

JOHN HANCOCK

John Hancock is a significant character in Esther Forbes' novel, Johnny Tremain. He certainly was a significant member of the Sons of Liberty. Born on January 12, 1736 in Quincy to the Rev. John and Mary Hancock, he was soon orphaned, but was adopted by his childless uncle Thomas, who happened to be an extremely successful businessman. Hancock attended Harvard, as did many members of the Long Room Club, and soon became a partner in his uncle's business. Reputed to be the wealthiest man in New England, Hancock enjoyed power and reveled in being the center of attention. He was also generous with his money to causes he believed in, and never totally forgot that he came from a poor family. A member of the Brattle Street Church, which he generously supported, Hancock looked to Rev. Samuel Cooper for advice and friendship. He believed in the Whig cause whole-heartedly, and was especially close to Samuel Adams, who used Hancock's position and money to further the cause of the Sons of Liberty.

Hancock was pressured to join the Patriot cause when his ship, the Liberty, was seized by the British in 1768. He was trying to smuggle Madeira into New England without paying the tax. The fines would have bankrupted him. Soon he was a member of the General Court, head of the Town Committee in Boston, and in 1774-75, the President of the Provincial Congress. Hancock, however, hoped that he would be chosen as commander of the American army at the upcoming Second Continental Congress. When he arrived at Philadelphia, he must have been heartened when he was elected President of the Continental Congress, and was first to sign the Declaration of Independence. When John Adams nominated George Washington for the post Hancock wanted, and Sam Adams supported the choice, it must have been hard to bear.

Back in Massachusetts, Hancock became President of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention in 1780, the Governor of Massachusetts from 1780 to 1785 and 1787 to 1793, and presided over the Massachusetts Convention to ratify the US Constitution. He died while still governor, and was replaced by his Lieutenant Governor – Samuel Adams!

Broadside, *Glorious News, Just Received from Boston. . . .*, 16 May 1766

This broadside shows the importance of Hancock's ships both for trade and communication.

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GLORIOUS NEWS,

BOSTON, Friday 11 o'Clock, 16th May 1766.

THIS Instant arrived here the Brig Harrison, belonging to *John Hancock*, Esq; Captain *Shubael Coffin*, in 6 Weeks and 2 Days from LONDON, with important News, as follows.

From the LONDON GAZETTE.
Westminster, March 18th, 1766.

THIS day his Majesty came to the House of Peers, and being in his royal robes seated on the throne with the usual solemnity, Sir Francis Molineux, Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, was sent with a Message from his Majesty to the House of Commons, commanding their attendance in the House of Peers. The Commons being come thither accordingly, his Majesty was pleased to give his royal assent to

An ACT to REPEAL an Act made in the last Session of Parliament, intituled, an Act for granting and applying certain Stamp-Duties and other Duties in the British Colonies and Plantations in America, towards further defraying the expences of defending, protecting and securing the same, and for amending such parts of the several Acts of Parliament relating to the trade and revenues of the said Colonies and Plantations, as direct the manner of determining and recovering the penalties and forfeitures therein mentioned.

Also ten public bills, and seventeen private ones.

Yesterday there was a meeting of the principal Merchants concerned in the American trade, at the King's Arms tavern in Cornhill, to consider of an Address to his Majesty on the beneficial Repeal of the late Stamp-Act.

Yesterday morning about eleven o'clock a great number of North American Merchants went in their coaches from the King's Arms tavern in Cornhill to the House of Peers, to pay their duty to his Majesty, and to express their satisfaction at his signing the Bill for Repealing the American Stamp-Act, there was upwards of fifty coaches in the procession.

Last night the said gentlemen dispatched an express for Falmouth, with fifteen copies of the Act for repealing the Stamp-Act, to be forwarded immediately for New York.

Orders are given for several merchantmen in the river to proceed to sea immediately on their respective voyages to North America, some of whom have been cleared out since the first of November last.

Yesterday messengers were dispatched to Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, and all the great manufacturing towns in England, with an account of the final decision of an august assembly relating to the Stamp-Act.

