Ye Old Colonial Schoolmaster.

The records of old New England towns furnish a wealth of interesting material for study and thought. Not the least interesting is that which opens to us the beginnings in the development of the present public school system. In our personal school experience it was generally the master who made the warmest and most lasting impression upon us, and so out of the various phases of these early beginnings I have chosen him as the theme of the evening. This is not an exhaustive essay but rather a composite sketch of the man as found in such town records, diaries, letters and reminiscences as are now extant. And that you may taste the bouquet of that ancient vintage much is given as it is found in the quaint phraseology of that day.

The first schoolmaster mentioned is in that oft quoted Boston record of 1635, - "Likewise it was then generally agreed upon that our Brother Philomon Parmont shall be entreated to become schoolmaster for the teaching and nourishing of children with us". Much has been made of this earliest record, especially of the term brother as dignifying the schoolmaster. But a later record of the same meeting says, "also that our Brother Richard Fairbanks shall be entreated to take the cows to keeping that are upon the neck and in case he cannot, then our Brother Thomas Wordall to be entreated thereunto". Brother was a common term, but you will notice that while an alternate was named for the cows, there was none for the children. Cowherds were more plentiful than schoolmasters.

Generally throughout the entire colonial period the market was "short". As early as 1624 Governor Bradford wrote, "Indeed, we have no common school for want of a fit person or hitherto means to maintaine one", and in 1642, Governor Dudley writing to his son in England said, "There is a want of schoolmasters hereabouts". This want extended over many years. Many Harvard graduates taught for a year or two but most of them were destined for the ministry. As the meeting house was the first public building erected in every town, the spirit of the age pointed to the ministry as
secondary to the church. Born from the fear of a future illiterate ministry, it was fostered by the clergy, ruled by them, and made the stepping stone to the church. Very frequently the first school house was the abandoned first meeting house, when the second one was built.

In many settlements there would have been no schools but for the self sacrifice of this same clergy. This is eminently true in the Plymouth colony where for more than a generation there were no public schools. All of Duxbury's early schoolmasters were clergymen, who received the youth into their families and fitted them for college. In Swansea in 1673, Pastor Myles, an English university graduate, was the teacher. Rev. Samuel Danforth was the grammar schoolmaster in Taunton for years. In 1646 Rev. John Higginson, the "teaching Elder of the church" in Guilford, was also the schoolmaster. Rev. Mr. Shepard was pastor and teacher at Lynn for a long series of years.

Later in colonial life, the same conditions obtained, especially in the newer settlements, or where new grammar schools were established. In Wenham in 1779, the grammar school was kept by the minister. Manchester in 1727 appointed a committee, "To treat with our Rev. Mr. Cheever and to know of him whether he will provide us a school or not, and if he refuses to provide for us any longer, to reckon with him".

In Gilmanton, 1769, Rev. Wm Parsons was the first schoolmaster, and he continued this service for the benefit of the children some time after his labors as a minister had ceased. And so the record might continue through a long list.

Now this combination affected the youthful mind may be judged by the remarks of a speaker, himself a clergymen, at the Wilton N. H. Centennial. Recalling his early days he said, "My earliest impression about a minister was that he was the most awful being in the world. Next to him the schoolmaster, judging from what I had heard, appeared to my imagination awful above all others. With what profound dread was it then that I took my way for the first time to the winter school; for the awful
Outside the minister, the quality of the schoolmaster was rigidly inspected; not the quality of teaching but the quality of religion. Every schoolmaster must be properly branded. In 1654 this was in the law: "For as much as it greatly concerns the welfare of this country that the youth thereof be educated, not only in good literature but sound doctrine, this Court doth therefore command it to the serious considera-
tion and special care of the officers of the college and the selectmen in the several towns, not to admit or suffer any such to be continued in the office or place of teaching, educating or instructing of youth or children in the college or schools, that have manifested themselves unsound in the faith, or scandalous in their lives, and not giving due satisfaction ac-
cording to the rules of Christ."

