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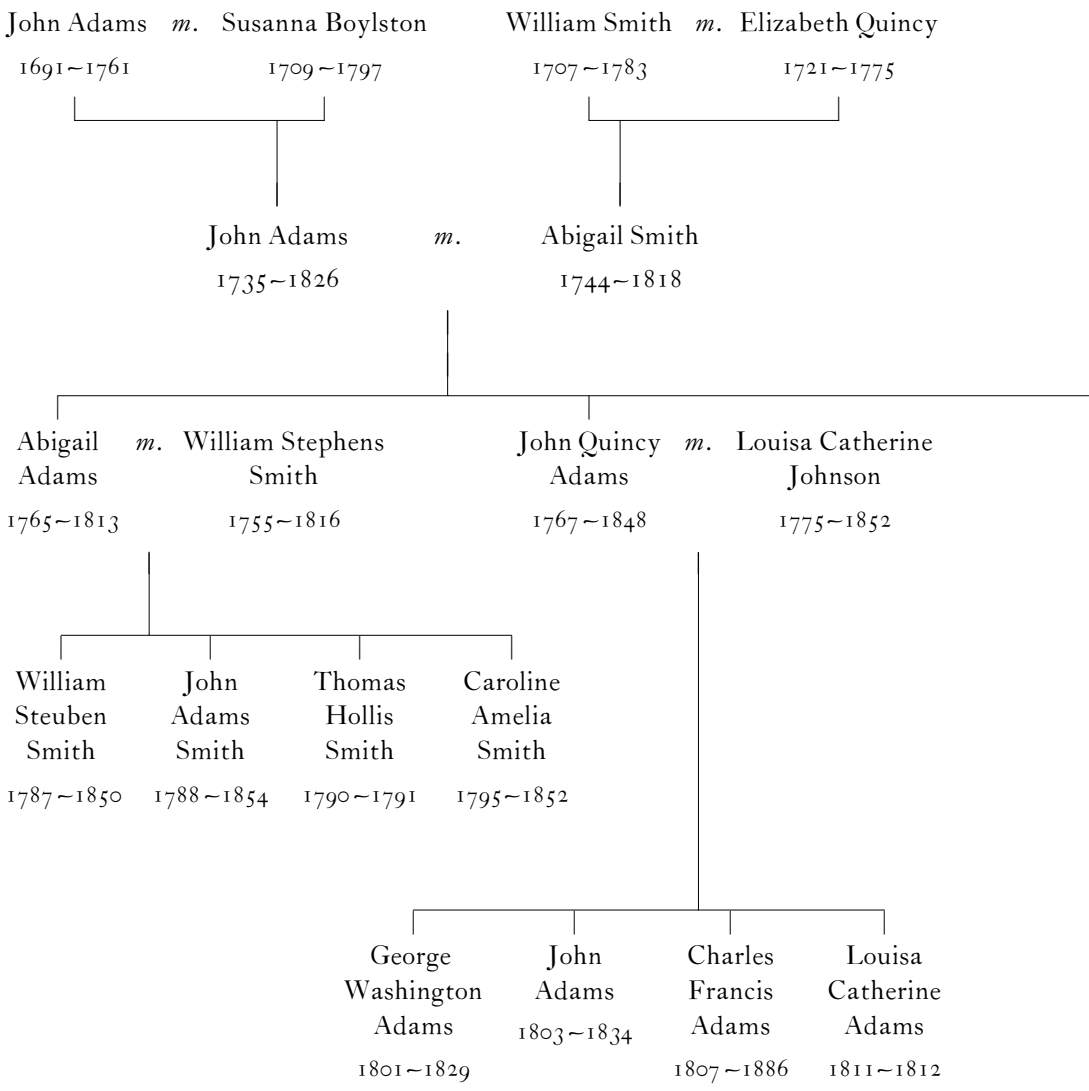
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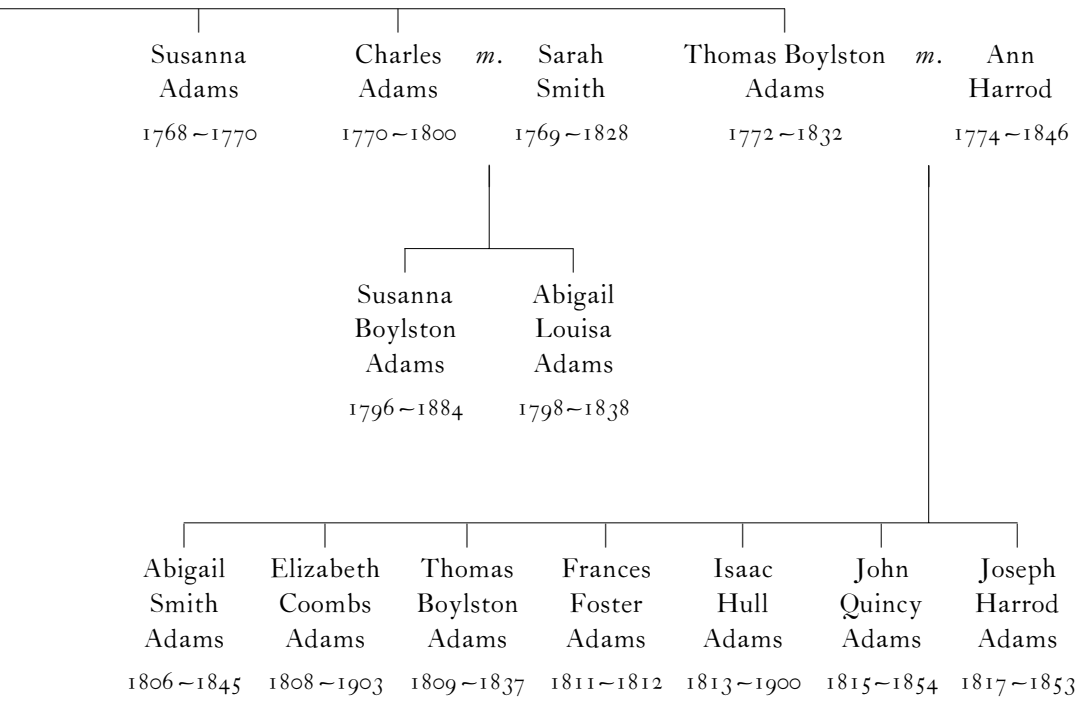
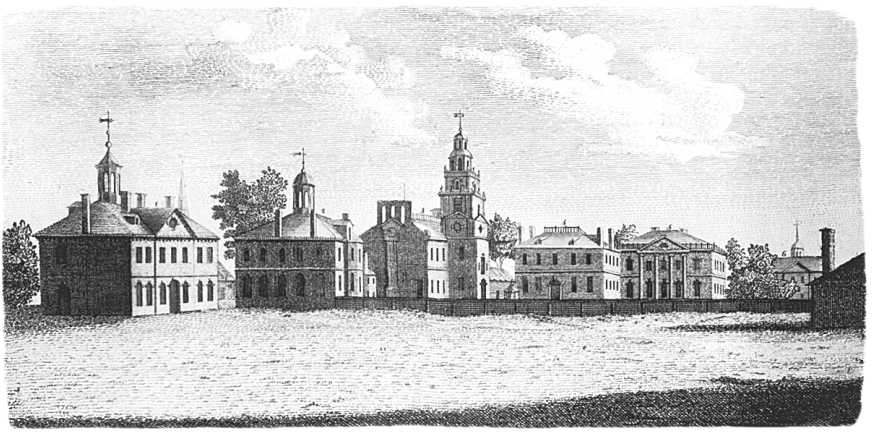


We live, my dear soul, in an age of trial. What will be the consequence, I know not.

—John Adams to Abigail Adams, 1774

Part I

Revolution



But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people.

—John Adams

I have heard of one Mr. Adams but who is the other?

—King George III

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROAD TO PHILADELPHIA

You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator. . . . We have too many high sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them.

—Abigail Adams

I

In the cold, nearly colorless light of a New England winter, two men on horseback traveled the coast road below Boston, heading north. A foot or more of snow covered the landscape, the remnants of a Christmas storm that had blanketed Massachusetts from one end of the province to the other. Beneath the snow, after weeks of severe cold, the ground was frozen solid to a depth of two feet. Packed ice in the road, ruts as hard as iron, made the going hazardous, and the riders, mindful of the horses, kept at a walk.

Nothing about the harsh landscape differed from other winters. Nor was there anything to distinguish the two riders, no signs of rank or title, no liveried retinue bringing up the rear. It might have been any year and they could have been anybody braving the weather for any number of reasons. Dressed as they were in heavy cloaks, their hats pulled low against the wind, they were barely distinguishable even from each other, except that the older, stouter of the two did most of the talking.

He was John Adams of Braintree and he loved to talk. He was a known talker. There were some, even among his admirers, who wished he talked less. He himself wished he talked less, and he had particular regard for those, like General Washington, who somehow managed great reserve under almost any circumstance.

John Adams was a lawyer and a farmer, a graduate of Harvard College, the husband of Abigail Smith Adams, the father of four children. He was forty years old and he was a revolutionary.

Dismounted, he stood five feet seven or eight inches tall—about "middle size" in that day—and though verging on portly, he had a straight-up, square-shouldered stance and was, in fact, surprisingly fit and solid. His hands were the hands of a man accustomed to pruning his own trees, cutting his own hay, and splitting his own firewood.

In such bitter cold of winter, the pink of his round, clean-shaven, very English face would all but glow, and if he were hatless or without a wig, his high forehead and thinning hairline made the whole of the face look rounder still. The hair, light brown in color, was full about the ears. The chin was firm, the nose sharp, almost birdlike. But it was the dark, perfectly arched brows and keen blue eyes that gave the face its vitality. Years afterward, recalling this juncture in his life, he would describe himself as looking rather like a short, thick Archbishop of Canterbury.

As befitting a studious lawyer from Braintree, Adams was a "plain dressing" man. His oft-stated pleasures were his family, his farm, his books and writing table, a convivial pipe and cup of coffee (now that tea was no longer acceptable), or preferably a glass of good Madeira.

In the warm seasons he relished long walks and time alone on horseback. Such exercise, he believed, roused "the animal spirits" and "dispersed melancholy." He loved the open meadows of home, the "old acquaintances" of rock ledges and breezes from the sea. From his doorstep to the water's edge was approximately a mile.

He was a man who cared deeply for his friends, who, with few exceptions, were to be his friends for life, and in some instances despite severe strains. And to no one was he more devoted than to his wife, Abigail. She was his "Dearest Friend," as he addressed her in letters—his "best, dearest, worthiest, wisest friend in the world"—while to her he was "the tenderest of husbands," her "good man."

John Adams was also, as many could attest, a great-hearted, persevering man of uncommon ability and force. He had a brilliant mind. He was honest and everyone knew it. Emphatically independent by nature, hardworking, frugal—all traits in the New England tradition—he was anything but cold or laconic as supposedly New Englanders were. He could be high-spirited and affectionate, vain, cranky, impetuous, self-

absorbed, and fiercely stubborn; passionate, quick to anger, and all-forgiving; generous and entertaining. He was blessed with great courage and good humor, yet subject to spells of despair, and especially when separated from his family or during periods of prolonged inactivity.

Ambitious to excel—to make himself known—he had nonetheless recognized at an early stage that happiness came not from fame and fortune, "and all such things," but from "an habitual contempt of them," as he wrote. He prized the Roman ideal of honor, and in this, as in much else, he and Abigail were in perfect accord. Fame without honor, in her view, would be "like a faint meteor gliding through the sky, shedding only transient light."

As his family and friends knew, Adams was both a devout Christian and an independent thinker, and he saw no conflict in that. He was hard-headed and a man of "sensibility," a close observer of human folly as displayed in everyday life and fired by an inexhaustible love of books and scholarly reflection. He read Cicero, Tacitus, and others of his Roman heroes in Latin, and Plato and Thucydides in the original Greek, which he considered the supreme language. But in his need to fathom the "labyrinth" of human nature, as he said, he was drawn to Shakespeare and Swift, and likely to carry Cervantes or a volume of English poetry with him on his journeys. "You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket," he would tell his son Johnny.

John Adams was not a man of the world. He enjoyed no social standing. He was an awkward dancer and poor at cards. He never learned to flatter. He owned no ships or glass factory as did Colonel Josiah Quincy, Braintree's leading citizen. There was no money in his background, no Adams fortune or elegant Adams homestead like the Boston mansion of John Hancock.

It was in the courtrooms of Massachusetts and on the printed page, principally in the newspapers of Boston, that Adams had distinguished himself. Years of riding the court circuit and his brilliance before the bar had brought him wide recognition and respect. And of greater consequence in recent years had been his spirited determination and eloquence in the cause of American rights and liberties.

That he relished the sharp conflict and theater of the courtroom, that he loved the esteem that came with public life, no less than he loved "my farm, my family and goose quill," there is no doubt, however frequently

he protested to the contrary. His desire for "distinction" was too great. Patriotism burned in him like a blue flame. "I have a zeal at my heart for my country and her friends which I cannot smother or conceal," he told Abigail, warning that it could mean privation and unhappiness for his family unless regulated by cooler judgment than his own.

In less than a year's time, as a delegate to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, he had emerged as one of the most "sensible and forcible" figures in the whole patriot cause, the "Great and Common Cause," his influence exceeding even that of his better-known kinsman, the ardent Boston patriot Samuel Adams.

He was a second cousin of Samuel Adams, but "possessed of another species of character," as his Philadelphia friend Benjamin Rush would explain. "He saw the whole of a subject at a glance, and . . . was equally fearless of men and of the consequences of a bold assertion of his opinion. . . . He was a stranger to dissimulation."

It had been John Adams, in the aftermath of Lexington and Concord, who rose in the Congress to speak of the urgent need to save the New England army facing the British at Boston and in the same speech called on Congress to put the Virginian George Washington at the head of the army. That was now six months past. The general had since established a command at Cambridge, and it was there that Adams was headed. It was his third trip in a week to Cambridge, and the beginning of a much longer undertaking by horseback. He would ride on to Philadelphia, a journey of nearly 400 miles that he had made before, though never in such punishing weather or at so perilous an hour for his country.

The man riding with him was Joseph Bass, a young shoemaker and Braintree neighbor hired temporarily as servant and traveling companion.

