

Memoir of Charles Grandison Thomas, AB 1838  
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The subject of the following observations found himself, at a very early age, adrift in life, entirely destitute of the means of moral and intellectual improvement. This condition was the result of misfortunes of those, who have a just claim to his respect. Having no person to watch over his early impressions and associations to secure his mind against the influence of prevailing errors and engage in its prepossessions on the side of truth and virtue, his character and education have been principally the result of circumstances of situation and example, and therefore, cannot be expected to exhibit that degree of uniformity and consistency, which result from early, continued, and systematic instruction.

My exertions for ten years past have been directed to one object, in the attainment of which I have had difficulties to encounter of which it is useless to complain. The period of twenty and eight years, which places me in point of age ahead of my class, save one, is not altogether unfruitful in events, a few of which I propose to detail, at considerable length, in order to fulfill a hasty promise, and gratify the curiosity of a few intimate friends.

The misfortunes which followed soon after the death of my mother, who was considered highly qualified to conduct my education, occasioned the loss of a pleasant home, which had promised all the conveniences and some of the

luxuries of life. Soon after this event, fortune assigned me a residence (at the distance of about five miles from the place where I first came to light) in a log-house of only one door, one room, save the garret in which I used to lie and count the stars through the ruined room. Here in my eighth year commenced a two years' residence. The greatest share of my time was spent in catching trout from a rivulet, which, passing close by the residence, and winding its way through the wild forest, emptied its contents into the Black River, at a small village about two miles distant. This, my first occupation, enabled me to contribute to the necessities of a younger brother, and an elder sister. Thus slim were our means of subsistence. But as my business is only with one of the family, I will only say of the rest, with whom the ties of nature require me to sympathize deeply, that only one half of the original number are at present surviving.

No small part, however, of this period was spent in assisting a maker of charcoal, which be set down as my second occupation. At the expiration of these two years my residence was changed to a house (near the place of my birth,) in every respect similar to the one already described, with this distinction only, that the latter had not, for a considerable share of the time, either floors or chimney. Yet it was deemed sufficiently commodious, (though having but one room,) to furnish a residence for a large family besides a cooper's shop, in and out of which I labored diligently at my third and equally hated occupation.

During these three years I suffered more from cold and hunger than in all the rest of my life. I learned experimentally the fact, that a person might live almost exclusively on potatoes, and without shoes in the winter. As my fortune was intimately connected with the fate of the person, with whom I was residing at this time, it is well to observe, that the intelligent, generous, honest, but unfortunate man, who was entitled to my sympathy, was often obliged to conceal himself to prevent arrest, and the entire deprivation of his personal liberties, which was usually then and there taken in discharge of debts. On one occasion, when an officer attempted to seize him on ground without his jurisdiction, he defended himself manually and leveled him to the ground. At last his furniture was seized, the last remnant of a once respectable fortune; and myself compelled to seek shelter elsewhere.

Next, fortune assigned to me a residence at a place about five miles distant, which, from the situation of the country and the condition of the inhabitants, was very appropriately called Poverty Hollow. During my first resident here of about one year, I was engaged as servant boy to an Irish carpenter, by whom I most cruelly treated. His methods of punishing me I shall not describe. Suffice to say, that one of his severest was inflicted when I was dangerously ill. I have always intended to have another interview with him; but death has paid all his debts, and transferred the settlement of my account with

him to the highest tribunal of justice. It may be proper to take passing notice of one or two circumstances, which distinguish this mournful period of my life.