Hartford some years earlier had instructed her selectmen to find as schoolmaster "a scholar, no common man, a gentleman", and Portsmouth nearly a half century later voted, "That care be taken that an able

schoolmaster be provided for the town as the law directs, not vicious in conversation". No man could hold a private school who did not meet the popular demands, the law of 1712 reading, "None shall keep a school but such as are of sober and good conversation, with the allowance of the selectmen, and if any person shall be so hardy as to set up a school without such allowance, he shall forfeit forty shillings to the use of the poor of the town". The incoming schoolmaster must be certified to, not only by the minister of the town in which he proposed to teach, but by the minister of one or more adjoining towns. Selection by the selectmen, election by the inhabitants in open town meeting and approbation by the ministers was the legal straight and narrow road to teaching.

Samples of these certificates are interesting. One from Wenham reads, "Mr. Jonathan Perkins having been agreed with to keep school in our town for six months, we being well satisfied of his ability for that service and his sober and good conversation, do approve the said Jonathan
in such conversation.

An earlier one from Sudbury says, "We, the subscribers, being desired by the town of Sudbury to write what we could testify in concerning the justification of Mr. Joseph Noyes of Sudbury for a legal grammar schoolmaster, having examined the said Mr. Joseph Noyes, we find that he hath been considerably versed in the Latin and Greek tongue, and do think that upon his diligent revisal and recollection of what he hath formerly learned, he may be qualified to initiate and instruct the youth in the Latin tongue".

And one in Plymouth reads, "We, the subscribers, ministers of the gospel, do hereby signify that we do approve Mr. John Sparhawk as a person well capacituated and qualified to teach a grammar school and accordingly do recommend him to the town of Plymouth or any other town where God in his providence shall see cause to call him".

The schoolmaster was dealt with in open town meeting with refreshing frankness. Hampton, N. H. in 1674 made this record "on the question whether the town would receive a certain man of Andover as schoolmaster, and it was decided in the negative", and a generation later, "the late schoolmaster, Humphrey Sullivan, was put to vote and not accepted of".

Two curious votes are recorded of a meeting legally warned and held in the schoolhouse in the Up-Neck district of Hartford. They voice a whole tragedy. First, voted, "That the schoolmaster read a paragraph before this meeting". Second, voted, "That the master be dismissed from keeping a school in this district".

Dedham had a Mr. Hinchman who desired to give up teaching. The selectmen proposed "To make a motion to James Thorp and to his son, Peter, that he, Peter, would keep school in Mr. Hinchman's stead", but when the next month, the town is asked if they are willing to have Peter, they "Answer and declare by their votes that they are not willing". Stamford, Conn., in 1671, voted, "That Mr. Rider be admitted into the town for a time of trial to keep school", but a year later they voted, "The town is
the town will proceed by a written vote to choose a master. In 1722, a complaint against one of the masters was referred to a committee who reported later in the year that they had visited the school and "examined the scholars under Mr. Amos Anger's tuition as to their proficiency in reading, writing, cyphering, and the master's ability of teaching and instructing youth, and his rules and methods therefor, and are of opinion that it will be no service to the town to continue Mr. Anger in that employ." And then the town by vote dismissed him.

The selectmen upon whom devolved the duty of finding schoolmasters could not always find men who satisfied the demands of the law, the requirements of the ministers and the whims of the voters. Their task was not an easy one, especially when the Courts were threatening fines if the schools were not maintained. Varied material had to be accepted: doctors, deacons, and town-clerks were frequently pressed into service. The physician was frequently the schoolmaster. The first recorded in Braintree was Mr. Thompson who had previously taught in Boston and Charlestown. He was also supposed to have been the first physician. "In urgent cases he was obliged to close his school to attend to his professional duties." This was in 1678. Malden had a Dr. Wigglesworth who as a physician received six pence a visit and as a schoolmaster $16 - 10 s for a six months' engagement. In 1684 we find employed a Dr. Johnson to keep school a month on trial. He was later engaged for a year. In the contract he was allowed two weeks in the spring "to attend to his practice of physic", but the two occupations did not mix well, and the engagement was soon cancelled, though in various places the doctor and schoolmaster were one up to the Revolution.

