

JOHN WINTHROP, JUNIOR.

BY FREDERICK JOHN KINGSBURY.

JOHN WINTHROP, JR., is one of the most interesting, attractive and picturesque personalities in our early colonial history. There has never been a life of him published, nor do I know of any book containing anything more than a fragmentary sketch. We ought to have a book or a series of books containing the lives of all our early governors, if not of our later ones; but among them all there is not one whose life presents such attractive material for this purpose as that of John Winthrop, Jr. But the information is scattered through many books and papers, and probably much in the way of letters, which would throw light on his conduct and character, is unprinted and in private collections.

He was born February 12, 1605/6, in the little village of Groton, in the County of Suffolk, England, about fifteen miles directly west from Ipswich, one of the principal towns of the County of Suffolk about sixty miles northeast from London. He was the eldest son of John Winthrop and Mary Forth. His father was a lawyer and a man of property, though not of very large wealth, but enough to place the family among the landed gentry of the County, he being the Lord of the Manor of Groton. At the age of nine young Winthrop lost his mother; within two years his father had married again and lost his second wife; but his third wife, Margaret Tyndal, whom he married soon after, seems to have been a good mother to her step-son, and the relations between them were always affectionate and confidential.

At an early age he was sent to the Free Grammar School of Bury St. Edmunds in his native County of Suffolk, and at fifteen entered Trinity College, Dublin. Cambridge University was only a few miles distant from his home. His father had been a student there, but left to get married and begin life for himself when not yet eighteen years old. Why the younger John was sent to Dublin, which involved a long and disagreeable journey, at least twice a year, each way, does not appear; but he had an uncle, Emmanuel Downing, the husband of his father's sister Lucy, living at that time in Dublin and in whose family he lived for at least a portion of his college course. This may have been the reason for his going there rather than to Cambridge. Cotton Mather says that he was at Cambridge for a while; but Savage thinks he is wrong, and I find no evidence of it although Mather's statement is copied by Dr. Benjamin Trumbull and probably by several others. During his residence at Dublin he maintained a frequent correspondence with his father, many of whose letters have been preserved. They are filled with such good advice as parents usually send to their sons in college, written in the prevalent religious style of the time, and with details in regard to books, clothes and bills; but their tone is confidential and warmly affectionate. In one of his letters his father says: "For the money you have spent I will pay it and what else your uncle shall appoint me, so soon as I receive my rents. And for your expenses, seeing I perceive you are considerate of my estate, I will have an equal regard of yours; and so long as your mind is limited to a sober course I will not limit your allowance less than to the uttermost of mine own estate. So as, if £20 be too little, as I always accounted it, you shall have £30, and when that shall not suffice you shall have more. Only hold a sober and frugal course, yet without baseness, and I will shorten myself to enlarge you," *etc.* This letter is a very fair indication of the relations existing between the

father and son during their whole lives. The father was always very proud of the son and reposed the greatest confidence in him, while the son entertained for the father a reverent respect and admiration. Yet, I do not think that they were very much alike; perhaps as much so however as fathers and sons usually are, and possibly too if they had been more alike they would have been less affectionate.

At nineteen young Winthrop left Dublin. It is supposed that he graduated; but there appears to be some doubt about it. He then went to London to study law and was admitted to the Inner Temple February 28, 1624/5. During the next year he has some correspondence with his father on the subject of his marriage, and then he all at once decides that he is not suited to the law and wants to go into the navy. The allusions are somewhat vague but he seems to have had at different times two young ladies in mind. It may be mere imagination, but one cannot help suspecting that some untoward experience in his love affairs suddenly aroused the sleeping patriotism in his heart and led him to think that the country might value a life which some young woman did not appear to care for. Anyone whose memory extends through the period of our late war must have had frequent occasion to observe how much unrequited love and uncongenial marriage had to do with the recruiting officer's success—so that at times it seemed as if these prolific promoters of patriotism had been appointed of Providence to carry the country through its crisis. However that may be, his friends obtained for him the appointment of secretary for Capt. Best who, under Admiral Harvey, formed part of an expedition led by the Duke of Buckingham for the relief of the French Protestants at Rochelle. It seems to have been a relative, Joshua Downing, an officer in the admiralty, who secured him the place, and from a letter of his one would judge that just at that time young Winthrop was not particular

where he went or what became of him. Mr. Downing writing to John Winthrop, Sr., April 24, 1627, says :

“Concerning Mr. John Winthrop’s inclinations to the sea, I will use my best endeavors for him, but I have no part in any shipping that goes for Turkey and the merchants that are owners do commonly place their own servants for pursers. But if he pleaseth to go along in those ships as a passenger to see the countries, the charges of his diet will not be great and I will commit him to the care of them that will be tender of him ; so shall he have more liberty for himself and have all occasion to make the best observation for his own good. But what if you send him now out in this fleet with the Duke. The Lord Harvey is rear admiral and I think a well disposed gentleman, the captain under him is Capt. Best, in whom I have some interest. If you should think well of it advise me speedily and I will deal with Capt. Best accordingly.”

