

SOME LETTERS, ETC., OF JOHN HANCOCK AND  
THOMAS CUSHING.

BY ALLEN C. THOMAS.

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SOME years ago there came into my possession a bundle of old papers containing letters, wills, marriage-certificates, indentures, deeds and memoranda of various kinds dating from 1684 to 1841. The giver had no idea what this bundle contained, but was content to transfer them "as is," and receive thanks.

Among these papers were several autograph drafts of letters and documents of John Hancock. They do not contribute much to our knowledge of past events, but they show his thoughts in the rough, and the modifications made before the documents were sent to their destination. They may also serve to call attention to the neglect into which John Hancock has fallen, and thereby stimulate some one to undertake a biography which will place him where he rightfully belongs, even if it does not restore him to the high position which he once held. The man who was for nigh thirty years the most popular citizen of Massachusetts deserves better treatment than he has received at the hands of most historians, and from the biographers of his contemporaries. It is idle to deny that he had infirmities of temper; who would not have such, if he were the martyr to gout as was Hancock? It is also undeniable that he was afflicted with attacks of vanity, or something which closely resembled it.

He is charged, when President of Congress, with living in fine style at the expense of the country, while the soldiers were starving. But it is not stated that he drew

no salary as President, or that he was not repaid for his outlay until the war was practically over (1783), when he was voted by Congress "\$3,248.00 in full for household and other expenses for two years and five months, being the time he acted as President of Congress."<sup>1</sup> Doubtless this was paid, if it was paid, in the depreciated money of those trying days. He is charged with being a smuggler; but in the eyes of many eminent and honorable men of that day in New England, smuggling was considered not only not reprehensible, but even praiseworthy. He is said to have been below mediocrity in ability; but his letters, official papers, and his recommendations to the General Court do not indicate such a condition of mind. He had numerous detractors in his own time, and they have not been wanting in our day. One of the latest of these, the somewhat supercilious "Philistine" who gives "heart to heart talks to his flock," and describes "Little Journeys" to homes of various kinds, has been pleased to term him "a defaulter," "a smuggler," "a man who joined the patriots to save his own neck."

Whatever ground there may be for some of the charges against him, we must acknowledge that he acted in an unaccountable manner as Treasurer of Harvard College.

That Hancock has been neglected and undervalued, and neglected because undervalued, is partly due to the fact that for the average inquirer the sources of information are very limited, and because the fullest and most accessible accounts are hostile to him. Many, if not most, of our modern statements concerning him may be traced to Wells's *Life of Samuel Adams*. This work, a most interesting and valuable one, is written by the great-grandson of Adams, and no opportunity is lost to magnify his ancestor, even at the expense of others. Samuel Adams, however, needs no such bolstering. The tone of this

<sup>1</sup> Journals of Congress, March 31, 1783.

book is distinctly adverse to Hancock, and almost every good thing which he did is ascribed to the influence of Samuel Adams.

In 1896, on the motion of a negro member of the Massachusetts Legislature, a simple monument to John Hancock was erected in the old Granary Burying Ground in Boston, at the public expense. But the interest then aroused was short-lived. No adequate biography has yet appeared. It is true that "John Hancock, His Book," by Mr. A. E. Brown, published in 1898, gives a graphic account of the early business life of John Hancock, the merchant, and of his correspondents; but this record practically closes with the opening of the Revolution. Another book, "Dorothy Quincy, Wife of John Hancock, with Events of Her Time," published in 1901, does not attempt to tell more about him than would be needed in such a biography. Moreover, this little book is written by a great-great niece of Dorothy Hancock, and is open to the charge of being too favorable to the heroine and her husband. So far as known, these are the only works relating to Hancock which have been published since the temporary revival of interest in 1896.