Boone in his "Education in the United States" quotes these duties of a schoolmaster of 1661:

"1. To act as Court Messenger
2. To serve summons.
3. To conduct certain ceremonial services of the church.
4. To instruct the youth in sound morals and religion."
5. To ring the bell for public worship.
6. To dig graves.
7. To take charge of the school.
8. To perform other occasional duties."

While it is doubtful if any one schoolmaster performed all these duties, it is very evident that many performed more than one of them. But one great duty is missing in this list, that of assisting the minister on Sunday. New England records teem with this demand. Next to having a minister who would teach was having a teacher who could preach. This custom extended over the whole colonial period. John Fiske, Salem's first schoolmaster, 1637, assisted in the pulpit for over two years. In 1757, Peter T. Smith "kept school and preached at Weymouth". John Wilson Jr. was engaged in 1685 to teach the school in Medfield and "he was given leave to preach sometimes and take as recompense what should be given by free contributions. When he should be desired to preach, he was to have liberty of two days from the school in the week before. The records do not state if these two days were allowed for preparation of the sermon, or to acquire the proper spiritual mood after the trials of the schoolroom.

Woburn in 1700 sought a grammar schoolmaster with ability "occasionally to assist the Rev. Mr. Fox in the ministry". Farmington, Conn., in 1683, wanted one of certain scholarly qualities and "also to step into the pulpit to be helpful there in time of emergency". Guilford early named three conditions in hiring a schoolmaster: "He taking all sorts and that from their A B C's; secondly, to continue so doing for three years; thirdly, to be helpful in preaching when need required". Falmouth, in 1701, voted, "To look out for a fit person to preach the word of God and to keep school". And so this list might be continued.

The colonial schoolmaster who adopted his work as his regular occupation and not as a stepping stone to the ministry was reasonably secure in his position. No "Tenure of office" law was needed. The permanency of the clergy probably affected the schoolmaster; the limited supply of}\n
service also weighed in his favor. While the newer settlements found it difficult to obtain masters for short periods or had none at all, the older communities frequently retained theirs for a generation or more. The master of the Cambridge Grammar School was Elijah Corbett. Just when he began is a matter of doubt, but it is known that he was there more than forty years. In 1643 it is said that "he had taught sufficiently long to have acquired a high reputation for skill and faithfulness", and in 1684, the town voted him "20 annually" for so long as he continues to be schoolmaster in this place". Richard Norcross began in Watertown in 1651 and was teaching as late as 1700 when he was 79 years old. It was seven years after Oxford voted to have a schoolmaster, before the selectmen succeeded in finding one. Then Mr. Richard Rogers was secured and taught twenty-two successive years. "He was the most accomplished teacher of his time, not only in English and Latin, but noted for his unrivalled penmanship." John Lovell was master of the Boston Latin School for forty-two years. John Tileston was master of their North Writing School from 1762 to 1819. At the age of 85, "Feeling the infirmities of years increasing, with the decay of strength natural to so long and laborious a life, he found it necessary to resign and retire from active service". Ezekiel Cheever, however, is the well-known, conspicuous example. This record in brief is this. He began teaching in New Haven at the age of 23 where he remained twelve years. Because of church troubles he went to Ipswich and taught eleven years, "making his school famous in all the country". Then he taught in Charlestown nine years, and was called to Boston in 1670. He was then fifty-six years old, an age at which the modern master finds it difficult to obtain a situation. There he remained thirty-eight years. He died in the harness at 94, having taught over seventy years.