I was one day stationed by him to work in a field, by the side of a large forest, which was infested with predacious animals. Having worked with unusual diligence during most of the forenoon, I seated myself on the ground, and commenced talking with myself as usual on such occasions, and engaged my attention in forming some great scheme, to be carried into effect in after life. While engaged in this reverie, I heard a very strange noise in the adjoining wood. The second time I listened and recognized my master's dissembled voice, which was no less a warning of approaching danger; as he always made it a point to flog me without mercy when he found me idle. I, accordingly, took to flight and feigned myself frightened almost to death at the voice of a ferocious animal in the wood. I ran about a mile, then halted to plan some form of escape; and at length came to a determination to run away; a business for which I afterwards became notorious throughout the country. But before attempting to carry my scheme into effect, I have spent about thirty and six hours, in and about an old barn, without food, including one cold and dreary night of Autumn, which by chance I was discovered by my master. I had spent the sleepless and shivering night in thinking of my own misfortunes, and those of our family, of which mine exhibited but a fair specimen. When morning came, and I happened to meet my master, which about to attempt an escape, he gazed at me for a moment without

speaking. And when he spoke, I did not reply, for I was compelled to make the only appeal to his feelings, which human nature can best manifest without speaking. But in vain. And I was most inhumanely punished by two men in his presence.

At another time, having failed to accomplish, at the appointed time, the task set me, and apprehensive of the result, I made another attempt to escape. But it being cold weather, and myself now only about ten years of age, and almost destitute of clothes, my firmness proved unequal to an undertaking, which afforded but a slim prospect of success, and in the event that I should not succeed, no mercy would be shown. I, therefore, concluded to return. Arriving at my master's house in the evening, and dreading the consequence of entering, I stayed without until I was completely overcome by cold, and I crept slyly into the porch, where I was presently taken, by my master and one attendant, for a thief; and the consequence the next day was such as might be expected from the nature of the case, and disposition of the two persons concerned. These two instances intruded on the patience of the reader are but fair specimens, and illustrative of the treatment, which I have generally received, which I have generally received at the hands of my numerous masters, to no one of whom I was ever bound.

Leaving external circumstances, and passing to matters within, not less illustrative of character, I cannot recollect the time when I first recognized within me my all-predominant propensity. I presume it manifested itself in my disposition, long before memory began to record the most striking facts. I will, (to be candid,) for the want of a better name, call this propensity a longing to be somebody, or to be among the very first of those of whom I heard much said and well said. This, from my earliest years, almost constantly engaged my thoughts, and formed the subject of most of my soliloquies. At the age of ten years I found out by some means or other, that such persons were distinguished for their learning. This idea or association gave me a wonderful desire to study, and a taste for books, long before I was capable of reading or comprehending their contents.

Some doubtless will be disposed to contrast this with what was commonly called a natural taste for the study of a particular department of knowledge. But however it may be with others, in my own case it was very different. My fondness of intense application, however it might (at first) have originated, was, certainly, greatly aided and cherished by the contemplation of the fruits of such toil; and these in my unwisest days I considered to be only the importance which learning attaches to its possessor, which to my imperfect view appeared to be amply worth the sacrifice of ease, and all the ordinary enjoyments of life. When, at a later period, the different powers of my mind began to unfold themselves,

and widen the horizon of my knowledge, I began by degrees to discover my error,---that I had been chasing a shadow, and pursuing with eagerness those objects on which a false splendor is ever playing, during our most sanguine seasons. And it was not till recently that the real nature of such objects came to be thoroughly understood, so as to influence permanently my belief and practice. Even now it requires an effort to view praise and importance only as an appendage of the sole rational object of pursuit.

In this respect I was not singular, for all admire the emblems and trappings, before they are capable of understanding their meaning, or appreciating their real value. And I think few have been more deluded in this respect than myself. Even during my residence in Poverty Hollow, I loved books because great men did; and would fain have encountered all hardship to become learned. But unfortunately I had no parents or friends to appreciate such a prepossession, and turn it to good account. My whole library consisted of an Almanack and Testament. I have never seen an arithmetic, and it was not till two years afterwards, that I learned the nine figures. I recollect asking the person who showed them to me also what a row of them meant. But he refused; and I was not taught to numerate two or three figures till my fourteenth year, when the widow of a neighboring Judge gave me this valuable information, and about the same time taught me to tell the time of day by her clock, which I then thought

a very novel and curious thing, standing in one corner of the room, and looked as though it owed me a quarter's rent. But "redeo ad propositum."