It is not claimed that he was intellectually great; he must be placed considerably below the Adamases, Otis, and Warren; but that he was no mediocre man, or "empty barrel," as he has been called more than once, his record indicates very decidedly. Were there time, it would be of interest to give a chronological record of his public life, but suffice it to say that a man who was sent to the legislature continuously for eight years in troublous times, who was on every important committee, moderator of important public meetings, representative to the Continental Congress, President of it for two and a half years, re-elected in his absence, Governor of such a State as Massachusetts for thirteen years, and chairman of the convention to consider the adoption of the Federal Consti-

tution, which was finally adopted largely through his influence,—must have had more than mediocre ability. Surely such a record cannot be accounted for by the fact that he was the richest man in the Province, whose position, wealth, and name were wanted in the struggle for freedom, and that therefore he was led, possibly flattered, or cajoled by stronger men, into becoming and remaining an advocate of independence. It is, perhaps, allowable to call him, as has been said of him elsewhere, the “Alcibiades of the rebellious little Puritan town,” but it is far too little to say of him that, “He was valuable chiefly from his picturesqueness.”<sup>1</sup>

While there are not a few incidents in his life which need elucidating, some it would seem, with our present knowledge, to his discredit, but more, many more to his great credit, it is not unlikely that the results of a careful, scholarly research would lead us to unite with the mature and sober judgment of John Adams, who wrote of him in 1818, “I can say with truth that I profoundly admired him, and more profoundly loved him. . . . I knew Mr. Hancock from his cradle to his grave. He was radically generous and benevolent. . . . He became an example to all young men of the town. Wholly devoted to business, he was as regular and punctual at his store as the sun is in its course. . . . Though I never injured or justly offended him, and though I spent much of my time, and suffered unknown anxiety, in defending his property, reputation, and liberty from persecution, I cannot but reflect upon myself for not paying him more respect than I did in his life time. . . . Nor were his talents or attainments inconsiderable. They were far superior to many who have been much more celebrated. He had a great deal of political sagacity and penetration into men. He was by no means a contemptible scholar or orator.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lodge, “Boston,” p. 176. <sup>2</sup> Works of John Adams, X., 260, 261.

But it is time to take up the letters before us. The first is as President of Congress to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut. It is written from Philadelphia, June 27, 1775, and closely corresponds with the records in the Journals of Congress under the date of June 26-27, 1775.<sup>1</sup>

The letter is as follows:—

Philad<sup>a</sup> 27 June 1775

Hon<sup>l</sup> Sir

By the Unanimous Vote of this Congress I am Directed to assure you of the high & gratefull Sense they have of your Wisdom assiduity and Zeal in the common cause of the united Colonies, and to inform you of the appointment of a Commander in Chief & other General Officers over the Forces that are or may be Raised for the Defence of American Liberty, a List of whom <sup>you</sup> ~~Λ~~ have Inclos'd. the Subordinate officers <sup>of your troops</sup> ~~Λ~~ to be Recommended by <sup>you</sup> ~~Λ~~ the Provincial Congress to the General, to whom Commissions from this Congress are Sent to be fill'd up agreeable to such Recommendation.

I am also Directed by this Congress to Acquaint you that ~~by order their order~~ General Schuyler is order'd upon ~~a particul~~ an important service, in the prosecution of which, they have Resolved, that if he should have Occasion for a larger Quantity of Ready Money & Ammunition than he can in convenient time procure from the provincial Convention of the Colony of New York he do in such Case apply to you for such Supplies of both as can be furnish'd by your Colony, & you are Desir'd to Afford him both money & ammunition, & this Congress will make provision for Reimbursing the same

<sup>you</sup>  
I am likewise to inform <sup>Λ</sup> that this Congress have this Day come to a Resolution that Major Skeene an Officer lately arrived from England, & who has for some days been kept in this City by their order & suffer'd to be abroad upon his Parole, be Sent under a proper Guard to you, to be Retain'd at Hartford until the further order of this Congress; ~~The Order is to be~~  
~~Writ/d /y/c/ by the Officer who brings Major Skeene~~

Wishing you the Enjoyment of Health & every other personal

<sup>1</sup> Force's American Archives, Fourth Series, ii., pp. 1855, 1856; Journals of Congress, June 26, 27, 1775.

Blessing & that our Country may long be happy in the Continuance of your important Services, I am Hon<sup>L</sup> Sir  
Your most obed Servant

Hon<sup>L</sup> Gov Trumbull

Endorsed in J. H's handwriting "To Governor Trumbull  
June 1775"

[See Force's Amer. Archives, iv. 2, 1855, 56.]

The next letter is to General Washington, under date of June 28, 1775. It is as follows:—

Philadelphia June 28. 1775.

