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Source: *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Oct., 1953 - May, 1957, Third Series, Vol. 71 (Oct., 1953 - May, 1957), pp. 50-63

Published by: Massachusetts Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25080475>

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The Diary of a Colonial Clergyman Peter Thacher of Milton

EDWARD PIERCE HAMILTON*

WHEN John Langdon Sibley sat down in the old Harvard library to write the life of Reverend Peter Thacher (A.B., Harvard, 1671), he had quite a little source material from which to draw. Thacher's name was recorded a few times in the college archives, he was a friend and classmate of Samuel Sewall, in whose diary he often appears, and his connection with the Danforths gained him a mention in Samuel H. Emery's *Ministry of Taunton* (Boston, 1853). The *New-England Weekly Journal* printed an obituary of some value a week after his death late in 1727, but the main source of Sibley's information was *The Comfortable Chambers Opened and Visited* (Boston, 1728), the sermon which Cotton Mather preached at Thacher's funeral. The resulting study¹ covered several pages, recited the graduate's life and virtues quite as well as could be expected, and showed him to have been a leading, if not eminent, minister of the period. It did not of course tell us what he was really like as a man. Only in rare cases, such as those of Sewall and Cotton Mather, can we learn much about the man himself.

Early this year I was permitted to examine and study Peter Thacher's diary, and immediately a wide window was opened into his life and character, thus giving us further insight into the thoughts and conditions of his day. This diary deserves and will receive much more study than I have been able to give it, and it will add its share to our knowledge of the period, but for the purposes of this paper I have drawn on it only in an attempt to picture Peter Thacher as a living man.

The diary, most kindly lent to me by Mrs. Henry V. Hubbard, has never to my knowledge been available for detailed study since John G. Palfrey used it in 1864. At various times certain scholars have been shown portions of it by the family, and Albert K. Teele was allowed

* This paper was read at the May, 1955, meeting.

¹ John Langdon Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University*, II (Cambridge, 1881), 370-379.

30.9.79. Sab. I preached both parts of y^e day
 from 17. Jer. 17. god was pleased to help in
 praying & preaching blessed be his name.
 This day I received a letter from David & an
 other from m^r White who sent mee three
 & 30 pound of English goods.
 1. Dec. 79. y^e day I studyed part of it & mended y^e
 stove w^{ch} breaking y^e night before had like to have
 done mee a great injury. y^e Evening my Dear & I
 went to m^r Hinckleys to give a visit.
 2. Dec. 79. y^e morning while I was at duty in Tho.
 Huckins came to call mee to his Mother who
 was very ill with w^{ch} I prayed were was Eld^r
 Chipman who y^e day removed his Daughter to
 m^r Huckins. y^e I came home & wrote after
 w^{ch} she sent for some wine & I gave it &
 carried her some palsy water w^{ch} revived
 her. y^e Evening m^r Hinckley was to visit
 mee & I told him y^e next day wee intended
 to spend y^e after-noon in prayer for her
 & desired him to be y^e. after w^{ch} I went
 to writing.
 3. Dec. 79. y^e morning I studyed y^e Edward Lewis
 came to see mee. y^e after-noon I spent at
 Deacon Cowpers with m^r Hinckley Eld^r Chip
 man & some other brethren in prayer for
 m^r Huckins. Eld^r began y^e Bro. Bearce y^e m^r
 Hinckley & East my selfe. y^e night m^r Bacon
 brought us two Ducks.
 4. Dec. 79. I studyed hard all day in prepa-
 ration for y^e sabbath. y^e day Eld^r Chipman
 gave mee above a bussell of oates.
 5. Dec. 79. y^e morning & Co^l Huckins & c^o
 v^l L 21 | x f c v n f l i d e e - a i v u o
 - A a i v u c l i l . 5th : Co day I study
 ed hard. y^e day m^r Thomas Huckins & Ja.
 Gorum went toward Boston & m^r John
 Sawthorne by water.
 6. Dec. 79. y^e day wee had afore storme of
 wind & snow before it was at y^e highest it
 pleased y^e Lord to bring in m^r Barnaby Saw-
 thorne from Boston who otherwise woud
 have been much indangered. y^e day I study-
 ed hard all day. y^e night was Extreame cold.
 7. Dec. 79. Sab. y^e day was very cold. y^e day
 I preached both parts of y^e day 17. Jer 17.

