

**A MEMORIAL OF
JOHN W. FOSTER**

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A Memorial of John W. Foster by Andrew P. Peabody

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ANDREW P. PEABODY

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W. W. Foster.

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EDITED

BY ANDREW P. PEABODY.

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M E M O I R.

REGINALD FOSTER, or FORSTER, whose family receives honorable mention in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" and in "Marmion," is believed to have been the common ancestor of all, or nearly all, who bear that name in New England. He became a citizen of Ipswich, Mass. in 1638. In the direct line of descent from him, James Foster, the father of the subject of this Memoir, was born at Ipswich in 1748. He arrived at maturity during the unsettled period of our revolutionary troubles; and, though endowed with valuable qualifications as a man of business, he was slow in finding permanent and remunerating employment. During a portion of the time, he was engaged in the labor of instruction. For several of the last years of his life, he was a clerk in the Massachusetts Bank. He married Elizabeth Hiller, and had nine children, eight of whom survived him. He died in 1793, leaving for his family little inheritance except an honored name and a revered memory. He was a man of superior intelligence, of the most amiable domestic traits, and of a serene and cheerful piety.

He was an intimate friend of the late Rev. Dr. Belknap, who, in a letter written on the occasion of his death, speaks of his "regular and exemplary life, formed on evangelical principles;" and adds: "To his integrity and benevolence there are as many witnesses as he had acquaintance, and no person can be more sincerely lamented." We have before us several of his letters, as well as other portions of the family correspondence, which all indicate a household not only deeply imbued with the faith of the gospel, but endowed with those finer graces and amenities which belong to the well-developed Christian character.

JOHN WELCH FOSTER, the youngest son of James Foster, was born June 16, 1789. At his father's death, he was consequently but four years of age. To relieve his sister of some portion of her charge and burden, his uncle, Joseph Hiller, then collector of the port of Salem, adopted him as a member of his family. Here he remained nine years, attending the best common schools, and for a portion of the time enjoying the tuition of Dr. Jacob Bigelow. In 1802, his uncle, having been removed from office by President Jefferson, connected himself with a bookselling firm in Boston. His nephew became his clerk, and so continued till the dissolution of the firm, when he was received for a short time, in the same capacity, into the employment of Prescott and Cleveland, dealers in English goods. Of the incidents of his boyhood we have been able to learn but little; yet that little leads us to believe, that the traits of his subsequent character already existed in

rich promise. Religious reverence, strict veracity and integrity, rigid conscientiousness, and undeviating fidelity to duty, were but the legitimate heritage of his father's example, and the fruit of his mother's prayers. Though treated with the utmost kindness by his uncle, he encountered enough of the privation and loneliness of an orphan's lot to cherish habits of self-dependence and sober thought, and to force his character to an earlier maturity than it might have attained in his native home.

In 1804, Mr. Foster's sister Elizabeth, who had married Amos Green, Esq. died; and her husband, who was a member of a firm in Havana, became a permanent resident of that city, and offered his brother-in-law a situation in his counting-room. He accepted the offer, embarked at Boston in December, 1805, and arrived at Havana after a tedious and perilous passage of thirty-two days. Here he remained for two years. He was a member of Mr. Green's family; was treated with great consideration, confidence, and kindness; and received intimations that a prolonged stay should be made to his pecuniary advantage. But many circumstances conspired to render his sojourn there sad and wearisome. He found it impossible to accustom himself to manners and habits so foreign from those of New England. He felt deeply the loss of his religious privileges. His mother, for whom he cherished the profoundest attachment and reverence, died during his absence. He had also two severe attacks of yellow fever, one of which brought him to the point of death, and left him with a constitution

ever after somewhat enfeebled. These illnesses he incurred in the discharge of the duties of humanity. He found many American seamen suffering from the fever, and destitute of the necessary attendance. He went freely among them, administered to them such relief as was in his power, and often filled for them the joint capacity of physician and nurse. His letters, during this period, evince a high tone of Christian manliness; and, equally in his treatment of business affairs, in his messages of sympathy and condolence under the bereaving hand of Providence, and in his modest expressions of high moral principle and assured religious faith, mark a mind developed far beyond his years, and a heart pervaded by the loftiest resolutions and the most generous affections.

On his return to Boston in December, 1807, he entered the counting-room of Mr. John Tappan, then a large importer of English goods. In April, 1808, he became a member of the Old South Church, under the pastoral care of Rev. Dr. Eckley, of whose paternal reception of him, as a religious inquirer, he ever retained the most grateful remembrance. He had been educated in the milder form of nominal Calvinism, which then prevailed in the New England churches; but had thought little of points of controversy, and had dwelt mainly on those fundamental truths which have an immediate connection with the duties of life and the culture of the spiritual affections. About this time, he became deeply interested in Worcester's "Bible News," then recently published. The views pre-