know much about the diet of Puritan children. Parson Smith was a good farmer, killed his own pork and beef, planted apple trees, made cider, etc. We may suppose that Abigail had plenty of good fish and flesh, with a "sallet" now and then, and corn, squash, and pumpkins at her desire. "Pompions," the latter were often called, while "squash" were variously known as squantersquash, askutasquash, isquoukersquash, all Indian variants of the one name which we clip into a monosyllable. Wheat did not grow well in the Colonies; oaten and rye meal was chiefly used in combination with the universal corn. They had hasty pudding, boiled in a bag, or fried: "sukquttahhash," and jonne-cake, or journey cake, which we have changed by the insertion of an *h* till it appears as if "Johnny" had either invented or owned it. Parched corn (our pop-corn), a favorite food of

the Indians, was also highly appreciated by the Colonists. They were amazed at first sight of it: Governor Winthrop explains carefully how, on being parched, the corn turns entirely inside out, and is white and floury within. Sometimes they made it into "No-cake," which is, we are told, "Indian corn, parched in the hot ashes, the ashes being sifted from it; it is afterwards beaten to powder and put into a long leatherne bag, trussed like a knapsacke, out of which they take thrice three spoonfuls a day." This was considered wonderfully sustaining food; it was mixed, before eating, with snow in winter, with water in summer.

The pumpkins were made into "pyes," cakes, bread, sauce.

We have pumpkins at morning and pumpkins at noon,
If it were not for pumpkins we should be undone.

Potatoes were brought over from England as early as 1636, but were not grown till some time later. People were still afraid of them: some thought that "if a man eat them every day he could not live beyond seven years." Some again fancied the balls were the edible portion, and "did not much desire them." Nor were the recipes for cooking them specially inviting. "The Accomplisht Cook" much in use about the year 1700 says that potatoes must be "boiled and blanched; seasoned with nutmeg and cinnamon and pepper; mixed with eringo roots, dates, lemon, and whole mace; covered with butter, sugar, and grape verjuice, made with pastry; then iced with rosewater and sugar, and yclept a 'Secret

Pye."⁴

Let us hope that Mrs. Smith, a Quincy born, knew better than to torture and overwhelm a worthy vegetable! We know little of this good lady, but we may suppose that she was a notable housewife, since her daughter in later life showed such skill in all household arts. We shall see by and by how Abigail baked and brewed, spun and wove, clothed and fed and cared for her family, often with little or no assistance. We may fancy her now, trotting about after Mother Smith at Weymouth or Grandmother Quincy at Wollaston, her bright eyes noting everything, her quick fingers mastering all the arts of preserving, candying, distilling. There was a passion for such work among the New England women in those days.

"They made preserves and conserves, marmalets and quiddonies, hypocras and household wines, usquebarbs and cordials. They candied fruits and made syrups. They preserved everything that would bear preserving. I have seen old-time receipts for preserving quinces, 'respasse,' pippins, 'apricocks,' plums, 'damsins,' peaches, oranges, lemons, artichokes; green walnuts, elecampane roots, eringo roots, grapes, barberries, cherries; receipts for syrup of clove gillyflower, wormwood, mint, aniseed, clove, elder, lemons, marigold, citron, hyssop, liquorice; receipts for conserves of roses, violets, borage flowers, rosemary, betony, sage, mint, lavender, marjoram, and 'piony'; rules for candying fruit, berries, and flowers, for poppy water,

⁴ "Customs and Fashions in Old New England." Alice Morse Earle.

cordial, cherry water, lemon water, thyme water, Angelica water, Aqua Mirabilis, Aqua Celestis, clary water, mint water."⁵

Good living was cheap in Abigail's childhood. An English traveler, visiting Boston in 1740, writes thus: "Their poultry of all sorts are as fine as can be desired, and they have plenty of fine fish of various kinds, all of which are very cheap. Take the butchers' meat all together, in every season of the year, I believe it is about twopence per pound sterling; the best beef and mutton, lamb and veal are often sold for sixpence per pound of New England money, which is some small matter more than one penny sterling.

"Poultry in their season are exceeding cheap. As good a turkey may be bought for about two shillings sterling as we can buy in London for six or seven, and as fine a goose for tenpence as would cost three shillings and sixpence or four shillings in London. The cheapest of all the several kinds of poultry are a sort of wild pigeon, which are in season the latter end of June, and so continue until September. They are large, and finer than those we have in London, and are sold here for eighteenpence a dozen, and sometimes for half of that.

"Fish, too, is exceedingly cheap. They sell a fine fresh cod that will weigh a dozen pounds or more, just taken out of the sea, for about twopence sterling. They have smelts, too, which they sell as cheap as sprats are in London. Salmon, too, they have in great plenty, and these they sell for about a shilling apiece, which will

⁵ "Customs and Fashions in Old New England." Alice Morse Earle.

weigh fourteen or fifteen pounds."

Shad, strange to say, was profoundly despised. In Puritan times they were fed to the hogs; in 1733 they sold two for a penny, and it was not at all "the thing" to eat them – or at least to be seen eating them! A story is told of a family in Hadley, Massachusetts, who were about to dine on a shad; and who, hearing a knock at the door, delayed opening it till shad and platter had been hustled out of sight.

"They have venison very plenty. They will sell as fine a haunch for half a crown as would cost full thirty shillings in England. Bread is much cheaper than we have in England, but is not near so good. Butter is very fine, and cheaper than ever I bought any in London; the best is sold all summer for threepence a pound. But as for cheese, it is neither cheap nor good."

And milk was one penny a quart!

But we shall see great changes before we finish our story. These were the years of plenty, of the fat kine and the full ears of corn. Eat your fill, Abigail! drink your milk while it is a penny a quart; the lean years are coming, when you will pinch and scrape and use all your wit and ability to feed and clothe your family, and will look back with a sigh on these full years of your childhood.