In the Spring of 1820, in my eleventh year, I had an opportunity to leave Poverty Hollow with the consent of my master to seek my fortune. I had gone about three miles, when I fell in with a man, (driving two yoke of oxen bound to a new settlement in the woods,) to whom I engaged for a season. All the inducement which I had to attend him was, what then I conceived the high honor of driving one of his teams to his place of destination, where I might enjoy a view of the Natural Bridge over the Indian River. These motives were then sufficient to fill and fire my mind. On the evening of the same day we arrived our journey's end, and halted in a thick forest of oaks towering to heaven, with the river rolling beneath our feet, and enjoyed the view one of those anomalies of nature, that are fitted to excite our curiosity and wonder. This man had no fixed place of residence. His business was that of making shingles wherever in the forest he could steal the timber to the best advantage; mine was to assist him,---to cook his food in a hut. We spent a considerable [amount] of the time in company with the new settlers, whose time was usually divided between hunting and leveling the forest. Our accommodations as to board and lodgings were very poor, our bed consisting of hemlock boughs. Nothing remarkable, or of great importance to my future destiny, occurred to give me the highest degree of interest to this eventful period of my history. The year was spent in developing



my physical rather than mental powers; in hunting, fishing, making shingles, and salts of ashes. During the winter I availed myself of a few schooling, and learned to write my name, which was then a feat of sufficient importance to occupy my attention for a number of days. In the Spring following, I was obliged to return and reside with my original master in Poverty Hollow.

Being now in my twelfth year, my services were of considerable value, and as encouragement was always, with me, the most powerful stimulus to action, my master found his interest in a somewhat milder treatment during my residence with him; and I began to esteem this home desirable, at least, during the winter, when I always found it the most difficult to procure new masters. At the approach of winter, finding it more difficult to turn my services to good account, he concluded he should not need me any longer. And little as I understood my rights, I thought myself but poorly requited for six months' toil, at the rate of fifteen or sixteen hours per day, when I found myself at the beginning of the winter turned out into the streets, destitute of shoes and hat, to outlive it in a duck frock and pantaloons. I had as good reason, as those similarly circumstanced in the country, to expect, at least, a suit of woolen clothes, home-spun, home-made, home-colored with the best butternut bark that I was capable of procuring in the forest.

Having traveled about five miles, I succeed in obtaining a place where I resided for two years and a half. This was the widow's of the Judge already alluded to. This, on many accounts, was preferable to any of my former places. The farm on which I constantly employed was pleasantly situated on the banks of Deer River, a delightful stream that, after a few windings, discharges itself into the Black River. Its banks are adorned with almost every species of wild flowers, and associated with most of the sports and innocent pleasures of my early years. In respect of moral culture, few worse places could have been selected. As there was no stated place of public worship within the distance of five miles, I did not attend church, I think, in a single instance, during my residence in this place. This was, however, but little deviation from my usual custom, for previously to my tenth year I had not, to my recollection, been within a church. Instead of devoting the Sabbath to moral and religious culture, and associating my early notions of the Deity with the beauties of nature, I used on this holy season to assemble my little band of attendants in some convenient place, and spend the day in sports.

The first two years of this period of my history had past, without adding anything to my stock of knowledge, except the witty sayings and jokes of my fellow laborers, which I seldom failed to recollect, when by chance one of the laborers gave me an Arithmetic which I constantly kept in my hat for use, whenever an opportunity was afforded, or my overseer's back turned. This habit

for a few months, together with a few weeks schooling in the succeeding winter, enabled me to acquire a very good knowledge of its contents. I often heard my overseer's family speak in high commendation of his brother, who had received an education at college. This more than anything riveted my determination to make every sacrifice in my power to obtain a liberal education.

In the succeeding summer I was compelled to leave this place, to which I had strong attachments, (for though in many respects it was very exceptionable, yet on the whole it had more attractions than any other in which I resided,) to work, without any prospect of any compensation, with a maker of charcoal, at the distance of about twenty miles, and within nine of Lake Ontario. Hither I went in a severe thunderstorm on one of the saddest summer nights of my life. For if I had made one earnest prayer in my life, it was that I might escape a second engagement in this supremely hated occupation.

