

**HINTS OF CONTEMPORARY  
LIFE IN THE WRITINGS OF  
THOMAS SHEPARD, VOL.  
XII, PP. 136-162**

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**ANDREW MCFARLAND DAVIS**

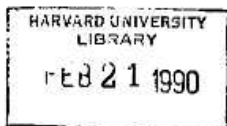
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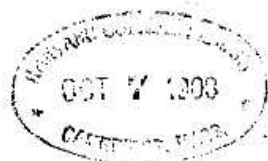


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The Authors.

**HINTS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE IN THE  
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HINTS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE  
IN THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS SHEPARD.

In the fall of 1634, Thomas Shepard, then a young man not quite twenty-nine years of age, set sail from the east coast of England with the purpose of chancing the hazards of what would practically be a winter voyage to New England. The sailing of the vessel on which he embarked had been announced several weeks before this, but various circumstances had detained her, and notwithstanding the fact that if one should make the voyage at that time of the year the passage to Boston could not be accomplished before the latter part of December, still it was determined by her owners to accept for the crew and the passengers the peril, the discomfort, and the suffering which would necessarily attend the trip, and for their craft the hazard of a winter approach to the dangerous New England coast. On the sixteenth of October, therefore, the vessel was permitted to sail from Harwich, having on board amongst others Thomas Shepard, his wife, and their infant son. That Shepard should have been willing to incur the exposure of such a voyage as this, is strong testimony to the peril of the situation in which he was then placed in England. Driven from pillar to post he had, notwithstanding his youth, become a marked man, and it was not only evident that he could not pursue his profession in England without sacrificing the tenets to which he was especially attached, but it was even probable that he might be punished for having disobeyed orders not to preach which had been given to him personally by Archbishop Laud, when Bishop of London, several years before. He had only been able of late to practise the functions of his office in remote districts, and if he ventured into parts where he was known he was obliged to exercise great discretion and remain in partial concealment. It was under the pressure of these circumstances that he sailed from Harwich, anticipating perhaps a voyage full of peril, but certainly without thought that even before he should be out of sight of land he would plunge into a violent storm which would utterly disable the ship and compel him three days thereafter to abandon her at Yarmouth. The experience of these three days was full of horror, and his sermons in after years bear evidence of the im-



pression then made on him, through the frequent use of marine metaphors evidently drawn in a large measure from this source.

The restraints imposed in England upon the movements of non-conformists were at that time being drawn closer and closer, and it was not an easy matter for Shepard to follow out his plan of emigration. The exposure of his family on the unfortunate vessel in which he made his first attempt had resulted shortly after his landing in the death of the child which had shared their perils. This misfortune in no way altered his determination to emigrate. He and his wife remained, therefore, quietly under cover waiting for another opportunity to get away. During this period of seclusion another son was born to them, so that when they sailed from London in August, 1635, the family was again the father, the mother, and the infant son. Their voyage, although marked by much rough weather, was not unusually long, and Boston, the place of their destination, was gained in October, a little less than a year after their first attempt to reach it.

One of the first needs of an immigrant on landing here in those days was a house. There were no places of public entertainment adequate for sheltering or feeding immigrants arriving in groups, and the permanent residents of Boston, even if their homes were elastic, could not take in all that arrived. The settlers who landed with Shepard were, therefore, in luck, in finding the question of house-hunting determined for them by the migration of the Hooker colony from Newtown to Hartford. Here, in Newtown, were vacant houses, so situated that they were available, which the owners wished to dispose of. They would at any rate serve a temporary purpose and were promptly appropriated by the newly arrived party.

