

**MEMOIR OF HON. WILLIAM
APPLETON: PREPARED
AGREEABLY TO A RESOLUTION
OF THE MASSACHUSETTS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Memoir of Hon. William Appleton: Prepared Agreeably to a Resolution of the Massachusetts Historical Society by Chandler Robbins

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CHANDLER ROBBINS

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MEMOIR

OF

HON. WILLIAM APPLETON.

PREPARED AGREEABLY TO A RESOLUTION

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

BY

REV. CHANDLER ROBBINS, D.D.

With an Appendix.

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1863.

MEMOIR

or

HON. WILLIAM APPLETON.

IN the year 1635, SAMUEL APPLETON came from Little Waldingfield, in Suffolk, Eng., with his family, and settled in Ipswich. Descended from an ancestry of good repute in his native country, he became the progenitor of a highly respected race in the land of his adoption. The beautiful Memorial of him published in Boston in 1850 renders it superfluous to renew the familiar account of his lineage. Whoever will refer to that volume, will find that in every period, from that of his remotest known ancestor, John Appulton of Great Waldingfield, who died in 1414, the family name has never failed to be worthily represented. Not only the commemorative tributes of this Society, but the annals of our State and National legislatures, the records of various institutions of learning, charity, and religion, the public eulogies and private encomiums of the citizens of Boston, and even the commercial and industrial prosperity of New England, bear testimony to the honorable manner in which it has been sustained in the thirteenth generation.

The instances must be very rare, in which, in a single city, four individuals of one kindred and name, and in the same grade of natural descent, have contemporaneously made their own way from humble beginnings to such high distinction in the same calling as was lately attained by the three brothers, Samuel, Nathan, and Ebenezer Appleton,* and their cousin William,—a sketch of whose life we are about to give. They were so intimately and pleasantly associated in life, and their images are naturally so grouped together in our remembrance, that we could not speak particularly of one till we had first made respectful mention of the rest.

William Appleton was born in the North Parish of Brookfield, Mass., Nov. 16, 1786. His father, Rev. Joseph Appleton, was born in Ipswich in 1751; graduated at Brown University in 1772; was ordained minister of the Second Church in Brookfield, now the First Congregational Church in North Brookfield, in 1776; and died in July, 1795.† He was a man of respectable abilities, approved scholarship, and exemplary Christian character.

His mother was Mary, daughter of Jacob Hook, a gentleman farmer of Kingston, N.H., whose estate was large

* Ebenezer Appleton died in April, 1888, at the age of sixty-eight. He was a man of more than ordinary talents, and of considerable literary taste and culture, genial in his disposition, and popular in his manners.

† The only work ever published by him was a controversial theological pamphlet of thirty pages. There is an elegant monument to him in the churchyard of North Brookfield, with suitable inscriptions, erected by his son, the subject of this Memoir.

Among the last of Hon. William Appleton's benefactions was the contribution of five thousand dollars to the First Congregational Society of North Brookfield, for the purchase of a library for the use of the minister. It is called the Appleton Library.

We are indebted for these facts to Rev. C. Cushing, the present pastor of the church in North Brookfield.

for that place and period. At the death of her husband, who bequeathed to her a small property and the sole charge of five young children,—two sons and three daughters,—she removed to her native place, and occupied a farm of moderate value, which she had inherited from her father. In the year 1798, she was married to Major Daniel Gould, of Lyndeborough, N.H.; and, with her children, took up her abode in that town. Many of the traits of her character bore a striking resemblance to those which afterwards appeared in her son. She had a strong mind, a quick apprehension, a sound judgment, and an unusual capacity for business. Although of feeble health, she was energetic and persevering. Her conversation was often playful and witty, and occasionally seasoned with a spice of satire: though all these qualities were duly held in check; for she was a Christian, both by profession and practice. Her son has recorded his deep sense of obligation to her for having shaped and controlled his character. In a brief notice of her life, written on the day of her death, he says, "From the time my father died, she was very particular in giving her children religious instruction, and often prayed with them in her chamber. I have lost in her, not only the faithful guardian of my infancy, but the discreet monitor of my youth, and counsellor of my maturity."