The day was Wednesday, January 24, 1776. The temperature, according to records kept by Adams's former professor of science at Harvard, John Winthrop, was in the low twenties. At the least, the trip would take two weeks, given the condition of the roads and Adams's reluctance to travel on the Sabbath.

TO ABIGAIL ADAMS, who had never been out of Massachusetts, the province of Pennsylvania was "that far country," unimaginably distant,

and their separations, lasting months at a time, had become extremely difficult for her.

"Winter makes its approaches fast," she had written to John in November. "I hope I shall not be obliged to spend it without my dearest friend. . . . I have been like a nun in a cloister ever since you went away."

He would never return to Philadelphia without her, he had vowed in a letter from his lodgings there. But they each knew better, just as each understood the importance of having Joseph Bass go with him. The young man was a tie with home, a familiar home-face. Once Adams had resettled in Philadelphia, Bass would return home with the horses, and bring also whatever could be found of the "common small" necessities impossible to obtain now, with war at the doorstep.

Could Bass bring her a bundle of pins? Abigail had requested earlier, in the bloody spring of 1775. She was entirely understanding of John's "arduous task." Her determination that he play his part was quite as strong as his own. They were of one and the same spirit. "You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator," she wrote at her kitchen table. "We have too many high sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them." Unlike the delegates at Philadelphia, she and the children were confronted with the reality of war every waking hour. For though British troops were bottled up in Boston, the British fleet commanded the harbor and the sea and thus no town by the shore was safe from attack. Those Braintree families who were able to leave had already packed and moved inland, out of harm's way. Meanwhile, shortages of sugar, coffee, pepper, shoes, and ordinary pins were worse than he had any idea.

"The cry for pins is so great that what we used to buy for 7 shillings and six pence are now 20 shillings and not to be had for that." A bundle of pins contained six thousand, she explained. These she could sell for hard money or use for barter.

There had been a rush of excitement when the British sent an expedition to seize hay and livestock on one of the islands offshore. "The alarm flew [like] lightning," Abigail reported, "men from all parts came flocking down till 2,000 were collected." The crisis had passed, but not her state of nerves, with the house so close to the road and the comings and goings of soldiers. They stopped at her door for food and slept on her kitchen floor. Pewter spoons were melted for bullets in her fireplace.

"Sometimes refugees from Boston tired and fatigued, seek an asylum for a day or night, a week," she wrote to John. "You can hardly imagine how we live."

"Pray don't let Bass forget my pins," she reminded him again. "I endeavor to live in the most frugal manner possible, but I am many times distressed."

The day of the battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775, the thunder of the bombardment had been terrifying, even at the distance of Braintree. Earlier, in April, when news came of Lexington and Concord, John, who was at home at the time, had saddled his horse and gone to see for himself, riding for miles along the route of the British march, past burned-out houses and scenes of extreme distress. He knew then what war meant, what the British meant, and warned Abigail that in case of danger she and the children must "fly to the woods." But she was as intent to see for herself as he, and with the bombardment at Bunker Hill ringing in her ears, she had taken seven-year-old Johnny by the hand and hurried up the road to the top of nearby Penn's Hill. From a granite outcropping that breached the summit like the hump of a whale, they could see the smoke of battle rising beyond Boston, ten miles up the bay.

It was the first all-out battle of the war. "How many have fallen we know not," she wrote that night. "The constant roar of the cannon is so distressing that we cannot eat, drink, or sleep."

Their friend Joseph Warren had been killed at Bunker Hill, Abigail reported in another letter. A handsome young physician and leading patriot allied with Samuel Adams and Paul Revere, Warren had been one of the worthiest men of the province. John had known him since the smallpox epidemic of 1764, when John had gone to Boston to be inoculated. Now Joseph Warren was dead at age thirty-four, shot through the face, his body horribly mutilated by British bayonets.

"My bursting heart must find vent at my pen," Abigail told her absent husband.

THE ROUTE JOHN ADAMS and his young companion would take to Philadelphia that January of 1776 was the same as he had traveled to the First Continental Congress in the summer of 1774. They would travel the

Post Road west across Massachusetts as far as Springfield on the Connecticut River, there cross by ferry and swing south along the west bank, down the valley into Connecticut. At Wethersfield they would leave the river for the road to New Haven, and from New Haven on, along the Connecticut shore—through Fairfield, Norwalk, Stamford, Greenwich—they would be riding the New York Post Road. At New York, horses and riders would be ferried over the Hudson River to New Jersey, where they would travel "as fine a road as ever trod," in the opinion of John Adams, whose first official position in Braintree had been surveyor of roads. Three more ferry crossings, at Hackensack, Newark, and New Brunswick, would put them on a straightaway ride to the little college town of Princeton. Then came Trenton and a final ferry crossing over the Delaware to Pennsylvania. In another twenty miles they would be in sight of Philadelphia.

All told, they would pass through more than fifty towns in five provinces—some twenty towns in Massachusetts alone—stopping several times a day to eat, sleep, or tend the horses. With ice clogging the rivers, there was no estimating how long delays might be at ferry crossings.

Making the journey in 1774, Adams had traveled in style, with the full Massachusetts delegation, everyone in a state of high expectation. He had been a different man then, torn between elation and despair over what might be expected of him. It had been his first chance to see something of the world. His father had lived his entire life in Braintree, and no Adams had ever taken part in public life beyond Braintree. He himself had never set foot out of New England, and many days he suffered intense torment over his ability to meet the demands of the new role to be played. Politics did not come easily to him. He was too independent by nature and his political experience amounted to less than a year's service in the Massachusetts legislature. But was there anyone of sufficient experience or ability to meet the demands of the moment?

"I wander alone, and ponder. I muse, I mope, I ruminate," he wrote in the seclusion of his diary. "We have not men fit for the times. We are deficient in genius, education, in travel, fortune—in everything. I feel unutterable anxiety."

He must prepare for "a long journey indeed," he had told Abigail.

"But if the length of the journey was all, it would be no burden. . . . Great things are wanted to be done."

He had worried over how he might look in such company and what clothes to take.

> I think it will be necessary to make me up a couple of pieces of new linen. I am told they wash miserably at N[ew] York, the Jerseys, and Philadelphia, too, in comparison of Boston, and am advised to carry a great deal of linen.
>
> Whether to make me a suit of new clothes at Boston or to make them at Philadelphia, and what to make I know not.

Still, the prospect of a gathering of such historic portent stirred him as nothing ever had. "It is to be a school of political prophets I suppose—a nursery of American statesmen," he wrote to a friend, James Warren of Plymouth. "May it thrive and prosper and flourish and from this fountain may there issue streams, which shall gladden all the cities and towns in North America, forever."

There had been a rousing send-off in Boston, on August 10, 1774, and in full view of British troops. Samuel Adams, never a fancy dresser, had appeared in a stunning new red coat, new wig, silver-buckled shoes, gold knee buckles, the best silk hose, a spotless new cocked hat on his massive head, and carrying a gold-headed cane, all gifts from the Sons of Liberty. It was thought that as leader of the delegation he should look the part. In addition, they had provided "a little purse" for expenses.

It had been a triumphal, leisurely journey of nearly three weeks, with welcoming parties riding out to greet them at town after town. They were feted and toasted, prayers were said, church bells rang. Silas Deane, a Connecticut delegate who joined the procession, assured John Adams that the Congress was to be the grandest, most important assembly ever held in America. At New Haven "every bell was clanging," people were crowding at doors and windows "as if to see a coronation."

In New York they were shown the sights—City Hall, the college, and at Bowling Green, at the foot of Broadway, the gilded equestrian statue of King George III, which had yet to be pulled from its pedestal by an angry mob. The grand houses and hospitality were such as Adams had never known, even if, as a self-respecting New Englander, he thought

New Yorkers lacking in decorum. "They talk very loud, very fast, and altogether," he observed. "If they ask you a question, before you can utter three words of your answer, they will break out upon you again—and talk away."

Truly he was seeing the large world, he assured Abigail in a letter from the tavern at Princeton, a day's ride from Philadelphia. "Tomorrow we reach the theater of action. God Almighty grant us wisdom and virtue sufficient for the high trust that is devolved upon us."

But that had been nearly two years past. It had been high summer, green and baking hot under summer skies, an entirely different time that now seemed far past, so much had happened since. There had been no war then, no blood had been spilled at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill. Now fully twenty regiments of red-coated British regulars occupied Boston under General William Howe. British warships, some of 50 guns, lay at anchor in Boston Harbor, while American forces outside the city had become perilously thin.

In the late summer and fall of 1775, the "bloody flux," epidemic dysentery, had ripped through their ranks. Adams's youngest brother, Elihu, a captain of militia, camped beside the Charles River at Cambridge, was stricken and died, leaving a wife and three children. Nor was Braintree spared the violent epidemic. For Abigail, then thirty years old, it had been the worst ordeal of her life.

"Such is the distress of the neighborhood that I can scarcely find a well person to assist me in looking after the sick . . . so mortal a time the oldest man does not remember," she had lamented in a letter to John. "As to politics I know nothing about them. I have wrote as much as I am able to, being very weak."

"Mrs. Randall has lost her daughter, Mrs. Bracket hers, Mr. Thomas Thayer his wife," she reported. "I know of eight this week who have been buried in this town." Parson Wibird was so ill he could scarcely take a step. "We have been four sabbaths without any meeting." Their three-year-old Tommy was so wretchedly sick that "[were] you to look upon him you would not know him." She was constantly scrubbing the house with hot vinegar.

"Woe follows woe, one affliction treads upon the heel of another," she wrote. Some families had lost three, four, and five children. Some families were entirely gone.

The strong clarity of her handwriting, the unhesitating flow of her pen across the paper, line after line, seemed at odds with her circumstances. Rarely was a word crossed out or changed. It was as if she knew exactly what was in her heart and how she wished to express it—as if the very act of writing, of forming letters, in her distinctive angular fashion, keeping every line straight, would somehow help maintain her balance, validate her own being in such times.

She had begun signing herself "Portia," after the long-suffering, virtuous wife of the Roman statesman Brutus. If her "dearest friend" was to play the part of a Roman hero, so would she.

Her mother lay mortally ill in neighboring Weymouth. When, on October 1, 1775, her mother died, Abigail wrote to John, "You often expressed your anxiety over me when you left me before, surrounded with terrors, but my trouble then was as the small dust in the balance compared to what I have since endured."

In addition to tending her children, she was nursing a desperately ill servant named Patty. The girl had become "the most shocking object my eyes ever beheld . . . [and] continuously desirous of my being with her the little while she expects to live." It was all Abigail could do to remain in the same house. When Patty died on October 9, she "made the fourth corpse that was this day committed to the ground."

Correspondence was maddeningly slow and unreliable. In late October she wrote to say she had not had a line from John in a month and that in his last letter he had made no mention of the six she had written to him. " 'Tis only in my night visions that I know anything about you." Yet in that time he had written seven letters to her, including one mourning the loss of her mother and asking for news of "poor, distressed" Patty.

Heartsick, searching for an answer to why such evil should "befall a city and a people," Abigail had pondered whether it could be God's punishment for the sin of slavery.

AT CAMBRIDGE THE MORNING of the bitterly cold first day of the new year, 1776, George Washington had raised the new Continental flag with thirteen stripes before his headquarters and announced that the new army was now "entirely continental." But for days afterward, their enlistments up, hundreds, thousands of troops, New England militia,

started for home. Replacements had to be found, an immensely difficult and potentially perilous changing of the guard had to be carried off, one army moving out, another moving in, all in the bitter winds and snow of winter and in such fashion as the enemy would never know.

"It is not in the pages of history, perhaps, to furnish a case like ours," Washington informed John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress. Hardly 5,000 colonial troops were fit for duty. Promises of men, muskets, powder, and urgently needed supplies never materialized. Blankets and linen for bandages were "greatly wanted." Firewood was in short supply. With smallpox spreading in Boston, the British command had allowed pathetic columns of the ill-clad, starving poor of Boston to come pouring out of town and into the American lines, many of them sick, and all in desperate need of food and shelter.

"The reflection on my situation and that of this army produces many an unhappy hour when all around me are wrapped in sleep," wrote Washington, who had never before commanded anything larger than a regiment.

The night of January 8, Washington had ordered a brief American assault on Charlestown, largely to keep the British guessing. Adams, at home at his desk writing a letter, was brought to his feet by the sudden crash of the guns, "a very hot fire" of artillery that lasted half an hour and lit the sky over Braintree's north common. Whether American forces were on the attack or defense, he could not tell. "But in either case, I rejoice," he wrote, taking up his pen again, "for defeat appears to me preferable to total inaction."

As it was, Washington saw his situation to be so precarious that the only choice was an all-out attack on Boston, and he wrote to tell Adams, "I am exceedingly desirous of consulting you." As a former delegate to Philadelphia, Washington understood the need to keep Congress informed. Earlier, concerned whether his authority reached beyond Boston to the defense of New York, he had asked Adams for an opinion, and Adams's reply had been characteristically unhesitating and unambiguous: "Your commission constitutes you commander of all the forces . . . and you are vested with full power and authority to act as you shall think for the good and welfare of the service."

No one in Congress had impressed Adams more. On the day he had called on his fellow delegates to put their colleague, "the gentleman from

Virginia," in command at Boston, Washington, out of modesty, had left the chamber, while a look of mortification, as Adams would tell the story, filled the face of John Hancock, who had hoped he would be chosen. Washington was virtuous, brave, and in his new responsibilities, "one of the most important characters in the world," Adams had informed Abigail. "The liberties of America depend upon him in great degree." Later, when she met Washington at a Cambridge reception, Abigail thought John had not said half enough in praise of him.

A council of war with the commander and his generals convened January 16 in the parlor of the large house on Brattle Street, Cambridge, that served as Washington's headquarters. With others of the Massachusetts congressional delegation still at Philadelphia, Adams was the only member of Congress present as Washington made the case for an attack on Boston, by sending his troops across the frozen bay. But the generals flatly rejected the plan and it was put aside.

Two days later, Adams was summoned again. Devastating news had arrived by dispatch rider. An American assault on Quebec led by Colonels Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold had failed. The "gallant Montgomery" was dead, "brave Arnold" was wounded. It was a crushing moment for Washington and for John Adams. Congress had ordered the invasion of Canada, the plan was Washington's own, and the troops were mostly New Englanders.

