

Mary Thaxter was married at seventeen to a husband only twenty-two; and when her son was born, she was still young enough to insist upon his being named George for the king. Joshua Otis was a great wag. He had been expelled from Harvard for some daring caper, — not half so grave, I feel sure, as many of those which dishonor its undergraduates now-a-days, — and before his wife was strong enough to enter the old church, warmed only by a few coals here and there in foot furnaces, he took the baby to its christening, promising that it should receive the name of George; he kept his promise, but had that of Washington added, which quite changed its significance.

Joshua Otis, who was a second cousin of James Otis, “the Patriot” and “Flame of Fire,” was a witty, handsome man, but without energy or application. His family had always been among the first in Scituate; and after his marriage he continued to live on his estate as a gentleman farmer, but could do little for his children. George, who was the oldest son, came to Boston to push his own way at a very early age. He was married before he was twenty-three, and bought land and built a house before he was twenty-five, by his own unassisted efforts. He deeply felt the want of a college education. To that, every New England boy of condition then felt himself entitled. He determined that his own children should have the very best. All his connections had been educated people. Mary Thaxter had four brothers who were physicians. Dr. Robert Thaxter of Dorchester was George’s own cousin, as were also Dr. Gridley and Dr. Ezekiel Thaxter, and Dr. Benjamin Cushing’s mother. Dr. Frank Thomas of