

**MEMOIR OF THE HON. JAMES
SAVAGE, LL.D., LATE PRESIDENT
OF THE MASSACHUSETTS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Memoir of the Hon. James Savage, LL.D., Late President of the Massachusetts Historical Society
by George S. Hillard

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GEORGE S. HILLARD

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OF THE

HON. JAMES SAVAGE, LL.D.,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY;

PREPARED AGREEABLY TO A RESOLUTION OF THE SOCIETY

1878
BY GEORGE S. HILLARD.

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1878.

MEMOIR

OF THE

HON. JAMES SAVAGE, LL.D.

THE name of Savage has been well known in New England for nearly two and a half centuries. Thomas Savage, the founder of the family, arrived in Boston in the year 1635, probably one of those who accompanied Sir Henry Vane. He was twenty-seven years old at the time. In 1637, he married Faith Hutchinson, daughter of the celebrated Ann Hutchinson, who gave our fathers so much trouble by her peculiar theological opinions, and her obstinacy in adhering to them. Thomas Savage was a man of influence and consideration in the infant colony up to the time of his death in 1682, and held many offices, both civil and military. He was often one of the representatives of the town in the General Court, was Speaker in 1659 and frequently afterward.

In 1680, he was chosen by the Colony one of the Assistants, which office he held till his death. He was one of a committee appointed in 1673 to erect a barricade in the harbor of Boston for defence against a fleet then expected from Holland. Out of this barricade grew, in less than forty years, the Long Wharf, a small portion of which has continued ever since the property of some member or members of the family. Thomas Savage was Captain of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, and was commander of the forces in King Philip's War at its opening, and served during its continuance with reputation. Upon his death, a funeral sermon was preached by the Rev. Samuel Willard, pastor of the Third Church, of which Major Savage was one of the founders. The sermon was printed in 1684 by Samuel Green. A copy of this sermon was given to Mr. James Savage, the subject of this Memoir, by Mr. John Farmer. On the fly-leaf is the following inscription in the handwriting of Mr. Savage:

"This sermon was presented to me by John Farmer, Esq., of Concord, N. H. It was taken out of a volume by the Rev. Samuel Willard, Vice-President of Harvard College." Mr. Samuel Willard, the author of the sermon, was chosen Vice-President of the College in 1701, upon the resignation of Increase Mather, its President.

Major Savage had a family of patriarchal extent, being the father, by two wives, of no less than eighteen children. Mr. James Savage, in his Genealogical Dictionary of the settlers of New England, quaintly remarks, "I believe no descendant has equalled that number of children!" The family has been numerous in New England ever since. Thirteen of the name had been graduated at Harvard in 1854, and four at Yale, all descendants of Major Thomas Savage. The branch of the family which settled in Boston has continued there for several generations. James Savage, descended in the sixth degree from Major Thomas Savage, was born in Boston on the thirteenth day of July, 1784. His father was Habijah Savage, and his mother Elizabeth, daughter of John Tudor. They had a numerous family, comprising eight sons and three daughters. James was the ninth child and sixth son. He lost his mother before he had completed his fourth year. Nor was this loss, so irreparable to a child of his tender years, the only misfortune which fell upon him. His father had before this been afflicted by a failure of reason, for irregular periods of short duration; but such was the effect upon him of the death of his wife that he became permanently and hopelessly deranged.

There being no public retreats for the insane at that time, he was placed by his friends in the family of a farmer at Andover, where his life was prolonged for many years. Some one or more of his children boarded in a neighboring house, so as to be able to give such filial attention as his situation required. But James was not one of those; and he himself says, "I can hardly dare to say my memory runs to partaking his smile more than two or three times in my life." The Rev. Dr. Thacher, who preached upon the death of his mother, selected a touching and appropriate text in Psalms xxvii. 10: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." In this forlorn condition of the family, the place of parents was supplied by their maternal uncle, Judge Tudor, and his sister, Mrs. Mary Thompson.

