

*The Autobiographical Memoranda
of John Brock, 1636-1659*

EDITED BY CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON

FOR some years there has been in the Amherst College library a memorandum book in a late seventeenth-century hand and of such a prevailing piety as to discourage any attempt to decypher and identify it. Mr. William Piper, of Worcester, noted the presence of secular statements scattered here and there, and with the aid of these identified the author as John Brock, who graduated at Harvard in the Class of 1646. The manuscript is a copy of the original made not long after the author's death, probably by one of the Moodys of New Hampshire and Maine. Mrs. Henry S. Emerson of the Hitchcock Memorial Room of the Amherst College Library kindly gave us permission to extract the secular bits from the manuscript. When this was done it was noted that the dropping of the points which at the end of nearly every sentence indicated the omission of religious speculations would nowhere do violence to the meaning, so they were left out of this transcription in the interest of legibility. These extracts contribute nothing new or startling to the history of New England but they do add to our knowledge of Henry Dunster and his teaching methods, student life at the college, and conditions on the Isles of Shoals. They add one more to the meager list of narratives which illuminate the reasons for the settlement of New England. Their running comments on the Quakers, the Civil War in England, and supernatural phenomena contribute something to our knowledge of the New England mind.

John Brock was born at Stradbrook, in Suffolk, in 1620, a son of Henry Brock, presumably by the wife Elizabeth who came to America with him. When John began keeping these memoranda, probably while at college, he prefaced them by a summary of his early years:

From a Child I was well educated & kept in from gross & scandalous Courses in a great Measure & knew little amiss in my Ways but the good Council, & Example of my Parents at Length somewhat stayed with me. By Reading through admonitions of Parents in a Book called The Practice of Piety I found some Description, of the Misery of Men in Hell & of Happiness of the Godly which somewhat stirred me. I was brought up at the Latin School & there was not only very apt to my Book but did so love my Book that I would for the most Part choose to be studying while others were at Play. And I proceeded in Learning until I was almost fit for Cambridge but was discouraged by the wickedness of some from the same & so I gave over the School though to the Grief of my Parents who would have me to be a Schollar. God helpt me to see the Evil of the Idolitrous Worship & Ceremonies of the Church of England so as I durst not but travail to hear good Ministers. The Saints loved me & stirred me up & would yet have me joyn with them. Many Times I escaped abridgment of my Liberty by going by Night & in by Ways to hear good Ministers.

[1636] Encouragement & Light came . . . by a Doctrine of famous Mr Hooker about Gods Drawing a Soul unto Christ that makes the Soul come unto him.¹

[1637] I was encouraged . . . to love the Saints that were called Puritans But I had no Hopes to get to New England. Persecutors grew daily more odious in their Ways. Many that went with us to Gods House now they grow timerous & stay at home, to save their Purses & skins. The Lord . . . heard me to open a Way for us to leave England & to get the Society of a beloved Christian. My Parents brought him & his over the Seas to my greatest Comfort. The latter End of this Year we were full of Contrivances to get out of the Country my Parents having left their own and hired in a neighbour Town but there Worship was not so pure & my Parents could not escape the spiritual Courts.

[1638] Against the Season of Ships going all Stumbling Blocks were

¹ Thomas Hooker, *Poor Douting Christian Drawne unto Christ*. John Brock was using a copy of one of the first five editions, of which not one example can now be located.

removed . . . & so we put out to Sea but without a Minister & being amongst our Acquaintance. Our Voyage was long & not so stormy. Once God heard my poor desire to scatter a Turk that was coming in the Night to board us. We came all safe to Land, and our first Sermon was by Mr. Shepard . . . preached the 12th of August. The good People do bid us very welcom. The Magistrates is willing that we should stay here. My Fathers Acquaintance Mr Danforth was lately dead:² But we are very well respected by the Guardians of his Children & Mr. Collins³ is very kind unto us according to his Promise. We do admire what a happy People we do live amongst. But going to Dedham to see the People & our Countrymen there I find that God is with them also. The People encouraged me to come with our Family to Town & God has appointed out a Place for us there.⁴

[1639] But soon after I was taken very sick of the Spotted Feaver & after a little Recovery to go abroad I was taken sick of the Small Pox & that was a sore affliction & many died of it that came with us. I then offered my self to the Church & prayed to God to clear up my Condition to them: But they did not desire soon to admit me, lest I should delude them; being such a Sermon Runner in the old Land; & had been so wonted to spiritual things.