As a young man, struggling over what to make of his life, Adams had often pictured himself as a soldier. Only the previous spring, when Washington appeared in Congress resplendent in the blue-and-buff uniform of a Virginia militia officer, Adams had written to Abigail, "Oh that I was a soldier!" He was reading military books. "Everybody must and will be a soldier," he told her. On the morning Washington departed Philadelphia to assume command at Boston, he and others of the Massachusetts delegation had traveled a short way with the general and his entourage, to a rousing accompaniment of fifes and drums, Adams feeling extremely sorry for himself for having to stay behind to tend what had become the unglamorous labors of Congress. "I, poor creature, worn out with scribbling for my bread and my liberty, low in spirits and weak in health, must leave others to wear the laurels."

But such waves of self-pity came and went, as Abigail knew, and when

in need of sympathy, it was to her alone that he would appeal. He was not a man to back down or give up, not one to do anything other than what he saw to be his duty. What in another time and society might be taken as platitudes about public service were to both John and Abigail Adams a lifelong creed. And in this bleakest of hours, heading for Cambridge, and on to Philadelphia, Adams saw his way clearer and with greater resolve than ever in his life. It was a road he had been traveling for a long time.

II

At the center of Braintree, Massachusetts, and central to the town's way of life, was the meetinghouse, the First Church, with its bell tower and graveyard on the opposite side of the road. From the door of the house where John Adams had said goodbye to wife and children that morning, to the church, was less than a mile. Riding north out of town, he passed the snow-covered graveyard on the left, the church on the right.

He had been born in the house immediately adjacent to his own, a nearly duplicate farmer's cottage belonging to his father. He had been baptized in the church where his father was a deacon, and he had every expectation that when his time came he would go to his final rest in the same ground where his father and mother lay, indeed where leaning headstones marked the graves of the Adams line going back four generations. When he referred to himself as John Adams of Braintree, it was not in a manner of speaking.

The first of the line, Henry Adams of Barton St. David in Somersetshire, England, with his wife Edith Squire and nine children—eight sons and a daughter—had arrived in Braintree in the year 1638, in the reign of King Charles I, nearly a century before John Adams was born. They were part of the great Puritan migration, Dissenters from the Church of England who, in the decade following the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, crossed the North Atlantic intent on making a new City of God, some twenty thousand people, most of whom came as families. Only one, the seventh of Henry Adams's eight sons remained in Braintree. He was Joseph, and he was succeeded by a second Joseph—one of Henry's eighty-nine grandchildren!—who married Hannah Bass,

a granddaughter of John and Priscilla Alden, and they had eight children, of whom one was another John, born in 1691.

They were people who earned their daily bread by the work of their hands. The men were all farmers who, through the long winters, in New England fashion, worked at other trades for "hard money," which was always scarce. The first Henry Adams and several of his descendants were maltsters, makers of malt from barley for use in baking or brewing beer, a trade carried over from England. The first John Adams, remembered as Deacon John, was a farmer and shoemaker, a man of "sturdy, unostentatious demeanor," who, like his father, "played the part of a solid citizen," as tithing man, constable, lieutenant in the militia, selectman, and ultimately church deacon, taking his place on the deacon's bench before the pulpit.

In 1734, in October, the golden time of year on the Massachusetts shore, Deacon John Adams, at age forty-three, married Susanna Boylston of Brookline. She was twenty-five, and from a family considered of higher social standing than that of her husband. Nothing written in her own hand would survive—no letters, diaries, or legal papers with her signature—nor any correspondence addressed to her by any of her family, and so, since it is also known that letters were frequently read aloud to her, there is reason to believe that Susanna Boylston Adams was illiterate.

One year later, on October 19, 1735, by the Old Style calendar, their first child, a son, was born and given his father's name. When England adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752, October 19 became October 30.

"What has preserved this race of Adamses in all their ramifications in such numbers, health, peace, comfort, and mediocrity?" this firstborn son of Deacon John would one day write to Benjamin Rush. "I believe it is religion, without which they would have been rakes, fops, sots, gamblers, starved with hunger, or frozen with cold, scalped by Indians, etc., etc., etc., been melted away and disappeared. . . ." In truth, he was extremely proud of his descent from "a line of virtuous, independent New England farmers." That virtue and independence were among the highest of mortal attainments, John Adams never doubted. The New England farmer was his own man who owned his own land, a freeholder, and thus the equal of anyone.

The Braintree of Adams's boyhood was a quiet village of scattered houses and small neighboring farmsteads strung along the old coast road, the winding main thoroughfare from Boston to Plymouth, just back from the very irregular south shore of Massachusetts Bay. The setting was particularly picturesque, with orchards, stone walls, meadows of salt hay, and broad marshlands through which meandered numerous brooks and the Neponset River. From the shoreline the land sloped gently upward to granite outcroppings and hills, including Penn's Hill, the highest promontory, close by the Adams farm. Offshore the bay was dotted with small islands, some wooded, some used for grazing sheep. Recalling his childhood in later life, Adams wrote of the unparalleled bliss of roaming the open fields and woodlands of the town, of exploring the creeks, hiking the beaches, "of making and sailing boats . . . swimming, skating, flying kites and shooting marbles, bat and ball, football . . . wrestling and sometimes boxing," shooting at crows and ducks, and "running about to quiltings and frolics and dances among the boys and girls." The first fifteen years of his life, he said, "went off like a fairytale."

The community numbered perhaps 2,000 people. There was one other meetinghouse—a much smaller, more recent Anglican church—a schoolhouse, gristmill, village store, blacksmith shop, granite quarry, a half dozen or more taverns and, in a section called Germantown, Colonel Quincy's glass factory. With no newspaper in town, news from Boston and the world beyond came from travelers on the coast road, no communication moving faster than a horse and rider. But within the community itself, news of nearly any kind, good or bad, traveled rapidly. People saw each other at church, town meeting, in the mill, or at the taverns. Independent as a Braintree farmer and his family may have been, they were not isolated.

The Adams homestead, the farmhouse at the foot of Penn's Hill where young John was born and raised, was a five-room New England saltbox, the simplest, most commonplace kind of dwelling. It had been built in 1681, and built strongly around a massive brick chimney. Its timbers were of hand-hewn oak, its inner walls of brick, these finished on the inside with lath and plaster and faced on the exterior with pine clapboard. There were three rooms and two great fireplaces at ground level, and two rooms above. A narrow stairway tucked against the chimney,

immediately inside the front door, led to the second floor. The windows had twenty-four panes ("12-over-12") and wooden shutters. There were outbuildings and a good-sized barn to the rear, fields and orchard, and through a broad meadow flowed "beautiful, winding" Fresh Brook, as Adams affectionately described it. The well, for household use, was just out the front door. And though situated "as near as might be" to the road, the house was "fenced" by a stone wall, as was the somewhat older companion house that stood forty paces apart on the property, the house John and Abigail moved into after they were married and from which he departed on the winter morning in 1776. The one major difference between the two buildings was that the house of Adams's boyhood sat at an angle to the road, while the other faced it squarely. Across the road, in the direction of the sea, lay open fields.

In the dry spells of summer, dust from the road blew in the open windows of both houses with every passing horse or wagon. From June to September, the heat in the upstairs bedrooms could be murderous. In winter, even with logs blazing in huge kitchen fireplaces, women wore heavy shawls and men sat in overcoats, while upstairs any water left in the unheated rooms turned to ice.

In most of the essentials of daily life, as in their way of life, Adams's father and mother lived no differently than had their fathers and mothers, or those who preceded them. The furnishings Adams grew up with were of the plainest kind—a half dozen ordinary wooden chairs, a table, several beds, a looking glass or two. There was a Bible, possibly a few other books on religious subjects. Three silver spoons—one large, two small—counted prominently as family valuables. Clothes and other personal possessions were modest and time-worn. As one of the Adams line would write, "A hat would descend from father to son, and for fifty years make its regular appearance at meeting."

Small as the house was, its occupancy was seldom limited to the immediate family. Besides father and mother, three sons, and a hired girl, there was nearly always an Adams or Boylston cousin, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or friend staying the night. Men from town would stop in after dark to talk town business or church matters with Deacon John.

With the short growing season, the severe winters and stony fields, the immemorial uncertainties of farming, life was not easy and survival never taken for granted. One learned early in New England about the

battle of life. Father and mother were hardworking and frugal of necessity, as well as by principle. "Let frugality and industry be our virtues," John Adams advised Abigail concerning the raising of their own children. "Fire them with ambition to be useful," he wrote, echoing what had been learned at home.

About his mother, Adams would have comparatively little to say, beyond that he loved her deeply—she was his "honored and beloved mother"—and that she was a highly principled woman of strong will, strong temper, and exceptional energy, all traits he shared though this he did not say. Of his father, however, he could hardly say enough. There were scarcely words to express the depth of his gratitude for the kindnesses his father had shown him, the admiration he felt for his father's integrity. His father was "the honestest man" John Adams ever knew. "In wisdom, piety, benevolence and charity in proportion to his education and sphere of life, I have never known his superior," Adams would write long afterward, by which time he had come to know the most prominent men of the age on two sides of the Atlantic. His father was his idol. It was his father's honesty, his father's independent spirit and love of country, Adams said, that were his lifelong inspiration.

A good-looking, active boy, if small for his age, he was unusually sensitive to criticism but also quickly responsive to praise, as well as being extremely bright, which his father saw early, and decided he must go to Harvard to become a minister. An elder brother of Deacon John, Joseph Adams, who graduated from Harvard in 1710, had become a minister with a church in New Hampshire. Further, Deacon John himself, for as little education as he had had, wrote in a clear hand and had, as he said, "an admiration of learning."

Taught to read at home, the boy went first and happily to a dame school—lessons for a handful of children in the kitchen of a neighbor, with heavy reliance on *The New England Primer*. ("He who ne'er learns his ABC, forever will a blockhead be.") But later at the tiny local schoolhouse, subjected to a lackluster "churl" of a teacher who paid him no attention, he lost all interest. He cared not for books or study, and saw no sense in talk of college. He wished only to be a farmer, he informed his father.

That being so, said Deacon John not unkindly, the boy could come along to the creek with him and help cut thatch. Accordingly, as Adams

would tell the story, father and son set off the next morning and "with great humor" his father kept him working through the day.

> At night at home, he said, "Well, John, are you satisfied with being a farmer?" Though the labor had been very hard and very muddy, I answered, "I like it very well, sir."
>
> "Aya, but I don't like it so well: so you will go back to school today." I went but was not so happy as among the creek thatch.

Later, when he told his father it was his teacher he disliked, not the books, and that he wished to go to another school, his father immediately took his side and wasted no time with further talk. John was enrolled the next day in a private school down the road where, kindly treated by a schoolmaster named Joseph Marsh, he made a dramatic turn and began studying in earnest.

A small textbook edition of Cicero's *Orations* became one of his earliest, proudest possessions, as he affirmed with the note "John Adams Book 1749/50" written a half dozen times on the title page.

In little more than a year, at age fifteen, he was pronounced "fitted for college," which meant Harvard, it being the only choice. Marsh, himself a Harvard graduate, agreed to accompany John to Cambridge to appear for the usual examination before the president and masters of the college. But on the appointed morning Marsh pleaded ill and told John he must go alone. The boy was thunderstruck, terrified; but picturing his father's grief and the disappointment of both father and teacher, he "collected resolution enough to proceed," and on his father's horse rode off down the road alone, suffering "a very melancholy journey."

Writing years later, he remembered the day as grey and somber. Threatening clouds hung over Cambridge, and for a fifteen-year-old farm boy to stand before the grand monarchs of learning in their wigs and robes, with so much riding on the outcome, was itself as severe a test as could be imagined. His tutor, however, had assured him he was ready, which turned out to be so. He was admitted to Harvard and granted a partial scholarship.

"I was as light when I came home, as I had been heavy when I went," Adams wrote.

It had long been an article of faith among the Adamses that land was

the only sound investment and, once purchased, was never to be sold. Only once is Deacon John known to have made an exception to the rule, when he sold ten acres to help send his son John to college.

The Harvard of John Adams's undergraduate days was an institution of four red-brick buildings, a small chapel, a faculty of seven, and an enrollment of approximately one hundred scholars. His own class of 1755, numbering twenty-seven, was put under the tutorship of Joseph Mayhew, who taught Latin, and for Adams the four years were a time out of time that passed all too swiftly. When it was over and he abruptly found himself playing the part of village schoolmaster in remote Worcester, he would write woefully to a college friend, "Total and complete misery has succeeded so suddenly to total and complete happiness, that all the philosophy I can muster can scarce support me under the amazing shock."

He worked hard and did well at Harvard, and was attracted particularly to mathematics and science, as taught by his favorite professor, John Winthrop, the most distinguished member of the faculty and the leading American astronomer of the time. Among Adams's cherished Harvard memories was of a crystal night when, from the roof of Old Harvard Hall, he gazed through Professor Winthrop's telescope at the satellites of Jupiter.

He enjoyed his classmates and made several close friends. To his surprise, he also discovered a love of study and books such as he had never imagined. "I read forever," he would remember happily, and as years passed, in an age when educated men took particular pride in the breadth of their reading, he became one of the most voracious readers of any. Having discovered books at Harvard, he was seldom ever to be without one for the rest of his days.

He lived in the "lowermost northwest chamber" of Massachusetts Hall, sharing quarters with Thomas Sparhawk, whose chief distinction at college appears to have come from breaking windows, and Joseph Stockbridge, notable for his wealth and his refusal to eat meat.

The regimen was strict and demanding, the day starting with morning prayers in Holden Chapel at six and ending with evening prayers at five. The entire college dined at Commons, on the ground floor of Old

Harvard, each scholar bringing his own knife and fork which, when the meal ended, would be wiped clean on the table cloth. By most accounts, the food was wretched. Adams not only never complained, but attributed his own and the overall good health of the others to the daily fare—beef, mutton, Indian pudding, salt fish on Saturday—and an ever abundant supply of hard cider. "I shall never forget, how refreshing and salubrious we found it, hard as it often was." Indeed, for the rest of his life, a morning "gill" of hard cider was to be John Adams's preferred drink before breakfast.