CHAPTER II

GIRLHOOD AND MARRIAGE

WE are told that Abigail Smith in her childhood and girlhood was "surrounded by people of learning and political sagacity." Who were some of these people? At home in Weymouth, there was her father, of course, "remarkably lively and animated in all his public performances," as we learn from his tombstone. Doubtless his company was stimulating to the bright little girl; perhaps he took her with him now and then on his trips to Boston or Hingham, when he went to preach or to buy "Flower"; and ministers and other godly folk often came to the parsonage. But probably at her grandparents' home she saw even more people of learning and political sagacity. The Quincy clan itself made a goodly fellowship of cultivated men and women. The Hancocks lived near by. John Hancock was a boy of seven when Abigail was born. In the year 1755, when she was eleven, he was a lad of eighteen; had graduated the year before from Harvard College and had already begun a brilliant mercantile career. John was handsome and always fond of good clothes and gay colors. We have no description of his youthful costumes, but we know that one day in later life he wore "a red velvet cap within which was one of fine linen, the last turned up two or three inches over the lower edge of the velvet. He also wore a blue damask gown lined

with velvet, a white stock, a white satin embroidered waistcoat, black satin small-clothes, white silk stockings and red morocco slippers."

Roxbury was not far off, and here lived the Warrens, warm friends of the Quincys. Joseph Warren was three years younger than Abigail; they may have played together in the Quincy gardens. We may fancy them, the little maid in bib and apron, mitts and kerchief; the little lad in flapped coat, knee-breeches, and waist-coat reaching to his knees; both have buckled shoes. Abby's hair is rolled smoothly back over a cushion, Pompadour-fashion, and tied behind with a ribbon; Joseph's worn in much the same way, but without the cushion.

There was another young man named John, who may have made calls either of ceremony or of friendship at the Quincy mansion. John Adams was a year behind John Hancock in college, having graduated in this very year 1755, which I have chosen for a survey of my heroine's surroundings. He came of good New England stock, his father being a substantial farmer, and for many years a selectman of the town of Braintree. The Adamses were never rich, yet we are told that there had been a silver spoon in the family for four generations.

"In the year 1791, Miss Hannah Adams, the historian, in writing to John Adams, made reference to the 'humble obscurity' of their common origin. Her correspondent, in reply, while acknowledging the kinship, went on energetically to remark that, could he 'ever suppose that family pride were any way excusable,

[he] should think a descent from a line of virtuous, independent New England farmers for a hundred and sixty years was a better foundation for it than a descent through royal or noble scoundrels ever since the flood."⁶

When young John was sixteen, his father offered him the choice of following the family pursuit of farming, and inheriting his share of the family estate, worth some thirteen hundred pounds, or of having a "learned education" for all his inheritance. There was no question of John Adams' choice; he went to Harvard, as we have seen, and was one of the four best scholars in college at the time.

Shortly after receiving his degree, he became the teacher of the grammar school in the town of Worcester. This must have been a doleful change from his college life, with its gay and stimulating companionship, but he entered on the new work manfully, if not enthusiastically, and prospered in it.

Why do my thoughts so cluster round this year 1755? Why not take 1754, when Abigail was ten years old, or 1764, when she was twenty? Well, I shall have plenty to say about 1764, for that was the year – but never mind! The truth is, 1755 was a remarkable year, "a year never to be forgotten in America,"⁷ a year made memorable by the cruel expulsion of the French from Nova Scotia, by the destruction of General Braddock's army, by the unfortunate attempt of Sir William Johnson against Crown Point.

⁶ "Three Episodes of Massachusetts History." C. F. Adams.

⁷ "History of Massachusetts." Minot.

These were incidents in the so-called French and Indian War, a war in some respects more dreadful than any other up to that of the present day; a war specially momentous for all Americans, since it was to pay the debts then contracted that Great Britain levied on the American Colonies (which had voluntarily spent vast sums and suffered untold hardships in this war), the taxes which brought about the American Revolution.

So much from the historical point of view; but for myself, I must confess that two events, one actual and terrible, the other conjectural and delightful, fixed 1755 at an early age in my mind.

That was the year when Lisbon town
Saw the earth open and gulp her down.

I must have been a very small child when I proudly owned the Little Green Geography Book. There has been no other geography book like it; it was small, and square, and apple-green; it had many and wonderful pictures. Among these pictures, three impressed me most deeply: one of the Maelstrom, where a large vessel was going down over the edge of a terrifying circle like a round Niagara Falls; another of Peruvian Indians pulling up plants by the roots, and collecting quicksilver by the quart, it would appear. The third, and by far the most thrilling and terrifying, was of the Lisbon Earthquake. The ground was opening in every direction in long horrid chasms, and into these chasms were falling churches, houses, men, in dreadful

confusion. This picture and that of the Maelstrom had a strange fascination for me; I was forever poring over them, when I should have been learning about the exports of Russia, of which to this day I can give little account.

And then – but every one of my readers knows that

'Twas on the terrible Earthquake Day
That the Deacon finished the One Hoss Shay.

So it really is not surprising that 1755 is an *annus mirabilis* to me.

It is interesting to find that the earthquake came over seas to this country, and created considerable disturbance, though no serious damage was done. November the first was Lisbon's day of doom; it was the eighteenth before the internal commotion reached Massachusetts.

Parson Smith alludes to it with characteristic brevity: "A great and terrible earthquake happened."

Six words! We can fancy Mrs. Smith rushing to his study, crying out that the chimneys were falling, that Neighbor Wibird's great elm was down; daughter Mary bringing the news that the "Chaney Teapot had fallen from the dresser and was in a hundred pieces."

This, I say, we are at liberty to fancy, but Parson Smith will not help us. His next entry is: "Married David Bicknell to Jerusha Vinsen. Lent the Dr. a pail of hair."

(No; I don't believe it was his wig; it was probably cattle hair, to use with mortar; but he does not say.)

John Adams is kinder to us. His diary begins thus:

"We had a very severe shock of an earthquake. It continued near four minutes. I then was at my father's in Braintree, and awoke out of my sleep in the midst of it. The house seemed to rock and reel and crack, as if it would fall in ruins about us. Chimneys were shattered by it within one mile of my father's house."

John Adams' diary is as different from that of his future father-in-law as cheese from chalk. No abbreviations here; no dry statistics of birth, death, marriage, as if they were of no human interest. He pours out his rolling periods with evident enjoyment. His son, who edits the diary, says:

"These are loose fragments of journal in the hand-writing of John Adams upon scraps of paper scarcely legible, from 18 November, 1755, to 20 November, 1761. They were effusions of mind, committed from time to time to paper, probably without the design of preserving them; self-examinations at once severe and stimulative; reflections upon others, sometimes, not less severe upon his friends; thoughts such as occur to all, some of which no other than an unsullied soul would commit to writing, mingled with conceptions at once comprehensive and profound."