Sir

By Direction of the Congress I now transmitt you several Resolutions pass'd yesterday, by which you will observe they have Directed major General Schuyler to Examine into the State of the Posts at Ticonderago [*sic*] & Crown Point & of the Troops Station'd there as also to Enquire into the Disposition of the Canadians & Indians. You will likewise find they have Direct'd him to Take or Destroy all Vessells, Boats or Floating Batteries prepared by Gov<sup>r</sup>. Carlton on or near the Waters of the Lakes, and to Take possession of of St Johns & Montreal if he finds it practicable & not Disagreeable to the Canadians. The

of Congress

The Alterations of their Sentiments <sup>^</sup> since your Departure relative to making an Impression into Canada was occasion'd by a letter ~~the Cong~~ they Rec'd from the Committee of Albany, a Copy of which you have inclos'd, they Gave their Directions upon these important matters Directly to Major General Schuyler, as he would be near the posts abovemention'd & as their being sent to you would occasion such Delays as might prove Detrimental to the Service.

I send you the Remainder of the Commissions Sign'd, should you have occasion for more please to acquaint me & they shall be immediately transmitted to you.

Brig<sup>d</sup> General Gates not yet Arriv'd in the City, I Expect him to morrow, & shall deliver him his Commission, & promote his Joining you as soon as possible; Inclos'd is a Letter from him.

With my best wishes for every personal Happiness, & Success in all your Undertakings

I have the honour to be Sir

Your most obed<sup>t</sup> ~~humb~~ humbl

General Washington.

[See Force's Am. Arch., iv. 2, 1855, 56.]

These drafts bear few erasures and alterations. They are interesting as showing that they were the work, not of

a Secretary, but of the President himself. I am inclined to think, however, that these drafts were afterwards copied by a Secretary and signed by the President with his formal signature. On the other hand, I have here the draft of a letter from the President of Congress to General Washington, written some time in July, 1775, which appears to be in the handwriting of John Jay.

Endorsed to "General Washington." July, 1775.

Your letter of the 10<sup>th</sup> Instant with the enclosed papers being duly received was laid before Congress and immediately taken into Consideration.

In answer to the several matters therein contained I am to inform you, that the Congress appointed a Committee to enquire what quantity of light sail cloth sheeting & osnabugs or tuklenburgs could be obtained in this town for the purpose of making tents, & in this business the committee are now closely employed.

It is agreed that tow cloth will be most proper for hunting shirts, & of this the Congress are informed a sufficient quantity may be obtained in Rhode Island & Connecticut. It is expected you will give orders for purchasing there the quantity necessary

Agreeable to your recommendation they have appointed Joseph Trumbull Esq<sup>r</sup> commissary Gen<sup>l</sup> of stores & provisions for the army of the United Colonies

The appointment of a quarter master general Commissary of Musters and a commissary of Artillery is left to you, thi<sup>s</sup> congress not being sufficiently acquainted with persons properly qualified for these offices.

They have ordered a company of \_\_\_\_\_ to be raised in this city & sent forward. General Thomas they have appointed first Brigadier General in the room of Mr Pomroy who did not act under the commission sent him and have ordered General Thomas' commission to bear date the same day Gen<sup>l</sup> Pomroy's did.

They have empowered you, if you think fit, to appoint three Brigade Majors of such persons as you chuse to honour with that command and to commission them accordingly.

They have appointed a committee to consider & report the establishing an Hospital & appointing a Director. As soon as they have brought in their report and the congress have come to any resolution on that subject you will be made acquainted with it.

Letters are sent with a recommendation to the colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts bay Rhode Island & Connecticut to

complete the deficiencies in the regiments belonging to their respective colonies, which you shall retain in the continental army.

And it is earnestly recommended to Rhode-island to send forward to you three hundred & sixty men lately voted by their general assembly and to Connecticut to send forward fourteen hundred men lately voted by the general assembly of that Colony.

Upon intelligence that Mr Johnson is endeavouring to instigate the Indians to acts of Hostility the Congress have empowered General Schuyler "to dispose of and employ all the troops in the New York department in such manner as he may think best for the protection & defense of these colonies, the tribes of Indians in friendship and amity with us and most effectually to promote the general Interest, still pursuing, if in his power, the former orders from this congress & subject to the future orders of the commander in chief."