"All scholars," it was stated in the college rules, were to "behave themselves blamelessly, leading sober, righteous, and godly lives." There was to be no "leaning" at prayers, no lying, blasphemy, fornication, drunkenness, or picking locks. Once, the records show, Adams was fined three shillings, nine pence for absence from college longer than the time allowed for vacation or by permission. Otherwise, he had not a mark against him. As the dutiful son of Deacon John, he appears neither to have succumbed to gambling, "riotous living," nor to "wenching" in taverns on the road to Charlestown.

But the appeal of young women was exceedingly strong, for as an elderly John Adams would one day write, he was "of an amorous disposition" and from as early as ten or eleven years of age had been "very fond of the society of females." Yet he kept himself in rein, he later insisted.

> I had my favorites among the young women and spent many of my evenings in their company and this disposition although controlled for seven years after my entrance into college, returned and engaged me too much 'til I was married. I shall draw no characters nor give any enumeration of my youthful flames. It would be considered as no compliment to the dead or the living. This I will say—they were all modest and virtuous girls and always maintained that character through life. No virgin or matron ever had cause to blush at the sight of me, or to regret her acquaintance with me. No father, brother, son, or friend ever had cause of grief or resentment for any intercourse between me and any daughter, sister, mother or any other relation of the female sex. My children may be assured that no illegitimate brother or sister exists or ever existed.

A student's place in his class being determined on entrance to Harvard by the "dignity of family," rather than alphabetically or by academic performance, Adams was listed fourteenth of the twenty-five who received degrees, his placement due to the fact that his mother was a Boylston and his father a deacon. Otherwise, he would have been among the last on the list. At commencement ceremonies, as one of the first three academically, he argued the affirmative to the question "Is civil government absolutely necessary for men?" It was to be a lifelong theme.

How close Adams came to becoming a minister he never exactly said, but most likely it was not close at all. His mother, though a pious woman, thought him unsuited for the life, for all that Deacon John wished it for him. Adams would recall only that in his last years at Harvard, having joined a debating and discussion club, he was told he had "some faculty" for public speaking and would make a better lawyer than preacher, a prospect, he said, that he readily understood and embraced. He knew from experience under his father's roof, when "ecclesiastical councils" gathered there, the kind of contention that could surround a preacher, whatever he might or might not say from the pulpit. "I saw such a spirit of dogmatism and bigotry in clergy and laity, that if I should be a priest I must take my side, and pronounce as positively as any of them, or never get a parish, or getting it must soon leave it." He had no heart for such a life and his father, he felt certain, would understand, his father being "a man of so thoughtful and considerate a turn of mind," even if the profession of law was not one generally held in high esteem.

He judged his father correctly, it seems, but to become a lawyer required that he be taken into the office of a practicing attorney who would charge a fee, which the young man himself would have to earn, and it was this necessity, with his Harvard years ended, that led to the schoolmaster's desk at Worcester late in the summer of 1755.

He made the sixty-mile journey from Braintree to Worcester by horseback in a single day and, though untried and untrained as a teacher, immediately assumed his new role in a one-room schoolhouse at the center of town. To compensate for his obvious youth, he would explain to a friend, he had to maintain a stiff, frowning attitude.

His small charges, both boys and girls numbering about a dozen, responded, he found, as he had at their age, more to encouragement and praise than to scolding or "thwacking." A teacher ought to be an encourager, Adams decided. "But we must be cautious and sparing of our praise, lest it become too familiar." Yet for the day-to-day routine of the classroom, he thought himself poorly suited and dreamed of more glorious pursuits, almost anything other than what he was doing. One student remembered Master Adams spending most of the day at his desk absorbed in his own thoughts or busily writing—sermons presumably. But Adams did like the children and hugely enjoyed observing them:

> I sometimes, in my sprightly moments, consider myself, in my great chair at school, as some dictator at the head of a commonwealth. In this little state I can discover all the great geniuses, all the surprising actions and revolutions of the great world in miniature. I have several renowned generals but three feet high, and several deep-projecting politicians in petticoats. I have others catching and dissecting flies, accumulating remarkable pebbles, cockleshells, etc., with as ardent curiosity as any virtuoso in the Royal Society. . . . At one table sits Mr. Insipid foppling and fluttering, spinning his whirligig, or playing with his fingers as gaily and wittily as any Frenchified coxcomb brandishes his cane and rattles his snuff box. At another sits the polemical divine, plodding and wrangling in his mind about Adam's fall in which we sinned, all as his primer has it.

He perceived life as a stirring drama like that of the theater, but with significant differences, as he wrote to a classmate, Charles Cushing:

> Upon common theaters, indeed, the applause of the audience is of more importance to the actors than their own approbation. But upon the stage of life, while conscience claps, let the world hiss! On the contrary if conscience disapproves, the loudest applauses of the world are of little value.

He boarded with a local physician whose collection of medical books helped satisfy his insatiable appetite for reading. For a time, interest in

the law seemed to fade and Adams thought of becoming a doctor. But after attending several sessions of the local court, he felt himself "irresistibly impelled" to the law. In the meantime, he was reading Milton, Virgil, Voltaire, Viscount Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, and copying long extracts in a literary commonplace book.

From his reading and from all he heard of the common talk in town, he found himself meditating more and more about politics and history. It was the time of the French and Indian War, when Americans had begun calling themselves Americans rather than colonists. Excitement was high, animosity toward the French intense. In one of his solitary "reveries," Adams poured out his thoughts in an amazing letter for anyone so young to have written, and for all it foresaw and said about him. Dated October 12, 1755, the letter was to another of his classmates and his cousin Nathan Webb.

"All that part of Creation that lies within our observation is liable to change," Adams began.

> Even mighty states and kingdoms are not exempted. If we look into history, we shall find some nations rising from contemptible beginnings and spreading their influence, until the whole globe is subjected to their ways. When they have reached the summit of grandeur, some minute and unsuspected cause commonly affects their ruin, and the empire of the world is transferred to some other place. Immortal Rome was at first but an insignificant village, inhabited only by a few abandoned ruffians, but by degrees it rose to a stupendous height, and excelled in arts and arms all the nations that preceded it. But the demolition of Carthage (what one should think should have established it in supreme dominion) by removing all danger, suffered it to sink into debauchery, and made it at length an easy prey to Barbarians.
>
> England immediately upon this began to increase (the particular and minute cause of which I am not historian enough to trace) in power and magnificence, and is now the greatest nation upon the globe.
>
> Soon after the Reformation a few people came over into the new world for conscience sake. Perhaps this (apparently) trivial incident may transfer the great seat of empire into America. It looks likely to

me. For if we can remove the turbulent Gallics, our people according to exactest computations, will in another century, become more numerous than England itself. Should this be the case, since we have (I may say) all the naval stores of the nation in our hands, it will be easy to obtain the mastery of the seas, and then the united force of all Europe, will not be able to subdue us. The only way to keep us from setting up for ourselves is to disunite us. *Divide et impera*. Keep us in distinct colonies, and then, some great men in each colony, desiring the monarchy of the whole, they will destroy each others' influence and keep the country in *equilibrio*.

Be not surprised that I am turned politician. The whole town is immersed in politics.

At Harvard he had tried keeping a journal. In Worcester he began again in a paper booklet no bigger than the palm of his hand, writing in a minute, almost microscopic script, numbering the days down the left hand margin, his entries at first given to spare, matter-of-fact notations on the weather and what little passed for social events in his new life:

January 23 [1756]. Friday.

A fair and agreeable day. Kept school. Drank tea at Col. Chandler's, and spent the evening at Major Gardiner's.

January 24. Saturday.

A very high west wind. Warm and cloudy. P.M. Warm and fair.

January 25. Sunday.

A cold weather. Heard friend Thayer preach two ingenious discourses from Jeremy [Jeremiah] 10th, 6, and 7. Supped at Col. Chandler's.

Soon he was filling pages with observations like those on his small scholars and on the arrival of spring, with frequently sensuous responses to nature—to "soft vernal showers," atmosphere full of "ravishing fragrance," air "soft and yielding."

Increasingly, however, the subject uppermost in mind was himself, as waves of loneliness, feelings of abject discontent over his circumstances, dissatisfaction with his own nature, seemed at times nearly to overwhelm him. Something of the spirit of the old Puritan diarists took hold. By writing only to himself, for himself, by dutifully reckoning day by day his moral assets and liabilities, and particularly the liabilities, he could thus improve himself.

"Oh! that I could wear out of my mind every mean and base affectation, conquer my natural pride and conceit."

Why was he constantly forming yet never executing good resolutions? Why was he so absent-minded, so lazy, so prone to daydreaming his life away? He vowed to read more seriously. He vowed to quit chewing tobacco.

On July 21, 1756, he wrote:

> I am resolved to rise with the sun and to study Scriptures on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings, and to study some Latin author the other three mornings. Noons and nights I intend to read English authors. . . . I will rouse up my mind and fix my attention. I will stand collected within myself and think upon what I read and what I see. I will strive with all my soul to be something more than persons who have had less advantages than myself.

But the next morning he slept until seven and a one-line entry the following week read, "A very rainy day. Dreamed away the time."

There was so much he wanted to know and do, but life was passing him by. He was twenty years old. "I have no books, no time, no friends. I must therefore be contented to live and die an ignorant, obscure fellow."

That such spells of gloom were failings in themselves, he was painfully aware, yet he was at a loss to know what to do about it. "I can as easily still the fierce tempests or stop the rapid thunderbolt, as command the motions and operations of my own mind," he lamented. Actual thunderstorms left him feeling nervous and unstrung.

By turns he worried over never having any bright or original ideas, or being too bright for his own good, too ready to show off and especially in the company of the older men in the community who befriended him.

"Honesty, sincerity, and openness, I esteem essential marks of a good mind," he concluded after one evening's gathering. He was therefore of the opinion that men ought "to avow their opinions and defend them with boldness."

Vanity, he saw, was his chief failing. "Vanity, I am sensible, is my cardinal vice and cardinal folly," he wrote, vowing to reform himself.

By "vanity" he did not mean he had an excessive pride in appearance. Adams was never one to spend much time in front of a mirror. Rather, in the eighteenth-century use of the word, he was berating himself for being overly proud, conceited.

"A puffy, vain, conceited conversation never fails to bring a man into contempt, although his natural endowments be ever so great, and his application and industry ever so intense. . . . [And] I must own myself to have been, to a very heinous degree, guilty in this respect."

By late summer of 1756 Adams had made up his mind about the future. On August 21, he signed a contract with a young Worcester attorney, James Putnam, to study "under his inspection" for two years. The day after, a Sunday, inspired by a sermon he had heard—and also, it would seem, by a feeling of relief that his decision not to become a minister was at last resolved—he wrote of the "glorious shows" of nature and the intense sensation of pleasure they evoked. Beholding the night sky, "the amazing concave of Heaven sprinkled and glittering with stars," he was "thrown into a kind of transport" and knew such wonders to be the gifts of God, expressions of God's love. But greatest of all, he wrote, was the gift of an inquiring mind.

> But all the provisions that He has [made] for the gratification of our senses . . . are much inferior to the provision, the wonderful provision that He has made for the gratification of our nobler powers of intelligence and reason. He has given us reason to find out the truth, and the real design and true end of our existence.

To a friend Adams wrote, "It will be hard work, but the more difficult and dangerous the enterprise, a higher crown of laurel is bestowed on the conqueror. . . . But the point is now determined, and I shall have the liberty to think for myself."

He changed lodgings, moving in with lawyer Putnam, and while con-

tinuing his daytime duties at the Worcester schoolhouse, he read law at night moving fast (too fast, he later thought) through Wood's four-volume *Institute of the Laws of England*, Hawkins's *Abridgment of Coke's Institutes*, Salkeld's hefty *Reports*, Coke's *Entries*, and Hawkins's massive two-volume *Pleas of the Crown* in a single volume that weighed fully eight pounds. "*Can you imagine any drier reading?*" he would one day write to Benjamin Rush, heavily underscoring the question.

Putnam's fee was $100, when Adams could "find it convenient."

With the war continuing, much the greatest excitement in Worcester was the arrival of Lord Jeffrey Amherst and 4,000 of the King's troops on their way west to Fort William Henry on Lake George. They camped on a nearby hill and for several days and nights life in the town was transformed. Writing more than half a century later, Adams could still warm to the memory.

> The officers were very social, spent their evenings and took their suppers with such of the inhabitants as were able to invite, and entertained us with their music and their dances. Many of them were Scotchmen in their plaids and their music was delightful. Even the bagpipe was not disagreeable.

"I then rejoiced that I was an Englishman, and gloried in the name of Britain," he would recall to a friend. How he might fare in the law was another matter. As he wrote at the time, "I am not without apprehensions."

In the fall of 1758, his studies with Putnam completed, Adams returned to Braintree to move in with his father and mother again after an absence of eight years. "I am beginning life anew," he jubilantly informed a Harvard classmate.

He was busy catching up with old friends, busy with his share of the farm work and preparing for admittance to the bar. For the first time, he was on his own with his studies, and he bent to them with the spirit of independence and intense determination that were to characterize much of his whole approach to life. In his diary he wrote of chopping wood and translating Justinian, with equal resolution.

"I have read Gilbert's first section, of feuds, this evening but I am not a master of it," he recorded October 5, referring to Sir Geoffrey Gilbert's *Treatise of Feudal Tenures*. "Rose about sun rise. Unpitched a load of hay. Translated two leaves more of Justinian . . . and am now reading over again Gilbert's section of feudal tenures," he wrote the day following, October 6. October 7: "Read in Gilbert. . . ." October 9: "I must and will make that book familiar to me." October 10: "Read in Gilbert. I read him slowly, but I gain ideas and knowledge as I go along." October 12: "This small volume will take me a fortnight, but I will be master of it."

Though full of opinions, he often found himself reluctant to express them. "I was young, and then very bashful, however saucy I may have sometimes been since," he would recall long afterward to Thomas Jefferson.

Feeling miserably unsure of himself, he attended court in Boston, where, awestruck, he listened to the leading attorneys of the day, Jeremiah Gridley and James Otis, argue cases. But, as he explained to a friend in Worcester, the appeal of Boston was threefold.