The future President was already deeply interested in public affairs; his ardent patriotism was already forecasting the future of his beloved country. Shortly before the beginning of the Diary,

he writes to his friend and kinsman, Nathan Webb:

"All that part of creation which lies within our observation, is liable to change. Even mighty states and kingdoms are not exempt... Soon after the Reformation, a few people came over into this new world for conscience's sake. Perhaps this apparently trivial incident may transfer the great seat of empire into America. It looks likely to me; for if we can remove the turbulent Gallicks, our people, according to the exactest computation, will in another century become more numerous than England itself. Should this be the case, since we have, I may say, all the naval stores of the nation in our hands, it will be easy to obtain the mastery of the seas; and then the united force of all Europe will not be able to subdue us. The only way to keep us from setting up for ourselves is to disunite us. *Divide et impera*. Keep us distinct colonies, and then, some great men in each colony desiring the monarchy of the whole, they will destroy each others' influence and keep the country in *equilibrio*.

"Be not surprised that I am turned politician. This whole town is immersed in politics. The interests of nations, and all the *dira* of war, make the subject of every conversation. I sit and hear, and after having been led through a maze of sage observations, I sometimes retire, and by laying things together, form some reflections pleasing to myself. The produce of one of these reveries you have read above..

"Friendship, I take it, is one of the distinguishing glories of man; and the creature that is insensible of its charms, though

he may wear the shape of man, is unworthy of the character. In this, perhaps, we bear a nearer resemblance to unembodied intelligences than in anything else. From this I expect to receive the chief happiness of my future life; and am sorry that fortune has thrown me at such a distance from those of my friends who have the highest place in my affections. But thus it is, and I must submit. But I hope ere long to return, and live in that familiarity that has from earliest infancy subsisted between yourself and affectionate friend,

"John Adams."

We shall see about this. Friendship played an important part in John Adams' life; but it was not to form the chief happiness of his life.

He did not enjoy teaching; witness another letter to Nathan Webb.

"The situation of the town is quite pleasant, and the inhabitants, as far as I have had opportunity to know their character, are a sociable, generous, and hospitable people; but the school is indeed a school of affliction. A large number of little runtlings, just capable of lispng A B C, and troubling the master. But Dr. Savil tells me, for my comfort, 'by cultivating and pruning these tender plants in the garden of Worcester, I shall make some of them plants of renown and cedars of Lebanon.' However this be, I am certain that keeping this school any length of time, would make a base weed and ignoble shrub of me."

Yet at times he realized the value of his work. We read in the

diary of 1756:

"I sometimes in my sprightly moments consider myself, in my great chair at school, as some dictator at the head of a commonwealth. In this little state I can discover all the great geniuses, all the surprising actions and revolutions of the great world, in miniature. I have several renowned generals but three feet high, and several deep projecting politicians in petticoats. I have others catching and dissecting flies, accumulating remarkable pebbles, cockle-shells, etc., with as ardent curiosity as any virtuoso in the Royal Society. Some rattle and thunder out A B C, with as much fire and impetuosity as Alexander fought, and very often sit down and cry as heartily upon being outspelt, as Cæsar did, when at Alexander's sepulchre he reflected that the Macedonian hero had conquered the world before his age. At one table sits Mr. Insipid, foppling and fluttering, spinning his whirligig, or playing with his fingers, as gaily and wittily as any Frenchified cox-comb brandishes his cane or rattles his snuff-box. At another, sits the polemical divine, plodding and wrangling in his mind about 'Adam's fall, in which we sinned all,' as his Primer has it. In short, my little school, like the great world, is made up of kings, politicians, divines, L.D.'s, fops, buffoons, fiddlers, sycophants, fools, coxcombs, chimney-sweepers, and every other character drawn in history, or seen in the world. Is it not, then, the highest pleasure, my friend, to preside in this little world, to bestow the proper applause upon virtuous and generous actions, to blame and punish every vicious and contracted trick,

to wear out of the tender mind everything that is mean and little, and fire the newborn soul with a noble ardor, and emulation?"

Out of school hours, John Adams was studying law with all possible diligence. By 1758 he was able to give up teaching, and was admitted to practise at the Massachusetts bar. His ability was recognized at once. A few years later, Governor Barnard, wishing to attach this promising young lawyer to the royal party, offered him the office of advocate-general in the Admiralty Court, which was considered a sure step to the highest honors of the bench.

This was the young man who, in 1764, came knocking at the door of Parson Smith of Weymouth, asking the hand of his daughter Abigail in marriage; to whom she writes on April 20th:

"I hope you smoke your letters well, before you deliver them. Mamma is so fearful lest I should catch the distemper, that she hardly ever thinks the letters are sufficiently purified. Did you never rob a bird's nest? Do you remember how the poor bird would fly round and round, fearful to come nigh, yet not know how to leave the place? Just so they say I hover round Tom, whilst he is smoking my letters.

"But heyday, Mr. What's your name, who taught you to threaten so violently? 'A character besides that of a critic, in which if I never did, I always hereafter shall fear you.' Thou canst not prove a villain, impossible, – I, therefore, still insist upon it, that I neither do nor can fear thee. For my part, I know not that there is any pleasure in being feared; but, if there is, I hope you will be so generous as to fear your Diana, that she may at least

be made sensible of the pleasure. Mr. Ayers will bring you this letter and the *bag*. Do not repine, – it is filled with balm.

"Here is love, respects, good wishes, regards – a whole wagon load of them, sent you from all the good folks in the neighborhood.

"Tomorrow makes the fourteenth day. How many more are to come? I dare not trust myself with the thought. Adieu. Let me hear from you by Mr. Ayers, and excuse this very bad writing; if you had mended my pen it would have been better. Once more, Adieu. Gold and silver have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee, – which is the affectionate regard of your

"A. S."