When the KING went to the House of Peers to give the Royal Assent, there was such a vast Concourse of People, huzzaing, clapping Hands, &c. that it was several Hours before His Majesty reached the House.

Immediately on His Majesty's Signing the Royal Assent to the Repeal of the Stamp-Act the Merchants trading to America, dispatched a Vessel which had been in waiting, to put into the first Port on the Continent with the Account.

There were the greatest Rejoicings possible in the City of London, by all Ranks of People, on the TOTAL Repeal of the Stamp-Act, -- the Ships in the River displayed all their Colours, Illuminations and Bonfires in many Parts. -- In short, the Rejoicings were as great as was ever known on any Occasion.

It is said the Acts of Trade relating to America would be taken under Consideration, and all Grievances removed. The Friends to America are very powerful, and disposed to assist us to the utmost of their Ability.

Capt. Blake sailed the same Day with Capt. Coffin, and Capt. Shand a Fort-night before him, both bound to this Port.

It is impossible to express the Joy the Town is now in, on receiving the above, great, glorious, and important NEWS -- The Bells in all the Churches were immediately set a Ringing, and we hear the Day for a general Rejoicing will be the beginning of the next Week.

PRINTED for the Benefit of the PUBLIC, by
Drapers, Edes & Gill, Green & Russell, and Fleets.

The Customers to the Boston Papers may have the above gratis at the respective Offices.

Glorious News, Just received from Boston, brought by Messrs. Jonathon Lowder, and Thomas Brackett . . . (Newport: S. Hall, 1766.)

John Hancock, *An Oration*, 5 March 1774

This speech was probably written with considerable assistance from Dr. Benjamin Church.

AN ORATION

Men, Brethren, Fathers and Fellow Countrymen!

The attentive gravity, the venerable appearance of this crouded audience, the dignity which I behold in the countenances of so many in this great Assembly, the solemnity of the occasion upon which we have met together, join'd to a consideration of

the part I am to take in the important business of this day, fill me with an awe hitherto unknown; and heighten the sense which I have ever had, of my unworthiness to fill this sacred desk; but, allur'd by the call of some of my respected fellow-citizens, with whose request it is always my greatest pleasure to comply, I almost forget my want or ability to perform what they required. In this situation, I find my only support, in assuring myself that generous people will not severely censure what they know was well intended, though it's want of merit, should prevent their being able to applaud it. And I pray, that my sincere attachment to the interest of my country, and hearty detestation of every design formed against her liberties, may be admitted as some apology for my appearance in this place.

I have always from my earliest youth, rejoiced in the felicity of my Fellow-men, and have ever considered it as the indispensable duty of every member of society to promote, as far as in him lies, the prosperity of every individual, but more especially of the community to which he belongs; and also, as a faithful subject of the state, to use his utmost endeavours to detect, and having detected, strenuously to oppose every traitorous plot which its enemies may devise for its destruction. Security to the persons and properties of the governed, is so obviously the design and end of civil government, that to attempt a logical proof of it, would be like burning tapers at noon day, to assist the sun in enlightening the world; and it cannot be either virtuous or honorable, to attempt to support a government, of which this is not the great and principal basis; and it is to the last degree vicious and infamous to attempt to support a government which manifestly tends to render the persons and properties of the governed insecure. Some boast of being *friends to government*; I am a friend to *righteous* government, to a government founded upon the principles of reason and justice; but I glory in publicly avowing my eternal enmity to tyranny. Is the present system which the British administration have adopted for the government of the colonies, a righteous government? Or is it tyranny? Here suffer me to ask (and would to Heaven there could be an answer) What tenderness? What regard, respect or consideration has *Great-Britain* shewn in their late transaction for the security of the persons or properties of the inhabitants of the colonies? or rather, What have they omitted doing to destroy that security? They have declared that they have, ever had, and of right ought ever to have, full power to make laws of sufficient validity to bind the colonies in all cases whatever: They have exercised this pretended right by imposing a tax upon us without our consent; and lest we should shew some reluctance at parting with our property, her fleets and armies are sent to inforce their mad pretensions. The town of Boston, ever faithful to the British Crown, has been invested by a British fleet: The troops of George the Third have cross'd the wide atlantick, not to engage an enemy, but to assist a band of TRAITORS in trampling on the rights and liberties of his most loyal subjects in America,—those rights and liberties which as a father he ought ever to regard, and as a King he is bound in honour to defend from violations, even at the risque of his own life [. . .]