As the Congress are not fully acquainted with number of the enemy you have to oppose and the extent of your operations, they reposing confidence in your prudence have resolved, that "Such a body of troops be kept up in the Massachusetts bay as you shall think necessary, provided they do not exceed twenty two thousand."

In a letter from Lord Dartmouth to Gov<sup>r</sup> Martin dated Whitehall May 3<sup>d</sup> 1775 after recommending to him to embody such of the men in four Counties (which Gov<sup>r</sup> Martin had represented as favourable to the views of administration) as are able to bear arms, is the following paragraph "I confess to you, Sir, that this appears to me to be a matter of so much importance that I cannot to earnestly recommend it to your attention, & that no time may be lost, in case of absolute necessity I have received his Majesty's commands to write to General Gage to apprize him of this favourable circumstance & to instruct him that he do, upon application from you, send some able & discreet officer to you in order to concert the means of carrying so essential a service into effect & if necessary to lead the people forth against any rebellious attempts to disturb the public peace."

Whether the five vessels you mention to have sailed from Boston on the 11<sup>th</sup> Inst. are gone on this service time must manifest.

The Bills ordered to be struck by the congress are in good forwardness; as soon as a sufficient quantity worth sending is completed, it will be sent to you.

I have the pleasure to inform you that the Congress have received a letter from the provincial convention of Georgia dated 8<sup>th</sup> Instant, informing that all the parishes in that Colony except two which it is supposed do not contain a score of freeholders inhabitants, met by their delegates in convention on the 4<sup>th</sup> instant; that those parishes that upon former occasions seemed reluctant, have manifested a laudable zeal on this occasion; that



several gentlemen in Savannah, that have hitherto been neuter or declared against America, now speak of the proceedings of Parliament as illegal & oppressive; that the convention had applied to the Governor to appoint a day of fasting & prayer, with which request the Governor informed them he would comply; that they have chosen five delegates to represent their colony in this Congress viz John Houston, Arch<sup>d</sup> Bullock Esq<sup>r</sup> the rev<sup>d</sup> Doct Zubly, Lyman hall and Noble Wimberly Jones Esq<sup>r</sup>; & lastly that they have resolved strictly to adhere to the continental Association & are heartily disposed zealously to enter into every measure that the Congress may deem necessary for the safety of America."

With the next drafts we turn from national to state affairs. It is now Governor Hancock, and the date, November, 1782. The question is relative to the passage of an excise bill, and the adjournment of the General Court.

I am indebted to Mr. Tillinghast, the accomplished Massachusetts State Librarian, for transcripts from the Journal of the General Court, which explain the Governor's drafts. These drafts and extracts<sup>1</sup> speak for themselves, and are characteristic.

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from House Journal, Nov. 12, 1782.

"Mr. Smead was charged with a Message to inform the Hon. Senate that the House had taken Order on all the public business before them and were ready for a recess in case the Hon. Senate were likewise prepared therefor."

"The Hon. Mr. Davis came down & said that the Senate had not acted upon the public business so far as was necessary previous to a Recess & therefore had not concurred with the House in the Order aforesaid."

"The Hon. Genl. Brooks brought down the Order of the House, appointing a committee to wait upon His Excellency the Governor, to request him to adjourn the Genl. Court, In senate read & concurred with amendment at A. Sent down for concurrence. Read & concurred."

"The Secretary came down & said that His Excellency the Governor thought it impossible for the General Court to be adjourned this evening several Resolves having just been laid before him, but that His Excellency would send a Message to both Houses early in the morning. Then the House adjourned to Wednesday Morning 9 o'clock.

Nov. 13, 1782.

"The Secretary came down and delivered the following Message from His Excellency the Governor.

Gentlemen of the Senate & Gentlemen of the House of Representatives—The Secretary has laid before me a Bill entitled an Act for repealing several acts laying certain duties of Excise on certain articles therein mentioned, & for laying a duty or excise on certain articles therein mentioned. I am clearly of opinion that under present circumstances it is highly expedient if not absolutely necessary, to raise money in some such way as is pointed out by this Bill. Experience has taught us

MESSAGES TO THE GENERAL COURT.

