Johns Hopkins
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CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY LIFE OF JOHNS HOPKINS

THE man who has colored the thought of the modern world, through the influence of two notable institutions which bear his name, The Johns Hopkins University and The Johns Hopkins Hospital, was born in the year 1795 on a tobacco plantation in Anne Arundel county, Maryland, half way between Baltimore and Annapolis.

The infant nation which claimed Johns Hopkins as a son of her soil was at this time scarcely of age, lacking two years of being twenty-one. George Washington still held it by the hand and it was rapidly learning to walk alone. Though the recent vigorous use of its fists had shown Mother England its mettle, this youthful country still clung to English lore and tradition. Its counties and towns and its private estates bore witness by their names to their English parentage, and "White-hall," the birthplace of Johns Hopkins, was in this respect no exception. It was owned by Samuel Hopkins, his father, and was part of a tract of land granted by the King to one William Hopkins.

Five hundred acres of long green tobacco plants formed the background for the unpretentious brick house, the large barns, and the slaves' quarters, a group of log cabins, usually surrounded by pickaninnies and old mammies while the more able-bodied negroes were busy in the fields.
Though "Whitehall" was a house of only moderate size, yet here, in the early days, were entertained many parties of friends and relatives from North Carolina and the Valley of Virginia, for the Hopkins family were sociable people and the latch-string was always out. These visitors traveled on horse-back, bringing what baggage they could strapped to the backs of the saddles and following the Indian trails. The ample barns and stables of "Whitehall" easily accommodated the extra horses and hospitality was always to be counted on.

In this land of sand and sunshine, of frequent streams and rolling country, fox-hunting was the chief diversion; and for generations there had been a pack of hounds and plenty of riding horses in the Hopkins family. Many a morning at "sun-up" Johns and his older brother, Joseph, would saddle "Tom" and "Rattler," and calling the hounds gallop over the fields of sedge.

These were days of ease and plenty. Johns Hopkins's father, Samuel Hopkins, had bought out the shares of his brothers in the plantation, and had thus become the sole owner of a large tract of land lying between the Severn River and the Magothy. He had married Hannah Janney, of Loudon County, Virginia, whose family were people of means and prominence. It was in 1792 that Samuel, then a man of thirty-three years, had brought his bride from the Valley of Virginia to be the mistress of "Whitehall;" and in this maid of eighteen were latent those truly great qualities of motherhood which once prompted the statement that
"Whitehall," the Birthplace of Johns Hopkins Near Millersville, Anne Arundel County, Maryland
there never was a great man the elements of whose greatness might not be traced to the original characteristics and early influence of his mother. She was a woman of spirit, fortitude, and high ideals; and she and Samuel both took a prominent part in the Society of Friends, to which they belonged.

The Hopkins family had not always been Friends; they were of English stock and had belonged to the Church of England; but when in 1671, George Fox, the great Quaker preacher, visited the colonies and spread the doctrine of Friends, he converted many to his religion and among others Gerard (or Garrard) Hopkins, styled “Gentleman,” the great-grandfather of Johns. This Gerard, a man of some note, and one of a committee appointed in 1732 to welcome Lord Baltimore, married Margaret Johns, daughter of Richard Johns, the owner of an estate of some four thousand acres of land in Calvert County, Maryland. Richard Johns was spoken of as “a man of good credit and repute;” and it was from this ancestor, his great-great-grandfather, that Johns Hopkins received his Christian name. The old estate of the Johns family was known as “The Clifts,” and it is notable that Johns Hopkins named his country seat “Clifton” in memory of the home of his ancestors in Calvert County.

To Samuel and Hannah Hopkins were born eleven children, six sons, of whom Johns was the second, and five daughters. They had ample means to meet their simple needs, and plenty of faithful slaves to care for the children and attend to the duties of their large
household; and the years of plenty rolled peacefully around.

On "First Day" (Sunday) the family rode or drove to the West River Meeting-House, where they sat, the women and girls on one side, the men and boys on the other. Now and then Hannah would rise and in her soft voice make a prayer or deliver a sermon with dignity and quiet force. Johns often thought of his mother in after years as she stood in Meeting; her sweet face and womanly presence made a picture which he never forgot. Samuel was a popular man in the neighborhood and prominent in the Society of Friends. He was an Elder and Overseer in the West River Meeting, and in 1808 he was appointed one of a committee to select a site for the first Quaker Meeting-House in the city of Washington. He was an affectionate father, a devoted husband, and a man of high principles. He and Hannah with their eleven children were an unusually happy and united family.

Until Johns Hopkins was about twelve years old there seemed no cloud to darken the horizon. Tobacco was a profitable crop and found a ready market in England. Such was the demand for it that English agents were placed at all the river ports to secure the crops and prevent their being diverted to France and to Holland. Through his Tobacco Plantations Samuel Hopkins had become a man of ample means.

