

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE  
ENGLISH UNIVERSITIES IN  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
NEW ENGLAND**

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The influence of the English universities in the development of New England by Franklin B. Dexter

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FRANKLIN B. DEXTER.

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At the stated meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, held Feb. 12, 1880, Professor FRANKLIN B. DEXTER, of Yale College, New Haven, Conn., a Corresponding Member, was introduced, and read the following paper on the "Influence of the English Universities in the Development of New England":—

New England civilization received its first efficient impulse from the arrival of the Massachusetts Company, bearing their charter, in June, 1630; and in any attempt to trace a connection between liberal education on the other side of the water and the progress of New England, this date must mark the real beginning.

For, though half a dozen university men (Brewster, Blaxton, Higginson, Skelton, R. Smith, and Bright) had reached New England before 1630, not one of them continued within the limits of the Massachusetts Colony long enough to bear a hand in, or even to witness, the beginning there of the new era, in connection with the establishment of the public school, the printing-press, and the college, during the fruitful period from 1636 to 1647. But before this period had expired, the number of university men who had immigrated to New England had mounted up to at least ninety; there may perhaps have been half a dozen more, at present not identified;—

enough, it is probable, with the few who came in the next generation, to make a total of a hundred names.

Of this body almost three-fourths were from the University of Cambridge, — known as a special stronghold of Puritanism from the middle of the sixteenth century onward. At Cambridge had been educated the Protestant sectaries who had led the revolt against the notion of a national church, — Robert Browne, Henry Barrowe, John Greenwood, John Penry, Francis Johnson, Richard Clifton, John Robinson; *all* in fact of the more noted Separatists who had a university training, except Henry Jacob. And when we recall that the same *Alma Mater* nurtured such other strong men of the Puritan party as Burton, Cartwright, Whitaker, and Ames, Sibbes, Preston, Davenant, Lightfoot, John and Thomas Goodwin, Cromwell, Fairfax, and Milton, we get some idea of the historical environment which helped to mould the educated leaders of New England.

In the archives of the university the matriculation registers, which received at the opening of each month the record of those who had entered at any of the separate colleges during the month preceding, are still extant (with the exception of an unfortunate gap from June, 1589, to June, 1602), and of ready access, in the Registry's office, in the Pitt Press Building, with the accompanying list of degrees granted at the ending of the academic course. The matriculation book contains merely the names of the students, roughly classified by rank, and the colleges which they have entered; the admission books of the particular colleges occasionally supplying additional items of information, such as age and parents' names, with varying degrees of fulness.

The statute interval between matriculation and graduation was four years of three terms each, though, by a lax construction, it was common to reduce this period by one term, or even by more; and, judging from the known ages in the case of the New England immigrants, the average seventeenth-century age, at admission, was not far from seventeen, and that at graduation about twenty.

On these official lists the first name belonging to our history is that of William Brewster, who was matriculated on the 3d of December, 1580, at the oldest of the college foundations, St. Peter's or Peterhouse. We had already the statement in Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation" that Elder Brewster "spent some small time at Cambridge," and, as was rightly inferred, without graduating; but hitherto the first known date in his life has been the reference (also in Bradford) to his presence with Secretary Davison, when the

cautionary towns in the Low Countries were given up to England in 1585.

After Elder Brewster, no New England name appears until that of John Phillips, of Catharine Hall, who graduated in 1596, and was a temporary resident in Massachusetts from 1638 to 1641. By the time of his graduation, at least three others of our future immigrants (Robert Peck, Ralph Partridge, and Nathaniel Ward) were domiciled in Cambridge; and for the next forty years there was never a smaller number — sometimes upward of twenty — in residence together. The roll, fullest about 1620, closes with Nathaniel Norcross, also of Catharine Hall, who graduated in 1637, and was in Salem a year or two later.

