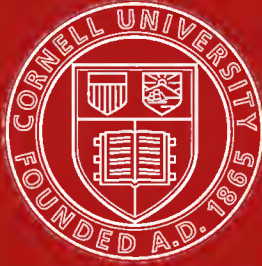


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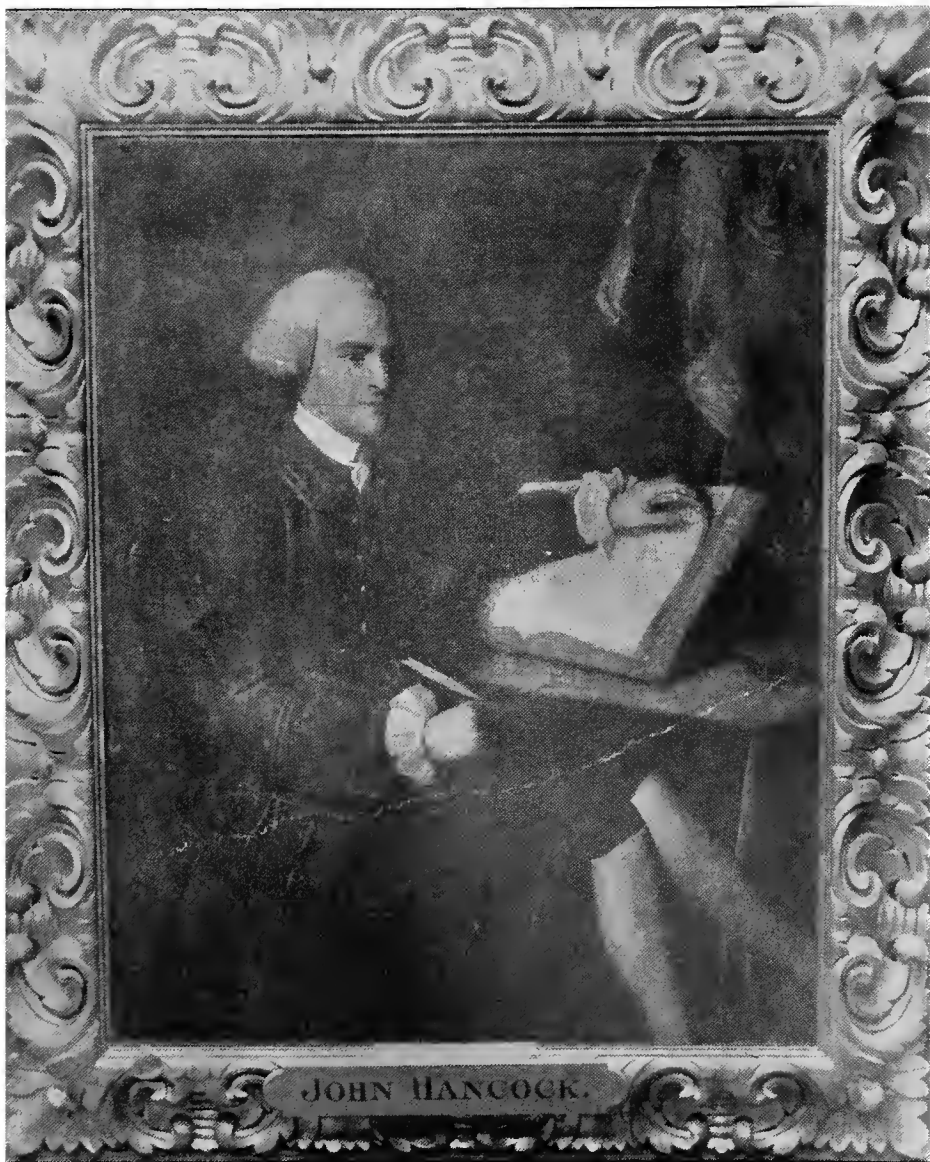


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From an oil painting by John S. Copley, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

JOHN HANCOCK

AND HIS TIMES.

READ BEFORE "THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY," IN THE OLD STATE HOUSE,
BY THE SECRETARY,
WILLIAM CLARENCE BURRAGE,
JUNE 13, 1890.

PUBLISHED BY THE
John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co., of Boston.

1891.
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PREFACE BY THE PUBLISHERS.

