

THOMAS HUTCHINSON AND HIS
"HISTORY OF MASSACHUSETTS-BAY"

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FOR one reason or another it has devolved upon me to prepare for publication a new edition of Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts-Bay* and, consequently, during the past year I have had occasion to reread that well-known work with a careful and critical eye. Realizing that both Hutchinson and his *History* are very familiar subjects, perhaps I should hesitate to inflict upon the members of this Society certain impressions I received in the course of my labors; but in the hope that some of these may have at least the merit of novelty, I have put them on paper and now submit them for your consideration.

About one hundred and seventy years ago a prominent and highly respected gentleman of Boston resolved to write the history of Massachusetts-Bay. This was Lieutenant-governor Thomas Hutchinson, whose native love for the province was enhanced by the fact that his ancestors, immediate and remote, had played a considerable part in its history and development. His great-great-grandmother, Anne Hutchinson, made a name for herself in the first decade of the colony's life and was banished for her dangerous doctrines. His great-grandfather, Edward Hutchinson, when a representative in the General Court so strongly disapproved of the penalty of death for obdurate Quakers that he desired leave to enter his dissent upon the records.¹ Later, at the beginning of King Philip's War, he was sent to negotiate with the perfidious Nipmuck Indians, was caught in an

¹George Bishop, *New England Judged by the Spirit of the Lord* (Philadelphia, 1885), p. 83.

ambush, and lost his life in the service of the Colony.¹

Thomas Hutchinson's grandfather—Elisha by name—was a member of the Council for many years, and though relatively unsuccessful as a merchant he possessed the kind of character, physique, and personality that drew to him many responsibilities as a public citizen. He was colonel of the Boston regiment, commander-in-chief of the provincial militia, and a judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Suffolk County. And when he died in 1717 his funeral was an occasion of pomp and circumstance that Boston remembered for a long, long time.² Elisha's son Thomas, the father of the historian, was also in the public eye throughout his career. As a young man he accompanied the officer who went to arrest Captain Kidd at his lodgings in Boston, and it was he who stayed the pirate's arm when he attempted to draw his sword.³ In later years Thomas Hutchinson, Sr. was for a quarter of a century a member of the Council. He acquired a handsome fortune, and lost most of it by not selling his shipping when it ceased to be profitable. "What will become of all the people in my employ, if I should sell all my vessels?" he asked his son. The son's reply to this question is not recorded, but in a footnote to his *History of Massachusetts-Bay* Thomas Hutchinson, Jr. could not refrain from paying the following tribute to his father as a public servant. "Regardless of the frowns of the people he spoke and voted according to his judgment, attaching himself to no party any further than he found their measures tended to promote the public interest."⁴

When Lieutenant-governor Hutchinson determined to write a history of Massachusetts-Bay, he little dreamed that within a few years he would be banished

¹George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* (1906), pp. 29-30, 106-112.

²*Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, edited by Peter Orlando Hutchinson, II, 466.

³Thomas Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts-Bay*, II, (1767), 119.

⁴*Ibid.*, II (1767), 391.

for his dignified conservatism even as his ancestress was banished for her flamboyant liberalism. His political career throughout was marked by sound principles rather than by expediency and popularity. Elected to the General Court in 1737, as one of Boston's representatives, he distinguished himself by a vigorous, well-reasoned opposition to the further issue of paper money. This cost him re-election in 1739. But in the course of time the voters of Boston turned to him again, and he was Speaker of the House for three years, 1746-1749. In 1754 he was one of the province's delegates to the Albany Congress, that intercolonial convention which proposed a plan of union that was doomed to be disapproved by the authorities on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1758 he was appointed lieutenant-governor, and in the following year chief-justice of the province. In 1771 he succeeded Bernard as governor, and continued in that office until relieved of it by the appointment of General Gage in 1774.