At this business I was employed till the succeeding winter. My dwelling was a hole in ground, and my bed consisted of a few bundles of straw. During the burning of the pits, our business would allow us no regular rest for some weeks together. In about the middle of the winter, when the coldness of the weather and the depth of the snow rendered it inconvenient to prosecute the business any longer in the season, I was given my liberty till the succeeding

spring, and a quarter of a dollar to defray my travel expenses, until I might be enabled to obtain some employment.

I succeeded in getting a place about twenty miles distant, where I worked for some time for my board. In the meantime I availed myself of an opportunity to attend school for a few days, till my schooling amounted to my twenty-five cents and a four pence, which I borrowed from one of the scholars. The teacher was well pleased with my proficiency, and volunteered his services in a number of instances to instruct me, long after the other scholars had left the house. So that I was enabled on my thirty cents tuition to revive, and about complete my knowledge of my old arithmetic.

A few days after this I happened to fall in with a traveler from the Canadas, who was willing that I should accompany him to his home, about one hundred and twenty miles distant, and thirty miles north of Albany. Considering this a good means of escaping a third engagement in the business of coaling, during the approaching season, I availed myself to the absence of my master; and a present of fifty cents from one of the neighbors enabled me to carry the measure into effect and achieve a journey of one hundred and twenty miles. Here I engaged myself as an apprentice to a shoemaker, tanner, and currier, with whom I resided for two years and a half. Instead, however, of employing me in his occupation, I was a good share of the time kept at work upon his farm, upon

the adjacent mountains, where my services for part of the season might be turned to the best account. During a small part of the time, I was allowed the enviable honor of wearing a leather apron, and serving in the capacity of a cobbler. This stride in my progress from coaling to cobbling was promotion too great for my frail nature. I was completely intoxicated by the elevation, and cut my original associates. In the spring I was unusually employed in making maple sugar. During the winter I had an opportunity of attending a school for a few weeks. This time was spent in intense application of the study of geography, at the rate of nineteen or twenty hours per day. And singular as it may seem to my classmates, my teacher spread the fame of my learning, and facility of acquiring knowledge, throughout the neighborhood. I here acquired a critical knowledge of geography, a subject which my vanity prompted me to introduce on most occasions, whenever an opportunity was afforded of conversing with any individual, a habit with respect to my studies, which with some modifications, I have always retained, in order to profit from different views, which minds of different habits of thinking take of the same subject. Elated with success, I was more than ever fixed in my determination to get an education, and waited patiently for the approach of spring for an opportunity to run away also from this master.

This period, however, was marked by one event, the recollection of which has always afforded me more than any other circumstance of my life.

The author of this happened one evening to have an opportunity of attending a debating society, where he was invited to take part in the discussion. After much urging he complied, and had an opportunity of noticing many important points passed over by both parties, which he was confident might be decisive of the question. No sooner had he arisen and commenced, than he manifested a degree of interest that he never had before or since on any occasion. Probably his memory and delivery never performed their functions so well before. Endeavoring to throw on the subject the utmost possible light in his power, of all the wise sayings that he had ever heard made the choicest selections of those, which would best illustrate the principle in question, and wove them into his lengthened speech, like links in the mail of the ancient knight, to strengthen the different portions of the discourse, and give the greater force to the arguments. It was reported, that he acquitted himself with so much success in the estimation of those present, that the country justice, who succeed him, did but little else than lavish his praises on the speech of the learned and eloquent gentleman, who preceded him. The author's fame for this deed soon spread throughout the town, and a few other similar trials of this kind inspired him with a confidence of his powers in this respect, which was never shaken even (to the end of his college course) amidst the general wreck of all the high notions of his literary achievements, which, in some of the less essentials branches of study, will not bear a comparison with those of his associates in college.