We know little of the preliminary steps in the courtship. The young lawyer, riding his circuit, naturally passed through Weymouth, perhaps rode directly by the house of Parson Smith. The parson doubtless knew the elder Adams, would naturally offer civility and hospitality to his son; a man of parts himself, he would quickly perceive the intelligence and character of the young lawyer. But the Family at Large was mightily disturbed. Lawyers were looked askance at in those days; the law was a new profession, probably a dangerous, possibly an iniquitous one. Quincys, Nortons, Tynes, all shook their heads emphatically. The whole parish followed suit. What! Abigail, with her wit, beauty, gentle blood and breeding, marry "one of the dishonest tribe of lawyers," the son of a small country farmer? Perish the thought!

The elder sister Mary had been married the year before to

Richard Cranch. This was thought a wholly suitable match. Parson Smith preached a wedding sermon, taking for his text, "And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her," and everybody was pleased. But no one, except the contracting parties and the Parson, seems to have approved of Abigail's marrying John Adams. This, however, troubled none of the three overmuch. It is true that John had to do his courting without assistance from his future "in-laws." He must tie his horse to a tree and find his Abigail as he could: no one even offered him a courting-stick, that "hollow stick about an inch in diameter and six or eight feet long, fitted with mouth and ear pieces"⁸ through which some lovers, seated on either side of the great fireplace, had to carry on their courtship in the presence of the whole family.

Possibly John Adams might have declined this privilege even had it been offered. He has nothing to say about his courtship, but thus soberly and gravely he writes of his marriage.

"Here it may be proper to recollect something which makes an article of great importance in the life of every man. I was of an amorous disposition, and, very early, from ten or eleven years of age, was very fond of the society of females. I had my favorites among the young women, and spent many of my evenings in their company; and this disposition, although controlled for seven years after my entrance into college, returned and engaged me too much till I was married.

⁸ "Customs and Fashions in Old New England." Alice Morse Earle.

"I shall draw no characters, nor give any enumeration of my youthful flames. It would be considered as no compliment to the dead or the living. This, I will say: – they were all modest and virtuous girls, and always maintained their character through life. No virgin or matron ever had cause to blush at the sight of me, or to regret her acquaintance with me..

"I passed the summer of 1764 in attending courts and pursuing my studies, with some amusement on my little farm, to which I was frequently making additions, until the fall, when, on the 25th day of October, I was married to Miss Smith, second daughter of the Rev. William Smith, minister of Weymouth, granddaughter of the Honorable John Quincy, of Braintree, a connection which has been the source of all my felicity, although a sense of duty, which forced me away from her and my children for so many years, produced all the griefs of my heart, and all that I esteem real afflictions in life."

So they were married, and the parson conveyed a gentle reproof to his family and parishioners by preaching a sermon from Luke vii:33: "For John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, '*He hath a devil.*'"

CHAPTER III

THE BOSTON MASSACRE

IT was not a gay wedding, this of Abigail Smith and John Adams. They were married quietly by good Parson Smith, and then, hand in hand, walked across the fields to the little lean-to farmhouse where they were to find so much happiness and to live through such difficult times. It seems unlikely that Abigail enjoyed the pretty Colonial custom of "coming out Bride," of which we read in old diaries and letters. On the first Sunday after the wedding it was customary for the bride and groom, "whether old or young, gentle or simple," to go to church in the very best finery they could muster. If they were well-to-do, they kept this up for the four Sundays of the honeymoon, sometimes – oh, un-Puritan extravagance! – in a new gown and suit each time!

"They usually arrived a bit late, in order to have their full meed of attention; and proceeded slowly, arm in arm, down the broad aisle to seats of honor, in the hushed attention of the entire congregation... At a certain point in the services, usually after the singing of the second hymn, the happy couple, in agonies of shyness and pride, rose to their feet, and turned slowly twice or thrice around before the eyes of the whole delighted assembly, thus displaying to the full every detail of their attire."⁹

⁹ "Two Centuries of Costume in America." Alice Morse Earle.

This would not have suited either Abigail or John Adams. Their tastes were simple, their minds set on far other things than clothes. Mrs. Adams was always neat and trim in her dress, never extravagant or ostentatious. Whether in the little Braintree farmhouse, at the Court of St. James, or as Lady of the White House, she was always the same – simple, modest, dignified: an example and an inspiration to all around her.

The first ten years of her married life were passed happily and quietly, partly in Braintree, partly in Boston, whither Mr. Adams' increasing law practice often called him. Four children were born to her, a daughter named for herself, and three sons, John Quincy, Charles and Thomas.

Mrs. Adams kept no diary; it is to her husband's that we naturally turn for records of these ten years of happy family life. Alas! he has nothing to say about them. He was *living* his home life; it never occurred to him to write about it. His diary is concerned with public and professional affairs, and with them alone.

It was not till forced apart by the pressure of public duties and private service, that these two loving hearts needed any other expression than the spoken word of affection, cheer and sympathy. It is to the breaking up of their happy home life that we owe the Familiar Letters which are of such priceless value to all students of American history, to all lovers of high and noble thought.

But we have not come to the separation yet; we must consider

these ten silent years, and fill in the picture as best we may.

Here is a sketch, boldly drawn by John Adams himself, writing in his old age to a friend, which brings the time before us as nothing else can. He is describing a scene in the Council Chamber in the old Town House, in February, 1761.

"In this chamber, round a great fire, were seated five judges, with Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson at their head as Chief Justice, all arrayed in their new, fresh, rich robes of scarlet English broadcloth; in their large cambric bands and immense judicial wigs... In this chamber were seated at a long table all the barristers at law of Boston, and of the neighboring county of Middlesex in gowns, bands, and tie wigs. They were not seated on ivory chairs, but their dress was more solemn and pompous than that of the Roman Senate, when the Gauls broke in upon them..

"Samuel Quincy and John Adams had been admitted barristers at that term. John was the youngest; he should be painted looking like a short, thick archbishop of Canterbury, seated at the table with a pen in his hand, lost in admiration.

"But Otis was a flame of fire, with.. a torrent of impetuous eloquence, he hurried away everything before him... Then and there the child Independence was born."

The year 1763 is usually regarded as the beginning of the American Revolution, since it was in that year that George III and his ministers determined to raise a revenue from the colonies. These matters belong rather to history than to biography, but we must briefly note the most striking events of this important time.