A PAGE FROM THE DIARY OF PETER THACHER

Enlarged one-quarter

to draw on it quite extensively for his *History of Milton*, which appeared in 1887. The diary commences in January, 1678/79, and concludes for all practical purposes with a description of the arrival of Andros in 1686. The years between are covered in considerable detail, although many of the entries are reports of only ordinary doings. The great joy of this journal is its simplicity, its down-to-earth recording of the daily life of a country minister. There is none of the vanity and ostentation of Mather's diary, or of the life and doings of Boston that we find in Sewall's; but Thacher led no hermit's life and was well in touch with the outside world.

I propose first to outline Peter Thacher's background and then to draw on his diary for further information about him. He came of a family of clergymen. The first Thacher of whom we can be certain was a Reverend Peter, born in 1588, a graduate of Queens at Oxford in 1603, and a fellow of Corpus Christi in 1613. He became vicar of Milton Clevedon, Somersetshire, later moving to St. Edmunds in Salisbury. His son Thomas, born in 1620, came to New England in 1635 with his uncle Anthony² and was educated by Charles Chauncy, which was the nearest he ever came to Harvard. Our Peter's mother was the daughter of Ralph Partridge, the Duxbury minister and one of the most eminent clergymen of the day. Thomas Thacher was minister of Weymouth for twenty years, although his son Peter was born in Salem. In 1657 he was receiving the highest salary of any minister in Suffolk County, £100. He moved to Boston in 1664 and practiced medicine for a few years, preaching an occasional sermon as well. In 1669 he took over the pulpit of the Boston church later to be known as the "Old South." Cotton Mather stated that Thomas Thacher ministered to the body as well as to the soul, and this is verified by the fact that the first medical treatise published in this country was a broadside written by Thacher which gave directions for treating the smallpox.

As a small boy, our Peter fell into the headrace of a water mill and was carried through the wheel without suffering any injury, a most remarkable escape. He next appears in history as an undergraduate of the class of 1671. He took his second degree in June, 1674, and was chosen third fellow. During the winter of 1674/75, while serving as a tutor, he received the unusual privilege of living in Boston,

² Who gave his name to Thacher's Island, near Gloucester.

for what purposes we do not know. He was a great friend of Samuel Danforth, son of the college treasurer who later became deputy governor, and followed him to England for a lengthy visit. We do not know why he went or what he did when there, but it has been said that he studied medicine. A letter written by his father to Thacher in England has survived, and one infers from it that he may have been looking for a parish in the old country. He returned to Boston in the spring of 1677. Within a year he was invited to preach at the Barnstable church, went there in 1679, and remained until he received a call to Milton in the fall of 1680. He soon accepted a permanent settlement and devoted the rest of his life to the Milton church. He had married Theodora, daughter of Reverend John Oxenbridge of the First Church of Boston, shortly after his return from abroad. His eldest son, Oxenbridge, became a Boston merchant, father of the lawyer Oxenbridge, and his son Peter became minister at Middleborough. There were also two daughters and a son by a second marriage. He died in 1727 after a very long and peaceful ministry, during part of which he preached once a month to the Indians at the Ponkapoag reservation. In 1723 he collaborated with Samuel Danforth (A.B., Harvard, 1683), minister at Taunton, and John Danforth (A.B., Harvard, 1677), minister at Dorchester, in *An Essay . . . concerning the Singing of Psalms . . .*, which favored psalm singing in the "New Way" and insisted that church singing must be harmonious. Cotton Mather, in Peter's funeral sermon (which incidentally was Mather's last), stated that he devoted much time to helping the sick and spent very considerable sums out of his own pocket on medicine for his parishioners.

That is the gist of what history knows of Peter Thacher from sources other than his diary, and, considering his relative unimportance and the many years that have elapsed, it is quite a respectable résumé of a long and busy life. We know when he lived and what he did, but practically nothing about him as a living, thinking person.

The diary, now in the possession of this Society, is in two small notebooks, written in a fine but very legible hand, and portions of it are in cipher or shorthand. The second volume ends in 1686. In the early years of the last century a third volume existed: certain pages of church records were removed from it, and these are now in the possession of the Milton Historical Society, but the rest of the book is lost.