The next three pages of Brock's memorandum book are given over to groundless doubts as to his spiritual state. Finally, after "the wife of good-man Brocke" had been "received with good satisfaction unto the church" at Dedham, "John Brocke his son was received giving good satisfaction" on April 3, 1640. It was not until more than a year later that the goodman himself was admitted to the church, and then without any remark as to satisfaction. John took the freeman's oath on May 18, 1642. Interesting entries begin again under the date 1643:

Our Pastor⁵ asked me, How far I was learned in my Youth, & would have me to think of it, whether God might not call me to study, to re-

² Nicholas Danforth, of Cambridge, Selectman and Deputy, died in April, 1638.

³ Edward Collins, formerly of Ipswich, England, and one of the leading men of Cambridge in New England.

⁴ On September 8, 1638, Henry Brock purchased the lot and meadow of Joseph Shaw and at once began to participate in Dedham town meetings.

⁵ John Allin.

cover all again: & I had no Heart to it, but he followed me with Encouragements for so much as I had but a weak Body & so not able to follow Husbandry. I told him I had some mind to study the Original Tongues, for the Scripture Sake; & to that he perswaded me & proffered his Help. I have been contented, when I understood the Ceremonies in the University, that the Students must conform themselves to, in old England. I went down to Cambridge, & found a Friend that was very willing to let me be in their House. I saw Cause to deny my self the Delights of a married Estate, for the Work of God.⁶ Hard to leave my parents. I was saluted at Cambridge, with a Sacrament: and the Church did salute me without any Recommendation. I wanted, as a Stranger, some Society with Gods People, as formerly: That grieved me. My Tutor [Henry Dunster] very loving: I had good experimental Conference with his Wife;⁷ & so by little & little I knew many Saints there. I was but weakly in Body; but I had a very comfortable Study. Light came in by little & little about the Latine Tongue. Many precious Instructions were at Duties in the Colledge. A Gracious Tutor! I was glad of it. The Students are but vain: My Tutor will have them amended, & I am glad of it. The Cook was my Friend in cold mornings; I must be very thankful to God & Man for Respects shown to the meanest in the Colledge. Other dear Sisters sent to me to know what I did Want. I wanted nothing. I could not go to my Friends. Mr. Shepard spake very lovingly to me. I found one good one in the Colledge amongst the Students. I was encouraged to go & discourse with Mr. Shepard, & he was very loving & chearly. I was invited to three Seasons [of prayers] by some of the Church, & found much of God therein. Some good Brethren would come and talk & pray with me at Evenings. My Tutor would come & visit me & encourage me, & I was to go & stay with him. The Scriptures being opened every Day, did much to help me. I was an Informer, to further the Reformation in the Colledge. Satan would vex me to go home & leave off Studying. Corn is but scarce with us; but God heareth poor Prayers. The Lord blesseth my Logic Studies. Oft I am so troubled with Head-Ack, as I can not study. I can but take a View of some old Sermons. Studies sometimes are very hard. Fellow Students are helpful: I want the Lent of no Booke; & I have extraordinary Liberty to go into the Library. More Books lent me, till I can get some of my own. Many are

⁶ John Brock was twenty-three years old, six years older than the average freshman of that generation.

⁷ Mrs. Elizabeth (Glover) Dunster died in August, 1643.

so taken with the World, their Families being in such Streights, I pity them. My Studies go on but slowly at home.