No biography of John Hancock has ever been printed, and brief as is the following "eloquent paper" by Mr. Burrage, it is the most complete record of the life of the first governor of Massachusetts which has ever been written. When one considers the service rendered by Hancock to both state and country, it seems remarkable that historians should have neglected to record the important events of his life in connection with the struggle of the colonies for independence, especially as so many lesser lights have received recognition.

The ingratitude of republics is proverbial, and in the case of Hancock is evidenced not alone by the paucity of material recording his patriotic deeds, but in the fact that for nearly a century Boston has neglected to provide even a monument to her illustrious citizen and the first governor of the commonwealth. In truth the most important act that has tended to keep the name of the stately and sturdy old governor remembered according to his merits, and insure its daily mention among the people, was the bestowal of that name upon

THE JOHN HANCOCK
MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY.

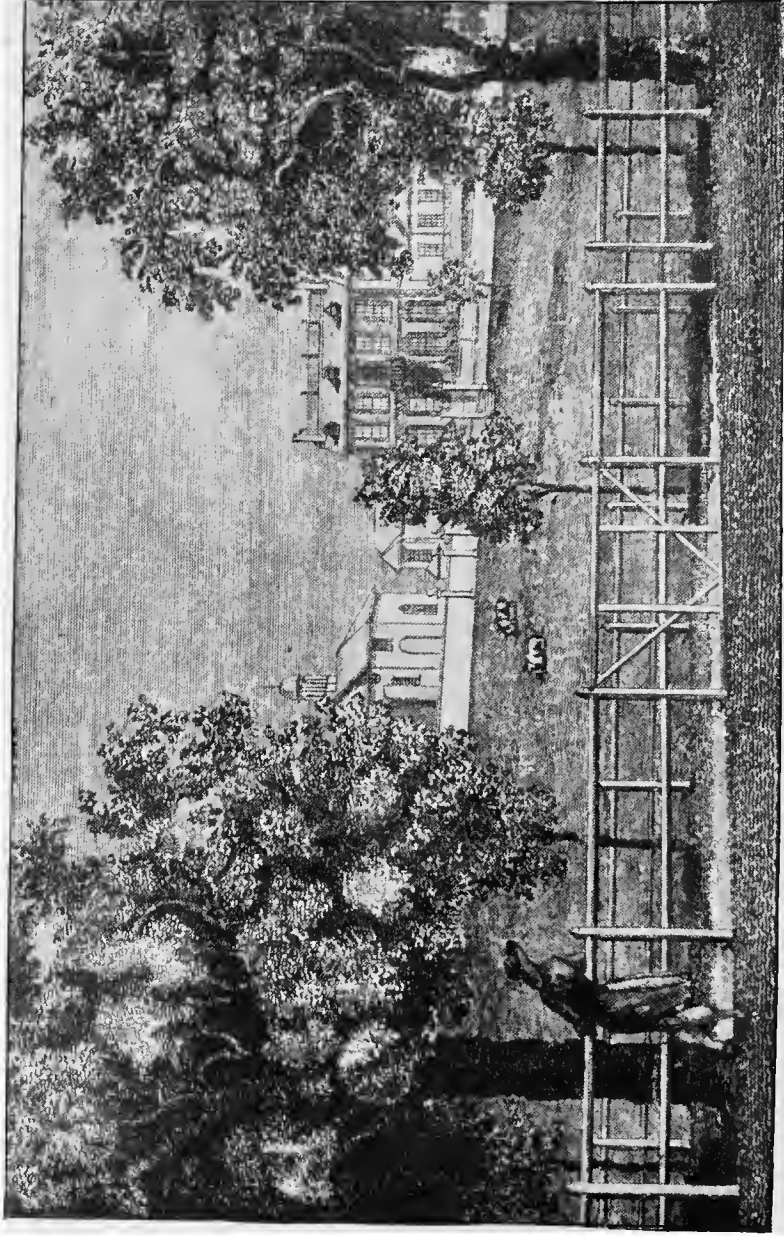
JOHN HANCOCK AND HIS TIMES.