Billerica, Harwich, Northampton, Malden and Weymouth retained their masters from twenty-five to forty years. While these and other towns were enjoying the peace and prosperity of long service, still others were...
Court to provide a schoolmaster according to law, and checked on the other by the scarcity of material. This difficulty is clearly set forth in the reply of the selectmen of Andover in 1713, to an indictment for not having a school. Part of the document is as follows: "This may certify any to whom it may concern, that the Selectmen of said town have taken all the care and pains they could for to procure a schoolmaster for our town for the year last past, but could not obtain one; first we agreed with Mr. Obadiah Ayers of Haverhill for a half year, only he expected liberty if he had a better call or offer, which we thought would be only to the work of the ministry, but, however, he was pleased to take it otherwise and so left us; whereupon we forthwith applied ourselves to the College of the President for advice, and he could tell us of none; only advised us to the Fellows to ask them; and they advised to Mr. Rogers of Ipswich, for they could tell us of no other; and we applied ourselves to him and got him to Andover but by reason our Rev. Mr. Barnard could not diet him, he would not stay with us and since, we have sent to Newbury and Salisbury and to Mistick for to hire one and cannot get one". They close with a plea for clemency, "for we cannot compel gentlemen to come to us".

Because of this scarcity towns frequently resorted to what might be called emergency schoolmasters; it was a case of taking what could be had. In 1663, Dedham made this record, "In consideration of the present want of a schoolmaster and of the weakly estate of our Bro. Joseph Ellice, he being willing and we being hopeful he may do some good in teaching some children to read English for the present and until one more able may be attained do agree and order that forthwith notice be given that he shall begin to teach at the school house the next second day, and that he shall have six shillings per week, so long as he shall so teach". Malden in 1697 chose one John Moulton as schoolmaster. He was 56 years old, had spent all his life at sea and had never taught a day. A few years later they employed a weaver, and still later a shoemaker of natural ability but limited education who had to take lessons of the minister before he could teach his little pupils. It is said of him, "He had taught them nothing except to say their prayers".
Providence given him health, a shoemaker he might have remained to the end. But he appears to have possessed a feable constitution and to have been troubled by many ills; and the selectmen, vexed and perplexed as they seem to have been by their annual duty of providing a schoolmaster and thinking, perhaps, that a sick sick shoemaker might make a passable teacher, prevailed upon him to leave the lapstone and the awl and enter upon a course of study.

New Haven after losing Mr. Cheever maintained her school intermittently. At one time a George Pardoe was engaged "To teach English and writing and to carry the scholars in Latin as far as he could"; and Mr. Pardoe remarked that this would be "a very short distance indeed".

Northampton was obliged to hire one James Cornish, a man of good attainments probably but of one bad habit, profanity. He was fined twice and the Court on the second offense "highly resented that such an aged man and of his quality and profession, should so dishonor God and give such evil example to youth and others".

Brookline in 1711 "agreed with John Winchester, Jr. for his man Ed Ruggles, to keep school at the new school house two months".

In 1763, Chester, N. H., had a Mr. Herring as schoolmaster. Two years later it is recorded, "Henry Herring, the former master, has become a pauper and warned out of town".

This last item leads me to say that these masters, because of the small pay they received, frequently joined other occupations with that of "keeping school". Richard Norcross, whom I have mentioned before, besides his salary of £30 was "allowed two shillings a head for keeping the dry herd". Weeden commenting on this combination remarks, "He wet nursed the brains of the children and dry nursed the bodies of the cattle". Roger Sherman, a Milton master of 1738 - 40, was "cobbler" and made periodic trips through the town, stopping at each house long enough to make and mend the shoes of the family.

A very common addition to the master's duties was "To sweep the
and maintain a schoolmaster to instruct their youth in writing and reading. No action was taken for over a year and then when it was proposed in town meeting, someone moved the salary be made equal to the minister's. It was instantly voted down. Motions for £40, £30, £20, £10, and £5 were successively made and lost. Finally it was voted "To give £3 to a schoolmaster for one year to teach youths to read and to write, and to keep it at his own house and to find himself diet".