[1644] We are seeking to get up a private Conference in the College. The Students suffer me to pray with them in the Tutors Absence: Not one goes to the Sacrament as yet. I rejoyce, That some Indians now come under our Government. Justice executed for adultery.⁸ Erroneous Persons are discovered & sent away, God be praised. Fishing is blessed for the Good of the Country. Secret Wickedness is discovered in some. Sisters are not so prudent in their Meetings. School Learning is Heavy. Church is watchful. Our Husbandry goes on comfortably without my Help. My Sister El. is not so humble & heavenly as is desired.⁹ Church Censures take Place upon some Masters of Families. Hypocrites joyn to our Churches to their own Ruine. My associates have lively Frames. My hard Studies are sweetned. I study Desertions. Indians threaten. Our Family is comfortably maintained. My Parents are more disabled by Fire; & my Help falls short at college: I am about to return home. Warrs are hot in England. Alas! Alas! We look for a Skermish with the Indians. My Learning doth go forward, & I hope to go to the College again. We look for a firreign Enemy, Alas! Through God, the Indians are quiet. My aged Father is maimed; I am afraid it will hinder my Studies. Some of the wild ones in the College begin to turn. I have thought to persuade to a private Meeting. Some of our Friends are dead in England: Some live thro the Wars. The Workings of Young Students are deceitful.¹⁰ I would be more exemplary at College. I am sorry to hear such vain Talk: I am glad, when I do not eat with them. A Meeting for good Conference is attained. My Frame is heavenly & chearly. I wish that the Church were not so cold & carnal: But the Pastors Sickness did move them. My Tutor doth glorify God for his singular Blessing on my Studies. As the Students grow better, & are acquainted with me, so I am refreshed by them. Foolish Fashions are come from England. Not so much Prayer in New England. I see more Cause to love some of the Students, upon some Conferences. What a blessed Mercy was it that we came to New England! Every Soul of us have been much bettered. Tis hard with the College for Provisions: a hard Winter.

[1645] The Churches of Christ do now multiply in their Members. Young Students would joyn in our Meetings for their Edification. Young People begin to awaken from the Dead. We have great Prepara-

⁸ James Britton and Mary Latham.

⁹ Elizabeth Brock married Robert Gowing on October 31, 1644.

¹⁰ Two ministers' sons were detected in burglary and whipped by President Dunster.

tions to fight with the Indians; but God has Ways to prevent it. I did not intend, at first, to study for the Ministry, I am more encouraged. The Bugs came into the College, for to rouse them to Prayers. College is but poor. Praises for Old England abounds. God makes more to listen to me at College. Water is wanting. Mark the end of the Wicked. Anabaptism wandreth. Merchants have their Trials. God Grant I may not love humane Learning too much! Many Students love me now. Signs in the Sun. Church Discipline is a Controversy.

[1646] The Images of the Sun to witt ooo forewont a great Mortality among us.¹¹ I am moved to go & preach to a People, to awaken me. Many Papists were burnt, Thanks be to God. The Worms anoy us; but Prayer chases them away. My Brother in Law must be awakened. God loves my Tutor. My Tutor is a Teacher.

[1647] A very moist Spring. I was moved to study for the Indians; but my Parents do not like it. I had Thots to study Physick to rapair my Health. Every body has gotten a Cold. My Heart was broken to hear some of the Indians open their mouths for God at the Synod.¹² The Lord shines afore some others of the Students. Every little makes a Mickle. A long Winter though moderate. Some Witches are discovered.¹³

[1648] I must go abroad, a little, to teach a School. My Schollars are childish. There are Fears of a Pest in the Country: Otherwise many die. The President is recovered; Blessed be God. The Synod prospers. Many hunger after Errors. They will have me to the College again. Church, at Virginia, broke up. They would have me to stay at the College. I find much of God in humane & divine Studies. More spiritual Friendship at College. My weak Memory! God will help me to my next degree.

Beginning in 1648 Brock kept school for at least two years at Rowley and began his preaching career there as assistant of the Reverend Ezekiel Rogers.

[1649] King is beheaded! O dreadful Judgment! The Beginning of Sorrows! Many sick of a Cold. The College want Provision. They would have me to go to the Charibdee Islands. A Thanksgiving after my Com-

¹¹ Governor Winthrop did not regard this phenomenon as a portent. See John Winthrop *The History of New England* (Boston, 1826), vol. 2, p. 254.