The fact that Shepard was a conspicuous man in England and that he had been the victim of persecution was undoubtedly caused by the wonderful influence that he exercised as a preacher over his audiences. Even the sermons preached by him as a beginner were afterwards published without his privity. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him at once taking high rank among the New England clergymen. A new society, with Shepard at its head, was promptly organized in Newtown to fill the vacancy occasioned by the migration of Hooker and his followers, and when in 1637, in order to escape the political pressure of the believers in Mrs. Hutchinson who were then in the ascendant in Boston, the sessions of the General Court were trans-

ferred to Newtown, it was Shepard's strong influence, according to Cotton Mather, which secured the selection of that place as the site of a proposed college. Already it had been voted in 1636 that there should be a college and that the appropriation then nominally made should become available, one half the next year when the site should be selected, the other half when the building should be completed. Had the site been fixed in 1636, Shepard's voice might not have prevailed. As it was, with the Court holding its sessions in his own church, surrounded by his own people, and with himself in earnest in the work, he was able to accomplish his purpose.

It is obvious that there must have been some strong, moving power to influence the passage of the Act of 1636 prescribing that there should be a college. This Act did not in terms immediately appropriate any money — it was a mere promise or agreement to do this, and probably met with less opposition on that account, than if it had provided for an actual appropriation of £400 payable in whole or in part at once. Popular Acts which call for no immediate disbursements are at all times easy of passage, as was the case with resolves that statues should be erected in honor of the military heroes of the Revolution, in the early days of our Congress. When it came to making these resolves effective, that was another matter; and so with this Act of 1636, it would perhaps have died a natural death if somebody had not followed it up the next year and insisted upon the determination of the site as provided for in the original Act. Who it was in the General Court that did this we do not know, but what Cotton Mather says may help us to determine who inspired the action. The passage in Mather's *Life of Shepard* which justifies this statement makes the assertion that it was with respect unto "the enlightening and powerful ministry of Mr. Shepard, that when the foundation of a college was to be laid, Cambridge, rather than any other place was pitched upon to be the seat of that happy seminary."

It is clear that Shepard's desire to secure the planting of the College in Newtown was prompted by his general interest in the cause of education. He was himself an educated man, and he tells us in his *Autobiography* that he looked upon the College as "an opportunity of doing good to many by doing good to students." It was, in part at least, "at the desires of some of the students" that the *Theses Sabbatice* were published. It was at his instigation that the Commis-

sioners of the United Colonies recommended a general contribution in aid of the College. He stands revealed to us, therefore, not only as one having posthumous reputation, but as a person of command and influence in the community where he lived, and the esteem in which he was held was not only recognized by the General Court, in the adoption of Newtown as the site of the College, and in his appointment November 20, 1637, upon a committee to "take order for a Colledge at Newtowne," but found expression in the writings of contemporary authors, especially in the prefaces with which his fellow-workers introduced to readers his published sermons. It might be inferred, indeed, without this testimony that one who has left behind him so many published volumes of sermons and polemical treatises upon theological subjects, many of which have passed through numerous editions, must of necessity have received contemporary recognition; must as a matter of course have commanded the respect of the community in which he lived. Now, although we cannot identify the person in the General Court who introduced the Act of 1636 ordaining that there should be a college, we can see that he whose influence secured the adoption of its site was this powerful and influential preacher who has left such an extraordinary record behind him, a record of homage reaching to comparatively recent times, and culminating in the coupling of his name as a mark of esteem and honor in the title of a religious society in Cambridge.

Thus far in treating of Shepard's position in the community and his close connection with educational matters, we have dealt with accepted or obvious facts. Let us now, for the moment, enter the field of permissible conjecture, in an endeavor to show a probable association of his name with the bequest which has made Harvard immortal. Shepard was a graduate of Emmanuel College and it is not too presumptuous to say that to him as a fellow-graduate, John Harvard would, on arrival, have turned for counsel; for advice; for friendship. That the relations between the two were friendly, and that Shepard on his part esteemed Harvard, as we have just seen that Harvard must have esteemed Shepard, is shown by the allusion to Harvard in the Autobiography, at once the most touching, the most complete, and the most personal of the references to Harvard to be found. "This man," Shepard says, "was a scholar and pious in his life and enlarged toward the Country and the good of it in life and death." Who, more

*Shepard  
Emmanuel  
Church, in  
F. W. C. C.*