> I had the pleasure to sit and hear the greatest lawyers, orators, in short the greatest men in America, haranguing at the bar, and on the bench. I had the pleasure of spending my evenings with my Harvard friends in the joys of serene, sedate conversation, and perhaps it is worth my while to add, I had the pleasure of seeing a great many and of feeling some very [pretty] girls.

On the morning he found his way through the crooked streets of Boston to Jeremiah Gridley's office for the requisite interview for admission to the bar, Gridley, much to Adams's surprise, gave him not a few cursory minutes but several hours, questioning him closely on his reading. With a kindly, paternal air, Gridley also counseled him to "pursue the study of the law itself, rather than the gain of it," and not to marry early.

Adams was admitted to the bar in a ceremony before the Superior Court at Boston on November 6, 1759, and in a matter of weeks, at age twenty-four, he had taken his first case, which he lost.

In Braintree, as elsewhere in New England, much of town business

was taken up with the commonplace problem of keeping one man's livestock out of another man's fields, and by long-standing custom most legal matters were handled by town clerks and officials who, though without legal training, were thoroughly schooled in procedure, knowing to the last detail all that was required for writs and warrants, matters about which, for all his reading, Adams knew little. The case *Lambert v. Field* involved two horses belonging to Luke Lambert, a coarse, cocksure man whom Adams did not like. Lambert's horses had broken into the enclosure of a neighbor, Joseph Field, and trampled some crops. When Lambert crossed onto Field's land to retrieve them, Field called for him to stop, but Lambert, as Adams noted, "waved his hat and screamed at the horses and drove away, without tendering Field his damages."

As counsel for Field, the plaintiff, Adams felt confident in his understanding of the principles of law involved, but worried that the writ he prepared was "unclerklike" and thus he would fail. He had had no experience in preparing such a document. His anguish was acute. He blamed Putnam for insufficient training. He blamed his mother for insisting he take the case lest it be thought he was incapable of drawing a writ. Nothing, he decided, would ever come easily to him. "But it is my destiny to dig treasures with my own fingers," he wrote woefully.

To gather strength, he read aloud from Cicero's *Orations*. The "sweetness and grandeur" of just the sounds of Cicero were sufficient reward, even if one understood none of the meaning. "Besides . . . it exercises my lungs, raises my spirits, opens my pores, quickens the circulation, and so contributes much to health."

The case was the talk of the village. Everybody knew everybody involved. The justice of the peace, before whom Adams would appear, and the lawyer for Lambert were father and son—Colonel Josiah Quincy and young Samuel Quincy—a circumstance that obviously did not bode well for Adams and his client.

Just as he feared, Adams lost on a technicality. He had neglected to include the words "the county in the direction to the constables of Braintree."

"Field's wrath waxed hot," he recorded, and his own misery was extreme. In his first appearance as a lawyer he had been bested by a crude countryman like Lambert. He had been made to look a fool in the eyes of the whole town, and the humiliation and anger he felt appear to have

affected the atmosphere at home. The night following, a terrible family row broke out. Susanna Adams flew into a rage over the fact that Deacon John, in answer to his own conscience and feelings of responsibility as selectman, had brought a destitute young woman to live in the crowded household, the town having no means to provide for her. How was the girl to pay for her board, Susanna demanded of her husband, who responded by asserting his right to govern in his own home. "I won't have the town's poor brought here, stark naked for me to clothe for nothing," she stormed. He should resign as selectman.

When the young woman, whose name was Judah, burst into tears and John's brother Peter pointed this out, Adams told him to hold his tongue, which touched Peter off and "all was breaking into flame." Adams was so shaken, he had to leave the room and take up his Cicero again in order to compose himself.

His mother's uncontrolled responses, her "scolds, rages," were a grievous flaw, he felt. He knew the sudden, uncontrollable rush of his own anger, almost to the point of bursting. He must observe more closely the effects of reason and rage, just as he must never again undertake a case without command of the details. "Let me never undertake to draw a writ without sufficient time to examine and digest in my mind all the doubts, queries, objections that may arise," he wrote. And he never did. The painful lesson had been learned.

Henceforth, he vowed, he would bend his whole soul to the law. He would let nothing distract him. He drew inspiration from his Roman heroes. "*The first way for a young man to set himself on the road towards glorious reputation*," he read in Cicero, "*is to win renown.*" "Reputation," wrote Adams, "ought to be the perpetual subject of my thoughts, and aim of my behavior."

Should he confine himself to the small stage of Braintree? Or would he be better off in Boston? But how possibly could anyone with an interest in life keep a clear head in Boston?

> My eyes are so diverted with chimney sweeps, carriers of wood, merchants, ladies, priests, carts, horses, oxen, coaches, market men and women, soldiers, sailors, and my ears with the rattle gabble of them all that I can't think long enough in the street upon any one thing to start and pursue a thought.

He felt "anxious, eager after something," but what it was he did not know. "I feel my own ignorance. I feel concern for knowledge. I have . . . a strong desire for distinction."

"I never shall shine, 'til some animating occasion calls forth all my powers." It was 1760, the year twenty-two-year-old George III was crowned king and Adams turned twenty-five.

But if self-absorbed and ambitious, he was hardly more so than a number of other young men of ability of his time. The difference was that Adams wrote about it and was perfectly honest with himself.

"Why have I not genius to start some new thought?" he asked at another point in his diary. "Some thing that will surprise the world?" Why could he not bring order to his life? Why could he not clear his table of its clutter of books and papers and concentrate on just one book, one subject? Why did imagination so often intervene? Why did thoughts of girls keep intruding?

"Ballast is what I want. I totter with every breeze."

Chide himself as he would about time spent to little purpose, his appetite for life, for the pleasures of society was too central to his nature to be denied. Further, he had a talent for friendship. To many he seemed prickly, intractable, and often he was, but as his friend Jonathan Sewall would write, Adams had "a heart formed for friendship, and susceptible to the finest feelings." He needed friends, prized old friendships. He kept in touch with his Harvard classmates, and for several in particular maintained boundless admiration. Moses Hemmenway, who had become a Congregational minister known for his interminable sermons, would remain, in Adams's estimate, one of the first scholars of their generation. Samuel Locke, another from the class, was not only the youngest man ever chosen for the presidency of Harvard, but to Adams one of the best men ever chosen, irrespective of the fact that Locke had had to resign after only a few years in office, when his housemaid became pregnant. With his departure, in the words of one Harvard history, Locke was "promptly forgotten," but not by John Adams.

"Friendship," Adams had written to his classmate and cousin, Nathan Webb, "is one of the distinguishing glorys of man. . . . From this I expect to receive the chief happiness of my future life." When, a few years later, Webb became mortally ill, Adams was at his bedside keeping watch through several nights before his death.

His current friends—Sewall, Richard Cranch, Parson Anthony Wibird—were to be his friends to the last, despite drastic changes in circumstance, differing temperaments, eccentricities, or politics. When in time Adams became Richard Cranch's brother-in-law, he would sign his letters "as ever your faithful friend and affectionate brother, John Adams," meaning every word.

There was little he enjoyed more than an evening of spontaneous "chatter," of stories by candlelight in congenial surroundings, of political and philosophic discourse, "intimate, unreserved conversation," as he put it. And flirting, "gallanting," with the girls.

He was lively, pungent, and naturally amiable—so amiable, as Thomas Jefferson would later write, that it was impossible not to warm to him. He was so widely read, he could talk on almost any subject, sail off in almost any direction. What he knew he knew well.

Jonathan Sewall had already concluded that Adams was destined for greatness, telling him, only partly in jest, that "in future ages, when New England shall have risen to its intended grandeur, it shall be as carefully recorded among the registers of the literati that Adams flourished in the second century after the exode of its first settlers from Great Britain, as it is now that Cicero was born in the six-hundred-and-forty-seventh year after the building of Rome."

Yet Adams often felt ill at ease, hopelessly awkward. He sensed people were laughing at him, as sometimes they were, and this was especially hurtful. He had a way of shrugging his shoulders and distorting his face that must be corrected, he knew. He berated himself for being too shy. "I should look bold, speak with more spirit." In the presence of women—those he wished to impress above all—he was too susceptible to the least sign of approval. "Good treatment makes me think I am admired, beloved. . . . So I dismiss my guard and grow weak, silly, vain, conceited, ostentatious."

Determined to understand human nature, fascinated by nearly everyone he encountered, he devoted large portions of his diary to recording their stories, their views on life, how they stood, talked, their facial expressions, how their minds worked. In the way that his literary commonplace book served as a notebook on his reading, the diary became his notebook on people. "Let me search for the clue which led great Shake-

speare into the labyrinth of human nature. Let me examine how men think."

He made close study of the attorneys he most admired, the Boston giants of the profession, searching for clues to their success. Jeremiah Gridley's "grandeur" emanated from his great learning, his "lordly" manner. The strength of James Otis was his fiery eloquence. "I find myself imitating Otis," wrote Adams.

His portraits of "original characters" in and about Braintree were extraordinary, detailed, full of life and color, and written obviously, like so much of the diary, out of the pure joy of writing. Possibly he knew what a gift he had as an observer of human nature. In another time, under different circumstances, he might have become a great novelist.

That so many disparate qualities could exist in one person was of never-ending fascination to him. He longed to understand this in others, as in himself. The good-natured, obliging landlady of a friend was also a "squaddy, masculine creature" with "a great staring, rolling eye," "a rare collection of disagreeable qualities." A tavern loafer of "low and ignoble countenance," one Zab Hayward of Braintree, who had no conception of conventional grace in dancing or anything else, was nonetheless regarded as the best dancer in town. Adams sat one night in a local tavern observing from the sidelines. "Every room . . . crowded with people," he recorded. "Negroes with a fiddle. Young fellows and girls dancing in the chamber as if they would kick the floor through." When at first Zab "gathered a circle around him . . . his behavior and speeches were softly silly, but as his blood grew warm by motion and liquor, he grew droll.

> He caught a girl and danced a jig with her, and then led her to one side of the ring and said, "Stand there, I call for you by and by." This was spoken comically enough, and raised a loud laugh. He caught another girl with light hair and a patch on her chin, and held her by the hand while he sung a song. . . . This tickled the girl's vanity, for the song which he applied to her described a very fine girl indeed.

Adams's new friend, Pastor Anthony Wibird, who had assumed the pulpit of Braintree's First Church during the time Adams was away at Worcester, also became the subject of some of his most vivid sketches.

Older than Adams by several years, Wibird was, as would be said in understatement, "somewhat eccentric," yet warmly esteemed. His pastorate would be the longest in the annals of the parish, lasting forty-five years, and the friendship between Adams and Wibird, equally enduring. Privately, Adams wrote of him with the delight of a naturalist taking notes on some rare and exotic specimen:

> P[arson] W[ibird] is crooked, his head bends forward. . . . His nose is a large Roman nose with a prodigious bunch protuberance upon the upper part of it. His mouth is large and irregular, his teeth black and foul and craggy. . . . His eyes are a little squinted, his visage is long and lank, his complexion wan, his cheeks are fallen, his chin is long, large, and lean. . . . When he prays at home, he raises one knee upon the chair, and throws one hand over the back of it. With the other he scratches his neck, pulls the hair of his wig. . . . When he walks, he heaves away, and swags one side, and steps almost twice as far with one foot as the other. . . . When he speaks, he cocks and rolls his eyes, shakes his head, and jerks his body about.

Wibird was "slovenly and lazy," yet—and here was the wonder—he had great "delicacy" of mind, judgment, and humor. He was superb in the pulpit. "He is a genius," Adams declared in summation.

Parson Wibird was one of the half dozen or so bachelors in Adams's social circle. The two closest friends were Jonathan Sewall, a bright, witty fellow Harvard man and struggling attorney from Middlesex County, and Richard Cranch, a good-natured, English-born clockmaker who knew French, loved poetry, and delighted in discussing theological questions with Adams. Bela Lincoln was a physician from nearby Hingham. Robert Treat Paine was another lawyer and Harvard graduate, whom Adams thought conceited but who, like Wibird and Sewall, had a quick wit, which for Adams was usually enough to justify nearly any failing.

The preferred gathering place was the large, bustling Josiah Quincy household at the center of town, where a great part of the appeal was the Quincy family. Colonel Quincy, as an officer in the militia and possibly the wealthiest man in Braintree, was its leading citizen, but also someone Adams greatly admired for his polish and eloquence. (Nothing so helped

one gain command of the language, Quincy advised the young man, as the frequent reading and imitation of Swift and Pope.) In addition to the lawyer son Samuel, there were sons Edmund and Josiah, who was also a lawyer, as well as a daughter, Hannah, and a cousin, Esther, who, for Adams and his friends, were the prime attractions. Esther was "pert, sprightly, and gay." Hannah was all of that and an outrageous flirt besides.

While Jonathan Sewall fell almost immediately in love with Esther, whom he would eventually marry, Adams, Richard Cranch, and Bela Lincoln were all in eager pursuit of the high-spirited Hannah. Sensing he was the favorite, Adams was soon devoting every possible hour to her, and when not, dreaming of her. Nothing like this had happened to him before. His pleasure and distress were extreme, as he confided to his friend and rival Cranch:

> If I look upon a law book my eyes it is true are on the book, but imagination is at a tea table seeing that hair, those eyes, that shape, that familiar friendly look. . . . I go to bed and ruminate half the night, then fall asleep and dream the same enchanting scenes.

All this was transpiring when the amorous spirits of the whole group appear to have been at a pitch. Adams recorded how one evening several couples slipped off to a side room and "there laughed and screamed and kissed and hussled," and afterward emerged "glowing like furnaces."

After an evening stroll with Hannah through Braintree—through "Cupid's Grove"—Adams spent a long night and most of the next day with Parson Wibird, talking and reading aloud from Benjamin Franklin's *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage*.

"Let no trifling diversion or amusement or company decoy you from your books," he lectured himself in his diary, "i.e., let no girl, no gun, no cards, no flutes, no violins, no dress, no tobacco, no laziness decoy you from your books." Besides, he had moments of doubt when he thought Hannah less than sincere. "Her face and heart have no correspondence," he wrote.

Then came the spring night he would remember ever after. Alone with Hannah at the Quincy house, he was about to propose when cousin Esther and Jonathan Sewall suddenly burst into the room and the

moment passed, never to be recovered. As it was, Bela Lincoln, the Hingham physician, increased his attentions and in a year he and Hannah Quincy would marry.