¹² The Synod met at Cambridge and John Eliot preached to the Indians there in their own language.

¹³ Margaret Jones, of Charlestown, was found guilty and hanged.

mencement.¹⁴ Alas! for his dear Church. Profaness & Errors grow very fast. I am to live & serve God in a Gentlemans House.

[1650] The Family is idle but once again shall I live in another Bodies House & have such Comfort as formerly. I am, by a mighty Hand, hindred from settling somewhere. They are provided, before the Letters come to Hand. I am a little croost. That I should be cast into a godly Family afore so many others that would have entertained me. I am advised again for the Islands: But the News of the Wickedness of the People takes away my Heart. I find Acceptance, Thanks be to God; & am encouraged to rest with them, tho among Strangers, yet God awakens some to be my Friends, to tell me where I had best to take my Diet; & the House is made an House of Prayer. I am helped to grow in Preaching, daily. Often I have Parleys with Strangers, of this, our Native Country.

Brock went to preach, not to the wicked people of the "Charibdee Islands," but to the fishermen on the Isles of Shoals. His memoranda for 1651 would seem to contradict John Langdon Sibley's assumption that he was the "Mr. Brookes" who was living at the college at this time.

[1651] The Saints, on the Main Land, do not yet forget me. Invitations to settle abroad, if the Lord be willing. I am comfortable with my Friends. I am saved from Sickness. I am, notwithstanding, called to return. A good Stomach is never wanting at these Islands. My Life is not comfortable through some troublesom Spirits; but I shall overcome them with Goodness—Everywhere my poor Preaching is blessed. Carnal Friendship is odious.

[1652] New England is sorely afflicted in their Names & Goods. If the Churches be not awakned I have some Fears that they have enjoyed the best. The Hand of God is much against us in our Fishing. My people have yet Breathings after Goodness. I am about to change my Habitation. The People are not so good, where I have been. There is a great want of Discretion in some Mens Trading. Our Fishermen find sore affliction in their way. Growth of Grace is very slow, The professing Indians are not to be trusted. Tis rare to see those to be very religious, that are employed in public affairs. My dear Parents are dead in one

¹⁴ Brock had taken his B.A. in 1646 after the usual three years' course and in 1649 he took his M.A.

week.¹⁵ My People are full of Joy at my Return. The Lord would have me think upon Settling. My Heart has taken deeply to Heart the Death of much renowned Mr. Cotton.

[1653] I have had more Experience of the Affections of my People towards me. Methinks that the Providence of God dothe lead me to tarry with mine another Year. The Lord has lately mercifully blessed them, in Healing the Breaches made by the last Storm. I am yet in the Dark about the Place of my Settling. Tis evident to me that I must not remove this Year. My People give me Encouragement to Gods Praise. Sweet things are revealed every day. Anabaptist Sectaries are the Instruments of exceeding Mischief, in this Age; but they are not far from Conversion, or Dispersion.

[1654] Our Neighbours are over full of English Goods; but in this Country tis very scarce. My Journey to visit my Friends is exceeding profitable. My Longings are much satisfied at a Sacrament. News is from England of the Lords Regard of our poor Prayer. The Liberty of England is Heart Shaking to us. Their Peace may Occasion some Disturbance among us. I am about to visit the South Parts. My Friends in England are high in their Notions. The present Government is not so pleasant to them. The Church is much out of Order. Many Mercies are with New England. Provisions are cheap. The French are surprised by Men of War from England. God grant it may not be the Beginning of Sorrows to us! Errors are restrained. My People do not appear to be settled. I know not where I shall winter. The People begin to seal their Hearts again. Fishing is much weakened this Season. Men attend the Wars. We have our Trials in this Wilderness, in all Respects. God will find out the Sins of Traders, amongst us. Our Fishermen are their own Foes, they will learn to see it. A miserable Thing to be a rebel.