During the first few years of that century which was destined to bring freedom to the civilized world, a new note began to be sounded among the Friends. On
Sundays, after meetings, little animated groups would form on the lawn of the Meeting-House to discuss a tremendous and devastating change which was being contemplated. "Abolition" was a political question which had begun to stir the country; but for the Quakers it had become a question of principle. Whether the country decided to free the slaves or not, there was still a right and a wrong in the matter, and this must be settled by them to the satisfaction of their own consciences no matter what the political outcome might be.

We can picture the anguish of spirit with which that little band of Quakers in Anne Arundel faced this tremendous question. Free the slaves? Terrible would be the consequences of such an act! Boys taken from school to work on the plantations! Hard physical labor for entire families accustomed to ease and leisure! To manumit the slaves in whom large sums of money had been invested, and let them go without compensation—that way lay Ruin!

It was a hard and a perplexing time and mental anguish preceded decision. For months Samuel and Hannah could think of nothing else. All of the work of the plantation, as well as of the household was done by the slaves. The cloth for the boys' and men's suits was woven on the place, and even some of the hats were made by slave labor. Who would till the fields and harvest the crops when the slaves were gone? Who would card the wool and the cotton, do the weaving in the weaving-house, and keep the spinning wheels
humming with the gentle burr that daily filled the air?

Samuel Hopkins had been a good master to his slaves; he had fed them well and clothed them well. Once every year he would measure them all for shoes, notching peach-sticks to correspond to the length of the many feet, and then gathering these into bundles, he would go to the city and buy shoes and clothing of various kinds, enough to last a year. He had been kind and considerate to those who served him, and now was he to be plunged into poverty by turning them all loose on the world to look out for themselves? It was almost as dark an outlook for the slaves as for their masters. The young and old were helpless and entirely dependent. They would have to stay and be cared for though they made little return in labor.

There was "Aunt Minty," the well-beloved Mammy. Could they part with her? And there was her mother, a very old woman, who had come over from Africa years before, bringing with her a lump of Guinea gold which she had given to her mistress, Hannah, and which had been made into cuff-buttons for Joseph, the oldest son, and engraved with his initials.

There were many perplexing sides of the question to be faced. Abolition was very unpopular in the neighborhood among those who were not Quakers, many of whom were dear friends of Samuel and Hannah. How would they feel toward those who voluntarily freed their slaves?

The time came at last for a final decision and the
Society of Friends took a firm stand. All were to set free their slaves without compensation of any sort or be put out of Meeting.

Samuel Hopkins paced the floor for three nights trying to adjust his mind to the changes that would come if he obeyed this ultimatum. Hannah stood by advising and encouraging him. They knew that if they took this momentous step it meant robbing their children of their full share of education. It meant great responsibility for themselves, self-denial, and added burdens; and it meant very careful economy to make it possible to keep the plantation.

At last a decision was reached and the life of the Hopkins family turned a corner. Because of something unexplainable, but perhaps divine, which manifests itself now and then in men and women, Samuel and Hannah were able, though blood and sweat were the price, to lift their eyes unto the hills and see the vision. And so all of the able-bodied negroes belonging to Samuel Hopkins were set free in the year 1807. Those who still needed care and protection were kept. A cabin was given to Aunt Minty's old mother to occupy for the rest of her life, and an allowance of sixty dollars a year, a sum which was considered ample in those days.

The memory of these early days was always a vivid picture in the mind of Johns Hopkins. He had an intense admiration for his father and mother, and he and his sisters and brothers were brought into closer sympathy than is usual by conditions which obliged them to help each other in many ways. Johns was
often the care-taker for the younger ones. The South River School was a mile distant from Whitehall and necessitated a long walk twice a day for the children of the Hopkins family. Joseph, the oldest, being away at school in Alexandria, it fell to Johns to see that his younger sisters and brothers reached the school and returned safely and in good order each day. Having been their care-taker in youth, through life he assumed a protectorate over them, and when his brother Joseph died in 1845, leaving four young sons, Johns was named as their guardian.

After the momentous decision to free their slaves, came the end of the golden days for Samuel Hopkins and his family. Joseph, the oldest son, was called home from school. Labor and anxiety took the place of the happy companionship of classmates. Samuel, though no longer a young man, had to rise early and work hard to superintend and direct the activities of the large plantation. Things had to be kept going with the help of the young negro boys and girls and those who, though old, could still work a little. Samuel’s own son, Joseph, had to put his shoulder to the wheel, and Johns, though only a boy of twelve, was kept busy on the plantation helping in such ways as he could.

Hannah’s evenings were not times of leisure; but not for a moment did she allow the cares and worries and the daily drag of a large family to blind her spiritual vision. Instead of complaining of her changed life or becoming depressed, when the winter evenings were only the uneventful endings of long days of unaccus-
tomed labor, she read from the fine old literature available to her and was refreshed and uplifted by such intellectual contact. With her spinning wheel in front of her and a book propped up on a conveniently arranged shelf, she managed to spin and at the same time to read aloud to her children. She was thoroughly conversant with the classics, and her favorite book was The Iliad of Homer, with which she finally became so familiar that she was able to recite it from beginning to end. Her children also memorized large portions of it. She was a rock of strength to her husband and an inspiration to her children. No wonder that the boy Johns through all his life was so devoted to his mother, and that one of his greatest pleasures later on was to be able to give her the leisure and luxury she so richly deserved. It was in these early days that habits of strict economy as well as principles of integrity were grounded in him by the example of his parents and especially by the unselfish devotion of his mother.