In 1761 were issued the Writs of Assistance, which empowered Government officials to enter and search the houses of citizens for possible contraband goods. In 1765 came the Stamp Act, imposing war-taxes on the Colonies, and struck cold on the hearts of the colonists. Franklin, seldom stirred out of his philosophic calm, cried aloud on hearing of it, "The sun of liberty is set!" For John Adams, it was the call to action, and from it dates his entrance into the field of politics. He was a selectman of Braintree at this time: "he prepared at home a draft of instructions, and carried them with him to the meeting. They were accepted by the town without a dissenting voice, and being published in Draper's paper, from a copy furnished to the printer at his request, were adopted by forty other towns of the province, as instructions to their respective representatives. Passages from them were also adopted in the instructions from the town of Boston to their representatives, which were drawn up by Samuel Adams."

Immediately after the Boston town meeting, John Adams was asked to appear as counsel for the town before the governor and council, "in support of the memorial of the town, praying that the courts of law in the province" (closed by order of the governor, because the stamps had not been delivered) might be opened.

Singularly enough, on the same evening, possibly at the same hour, when the people of Boston were thus showing their trust and confidence in him, Mr. Adams was recording in his diary the doubts and fears which beset him at the prospect opened before

him by the Stamp Act and its consequences.

"The bar seem to me to behave like a flock of shot pigeons; they seem to be stopped; the net seems to be thrown over them, and they have scarcely courage left to flounce and to flutter. So sudden an interruption in my career is very unfortunate for me. I was but just getting into my gears, just getting under sail, and an embargo is laid upon the ship. Thirty years of my life are passed in preparation for business; I have had poverty to struggle with, envy and jealousy and malice of enemies to encounter, no friends, or but few, to assist me; so that I have groped in dark obscurity, till of late, and had but just become known and gained a small degree of reputation, when this execrable project was set on foot for my ruin as well as that of America in general, and of Great Britain."

On receiving the invitation from Boston next day, he marveled.

"When I recollect my own reflections and speculations yesterday, a part of which were committed to writing last night, and may be seen under December 18th, and compare them with the proceedings of Boston yesterday, of which the foregoing letter informed me, I cannot but wonder, and call to mind Lord Bacon's observation about secret invisible laws of nature, and communications and influences between places that are not discovered by sense.

"But I am now under all obligations of interest and ambition, as well as honor, gratitude and duty, to exert the utmost of my

abilities in this important cause. How shall it be conducted?"

As we all know, the Stamp Act was repealed in March, 1776, and we find no more doubts or fears in John Adams' diary. Henceforth he belonged to his country. So did the diary! From now on it is chiefly a record of public affairs. This was natural, but one does wish he had said a little more about his home and family. Only now and then do we find an entry of this kind:

"A duller day than last Monday, when the Province was in a rapture for the repeal of the Stamp Act, I do not remember to have passed. My wife, who had long depended on going to Boston, and my little babe, were both very ill, of an whooping cough. Myself under obligation to attend the superior court at Plymouth the next day, and therefore unable to go to Boston, and the town of Braintree insensible to the common joy!"

Or we read: "Set off with my wife for Salem; stopped half an hour at Boston, crossed the ferry, and at three o'clock arrived at Hill's, the tavern in Malden, the sign of the Rising Eagle, at the brook near Mr. Emerson's meeting-house, five miles from Norwood's: where, namely, at Hill's, we dined. Here we fell in company with Kent and Sewall. We all oated at Martin's, where we found the new sheriff of Essex, Colonel Saltonstall. We all rode into town together. Arrived at my dear brother Cranch's about eight, and drank tea, and are all very happy. Sat and heard the ladies talk about ribbon, catgut, and Paris net, ridinghoods, cloth, silk and lace. Brother Cranch came home, and a very happy evening we had."

Mr. Cranch was the gentleman in marrying whom Mary Smith had "chosen the good part." The brothers-in-law were warm friends and there were many pleasant family meetings.

"April 8th. Mounted my horse, in a very rainy morning, for Barnstable, leaving my dear brother Cranch and his family at my house. Arrived at Dr. Tufts', where I found a fine wild goose on the spit, and cranberries stewing in the skillet for dinner. Tufts, as soon as he heard that Cranch was at Braintree, determined to go over and bring him and wife and child over, to dine upon wild goose, and cranberry sauce."

In the spring of 1768, Mr. Adams moved into Boston with his wife and children. It was the first of several moves, which he thus records in his diary four years later:

"In April, 1768, I removed to Boston, to the white house in Brattle Square. In the spring, 1769, I removed to Cole Lane, to Mr. Fayerweather's house. In 1770, I removed to another house in Brattle Square, where Dr. Cooper now lives; in 1771, I removed from Boston to Braintree, in the month of April, where I have lived to this time. I hope I shall not have occasion to remove so often for four years and a half to come."

In 1768, John Adams went on circuit as usual. Returning, he found the town full of troops. They had landed "about one o'clock at noon, October the first, under cover of the ship's cannon, without molestation; and, having effected it, marched into the Common with muskets charged, bayonets fixed, drums beating, fifes playing, etc., making, with the train of artillery, upward of

seven hundred men."¹⁰

The diary continues: "Through the whole succeeding Fall and Winter, a regiment was exercised by Major Small, in Brattle Square, directly in front of my house. The spirit-stirring drum and the ear-piercing fife aroused me and my family early enough every morning, and the indignation they excited, though somewhat soothed, was not allayed by the sweet songs, violins and flutes, of the serenading Sons of Liberty under my windows in the evening. In this way and a thousand others, I had sufficient intimations that the hopes and confidence of the people were placed in me as one of their friends; and I was determined that, so far as depended on me, they should not be disappointed; and that if I could render them no positive assistance at least I would never take any part against them.

"My daily reflections for two years, at the sight of these soldiers before my door, were serious enough. Their very appearance in Boston was a strong proof to me, that the determination in Great Britain to subjugate us was too deep and inveterate ever to be altered by us; for every thing we could do was misrepresented, and nothing we could say was credited. On the other hand, I had read enough in history to be well aware of the errors to which the public opinions of the people were liable in times of great heat and danger, as well as of the extravagances of which the populace of cities were capable when artfully excited to passion, and even when justly provoked by

¹⁰ "Gordon's History."

oppression..