Seeing what a narrow escape he had had, Adams solemnly determined to rededicate himself. Only by a turn of fate had he been delivered from "dangerous shackles." "Let love and vanity be extinguished and the great passions of ambition, patriotism, break out and burn," he wrote.

Yet, when he met Abigail Smith for the first time later that same summer of 1759, he would not be greatly impressed, not when he compared her to Hannah. Abigail and her sisters Mary and Elizabeth were the daughters of Reverend William Smith of Weymouth, the small seaport town farther along the coast road. Adams's friend Cranch had lately begun calling on Mary, the oldest and prettiest of the three. On the evening he invited Adams to go along with him to meet Abigail, the middle sister, it was for Adams anything but love at first sight. In contrast to his loving, tender Hannah, these Smith sisters were, he wrote, neither "fond, nor frank, nor candid." Nor did Adams much like the father, who seemed a "crafty, designing man." Adams's first impressions were almost entirely bad and, as he would come to realize, quite mistaken.

THE HEAVIEST BLOW of his young life befell John Adams on May 25, 1761, when his father, Deacon John, died at age seventy, the victim of epidemic influenza that took a heavy toll in eastern Massachusetts and on older people especially. In Braintree, seventeen elderly men and women died. Adams's mother was also stricken, and though she survived—as she was to survive one epidemic after another down the years—she was too ill to leave her bed when her husband was buried.

On the back of the office copy of his father's will, Adams wrote in his own hand the only known obituary of Deacon John:

> The testator had a good education, though not at college, and was a very capable and useful man. In his early life he was an officer of the militia, afterwards a deacon of the church, and a selectman of the town; almost all the business of the town being managed by him in that department for twenty years together; a man of strict piety,

> and great integrity; much esteemed and beloved wherever he was known, which was not far, his sphere of life being not extensive.

With his father gone, Adams experienced a "want of strength [and] courage" such as he had never known. Still, as expected of him, he stepped in as head of the family, and as time passed, those expressions of self-doubt, the fits of despair and self-consciousness that had so characterized the outpourings in his diary, grew fewer.

With his inheritance, he became a man of substantial property by the measure of Braintree. He received the house immediately beside that of his father's, as well as forty acres—ten of adjoining land, plus thirty of orchard, pasture, woodland, and swamp—and slightly less than a third of his father's personal estate, since alone of the three sons he had been provided a college education.

Adams was a freeholder now and his thoughts took a decided "turn to husbandry." He was soon absorbed in all manner of projects and improvements, working with several hired men—"the help," as New Englanders said—building stone walls, digging up stumps, carting manure, plowing with six yoke of oxen, planting corn and potatoes. He loved the farm as never before, even the swamp, "my swamp," as he wrote.

His love of the law, too, grew greater. He felt privileged, blessed in his profession, he told Jonathan Sewall:

> Now to what higher object, to what greater character, can any mortal aspire than to be possessed of all this knowledge, well digested and ready at command, to assist the feeble and friendless, to discountenance the haughty and lawless, to procure redress to wrongs, the advancement of right, to assert and maintain liberty and virtue, to discourage and abolish tyranny and vice?

In the house that was now his own, in what had once been the kitchen, before a lean-to enlargement was added at back, he established his first proper law office. The room was bright and sunny and in winter warmed by what had been the old kitchen fireplace. In the corner nearest the road, he had an outside door cut so that clients might directly come and go.

His practice picked up. He was going to Boston now once or twice a week. Soon he was riding the circuit with the royal judges. "I grow more expert . . . I feel my own strength."

In November 1762 his friend Richard Cranch and Mary Smith were married, a high occasion for Adams that he hugely enjoyed, including the customary round of "matrimonial stories" shared among the men "to raise the spirits," one of which he happily included in his journal:

> The story of B. Bicknal's wife is a very clever one. She said, when she was married she was very anxious, she feared, she trembled, she could not go to bed. But she recollected she had put her hand to the plow and could not look back, so she mustered up her spirits, committed her soul to God and her body to B. Bicknal and into bed she leaped—and in the morning she was amazed, she could not think for her life what it was that had so scared her.

In the company of Richard Cranch, Adams had been seeing more and more of the Smith family, about whom he had had a change of heart. That his interest, at first informal, then ardent, was centered on Abigail was obvious to all. As an aspiring lawyer, he must not marry early, Jeremiah Gridley had warned. So it was not until October 25, 1764, after a courtship of nearly five years and just short of his twenty-ninth birthday, that John Adams's life changed as never before, when at the Weymouth parsonage, in a small service conducted by her father, he and Abigail Smith became husband and wife.

OF THE COURTSHIP Adams had said not a word in his diary. Indeed, for the entire year of 1764 there were no diary entries, a sure sign of how preoccupied he was.

At their first meeting, in the summer of 1759, Abigail had been a shy, frail fifteen-year-old. Often ill during childhood and still subject to recurring headaches and insomnia, she appeared more delicate and vulnerable than her sisters. By the time of her wedding, she was not quite twenty, little more than five feet tall, with dark brown hair, brown eyes, and a fine, pale complexion. For a rather stiff pastel portrait, one of a pair that she and John sat for in Salem a few years after their marriage, she posed with

just a hint of a smile, three strands of pearls at the neck, her hair pulled back with a blue ribbon. But where the flat, oval face in her husband's portrait conveyed nothing of his bristling intelligence and appetite for life, in hers there was a strong, unmistakable look of good sense and character. He could have been almost any well-fed, untested young man with dark, arched brows and a grey wig, while she was distinctly attractive, readily identifiable, her intent dark eyes clearly focused on the world.

One wonders how a more gifted artist might have rendered Abigail. Long years afterward, Gilbert Stuart, while working on her portrait, would exclaim to a friend that he wished to God he could have painted Mrs. Adams when she was young; she would have made "a perfect Venus," to which her husband, on hearing the story, expressed emphatic agreement.

Year after year through the long courtship John trotted his horse up and over Penn's Hill by the coast road five miles to Weymouth at every chance and in all seasons. She was his Diana, after the Roman goddess of the moon. He was her Lysander, the Spartan hero. In the privacy of correspondence, he would address her as "Ever Dear Diana" or "Miss Adorable." She nearly always began her letters then, as later, "My Dearest Friend." She saw what latent abilities and strengths were in her ardent suitor and was deeply in love. Where others might see a stout, bluff little man, she saw a giant of great heart, and so it was ever to be.

Only once before their marriage, when the diary was still active, did Adams dare mention her in its pages, and then almost in code:

> Di was a constant feast. Tender, feeling, sensible, friendly. A friend. Not an imprudent, not an indelicate, not a disagreeable word of action. Prudent, soft, sensible, obliging, active.

She, too, was an avid reader and attributed her "taste for letters" to Richard Cranch, who, she later wrote, "taught me to love the poets and put into my hands, Milton, Pope, and Thompson, and Shakespeare." She could quote poetry more readily than could John Adams, and over a lifetime would quote her favorites again and again in correspondence, often making small, inconsequential mistakes, an indication that rather than looking passages up, she was quoting from memory.

Intelligence and wit shined in her. She was consistently cheerful. She,

too, loved to talk quite as much as her suitor, and as time would tell, she was no less strong-minded.

Considered too frail for school, she had been taught at home by her mother and had access to the library of several hundred books accumulated by her father. A graduate of Harvard, the Reverend Smith was adoring of all his children, who, in addition to the three daughters, included one son, William. They must never speak unkindly of anyone, Abigail remembered her father saying repeatedly. They must say only "handsome things," and make topics rather than persons their subjects—sensible policy for a parson's family. But Abigail had views on nearly everything and persons no less than topics. Nor was she ever to be particularly hesitant about expressing what she thought.

Open in their affections for one another, she and John were also open in their criticisms. "Candor is my characteristic," he told her, as though she might not have noticed. He thought she could improve her singing voice. He faulted her for her "parrot-toed" way of walking and for sitting cross-legged. She told him he was too severe in his judgments of people and that to others often appeared haughty. Besides, she chided him, "a gentleman has no business to concern himself about the legs of a lady."

During the terrible smallpox epidemic of 1764, when Boston became "one great hospital," he went to the city to be inoculated, an often harrowing, potentially fatal ordeal extending over many days. Though he sailed through with little discomfort, she worried excessively and they corresponded nearly every day, Adams reminding her to be sure to have his letters "smoked," on the chance they carried contamination.

The rambling, old-fashioned parsonage at Weymouth and its furnishings were a step removed from the plain farmer's cottage of John's boyhood or the house Abigail would move to once they were married. Also, two black slaves were part of the Smith household.

According to traditional family accounts, the match was strongly opposed by Abigail's mother. She was a Quincy, the daughter of old John Quincy, whose big hilltop homestead, known as Mount Wollaston, was a Braintree landmark. Abigail, it was thought, would be marrying beneath her. But the determination of both Abigail and John, in combination with their obvious attraction to each other—like steel to a magnet, John said—were more than enough to carry the day.

A month before the wedding, during a spell of several weeks when

they were unable to see one another because of illness, Adams wrote to her:

> Oh, my dear girl, I thank heaven that another fortnight will restore you to me—after so long a separation. My soul and body have both been thrown into disorder by your absence, and a month or two more would make me the most insufferable cynic in the world. I see nothing but faults, follies, frailties and defects in anybody lately. People have lost all their good properties or I my justice or discernment.
>
> But you who have always softened and warmed my heart, shall restore my benevolence as well as my health and tranquility of mind. You shall polish and refine my sentiments of life and manners, banish all the unsocial and ill natured particles in my composition, and form me to that happy temper that can reconcile a quick discernment with a perfect candor.
>
> Believe me, now and ever your faithful
>
> Lysander

His marriage to Abigail Smith was the most important decision of John Adams's life, as would become apparent with time. She was in all respects his equal and the part she was to play would be greater than he could possibly have imagined, for all his love for her and what appreciation he already had of her beneficial, steadying influence.

Bride and groom moved to Braintree the evening of the wedding. There was a servant to wait on them—the same Judah who had been the cause of the family row years before—who was temporarily on loan from John's mother. But as the days and weeks passed, Abigail did her own cooking by the open hearth, and while John busied himself with his law books and the farm, she spun and wove clothes for their everyday use.

Her more sheltered, bookish upbringing notwithstanding, she was to prove every bit as hardworking as he and no less conscientious about whatever she undertook. She was and would remain a thoroughgoing New England woman who rose at five in the morning and was seldom idle. She did everything that needed doing. All her life she would do her own sewing, baking, feed her own ducks and chickens, churn her own

butter (both because that was what was expected, and because she knew her butter to be superior). And for all her reading, her remarkable knowledge of English poetry and literature, she was never to lose certain countrified Yankee patterns of speech, saying "Canady" for Canada, as an example, using "set" for sit, or the old New England "aya," for yes.

To John's great satisfaction, Abigail also got along splendidly with his very unbookish mother. For a year or more, until Susanna Adams was remarried to an older Braintree man named John Hall, she continued to live with her son Peter in the family homestead next door, and the two women grew extremely fond of one another. To Abigail her mother-in-law was a cheerful, open-minded person of "exemplary benevolence," dedicated heart and soul to the welfare of her family, which was more than her eldest son ever committed to paper, even if he concurred.

John and Abigail's own first child followed not quite nine months after their marriage, a baby girl, Abigail or "Nabby," who arrived July 14, 1765, and was, her mother recorded, "the dear image of her still dearer Papa."

A second baby, John Quincy, was born two years later, and again in mid-July, 1767, and Adams began worrying about college for Johnny, fine clothes for Nabby, dancing schools, "and all that." To Abigail, after nearly three years of marriage, her John was still "the tenderest of husbands," his affections "unabated."

For Adams, life had been made infinitely fuller. All the ties he felt to the old farm were stronger now with Abigail in partnership. She was the ballast he had wanted, the vital center of a new and better life. The time he spent away from home, riding the court circuit, apart from her and the "little ones," became increasingly difficult. "God preserve you and all our family," he would write.

But in 1765, the same year little Abigail was born and Adams found himself chosen surveyor of highways in Braintree, he was swept by events into sudden public prominence. His marriage and family life were barely under way when he began the rise to the fame he had so long desired. "I never shall shine 'til some animating occasion calls forth all my powers," he had written, and here now was the moment.

"I am . . . under all obligations of interest and ambition, as well as honor, gratitude and duty, to exert the utmost of abilities in this impor-

tant cause," he wrote, and with characteristic honesty he had not left ambition out.

THE FIRST NEWS of the Stamp Act reached the American colonies during the last week of May 1765 and produced an immediate uproar, and in Massachusetts especially. Starting in November, nearly everything written or printed on paper other than private correspondence and books—all pamphlets, newspapers, advertisements, deeds, diplomas, bills, bonds, all legal documents, ship's papers, even playing cards—were required to carry revenue stamps, some costing as much as ten pounds. The new law, the first British attempt to tax Americans directly, had been passed by Parliament to help pay for the cost of the French and Indian War and to meet the expense of maintaining a colonial military force to prevent Indian wars. Everyone was affected. The *Boston Gazette* reported Virginia in a state of "utmost consternation." In August, Boston mobs, "like devils let loose," stoned the residence of Andrew Oliver, secretary of the province, who had been appointed distributor of the stamps, then attacked and destroyed the house of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson, wrongly suspecting him of having sponsored the detested tax.

Adams, who had earlier joined a new law club in Boston started by Jeremiah Gridley, had, at Gridley's suggestion, been working on an essay that would become *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*. It was his first extended political work and one of the most salient of his life, written at the age of thirty. Now, at the height of the furor, he arranged for its publication as an unsigned, untitled essay in the *Gazette*. (It would be published in England later, in a volume titled *The True Sentiments of America*.) It was not a call to arms or mob action—with his countryman's dislike of the Boston "rabble," Adams was repelled by such an "atrocious violation of the peace." The Stamp Act was hardly mentioned. Rather, it was a statement of his own fervent patriotism and the taproot conviction that American freedoms were not ideals still to be obtained, but rights long and firmly established by British law and by the courage and sacrifices of generations of Americans. Years later Adams would say the Revolution began in the minds of Americans long before any shots were fired or blood shed.

"Be it remembered," he wrote in his *Dissertation*, "that liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we have not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us at the expense of their ease, their estates, their pleasure, and their blood.