The spring at length arrived and the fixed day of my departure; but through reluctance at leaving a place endeared to me by so many pleasant recollections, it was deferred. The mountains and sloping woodlands, where I had toiled, affording a view, as far as the eyes could extend, of almost every variety of scenery that can awaken our sensibilities to the beauties of nature, as well as an extensive circle of respectable friends, had given a degree of attraction to this delightful country, which nothing but my settled determination to devote all of my industry to the improvement of my mind could overcome.

Having fixed a second time upon a day, I arose early in the morning, and without the knowledge of my master, bent my way towards Albany, fresh, vigorous, and unencumbered with a single extra garment. I often looked back; but soon the mountains dwindled in the distance, and Greenfield sunk forever beneath the horizon. Having traveled about seven miles, and being apprehensive of the pursuit of my master, I stopped at a public house, where two roads met, the one leading towards Albany, the other towards Troy, and hastily inquired the way to Albany, then, unobservedly taking the other road, walked leisurely on my way towards Troy, leaving my master (whom I have never seen since) the liberty of pursuing his apprentice on the road to Albany.

I traveled this day about thirty miles without taking any refreshments, and at evening put up at a Dutch Tavern. As I had but about eighteen cents, I was obliged to take my lodgings without any supper. In the evening a stranger introduced himself to me,---said that some years before he was in the country and heard me sing an amusing song. The next morning the essence-peddler persuaded me to accompany him to Waterford, the head navigation of the Hudson, with a promise that I should have my curiosity gratified by the view of some ships. I accordingly accompanied him, and after an hour's travel, enjoyed the sublime view of some canal boats. Here leaving him, I hastened on my way to Troy. Before entering the city I stopped by the way, and spent my few remaining cents for gingerbread, for which thirty and six hours travel had given me an excellent relish. Then while considering what to do, I chanced to observe a number of beautiful seats along the sloping hill, on the left. Hither I was half determined to direct my course, with a view to engage myself as a servant. At length, I concluded to enter the city and engage myself to a shoemaker, to whom a countryman had a few hours before directed me. Here I succeeded in getting business;---took out some work, though I was fully conscious of my want of skill at the business. During the first week, I worked from eighteen to twenty hours per day. But when I returned the materials on Saturday afternoon, in some like form of the shoes, for inspection, I had the mortification to have my work condemned to infamy for life; and was obliged to get business with the Irishmen



on the wharf, to compensate for the privilege of working this week at shoemaking.

At the expiration of nine and twenty one months passed in Troy and Waterford, I had laid up about thirty dollars, the greatest amount I have accumulated by manual labor. I then, in accordance with my previously settled determination to invest my money in intellectual stores, about as fast as I earned, attended a grammar school in Waterford for about thirty days. I allowed myself very little sleep during the time, and was enabled by my usual habits of application to acquire a tolerable knowledge of the English Grammar, and make the teacher my sincere friend. I was informed some time after I had left them to recruit my funds, that he had often cited to his scholars as a stimulus to exertion, the great proficiency I had made.

About the middle of October, being now nineteen years of age, and having exhausted my money at school, I was residing at Troy, where a gentleman called to see me, and informed me that my old remaining sister had died on Martha's Vineyard, about two years before. This produced an effect on my feelings from which I was never able to completely recover. As I would have gone to ends of the earth to have seen her alive, I could not content myself until I visited her grave; and for this purpose embarked on board a steam boat at Troy, for New York, having two dollars and sixty cents.

Have passed about half the distance, the passengers were called to pay their passages, when to my surprise, I found that my two dollar bill was not passable. The captain, however, treated me very politely. When I arrived in New York, I left a coat at a pawnbroker's for five dollars,---paid the captain two; and for the remaining three engaged my passage to the Vineyard, on board a sloop to Boston. The agreement was to land me any where on the island, if the wind should at our arrival be ahead, which would enable him to do it without forfeiting his insurance. This fortunately happened to be the case on our arrival at Homes Hole, where I was landed by a boatman, who, profiting by my ignorance of the value of his services, charged me two dollars instead of twenty-five cents, the usual price. Having but about sixty cents, I was obliged to leave my trunk as security for the amount. Then I passed up into the dreary sandy country, and sought the house of an old gentleman, for direction to the grave of my sister, who to my surprise informed me, that my other sister, having come for her health to the place, about two years previously had also died about the same time; and that the remains of the two were interred, side by side, on a bleak promontory not far distant. Having visited the place, I put up in the evening at a country house. The next morning by some overruling Providence, the lady of the house made me a present of five dollars, which I gratefully accepted, and gave her the promise of ten in return.