They did think well of it and he went with Capt. Best. The expedition was unsuccessful in its undertaking. There are one or two letters from Winthrop to his father, but nothing to show his own part in what was going on. In less than a year the affair had ended and he was back in London speculating as to whether he would join Endicott’s Company to America. His father writes to him to send him some tobacco, but not to make any permanent arrangement with Endicott, but the rather to come and go for a little and see how he liked it. About this time the elder Winthrop had a severe injury to his hand, which became inflamed and confined him for many weeks, and the young man writes full instructions how to take care of it, not however of the most scientific kind, and sends him two plasters, a black and a yellow, given him by an old woman in London, with the promise of a certain cure, which indeed after a while occurred. This is given rather to show the turn of his mind and disposition than his medical knowledge or skill. Where or when he obtained the medical knowledge for which he afterwards

became somewhat famous I do not know. For a man of his quick observation and versatility and scientific and mechanical tastes it was probably not difficult to acquire such an amount of it as was possessed by the average practitioner of that time.

About this time he had an opportunity for a voyage to Turkey and the East under favorable auspices and sailed in the ship *London*, June, 1628. He visited Italy and Turkey, was in Constantinople three months and travelled about the Mediterranean where there was water carriage. He was absent fourteen months and came home by way of Amsterdam, from whence he writes for money and says he has not heard a word from his family since leaving home; showing a great change in postal facilities in the last two hundred and fifty years. He was with the English Ambassadors of the countries where he went, evidently received much attention and saw things with an observant eye and an intelligent understanding.

Almost the first news he gets on his return is a letter from his father announcing his proposed migration to America, and to this he replies, after some introductory and formal sentences, "For the business of New England I can say no other thing but that I believe confidently that the whole disposition thereof is of the Lord, who disposeth all alterations by his blessed will to his own glory and the good of His; and therefore do assure myself that all things shall work together for the best therein. And for myself I have seen so much of the vanity of the world" (he is now 24 years old) "that I esteem no more of the diversities of countries than as so many inns, whereof the traveller that hath lodged in the best or the worst findeth no difference when he cometh to his journey's end; and I shall call that my country where I can most glorify God and enjoy the presence of my dearest friends. Therefore herein I submit myself to God's will and yours, and, with your leave, do dedicate myself, laying by all desire of

other employments whatsoever, to the service of God and the company herein, with the whole endeavors both of body and mind." This promise he seems at once to have set out to fulfil, looking in a broad-minded way into the needs of a new colony and planning for them. January 18, 1629, he writes that he has a perfect plan with complete dimensions of the fort at Colchester. He also gives a full account of a horizontal wind-mill which he has invented and which he thinks will be very useful in a new country. This invention seems however never to have gotten further. February 8, 1631/2, he was married to his cousin, Martha Fones, of London. Savage says she was nineteen. Her father had died during Winthrop's absence in the East and her sister had married his younger brother Henry, who was a rather visionary and extravagant young man and had already spent some time in the West Indies. Henry came to America with his father, though not in the same vessel, and was accidentally drowned soon after his arrival.

John Winthrop, Sr., sailed for America in April, 1630. He brought with him, besides Henry, two boys, Stephen and Adam, twelve and ten years old. Mrs. Winthrop and the other children, one of whom was born soon after her husband left the country, remained in England under the care of John, who was also intrusted with selling his father's estate and settling his affairs. Having disposed of all these complicated matters, about the middle of August, 1631, he, with his wife, his mother and all her children, except Deane, who was left at school, set sail for the new world in the ship *Lyon*. They reached Boston harbor November 2d, and were received with great demonstrations of respect by the public authorities and were welcomed with salutes of artillery and small arms, and complimented with bountiful presents of provisions, so that the Governor says in his diary, "It was a great marvel that so much people and such a store of provisions could be gathered together at so few hours warning."

Very soon after his arrival he, being now twenty-five

years of age, was complimented by an appointment as one of the assistants or governor's council for the Colony of Massachusetts. Two years later he had purchased and settled the town of Ipswich, taking with him from Boston several of the old Groton neighbors who had come out with his father.