About seventy New Englanders are thus traced to Cambridge University; and more than twenty of them were connected with Emanuel College, notorious almost from its foundation, in 1584, as a Puritan seed-plot. Though outstripped in numbers by Trinity and St. John's (which were then, as now, the largest of the colleges in the university), Emanuel stood easily in the next rank, as to size, and equal to any in scholarship; nor were the least brilliant names in its teaching body during this period those of John Cotton and Thomas Hooker.

Next, but far below this, in popularity with the New England fathers, were Trinity, where eight or nine of them are enrolled (including in this number the illustrious name of John Winthrop, the elder, who was a student here from December, 1602, till some time in 1604),\* and Magdalen and St. John's, each with seven. Sidney Sussex, sometimes classed with Emanuel as a special nursery of Puritans, chiefly because it was Oliver Cromwell's college, has but three of our names on its lists, of whom only the Massachusetts agitator, John Wheelwright, was a contemporary of the Protector. The other greatest name of Cambridge in the Puritan period is that of John Milton, resident in Christ's College from 1625 to 1632. None of the transatlantic heroes seem to have been inmates of Christ's at the same time with her greatest son; but undergraduate fellowship easily overleaps college boundaries; and it is pleasant to recall that Thomas Shepard and John Norton, Roger Williams and Abraham Pierson, John Harvard and Henry Dunster, were a part of the busy throng that paced the same streets and drank of the same influences, side by side with John

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\* See "Life and Letters of John Winthrop," vol. I. pp. 54-59.



Milton and Jeremy Taylor. In like manner, it may help to fill out our conception of the gentle Elder Brewster to remember that he was an undergraduate at Peterhouse with John Penry, the Puritan martyr. So Peter Bulkley, the pastor of Concord, may, as Fellow of St. John's, have shared in the training of the great Earl of Strafford; and the pure fame of President Chauncey may gain an added light as we picture him in daily intercourse, year in and year out, with the saintly George Herbert, while both of them were Fellows of Trinity.

Passing now to Oxford, the question is a natural one, why we find but about one-third as many New England names as at Cambridge. The argument from locality will not explain so great a difference, though doubtless the eastern counties furnished the larger number of the Cambridge men on our list, as they furnished, in general, a greater proportion of the total emigration than any other section. As to this last, the best available data make the metropolis naturally the largest feeder to New England, and Kent, in the extreme south-east, probably the next largest; after which, with a distribution of numbers fairly proportioned to their several areas, come closely the group of strictly eastern counties, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex; but Wiltshire, Devonshire, Somerset, Hants, Dorset, and Surrey, in the south, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, in the southern midland, and Lancashire, in the north-west, fall not far below the previous group in the quota contributed to the peopling of New England.

If we look further for reasons why Oxford drew to itself so much less of the element we are seeking than did Cambridge, I venture to suggest that one fact should be remembered, that by far the most conspicuous figure in the former university from 1604 to 1621 was William Laud, Fellow and afterward President of St. John's College, and that the influences typified by his name made Oxford an unattractive place to men whose natural development led them in later years to these Colonies.

It may well be significant that not a single student from St. John's shared in the settling of New England; significant also, perhaps, that in the scant roll of twenty-four Oxford men who came over, must be counted no less than five (Norris, Davenport, Parker, Mather, Vane), who left the university before completing the formalities of matriculation and subscription,—of whom were the two most notable of all the number, John Davenport and Richard Mather, though Davenport afterward returned for a degree upon examination. There was something incompatible between the spirit which fostered Laud and the spirit which founded New England.

For access to a carefully verified and alphabetically arranged index to the original matriculation and subscription registers at Oxford, I was indebted a few months ago, while in London, to the generous kindness of Colonel Joseph L. Chester, LL.D. The entries are more full than the corresponding records at Cambridge, containing as they do the age of the matriculant, and, to a great extent, the residence and rank in life of the father. A conveniently arranged copy of the roll of degrees conferred by Oxford before the beginning of the printed catalogue (1659), can be consulted in the Bodleian Library, among the voluminous manuscript collections of Anthony Wood.