Although Hutchinson had always been a reader of history and a collector of historical manuscripts, he had never turned his hand to the writing of history when he began to write the annals of Massachusetts-Bay. This fact accounts in part for the deficiency of style and the peculiar manner of presentation that make his first volume undeniably dry reading. He strove to tell the truth, and succeeded admirably—if one makes allowance for the paucity of material at his disposal. But his men and women are wooden, and more often than not a new name is introduced without a particle of background or adornment to awaken the reader's interest. Hutchinson felt this defect, but did not know how to correct it. Occasionally he attempted to do so by adding in a footnote information that the modern reader would prefer to find woven into the text. When this footnote is given on the page in which the man's name first appears, the result is fairly successful; but time and again he let the sketch

go until his narrative reached the year of the man's death. Then he would tuck in a footnote, wholly irrelevant to the text at that point, saying that so-and-so died in this year and giving a brief sketch of his character and achievements. To our way of thinking, much of this information might have been given better when so-and-so was first mentioned; and the author's failure to use it in that way makes the first volume of his work annals rather than history.

After the first volume was published Hutchinson asked the Reverend Ezra Stiles—the future president of Yale, but at that time merely the learned minister of the Second Church at Newport, Rhode Island—for criticism. He got it. Stiles encased his views in more or less palaver, as most of us would in writing to an author who held so exalted a position, but even so he questioned at least one point of fact and made certain constructive criticisms as well. He felt the want of life in the narrative and wondered why the author had not given his opinion of the major figures, instead of merely telling what they accomplished.¹ Hutchinson's defense is interesting: "I am very much obliged to you," he wrote, "for your favorable opinion of my book, and more so for your observations upon it. The same remark has been made by others, which you make, of many things being brought into the Notes, which might better have come into the body of the page, and I am satisfied it is just. I am ashamed to give you the reason for this fault, but really it was to save me trouble, finding it easier to insert things which occurred to me, after I had passed by the time they related to, in this way, than by altering the page. I had, from the beginning, determined to have large notes, something in the same manner as Mr. Harris has in his *Life of Cromwell, &c.*, but I carried it too far. Indeed I wonder more fault is not found with the whole performance. I think, from my beginning the

¹Stiles's letter is printed in *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVI (1872), 162-163.

work until I had compleated it, which was about twelve months, I never had time to write two sheets at a sitting without avocations by publick business, but was forced to steal a little time in the morning and evening, while I was in town, and then leave it for weeks together; so that I found it difficult to keep any plan in my mind. I have an aversion to transcribing, and except the three or four first sheets and now and then a page in which I had made some mistake, the rest of the work is rough as I first wrote it. . . .

“I have no talent at painting, or describing characters. I am sensible it requires great delicacy. My safest way was to avoid them and let facts speak for themselves. I was astonished after reading Robertson’s *History of Scotland*, and having settled Mary Stewart’s character in my own mind as one of the most infamous in History, to find him drawing her with scarce a blemish. . . .

“I did not enough consider the present taste for anecdotes. I could have enlarged the volume, or made it large enough for two.”¹

The first volume was printed in Boston in 1764. A London edition appeared in the following year. Before collating the two editions I assumed that the second would show numerous corrections by the author—a date here, a name there, perhaps one or two omissions or different conclusions. But to my surprise it turned out otherwise. Here and there, to be sure, there was a change that obviously came from the author’s revising hand; but most of the slips and printer’s errors were repeated in the London edition. Worse than that, the British printer had made errors of his own, and being unfamiliar with American nomenclature had altered certain names so that they would look right to English eyes. In other words, he assumed errors where errors did not exist, and did not catch those that were present. I came to the conclusion, therefore, that the

¹*New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVI (1872), 163–164. In part this letter is printed in *Extracts from the Itineraries of Ezra Stiles*, edited by Franklin Bowditch Dexter, pp. 518–519.

first edition should be adopted as the standard. The errors it contains are both less numerous and less misleading than those in the second.

A passage in one of Hutchinson's letters to Stiles explains the absence of careful revision on the part of the author before the London edition went to press. "Mr. Condry to whom I gave the copy, finding the book was in demand here, ordered immediately a large impression in England. I am sorry for it, because I had not opportunity enough to make several amendments, I should have chosen to have made. Care is taken of the typographical errors which are numerous, as also some inaccuracies."¹