IT has been the custom of historians to give the portrait of Hancock and his broad signature a conspicuous place in their pages, and to forthwith put underneath: "He was a vain man, meant well, but pompous and fond of show." No public man has been more maligned after his influence and power had vanished, and he had left no direct descendant to uphold his name; yet no man, except Washington, did more for his country in her hours of peril than John Hancock. He was of the people, brave and generous, but he had his faults and foibles like all men. Henry Cabot Lodge calls him the "empty barrel," but puts the epithet, "according to tradition," into the mouth of John Adams, who probably never said it. Mr. H. E. Scudder puts more bitter words into the utterances of John Adams, saying: "Adams observed with satisfaction Hancock's chagrin at finding himself subordinated to Washington." There are no proofs for these careless statements.¹

Quincy, in his history of Harvard University, animadverted strongly on Hancock, saying: "His connection with the college was troublesome and vexatious." As early as 1774,

when they sent for the college papers at Philadelphia, where Hancock had taken them for safety, seeming to fear he would lose them, the officers commenced to write and almost dictate to him about his accounts. Obtaining the documents, they displaced him from his honorable office in 1777, an act which Hancock and his friends never forgave. Hancock frequently assured them "that he had the interest of the college at heart as much as any one, and will pursue it," and the records show that he honorably fulfilled the terms of his uncle's intended bequest of £500 to the library, and made liberal gifts to the same himself. The officers passed a vote of thanks "for this lasting monument of his bounty and public affection." In 1785 he made a final settlement, but it was left for his heirs to pay over the full amount due, which they did, except the charge for compound interest. Indeed, there has been no history written of Governor Hancock, and he, the product of our stormiest times, left a character most easily assailed by these modern critics. Monuments are erected to far lesser lights, yet to-day Massachusetts builds no effigy to her first governor.

John Hancock came of good stock, his ancestor, Nathaniel, coming from Cambridge, Eng., in 1635. His grandfather was minister in the old town of Lexington, where his name is still remembered with affection, and his father was a settled minister of the gospel at Braintree, at which ancient town the prospective governor was born on the 23d day of January, 1737. He attended the Latin School on School Street in 1745, and was graduated from Harvard University in 1754, whence he was received into the family of his rich uncle, Thomas Hancock, who adopted him and always befriended him.



"VIEW OF THE SEAT OF HIS EXCELLENCY JOHN HANCOCK, ESQR. TAKEN FROM THE HAYMARKET."
From copper plate engraved in 1789.

Thomas Hancock was born July 13, 1703, and apprenticed to Samuel Gerrish, a bookseller, in 1718.² Both Quincy and Arthur Gilman erroneously gave the bookseller, Henchman, as his master. Thomas Hancock soon became so famous that he established a bookstore, known as the Stationer's Arms, in Ann street. In 1729 Thomas Johnson, a stonemason of Middletown, Ct., furnished the brown stone for the Hancock house for £300, "pay to be taken in goods," and the granite ashlar, similar to the stone of King's Chapel, came from the town of Quincy. The furniture, the window glass, the wall papers, the carpets, the hangings, the tall clocks, etc., were brought from England. The garden contained many mulberry and other rare trees and shrubs, although the bleak climate seldom spared the beautiful fruit trees. From the summer house opened a capital prospect of the harbor and the country round about. This beautiful estate extended from Mt. Vernon to Joy Street.

In the year 1737 this elegant home was finished, and here was carefully nurtured the patriot from his graduation in 1754. He took a tour of England under the patronage of Mr. Pownall, who had been his governor, and was one of his uncle's friends. In a letter to his step-father, Rev. Daniel Perkins, of Bridgewater, he says: "March 2, 1761. I shall with satisfaction bid adieu to this grand place with all its pleasurable enjoyments and tempting scenes, for more substantial pleasures which I promise myself in the enjoyment of my friends in America. I wish I had some news that you might communicate it to the man who is so fond of it, my friend the blacksmith at the bridge, whose name I have forgotten. I dare say he was full of it when he heard of the king's death." This refers to the

death of George II. He witnessed the coronation of George III, and was received by him at court, and presented with a snuffbox, with the king's likeness thereon, and treated with great honor.

Three years later his honored patron was stricken with apoplexy in the old State House, where he filled the position of one of his majesty's council. He died on the first of August, 1764. He left about £80,000 to his nephew, John, including his elegant estate, which, according to a contemporary, "was the seat of hospitality, where all his numerous acquaintances and strangers of distinction met with an elegant reception." He also left £500 for founding the Massachusetts Hospital, £1000 to the Society for Propagating the Gospel, and £1000 to found a professorship in Harvard College. I will also state here that, in 1777, Hancock received by legacy from his aunt, Lydia Hancock, the famous Brattle Square parsonage estate and other liberal legacies, including her share in the Hancock House.

