

**LETTERS OF NATHANIEL WALKER
APPLETON TO HIS CLASSMATE,
ELIPHALET PEARSON, 1773-1784,
VOL. VIII, PP. 289-324**

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WILLIAM COOLIDGE LANE

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OF
NATHANIEL WALKER APPLETON
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THE following letters from Nathaniel Walker Appleton to Eliphalet Pearson were found among other papers of Dr. Pearson lately received from his descendants by the Trustees of Phillips Academy, Andover, of which school Dr. Pearson was the first preceptor. Such of the papers as related to Harvard College, with the government of which Dr. Pearson had been closely connected as Professor and Fellow of the Corporation, the Trustees generously transferred to the Library of Harvard College. Among them were included this brief series of letters written by one classmate to another in the years immediately succeeding their graduation, while one was preparing for the practice of medicine, the other for the ministry. They contain many interesting references to College affairs, and they also reflect the stirring events and political passions of the time (1778-1778).

Nathaniel Walker Appleton, the writer of the letters, born in Boston, 14 June, 1755, was the son of Nathaniel Appleton of the Class of 1749, a merchant of Boston, a member of the Committee of Correspondence, and a Commissioner of Loans. His grandfather was the well-known Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Appleton of the Class of 1712, minister of the Church in Cambridge from 1717 till his death in 1784. An uncle John Appleton (born 1739, died 1817) lived in Salem, where Nathaniel W. Appleton studied medicine under the direction of his father's cousin, Dr. Edward Augustus Holyoke, a son of President Edward Holyoke. After remaining three years in Salem with Dr. Holyoke, he moved to Boston, where he died 15 April, 1795. A funeral "Discourse, Delivered at the First Church in Boston, 19th April, A. D.

1795, the Lord's-Day after the Interment of Nathaniel W. Appleton, M.D.," was published in 1796 by the Rev. John Clarke, who is mentioned several times in the letters which follow.¹

Eliphalet Pearson, Appleton's correspondent and College friend, was born in Byfield 11 June, 1752, and was educated at Dummer Academy. He entered Harvard College in 1769 and graduated in 1778. In 1778-1774 he was Master of the Grammar School in Andover and was living in the family of his friend Samuel Phillips (later known as Judge Phillips) in Andover. He returned to Cambridge to study for the ministry, but during the College's exile from Cambridge, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, he was again in Andover with his friends. He became the first preceptor of Phillips Academy, which was opened in April, 1778. After eight years of service, in 1786 he was called to Cambridge as Professor of Hebrew in the College. In 1800 he became a member of the Corporation of Harvard College, and was Acting-President during the interval between the death of President Joseph Willard in 1804 and the election of Samuel Webber in 1806. (Becoming more and more dissatisfied with the liberal tendencies of the College, he resigned his professorship and his membership in the Corporation in 1806 and withdrew to Andover.²) On the establishment of the Theological Seminary in Andover, he was made Professor of Sacred Literature in 1808.

His first wife was Priscilla, a daughter of President Holyoke, born in 1739 and accordingly his senior by thirteen years. She died in Andover, 29 March, 1782, soon after the birth of her daughter, Mary.³ Dr. Pearson died 12 September, 1826.⁴

¹ Appleton married Sarah Greenleaf 24 May, 1780, and had seven children. After his death, his widow married Joseph Haven of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and died 2 January, 1838. See W. S. Appleton, *Genealogy of the Appleton Family* (1874), p. 22; *Boston Record Commissioners' Reports*, xxiv. 285, xxx. 448.

² For a letter written 19 March, 1806, by Samuel Cary, relating to Dr. Pearson's resignation, see the *Publications of this Society*, iii. 177-179.

³ The daughter married the Rev. Ephraim Abbot of Greenland, New Hampshire (Sarah L. Bailey, *Historical Sketches of Andover*, p. 537). Dr. Pearson married for his second wife, in 1785, Sarah Bromfield, daughter of Edward Bromfield.