Great expectations were also formed from the artful scheme of allowing the East India company to export Tea to America upon their own account. This certainly, had it succeeded, would have effected the purpose of the contrivers, and gratified the most sanguine wishes of our adversaries. We soon should have found our trade in the hands of

foreigners, and taxes imposed on every thing which we consumed; nor would it have been strange, if in a few years a company in London should have purchased an exclusive right of trading to America. — The people soon were aware of the poison which with so much craft and subtilty had been concealed: Loss and disgrace ensued: and perhaps this long-concerted, master-piece of policy, may issue in the total disuse of TEA in this country, which will eventually be the saving of the lives and the estates of thousands — — Yet while we rejoice that the adversary has not hitherto prevailed against us, let us by no means put off the harness. Restless malice, and disappointed ambition will still suggest new measures to our inveterate *enemies* — Therefore let *Us* also be ready to take the field whenever danger calls, let us be united and strengthen the hands of each other, by promoting a general union among us. — Much has been done by the Committees of Correspondence for this and the other towns of this province toward uniting the inhabitants; let them still go on and prosper. Much has been done by the Committees of Correspondence for the Houses of Assembly in this and our Sister Colonies, for uniting the Inhabitants of the whole Continent for the security of their common interest. May success ever attend their generous endeavours. But permit me here to suggest a general Congress of Deputies from the several Houses of Assembly on the Continent, as the most effectual method of establishing such an Union as the present posture of our affairs requires. At such a Congress, a firm foundation may be laid for the security of our Rights and Liberties; a system may be formed for our common safety, by a strict adherence to which we shall be able to frustrate any attempts to over throw our constitution; restore peace and harmony to America, and secure honor and wealth to Great-Britain, even against the inclinations of her ministers, whose duty it is to study her welfare; and we shall also free ourselves from those unmannerly pillagers who impudently tell us, that they are licenced by an act of the British parliament to thrust their dirty hands into the pockets of every American. But I trust, the happy time will come, when with the besom of destruction, these noxious vermin will be swept for ever from the streets of Boston.

Surely you never will tamely suffer this country to be a den of thieves. Remember, my friends, from whom you sprang — Let not a meanness of spirit, unknown to those whom you boast of as your Fathers, excite a thought to the dishonour of your mothers. I conjure you, by all that is dear, by all that is honorable, by all that is sacred, not only that ye pray, but that you act; that, if necessary, ye fight, and even die for the prosperity of our Jerusalem. Break in sunder, with noble disdain, the bonds with which the Philistines have bound you. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed by the soft arts of luxury and effeminacy, into the Pit digged for your destruction. Despise the glare of wealth. That people who pay greater respect to a wealthy villain, than to an honest upright man in poverty, almost deserve to be enslaved; they plainly shew that wealth, however it may be acquired, is in their esteem, to be preferr'd to virtue.

But I thank God, that America abound in men who are superior to all temptation, whom nothing can divert from a steady pursuit of the interest of their country; who are at once it's ornament and safe-guard. And sure I am, I should not incur your displeasure, if I paid a respect so justly due to their much honoured characters in this public place; but when I name an ADAMS, such a numerous host of Fellow patriots rush upon my mind, that I fear it would take up too much of your time, should I attempt to call over the illustrious roll: But your grateful hearts will point you to the men; and their revered names, in all succeeding times, shall grace the annals of America. From them, let us, my

friends, take example; from them let us catch the divine enthusiasm; and feel, each for himself, the god-like pleasure of diffusing happiness on all around us; of delivering the oppressed from the iron grasp of tyranny; of changing the hoarse complaints and bitter moans of wretched slaves, into those cheerful songs, which freedom and contentment must inspire. There is a heart-felt satisfaction in reflecting on our exertions for the public weal, which all the sufferings an enraged tyrant can inflict, will never take away; which the ingratitude and reproaches of those whom we have sav'd from ruin cannot rob us of. The virtuous assertor of the Rights of mankind, merits a reward, which even a want of success in his endeavours to save his country, the heaviest misfortune which can befall a genuine Patriot, cannot entirely prevent him from receiving.