[1655] They say that protestant Nations league together: A precious Favour. The Tidings from England is of great Respect shewn to Gods poor People from the highest Magistrate there. I know not how I shall be disposed: I am likely to be deprived of Something towards my comfortable Being. Now there is a quaking Sect arose, in whom more apparently Satan reigns, the good Lord save all his dear Children therefrom! Tis lamentable how many intestine Troubles be in the Country. God pluckt off some of Englands Feathers. We are yet marvellously favoured with Peace & Plenty & now God is in a Way to help the

¹⁵ The Dedham records report the deaths of Henry and Elizabeth Brock in 1652 but do not give the day and month. On October 18 John Brock disposed of a house and land, presumably their home.

Country out of some Debts. Though I knew no other, but I should have remained with my Handful of People; yet by the winterly Weather I was necessitated to be absint & to sojourn with another People . . . till all the Town were moved, both good & bad towards Christ . . . all the Providences working there to stay me Three Months.

[1656] Our Neighbour Dutch are oppressed with the Heathen. My People are set upon some other Exercises for their Souls. Satan is busie. The Country bewail the Case of England & hope for the Renewing of the Love of Christ unto them. The magistrates stir, blessed be God, against Heresies. It is lamentable what declining Times we live in. I hope that God will provide well for my Friends who are to be dispos'd in England. The Quakers are further crushed, the Lord be pleased therewith. I know not how to live here another Year, unless some Providences may appear to my Comfort. My People can not endure to hear that I should leave them. News of some of my People in Spanish Slavery. Satan is very busie to make some Disturbance amongst the People; but God will tread him down. I hope it shall be for the better that I stay with the Islanders. Foul weather many Lords Days. The Lord will rebuke Satan, that is troublesome of my People. I have many Devisings to know whether I should not remove to a better People; though my Imployment is good. Ministers are in small Request with the Vulgar: Opinionists swarm in some Places. Fears are great in Regard England for the Embargo of Ships from the Carrabee Islands. Never did any prosper in their Insurrections against Majestratcy or Ministry. I see not my Way as yet of a Yokefellow.

[1657] Its my Part to take my People if I may with a certain Cunning. I am yet confirmed that 'tis best to reserve a Liberty to Illustration. I begin yet forsee some better work for me to wait upon either here or otherwhere. The Newfound Spring is famously blessed. O that the Lord should be pitiful to so many in the use of the Spring. Motions follow me for a Remove after a Prentiship to further the Trade. I saw a Resemblance of a Trooper in the Air; the Lord fit us for what he shall call us unto. The Madness of the quaking Notions! I cannot yet obtain of God a Liberty to change my Condition. It's needless to have a Dependance on Creatures. I seldom pray for any Encouragement about any particular, but the Lord doth some way give me an answer. My Heart is towards the Governors of the Saints.

[1658] Vengeance is poured out on Drunkenness of Strangers. The Flemin doe encourage our Trading. My way for a Remove opens more

unto me. Some old People make Disturbance for that young Ones do not comport with their Experiences. The horrible Sin of the English Idolatries. The Lord clear us more & more of it! This Country is more exercised with Losses at Sea. Planters begin to contrive for their own Supplies. Quakers are more in Sufferings. The State [Commonwealth] yet much malign'd. My Way seems now to be opened from the Islands. I see not my Call to change my Condition. I shall have more Insight into Physick. I have been seeking to go from the Islands, but Gods Providences lead me back again. Saints are lively. Fishermen are much tried for want of Bread. Many Encouragements wait on me to help to write some Sermons fair at large. I am an unprofitable Preacher, as to any full Notes taken of any of my Sermons. I will not despise my former Work.

[1659] The Lord is my dear Tutor, now my Tutor is deceased.¹⁶ This Year I am about it to have some Conveniences or Nothing at the Islands. I am held in a strait for the Present in Regard of my comfortable Being this winter.

So end the secular memoranda in John Brock's volume. Three years later he removed to the First Church of Reading, now the First Church of Wakefield, where he took over the pulpit and the widow of Samuel Hough. He died on June 18 1688, after a long and useful ministry. From the testimony of his contemporaries Cotton Mather compiled a glowing biography which appears in *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), book 4, pp. 141-3.

¹⁶ Henry Dunster died on February 27, 1658/9.

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