⁴ For a notice of, and allusions to, the Rev. Dr. Pearson, see the *Publications of this Society*, v. 205-214 and notes, vi. 221.

I

CAMBRIDGE Dec. 14th 1778.

DEAR FRIEND

As I had wrote you three or four Letters and received no Answer, I was at a Loss to know what to impute to, but understanding by M^r. Farrington¹ that you had wrote I concluded it had miscarried so thought proper to inform you of it, shall expect immediately a Long Letter from you in Answer to All those I have wrote. Herewith goes your News Paper² which I endeavour to send as soon as possible. The unhappy affair concerning the late Pr-s-d-nt remains as yet something in the dark, perhaps Time may discover it.³ He resigned on 6th Inst & went off to Sherburne the next Day. We Hope that the Corporation will make Choice of a Person to fill the vacant Chair who by his exemplary VIRTUE will remove the Blemish which now lays upon the College. There have been some Commotions in the S—C— which are yet not entirely settled.⁴ Mr. Gannet is much approved of as Tutor.⁵

¹ A classmate, Thomas Farrington, of Amesbury.

² The Boston Gazette, as is evident from a later reference to the publishers, Edes and Gill, p. 307, below.

³ All the College records preserve a discreet silence in regard to the reasons for President Samuel Locke's resignation. At the meeting of the Corporation on 7 December, 1778:

Dr. Appleton communicated a Letter from President Locke dated Dec. 1st 1778, signifying his resignation of the Office of President of this College. Voted, that the Rev^d Dr. Appleton, Professor Winthrop and Mr. Eliot be a Committee to receive and take into their Care the Books Papers and other Things in the President's house, that belong to the College and to receive the Keys as soon as the late President has removed his Family & Effects.

The cause of President Locke's resignation and of the considerate silence generally observed in regard to it, is disclosed in President Stiles's Literary Diary, i. 426.

⁴ I am indebted to Mr. Albert Matthews and to the Rev. Dr. Edward Everett Hale for the suggestion that the letters "S. C." stand for the Speaking Club of Harvard College, the predecessor of the Institute of 1770. The records of the Speaking Club, comprising Journal, Laws and Orders, signatures of members, and accounts, are still preserved, almost intact, in the College Library. The

⁵ Caleb Gannett, of the Class of 1763, was Tutor from 1778 to 1780, Fellow from 1778 to 1780, and Steward from 1779 to 1818. He lived in the house afterwards known as the Holmes House. A water-color view of the College made about 1805, now in the College Library, was taken "from the Seat of Caleb Gannett Esq." Cf. Publications of this Society, vii. 202.

I Understand you have some thoughts of going to Portsmouth, should be glad to know as to that. Received a Letter ab¹ 10 Days ago from your Chum Cutler¹ & also one from our Friend Crosby² both well and in

Club was founded in 1770, with Samuel Phillips, President; Joseph Pearse Palmer, Vice-President; and Israel Keith, Secretary — all of the Class of 1771.

Pearson and Appleton were received as members 18 June, 1771, at the close of their Sophomore year. Appleton was elected Secretary in June, 1772, and seems to have so remained while in College. As a resident graduate, he evidently continued to take a lively interest in the Society. The object of the Society was to provide an opportunity for practice in public speaking and declamation. Despite the secrecy which attended the Society at the time, and which would have concealed its very existence, it may be permissible at this late day to quote three orders which were adopted 16 November, 1773, in order to show the serious way in which the work of the Society was taken.

15th. That a Committee consisting of 5 be chosen for the purpose of remarking upon the exhibitions in the Club; and that this Committee shall be chosen 3 Months at least before they begin to act in the Club; and, in order, to qualify themselves for their office, shall study the best treatises upon Elocution; and continue to execute their office 6 Months, unless the Club think fit to remove them for misbehaviour or insufficiency.

16th. That some of the best treatises shall be bought at the expence of the Club, and read thro' in course in the Club by the Members each in his turn (a suitable part being read at each meeting) and that these books be left with the Com^{tee} to be lent to the Members of the Club, as the Committee think proper.