She was evidently a fine specimen of the best class of New-England mothers; to whom, more than to any other source, are to be traced those sound principles, virtuous habits, and practical qualities, by means of which their children have attained both material pros-

perity and a fair moral fame. Her death took place at Mount Vernon, N.H., June 25, 1842, in her eighty-seventh year, after she had long enjoyed the fruit of her maternal fidelity in witnessing the successful career of her son.

In tracing that career, as well as in estimating Mr. Appleton's character, we have been permitted to avail ourselves of a private diary, which he had kept, with occasional interruptions, during a period of nearly fifty years. It fills seven manuscript volumes, evidently written without the slightest reference to posthumous use. It consists of very brief and simple notes of incidents, especially interesting to the writer, connected with his family, his business, the state of his health, and his religious experience and duties: to which are occasionally added reminiscences of early life; impressions of men; obituary sketches of his friends; and views, both retrospective and prospective, of commercial, financial, and industrial affairs. Although intended exclusively for his own perusal, there is nothing in this journal which would not bear general inspection. On the contrary, it exhibits the writer, off his guard and in his interior life, in a highly creditable and amiable light. It reveals such conscientiousness, such an humble estimate of himself, such a true and lively affection for his family and friends, such a constant conflict with the love of the world and the desire for riches, and such gratitude and submission to Providence, as are worthy of respect and sympathy.

In using this diary, it will be our endeavor not to violate the generous confidence of the living, nor the

delicate reserve which is due to the private papers of the dead. No further reference will be made to it than may be necessary to such a truthful representation of his character as alone would be sanctioned by himself, or conducive to those moral and Christian ends which were evidently near to his heart, and to which, we are persuaded, he would desire, above all things, that his biography should be subservient.

He was sent to school at an early age, first at New Ipswich, and afterwards successively at Francestown and Tyngsborough. In 1801, he made his first trial of business as a clerk in a store at Temple, N.H., kept by Mr. Artemas Wheeler. His capacity and good conduct made such a favorable impression upon his employer, that, at the age of nineteen, he took him into partnership. At the expiration of a year, having found that a country store afforded a too limited field for his abilities and ambition, he sold his stock, and interest in the firm; and with the small property which he had inherited, together with what he had earned, came to Boston. In alluding to this period, he was scrupulously careful not to appropriate the remark, intended to be complimentary, which was sometimes applied to him, as it has been to so many other of our wealthy citizens, — that he came from his country home with nothing but “a small bundle in his hand, and a few cents in his pocket.” The sum which he actually brought was small enough, in contrast with what he afterwards accumulated, to accredit his talents for business; and the very fact that a portion of it had been already saved, and the remainder earned, before his arrival, throws back upon his youth the merit

of those same qualities which were afterwards so conspicuously exemplified in his maturity.

The following memoranda, relating to the early stages of his business-life, are copied from his journal:—

“After I came to Boston, I resided for a short time with How and Spar, who kept a West-India goods store. In 1807, I went into business with Mr. N. Giddings. We kept at the corner of India Street and Central Street,—the only store then occupied in the street. (?) Our business was the buying and selling of West-India goods and crockery-ware. We dissolved our connection in the autumn of 1809. Then, considering myself worth about four thousand dollars, I bought the ship ‘Triumphant,’ at Salem, in connection with Upham, Gassett, and Co., for five thousand dollars, and went with her to Fayal, where I had her put under Portuguese colors, and despatched her to Liverpool; I taking passage with Mr. and Mrs. Bowdoin in another ship. On my arrival at Liverpool, I found my ship had been captured by a French privateer: but she was fortunately retaken a few weeks after, and brought to Plymouth; whither I went to take charge of my property. I remained in England till July; when I embarked in the brig ‘Eliza,’ Captain Gardner, with about ten thousand pounds’ value of goods, for account of myself and Parker, Appleton, and Co. These goods, and another importation, I sold; and, at the end of the year 1811, found myself worth about ten thousand dollars. I went from Philadelphia to North Carolina, where I loaded two vessels with naval-stores for England. From thence I went to Charleston, S.C., and took passage in the ship ‘Ceres,’ Captain Webber, for Liverpool; where I found that an embargo was laid in the United States, which was considered preparatory to war with England.

“In June, 1812, I was in the House of Commons, listening to the debates of that body; when it was announced that the orders in Council which related to the American ships would be modified or repealed: these orders being supposed to be the