

Thacher, Peter

The Thacher Family.....

Boston 1885

THE THACHER FAMILY.

FACTS which have been ascertained within eighteen months past, touching the early history of the THACHER family in England, chiefly through the indefatigable labors of Miss Julia W. Redfield of Pittsfield, Mass., with certain comments thereupon.

Rev. PETER THACHER, father of Rev. THOMAS THACHER, first minister of the Old South, or Third Church of Boston, from the county of Somerset, was matriculated at Queen's College, Oxford, May 6, 1603, at the age of fifteen, by which it appears that he was born in 1588. He was elected *Disciple* or *Scholar* of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on the Somerset Foundation, July 19, 1603. There he took his degree of B.A., Feb. 4, 1608; and his Master's degree, March 14, 1611. He became Fellow of Corpus Christi College, March 20, 1613. He was married previous to 1615 to Anne —; for on June 12, 1615, his son John was born.

The illustrious Dr. John Reynolds, for many years president of Corpus Christi College, who deceased in 1607, gave directions in his will for the distribution of a portion of his library — many volumes of which went to increase the famous Bodleian Library — among undergraduates of the university, to be selected by his executors, who assigned thirty-five volumes to PETER THACHER, a larger number than were allotted to any other student, except that three nephews of the testator each received a few more.

Aug. 9, 1616, Mr. Thacher was instituted vicar of the parish of Milton Clevedon, Somersetshire, and remained in that office

till the latter part of 1622, when he resigned it to accept the rectorship of the Church of St. Edmunds, in Salisbury, Wiltshire. Cotton Mather states the birth of his son Thomas, already mentioned, to have occurred May 1, 1620, but is silent as to the locality. No record of his birth has as yet been found; but as his father's residence, at the date assigned to it, was MILTON CLEVEDON, it is a fair inference that he was born there. The parish register of that church records the burial of his son John, June 13, 1622, at the age of seven. It also gives the date of the baptism of his daughter Anne, ^{the name of his sister} who became the wife of Christopher Batt, as Feb. 17, 1622. Very few of the ancient records, however, are extant.

Upon a stone slab, inserted in the outer wall of the east end of the main body of the church of Milton Clevedon, about seven feet from the ground, is an inscription in rhyme, to the memory of this son. Of this a perfect photographic copy has lately been taken, through the kindness of Rev. F. W. Weaver, the curate at present in charge of that parish, who has gratuitously rendered most excellent service to Miss Redfield in her researches. It is well engraved in Roman capitals, and is perfectly legible. The following is a copy thereof:—

VNDER THAT STONE'S A CH
ILD WRAPT IN EARTH'S MOLD
FOR WHOM CANOT HIS PAR
ENTS GRIEFE BE TOLD.
IN WIT MOST RARE NOE
LESSE IN GRACE WAS HE
THE SOONER FIT WITH
CHRIST IN BLIS TO BE.
JOHN THACHER BORNE IV. 12. 1615.

It is believed that this slab originally formed a part of the floor of the church, with other flat stones, inscribed to the memory of persons interred beneath them ; that when the old flooring was removed, and tiles substituted, as was done at some former period, the slabs containing such memorials of the dead were removed to the churchyard except this, which, perhaps, in part for the simple pathos of its inscription, and in part because it was in memory of a child of a former vicar, was placed in the conspicuous position it occupies.

Mr. Weaver is of the opinion that this church is of the time of Henry VII. ; though he believes, that, before the Norman conquest, there was a Christian church upon or near the site of the present one.

It has also been ascertained that a certain JOHN THACHER, likewise from Somerset, was matriculated at Queen's College, Oct. 19, 1604, at the age of thirteen. His age and college, and other facts to be mentioned, suggest that he was probably a brother of PETER THACHER, whose history we have been tracing. The register of matriculations styles this John "the son of a clergyman." PETER THACHER, the rector of St. Edmunds, who died at Salisbury in 1640, names in his will a brother John, who survived him, and who may well have been his fellow-student at Oxford. In the middle aisle of the Church of Queen Camel, Somersetshire, twelve miles from Milton Clevedon, is a stone slab, containing the following inscriptions : —

"Here lyeth the Body of John Thacher, who was buried the 25th day of February, Anno Dom. 1653.