17th. That the Committee be authorised to direct any Member of the Club to read the piece he has just spoke, or any other piece they think proper, that they may have an opportunity of pointing out his faults more particularly, and he of correcting them by repeated trials.

On 28 December, 1801, the name of the Society was changed to "Patriotic Association," in order that the object of the Society's endeavors, which apparently was its sole secret, might not be betrayed by a casual mention of its name. The entry in its record on this occasion is as follows:

Preamble of the revising Committee, recommending an alteration of the name of this Society.

As this Society has become venerable for its antiquity, and respectable for the virtue, merit, and dignity, of its members, from its first institution, it is with the greatest caution and diffidence that we propose any alteration, affecting its constitution. But, duly considering the wise design and prudent measures of our predecessors, to preserve the object of this Society an inviolable secret, and being actuated

¹ Nahum Cutler, the first member of the class to die. His name is starred in the Triennial Catalogue of 1776, but the date of his death is unknown. He is frequently referred to in the following letters. See, in particular, the mention of his death on p. 316, below.

² Probably Stephen Crosby of Cambridge, a classmate. He was born 8 August, 1752, according to the Records of the College Faculty, iii. 168.

good Spirits, hope this will find you so. You have doubtless seen the Proceedings of the PEOPLE.¹ We wait the Event with Patience, trust-

1. almost from
people
2. Harvard n
primary

by the same benevolent motives, to transmit it unimpaired, as a blessing to posterity, and perceiving the danger, which now threatens it from those who use every possible exertion to make it known, and that its present name, if inadvertently uttered, must betray its most important secret, a secret which deeply [affects] the interest of this Society, and the peace and happiness of its members, we propose, and recommend, that this Society hence forth be denominated the "Patriotic Association."

For additional facts in regard to the history of the Speaking Club, and the other societies afterward incorporated with it, see the account of the Institute of 1770, by Francis Greenwood Peabody, in *The Harvard Book* (1875), ii. 341, 342, and an earlier brief account in the *Harvard Magazine* (1884), x. 238-239.

¹ After months of heated discussion and protest stirred up by the duty laid upon tea, the Dartmouth, bringing the first cargo of the "detested plant," had arrived in Boston Harbor on 28 November, 1773. On the following day a public meeting was called in Faneuil Hall which later adjourned to the Old South Church. Votes were passed declaring that the tea must be returned in the same bottoms in which it came, and that no duty shall be paid thereon. Adjourned meetings on the afternoon of the same day and on the next day (30 November), held for the purpose of hearing what propositions the consignees had to make, exacted promises from the owner and master of the Dartmouth and from the owners of the other vessels expected that they would comply with the requirements of the people. A letter from the consignees, and in the afternoon a message from them brought by John Singleton Copley the artist, stated that it was out of their power to reship the teas, but that they were ready to store the teas under inspection until they were able to hear further from their constituents. This offer was voted to be not "in the least degree satisfactory to this body," and the watch which had been appointed the previous day "for the security of Capt. Hall's ship and cargo" was continued and instructed to take charge of other ships which might arrive later. Resolutions were passed denouncing as enemies to their country any persons who should import tea from Great Britain, and declaring that they would prevent its landing and sale and the payment of any duty thereon, and it was voted "That it is the determination of this body to carry their votes and resolutions into execution at the risk of their lives and property." ("Proceedings of the town of Boston on the 20th and 30th Novemb^r 1773," as printed in the *Boston Gazette* of 6 December, 1773, and in *F. S. Drake's Tea Leaves*, 1884, pp. 320-331.) The guard appointed at this meeting was continued until December sixteenth, the day of the "tea-party."

As the time passed, and the twenty days were nearly expired at the conclusion of which the vessel was liable to seizure for non-payment of duties, the Committee of Safety began to put pressure again upon Mr. Rotch, the owner of the vessel, to fulfil his promise to send her back, yet she could not be legally cleared until her whole cargo had been discharged. At first he refused, but on