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THE CHARTER OF 1650



Harvard College in 1650 was a sturdy adolescent, attempting to advance the cause of humane and divine learning among a scanty population who were engaged in a severe struggle for existence. Under the energetic presidency of Henry Dunster, the College had weathered the depression of the 1640's, completed a building of ambitious dimensions, established a curriculum in the Liberal Arts, the Learned Tongues, and the Three Philosophies, and granted degrees to a group of promising young men. Financial support was still far from adequate for the kind of institution that Dunster wished to maintain, and the sort of things he yearned to do; yet Harvard College was in a fairly flourishing condition, with some forty undergraduates in residence, and about ten graduate students studying for the M.A.¹ Thirty years later, this Dunster era was regarded as a sort of golden age. Then, wrote Increase Mather, 'there was a Spirit to encourage Learning, and the College was full of Students.'²

Corporate autonomy, such as all the English colleges enjoyed,³ was needed to place the College on a firm foundation. The Board of Overseers, the ex officio board of magistrates and ministers organized by the Act of 1642, was a cumbrous body for the ordinary needs of college business, difficult to assemble from the different parts of the Bay Colony;⁴ and only one member of it, the President of the College, had any close contact with college affairs. Moreover, the President and Tutors

1. These numbers are obtained from Chesholme's accounts (*C. S. M.*, xxxi).
2. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia* (1702 ed.), book v. 94. Cf. Chapter XXI, below.
3. See my *Founding of Harvard College* (1935), especially Chapter V.
4. *F. H. C.*, Chapter XXII. The ministerial members lived no further away than Boston and Dorchester; but one of the magisterial members, William Pynchon, lived in Springfield, and several others at Ipswich and Newbury.

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