"The danger I was in appeared in full view before me; and I very deliberately, and, indeed, very solemnly, determined at all events to adhere to my principles in favor of my native country, which, indeed, was all the country I knew, or which had been known by my father, grandfather, or great grandfather; but, on the other hand, I never would deceive the people, nor conceal from them any essential truth, nor, especially, make myself subservient to any of their crimes, follies, or eccentricities. These rules, to the utmost of my capacity and power, I have invariably and religiously observed to this day."

The drummings and fifings were to have more serious results than the disturbing of good citizens' slumbers. The presence of the troops in Boston proved a constant and growing irritation to the citizens, already exasperated by repeated aggressions. The soldiers saw no reason why they should be polite to the people, the people saw every reason why they should be rude to the soldiers. There were constant wrangles and jangles, growing more and more frequent, more and more violent, till at length, on the night of March 5th, 1770, the seething pot boiled over. John Adams writes:

"The evening of the fifth of March I spent at Mr. Henderson Inches' house, at the south end of Boston, in company with a club with whom I had been associated for several years. About nine o'clock we were alarmed with the ringing of bells, and, supposing it to be the signal of fire, we snatched our hats and

cloaks, broke up the club, and went out to assist in quenching the fire, or aiding our friends who might be in danger. In the street we were informed that the British soldiers had fired on the inhabitants, killed some and wounded others, near the town-house. A crowd of people was flowing down the street to the scene of action. When we arrived, we saw nothing but some field-pieces placed before the south door of the town-house, and some engineers and grenadiers drawn up to protect them... Having surveyed round the town house, and seeing all quiet, I walked down Boylston Alley into Brattle Square, where a company or two of regular soldiers were drawn up in front of Dr. Cooper's old church, with their muskets all shouldered, and their bayonets all fixed. I had no other way to proceed but along the whole front in a very narrow space which they had left for passengers. Pursuing my way, without taking the least notice of them, or they of me, any more than if they had been marble statues, I went directly home to Cole Lane."

What had happened was the Boston Massacre, which is vividly described by John Quincy Adams, at that time a child of two years.

It was nine o'clock of a moonlight night, he tells us, and there had been a light fall of snow on the icy streets. A single sentry was pacing slowly up and down before the door of the custom house in King Street. From his beat he could hear shouts and tumult in the neighboring streets; Boston did not go to bed at curfew these days. Parties of citizens had met parties of soldiers, and

exchanged uncomplimentary remarks, with shouts and threats on either side. Probably the sentry thought little of this: it went on every night, more or less. Presently, however, round the corner came a barber's boy, and began to "slang" the sentry himself. This was another matter, and he responded in kind. The dispute ran high; other boys came running, and with them men, angry men who had had their fill of British insolence. The sentry, who for his part had had quite enough of "rebel impudence," called for support, and out came a corporal and six men (or twelve – the accounts vary) under the direction of Captain Preston, and ranged themselves in a semi-circle in front of his post. Instantly, as if by magic, the soldiers were surrounded by "forty or fifty of the lower order of town's people, who had been roving the streets armed with billets of wood... What begins with jeering and profanity not seldom ends in some shape or other of deepest tragedy. Forty or fifty of the coarsest people of a small trading town and eight hirelings of an ordinary British regiment can scarcely be imagined as types of any solid principle or exalted sentiment, and yet at the bottom lay the root of bitterness which soon afterwards yielded such abundant fruit. This was the first protest against the application of force to the settlement of a question of right."

We all know the outcome. Seven of the soldiers, "either under orders or without orders," fired: five men fell mortally wounded: six others were wounded less seriously. Each musket was loaded with two balls and every ball took effect. "So fatal a precision

of aim, indicating not a little malignity, though it seems never to have attracted notice, is one of the most singular circumstances attending the affray. No wonder, then, that peaceable citizens of a town, until now inexperienced in events of the kind, should, in their horror of the spectacle, have called the act a massacre, and have demanded, in tones the most absolute, the instantaneous removal of the cause. The armed hand, which had done this deed, was that of England. It was not that of a friend or guardian. The drops of blood then shed in Boston were like the dragon's teeth of ancient fable – the seeds, from which sprung up the multitudes who would recognize no arbitration but the deadly one of the battle-field."

There can have been little sleep that night for either Mr. or Mrs. Adams. The latter was in delicate health. The roll of the drums, the shouts of "Town-born, turn out, turn out!" the tramp of soldiers, as company after company was hurried to the scene of action, must have been terrifying enough. Still the tumult grew, till at length Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, with great difficulty making himself heard from the balcony of the town house (now known as the Old State House) pledged his word to the citizens that justice should be done, and prevailed upon the commander of the troops to withdraw them to their barracks.

This quieted the tumult, but still a crowd of anxious citizens – not the rioters, but the sober patriots who realized the gravity of the crisis – besieged the closed doors behind which Governor and Commander and justices of the peace were in council. All

night they waited, watchful, silent: at three in the morning, it was announced that Captain Preston had surrendered himself and was committed to prison; then, and not till then, Boston went to bed.

The rest of the story must be told by John Adams himself.

"The next morning, I think it was, sitting in my office, near the steps of the town-house stairs, Mr. Forrest came in, who was then called the Irish Infant. I had some acquaintance with him. With tears streaming from his eyes, he said, 'I am come with a very solemn message from a very unfortunate man, Captain Preston, in prison. He wishes for counsel, and can get none. I have waited on Mr. Quincy, who says he will engage, if you will give him your assistance; without it, he positively will not. Even Mr. Auchmuty declines, unless you will engage.' I had no hesitation in answering that counsel ought to be the very last thing that an accused person should want in a free country; that the bar ought, in my opinion, to be independent and impartial, at all times and in every circumstance, and that persons whose lives were at stake ought to have the counsel they preferred. But he must be sensible this would be as important a cause as was ever tried in any court or country of the world; and that every lawyer must hold himself responsible not only to his country, but to the highest and most infallible of all tribunals, for the part he should act. He must, therefore, expect from me no art or address, no sophistry or prevarication, in such a cause, nor any thing more than fact, evidence, and law would justify. 'Captain Preston,' he

said, 'requested and desired no more; and that he had such an opinion from all he had heard from all parties of me, that he could cheerfully trust his life with me upon those principles.' 'And,' said Forrest, 'as God Almighty is my judge, I believe him an innocent man.' I replied, 'That must be ascertained by his trial, and if he thinks he cannot have a fair trial of that issue without my assistance, without hesitation, he shall have it.'