Being now able to leave the island, I succeeded in getting employment on Cape Cod. Having earned about twenty dollars, I returned in the succeeding spring to the Vineyard; and offered to return the lady her present, which she refused to accept.

I then attended school at Edgartown, a pleasant village on this island, and applied myself with the usual zeal. Having expended my twenty dollars, I was about to leave school, when the teacher advised me to continue, and promised to render me all the assistance in his power. I have always found him as good as his word. There is no one of my numerous friends, to whom I am under greater obligations. He at length gave up his business; and I was left principally on my own resources. I then of my own choice took up my abode in a Lighthouse, near Edgartown, built in the water at a distance of about half a mile from the land, with which it was connected by a bridge. The house was fitted for residence by a family, but as, from its situation, the lives of the occupants might, at certain times, be endangered, the appointed keeper preferred to reside on shore, and visit the house as occasion required. I had the merely the privilege of occupying the rooms, free of expense. Here I lived almost entirely on bread and water at the rate of forty or fifty cents per week, and attended as intensely as possible to my studies, for about three years, with such intervals of interruption, as were necessary to defray my expenses. Here I fitted for College.

As far as solitude was concerned, few better places could have been selected for the residence of a student. During most of the time, there was a smooth sea, and nothing to disturb my meditations except the gentle beating the waves against the house, which in the dead of night could serve no other purpose, than to remind me of past sorrows and troubles, and was quite congenial to my feelings during solemn hours, to which I was sometimes subject, when my better sense lost its influence over my imagination.

I used [to] generally to leave the house, once or twice a day, and walk along the beach; though sometimes when I happened to have a fit for study, I did not for many days together. But this residence had this inconvenience;---the house was liable to be swept away by the sea, whenever a severe tempest occurred. During one season it was, in a number of instances, exposed to this danger, one of which was worthy of notice.

One calm evening, having been earnestly in reading Cicero until about midnight, when about to retire, I perceived by the light of the lamps from the top of the house, that the tide had arisen to an unusual height. I had hardly closed my eyes in sleep, before I was awakened by the trembling of the house, in consequence of a tremendous storm. Arising in haste, I saw the white waves tumbling by the window, and hastened to the lower floor, whence I perceived the seas passing in quick succession, over the Breakwater. Judging from

appearances, that the house could not outlive the tempest, I thought it prudent to encounter the danger of being swept from the Breakwater, in an attempt to make the shore upon it; and having divested myself of part of my clothes, the better to encounter the sea, in case I should be dashed overboard, I seized the most favorable opportunity, made the attempt, and succeeded in reaching the shore. I took shelter from the hail driven by the wind with the greatest violence against my head, under the coverings of some salt-works. Perceiving my life endangered by the overturning of these, I passed up a steep bank, and observed in the distance an old barn, which I entered. This soon shared a worse fate than the other shelter. I was fortunate enough to extricate myself uninjured from the ruins, and went to the neighboring village where I spent the rest of the night.

Before the tempest subsided, it swept down a long piece of the Breakwater, whose huge oaken timbers opposed but a cobweb against the force of the sea. The house was much shattered but outlived the storm.

I was obliged to pass to the house in a boat, during the repairing the breach, which, in accordance with the orders of the government, was soon commenced: and fortunately I was employed to assist in the work, for which I was paid even more than I asked; for my employer said he always found me ready to plunge into the water, whenever the occasion required, to perform the most repulsive part of the work, to cheer the dropping spirits of the men, and to

stimulate them to exertion. In short, he considered the Old Hard Bread, (which had been exclusively my diet, without an ounce of fish or animal food for about two years, and had now become my *nom de guerre*,) on the most able bodied and energetic hands.