In general the salaries ranged from £15 to £40; £20, £25, £30 are most commonly found. In some places they were also furnished with dwellings, notably in Boston, and some times with orchards and land for pasturage and tillage. This salary was from one third to one half the salary paid the ministers. At this time laborers were hired at two shillings a day, £10 for a year; board cost four shillings a week.

These salaries were payable in various commodities, generally under definite contract. In 1658, Dedham agreed to pay £20 sterling, the one half in wheat and the other half in Indian or rye, all being merchantable, at the end of each half year, £10".

In 1703, Deerfield "bargained with Mr. Jonathan Richards to pay him for the teaching of their town children for the year, twenty and five pounds in manner following; that is to say, they have by bargain liberty to pay him the one third part of said sum in barley and no more; the other two thirds in other grain, that is to say in Indian corn, pease, or rye, in any or all of them; oats wholly excepted; all these afore mentioned to be good and merchantable".

Rehoboth paid part of the salary in boards, Haunton in pig-iron, New Hampshire in corn, cattle and butter, Connecticut in beef, pork, butter and grain.

Though poorly paid, the schoolmaster held an honored place in the community, second only to the minister. This social position was assured and frequently it was emphasized by a choice allotment in the church seating. "Encouragement" was often extended by exemption from
was William Chord, who was also town clerk and attended to the drawing up
of such legal papers as the people needed. In 1669 he was also sexton
and seems to have kept this dual position until 1687 when he was voted out
of school, but it was added, "He is at liberty to use the dwelling and
schoolhouse until next March meeting for which he is to ring the bell and
sweep the meeting house". Such voted are quite general.

Towns as far as possible obtained the best masters available, and
some, like Braintree, can show an almost unbroken line of Harvard grad-
uates in these early years. The pay was small for towns heavily bur-
dened in every way could not afford to be liberal. Frequently it was
voted that the selectmen should procure a schoolmaster as "cheap as they
can", though few towns added the restriction, Hingham did in 1690,
"provided they shall hire a single man and not a man that have a family".

Malden in 1703 had as schoolmaster one Ezekiel Jenkins at $3 for the
year and the benefit of the scholars". The next year his price was thirty
shillings and the benefit of the scholars. He continued on these t

terms until he died in 1705. On his gravestone are these words, "Malden's
late schoolmaster from a painful life is gone to take his rest. His
Lord hath called him home".

This benefit of scholars was fees and in some cases light manual
labor. Thirty shillings and the benefit remained in force until 1709
when one Jacob Wilson accepted the place at "two shillings paid him by
the town" and the benefit. The next year the work was attempted for the
benefit alone but was soon given up.

Framingham in 1718 appointed a committee to visit Mr. Goddard who
had previously taught their school at £15 per year, and "see upon what
terms he will serve the town as schoolmaster for a year; and if he will
serve as cheap or something cheaper than another, then they are to make
a bargain with him for a full year"; but Abraham Cozzens underbid at £13,
and he was immediately hired for the balance of that year and all of the
next.

The Fitchburg document is dated 1715, where a single treble rate of £20
Dignified in demeanor, stern and forbidding in aspect, harsh, often cruel in action, this schoolmaster typified the spirit of the age. The severity which carried the weak old babe to the baptismal font in which the ice must be broken to reach the water, carried him to the Dame school at two and half with his horn book. The same spirit of repression in the home and in the church must be found in the school. The austerity of the minister who frowned upon and rebuked boyish levity at church must be reflected in the master who on Monday at school flogged these boys for their Sunday remissness. And yet this same schoolmaster produced a sturdy, self-contained, self-reliant people, poor readers, poor spellers, good writers, with no knowledge of geography or history or grammar, with some knowledge of arithmetic as far as the rule of three, but of strong character.

The colonies were often wearied and exhausted by their fierce struggles in establishing homes, in conquering the wilderness and the savage. Life and religious liberty proved costly, yet new settlements pushed out and out into untried sections and the children repeated the struggles of the fathers. Taxation in every form was a burden. Yet in all their struggles, under all their burdens, they never abandoned the schoolmaster, but provided for him as one of the pillars upon which their future depended.