John Hancock thus early in life became possessed of wealth, and the important events soon to follow showed him a pathway in which patriotism was mingled with honor and fame, requiring but courage and patience to teach him to walk the brilliant way. In 1765 commenced the serious agitation, for purposes of revenue, of the imposition of the stamp duty on the colonies. The packet Capt. John Marshall for London, belonging to Hancock, cleared without any stamp duties, and constant opposition was made to the paying of the tax.

December 17, Andrew Oliver, distributor of stamps, was compelled to resign that position, which he was glad to do, it being distasteful to him. This was done in the house of



THE BOSTON TEA PARTY, DEC. 16, 1773.

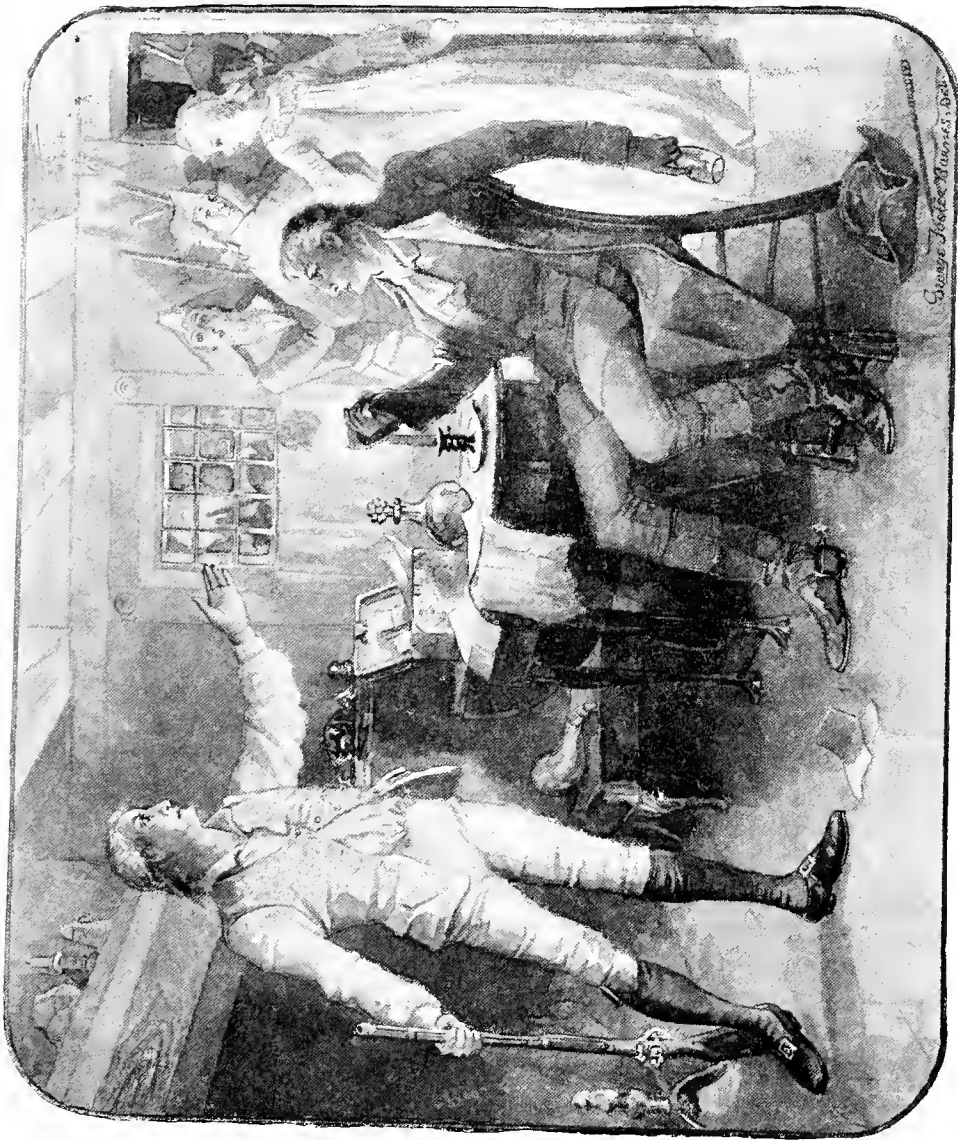
Samuel Dana, opposite the liberty tree, where were assembled two thousand people to witness the event. John Hancock, as one of the selectmen, participated in the ceremony. On the 18th of March, 1766, amid great rejoicing, the stamp act was repealed, and a banquet was given at the Bunch of Grapes tavern in honor of the event.