Here, not long after his arrival, his young wife died. She left no children. The following year he returned to England, and in 1635 married Elizabeth Reade, step-daughter of Hugh Peters. While in England he made an arrangement with Lord Say and Sele and Lord Brook to settle a plantation on their lands at and about the mouth of the Connecticut River, and was appointed governor of that territory for one year. He returned here in the fall of 1635, and immediately despatched men from Boston to the mouth of the Connecticut to erect a fort. He was just in time; for the Dutch already had men on the way to take possession of the place, but finding it occupied withdrew. He finished his fort building, served out his term of a year and returned to Ipswich to look after his interests there. For the next ten years he made his home in this vicinity, apparently attending to his private affairs and taking no further interest in public matters than became a gentleman of large public influence and a magistrate. About 1638 the town of Ipswich granted to him "Castle Hill," a finely situated farm of one hundred acres, "if he lives in Ipswich." This condition seems to show that his pioneering spirit was so well understood that it seemed likely he might leave them, and on the other hand that his influence and example were such as made him a very desirable citizen to keep. It was also probably, to some extent at least, a compensation for services already rendered the town in extinguishing Indian titles, and in other ways. I find in several books, apparently copied by one writer from another, but from whom originally I am not sure, the following statement, "When his father had made himself poor in nourishing the Massachusetts Colony,

this noble son gave up voluntarily his own large inheritance to further the noble work." I am at a loss to know just what this means. It is clear from various letters that the younger Winthrop had considerable property still in England. I do not know how he came by it. His mother, Mary Forth, was an heiress, but it nowhere appears that any portion of her property came to him. His father in a letter written to his son not long before his own death speaks of having received a large property with his wife, but in his letters to his son at college, in speaking of providing for his expenses, he says nothing of young Winthrop having property of his own. In the letter above referred to he says, "My son, the Lord knows how dear thou art to me and that my care has been more for thee than for myself." I do not think his first wife, Martha Fones, had any large amount of property, but I am inclined to think that he must have received something with his second wife. He was a good business manager, but he went into many enterprises, like salt works, iron works, mining schemes, *etc.*, with reference to the public good, and none of them I think were very successful and must on the whole have resulted in a loss. [*See Note.*]

The elder governor Winthrop died a poor man; but he had given almost his whole time to the service of the State, and for the most part without salary, although he had from time to time very considerable grants of land, most of which he still owned at the time of his death, but which were not of great pecuniary value. In short I am in the dark as to what this statement about his giving up his property means, although a more careful study might throw light upon it.

In 1641 he again visited England, and on his return engaged for a while in establishing an iron foundry at or near Braintree. In 1640 he had acquired title to Fisher's Island and extensive tracts on the main land, getting a grant from Massachusetts and Connecticut, so far as either had power to grant; they admitting that there might be a

question as to jurisdiction, and some years later when the island was included in the Duke of York's grant, he obtained a further patent from that government.

In 1644, according to Miss Calkins, he began building and planting on the island. In 1645 he was there, and his wife's sister Mrs. Lake was with him, although he had not yet removed his family, which he did the following year. The question of jurisdiction was still unsettled. Winthrop was a magistrate of Massachusetts and had the right to join persons in marriage. A young couple in Saybrook wishing to marry, Winthrop doubted his jurisdiction but told them if they would come to New London (or Pequot, as it then was) he would marry them. This was not convenient for them, but they finally compromised by meeting at what was supposed to be the boundary, a small stream a little west of Niantic, and there he married them. The stream has borne the name of Bride Brook to this day.

John Winthrop, Jr., was not yet a citizen of Connecticut. Sept. 9, 1647, "The Court (Gen. Assembly) thinks meet that a commission be directed to Mr. Winthrop to execute justice according to our laws and the rules of righteousness."

March 14, 1648, "Mr. John Winthrop of Pequot was voted to be in nomination for election to the place of magistrate."

May 18, 1648, "Mr. Winthrop, younger, is to have commission for to execute the place of a magistrate at Pequot."

May 16, 1650, "John Winthrop, Esq., was made a freeman of this jurisdiction." It would seem from this that he was elected a magistrate before he was made a freeman; whether this was an oversight, I cannot now say.

May 13, 1651, he addressed a letter to the General Court saying that he has been requested to make search for minerals and metals of value, and proposing a form of grant with the Court, to the effect that whereas said John Winthrop proposes at his own expense to search for mines

and minerals, if he shall find and maintain any mines of lead, copper, tin, antimony, vitriol, black lead, alum, stone-salt, salt springs or the like, that he, his heirs and associates shall have and enjoy the same with the land, wood, timber and waters within two or three miles of said mine, for carrying on the same, provided it be not within the bounds of any town or any particular person's property, *etc.* This request was complied with.