> And liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people who have a right from the frame of their nature to knowledge, as their great Creator who does nothing in vain, has given them understandings and a desire to know. But besides this they have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible divine right to the most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean of the characters and conduct of their rulers.

He was calling on his readers for independence of thought, to use their own minds. It was the same theme he had struck in his diary at Worcester a decade before, in his turmoil over what to do with his life, writing, "The point is now determined, and I shall have the liberty to think for myself."

> Government is a plain, simple, intelligent thing, founded in nature and reason, quite comprehensible by common sense [the *Dissertation* continued]. . . . The true source of our suffering has been our timidity. We have been afraid to think. . . . Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write. . . . Let it be known that British liberties are not the grants of princes or parliaments . . . that many of our rights are inherent and essential, agreed on as maxims and established as preliminaries, even before Parliament existed. . . . Let us read and recollect and impress upon our souls the views and ends of our more immediate forefathers, in exchanging their native country for a dreary, inhospitable wilderness. . . . Recollect their amazing fortitude, their bitter sufferings—the hunger, the nakedness, the cold, which they patiently endured—the severe labors of clearing their grounds, building their houses, raising their provisions, amidst dangers from wild beasts and savage men, before they had time or money or materials for commerce. Recollect the civil and religious principles and hopes and expectations which constantly supported and carried them through all hardships with patience and resignation. Let us recollect it was liberty, the hope of liberty, for them-

selves and us and ours, which conquered all discouragements, dangers, and trials.

The essay began appearing in the *Gazette* on August 12, 1765, and it struck an immediate chord. "The author is a young man, not above 33 or 34, but of incomparable sense," wrote Boston's senior pastor, Charles Chauncey, to the learned Rhode Island clergyman and future president of Yale College, Ezra Stiles. "I esteem that piece one of the best that has been written. It has done honor to its author; and it is a pity but he should be known."

Soon afterward Adams drafted what became known as the Braintree Instructions—instructions from the freeholders of the town to their delegate to the General Court, the legislative body of Massachusetts—which, when printed in October in the *Gazette*, "rang" through the colony. "We have always understood it to be a grand and fundamental principle of the [English] constitution that no freeman should be subject to any tax to which he has not given his own consent." There must be "no taxation without representation"—a phrase that had been used in Ireland for more than a generation. And in rejecting the rule of the juryless Admiralty Court in enforcing this law, the instructions declared that there must be a trial by jury and an independent judiciary.

In amazingly little time the document was adopted by forty towns, something that had never happened before.

Now fully joined in Boston's political ferment, Adams was meeting with Gridley, James Otis, Samuel Adams, and others. Observing them closely, he concluded that it was his older, second cousin, Samuel Adams who had "the most thorough understanding of liberty." Samuel Adams was "zealous and keen in the cause," of "steadfast integrity," a "universal good character." The esteemed Otis, however, had begun to act strangely. He was "liable to great inequities of temper, sometimes in despondency, sometimes in rage," Adams recorded in dismay.

Otis, a protégé of Gridley, had been for Adams the shining example of the lawyer-scholar, learned yet powerful in argument. Now he became Adams's political hero, just as Thomas Hutchinson became Adams's chief villain. A lifetime later, Adams would vividly describe Otis as he had been in his surpassing moment, in the winter of 1761, in argument against writs of assistance, search warrants that permitted customs offi-

cers to enter and search any premises whenever they wished. Before the bench in the second-floor Council Chamber of the Province House in Boston, Otis had declared such writs—which were perfectly valid in English law and commonly issued in England—null and void because they violated the natural rights of Englishmen. Adams, who had been present as an observer only, would remember it as one of the inspiring moments of his life, a turning point for him as for history. The five judges, with Hutchinson at their head as chief justice, sat in comfort near blazing fireplaces, Adams recalled, "all in their new fresh robes of scarlet English cloth, in their broad hats, and immense judicial wigs." But Otis, in opposition, was a "flame" unto himself. "With the promptitude of classical illusions, a depth of research . . . and a torrent of impetuous eloquence, he hurried away all before him." By Adams's account, every one of the immense crowded audience went away, as he did, ready to take up arms against writs of assistance. "Then and there was the first scene of the first act of opposition to the arbitrary claims of Great Britain," Adams would claim. "Then and there the child independence was born."

But by 1765 it was the tragic decline of James Otis that gripped Adams. At meetings now, Otis talked on endlessly and to no point. No one could get a word in. "Otis is in confusion yet," Adams noted a year or so later. "He rambles and wanders like a ship without a helm." Adams began to doubt Otis's sanity, and as time passed, it became clear that Otis, his hero, was indeed going mad, a dreadful spectacle.

"The year 1765 has been the most remarkable year of my life," Adams wrote in his diary that December. "The enormous engine fabricated by the British Parliament for battering down all the rights and liberties of America, I mean the Stamp Act, has raised and spread through the whole continent a spirit that will be recorded to our honor, with all future generations."

"At home with my family. Thinking," reads the entry of a few nights later.

"At home. Thinking," he wrote Christmas Day.

WITH THE REPEAL of the Stamp Act by Parliament in the spring of 1766, and the easing of tensions that followed in the next two years, until the arrival of British troops at Boston, Adams put politics aside to con-

centrate on earning a living. He was thinking of politics not at all, he insisted.

He was back on the road, riding the circuit, the reach of his travels extending more than two hundred miles, from the island of Martha's Vineyard off Cape Cod, north to Maine, which was then part of the Massachusetts Bay Province, to as far west as Worcester. As recalled in the family years later, he was endowed for the profession of law with the natural gifts of "a clear and sonorous voice," a "ready elocution," stubbornness, but with the "counter-check" of self-control, and a strong moral sense. He handled every kind of case—land transfers, trespass, admiralty, marine insurance, murder, adultery, rape, bastardy, buggery, assault and battery, tarring and feathering. He defended, not always successfully, poor debtors, horse thieves, and smugglers. He saw every side of life, learned to see things as they were, and was considered, as Jonathan Sewall would write, as "honest [a] lawyer as ever broke bread."

In 1766, like his father before him, Adams was elected selectman in Braintree. But so active had his Boston practice become by 1768 that he moved the family to a rented house in the city, a decision he did not like, fearing the effect on their health. He established a Boston office and presently admitted two young men, Jonathan Austin and William Tudor, to read law with him, in return for fees of 10 pounds sterling. "What shall I do with two clerks at a time?" Adams speculated in his diary, adding that he would do all he could "for their education and advancement in the world," a pledge he was to keep faithfully. When Billy Tudor was admitted to the bar three years later, Adams took time to write to Tudor's wealthy father to praise the young man for his clear head and honest heart, but also to prod the father into giving his son some help getting started in his practice. Adams had seen too often the ill effect of fathers who ignored their sons when a little help could have made all the difference.

With the death of Jeremiah Gridley the year before and the mental collapse of James Otis, John Adams, still in his thirties, had become Boston's busiest attorney. He was "under full sail," prospering at last, and in the Adams tradition, he began buying more land, seldom more than five or ten acres of salt marsh or woodland at a time, but steadily, year after year. (Among his father's memorable observations was that he never knew a piece of land to run away or break.) Eventually, after his

brother Peter married and moved to his wife's house, John would purchase all of the old homestead, with its barn and fifty-three acres, which included Fresh Brook, to Adams a prime asset. In one pasture, he reckoned, there were a thousand red cedars, which in twenty years, "if properly pruned," might be worth a shilling each. And with an appreciative Yankee eye, he noted "a quantity of good stone in it, too."

He was becoming more substantial in other ways. "My good man is so very fat that I am lean as a rail," Abigail bemoaned to her sister Mary. He acquired more and more books, books being an acknowledged extravagance he could seldom curb. (With one London bookseller he had placed a standing order for "every book and pamphlet, of reputation, upon the subjects of law and government as soon as it comes out.") "I want to see my wife and children every day," he would write while away on the court circuit. "I want to see my grass and blossoms and corn. . . . But above all, except the wife and children, I want to see my books."

In the privacy of his journal, he could also admit now, if obliquely, to seeing himself as a figure of some larger importance. After noting in one entry that his horse had overfed on grass and water, Adams speculated wryly, "My biographer will scarcely introduce my little mare and her adventures."

He could still search his soul over which path to follow. "To what object are my views directed?" he asked. "Am I grasping at money, or scheming for power?" Yes, he was amassing a library, but to what purpose? "Fame, fortune, power say some, are the ends intended by a library. The service of God, country, clients, fellow men, say others. Which of these lie nearest my heart?

> What plan of reading or reflection or business can be pursued by a man who is now at Pownalborough [Maine], then at Martha's Vineyard, next at Boston, then at Taunton, presently at Barnstable, then at Concord, now at Salem, then at Cambridge, and afterward Worcester. Now at Sessions, then at Pleas, now in Admiralty, now at Superior Court, then in the gallery of the House. . . . Here and there and everywhere, a rambling, roving, vagrant, vagabond life.

Yet when Jonathan Sewall, who had become attorney general of the province, called on Adams at the request of governor Francis Bernard to

offer him the office of advocate general in the Court of Admiralty, a plum for an ambitious lawyer, Adams had no difficulty saying no.

Politically he and Sewall were on opposing sides, Sewall having become an avowed Tory. Yet they tried to remain friends. "He always called me John and I him Jonathan," remembered Adams, "and I often said to him, I wish my name were David." Both understood that the office, lucrative in itself, was, in Adams's words, a "sure introduction to the most profitable business in the province." Sewall, with his large Brattle Street house in Cambridge, was himself an example of how high one could rise. Yet so open a door to prosperity, not to say the gratification to one's vanity, that a royal appointment might offer tempted Adams not at all.

With Boston full of red-coated British troops—sent in 1768 to keep order, as another round of taxes was imposed by Parliament, this time on paper, tea, paint, and glass—the atmosphere in the city turned incendiary. Incidents of violence broke out between townsmen and soldiers, the hated "Lobsterbacks."

The crisis came in March of 1770, a year already shadowed for John and Abigail by the loss of a child. A baby girl, Susanna, born since the move to Boston and named for John's mother, had died in February at a little more than a year old. Adams was so upset by the loss that he could not speak of it for years.

On the cold moonlit evening of March 5, 1770, the streets of Boston were covered by nearly a foot of snow. On the icy, cobbled square where the Province House stood, a lone British sentry, posted in front of the nearby Custom House, was being taunted by a small band of men and boys. The time was shortly after nine. Somewhere a church bell began to toll, the alarm for fire, and almost at once crowds came pouring into the streets, many men, up from the waterfront, brandishing sticks and clubs. As a throng of several hundred converged at the Custom House, the lone guard was reinforced by eight British soldiers with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets, their captain with drawn sword. Shouting, cursing, the crowd pelted the despised redcoats with snowballs, chunks of ice, oyster shells, and stones. In the melee the soldiers suddenly opened fire, killing five men. Samuel Adams was quick to call

the killings a "bloody butchery" and to distribute a print published by Paul Revere vividly portraying the scene as a slaughter of the innocent, an image of British tyranny, the Boston Massacre, that would become fixed in the public mind.

The following day thirty-four-year-old John Adams was asked to defend the soldiers and their captain, when they came to trial. No one else would take the case, he was informed. Hesitating no more than he had over Jonathan Sewall's offer of royal appointment, Adams accepted, firm in the belief, as he said, that no man in a free country should be denied the right to counsel and a fair trial, and convinced, on principle, that the case was of utmost importance. As a lawyer, his duty was clear. That he would be hazarding his hard-earned reputation and, in his words, "incurring a clamor and popular suspicions and prejudices" against him, was obvious, and if some of what he later said on the subject would sound a little self-righteous, he was also being entirely honest.

Only the year before, in 1769, Adams had defended four American sailors charged with killing a British naval officer who had boarded their ship with a press gang to grab them for the British navy. The sailors were acquitted on grounds of acting in self-defense, but public opinion had been vehement against the heinous practice of impressment. Adams had been in step with the popular outrage, exactly as he was out of step now. He worried for Abigail, who was pregnant again, and feared he was risking his family's safety as well as his own, such was the state of emotions in Boston. It was rumored he had been bribed to take the case. In reality, a retainer of eighteen guineas was the only payment he would receive.

Criticism of almost any kind was nearly always painful for Adams, but public scorn was painful in the extreme.

"The only way to compose myself and collect my thoughts," he wrote in his diary, "is to set down at my table, place my diary before me, and take my pen into my hand. This apparatus takes off my attention from other objects. Pen, ink, and paper and a sitting posture are great helps to attention and thinking."

From a treatise by the eminent Italian penologist and opponent of capital punishment Cesare, Marchese di Beccaria, he carefully copied the following:

> If, by supporting the rights of mankind, and of invincible truth, I shall contribute to save from the agonies of death one unfortunate victim of tyranny, or of ignorance, equally fatal, his blessings and years of transport will be sufficient consolation to me for the contempt of all mankind.

There were to be two conspicuously fair trials held in the new courthouse on Queen Street. The first was of the British captain, Thomas Preston, the opening of the trial being delayed until October when passions had cooled. The second was of the soldiers. In the first trial Adams was assisted by young Josiah Quincy, Jr., while the court-appointed lawyer trying the case was Josiah's brother, Samuel, assisted by Robert Treat Paine. Whether Captain Preston had given an order to fire, as was charged, could never be proven. Adams's argument for the defense, though unrecorded, was considered a virtuoso performance. Captain Preston was found not guilty.

Adams's closing for the second and longer trial, which was recorded, did not come until December 3, and lasted two days. The effect on the crowded courtroom was described as "electrical." "I am for the prisoners at bar," he began, then invoked the line from the Marchese di Beccaria. Close study of the facts had convinced Adams of the innocence of the soldiers. The tragedy was not brought on by the soldiers, but by the mob, and the mob, it must be understood, was the inevitable result of the flawed policy of quartering troops in a city on the pretext of keeping the peace:

> We have entertained a great variety of phrases to avoid calling this sort of people a mob. Some call them shavers, some call them geniuses. The plain English is, gentlemen, [it was] most probably a motley rabble of saucy boys, Negroes and mulattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jacktars. And why should we scruple to call such a people a mob, I can't conceive, unless the name is too respectable for them. The sun is not about to stand still or go out, nor the rivers to dry up because there was a mob in Boston on the 5th of March that attacked a party of soldiers. . . . Soldiers quartered in a populous town will always occasion two mobs where they prevent one. They are wretched conservators of the peace.