In June, 1768, occurred more trouble about the revenues. Hancock, two years previously, had been elected, with his friend Samuel Adams, a representative from Boston to the General Assembly. Hancock's sloop Liberty was seized for smuggling while lying at Hancock wharf, and moored under the guns of the frigate Romney for safe keeping. This created a mob, which did much damage, and the revenue officials retired to the castle, where they remained until the arrival of the troops in October. At this very wharf, some time later, was scuttled a British ship of three hundred tons, and at this same historic spot the British left, on their flight from Boston, one thousand bushels of salt and three thousand blankets.

In 1769 we find Hancock a fireward of the city. In 1770 occurred the riot and killing of five of the populace by the soldiers of the 29th regiment. This affair was always called the Boston massacre. It hastened the coming revolution, and was the first blood shed to bring on that event. Our most learned men, before eminent societies, may repeatedly call it a "mob," a riot of "sans culottes," and deride the, perhaps, inartistic monument on the common, but the fact remains, like the riot before the storming of the Bastille. It is not to individuals that monument remains — which fact these men would have us believe — but to the events of history which speedily ensued.

In 1772 we find Hancock elected colonel of the cadets, succeeding Col. Jarvis, and that battalion received Gen. Gage when he landed at Long wharf, May 13, 1774, and there is extant a general order signed by Hancock to assemble at the Bunch of Grapes tavern about that time. The General had caused a beautiful embroidered banner, containing his arms, to be made in London and presented to them. Subsequently the Governor, becoming jealous and suspicious of his power, revoked the commission of Hancock, and on August 15 we find him chairman of a committee of the corps, who, in anger, returned to the Governor at Salem the flag and their commissions. In the same year Hancock was becoming more and more independent, and with Samuel Adams (with whom he never had any serious or long continued estrangement) many plans were made for the safety of the people. The Winter previous, Dec. 16, 1773, the decree had gone forth for the destruction of the tea, and a little band of "looters," "patriots," "rebels"—call them what you like—stole from the Old South Church, after a public meeting, to the little upper room in the Hancock tavern in Corn Court (still in existence) and, dressing as Indians, in the approaching nightfall threw the obnoxious tea overboard, tax and all.

In the Old South Church, March 5, 1774, John Hancock delivered the annual oration on the Boston massacre, and a great audience was assembled. May 15, Gen. Gage, residing at the Province House, proclaimed martial law in Boston and prevented the General Court from meeting. In August the regulation acts were received by Gage, and the charter of Massachusetts was swept away. In September Gage seized the province's store of powder, kept in the old mill on the



MEETING OF JOHN HANCOCK AND PAUL REVERE AT THE HOUSE OF REV. JONAS CLARK, IN LEXINGTON, MASS.,
APRIL 18, 1775.

“‘Ring the bell,’ says John Hancock, and the bell was rung as it was never rung before.”



RETREAT OF THE BRITISH FROM LEXINGTON.

The minute men firing the shots "heard 'round the world."

road from Winter Hill to Arlington, and began the construction of the fortifications. On the 5th of October the members of the Massachusetts Assembly appeared at Salem, but Gage refused to recognize them. They thereupon adjourned to Concord, where, on Oct. 11, was formed the first Provincial Congress, with John Hancock as President. Gage issued a proclamation denouncing them, and the close of 1774 witnessed times of difficulty for Boston and the whole country. The towns enrolled companies of minute men who were thoroughly drilled and equipped. In 1775, the Earl of Chatham brought forward in the House of Lords a bill for the removal of the king's troops from Boston, but Gage was instructed to act offensively.