James was fitted for college partly at the Washington Academy in Machias, in which place two of his sisters were married and settled, and partly at the Derby Academy in

Hingham. Here, to use his own language, "most happily had I the affectionate regard of a lady in whose family my mind gained its strongest impressions, my heart its tendency to quick impulses of benevolence." This was Mrs. Lincoln, the daughter of James Otis, and the widow of Benjamin Lincoln, son of General Lincoln, a lawyer of much promise, who died young. This lady was in all respects to him a mother. Indeed, in his letters to her he always addressed her by that name, and she in her turn always called him "her dear child." In 1799, he entered Harvard College. His college life was uniformly a very happy one, though in his Sophomore year he incurred the censure of the Government, and with three others was suspended. The cause was some riotous proceedings of the class consequent upon the punishment of one of its members; and Savage was selected for discipline, because a black flag was raised on the building in which he lived at the time. One of his companions in misfortune was Willard, afterward the pastor of Deerfield, the oldest man in the class, of staid aspect and carriage, upon whom the trial fell more severely because he was the nephew of President Willard.

This youthful escapade was the more remembered in after times, because there could be no two persons less likely to incur censure for resistance to lawful authority than Mr. Savage and Dr. Willard; the latter being remarkable for his saintly and apostolic character, an impression deepened by the total loss of sight, which he suffered twenty or thirty years before his death. For Mr. Savage himself his suspension was a good thing, for he was sent to the Rev. Isaac Braman of Rowley, a man of cheerful conversation, and with a wife in every way suited for a clergyman's helpmate.

By this amiable family he was treated as a son, while he pursued his studies without the distractions or interruptions of a college life. Upon his return to Cambridge, he applied himself with more than former diligence, and with such success that he was graduated in 1803 with the highest honors of his class. The Valedictory Oration was on the Patronage of Genius, and is a thoughtful performance, showing much reading, and written in a style finished and mature, though, as might be expected in a composition of that time, somewhat deficient in simplicity.

There is still, in Mr. Savage's handwriting, a picture of his mind and character in his youth and early manhood. It consists of copies of the various letters written by him while he was in college, and for a year after. They are contained in

several loose sheets, upon one of which in his later life he has inscribed the following memorandum: "This roll contains rude copies of my boyish letters from 1800 to 1804, which may be preserved as a mortification, but containing useful dates." The originals of these letters were addressed to his relatives and classmates. Why he should say, they "may be preserved as a mortification," it is not easy to understand; because, while they have no essential literary merit, as a record of the growth of his mind and the formation of his character, they might have been looked back upon with satisfaction at any time of life. They are characteristic alike of the writer and of the times in which they were written. Letters were then considered as an exercise in composition, and were not used as now, simply to communicate some passing event or fact, or to convey some transient mood of feeling. Correspondence is now simply a conversation in black and white. In those days, postage was dear, and money was scarce. These letters of young Savage were evidently written with much care: they may even be called labored, and occasionally a little stilted. The influence of Dr. Johnson was at that time all-pervading, and evidence of it appears in this correspondence. Cheap postage has proved one of the greatest blessings conferred on humanity; but it has made such letters as those of Gray and Cowper things of the past not likely to be revived.

These letters serve to show, even at that early age, the strength of principle, the purity of life, the warmth of domestic affection which always distinguished him. They also show that he held, when a boy, the same views, especially upon public subjects, which he maintained through life. The times in which they were written were times in which politics ran high, and convictions were held and expressed with great warmth and vehemence. We give a few extracts, which we think will be of interest to those who knew Mr. Savage in his manhood and declining years.