He described how the shrieking "rabble" pelted the soldiers with snowballs, oyster shells, sticks, "every species of rubbish," as a cry went up to "Kill them! Kill them!" One soldier had been knocked down with a club, then hit again as soon as he could rise. "Do you expect he should behave like a stoic philosopher, lost in apathy?" Adams asked. Self-defense was the primary canon of the law of nature. Better that many guilty persons escape unpunished than one innocent person should be punished. "The reason is, because it's of more importance to community, that innocence should be protected, than it is, that guilt should be punished."

"Facts are stubborn things," he told the jury, "and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictums of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."

The jury remained out two and a half hours. Of the eight soldiers, six were acquitted and two found guilty of manslaughter, for which they were branded on their thumbs.

There were angry reactions to the decision. Adams was taken to task in the *Gazette* and claimed later to have suffered the loss of more than half his practice. But there were no riots, and Samuel Adams appears never to have objected to the part he played. Possibly Samuel Adams had privately approved, even encouraged it behind the scenes, out of respect for John's fierce integrity, and on the theory that so staunch a show of fairness would be good politics.

As time would show, John Adams's part in the drama did increase his public standing, making him in the long run more respected than ever. Years later, reflecting from the perspective of old age, he himself would call it the most exhausting case he ever undertook, but conclude with pardonable pride that his part in the defense was "one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested actions of my whole life, and one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered my country."

A SECOND SON, Charles, was born that summer of 1770, and for all the criticism to which he was being subjected, Adams was elected by the Boston Town Meeting as a representative to the Massachusetts legislature. It was his first real commitment to politics. Inevitably it would

mean more time away from his practice, and still further reduction in income. When, the night of the meeting, he told Abigail of his apprehensions, she burst into tears, but then, as Adams would relate, said "she thought I had done as I ought, she was very willing to share in all that was to come."

But the complications and demands of both the law and politics became too much and Adams suffered what appears to have been a physical breakdown. "Especially the constant obligation to speak in public almost every day for many hours had exhausted my health, brought on pain in my breast and complaint in my lungs, which seriously threatened my life," he would later write. In the spring of 1771, he and the family moved back to Braintree, to "the air of my native spot, and the fine breezes from the sea," which "together with daily rides on horseback," gradually restored him.

Another child, Thomas Boylston, was born in September of 1772, and again Adams was off on the "vagabond life" of the circuit, carrying a copy of *Don Quixote* in his saddlebag and writing Abigail sometimes as many as three letters a day.

Business was good in Massachusetts in the calm of 1772 and Adams prospered once again. He appeared in more than two hundred Superior Court cases. Among his clients were many of the richest men in the colony, including John Hancock. At the conclusion of one morning in court, Adams was told people were calling him the finest speaker they had ever heard, "the equal to the greatest orator that ever spoke in Greece or Rome."

He could speak extemporaneously and, if need be, almost without limit. Once, to give a client time to retrieve a necessary record, Adams spoke for five hours, through which the court and jury sat with perfect patience. At the end he was roundly applauded because, as he related the story, he had spoken "in favor of justice."

At home, he filled pages of his journal with observations on government and freedom, "notes for an oration at Braintree," as he labeled them, though the oration appears never to have been delivered.

> Government is nothing more than the combined force of society, or the united power of the multitude, for the peace, order, safety, good

> and happiness of the people. . . . There is no king or queen bee distinguished from all others, by size or figure or beauty and variety of colors, in the human hive. No man has yet produced any revelation from heaven in his favor, any divine communication to govern his fellow men. Nature throws us all into the world equal and alike. . . .
>
> The preservation of liberty depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the people. As long as knowledge and virtue are diffused generally among the body of a nation, it is impossible they should be enslaved. . . .
>
> Ambition is one of the more ungovernable passions of the human heart. The love of power is insatiable and uncontrollable. . . .
>
> There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.

At the same time, he was vowing, at least in the privacy of his diary, to devote himself wholly to his private business and providing for his family. "Above all things I must avoid politics. . . ." But as tensions in the colony mounted, so did his pent-up rage and longing for action. On an evening with the Cranches, when a visiting Englishman began extolling the English sense of justice, Adams exploded, taking everyone by surprise, and Adams as much as any. "I cannot but reflect upon myself with the severity of these rash, inexperienced, boyish, raw and awkward expressions," he wrote afterward. "A man who has not better government of his tongue, no more command of his temper, is unfit for everything but children's play and the company of boys." There was no more justice in Britain than in hell, he had told the Englishman.

By the time of the destruction of the tea, what was later to become known as the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, he had again moved the family to Boston. His hatred of mob action notwithstanding, Adams was exuberant over the event. In less than six months, in May 1774, in reprisal, the British closed the port of Boston, the worst blow to the city in its history. "We live, my dear soul, in an age of trial," he told Abigail. Shut off from the sea, Boston was doomed. It must suffer martyrdom and expire in a noble cause. For himself, he saw "no prospect of any business in my way this whole summer. I don't receive a shilling a week."

Yet she must not assume he was "in the dumps." Quite the contrary: he felt better than he had in years.

In 1774, Adams was chosen by the legislature as one of five delegates to the First Continental Congress at Philadelphia, and with all Massachusetts on the verge of rebellion, he removed Abigail and the children again to Braintree, where they would remain.

In July he traveled to Maine, for what was to be his last turn on the circuit before leaving for Philadelphia. During a break from the court at Falmouth (later Portland), he and Jonathan Sewall, who was still attorney general, climbed a hill overlooking the blue sweep of Casco Bay, where they could talk privately.

Their friendship had cooled in recent years, as had been inevitable under the circumstances. In his diary Adams had grieved that his best friend in the world had become his implacable enemy. "God forgive him for the part he has acted," Adams had written, adding, "It is not impossible that he may make the same prayer for me." Now Sewall pleaded with Adams not to attend the Congress. The power of Great Britain was "irresistible" and would destroy all who stood in the way, Sewall warned.

As long as they lived, neither man would forget the moment. Adams told Sewall he knew Great Britain was "determined on her system," but "that very determination, determined me on mine." The die was cast, Adams said. "Swim or sink, live or die, survive or perish, [I am] with my country . . . You may depend upon it."

Less than a year later, after the battle of Bunker Hill, Sewall would choose to "quit America." With his wife and family he sailed for London, never to return. "It is not despair which drives me away," he wrote before departure. "I have faith . . . that rebellion will shrink back to its native hell, and that Great Britain will rise superior to all the gasconade of the little, wicked American politicians."

Not long afterward, in a series of letters to the *Boston Gazette* that he signed "Novangelus"—the New Englander—Adams argued that Americans had every right to determine their own destiny and charged the Foreign Ministry in London with corruption and venal intent. America,

Adams warned, could face subjugation of the kind inflicted on Ireland. Unless America took action, and at once, Adams wrote, they faced the prospect of living like the Irish on potatoes and water.

III

WITH JOSEPH BASS AT HIS SIDE, Adams crossed Long Bridge over the frozen Charles River and rode into Cambridge in the early afternoon of January 24, 1776, in time to dine with General Washington at the temporary quarters of Colonel Thomas Mifflin near Harvard Yard. Mifflin, a wealthy young Philadelphia merchant who served with Adams in the Continental Congress, had been one of the first to welcome Adams on his arrival in Philadelphia. As a "fighting Quaker," he had since become Washington's aide-de-camp.

Martha Washington was present with her husband, as were General Horatio Gates and his lady. When Martha Washington and Elizabeth Gates arrived in Cambridge by coach in December, it was remarked that they would surely be a welcome addition "in country where [fire] wood was scarce." Gates, a former British officer, was an affable, plain-faced man who, like Washington, had served during the French and Indian War on the disastrous Braddock expedition. As adjutant general he was Washington's right hand at Cambridge.

Washington and Adams were nearly the same age, Washington, at forty-three, being just three years older. Powerfully built, he stood nearly a head taller than Adams—six feet four in his boots, taller than almost anyone of the day—and loomed over his short, plump wife. The three officers, in their beautiful buff and blue uniforms, were all that Adams might imagine when picturing himself as a soldier.

Yet even they were upstaged by the main attractions of the gathering, a dozen or more sachems and warriors of the Caughnawaga Indians in full regalia who had been invited to dine, together with their wives and children. Adams had been fascinated by Indians since boyhood, when the aged leaders of the Punkapaug and Neponset tribes had called on his father. But he shared with Washington and Gates a dread fear of the British unleashing Indian war parties on the frontiers, as had the French twenty years before. Recalling what he had read and heard, Adams had

earlier written to a friend, "The Indians are known to conduct their wars so entirely without faith and humanity that it would bring eternal infamy on the Ministry throughout all Europe if they should excite those savages to war. . . . To let loose these blood hounds to scalp men and to butcher women and children is horrid." Yet finding himself now unexpectedly in the actual presence of Indians was another matter, and he had a very different reaction.

The dinner, starting at two o'clock, was a diplomatic occasion. The Caughnawagas had come to offer their services to the Americans, and, gathered all about him, they presented a spectacle that Adams, to his surprise, hugely enjoyed. "It was a savage feast, carnivorous animals devouring their prey," he wrote in his diary. "Yet they were wondrous polite. The general introduced me to them as one of the Grand Council Fire at Philadelphia, upon which they made me many bows and cordial reception." To Abigail he reported himself decidedly pleased by the whole occasion.

What he could not risk telling her by letter was that the command at Cambridge had received the most heartening news, indeed the only good news, of the long, grim winter. An expedition led by young Henry Knox, a former Boston bookseller and colonel in Washington's army, had been sent to Lake Champlain to retrieve the artillery captured by Ethan Allen at Fort Ticonderoga and haul the great guns back over the snow-covered Berkshire Mountains all the way to Boston, a task many had thought impossible. Now the "noble train" was at Framingham, twenty miles to the west. It was a feat of almost unimaginable daring and difficulty and, ironically, only made possible by the severity of the winter, as the guns had been dragged over the snow on sleds.

Mounted and on their way again the next morning, with the temperature still in the twenties, Adams and Bass were joined by a newly elected Massachusetts delegate to Congress, young Elbridge Gerry. They rode out past the pickets and campfires of Cambridge and at Framingham stopped to see for themselves the guns from Ticonderoga, Adams making careful note of the inventory—58 cannon ranging in size from 3- and 4-pounders to one giant 24-pounder that weighed more than two tons. Clearly, with such artillery, Washington could change the whole picture at Boston.

The three riders pressed on through the grey and white landscape,

making twenty to twenty-five miles a day. A "cold journey," Adams wrote. The weather was persistently wretched. There was more snow, wind, and freezing rain.

With dusk coming on by four in the afternoon and the bitter cold turning colder still, the glow and warmth of familiar wayside taverns was more welcome than ever. Under normal circumstances, Adams nearly always enjoyed such stops. He loved the food—wild goose on a spit, punch, wine, bread and cheese, apples—and a leisurely pipe afterward, while toasting himself by the fire. He picked up news, delighted in "scenes and characters," as he said, enough "for the amusement of Swift or even Shakespeare."

It was in such places that he had first sensed the rising tide of revolution. A year before the first meeting of Congress in 1774, riding the court circuit, he had stopped one winter night at a tavern at Shrewsbury, about forty miles from Boston, and as he would recall for Benjamin Rush years afterward, the scene left a vivid impression.

> . . . as I was cold and wet I sat down at a good fire in the bar room to dry my great coat and saddlebags, till a fire could be made in my chamber. There presently came in, one after another half a dozen or half a score substantial yeomen of the neighborhood, who, sitting down to the fire after lighting their pipes, began a lively conversation upon politics. As I believed I was unknown to all of them, I sat in total silence to hear them. One said, "The people of Boston are distracted." Another answered, "No wonder the people of Boston are distracted; oppression will make wise men mad." A third said, "What would you say, if a fellow should come to your house and tell you he was come to take a list of your cattle that Parliament might tax you for them at so much a head? And how should you feel if he should go out and break open your barn, to take down your oxen, cows, horses and sheep?" "What would I say," replied the first, "I would knock him in the head." "Well," said a fourth, "if Parliament can take away Mr. Hancock's wharf and Mr. Row's wharf, they can take away your barn and my house." After much more reasoning in this style, a fifth who had as yet been silent, broke out, "Well it is high time for us to rebel. We must rebel sometime or other: and we had better rebel now than at any time to come: if we put it off for ten

> or twenty years, and let them go on as they have begun, they will get a strong party among us, and plague us a great deal more than they can now. As yet they have but a small party on their side."

But now, at town after town, the atmosphere was edged with melancholy, the talk was of defeat at Quebec and the dire situation at Boston.

Snow lay deep most of the way. With drifts banked against buildings and stone walls, trees bare against the sky, the wind seldom still, no part of the journey was easy or uplifting to the spirits. Instead of welcoming committees and church bells, there was only the frozen road ahead.

The one bright note was young Gerry, who belonged to the so-called "codfish aristocracy" of Marblehead, his father having made a fortune shipping dried cod to Spain and the West Indies. Like Adams, indeed like every member of the Massachusetts delegation, Gerry was a Harvard graduate, a slight, birdlike man, age thirty-one, who spoke with a stammer and had an odd way of contorting his face, squinting and enlarging his eyes. But he was good company. Because of the family business, he had traveled extensively and was an ardent patriot. He and Adams talked all the way, making the journey, as Adams related to Abigail, considerably less tedious than it might have been. Their days together on the wintry road marked the start of what was to be a long, eventful friendship.

Like Adams, Gerry viewed mankind as capable of both great good and great evil. Importantly now, they were also of the same heart concerning what had to be done at Philadelphia.

Abigail had already said what John knew needed saying when, in November, a petition was circulated at home calling for reconciliation with Britain. "I could not join today in the petitions . . . for a reconciliation between our no longer parent state, by a tyrant state and these colonies," she wrote. Then, making a slight but definite dash mark with her pen before continuing, as if to signify her own break from the past, she said, "Let us separate, they are unworthy to be our brethren."

Passing through New York, Adams bought two copies of a small anonymous pamphlet, newly published under the title *Common Sense*. Keeping one, he sent the other on to her.

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