The New England names begin with the matriculation at Exeter College, in 1595, of John Maverick, the son of a Devonshire clergyman, and himself one of the pastors of the congregation which paused for a while at our Dorchester, on its way to Windsor in Connecticut; and the list is closed, in 1652, with the graduation of James Allen, whose service as a minister of the First Church in Boston lasted into the 18th century. Over this stretch of nearly sixty years the few who came to New England were scattered by twos and threes, and for brief periods, at no time being more than five at once, and with no representatives, as there were at Cambridge, among the body of instructors (except at the very end), to create a community of sentiment and a central bond.

I should add that of course these original sources at both universities have been before examined by other inquirers, — as, for instance, by Mr. Savage, — and that it cannot be expected that many discoveries remain; but the following New England names have not, I believe, before been identified with either university. Thus, I find of Massachusetts pastors, educated wholly or in part at Oxford: Joseph Avery, Stephen Bachiler, Richard Bluman, Henry Green, Joseph Hull, John Maverick, and Edward Norris, — with John Warham and Nicholas Street of Connecticut. So the Cambridge list is increased by the names of three Plymouth ministers, Christopher Blackwood, William Leverich, and Ralph Partridge; and of four in Massachusetts, Edmund Brown, George Burdett, Robert Fordham, and Thomas Waterhouse; as also by George Fenwick, the founder of Saybrook, who was matriculated at Queen's in 1619, and Ephraim Huet, Mr. Warham's colleague at Windsor. On the other hand, it may be asserted with some confidence, that a few who have been credited by tradition with university training were really never matriculated; in which list must be placed John Lothrop of Scituate, Charles Morton of Charlestown, James Noyes and John Woodbridge of

Newbury, Herbert Pelham of Cambridge, and Thomas Peters of Saybrook.

In addition to the Oxford and Cambridge men included in these summaries, there were here and there among the first comers a few who had studied at other universities, the most notable, perhaps, being the younger Winthrop, from Dublin, and Nathaniel Eaton, the first head of Harvard College, from Franeker, in Holland.

We commonly reckon the aggregate of the New England immigration down to 1643 at somewhat over 20,000 persons, or 4,000 families, of whom thus only one person in every group of forty families proves to have been of university antecedents. The result implied by such a statement in figures may not seem greatly significant, but, in fact, the character of the element thus singled out chiefly determined the character of the civilization established.

Turning to trace this emigration more in detail, we begin with the Mayflower company.

Elder Brewster, with his year or two of uncompleted study at Cambridge, was, so far as appears, the only man of university training in the Colony from the landing in 1620 till the arrival of the first settled minister, Ralph Smith, in 1629; nor was it till eight years later that there was any marked and permanent addition to this number.

The dearth of intellectual impulse in Plymouth Colony is sufficiently shown by the well-known fact that it was fifty years from the landing before the first public school was established. And it is equally evident that the lack of schools (owing, of course, largely to the poverty of the people) quenched the desire for higher education. In the volume which Mr. Sibley has published, of biographies of the earliest graduates of Harvard College, coming down to 1658, only one native and two residents of Plymouth Colony are included. The native (Isaac Allerton, of the class of 1650) caught the college fever at New Haven, where his father, after long wanderings from Plymouth, had finally settled, and the two Chauncey boys (graduates of 1651), born in England, can only be called occasional residents of Scituate, from whose uncongenial soil they and their father escaped as soon as possible. In the same length of time, one only of the ninety-eight graduates of Harvard had settled within the Plymouth boundaries, — Thomas Crosby, of the class of 1653, who was preaching without formal ordination to the church in Eastham. At the same date, the summer of 1658, besides this solitary witness for Harvard, stationed on the further side of Cape Cod Bay, the only English university men left in the Colony, of some dozen and a half who had found a longer