The favorable reception accorded Volume I encouraged Hutchinson to press on with a second, which brings the story down to the year 1750. The first had ended with the arrival at Boston of Governor Phips with the new charter in May, 1692. That the author was more than open-minded to helpful criticism is evident almost from the first page. The principal characters are now introduced in a manner that gives them life and engages the interest of the reader. Significant anecdotes are worked into the text and trivial ones appear in footnotes. For instance, Phips's altercations with the collector of customs and with "Captain Short of the *Nonesuch* frigate," are related at considerable length both because they were indicative of the Governor's temper and administrative methods and because they led directly to his downfall. These were judged worthy of a place in the text. Not so the story of Lady Phips's playing on one occasion the part of joint sovereign of Massachusetts-Bay; but as a bit of gossip that was too good to omit entirely Hutchinson tucked it away in a delightful footnote.² He got the anecdote from a manuscript letter. In all probability the writer of that letter would not have been so good an historian as Thomas Hutchinson, but

¹*New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVI (1872), 164.

²*History of Massachusetts-Bay*, II (1767), 61.

he possessed a lightness of touch that would have been a welcome addition to the historian's equipment. The story, as recounted in the letter, runs thus: "In Sir William's absence, his lady, I suppose upon account of her name's being Mary, (William and Mary) was solicited for a favour in behalf of a woman committed by one of the judges, on accusation of witchcraft by a formal warrant under his hand and seal, and in close prison for trial the next assizes, then not far off. The good lady, *proprîâ virtute*, granted and signed a warrant for the said woman's discharge, which was obeyed by the keeper, and the woman still lives for aught I know. Truly I did not believe this story till I saw a copy of the mittimus and discharge under the keeper's hand attested a true copy, for which discovery the keeper was discharged from his trust and put out of his employment, as he himself told me."

This brings up the question: to what extent, if any, did Hutchinson possess a sense of humor? From reading the first volume alone one would be led to believe that he had none whatever. There is not a spark of wit or humor from beginning to end. But in the second there is at least a suggestion of quiet fun peeping out from behind the anecdote just quoted, and towards the end of the volume Hutchinson could not resist the temptation to tell the story of "a dry old representative" who opposed a grant from the public funds to defray the funeral expenses of a governor's wife and went on to explain that "had the motion been for a grant to bury the governor, he should have thought the money well laid out."¹ Then again the passage in Hutchinson's letter to Stiles in which he expresses surprise at Robertson's estimate of Mary, Queen of Scots, is not entirely devoid of humor. Since it is so agreeable when indulged, why did not Hutchinson give it more rein when writing his history? Surely

¹*History of Massachusetts-Bay*, II (1767), 366. In a copy of this volume formerly belonging to John Pickering and Timothy Pickering, Jr., a manuscript footnote in an unknown hand identifies the "dry old representative" as "Wm. Fairfield of Wenham."

there are many episodes and personalities in our colonial and provincial periods that might be described with a friendly twinkle. My answer is only a conjecture: to the mind of Thomas Hutchinson the writing of history, like the administering of the provincial government, was serious business, not to be entered into lightly. It was all very well for a buffoon like Thomas Morton of Merrymount to spice his account of the New England Canaan with quips and gibes and boisterous ribaldry. But levity of any degree would be entirely out of place in this, the first History of Massachusetts-Bay. So respectable a subject required dignity of treatment in every detail. Of course, if Hutchinson had been blessed with the bubbling humor of Jeremy Belknap, the historian of New Hampshire, all the dignity in the world could not have rendered his narrative as austere as it is. But Hutchinson was not Belknap, and one's respect for the spirit in which he approached his work more than offsets one's wish that he might have relaxed now and then and allowed the reader a quiet smile.

The only New England historian to whom Hutchinson made specific acknowledgment in the preface to his first volume is William Hubbard, whose "History of New England" he possessed in manuscript. Incidentally he mentions the names of Cotton Mather, Daniel Neal and Thomas Prince. Though he observes that Neal's *History of New England* "is little more than an abridgment" of Mather's *Magnalia*, and that all Prince gave him was "the chronology of two or three years," still one feels that Hutchinson had high regard for these predecessors in the field. Winthrop's manuscript "History of New England" he apparently knew not, but the manuscript of Bradford's *Plymouth Plantation* he both knew and used. Among the lesser works upon which he relied were Ferdinando Gorges's *Brief Narration*, Josselyn's *Two Voyages*, Lechford's *Plain Dealing*, Wood's *New England's Prospect*, Johnson's *Wonder-working Providence*, Winslow's

Hypocrisy Unmasked, Bishop's *New England Judged*, Morton's *Memorial*, Increase Mather's *Narrative of the Miseries of New England*, and Calef's *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. But there were at least two so-called authorities against whom he felt that his readers should be warned. One of these was the French historian Charlevoix, a Jesuit, whose *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* was published in 1744. The other was Dr. William Douglass, whose *Summary, Historical and Political, of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements and Present State of the British Settlements in North America* had gone through four printings between 1749 and 1760.