In the summer of 1800, when he had just completed his sixteenth year, he writes to his younger brother, Arthur, as follows: "Do not be discomposed and disheartened by the difficulties of the Latin Grammar, for when you have learned this you cannot easily write false English; and, when you have got through it, you may consider every Latin word laid up in the storehouse of your memory as a treasure of great worth." In another to the same correspondent, written about a year after, he uses a little playful criticism: "Your short epistles are full of mistakes, improprieties of grammar, &c.:

only one half of these can be pardoned on account of your inexperience. 'I have some beautiful watermelons and muskmelons almost ripe.' I conclude that you left this sentence imperfect, and intended to have invited me to partake of them. Mixing English and Latin words together has always a disagreeable effect. 'We go about thirty-six miles *per* day.' This sounds too much like a sailor's speech, 'We run her about twelve knots an hour.' Exclusive of the ill-termed use of the Latin preposition '*per*,' what would you think of the gentleman who would write you in this manner: 'We walked 40 miles in that *diem*.' You have fairly stuffed into your letter nine great I's; but, in a letter of mine last week to a friend, not half that number was inserted. This egotism is a grievous fault: pray you avoid it."

To his elder brother, John, a clerk in a store in Barnstable, as decided a Democrat as his brother was a Federalist, he writes, under date of Feb. 4, 1801: "Your expectation that 'social order, republicanism, and liberty will soon pervade the world, and extend with them the arts and sciences,' though to me they appear delusive, yet I should be glad to find them verified. You further observe that 'the present year has opened on our country very auspiciously.' This our present happy state I hope will continue; but by many it is not expected, from the character of the men who are destined to the chair of government. I do not say this is my opinion, but I entertain fears which I could not have, if the 'Solon of New England' had been continued in office. But of politics enough."

To the same correspondent, he writes, under date of March 4, 1801: "This is the day so auspicious to you on account of the election of your republican friends, Jefferson and Burr; and I will join with you in wishing our country prosperity equal to what it has enjoyed under the republican administrations of Washington and Adams. But, however black clouds may threaten in our horizon, I hope and trust their destructive influence will never extend to New England, but that this fairest part of our Union may still continue as remarkable for its good order as it has ever been for its good sense. May the new administration never be led to abandon the interests of our country; and may the venerable Adams, the first and greatest legislator America has produced, enjoy the remainder of his life for the good of posterity." To the same correspondent, he writes, under date of April 9, 1801: "I received your last on Monday, and was pleased with your panegyric on Jefferson, and your allowance of eminent talents

and 'ardent patriotism' to Adams, notwithstanding his 'duplicity and ungovernable ambition.' You have formed a pleasing idea from considering the present state of the world, and I do not despond of our own country. If you expect that the maritime power of Britain will be restrained by the shackles which France has attempted to impose on her, in my opinion you will be deceived. I believe the claws of the lion are superior to the talons of the Prussian eagle, assisted by the united force of France, Holland, Russia, Spain, &c. I do not wish to see the power of Britain, the mistress of the ocean, reduced by any nation of Europe; for it is the general opinion that no nation will behave with greater regard to justice. But should our country equal even a secondary power, such as Spain or Holland, I presume we should not endure with patience the insults from France and Britain, which have been offered with impunity. But politics may rest."

To Mrs. Lincoln, to whom he felt all the love and gratitude of a son, he writes as follows: "Buonaparte, the man whom many abhor and many more admire, has, by the late restoration of the Catholic worship, strengthened his own power, and can now guide the curb as he will. The despotic nature of that religion is favorable to his views. As the Protestants have liberty to worship publicly, it is probable great benefit will result; at least, the return of the superstitious devotion of Rome is much preferable to their subjection to the divinity of Atheism, whose altars have so long been drenched with blood. The situation of the peasantry in that country will certainly be ameliorated by peace returning in triumph to religion."

To his friend and classmate, Lewis Strong, of Northampton, he gives an account of the Phi-Beta-Kappa exercises, under date of Aug. 29, 1802: "On Thursday, enjoyment was the expectation of all, and all were gratified. The poem was replete with wit, and the sentiments which will ever arise on the mention of the subject of New England. The story of Putnam's killing the monster who ravages the country round his habitation was told with much humor: the beast, however, that inhabited the poet's den was a mammoth, and not a wolf.* The language of McKean was simple and nervous. His subject was the origin, design, and tendency of secret societies, especially of the Phi-Beta-Kappa. The orator animated with severity on the societies whose object is carefully concealed, but whose tendency is to revolutionize the

* The poem on this occasion was delivered by William M. Richardson.