I have the most animating confidence that the present noble struggle for liberty, will terminate gloriously for America. And let us play the man for our God, and for the cities of our God; while we are using the means in our power, let us humbly commit our righteous cause to the great Lord of the universe, who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity. — And having secured the approbation of our hearts, by a faithful and unwearied discharge of our duty to our country, let us joyfully leave her important concerns in the hands of Him who raiseth up and putteth down the empires and kingdoms of the world as He pleases; and with cheerful submission to His sovereign will, devoutly say,

“Although the Fig-Tree shall not Blossom, neither shall Fruit be in the Vines; the Labour of the Olive shall fail, and the Fields shall yield no Meat; the Flock shall be cut off from the Fold, and there shall be no Herd in the Stalls: Yet we will rejoice in the LORD, we will joy in the GOD of our Salvation.”

John Hancock, *Oration Delivered March 5, 1774 . . .to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy.* (Boston: Edes & Gill, 1774).

Philelutheros, *A Letter to John Hancock*, 4 April 1774.

From the New-York Gazetteer, of April, 1774

A Letter to JOHN HANCOCK, Esquire.

When a gentleman addresses the public, he ought to be governed by the laws of truth and honor. Nor ought any man, openly professing himself a patriot, to aim, under that character, at deception, or advance any thing in diminution of the peace and good order of society. These truths are so well established by reason, that they cannot be denied by any one, without incurring pity or contempt. Therefore by these rules I shall now examine your late oration; by the publication of which you have acceded to this liberty, and therefore I need no apology.

But give me leave to premise, that it is in vain to assume the character of virtue, either public or private, relying on appearances only to support it. There must be the indelible marks of it fixed in the mind, before any one can truly enjoy or merit that honor.

And profession and practice must assume an indissoluble union, before the amiable part of mankind will decree the prize of virtue to any one.

The subject of your oration was the commemoration of the cruel and bloody massacre, as you stile it, committed on the 5th of March, 1770, by Captain Preston, and a party of soldiers under his command.

As the orator of the day, you exerted your utmost abilities in publishing to the world the enormous guilt of the transaction. You also, very profusely, loaded those persons with epithets, due only to the most abandoned and profligate of mankind. But permit me here to remind you, that the truth of a fact can never be established, b[y] supposing it proved.

If upon a strict and candid examination of the transaction and what followed, it should evidently appear, that there was not any murder or massacre committed either by Capt. Preston or any of the soldiers under his command, how will you escape censure? This enquiry naturally leads to the consideration of facts, and makes it necessary briefly to recapitulate some transactions of that night, and what in consequence thereof was done by a party at Boston, among which it is well known you was the most active, and of which you have ever since gloried.

On my part, it is freely confessed, that the party of soldiers headed by Capt. Preston, killed five men. On yours it must be acknowledged that the Captain and all the men accused, without hesitation or delay, were delivered up to the civil power, and committed to his Majesty's goal, in order to their being brought [to] a legal and regular trial. Here the matter by the rules of law, founded in humanity, ought to have [] until sitting of the court. But instead thereof, several Justices assembled, and in public began the examination of witnesses. Such were with unusual industry sought after, and some of which added no credit to the cause. Not contented with this unprecedented and dangerous maneuver, all the depositions so procured, were instantly ordered to be printed, together with the representation of the bloody tragedy, with most inflammatory notes under the same; and there were most industriously scattered, not only through this but the neighbouring colonies. This procedure certainly was very irregular and unfair. All industry was used, at repeated town-meetings, and in which you was present, in newspapers, nay, and in the public streets, to inflame the minds of all people, and to fill their breasts, with most invincible prejudices against the unfortunate prisoners, at that time destitute of all human help. All this, I think, might have satiated the keenest appetite for revenge. — But no, there was still one other powerful engine to be employed for the accomplishment of the *noble* end designed, the ignominious death of the innocent. Pulpit declamation was made subservient to the cause. For this reason too many of the Ministers, if they deserve that venerable name, instead of preaching the gospel of truth, love and charity, arraigned, tried, and condemned the unhappy prisoners, with a ferocity exactly fitted to the character of a gladiator. — This conduct is so entirely destitute of excuse, as to render it impertinent to remark upon it. — What could be the end proposed from these unusual methods? I fear it was as a certain Doctor of divinity, high up in the estimation of the party very emphatically expressed in the words following: “Had I been on the jury, I would have hanged them all, EVIDENCE OR NO EVIDENCE.” Surely no serious, no virtuous man can agree with the Doctor in this barbarous sentiment. And yet, I am sorry to declare it, this abandoned man was one of the