Thus, for repairing the ravages of the storm, which had threatened my life, I received for my services enough to enable me to study without interruption, during the rest of the season.

The next spring, my money being exhausted, and myself destitute of clothes, I left the island, came to New Bedford, and engaged myself in digging post holes, in front of a gentleman's house. Having earned about nine dollars, (which by the way, I was obliged to get a lawyer to collect,) I returned to the Light-house to continue my studies. By the time that I had spent this, I had raised a circle of friends in Edgartown, who took a deep interest in my welfare, by whose instrumentality I obtained the privilege of teaching the public school, in the village, which continued nine months. The six or seven hours per day, spent in the school, I regarded as only recreation; and for labor used to study a good part of each night. So that when school ended for the season, I was enabled to free myself from debt, and purchase a suit of clothes. The same situation was offered to me the next season; but as I had read Latin and Greek sufficient to enter College, (the way I pronounced these languages was a caution,) I

concluded to come to Cambridge to inquire into the facilities that might be afforded to me, to obtain a liberal education.

On my arrival, after a passage of three sleepless nights around Cape Cod, I found myself obliged to wait six weeks, or during the long vacation for an opportunity of presenting myself for an examination. I obtained a room in College, and lived (if I may use that term) six weeks, on about one dollar and fifty cent, which was all I had. I would not have thus treated my necessary wants, for any thing except the prospect of entering College; the object of all my toil for a number of years. As the realization of so great a good was near at hand, it almost constantly occupied my thoughts. The chance, too, of my getting into College, depended very much on my progress during these six weeks. This was sufficient inducement to stimulate me to redoubled diligence. I therefore cut the time of sleep down to about four hours.

I had thus passed but a few days, when by chance a gentleman called at my room out of curiosity, to see the room which he had once occupied himself. I asked him a number of questions relative to the University, and expressed my satisfaction for an opportunity of conversing with a man, after so many days of solitude. As his open countenance and instructive conversation indicated strongly his integrity and talents, and marked him out as a man of no ordinary mind, I ventured to give him a candid account of my condition.

The next day the same person called on me, and said he would do anything in his power, to assist me. He provided me with instruction during the remainder of the vacation; and brought me to the notice of a number of faithful friends, who have always manifested deep interest in my welfare. To two of them I might here acknowledge the obligation of many favors; but "Charity borrows much of its lustre from secrecy." It was not for my thanks that their assistance was bestowed; and were it otherwise, they stand too high in their country's history, to profit from the public acknowledgment of my gratitude.

The day of examination at length arrived. I succeeded in entering College, in which, by succession of events that at some future period I may be at the trouble of describing, I have been able to study during the last five years of my life.

Having joined the Freshman Class, and entered upon my college studies, I soon found that, through deficiency of early education, I had difficulties to encounter that no other one had in College. I was almost totally ignorant of the correct pronunciation of the English language. And as to Latin and Greek my pronunciation in every recitation excited the laughter of my classmates.



Though I regretted very much my deficiency in this respect, yet I was pleased to find it turned to so good account, as that of affording a little innocent amusement to my fellow-student, who generally treated me with great respect. In the few instances, when it was otherwise, and an attempt was made to take advantage of the few peculiarities which were occasioned by the disadvantages of my condition, in early life, I was always so successful, in repelling the aggressor from the ground prescribed by my own sense of right and duty, as to effectually prevent a second attack.

The opening scene of college life was altogether novel and interesting. I was brought into a circle of acquaintance whose accomplished manners presented a striking contrast to those of my early associates.