Gentlemen of the Senate & Gentlemen of the House of Representatives,

In the Evening of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ins<sup>t</sup> I Rec'd by a Committee of the General Court a Request to adjourn the Court, ~~to the last Wednes~~

that we cannot avail ourselves of money sufficient to carry on the war solely by the common mode of taxation. It is then of great importance that we should obtain all we can by duties & excises. The more important this measure appears to be, the more necessary it is that it should be done in such a way as to render it effectual & permanent, as well as conducted in such a manner as to make it an equal tax & thereby render it agreeable to the people in general. I would submit it to your consideration whether this can be effected, without first consulting the neighboring governments & knowing whether they will adopt similar measures. I therefore in duty cannot refrain to recommend your referring this Bill to the next Sessions for further consideration, and in the mean time taking such measures as you may judge proper to obtain the sentiments of the neighboring states upon this subject.

Boston, Nov. 13, 1782.

JOHN HANCOCK.

Whereupon a Motion being made & seconded the question was put whether the House would take measures for the said Bill to be returned to them again from His Excellency. and passed in the negative."

Nov. 14, 1782.

"Ordered that Col. Washburn, Gen. Ward & Dr. Manning with such others as the Hon. Senate may join, be a Committee to wait on His Excellency. the Governor & renew the request made by the General Court for an adjournment. Sent up for concurrence."

"The Secretary brought down the following Message from His Excellency. the Governor.

Gentlemen of the Senate & Gentlemen of the House of Representatives. In the evening of the 12th inst. I received by a Committee of the General Court a request to adjourn the Court, at which time I had before me a Bill of very great importance to the people at large which had engaged the attention of the Genl. Court for a considerable time & had not been in my possession three days, besides a number of Resolves which the Secretary laid before me on the same day I received the Message, & even at the very time the Committee were with me requesting the Recess I received a number of Resolves from the General Court, for the consideration of which the Constitution points out a suitable time. These circumstances I was under a necessity of representing to the General Court, by the Secretary & I informed them I could not consistent with my duty to the public comply with the request of the Court that evening. The next morning I sent a written Message to the Court, stating, I think, in a decent manner my apprehensions with respect to the effect of the Bill & in the mean time adopting such measures as the Court should (deem) judge proper to obtain the sentiments of the neighboring states on the subject in Order that the Bill might have an equal operation. Presuming that this Message was under the Consideration of the Court, and momentarily expecting an answer, when I this day received another Message renewing the application for a Recess, altho' a Resolve had been laid before me which had passed the Court just before I received the Message. It is my wish at all times to have it in my power to comply with the request of the General Court, and to promote the interest of the Commonwealth, & to lessen the public expenses & could I yesterday have received the determination of the Two Houses in consequence of my Message a Recess would have taken place very soon after; and I am even now disposed to adjourn the Court agreeably to their request, as I cannot in any, the least degree, fee myself liable to the charge of preventing the adjournment of the Court; for it cannot escape the notice of the Two Houses that the Excise Bill has not been before me five days agreeable to the Constitution & consequently cannot operate as

~~day in January~~ at which time I had before me a Bill of very great to the people at large importance <sup>^</sup>, which had engag'd the attention of the General a considerable Time

Court for ~~at least five weeks~~, & had not been in my Possession three days, beside a number of Resolves which the Secretary laid before me on the Same Day I Rec'd the Message and even at the very Time the Committee were with me ~~ill as they had~~ Requesting the

Recess, I Rec'd a number of Resolves from the General Court, ~~for of all~~ for the Consideration of which the Constitution points out a suitable time. These Circumstances I was under a necessity of Representing to the General Court by the Secretary, and informing them I could not consistent with my Duty to the Publick comply with the Request of the Court that Evening. ~~On~~ The next morning I Sent a written Message to the Court, stating I think

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an Act. However, if the General Assembly are, notwithstanding desirous of a Recess:—upon a significance of their pleasure I will immediately adjourn them.

Boston, Nov. 14, 1782.

JOHN HANCOCK."

"May it please your Excellency,

The Two Branches of the General Court have taken into mature consideration your Message of this date and are clearly of opinion that the Excise Bill so called by your Excellency has been before your Excellency the full time prescribed by the Constitution and is therefore become a law.

Read and concurred, & Mr. Sprague Col. Thatcher & Mr. Smead are joined. And it is further Ordered that said Committee renew the request made to his Excellency, the Governor for an adjournment of the General Court. Sent up for concurrence."