pulpit orators employed, was and still is caressed by you as a friend, an able politician, a learned and pious divine.

From this narration of facts no impartial person can be at a loss to conceive what deep rooted and almost irresistible prejudice influenced all ranks and degrees of persons in the province. Had the prisoners after such efforts, such effectual methods taken to poison the minds of those who were to be on their jury, any hope of deliverance remaining, unless their innocence appeared with strength and vigour sufficient to dissipate all doubt, and irradiate all the force of prejudice? Such were their uncommon, such their wretched situation when put upon trial.

Under these circumstances, I appeal to mankind in general, and to you, Sir, in particular, whether there is the smallest degree of probability, that the accused would have escaped punishment, if there had been any evidence, though but slight against them? I attended the trial, and though not a lawyer, humbly presume myself capable of judging of facts: And therefore undertake to affirm, that the evidence was so far from fixing the guilt of murder or any other crime on Capt. Preston, that it did not leave even the suspicion of any guilt whatsoever upon him. Nor was there any evidence to prove the soldiers, one excepted, guilty of any crime.

Now let us attend to the trial; for though there were two, I think it best for many obvious reasons to consider them only as one. It was had before a venerable, an honest, and a learned bench. The jury was composed of men of unblemished characters, chiefly from the neighbouring towns, the rest were inhabitants of Boston. Those also have ever borne the character of honest and sensible men. These were all duly returned and sworn. — The town engaged two counsel to prosecute, able and faithful. And they in strict conformity to their trust and duty, did themselves great honor. — Nothing was wanting on their parts. — The trial was very lengthy and extremely fair. — The whole evidence was most accurately taken in writing by the court, and the gentlemen of counsel on both sides, and indeed by several others. The same most deliberately and candidly examined, and applied by the judges and lawyers. — The law opened and explained. After which the court in a very solemn, but familiar stile, gave their several charges to the jury much in favour of the prisoners, more particularly of the Captain, unanimously agreeing that in their opinion, there was not any evidence to charge him with any crime. — The jury withdrew, and on their return, declared the prisoners not guilty, except one of the soldiers, whom they found guilty of manslaughter only; whereupon the rest were discharged. In fact, the whole process was attended with all the impartiality, caution, and judgment, necessary to constitute a fair and solemn trial in a British court of justice.

Now, Sir, let me ask you, are you ignorant of all these proceedings, or was you not, during all the scene, in or near the town; I dare say you will not answer in the negative. Indulge me a little farther. What kind of evidence is sufficient, in your mind, to exculpate from a charge of guilt? Is it the depositions of men of unspotted characters, and of sound sense? Is it the solemn judgment of grave and venerable judges upon the meaning and operation of such depositions? Or is it the unanimous suffrages of twelve good and lawful men, under oath, to determine according to evidence? Tell me, can a man produce stronger, more satisfactory, nay convincing proof of innocency, than an acquittal by an upright court and jury, upon the most mature consideration of law and evidence? And have you not all these irresistible proofs in the case before us? Yet, in opposition to them all, you publicly undertake to charge persons, thus proved innocent, as

guilty of the most horrid and matchless murder and massacre ever committed on the face of the earth, and to hand their names down to posterity, branded with the blackest infamy. Your passions, Sir, certainly represent objects to you in a very false light, or you would not have attempted thus to deceive the public, thus to declare war with common sense. Recollect yourself, and then you cannot be either so weak or vain as to imagine yourself capable first to deceive, and then mislead all others. Cannot time, added to the strongest evidence of innocence, mitigate your ill founded resentment, induce you to spare a good character [Captain Preston], once indeed in danger of being mangled to pieces by priests, justices, and —— witnesses.