"Upon this, Forrest offered me a single guinea as a retaining fee, and I readily accepted it. From first to last I never said a word about fees, in any of those cases, and I should have said nothing about them here, if calumnies and insinuations had not been propagated that I was tempted by great fees and enormous sums of money. Before or after the trial, Preston sent me ten guineas, and at the trial of the soldiers afterwards, eight guineas more, which were all the fees I ever received or were offered to me, and I should not have said anything on the subject to my clients if they had never offered me anything. This was all the pecuniary reward I ever had for fourteen or fifteen days' labor in the most exhausting and fatiguing causes I ever tried, for hazarding a popularity very general and very hardly earned, and for incurring a clamor, popular suspicions and prejudices, which are not yet worn out, and never will be forgotten as long as the history of this period is read.

"It was immediately bruited abroad that I had engaged for Preston and the soldiers, and occasioned a great clamor, which the friends of the government delighted to hear, and sily and

secretly fomented with all their art."

Their arts were of little avail. While the trial (which lasted through a whole term) was still in progress, an election came on for a representative of Boston, in the town meeting, and the people, eager to show their confidence in John Adams, elected him by a large majority.

"I had never been at a Boston town meeting, and was not at this, until messengers were sent to me to inform me that I was chosen. I went down to Faneuil Hall, and in a few words expressive of my sense of the difficulty and danger of the times, of the importance of the trust, and of my own insufficiency to fulfill the expectations of the people, I accepted the choice. Many congratulations were offered, which I received civilly, but they gave no joy to me. I considered the step as a devotion of my family to ruin, and myself to death; for I could scarce perceive a possibility that I should ever go through the thorns and leap all the precipices before me and escape with my life.

"At this time I had more business at the bar than any man in the Province. My health was feeble. I was throwing away as bright prospects as any man ever had before him, and I had devoted myself to endless labor and anxiety, if not to infamy and to death, and that for nothing, except what indeed was and ought to be all in all, a sense of duty. In the evening, I expressed to Mrs. Adams all my apprehensions. That excellent lady, who has always encouraged me, burst into a flood of tears, but said she was very sensible of all the danger to her and to our children, as well

as to me, but she thought I had done as I ought; she was very willing to share in all that was to come, and to place her trust in Providence."

These apprehensions were unfounded. Thanks to Adams' eloquence, Preston was acquitted, and so great was the public confidence in his advocate that not a murmur of dissent was heard, nor was his popularity in any degree lessened.

John Adams seldom condescends to anecdote, but he does tell us of "a labored controversy, between the House and the Governor, concerning these words: 'In General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same.' I mention this merely on account of an anecdote, which the friends of government circulated with diligence, of Governor Shirley, who then lived in retirement at his seat in Roxbury. Having read this dispute, in the public prints, he asked, 'Who has revived those old words? They were expunged during my administration.' He was answered, 'The Boston seat.' 'And who are the Boston seat?' 'Mr. Cushing, Mr. Hancock, Mr. Samuel Adams, and Mr. John Adams.' 'Mr. Cushing I knew, and Mr. Hancock I knew,' replied the old Governor, 'but where the devil this brace of Adamses came from, I know not.' This was archly circulated by the ministerialists, to impress the people with the obscurity of the original of the *par nobile fratrum*, as the friends of the country used, to call us, by way of retaliation."

CHAPTER IV

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

EVEN though it has little to say about his domestic life, I linger over John Adams' diary. It is enthralling reading; most of it belongs rather to history than to a slight record like this, yet here and there we get pleasant glimpses of the man himself.

Here he is on circuit, riding through Maine, which was then Massachusetts.

"Began my journey to Falmouth in Casco Bay... Dined at Goodhue's, in Salem, where I fell in company with a stranger, his name I knew not... One year more, he said, would make Americans as quiet as lambs; they could not do without Great Britain, they could not conquer their luxury, etc. Oated my horse, and drank balm tea at Treadwell's in Ipswich, where I found Brother Porter, and chatted with him half an hour, then rode to Rowley and lodged at Captain Jewett's. Jewett 'had rather the House should sit all the year round, than give up an atom of right or privilege. The Governor can't frighten the people with, etc.'.

"Sunday. Took a walk to the pasture to see how my horse fared. My little mare had provided for herself, by leaping out of a bare pasture into a neighboring lot of mowing-ground, and had filled herself with grass and water. These are important materials for history, no doubt. My biographer will scarcely introduce my

little mare and her adventures in quest of food and water. The children of the house have got a young crow, a sight I never saw before; – the head and bill are monstrous; the legs and claws are long and sprawling. But the young crow and the little mare are objects that will not interest posterity."

I do not agree with you, John. I like to think of you watching the little mare at her stolen breakfast, gravely observing the young crow; later, with a whimsical smile curling the corners of your firm mouth, entering the observations in your diary.

The climate of Boston did not suit Mr. Adams: he longed for his native air of Braintree.

"The complicated cares of my legal and political engagements, the slender diet to which I was obliged to confine myself, the air of the town of Boston, which was not favorable to me, who had been born and passed almost all my life in the country, but especially the constant obligation to speak in public, almost every day for many hours, had exhausted my health, brought on a pain in my breast, and a complaint in my lungs, which seriously threatened my life, and compelled me to throw off a great part of the load of business, both public and private, and return to my farm in the country. Early in the Spring of 1771, I removed my family to Braintree, still holding, however, an office in Boston. The air of my native spot, and the fine breezes from the sea on one side, and the rocky mountains of pine and savin on the other, together with daily rides on horseback and the amusements of agriculture, always delightful to me, soon restored my health in

a considerable degree."

Yet still he wondered why he was not stronger. Turning the pages of the diary, we feel no such surprise. He simply overworked himself, continuously and relentlessly. "Now my family is away, I feel no inclination at all, no temptation, to be anywhere but at my office. I am in it by six in the morning, I am in it at nine at night, and I spend but a small space of time in running down to my brother's to breakfast, dinner and tea."

"Returned at night.. to Braintree, – still, calm, happy Braintree – at nine o'clock at night."