During the War of 1812, when all communication with England was cut off and no goods could be purchased from abroad, Hannah Hopkins knitted suits for her children. Wool from her sheep was carded, dyed, and spun under her own personal supervision. When communication was again opened, one of her sons was sent to Annapolis to make much needed purchases, and a gentleman seeing the boy in his knitted suit exclaimed, "That boy must have a good mother!"

Johns was intensely interested in his studies, and the love of learning was encouraged not only by his mother
but also by the master of the South River school, which he had attended. This man was an Oxford graduate, a highly educated gentleman, and a lover of books and literature. Under him Johns formed a taste for reading which lasted all his life, and though he was obliged to leave school so early as he did, he became, with the aid of his good memory, a remarkably well read man.

South River school was a branch of King William's school in Annapolis, the first Free School established in America. In 1696 a petition for a free school in Maryland had been addressed to his Most Excellent Majesty, King William. "The act explained the needs of the Province for the establishment of free schools and asked the royal permission for such a school in Anne-Arundel-Town, upon the Severn River, to be named after the King and to be under the special guidance of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Royal permission was obtained, and certain lots of land in Annapolis, together with the "Kentish House," an ample brick building still standing in the shadow of the State House, were given for this school. Its purpose was, "to prepare both English and Indian boys for his Majesty's Royal College of William and Mary, in Virginia" and for the "propagation of the Gospel and the education of the youth of the Province in good letters and manners."

The school was finally conveyed, with its property, funds, masters, and students to St. John's College in Annapolis, whose beautiful colonial buildings still greet the visitor entering this quaint old town.
The success of King William's school led to an extension of the free school system in other parts of Maryland; and in 1723 free schools were located in the twelve Counties of the Province. It was that branch, or extension, of King William's school at the head of South River which Johns Hopkins attended, and to which his young brother, Gerard, became what was called a "visitor," in 1823. Gerard is spoken of as a "Planter whose home lay among the hills but a mile from the school building." He must have been a remarkable boy, for at this time he seems to have been not more than sixteen years of age. The visitors to these free schools were chosen from among the best men of the counties, and were conscientious in maintaining a high standard. When chosen for the position of visitor, each man had to serve the public in this capacity or forfeit one hundred pounds of tobacco. The influence of Gerard Hopkins was immediately felt. He advocated abandoning free scholarships, substituting the paying of a small tuition fee for each pupil, and urged the using of such fees for improvements upon the school lands and buildings. These suggestions were adopted.

The South River school was built on a tract of 150 acres of land "purchased from Mr. Richard Snowden" and known as "God Wills" and "Iron Mine." The building was of two stories, seventeen by twenty-five feet. The first story consisted of one large schoolroom with a great fireplace. Two rooms upstairs, with a fireplace in each, constituted the residence of
the Master. The Masters were required to be: "of the Church of England and of pious and exemplary lives and conversations and capable of teaching well, Grammar, good writing and the Mathematicks, if such could conveniently be got at twenty pounds sterling ($100) a year and the free use of the school plantation."

Such, however, could not often "be got," and most of the schools suffered in consequence. South River school, however, was most fortunate in this respect. The great prosperity of the colony brought many Englishmen of education to Maryland in search of their fortunes. They often met the fate of most adventurers and were quite frequently obliged to resort to teaching. This master at South River was no doubt one of these.

Among the group of country boys who filled up the main room of that little South River school, the master soon came to look for "Johnsie Hopkins," a blue-eyed, long-legged boy whose eager, intelligent face showed the deep interest he felt in his studies. Johns loved History and English Literature, and it was his delight to recite long passages from his favorite poems.

The time came, however, when he was sorely needed on the farm, and when he must put his shoulder to the wheel as his brother Joseph had done. School must be given up. No more meeting with the other boys at the cross-roads in the early morning; no more friendly days in the school-yard; no more loitering along the road with school-mates in the long afternoons. Stern necessity beckoned and the boy had to take on the ways of the man.
It was arranged that Johns should study his lessons at home from time to time through the day, as he was able, and on Saturday evenings the Master of the School came to dine with the Hopkins family and heard Johns recite his lessons. The whole family looked forward to this as the most delightful part of the week. The schoolmaster was a very interesting man, who would stay and talk after the lessons were over. It is partly to the inspiration of this English man of letters that we may attribute the later founding of the famous seat of learning in Baltimore. He implanted a love of learning which, thwarted in Johns Hopkins's early years, found compensation later in giving to others that for which he himself had longed.

In the hard school of necessity the young Johns Hopkins was shaped into habits of self-denial, industry, and thrift. This early training, added to his natural ability, fitted him when opportunity offered later on, not only to assume the responsibilities of a man of wealth, but also to occupy many positions of trust. In later life he used the great fortune which he had accumulated to help youths who were anxious as he had been for a wider education.