In 1907 George Winslow Thacher made or had made a very careful typewritten transcript of the surviving two volumes, which on account of its convenience I have used for this study. This has been microfilmed and a copy deposited in the library of this Society.

The first entry in this diary is January 2, 1678/79, when Thacher was living somewhere in the vicinity of Boston, Dorchester for a guess, as his landlady was a Minot, and she lived somewhere between Boston and Braintree. In February he moved his family to Boston to his own house. He lived next door to Mr. Allen, and if this is Reverend James Allen, his house was on Beacon Street somewhere near the present site of the Boston Athenæum. I cannot determine much about what he was doing at this period beyond substituting in the pulpit of various churches in Boston and its vicinity. He worked at settling his father's estate, examining the longhand and shorthand notes on it, and building up his energy on St. Patrick's Day by breakfasting on swan pie. He was very industrious in the preparation of his sermons and devoted much of his time to study. It is evident from numerous entries throughout the diary that he had some means of his own, and at this time he seems to have been living a pleasant life about town, with some study and preaching and some attention to business affairs. He often remarks about being ill, a condition which continues to a considerable extent throughout the period of the diary. In April he "played at nine pins in my alley" and paid five shillings sixpence for ninepins and a bowl, while in the following month he bought an Indian maidservant for £5 down and £5 due in three months.

He must have inherited his father's library,³ 410 volumes valued at £110, for he moved it into his study in July. There is no question either of his piety or of his religious sincerity. He often spent the morning in private prayer and was very critical of his own sermons. "The Lord was pleased to warme my heart both in praying and preaching." "This evening God Warmed mee in family prayer." "Preached . . . was cold and dull in the morning, very faint at noon . . . but much enlarged in sermon and baptism." Sometimes all the family kept a fast, sometimes one member alone. There is an interesting note about his hired girl, Lydia Chapin, who "kept a private fast in the garret, making believe that she went abroad."

In September of 1679 he was one of the Old South's representatives

³ Which Thomas had inherited from his father-in-law, Ralph Partridge.

to the synod at Boston, the other two being Thomas Savage and John Hull. The next month he moved with his family to Barnstable,⁴ took over the pulpit on trial, and immediately ran into trouble. All the details are not clear, and we only have his side of the story, for the Barnstable church records mention his name but once. The church and the parish appear to have been dominated by Thomas Hinckley, then deputy governor of Plymouth Colony and later to be governor, and he was a man who expected to have his way. Moreover he was not liberal in his religious views, and, as I shall later show, Thacher was something of a practical Christian. Hinckley's henchman, John Chipman, was one of the ruling elders, and these two had been the ones who invited Thacher to Barnstable for the second time in the spring of this year, yet they failed to greet him upon his arrival, an interesting omission. I judge that he did not receive a formal call from the church, but from these two agents only, and the church remained divided over his choice, some quarter of the score and a half communicants opposing. I am inclined to think that some of this opposition may have been directed against him as Hinckley's choice, but there probably were other reasons as well. Toward the end Hinckley turned against him, but perhaps not openly. Thacher apparently made many friends, and the family fitted happily into the life of the town.

It is interesting to watch, through the diary, the working of Thacher's mind as he strives to decide whether or not to accept the call of a divided church. It was a major decision for, if he accepted, he would probably remain for the rest of his life. One can see the religious aspect of the matter. Was this the place to which the Lord had called him? Was he sufficiently worthy and capable of filling the needs of this church? There was also the practical and political side. Could he manage a divided church? Might his acceptance result in an actual division? The diary clearly shows these and similar thoughts running through his mind, and they were not selfish ones. It is obvious that he was thinking of the welfare of the Barnstable church and not merely of his own future.