"The Secretary came down & said that he was directed by His Excellency, the Governor to acquaint the General Court that he had approved of the following Acts (See list on file) & that it was His Excellency's pleasure that the said Court should be adjourned to the last Wednesday of January next."

Excise Bill, Nov. 7, 1782.

"A Bill entitled an Act for repealing an Act entitled an Act laying certain duties of excise on certain articles therein mentioned for the purpose of paying the interest on Government Securities, and for repealing another Act entitled an Act in addition unto & for amending & explaining an Act made in the year 1781, laying certain duties of Excise on certain articles therein mentioned for the purposes of paying the interest on Government Securities, & for repealing one other Act entitled an Act making provision for giving permits to the Distillers & the Importers of those articles which are subject to an Excise duty: Also for repealing one other Act entitled an Act in addition unto an Act entitled an Act for laying certain duties of Excise on certain articles therein mentioned for the purpose of paying interest on Government Securities—And for altering another Act entitled an Act in addition unto & for amending & explaining the Act made in the year 1781 laying certain duties of Excise on certain articles therein mentioned for the purpose of paying the interest on Government Securities & for raising the revenue by Excise on certain articles therein mentioned for the payment of interest on Government consolidated securities & interest on the notes issued to the Officers & Soldiers of the Massachusetts Line of the Army for the respective balances due to them for their services in the year one thousand Seven Hundred and eighty.—

Nov. 8th. This Engrossed Bill having had three several readings, passed to be Enacted."

in a decent manner my apprehension with Respect to the Effect of the Bill, and in the same decent manner submitting ~~it~~ to their Consideration the propriety of Referring the Bill to the next Sessions, & in the mean time adopting such measures as the Court should Judge proper to obtain the Sentiment of the neighboring States on the Subject in order that the Bill might have an equal operation.

To this Message I have been waiting an Answer untill by a Committee at half past 12 o'clock this Day I Rec'd another Message from the General Court Requesting a Recess, altho' I had just before Rec'd a new Resolve from the Court, and had sent two important Letters to the Court which I had Rec'd last night by the Post from the Superintendent of Finance; I have ~~no Disposition to Enter into an Alteration~~

Presuming that this Message was under the Consideration of the Court, & momentarily expecting an Answer when I this Day Rec'd anothr Message Renewing the Application for [a] Recess, had been laid before me

altho a Resolve <sup>^</sup> which had passed the Court just before I Rec'd the message. ~~I am at a loss~~ It is my wish at all to have it in my power

times <sup>^</sup> to comply with the Requests of the General Court, and to promote the Interest of the Common Wealth & to Lessen the public Expences, & could I yesterday have ~~been~~ Rec'd the Determination of the ~~General Court~~ Two Houses, in consequence of my Message, a Recess would have Taken Place very soon after, and I am even now dispos'd to adjourn the Court, agreeably to their Request ~~of~~

J H

Boston Nov<sup>r</sup> 14 1782

as ~~for~~ I cannot in any the least Degree feel my self liable to the charge of preventing the Adjournment of the Court. ~~It would have given me much pleasure to have been able and upon the fresh Signification of the pleasure of the Gen<sup>l</sup> Court, that the General Court if it is their Intention that the Excise Bills should not operate untill the next Session I cannot and I must I shall not~~ I will immediately ~~compl~~ adjourn the Gen<sup>l</sup> Court agreeably to their ~~Request~~

~~and have given th and upon the first sig for it the cannot escape the notice of the Two Houses that the Excise Bill has not been for the Message will please to~~

agreeably to the Constitution

before me Five Days <sup>^</sup> and consequently ~~will~~ cannot operate

as an Act, however if the General Court are notwithstanding desirous of a Recess, upon a Signification of their pleasure I will immediately adjourn them

J H

Boston 14 ~~D~~ Novem 1782.