In the spring of 1657, Winthrop was elected governor of the Colony of Connecticut. He was not present at the time and the Court desired Capt. Culick (the secretary) "to write a letter to Mr. Winthrop as speedily as may be to acquaint him to what place the country hath chosen him and to desire his present assistance as much as may be." Here the office clearly sought the man, and sought him earnestly. In August the Court orders "that Mr. Winthrop being chosen governor of this colony shall be again desired to come and live in Hartford with his family while he governs; they grant him the yearly use or profits of the housing and lands in Hartford belonging to Mr. John Haynes, which shall be yearly discharged out of the public treasury." The next year, 1658, Thomas Wells was chosen governor and John Winthrop deputy-governor, but the year following he was chosen governor again and so on every year for a period of eighteen years until his death. There was a law that no person should be chosen governor above once in two years, which was the reason why he was not re-elected in 1658, but in 1660 this law was repealed in order that the colony might avail themselves of Winthrop's services. Connecticut was not without men of ability and experience and fully fit for the office of governor; neither were they men devoid of ambition. It therefore seems a surprising thing that they should have voted to change their organic law in order to avail themselves of the services of this new comer as a ruler. It is such a recognition of manifest ability and personal popularity as seldom comes to any public man. It was during the earlier years of his adminis-

tration as governor, that he acquired considerable eminence as a physician and had an extensive practice. He left a record of this practice covering a period of ten years. It is a strictly medical record such as physicians are accustomed to keep and gives us no special insight into the character of the man—but the fact of this experience is an added proof of his investigating spirit and his remarkable versatility.¹

In 1661, Winthrop presented to the General Court a form of charter such as he thought Connecticut should have from the King. This was referred to a committee with power. To be brief, the Court accepted the charter, appointed Winthrop their agent with full power to proceed to England to procure the same, and a grant was made of £80 for his personal expenses and £500 for general expenses connected with securing the charter. He went and he was successful. He had to take large authority and much responsibility; to make new agreements as to boundaries and to do various other things as to which the result on the minds of the people at home must have seemed to him very doubtful. He was a born diplomat, an astute manager. He knew when to insist and when to yield. It was during this visit that he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society, a very good indication of how he was received and how he stood among the best and most learned and most distinguished people in the Kingdom. He is frequently mentioned as being one of the founders of that society, but I believe the fact is that though a very early member his name does not appear among the original applicants for the charter of the society.

Cotton Mather in his *Magnalia* says, "I have been informed that while he was engaged in this negotiation [for the charter] being admitted into a private conference with the King he presented his majesty with a ring which Charles I. had upon some occasion given to his grand-

¹ He is said to have disclaimed being a physician and never to have received a fee for his services.

father, and the King not only accepted his present, but also declared that he accounted it one of his richest jewels." Since that time historians have quoted the story and some seem to regard this gift as the turning point in the whole transaction. Of late years, however, it has become the fashion to throw doubt on anything related by Cotton Mather. But it should be remembered that Mather did not write as a historian but as a collector of interesting events which in any way had come to his knowledge illustrating the life of the times. Doubtless Mather had heard this story and there is no reason why it should not be true. It was like Winthrop and like Charles. But even in those days kings were to some extent controlled by their ministers, and the granting of the charter, whatever might be the minor details, was a deliberate governmental act.

Winthrop sent the charter home and before long followed himself, and for fourteen years after "ruled the people prudently with all his power," by annual re-election, until his death in Boston while on the business of the State in 1676, at the age of seventy.

Thus we see him as a student, a lawyer, a sailor, a soldier, traveller, explorer, magistrate, founder of three towns, builder of fortifications, chemist, physician, mineralogist, diplomatist, governor, and above all a Christian gentleman.

NOTE.—Since the above was in type I have learned that this "giving up of his inheritance" refers to the fact that in 1630 John Winthrop, Jr., being heir of entail to his father's landed estate, voluntarily broke the entail in order that adequate settlements might be made on his step-mother and her children, and to provide funds for the emigration. The Forth money was settled on John Winthrop until his children by Mary Forth came of age when, if their mother was not living, it was to be divided between them. Thomas Fones, the father of John Winthrop, Jr.'s first wife, appears to have left a considerable estate.

His second wife received £300 from her father.

When Gov. Winthrop became pecuniarily involved in 1640, John Winthrop, Jr., made him considerable advances, taking in part payment unimproved land in New England.

I am indebted for the above to the kindness of Robert C. Winthrop, Esq., who also sent me several other items, but too late for insertion in the text.

F. J. K.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.