In May of 1680 a call came from the Milton church, and he thereupon declined the Barnstable pulpit, but continued to preach there on

⁴ He had visited Barnstable on two Sundays in the spring of 1678 and in July of that year had been given a call by Elder Chipman and Mr. Allen. He referred them to his father, and Reverend Thomas wrote out a number of requirements to be met before he would give his approval. Peter made another visit to Barnstable shortly before the synod.

a temporary basis. By July we find the Cape church trying to get him released by the Bay church, and shortly thereafter Thacher was surprised by the arrival of a delegation from Milton to help him pack and move. Despite this, he and Elder Chipman went to Boston in an endeavor to get Milton to release him, while at the same time Barnstable issued a formal call. It is somewhat hard to understand Thacher's hesitancy and lack of decision, except when we realize that he felt that he required both an external call, that is, from the church, as well as an internal one. The last evidently was his own final decision that this was the place to which the Lord had called him, and this was the question which was not yet entirely clear in his own mind. A surprising and rather delightful touch was given the proceedings by Elder Chipman's telling Thacher that Deputy Governor Hinckley thought it might be a good idea to cast lots in order to determine God's mind in this case. The church body gave much thought to this sporting proposition, but the suggestion was not followed. Hinckley and Elder Chipman met together with Samuel Torrey of the Weymouth church and the ministers of all the Boston churches, James Allen, Increase Mather, and Samuel Willard, for a discussion of Barnstable's second call. The diary, however, fails to record what they decided.⁵ Finally, after a further period of hesitancy, Thacher and his family left the Cape for Milton, accompanied as far as Sandwich by sixty-nine parishioners on horseback.

One interesting sidelight is an entry which recorded Elder Chipman as saying that he and Hinckley were reputed able to make or break any minister of the Barnstable church. It seems probable that Thacher made a wise decision in not settling in Barnstable. The following year Jonathan Russell was called and he remained there for the rest of his long life. During his pastorate the parish finally divided on geographical lines, and it is possible that this factor may have had something to do with the lack of unanimity over the church's choice of Thacher. On the other hand I am inclined to think he had a touch of liberalism not entirely suited to all the members of the church.

While he was living on the Cape Thacher made various trips to

⁵ See their letter to Hinckley and Barnabas Lothrop, Boston, September 23, 1680, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 4th Ser., v (1861), 43-48, in which they suggested that Hinckley and the church be more humble and not blame Thacher for what was largely their own fault.

Boston, usually on horseback, visited Thacher cousins in Yarmouth, and journeyed as far east as Eastham and as far west as Bridgewater, where he sold a piece of land which he owned there. He continued to study hard for his sermons, but was often interrupted by visits of parishioners. I judge that there was no doctor in Barnstable, for he records administering various remedies around town. At the same time he was often quite ill himself and at one time was forced to take a clyster of tobacco smoke in order to obtain relief.

Thacher and his family moved into the Milton parsonage in September of 1680. On June 1, 1681, he was formally ordained as minister of the Milton church, a position he was to hold for almost forty-seven years. The church gave him a unanimous call, and there is no hint of anything other than complete satisfaction on both sides, a far different condition from the troubled months at Barnstable. There is a note in the diary shortly after he was ordained about Mrs. Thacher's preparing for church membership. One would expect that, as the daughter of the minister of the First Church in Boston, she would have been accepted there before her marriage and would have had a letter of dismission to the Milton church. Thacher's life now becomes the placid existence of a country parson, and the years move serenely on, except for the many bouts of illness which continue to plague both him and his family. Milton, in those days a small country town of some 300 inhabitants, was within easy distance of Boston, and we find the Thachers going to town very often, for shopping, to sell butter and other produce, to Thursday lecture, or just visiting. Sometimes they stay in Boston overnight, more often they return to Milton. Thacher went quite regularly to the Boston lecture, often went to the Weymouth lecture, and sometimes to the one in Dedham. He continues to devote much time to study, visits around the parish, attends to his private business affairs, and sometimes goes picnicking or hunting in the Blue Hills. Just before he was ordained, he bought a gun, and a few days later the barrel and lock of a second one. There are only two references in the diary to hunting. Once he went with one of his brothers after pigeons and got five, while on another occasion he and three friends went deer hunting without success.

He brought two servants to Milton, the Indian slave girl Peg and Lydia Chapin, the faithful hired girl. Lydia was with him from 1677 to at least 1689, except for a short period when, having set her cap

unsuccessfully at a Barnstable youth, she went home for a bit to get over the affair. Thacher appears to have the use of two family Negro slaves at this time, but within a month or so of coming to Milton he also took on a boy, who presumably was to do chores for his keep and a little schooling. In November, 1681, he still had the boy, and in addition hired a man at £12 a year,⁶ and the following year, failing to get the indentured English servant he wanted, he bought a Negro slave for £20. Two slaves and three servants constitute much more of an establishment than we would expect for a New England country minister, and would, I should think, have caused talk in town, but there is no sign that it did.