Gentlemen of the Senate & Gentlemen of the House of Representatives

In Consequence of my Message of this Afternoon, I have Rec'd from the Two Branches of the General Court by ~~their~~ a Committee their ~~that they are clearly of~~ opinion that the Excise Bill has been before me the full Time prescribed by the Con- and is become a Law.

stitution <sup>^</sup> I must be allow'd to know the Time ~~when I Receive~~ I receive them for I always note upon Important Bills the precise time <sup>^</sup> am fully satisfied

and <sup>^</sup> ~~I am clearly of opinion that it~~ the Excise Bill has not been ~~constitutionally~~ before me five Days upon the principles of the Constitution, ~~I am not Disposed at this Time~~ and consequently I can by no means admit the Excise Bill to have pass'd into ~~an Act Law.~~ ~~My being~~ [Two words blotted out.] ~~if favor'd with the decision of the Two Branches of the General Court upon any special Message~~ <sup>^</sup> I wish and <sup>^</sup> But as the Gen<sup>l</sup> Court have renew'd their Message for a Recess, ~~if they have the Bill should be held up to the Publick in its present State, I have no Disposition to keep the C~~ and are inclin'd to Rise leaving the Excise Bill under its present Circumstances, I have Direct'd the Secretary to adjourn the General Court. J H

Boston 14 Nov<sup>r</sup> 1782.

Endorsed in John Hancock's handwriting "Messages to Gen<sup>l</sup> Court Nov<sup>r</sup> 14 1782."

The next draft also relates to State matters. It is addressed to William Greene, Governor of Rhode Island (1778-1786), and is dated January 7, 1783. It is as follows:—

Boston January 7th 1783.

Sir

Having Rec'd Information that one William Prentice an Inhabitant of this Common Wealth has been Detected in carrying on an Illicit Trade with our Enemies at New York, has been apprehended in the State over which you preside, and Committed to the Goal in Providence. In Consequence of this Information & of the Advice of Council which I have the Honor to Inclose your Excellency, I am to Request that your Excellency will be pleas'd to Give orders that the said Prentice be Deliver'd to Joseph Henderson Esq. Sheriff of the County of Suffolk or his Deputy to be Convey'd to Boston in order that Prentice & such others as have been Concerned with him in such illicit Trade may be Dealt with agreeable to Law.

I have had the Honor to Receive your Two Letters with their Inclosures respecting Mr. Thomas Brattle, which Papers by

Message I have laid before our Assembly, they have Committed  
me

the Papers, & as soon as the Issue is laid before <sup>^</sup> which I most devoutly wish may be favourable to Mr. Brattle, I will give your Excellency the earliest information & at same time will write Mr. Brattle. I feel myself really oblig'd by your Excellency's interposition in fav. of Mr. Brattle, I really look upon him deserving every Notice, & have never hear'd a solid Objection why he should not years ago have been permitted to return to his Citizenship.

I have the Honor to be with every Sentiment of Respect & Esteem, your Excellency's

Most obed't hum<sup>a</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>

J H

To His Excellency Governor Greene  
of the State of Rhod. Island.

Of the two interesting subjects mentioned in this draft, no opportunity has been offered to make any research into the facts relating to the extradition of William Prentice named in the letter.<sup>1</sup> In regard to Thomas Brattle, Sabine in his "Loyalists of the American Revolution,"<sup>2</sup> gives a short account which I condense.

Thomas Brattle, the son of William Brattle,<sup>3</sup> a man of remarkable versatility, was born at Cambridge 1742,

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<sup>1</sup> Since this paper was read, through the kindness of Hon. William M. Olin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, I have gained the following information:—

"In 1783 and for a considerable period later a simple letter requesting or demanding the apprehension and surrender to Massachusetts officers of persons charged with crimes who had fled without the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth appears to have been all sufficient for the purpose.

"The earliest mention of warrants to enable state officers to secure prisoners requisitioned for shows that they were issued by the judges of the supreme judicial court and not by the governor as became the practice subsequently.

"The record of the proceedings in the case of William Prentice is probably in the files of the supreme judicial court, . . . although a letter from the governor of Rhode Island to the Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts commenting on the actions of Prentice and others and the necessity for severely punishing them for their illicit trading appears in the manuscript collection for the year 1782."

<sup>2</sup> I. 250, 251.