Next, Sir, give me leave to shew wherein you have been faulty in point of real patriotism, in order that for the future you may adopt a conduct consistent with your professions. If in your oration there appears a manifest intention to lessen the consequence and authority of the Superior Court, before which the Captain and others were tried, and to bring into contempt, trials by juries; you cannot think you are thereby advancing the peace of society. Your doctrines in their consequences appear clearly to me in that light.

The necessity of courts for the due direction of public justice is self-evident; and it is equally obvious that the characters of both judges and jurors ought to be held in veneration, and never to be attacked or even discoloured, unless by reason and truth. Otherwise their solemn decisions, designed to quiet men in the enjoyment of their property, characters and lives, will not have those salutary effects. For when once the reverence justly due to courts and their judgments is obliterated, it necessarily follows, that individuals no longer will pay obedience to their authority; and so in a short time the strongest arm and longest sword will triumph over justice.

Supposing, Sir, the fact of murder to be as you have represented it, what a shocking idea must it raise of both court and jury? Could any man on such a supposition account why such manifest guilt escaped punishment? There are but two possible ways of satisfying the mind in this enquiry, viz. either that the court and jury were invincibly ignorant and stupid, or incorrigibly vicious and wicked. Both which directly tend to overthrow the dignity and weight of courts and juries, and consequently to destroy their utility. These are subjects of which you in particular under the character of a patriot ought to have been very attentive to, and tender of. Your over heated imagination hath plunged you deep in errors; perhaps the term may be thought to be some too mild. To such I declare I had rather be censured for lenity, than suspected of illiberality. To conclude, let me caution you to take great care, not to launch out into such extravagancies again, nor ever countenance others in such attempts, lest the dispassionate and thoughtful should be compelled by reason, not only to question, but deny your patriotism.

PHILELUTHEROS

Philelutheros [pseud], "A Letter to John Hancock, Esquire," *New York Gazetteer*, 4 April 1774.

**Peter Thacher, *Sermon on the Death of Governor Hancock*, 20 October 1793
[excerpt]**

A
SERMON
Preached to the
Society in Brattle Street, Boston,
October 20, 1793,
And Occasioned by the Death of
His Excellency
JOHN HANCOCK, Esq. L.L.D. and A.A.S.
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

By PETER THACHER, D. D.
Pastor of the Church in Brattle Street.

Governor Hancock was formed by nature to act a brilliant part on the theatre of the world. His abilities were of that kind which strike, astonish and please. They were highly respectable; and were cultivated by a learned education in our university, by travelling abroad, and by the conversation of wise and good men which he enjoyed from his infancy. Adopted by an uncle¹ who possessed very great property, and who filled some of the most important stations in the province, he early became an object of public attention. Every seed of genius in him was cultivated, and his future eminence was fondly predicted. They were happy who could contribute to his advancement, and his parents by adoption were more pleased with tokens of respect shewn to him than with those which they received themselves.

In early life he came into possession of a fortune equal to his utmost wishes, and superior to any which our part of America had then known. It was with anxiety his friends viewed him in this situation; they feared that he would be drawn into the vortex of dissipation, and become a prey to those who “lie in wait to destroy.” They were pleased when they found him taking a different turn, wishing to acquire the esteem and confidence of men of worth and character, and appearing as the friend and asserter of the liberties of his country.