Thacher was evidently engaging in trade on the side, probably only as an importer, but information on his activities is not very specific. He had a London agent who sent him various goods for sale, and in 1679, while still living in Boston, he learned that he had lost £40 worth at sea, quite a material loss. There are constant entries concerning borrowing and repaying of various, but usually minor, sums of money. He had a number of cows, and, by 1686, a considerable flock of sheep. I suspect that he was quite a horse trader. He sent two horses to the West Indies for sale, hoping to get a Negro man out of the proceeds, and next month traded his mare for a black horse. Within little more than another fortnight, or as he called it "this day fourteen nights," he has bought two more horses.

There was certainly a fair amount of leisure and play, for one pleasant October day in 1681 Thacher went with a party to the "pillar of stones" in the Blue Hills on a picnic. He was loaded down with a quarter of lamb and other kinds of food. Later the party went back to his house and sat around and drank and smoked. The following week he went with a group from Dorchester to visit Captain Clap at Castle William in Boston harbor. He made a trip to Duxbury to visit his brother Ralph every so often and once went back to spend a day or two on the Cape. Barnstable friends dropped in at Milton, sometimes staying overnight.

Thacher's religious activities centered, of course, on the preparation of the lengthy prayers and sermons required twice each Sunday, except for the relatively rare occasions when some other minister

⁶ The town at this time paid Thacher a salary of £70.

would act as his substitute. This required many hours of study and preparation, probably in the nature of three days a week. Then there were the Boston lecture, parish visits, and the ministers' meetings. These last were usually held about every two months at the homes of the various ministers of the group. The one to which he belonged consisted of Cambridge, Dedham, Dorchester, Milton, Medfield, Hull, Braintree, Weymouth, and, apparently, Bridgewater, although the last town was in the Plymouth Colony. Hingham and Roxbury should be expected to appear in this group but are not recorded. These meetings were, I judge, essentially clerical refresher sessions, but there certainly was a social side as well. Ministers from a distance would spend the night (Thacher once had four of them sleeping in his bed), there would be good food and drink, and, I hope, some good secular talk as well. Mrs. Thacher bought strawberries for one of the meetings in Milton.

Other religious duties which are recorded only occasionally were trips to assist at the ordination of a new minister and command appearances with the other elders at the Boston Town House to confer with what Thacher called the "Court of Assistance." The elders usually dined with the magistrates on these occasions. At such a meeting in November, 1683, Governor Simon Bradstreet asked the ministers what to do about the quo warranto out against the charter. They advised yielding gracefully as they thought that the more essential of the colony's rights might thus be retained.

There are indications which make one believe that Peter Thacher was somewhat liberal in his religion. He lived through a period when there was a great growth in the spirit of tolerance, and his life bridged the gap from the intolerance of an Endicott almost to the first glimmerings of Unitarianism. Sibley felt that Thacher believed "more in the graces and charities of a Christian life than in the severe teachings of a harsh and ungracious theology." This is a little unjust to the period, because by the time that Thacher was in college the intolerance of the early theocracy was rapidly breaking down, and in the latter days of his life practically complete religious freedom was being enjoyed by every well-behaved congregation. I will agree, however, that in this respect Peter Thacher kept a little ahead of his times, and I think that this can be proved by an entry or two from his diary. Once when he preached at the North Meetinghouse, a Quaker came in and

sat through the sermon, telling Thacher afterward that, if he would preach another such sermon, he would come to hear it. After he moved to Milton he discoursed with a Quaker for two hours, and we may be sure that they argued about questions of faith. By far the most interesting entry of this nature is in January, 1681/82, where Thacher noted that he and a layman acted as moderators at a meeting held to debate the Quaker religion. This clearly shows not only his own spirit of liberalism, but also to how great an extent religious toleration had been achieved while the Bay Colony was still under the old charter.