America was preparing to meet the issue thus forced. The new Congress convened at Cambridge in February, and appointed its delegates to the Continental Congress. A committee on public safety had been formed with Hancock as a member. In 1775 Dr. Joseph Warren had been appointed president, pro tempore, as will be seen by a commission issued by him, dated but a few day before he was killed. April brings the blood spilled on Lexington's field, and the 27th brings the order of Gage for the inhabitants to vacate the city. Hancock and Adams had departed for Philadelphia, where they arrived May 9, the Continental Congress meeting on the 10th. Gage attempted to destroy the military supplies stored at Concord, and, all too late, to seize the persons of Hancock and Adams, who had been attending the Congress at Concord, and sleeping at Lexington, the former at the house of Rev. Jonas Clark. We all remember how Gage was foiled in this by Joseph Warren, who hurried William Dawes and Paul

Revere by different routes to alarm the inhabitants. We are all familiar with the events of Bunker Hill, which followed in June.

Now follows a more brilliant and romantic series of events in this drama of a busy life. After Bunker Hill, Gen. Gage was recalled and sailed for England Oct. 10, being never appointed to any command again. His place was taken by Gen. Howe. We find John Hancock in Philadelphia. Peyton Randolph had been compelled to relinquish his seat in the Continental Congress and had gone home to die. Benjamin Harrison of Virginia, with a ready humor that loved a joke, seized Hancock in his arms and placing him in the presidential chair, exclaimed: "We will show mother Britain how little we care for her by making a Massachusetts man our President whom she has excluded from pardon and offered a reward for his head."

I can do no better than picture him at this epoch in the brilliant words of Winthrop: "Was there ever a more signal distinction vouchsafed to mortal man than that which was won and worn by John Hancock? Not altogether a great man, not without some grave defects of character; we remember nothing at this hour save his presidency of the Congress and his bold and noble signature to our Magna Charter. Behold him in the chair which is still standing in its old place, the very same chair in which Washington was to sit, the very same chair emblazoned on the back of which Franklin was to descry 'a rising, not a setting sun;' behold him, the young Boston merchant, not yet forty years of age, with a princely fortune at stake and with a price upon his head, sitting there in all the calm composure and dignity which so peculiarly characterized



DOROTHY QUINCY, WIFE OF JOHN HANCOCK.

From a photograph in the rooms of the Bostonian Society.

him, and which nothing seemed able to relax or ruffle. Behold him! He has risen for a moment. He has put the question. The Declaration is adopted. It is already late in the evening, but after a grace of three days the air will be vibrating with the joyous tones of the old bell in the cupola, proclaiming liberty to all mankind, with the corresponding acclamations of assembled multitudes."

It was on the 28th day of August, 1775, that John Hancock stole to Fairfield, Ct., and was married to the beautiful, brave and able Dorothy Quincy, by the Rev. Andrew Elliot. In a letter from William Bant, attorney to Hancock, dated June 10, 1776, the interesting adventures of Dorothy on her way to Philadelphia by stage coach were duly set forth. In those days it was a long journey, and incidents like the overturning of the stage were matters of common occurrence. In 1778 she took a similar journey to join her husband, two weeks after the birth of their son, John George Washington Hancock. We find, in 1776, Washington closing up and surrounding the British troops in Boston, which was evacuated by the British, Sunday, March 17, Lord Howe stealing away for the shores of Albion in his seventy-eight vessels.

On the 25th of July, from the balcony of this State House, was read the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, by Sheriff Greenleaf. Earl Percy had been living in the famous Hancock House, as well as Gen. Clinton, and, although Hancock writes his wife "he fears everything will be destroyed," yet fortune favored him. He sends some years later to a friend in London "the dimensions of two bed chambers for which I want Wilton carpets, the British totally defacing and ruining all my carpets." It was

said that the damages to his entire estate exceeded £4000, but, as this included rent and other charges, it is safe to say that Mr. Hancock escaped cheaply. It remained for vandals as late as the year 1863 to raze this historic house, spared till then from siege and flame.

The Continental troops were waging their weary war; in a letter from Hancock, published in the Magazine of American History, and written from one of the West India islands, where he had sojourned a short time for the benefit of his health, we find him encouraging by cheering words his friend Washington, who was close beset by treason, the plots of jealous generals and the famished and ragged condition of his troops, as well as the depleted condition of the Continental treasury. In 1777 Hancock resigned the presidency of Congress. Light was emerging from the thunder clouds. The calm, clear, almost supernatural ability of Washington piloted the little bark to a haven of peace. In 1778 we find the Hancock family living in some quietude. He entertained the officers of D'Estaing's fleet by a grand ball at Concert Hall, the invitations to which were printed on common playing cards. He was a generous host, and it was his frequent pleasure to entertain forty of the French officers at dinner, and occasionally was employed such "coup de théâtre" as the following: a guest seated near Mrs. Hancock requested her to pull a small cord, which, heretofore, had been unobserved, and it immediately became the signal for the discharge of all the guns of the squadron, to the astonishment of the guests.