To say that Hutchinson scorned Charlevoix's work would be to use too strong an expression. If he had scorned it he would not have quoted from it so freely as he did on various occasions in Volume II. But Charlevoix was a Frenchman, and when writing of the frontier strife between Frenchmen and Englishmen he must be taken with a large grain of salt. Consequently when Hutchinson quotes from Charlevoix he almost invariably precedes or follows the passage with a corrective sentence or two of his own. But he usually treats the Frenchman with consideration, explaining that Charlevoix "may have been misinformed by the Indians who have always kept from the French, as far as they could, the submissions made to the English;"¹ or "this, no doubt, was the account they gave to their priest, when they returned home;"² or "The different accounts given by the French and English of this expedition may afford some entertainment."³ Charlevoix might be, and often was, in error; nevertheless Hutchinson respected him and his work.

Dr. William Douglass was another matter. Born in Scotland and bred at Scots, Dutch, and French universities, Douglass had migrated to New England

¹*History of Massachusetts Bay*, II (1767), 73.

²*Ibid.*, II (1767), 89.

³*Ibid.*, II (1767), 309.

early in the 18th century and established himself as a physician in Boston. He prospered, invested in land, and gave his name to a new town near Worcester in which he was interested. As a physician he is remembered chiefly for his strong disapproval of inoculation as a means of preventing smallpox. When that question was burning in Boston, in 1721, Dr. Douglass, according to Hutchinson "was assuming even to arrogance, and in several fugitive pieces, which he published, treated all who differed from him with contempt. He was credulous and easily received idle reports, of persons who had received the small pox by inoculation taking it a second time in the natural way, of others who perished in a most deplorable manner from the corrupt matter which had so infected the mass of blood as to render the patient incurable. At other times, he pronounced the eruption from inoculation, to be only a pustulatory fever like the chicken or swine pox, nothing analogous to the small pox and that the patient, therefore, had not the least security against the small pox, afterwards, by ordinary infection."¹

From Hutchinson's description of Douglass's mentality and temperament it is clear that the Doctor was just the type of man who should *not* attempt to write history. But that is precisely what he was moved to do. For one who was so credulous, opinionated, and cocksure it must have been a fairly easy matter to produce two volumes on the origin and growth of the British colonies in North America. Certainly it proved to be an easy matter for a careful, discriminating historian like Hutchinson to point out errors in the result of his efforts. This Hutchinson did, and whenever he exposes him one feels the scorn that lies behind his words.

One of the sweeping statements with which Douglass sprinkled his *Summary* dealt with the town of Salem, Massachusetts. "In Salem and its neighborhood," he blithely asserted, "enthusiasms and other nervous

¹*History of Massachusetts Bay*, II (1767), 275.

disorders seem to be endemial; it was the seat of New England witchcraft anno 1692." As far as I know, Hutchinson had no special attachment to Essex County. His places of residence were Boston and Milton, and there are indications that Milton with its Blue Hills was to him the dearest spot in the world.¹ But his sense of fairness, which was great, was stirred by this gratuitous fling at Salem, and he could not let it pass without comment. After quoting it in a footnote he observes, "I question whether he had any other foundation for this remark than merely this scene of witchcraft, which must be considered as the distemper of the country in general rather than of any particular town or county, and had Mr. Parris's family lived in any other part of the province, perhaps the neighborhood would have been as much infected; and no impression ought to be made to the disadvantage of a town the most ancient, and at this day the second in rank within the province, and upon other accounts justly respectable."²

In another note Hutchinson speaks out even more loudly against Dr. Douglass and all his works. In the text Hutchinson has described the origin of the law preventing towns from electing as deputies to the General Court persons who were non-residents. Governor Phips and his friends, finding their majority in the lower house dangerously small and discovering also that many of the opposition were not residents of the towns they represented, hit upon this "reform" as a means of strengthening their position. The bill was passed in 1694, by a vote of 26 to 24. Hutchinson's account of the incident was cool and impersonal. Apparently Dr. Douglass's was the reverse, for at this point our author goes out of his way to add the following footnote: "Douglass," he says "whose foible it was to speak well or ill of men very much as he had a

¹See *Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, edited by Peter Orlando Hutchinson, II (1767), 290.