It is obvious that Peter Thacher was quite well-to-do and must have had other sources of income than his salary. I could not at first understand how he was able to linger in England for a year, nor how he supported a wife and family while waiting for a church. Then I learned that his mother's father, Reverend Ralph Partridge, had a considerable fortune, owning lands and houses both in this country and in England. After his death Mrs. Thacher inherited the properties abroad, and it is quite possible Peter's visit to England may have been concerned with them. Thomas Thacher married, as a second wife, Margaret Webb, widow of Jacob Sheaffe, reputedly one of the richest of the early inhabitants of Boston, and in 1675 he was keeping a coach, said to be the only one in the country at that time.⁷ The diary shows that there were tense moments in settling the estate of Thomas Thacher and that the stepmother at one time took legal action against Peter in connection with the Negro slaves, Frank and Nan.⁸ These, I think, eventually went to his brothers, Ralph and Thomas, although Peter had the loan of them on occasions. We find all three brothers giving a release to the Sheaffe heirs against any claims due to their father's marriage and receiving a lump sum payment of £480. In 1684 Hezekiah Usher, the younger, brought suit against Peter after failure to reach an agreement on some unknown piece of business and lost the case. Thacher paid his lawyer, Lieutenant Holbrook, ten shillings for his services. A little before this he had bought a farm in Milton, and was paying six per cent interest on the mortgage. He

⁷ According to William Harris, quoted in John G. Palfrey, *History of New England*, 5 vols. (1858-90), III, 304*n*.

⁸ *The Records of the Suffolk County Court, 1671-1680*, Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications*, XXIX-XXX (1933), II, 1170, show that the stepmother also successfully sued Peter to recover a cloak, presumably his father's and worth £3.

owned a house in Boston, leased for most of this period to "Mr. Buckley," probably Peter Bulkeley, and the rent appears to have been £22 a year. He also owned a house and land in England which he eventually sold for £130.

Despite Cotton Mather's statement about his medical practice there is little in the diary to bear it out, but it is quite possible that this was a development of later years. There is a great deal about illness and administration of simple home remedies, usually a laxative pill, but there are also several entries about sending for the doctor. Once when his daughter Theodora was very sick he thought it was probably the result of the cold milk and marigold jam she had eaten. The poor child was seven months old. Three months later she indulged in eating "chuckalett" with the result that might have been expected. Another time when his daughter had a fever he gave her as much powder of fox lungs as would lie on a threepenny bit. Once when his son had a fever they laid a fowl to his feet for four hours. On a day when Peter had a cold Mrs. "Dwite" gave him a conserve of red roses and egg yolk which furnished him considerable relief. We know that he studied medicine to some extent, for one day in August, 1679, he "read a little physick and mended the garden gate." Various notes about illness and administration of simple remedies abound, but when persons in Milton were really ill they sent to Dedham for Dr. Avery.

Scattered throughout the diary there are many little odd bits that add to our knowledge both of the living conditions of the period and of the secular activities of a New England clergyman. I was surprised to learn that Thacher owned an alembic and distilled spirits for his own consumption. There are various notes about food that are of interest, such as serving an Indian pudding as a main dish to guests, but he also noted dining on fresh beef and roast goose, followed by a duck supper. One morning he breakfasted upon salt fish and eggs, another on a chicken pie. I was greatly cheered to find justification for what is reputed to be an old New England custom: "Had . . . apple py for breakfast."

There are various little homely touches that make the diary so human, and I have culled a few of them here. One Sunday at church in January "I was near a hour and halfe in my first prayer . . . and an hour in sermon. I sweet much soe that my shirt was wet to my back."

"My dear and I went strawburying with some friends of Brush Hill. I was very sick for two hours in the evening. . . ." The family went by water to Barnstable in a ketch. Mrs. Thacher, the baby, and Lydia were all very seasick and "I was forced to bee nurse." On a trip to Boston he had the temerity to buy his wife a morning gown as well as "a bale of chuckalat." ". . . and found that my Indian girle had like to have knocked my Theodora in head by letting her fall wherefore I took a good walnut stick and beat the Indian to purpose till shee promise never to doe soe any more. After this I studied. . . ." One day the neighbors were bringing in the minister's wood. He gave them supper and "had the viol afterward." "This morning I broke of the gouse egges to see whether it was not rotten and was almost overcome by the stink of it. I took some wald-nut-water presently after it but it was a good while before I could get the smell out of my stomack."

There is great interest to me in the following lines: "I spent much time about the watch but could not make it doe." A few years ago I, too, had the pleasure of tinkering with Peter Thacher's watch, but I can report that I did "make it doe," and it still runs very nicely. (The watch which I overhauled was one that he owned at a somewhat later date, given to the Milton Historical Society by the Bostonian Society.)