<sup>3</sup> Of this William Brattle, Sabine says, "A man of more eminent talents and of greater eccentricities has seldom lived. . . He graduated at Harvard University (College) in 1722. . . He seems to have been of every profession, and to have been eminent in all. . . As a clergyman, his preaching was acceptable; as a physician, he was celebrated and had an extensive practice; as a lawyer, he had an abundance of clients; while his military aptitudes secured the rank of Major General of the Militia." He supported Gage and went into exile. At the evacuation of Boston he went to Halifax and died there in 1776.

graduated at Harvard in 1760, and received the degree of A.M. from Yale and Nassau. He went to England in 1775, and was included in the Proscription and Banishment Act of 1778. While abroad he travelled through Great Britain, France, and Holland. He earnestly sought to aid his unfortunate countrymen who had been captured and were imprisoned. He came to Rhode Island in 1779. It is pleasant to know that the General Court of Massachusetts acted favorably in his case. The enactments against him were repealed in 1784, and he returned to Massachusetts, and took possession of his patrimony. Not so versatile as his father, he appears to have been a man of public spirit and noble characteristics. He died in 1801. Governor James Sullivan says of him, "In his death the sick, the poor, and the distressed have lost a liberal benefactor; politeness an ornament; and philanthropy, one of its most discreet and generous supporters."

This letter is the last of the Hancock papers in my possession. There remains one document. It is a letter from Thomas Cushing (1725-1788) who, though he, too, played a prominent part in Massachusetts history, has also received but scant attention in later times.

Thomas Cushing was born in Boston, March 24, 1725, and early took a prominent part in the community. He was for many years the representative of his native city in the General Court. He was Speaker of the House, 1763-1774, and signed most if not all official documents. He was on almost all the important public committees, and took part in the public meetings for redress of grievances. He was a member of the first and second Continental Congresses, but on account of his reluctance to support independence, was replaced by Elbridge Gerry. He, however, accepted independence and was active in the service of his country. He was a judge, and was elected Lieutenant-Governor in 1779, holding the office by annual re-election until the year of his death, 1788.

The fact of his caution, perhaps we may even term it timidity, and his reluctance to sever the relations with the mother country, have doubtless caused him to be also undervalued by later generations. In fact it is only in recent years that historians, biographers, and others have begun to do justice to the loyalists, and to the conservative and prudent men of the American Revolution. Probably most of this class believed themselves to be as patriotic as their younger and more sanguine brethren, and we must admit that they had good, if they are not to us convincing, reasons for their attitude. That they were proved to be on the wrong side, is not necessarily to their discredit, though it may show inability to grasp the situation, as well as lack of foresight.<sup>1</sup>

This letter is addressed to "The Honble John Hancock, Esqr. at Philadelphia." It relates to the fitting out of naval vessels, and has a bid for future employment, which he afterwards secured.<sup>2</sup> It is as follows:—

Boston April 25, 1776.

Dear Sir

I forgot to mention in my last, that the Commissary General has left in these parts a large quantity of Provisions for the use of the Army, I would therefore submit it to your Consideration whether it would not be advisable for the Congress to direct the Commissary General or his Deputy here to sell or deliver me such a quantity of Provisions of all kinds as will be necessary to fix off the Ships building here; as he has lately purchased such large quantities in the four New England Governments for the army, I believe I shall find it difficult to get a sufficient Supply in these parts, the Deputy Commissary says they can be spared as well as not—As soon as the Ships are equipped for the Sea I shall have finished the Business assigned me & I hope I shall be able to do it to general acceptance.

I shall still be ready to serve the Continent all in my Power and to promote the Cause we are engaged in & if any thing

<sup>1</sup> As an example of change of opinion in historians it may be noted that Bancroft, in the early editions of his history, when speaking of Cushing's attitude in Congress says, "When Cushing's constituents heard of his pusillanimous wavering, they elected Elbridge Gerry to his place (8:243, 9th ed., 1869). In the author's Final Revision the adjective "pusillanimous" is dropped (4:316).

<sup>2</sup> See *Penna. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, X., 355, Oct., 1886.



turns up wherein I can be serviceable should be glad to be informed, perhaps an Agent for the Continental Vessels will be needed in this Province, as this is a business in my way, when such an Appointment is made, I should be obliged to you for your Interest or that I may be informed in any other way wherein you think I can be serviceable.

I remain with great respect yr Sincere Friend & humble sevt

THOMAS CUSHING.

[Endorsed in John Hancock's handwriting "Thomas Cushing April 1776."]

This closes the list of documents which I have had the privilege of presenting to you. If they have served to renew interest in these two public men of old time it is all that I desire.

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