²*Ibid.*, II (1767), 25, note.

personal friendship for them, or had a personal difference with them, of which I may instance more especially in his most elaborate endeavors to set Mr. Shirley in a disadvantageous light, his labored encomiums of several I chuse to avoid mentioning, because for some of them he had other foundation, had taken up a prejudice against the two Mathers, father and son, and remarks upon the occasion of this act, 'It is said that anno 1693 there were some Boston gentlemen representatives for some of the out towns, but not agreeable to the reverend I. Mather. Mr. Byfield for Bristol is mentioned. Mr. Mather of great interest with the weak Governor Phips and with the devotionally bigotted house procured this act.'"¹

At least four times in Volume I² Hutchinson found occasion to add a footnote calling attention to and correcting wild statements made by Dr. Douglass. Besides these there are three in Volume II, two of which I have quoted. An unfriendly critic might suggest that Hutchinson's severity in this quarter was probably due to the political disagreement of the two men in the 1740's. In those days Hutchinson was straining every nerve to establish in the province a stable currency of silver and gold; and when Parliament reimbursed Massachusetts for the Louisbourg expedition to the tune of £180,000 in specie, he proposed that the windfall be devoted to the extinction of the province's paper money. Most persons shook their heads, and "many men of good sense" were opposed to the plan because thereby "a *fatal shock* would be given to trade." Probably Hutchinson had counted upon the support of Dr. Douglass, for to use his own words Douglass "had wrote well upon the paper currency and had been the oracle of the anti-paper party." The versatile Doctor was not a member of the General Court, but his reputation for learning gave him a considerable following among the people.

¹*Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, II (1767), 80, note.

²*Ibid.*, I (1764), 191, 283, 286, and 320.

At this important, almost crucial, moment he suddenly changed his position "and, as his manner was with all who differed from him, discovered as much rancor against the author and promoters of this new project as he had done against the fraudulent contrivers of paper money emissions." In spite of Douglass, and after a great struggle, the measure was passed; but it is clear that Hutchinson never forgot the Doctor's behavior on this occasion. Nevertheless, I remain confident that his frequent corrections of Douglass's *Summary* are due not to personal enmity, but to Hutchinson's love of truth and to the contempt which a careful historical worker inevitably feels for the slapdash productions of one who possesses none of the essential qualities of an historian.

In his brief Preface to Volume I Hutchinson remarks: "All historians profess a sacred regard to truth. I have found some difficulty in guarding against every degree of prejudice in writing the history of my own country. I hope by shunning one extreme I have not run upon the other."¹

It may be interesting to see how far the author lived up to his aspiration to guard against "every degree of prejudice." In the first volume he appears to have done so to an almost regrettable degree. Anne Hutchinson was his ancestress, yet he refrains from any comment whatever upon her trial and banishment. He merely states the facts and at the suggestion of "several persons who have observed in the first volume a reference to a manuscript history of the trial" prints that document in the appendix to the second. The only conclusion he draws from the incident is this: "that if Mr. Vane had remained in England or had not craftily made use of the party which maintained these peculiar opinions in religion to bring him into civil power and authority and draw the affections of the people from those who were their leaders into the wilderness, these like many other

¹*Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, I (1764), iii.

errors might have prevailed a short time without any disturbance to the state, and, as the absurdity of them appeared, silently subsided, and posterity would not have known that such a woman as Mrs. Hutchinson ever existed."¹ This conclusion may be a bit harsh on Sir Harry Vane, but certainly it does not savor of filio-pietism.