My manner of living and habits of study in college cannot here be detailed to any considerable length. Of my board I will only say that its price varied, with amount of my funds, from forty cents to two dollars per week. Such irregularity had considerable influence on my spirits, and ability to prosecute my studies with success; but has not as yet materially affected my health. My habits of studied were modified by the system of discipline pursued in the University, which requires, and justly requires, a high degree of regularity and exactness on the part of the student. Such habits are important items in the account of the scholarship, which is computed by a scale of merit that is made the basis of

college honors and distinctions; which are considered very serviceable even to those who intend to extend the sphere of their reputation beyond the retirement of the University. For the degree of importance they attach to the character of the student, might be worth, in some instances, even the sacrifice of a part of his preeminence as a scholar.

What is still more important, a high estimate by this scale serves many purposes of unquestionable utility, as it is a passport to the lucrative and honorable business of teaching. Its merits, however, rest principally on its adaptation to the peculiar circumstances, under which the majority of the students enter the University in respect to age and acquirements. This system is perhaps well adapted to the youthful students for whom it was designed; but from its application to persons of my age and circumstances its wonted advantages could not be expected. My previous habits and intellectual culture had been the result of chance, not of systematic instruction. Some of my powers had been cultivated to the neglect of others. Was it to be expected that a person thus grown up, wild and free in the Western forests, could immediately be squeezed by any discipline of the kindest instructors into a uniform, methodical, and consistent scholastic mold? By no means;---yet I am thankful for what the University has made of me.

My previous habits, as well as the amount and manner of my intellectual culture, necessarily rendered the apportionment of the time for the different exercises of the college, in some respects, very ineligible.

These considerations made a deviation from the college course, in the pursuit of my studies, more inexcusable in me than in others. Thus a somewhat irregular attendance, on some of the exercises, became a matter of necessity; and I forfeited my right to college distinctions; but not to the good opinion of the college officers.

During my whole course, however, I have ever adhered to the important principles of passing over nothing, which I did not fully understand. To carry this plan into effect, I was obliged to study during all the vacations. I found it attended with great advantages, in the study of the Latin and Greek Authors, which I read as models of style, rather than for a critical knowledge of the language. Of a few of their philosophical works I wrote analyses, and made the study of them rather an exercise of the understanding than memory. In this manner, I made myself acquainted with the mold in which the mind of the Ancients was cast, and acquired considerable knowledge of their moral and intellectual philosophy.

I have now discharged, as well as I could, the obligation of a hasty promise to a few intimate friends; and given a rough sketch of the leading events of my life, with no other view than to gratify their curiosity. God forbid that I should sue for sympathy.

Some may doubt the propriety of telling so plain a story;---say it is incompatible with that degree of experience and caution, which a thorough knowledge of the world should create. I was once of the like opinion myself; but a more thorough drilling in the lessons of human nature has inspired me with a manly confidence in the frank and open confessions of the truth.

Such are some of the scenes with which I have long been familiarized. What was once trouble, sorrow, and disappointment, is now a source of the most pleasing emotions. For experience, at this period of life, has taught me the real value of such dispensations, and reconciled my mind to that state of thing, which I have neither disposition nor power to control. Whether the designed advantages of the trials of life thus spent are ever to be fully realized in my own case, remains to be determined. That they have had a decided influence over my destiny is unquestionable.

Have passed thus far on the sea of life, certainly not without breasting some of its breakers, to fully satisfy the curiosity of the most curious of my fellow

students, I will only say of my future direction, that my previous taste and habits determine me for the future to conceal myself in the obscurity of some populous city, and attend, with my wonted zeal, to the study and practice of law. This being "the noblest of human sciences, and that which does more to quicken and invigorate the understanding than all other kinds of learning put together," other studies and general acquirements must be made subordinate, that the different powers of the mind may be opened and developed exactly in their true proportions, and thereby yield the greatest amount of happiness.

[Charles Grandison Thomas

Born October 9, 1810 in Denmark, New York

Admitted to Harvard College August 30, 1833

Awarded an AB degree, 1838; LLB degree, 1841

Married Jennie Richardson, May 28, 1863, who died June 10, 1864, after giving birth to a son,

Charles Grandison Thomas, Jr. He died fifteen months later

Died May 31, 1879 in Cambridge, Massachusetts