He began his public life in a period highly interesting to America, a period which called out every man’s exertions and abilities. It was at the commencement of our controversy with Great-Britain, and our resistance to her unconstitutional acts. Naturally warm and decisive, and incapable of serving his friends or his country by halves, he entered deeply into this resistance. His patriotism, and his amiable popular manners, rendered him the idol of his fellow citizens; they loved his very name, and early showered upon him their best honors. This town, of which he spake with affectionate regard to the day of his death, invested him with every distinction which it was in their power to give. They made him one of their magistrates; they called him into notice on every occasion, and were delighted when they could do any thing to honour him. Their

¹ The Hon. Thomas Hancock, Esq. one of the council for the province of Massachusetts Bay, &c, died August 1st, 1761.

young men were happy to connect themselves with him, and place themselves under his command in a military core; young and old united in calling him to a seat in the general court of the province; and from early life their suffrages were never once withheld from him. He has always been dear to his fellow citizens. No man before him ever possessed such a command of their affections, and it has sometimes seemed as if they were “ready to pluck out their own eyes and give them unto him.”

When he became a statesman his sphere of action was enlarged, and his respectability and popularity increased with it. Mr. Hancock was a real patriot, and resisted strong and dazzling temptations to sacrifice the cause of his country, and withdraw his opposition to the measures of the British government. He was eloquent, and spoke with ease and propriety upon every subject; his manners were graceful, and his name and influence were of the highest importance to the common cause. These circumstances made him as dear to his fellow citizens at large as he was to those of his own town. They loved him because he espoused their cause and aimed at their interest.

Mr. Hancock had a peculiar talent of presiding with ease and dignity at the head of a deliberative body. His attentions were equally directed to all the members, yet every individual supposed himself to be particularly noticed and favoured. These talents he discovered when called to preside in the provincial congress of Massachusetts in the year 1774, and they afterwards improved and enlarged when, for several years at the commencement of the war, he presided in the congress of united America. His polite and easy manners, his elegant taste, his dignified appearance qualified him to appear with advantage at the head of the states. While he filled this station, some of the most interesting events took place which ever agitated any country. A war with Great-Britain commenced, and was carried on with various success. The first commission every held by the commander in chief of our armies, the great and good man who so happily led them during our whole war, was signed by Mr. Hancock. At the head of the band of heroes who declared their country free and independent, his name appears. He witnessed in this station the retreat through the Jerseys, and the capture of Burgoyne. The weight of business incumbent upon him at this time was exceedingly heavy, and he was indefatigable in his attention to it.

In proportion to his influence in America and his usefulness to its cause, he became an object of hatred and resentment to its enemies. They were not content with vilifying him as a man without principle and without fortune; they actually excepted him, with another distinguished patriot, our present commander in chief, from the pardon which they offered to all others. His zeal was not cooled, nor his courage abated by their threatenings. He was firm, inflexible and animated, and his ardor seemed to increase instead of diminishing with the difficulties of our situation. It was with great hazard he served his country, and in proportion to this hazard did his service appear valuable and important in their eyes.

When at his own request he was released from the fatigues of this station, and returned to this State, he was received with former affection, and experienced former confidence. But the people of Massachusetts manifested their esteem for him most decidedly, when they called him by their suffrages to be the first Governor under our present happy constitution. Such confidence and distinction are rarely placed long in the same man; the collisions of party, the envy and ambition of competitors, some of those unforeseen contingencies which like “time and chance happen to all men,” commonly

after a few years deprive a man of popular affection; but Mr. Hancock never lost it. Every year, excepting when at his own desire he was excused, brought him to the chair with a clear and decided majority, and sometimes with a consent nearly unanimous. On the last election, the numbers in his favour were as large as ever. To the day of his death he was “accepted of the multitude of his brethren,” and held a larger share in their affections than any man before him enjoyed.

His attachment to the interest, the freedom and sovereignty of the state was uniform and inflexible. He was not found wanting in demonstrating this attachment; and the approbation of his public conduct, the satisfaction which he gave in this office may be certainly argued from the constant and general suffrages of his constituents. They considered him as a genuine republican, as the friend of the people, the firm supporter of the cause of freedom; and they viewed him so with reason. His last affecting interview with the legislature, in which he declared, under circumstances peculiarly awful, his attachment to the people and his integrity in their service, furnish a strong trait in this part of his character.