This was no way to live, John, for any length of time. Small wonder that in November, 1772, he once more moved into Boston, having purchased a house in Queen Street, "where I hope I shall live as long as I have any connection with Boston."

How Abigail liked this "to-ing and fro-ing," we do not know. She is silent, and John has little to say about her. Now and then we find an entry like this: "My wife says her father never inculcated any maxim of behavior upon his children so often as this, – never to speak ill of anybody; to say all the handsome things she could of persons, but no evil; and to make things, rather than persons, the subjects of conversation. These rules he always impressed upon us, whenever we were going abroad, if it was but to spend an afternoon. He was always remarkable for observing these rules in his own conversation." This gives us a pleasant glimpse of good Parson Smith.

Now and then, too, we read of a drive or walk or tea-drinking

"with my wife"; but that is all. As a rule, John felt no more need of mentioning her, than the air he breathed, or the food that nourished him. She was there, and that was enough. By and by, however, Abigail began to speak, or rather to write for herself, and from now on her letters must be our best guide.

Be it remembered that, in 1767, by the so-called Townshend Acts, a tax had been levied on glass, lead, paper, painters' colors, and tea. Three years later all these taxes had been repealed, except that on tea, which was retained as the sign and token of Great Britain's right to tax her colonies when and how she pleased. This fact, borne in mind, explains the following letter, written by Mrs. Adams on December 5th, 1773, to her friend, Mercy Warren, wife of General James Warren of Plymouth and sister of James Otis:

"Do not, my worthy friend, tax me with either breach of promise or neglect towards you; the only reason why I did not write to you immediately upon your leaving town was my being seized with a fever, which has confined me almost ever since. I have not for these many years known so severe a fit of sickness. I am now, through the favor of Heaven, so far returned as to be able to leave my chamber some part of the day. I will not make any other apology for my past neglect, being fully sensible that I alone have been the sufferer. My pen, which I once loved and delighted in, has for a long time been out of credit with me. Could I borrow the powers and faculties of my much valued friend, I should then hope to use it with advantage to myself and delight to others.

Incorrect and unpolished as it is, I will not suffer a mistaken pride so far to lead me astray as to omit the present opportunity of improvement. And should I prove a tractable scholar, you will not find me tardy.

"You, madam, are so sincere a lover of your country, and so hearty a mourner in all her misfortunes, that it will greatly aggravate your anxiety to hear how much she is now oppressed and insulted. To you, who have so thoroughly looked through the deeds of men, and developed the dark designs of a rapacious soul, no action however base or sordid, no measure, however cruel and villanous, will be matter of any surprise.

"The tea, that baneful weed, is arrived. Great and, I hope, effectual opposition has been made to the landing of it. To the public papers I must refer you for particulars. You will there find that the proceedings of our citizens have been united, spirited and firm. The flame is kindled, and like lightning it catches from soul to soul. Great will be the devastation, if not timely quenched or allayed by some more lenient measures. Although the mind is shocked at the thought of shedding human blood, more especially the blood of our countrymen, and a civil war is of all wars the most dreadful, such is the present spirit that prevails, that if once they are made desperate, many, very many of our heroes will spend their lives in the cause, with the speech of Cato in their mouths.

"Such is the present situation of affairs, that I tremble when I think what may be the direful consequences, and in this town

must the scene of action lie. My heart beats at every whistle I hear, and I dare not express half my fears. Eternal reproach and ignominy be the portion of all those who have been instrumental in bringing these fears upon me. There has prevailed a report that tomorrow there will be an attempt to land this weed of slavery. I will then write further. Till then, my worthy friend, adieu."

During ten days more, Abigail Adams' heart was to "beat at every whistle she heard." The patriots meant to make no mistakes in this important matter. They steadfastly refused to receive the tea; they used their utmost efforts to induce Governor Hutchinson to allow its return. It was not till all had been done that man could do, that the final step was taken and the tea disposed of. Trevelyan, in his history of the American Revolution, says: "Boston, under circumstances which have been too frequently described to admit of their ever again being related in detail, gratified the curiosity of an energetic patriot who expressed a wish to see whether tea could be made with salt water." It is the only passage in that admirable work with which I have a quarrel. Boston born and bred, I cannot be expected to pass over the Tea Party with a brief word. I must recall, if only for the sake of that beating heart of Abigail Adams', that scene on the night of December 16th: the painted figures stealing from street and alley and crooked lane to the rendezvous at the Old South Church; the war-whoop ringing out, the rush down Franklin Street to Griffin's Wharf; the shouts and laughter, under which lay such deadly earnestness; the scuffle on the decks, the

splash! splash! as chest after chest of best Bohea and Hyson (to the value of eighteen thousand pounds) dropped into the icy water, and went "sailing so merrily out to sea." How should I not call up the scene at least thus briefly, when my own great-grandfather was one of the Mohawks? And how do we know that little Abigail and John Quincy Adams were not singing, in the days of turbulent excitement that followed the Tea Party, songs something like the following, though this is of a somewhat later date:

There was an old lady lived over the sea,
And she was an Island Queen.
Her daughter lived off in a new countrie
With an ocean of water between.
The old lady's pockets were full of gold,
But never contented was she,
So she called on her daughter to pay her a tax
Of three-pence a pound on her tea,
Of three-pence a pound on her tea.

"Now, mother, dear mother," the daughter replied,
"I shan't do the thing you ax.
I'm willing to pay a fair price for the tea,
But never the three-penny tax."
"You shall," quoth the mother, and reddened with rage,
"For you're my own daughter, you see.
And sure 'tis quite proper the daughter should pay
Her mother a tax on her tea,

Her mother a tax on her tea."

And so the old lady her servant called up
And packed off a budget of tea,
And, eager for three-pence a pound, she put in
Enough for a large familiee.
She ordered her servant to bring home the tax,
Declaring her child should obey,
Or old as she was, and almost woman grown,
She'd half whip her life away,
She'd half whip her life away.

The tea was conveyed to the daughter's door,
All down by the ocean side,
And the bouncing girl poured out every pound
In the dark and boiling tide,
And then she called out to the Island Queen,
"Oh! Mother! Dear Mother!" quoth she,
"Your tea you may have when 'tis steeped enough,

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