So it is with the sufferings of the Quakers. Though his great-grandfather voted against the death penalty, Hutchinson views the whole affair with a detachment that seems almost callous. He blames no one; but at the end of the narrative he expresses hope that the time may "never come again when the government shall think that by killing men for their religion they do God good service."²

His account of the witchcraft episode is another example of Hutchinson's fairness and of his good historical judgment. Although the frenzy of 1692 was probably entirely distasteful to him, he makes the point that Old England is in no position to criticize New England in this matter, for Old England set the example of prosecuting and hanging witches and wrote the books that deluded our ancestors. And probably no historian has passed a more equable judgment on the Salem tragedy than he. Instead of blaming ministers and accusing magistrates, as has been the fashion in recent years, he goes to the root of the evil and places the responsibility there. This is his conclusion: "A little attention must force the conviction that the whole was a scene of fraud and imposture, begun by young girls, who at first thought of nothing more than being pitied and indulged, and continued by adult persons, who were afraid of being accused themselves. The one and the other, rather than confess their fraud, suffered the lives of so many to be taken away, through the credulity of judges and juries."³

¹*Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, I (1764), 73.

²*Ibid.*, I (1764), 205.

³*Ibid.*, II (1767), 62.

In one of his letters to Ezra Stiles, written when the first volume was ready for the press, Hutchinson spoke of the possibility of a later volume which should deal with the period in which he himself played an important part. He was aware of the dangers that attend writing the history of one's own time, and added, "but I have had too great a share myself in our publick affairs for 30 years past to think of publishing that part of our History. I threaten Mr. Otis sometimes that I will be revenged of him after I am dead."¹ This intention and good-natured threat were carried out in a third volume which remains to be considered.

As Volume III contains an allusion to the Battle of Bunker Hill and another to the Declaration of Independence² we may infer that Hutchinson wrote it, or at any rate revised it, while the Revolutionary War was in progress. During those years he was in England waiting in vain for the restoration of British authority in the American colonies. Before he died in 1780 the manuscript was complete, but it did not go to press until almost a half-century later. In 1828 Hutchinson's grandson, with substantial encouragement from James Savage, published it in London³. Essentially this volume is a defense of the Bernard and Hutchinson administrations. Inevitably it is written from the loyalist point of view; but when the reader has made allowance for that bias he is impressed chiefly by Hutchinson's restraint and by his increased skill in portraiture.

¹*New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVI (1872), 162. The letter is dated July 4, 1764.

²Thomas Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts-Bay*, III, 348 and 173.

³*The History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, from 1749 to 1774, Comprising a Detailed Narrative of the Origin and Early Stages of the American Revolution*. By Thomas Hutchinson, Esq., L.L.D. formerly Governor of the Province. Edited from the Author's Ms., by his grandson the Rev. John Hutchinson, M.A. For the American market the title page was altered so that it reads as follows: *The History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay, from the Year 1750, until June, 1774*. By Mr. Hutchinson, Late Governor of that Province. Vol. III. From this version the editor's Dedication and Preface are omitted. James Savage and some of his friends purchased 500 copies outright, and endeavored to dispose of them in America. See *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, First Series, III, 144-147.

Revenge is usually poor policy, and so it proved to be in the case of Hutchinson's posthumous revenge upon James Otis. Instead of blighting Otis's reputation, it detracted from what was left of Hutchinson's; and ever since the publication of the third volume it has been customary to lament that one who could write good history allowed himself in this instance to be carried away by personal feeling. I shall not go so far as to claim that Hutchinson was entirely fair to his enemy. No human being who had endured all that came to Hutchinson directly and indirectly from Otis could have written of him impartially. But I feel that if we charge him with unfairness, we should also credit him with temperate statement. The story of the Otises, as told by Hutchinson, is briefly this: when James Otis, the father, was seeking a judgeship in the Bernard administration, young James Otis "vowed revenge" if he were not given the coveted office. For various reasons he was not appointed. Heretofore, the Otises, father and son, had been friendly to the administration. From this time on they were among its most active and implacable enemies. To Hutchinson's way of thinking this change of front was no mere coincidence; and after giving a detailed account of their disappointment, he comments, "From so small a spark a great fire seems to have been kindled."¹ He was not the only one who held this view. Tudor, in his *Life of Otis*, says that it was "common report" that Otis had declared "that he would set the province in flames, though he perished in the fire."² Nevertheless our patriotic fathers and grandfathers saw red when they encountered these words from the pen of Hutchinson, and in their fury they probably failed to note the careful phraseology. He did not say "From so small a spark a great fire *was* kindled"; what he said was "From so small a spark a great fire *seems* to have been kindled." So indeed it did seem to him—and

¹*The History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, from 1749 to 1774, comprising a Detailed Narrative of the Origin and Early Stages of the American Revolution*, III, 88.