I have now been living in close association with Peter Thacher for several weeks through the medium of his diary, and while I cannot say that I know him intimately, I certainly have more than a passing acquaintance. There is no question at all about the sincerity of his religion and his freedom from any touch of hypocrisy, but such was only to be expected from a minister of his period and background. The unexpected aspect is that of the businessman, how successful a one we cannot tell, but an owner of rent-producing properties and an importer of English goods, something which we would not at all expect in a country parson. He was, of course, hardly a typical country parson, for in addition to his own undoubted qualities, he was the son of a prominent Boston minister, and his wife was the daughter of another leading clergyman. He was a good friend of Cotton Mather, whose tutor he had been, and Samuel Sewall was his classmate. His social standing, entirely aside from his profession, was of the soundest. I wish that I knew more about his sporting activities and whether he kept up his shooting in the Blue Hills. I hope that he

did. He liked his pipe and a drink with friends. Entries in this diary make me believe that he did not take himself overseriously, but I fear that perhaps he did not have too much sense of humor. We know that he appreciated good music. All in all, we have a very live and well-rounded man, a religious one, but also a most practical man of affairs, one who could give sound advice to the governor and the magistrates, who could associate easily with both high and low, and who, aside from his periods of illness, enjoyed life and the world around him.

Is it a coincidence that the last regular entry in the diary records the end of an era?

December 19. 1686. (being Sabbath) Sir Edmund Androws arived within the Ise-lands. The next day (20. 10. 1686) the troupe and the Boston Companys were in armes to waite his coming ashore, and the President and Counsel, and the Old Governor, and Deputy and magistrates were to waite his come ashore. When hee came to Land, rabble [*illegible*] three shouts, the Prsident Joseph Dudley Esquire went first to welcome him ashore, then the old Governor then Mr. Stoughton Esquire, then then T. D.⁹ Esquire deputy Governor. After due salutation hee was gaurded by the horse and foot and these Gentle men into the Counsel-house and soe went into the Court chamber and took the Chaire and his Commission at lest part of was read. Then they goeing into the other room to dinner before dinner hee took the Ministers of Boston aside into the library and demanded one of the Meeting houses for the service of the Church of England to meet in said it might serve for him and them. They might meet at Eight in the morning and leave off at 10. . . .

A NOTE ON PETER THACHER'S SHORTHAND

The deciphering of Thacher's shorthand presents very considerable difficulties, not on account of the symbols themselves, but because of the abbreviations he made before enciphering. Sometimes they are phonetic, sometimes a special symbol he devised for a word, and often just plain unintelligible. He used John Willis' alphabet of about 1602, combining the symbols both forward and backward, based apparently upon ease of pen stroke. (This cipher was used for secrecy, not speed.) For example, for the word "give" or "gave" he used the letters G and V but wrote them in the reverse order, VG. For "wife" he wrote FW, although it is quite possible that he first made the W stroke and then added the F symbol above it and to the left. On the

⁹ Thomas Danforth.

other hand his "Boston" was a straight BSN and "some," SM. Below are given two examples of his shorthand entries, first as copied from the diary, next broken down into word groups, then transcribed into literal alphabetical letters, and finally put into words. It is quite

August 13, 1683

Co . 7 1 1 U " P 1 CC 7 - 7 1 c 5 c X

Co . 7 1 1 U " P 1 CC 7 - 7 1 c 5 c X

TH ED G VG MEE SM ASTTNS & DRS T LK T CHRIST

This day God gave me some assistance and desire to look to Christ.

November 29, 1683

U . 7 5 - α > c N 8 5 - 7 0 U Willard - v E 7 Co . 7

U . 7 5 - α > c N 8 5 - 7 0 U Willard - v E 7 Co . 7

ME DR WF & I EW T BSN LCR DRH MR WILLARD & W TRND TH ED

My dear wife and I went to Boston lecture heard Mr. Willard and we returned this day.

possible that I may have misinterpreted some of the symbols, but the results make perfectly good sense and so are probably correct. Various people, including the late Professor Henry V. Hubbard, a direct descendant of Thacher, have worked on this shorthand, and I have added but very little more. There yet remains much to be read in the diary by one who will have the time, patience, and skill to decipher it completely.