In appearance Hancock was tall and thin, nearly six feet in height, and of dignified presence. He was fond of brilliant costume, and at that time fashion dictated the dress for display



HANCOCK HOUSE ON BEACON STREET, BOSTON.
From a photograph taken just before the building was torn down.

as much as for use. In his home he wore a red velvet cap, within which was one of the finest linen. A blue damask gown, embroidered waistcoat, black satin small clothes, silk stockings and polished shoes with buckles formed his dress at the day. We see him portrayed by Copley in similar apparel, and this society has been presented with a costume once worn by him. In the ancient Wentworth House, in Newcastle, N. H., might have been seen, until recently, the original of the photograph here shown, of Dorothy Hancock in ancient costume, also pictured by Copley.

The constitution of the commonwealth was formed in 1780, and Hancock was called to the Governor's chair, receiving 11,207 out of a total of 12,281 votes. He was liberal and popular, and introduced the playing of music upon the Common for the benefit of the people. One of the old customs, long observed, was the celebration of Pope's day, Nov. 5, the anniversary of the so-called "gunpowder plot," when occurred the most sanguinary riots between the North and South ends. The day was a saturnalia, much ill-feeling being aroused. Gov. Hancock gave a dinner costing \$1000, at the Green Dragon Tavern. To this he invited the leading men of both factions, and in an eloquent speech was successful in dissuading them from continuing their dangerous celebrations.

In a broadside, dated Boston, March 29, 1783, was the announcement of the arrival of a packet at Chester with the news that general peace was declared on the 20th of January. This proved to be a fact, and was very generally celebrated later. On August 19, 1784, on the anniversary of the battle of Yorktown, Lafayette was entertained in Faneuil Hall by Gov. Hancock and five hundred other gentlemen at a grand

banquet. In the evening Mme. Haley gave a ball, and many illuminations were shown in the streets. The lighthouse now known as "Boston Light" was built by the exertions of Gov. Hancock, in 1783; the first building on this site, in 1716, being destroyed in 1776.

Gov. Hancock filled his office until February, 1785. The following unpublished letter, written a few days before, is more than an answer to his critics, who would make out his ill-health to be simulated. It is indorsed in his own handwriting, "Message to General Court Respecting My Resignation:"

Gentlemen of the Senate and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

Sensible of my infirm state of health, and of my incapacity to render service and give that attention to the concerns of the public that is expected from a person in my station, justice to the public and myself loudly call upon me not to prejudice the community, but rather to promote its benefit, to effect which I am obliged, gentlemen, to inform you that some relaxation is absolutely necessary for me, and that I must at present give up all attention to public business and pursue the means of regaining my health. Under these circumstances I must request to be indulged with a resignation of the chair, and from my personal state of health I hope I shall be able in a few days to meet the General Court in the Senate chamber, and take my leave in a formal manner. I am induced to give this notice to the two branches of the General Court, that they may have opportunity, if they please, to make inquiry of me with respect to any public matters that have been committed to me, and I shall be ready at all times to give them every information and satisfaction in my power.

JOHN HANCOCK.

BOSTON, Jan. 29, 1785.

One of the grandest Pageants of the period was the entry of the forces of the Count de Rochambeau into Boston, December, 1782. The troops consisted of four divisions. The officers wore two-cornered cocked hats with white cockades, the uniforms being white broadcloth, with facings of different colors, according to their corps. It is said that the cadet



GOVERNOR HANCOCK'S VISIT TO PRESIDENT WASHINGTON.

Washington's headquarters were at the corner of Tremont and Court Streets, on the site now occupied by the Hemenway Building.

uniform was copied from this dress. On the 11th of December Gov. Hancock and Council gave a solemn feast to the Marquis de Vandreuil and officers of the fleet, John Paul Jones being a guest.

In 1787 Hancock was again elected governor. Jan. 9, 1788, the convention met in the State House, and, adjourning to Federal Street Church, adopted the federal constitution. Hancock was president of the convention. In October, 1789, Washington visited Boston. It is stated that Hancock showed a petty spirit in regard to the visit of Gen. Washington, but Madam Hancock declared that the Governor was seriously ill at the time, and her version is certainly entitled to credit. We have also the testimony of Hancock himself to the Selectmen of Boston, dated :

“BOSTON, Dec. 15, 1789.