²William Tudor, *Life of James Otis*, p. 54.

to many another Bostonian. Hutchinson may have been deceived by appearances, but he did not lose his head even when he wrote of James Otis.

"I have no talent at painting, or describing characters," wrote Hutchinson in 1765.¹ Perhaps that was true at the time he wrote his first volume, but it was not true ten or fifteen years later when he was at work upon the third. Of the various portraits of contemporaries with which its pages are brightened not the least remarkable is that of a gentleman from Northampton. His name was Joseph Hawley. And though Hawley was a leader of the anti-administration forces in the House of Representatives, I surmise that Hutchinson not only respected but even liked him. However that may have been, his description of Hawley is a vivid picture of a New Englander of the intense type, and I cannot resist the temptation to quote it here:

"Mr. Hawley was a native of Northampton in the county of Hampshire. His mother was sister of colonel Stoddard, who all his life had great influence in that county; and the nephew derived some of his importance from the uncle, but more from his own strong natural parts, improved by a liberal education, and the study and practice of the law. He had a very fair character as a practitioner, and some instances have been mentioned of singular scrupulosity, and of his refusing and returning fees when they appeared to him greater than the cause deserved. He was strict in religious observances. Being upon his return home from a journey, the sun set, upon a Saturday evening, when he was within a few miles of his house. He remained where he was until the sun set the next day, and then finished his journey. He was, however, violent in his resentments. He had been at the head of an opposition to the minister of the town where he lived, and the chief cause of his leaving the town and removing into another colony. In a few years after,

¹*New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVI (1872), 164.

he made a publick acknowledgment of his unwarrantable conduct in this affair, which he caused to be published in the newspapers. This ingenuous confession raised his character more than his intemperate conduct had lessened it. He was subject to glooms, which confined him, and rendered him, while they lasted, unfit for business. Men of this habit, when the glooms are off, frequently go into the contrary extreme; but he always maintained great decency and propriety of behaviour, with the appearance of gravity and seriousness, without any mixture of levity or undue freedom. He was more attended to in the house than any of the leaders, but less active out of it. He was sometimes carried by strength of passion farther than he could justify, but had too much virtue to go all lengths, and was the less fit for a complete partisan; and for this reason, probably he found it necessary to decline the employments and honours offered him, and to retire from business when his popularity was at the highest."¹

If Hutchinson's sketches of the characters of John Adams, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams are less striking than his description of Joseph Hawley, they are so, I believe, only because we are better acquainted with those gentlemen. He knew John Adams and all his idiosyncrasies, yet appreciated his intellect. He knew Hancock and wrote of him with a smile. He knew Samuel Adams, recognized his power as a politician, and thought less well of him than of the other two. In each case, it is true, Hutchinson saw other causes than pure patriotism determining the man's attitude in the decade preceding the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord, but who today will claim that other causes were not at least contributory?

In April, 1775, John Eliot, the future author of a *Biographical Dictionary* of New England worthies, asked Judge Trowbridge of the Superior Court for his opinion of Thomas Hutchinson. Trowbridge had

¹Thomas Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts-Bay*, III, 295-296.

known Hutchinson in the old days and had admired him. Later he had differed with him on the question of the propriety of a judge's accepting his salary from the General Court instead of from the Crown,¹ and thenceforth had little enthusiasm for him personally. But in speaking of his mental equipment Trowbridge declared that Hutchinson was "a man of great abilities, who could fit himself in a very little time for any business."² Whether in every field of intellectual effort Thomas Hutchinson could have measured up to this tribute I am not prepared to say, but the result of his sole venture in the writing of history suggests that Trowbridge's estimate of him was not far from correct.

¹Thomas Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts-Bay*, III, 442.

²John Eliot, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 274, note.

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