"Here also lyeth Rebecka, the wife of John Thacher, who was buried the 11th day of December, 1662.

"Here also lyeth the Body of Peter, son of John Thacher, who was buried December the 9th, Anno Dom. 1669."

The dates of the interments of John and Rebecka Thacher show that this John may well have been a brother of Peter, vicar of Milton Clevedon, and rector of St. Edmunds ; and this Rebecka his brother John's widow. Upon this hypothesis,

the Peter named in the third inscription was a nephew of the aforesaid Rev. Peter.

In November, 1883, Rev. Ralph P. E. Thacher of Cambridge, Mass., discovered in the Hugo manuscript in the British Museum, that a Rev. PETER THACHER was instituted vicar of the parish of Queen Camel in 1574, and continued in that office till his death, in 1624, a period of fifty years. There are strong reasons to believe that he was the father of Rev. Peter (1) of Milton Clevedon and (2) of Salisbury, of John of Queen Camel, and of ANTONY THACHER, one of the three grantees and founders of Yarmouth, Mass., who held a conspicuous position in the colony of New Plymouth, and was the ancestor of a long line of men of marked ability. We find him, in 1621, at Queen Camel, with his family. Here is recorded the baptism of his daughter EDITH; and here Miss Redfield conjectures that he may have served his father Peter, as curate, as he did his brother Peter, at Salisbury, 1632-1634. Only fragments of the ancient records of Queen Camel remain; but the Diocesan Registry of Bath and Wells, at ~~Bath~~ ^{Wells}, contains the following entries:—

“QUEEN CAMEL.

“1602. Giles, the sonne of Peter Thacher was buried the third day of August, 1602.

“1621. Thomas Thacher and Mary Lokier were married the four and twentieth day of September, 1621.

“Edith, the daughter of Anthonie Thacher was baptized the seaventh day of ffebruarie A^o D^{no} 1621.

“John, the son of John Thacher was buried the six and twentieth day of March, 1621.

“Alice, the wife of Thomas Thacher, was buried the last day of March, Anno D^m, 1621.

“1622. Rebekah, the daughter of John Thacher, was baptized the Eighteenth day of April, 1622.”

We notice here the family names *John* and *Thomas*; the latter continued in the person of the first minister of the Old

South, or Third Church of Boston ; given by him to his oldest son ; re-appearing in the families of each of his three sons, and perpetuated in those of his descendants and of Antony Thacher to this day. A notable example of this is in the name of the honored and beloved professor at Yale, THOMAS ANTONY THACHER, whose father Peter, of Hartford, Conn., so far as in his power, thus commemorated his own American ancestor as well as that ancestor's uncle, the noted founder of Yarmouth.

The most striking, however, of these records is that of the baptism of EDITH, the daughter of Antony, already referred to. Assuming her baptism to have followed her birth within a few days, as was usual at that period, she would have been fourteen years of age in 1635, the date of that ever-memorable shipwreck on Thacher's Island, when she, with her brothers, — William, already grown to man's estate, and Peter, an infant, — together with her only sister, Mary, perished. She was then of suitable age to have had the charge of her infant brother, of whom her father, in his thrilling relation of the shipwreck (which *Savage* declares to be "one of the most affecting and effective stories of disasters of this sort ;" and, again, "I can recommend no more striking narrative in our early history"), says, "My little babe (ah, poor Peter !) [was] sitting in his sister Edith's arms, who, to the uttermost of her power, sheltered him from the waters." The record of EDITH's baptism fixes Antony and his family at Queen Camel in 1621. We have seen that the minister of Queen Camel from 1574 to 1624 was a Rev. Peter Thacher. This fact, the inscriptions at Queen Camel Church, and the records of this parish found in the diocesan registry at Wells, all point to Queen Camel as the *locus in quo* to which the Thachers of New England are to look for their origin. Careful researches at that place and vicinity, and perhaps in other parts of the county of Somerset, and in the various depositories of wills in England, — means to undertake which, it is hoped, will soon be forthcoming, — promise a rich reward touching the foundation and early history of the family of Thachers to which the brothers Peter and Antony, and Thomas

the son of Peter, the youthful emigrant to America, and their numerous descendants now to be found in many of the United States, belong.

PETER THACHER,
85 Milk Street, Boston.

MAY 18, 1885.