It would be injustice to the memory of Governor Hancock not to say, that he was firm friend to the independence and happiness of united America. When the federal constitution, from which this country has received the most essential advantages, was before the people, he gave his decided influence in its favour, and did then perhaps as much service to his country as when he consented to its independence.

The same regard to the rights of man and the happiness of the world, which made him a patriot at home, induced him to wish well to all mankind abroad; and fixed him the warm uniform friend of the revolution in France. While he lamented the excesses and divisions of this gallant nation, he rejoiced in their success, and ardently desired that they might enjoy the blessings of a free government.

To the character of Governor Hancock as a public man, may very properly be added his munificence. Perhaps there is not a person in America who has done more generous and noble actions, and who upon all occasions contributed more liberally to public institutions. Besides the grand and hospitable manner in which he entertained foreigners and others in his house, he expended large sums for every patriotic purpose, and for the benefit of our university, and equalled the generosity of his worthy patron to it by his own donations.

His acts of charity and liberality of a more private nature were numerous and constant. All his friends, and often his enemies, partook of them; and he seemed to be more happy in contributing to the enjoyment of those whom he loved than in his own gratification.— I should be guilty of base ingratitude did I not thus publicly acknowledge numberless instances of kindness, attention and liberality which I have received at his hands. These now lie heavy at my heart, and increase my sorrow for his loss, though they have not bribed me to exceed the truth in delineated his character.— The poor, the widow, the fatherless, the unhappy debtor, the prisoner, the decayed gentleman, all experienced his bounty. The sums which he gave away in this manner were astonishing, and would scarcely be credited were they to be told. His generosity was proverbial, and was felt sometimes at a great distance from his home. He was a prince among men upon this account. “When the ear heard him then it blessed him, and when the eye saw him it gave witness to him, because he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him; the blessing of him that was ready

to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy; he was eyes to the blind, and feet was he to the lame; he was father to the poor, and the cause which he knew not he searched out." And he might have adopted the further language of Job, and have said, "My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch; my glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand; unto me men gave ear, and waited and kept silence at my counsel; after my words they spake not again, and my speech dropped upon them, and they waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain. If I laughed on them they believed it not, and the light of my countenance they cast not down; I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comfortheth the mourners."

Educated by pious friends, a reverence for religion and its institutions was early inculcated upon him. This reverence he never lost. His house and his heart were always open to the ministers of religion, and he most publicly avowed his attachment to them. He felt himself interested in every thing that related to the house of God. He inherited from his worthy ancestors a great affection for this religious society, and he exceeded them in his acts of liberality to it. The sacred desk from which I now speak, yonder bell which calls us to the house of God, and announces our return to "the house appointed for all living," the volume from which the sacred scriptures are read, were exclusive donations from him; and we all know how largely he contributed, with other worthy and munificent men, in erecting this elegant place of worship, and procuring the expensive organ which assists us in our psalmody. It might have been said of him as of the centurion by the Jews, "he loved our nation, and hath built us a synagogue." He entered into all our interests with a warmth and sincerity which proved his real attachment to our peace and happiness.

So much have I said upon the public character of this great man, as that I have not left myself time to speak of him in a more private capacity. Indeed this is not the proper place for the performance of such a duty; but there is no impropriety in expressing our wishes and prayers that God would support and comfort the partner of his life, his aged and afflicted parent, his surviving brother, and his other relatives. May he "teach them to profit by the things which they suffer," and prepare them to follow him into the eternal world!

And thus, my brethren, have I attempted to do justice to the character of this great and amiable man; and my heart bleeds when I reflect that it is the last token of respect and kindness which I can ever shew him! There is something distressing in performing the last offices to our friends, in closing their eyes, and conveying them to the place whence they shall not return! The sensibility must be weak indeed which is not awakened upon such an occasion. I am sure I feel it at this moment, and while I thus take a final leave as to this world of my friend and benefactor, I experience sensations which it is not in my power to describe! [. . .]

Peter Thacher, *A Sermon Preached to the Society in Brattle Street, Boston, October 10, 1793, and Occasioned by the Death of His Excellency John Hancock . . .* (Boston: Alexander Young, 1793.)