To the Selectmen of the Town of Boston :

Being unfortunately confined on that day by bodily indisposition, it was out of my power to be abroad. His Honor the Lieutenant Governor, and the Honorable Council went out to meet the President.”³

We have before referred to Harvard College, which gave him, in 1792, the title of LL.D. His earthly days were drawing to a close. Racked with his hereditary trouble the gout, “swathed in flannel from head to foot, he was carried to his place of public worship, and fought the battle to the end.” He spoke of his own death with firmness and composure. [See biographical sketch printed at the Chronical office, Boston, no date, probably 1793.] “I feel the seeds of mortality ripening fast within me, but I think I have done my duty as a servant of the people. I never did and never will deceive them while I

have life and strength to act in their service." These were among his last words. He had signified his intentions to his life-long friend, Nathaniel Balch, to leave his mansion house to the commonwealth, but death intervened.*

He died Oct. 8, 1793. His funeral was the most imposing ever witnessed in the town. The supreme court for the last time were in full costume, with wigs and black silk gowns. The venerable Samuel Adams also attended his life-long friend to his tomb. The people of America value their patriots, and the love of a free and enlightened race is a gem greater than that worn by crowned heads. The Governor had two children. One, a boy, died at nine years of age, from injuries accidentally received in Milton, while skating. Lydia Hancock, the girl, was delicate and lived but a few years. We seldom hear now of Massachusetts' first Governor, yet he was living only a century since. Such is fame. He occupied a brilliant and important era in our history.

Hancock may not seem of heroic mould to all of us, but to me he resembles that undismayed youth, who, dying alone, his face to the setting sun, in a corner of the battlefield, with sword held aloft in his stiffening grasp, a halo of glory transfiguring the grim hand of death upon the upturned face; while his soul—like a beautiful picture—passes upward!

NOTES.

1. See "Memorial History of Boston."
2. The original Indenture of Apprenticeship, duly signed by Rev. John Hancock and Samuel Gerrish, is in the Old State House.
3. From Prof. Leffingwell's Collection, No. 2837.
4. The original deed of his widow, Dorothy Hancock, of the land upon which the State House now stands may be seen in the Old State House. It is in reality simply a "release" of same to the "Town of Boston," as the Selectmen were obliged to buy it, which they did, and gave it to the State.

Order of Proceffion,

for the FUNERAL of the late
GOVERNOR HANCOCK.

FUNERAL ESCORT,
under the Command of
BRIGADIER-GENERAL HULL.

OFFICERS of the MILITIA with side Arms,
JUSTICES of the PEACE,
JUDGES of PROBATE,
JUSTICES of the COURT of COMMON PLEAS,
ATTORNEY-GENERAL and TREASURER,
JUSTICES of the SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT,
MEMBERS of the HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES,
MEMBERS of the SENATE,
SHERIFF of SUFFOLK, with his Wand,
MEMBERS of the COUNCIL,

Quarter M. Gen. { HIS HONOR THE
Adj. General. } LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR, } Secretary.

Aid de Camp
to the deceased.



Aid de Camp
to the deceased

RELATIONS.

VICE-PRESIDENT, and Members of CONGRESS,
JUDGES and SECRETARIES of the UNITED STATES,
Gentlemen heretofore Councillors and Senators of Massachusetts,
Foreign MINISTERS and CONSULS,
The PRESIDENT and CORPORATION,
The Professors and other Instructors of HARVARD COLLEGE.
SELECTMEN and TOWN-CLERK,
OVERSEERS of the POOR and TOWN-TREASURER,
MINISTERS of the GOSPEL,
Members of the Ancient and Honourable ARTILLERY COMPANY.
Committee of Brattle-Street CHURCH, of which
the DECEASED was a Member.
other CITIZENS, and STRANGERS

Order of March.

The Proceffion will move from the Mansion House of the late Governor HANCOCK, across the Common—and down Frog-Lane, to Liberty-Pole—through the Main-Street—and round the State-House—up Court-Street,—and from thence to the Place of Interment.

Colonel TYLER, will superintend the forming of the Proceffion of Officers which precede the Corps,—and Col. WATERS, that of the other Citizens who follow.

