

# CHARLES WENTWORTH UPHAM

SALEM WITCHCRAFT AND  
COTTON MATHER: A REPLY

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## PREFATORY NOTE

The Editors of the *North American Review* would, under the circumstances, I have no reason to doubt, have opened its columns to a reply to the article that has led to the preparation of the following statement. But its length has forbidden my asking such a favor.

All interested in the department of American literature to which the Historical Magazine belongs, must appreciate the ability with which it is conducted, and the laborious and indefatigable zeal of its Editor, in collecting and placing on its pages, beyond the reach of oblivion and loss, the scattered and perishing materials necessary to the elucidation of historical and biographical topics, whether relating to particular localities or the country at large; and it was as gratifying as unexpected to receive the proffer, without limitation, of the use of that publication for this occasion.

The spirited discussion, by earnest scholars, of special questions, although occasionally assuming the aspect of

controversy, will be not only tolerated but welcomed by liberal minds. Let champions arise, in all sections of the Republic, to defend their respective rightful claims to share in a common glorious inheritance and to inscribe their several records in our Annals. Feeling the deepest interest in the Historical, Antiquarian, and Genealogical Societies of Massachusetts, and yielding to none in keen sensibility to all that concerns the ancient honors of the Old Bay State and New England, generally, I rejoice to witness the spirit of a commemorative age kindling the public mind, every where, in the Middle, Western and Southern States.

The courtesy extended to me is evidence that while, by a jealous scrutiny and, sometimes, perhaps, a sharp conflict, we are reciprocally imposing checks upon loose exaggerations and overweening pretensions, a comprehensive good feeling predominates over all; truth in its purity is getting eliminated; and characters and occurrences, in all parts of the country, brought under the clear light of justice.

The aid I have received, in the following discussion, from the publications and depositories of historical associations and the contributions of individuals, like Mr. Goodell, Doctor Moore, and others, engaged in procuring from the mother country and preserving all original tracts and documents, whenever found, belonging to our Colonial period, demonstrate the importance of such efforts, whether of Societies or single persons. In this way, our history will stand on a solid foundation, and have the

lineaments of complete and exact truth.

Notwithstanding the distance from the place of printing, owing to the faithful and intelligent oversight of the superintendent of the press and the vigilant care of the compositors, but few errors, I trust, will be found, beyond what are merely literal, and every reader will unconsciously, or readily, correct for himself.

*C. W. U.*

Salem, Massachusetts.

# INTRODUCTION

An article in *The North American Review*, for April, 1869, is mostly devoted to a notice of the work published by me, in 1867, entitled *Salem Witchcraft, with an account of Salem Village, and a history of opinions on witchcraft and kindred subjects*. If the article had contained criticisms, in the usual style, merely affecting the character of that work, in a literary point of view, no other duty would have devolved upon me, than carefully to consider and respectfully heed its suggestions. But it raises questions of an historical nature that seem to demand a response, either acknowledging the correctness of its statements or vindicating my own.

The character of the Periodical in which it appears; the manner in which it was heralded by rumor, long before its publication; its circulation, since, in a separate pamphlet form; and the extent to which, in certain quarters, its assumptions have been endorsed, make a reply imperative.

The subject to which it relates is of acknowledged interest and importance. The Witchcraft Delusion of 1692 has justly arrested a wider notice, and probably always will, than any other occurrence in the early colonial history of this country. It presents phenomena in the realm of our spiritual nature, belonging to that higher department of physiology, known as Psychology, of the greatest moment; and illustrates the

operations of the imagination upon the passions and faculties in immediate connection with it, and the perils to which the soul and society are thereby exposed, in a manner more striking, startling and instructive than is elsewhere to be found. For all reasons, truth and justice require of those who venture to explore and portray it, the utmost efforts to elucidate its passages and delineate correctly its actors.

With these views I hail with satisfaction the criticisms that may be offered upon my book, without regard to their personal character or bearing, as continuing and heightening the interest felt in the subject; and avail myself of the opportunity, tendered to me without solicitation and in a most liberal spirit, by the proprietor of this Magazine, to meet the obligations which historical truth and justice impose.

The principle charge, and it is repeated in innumerable forms through the sixty odd pages of the article in the *North American*, is that I have misrepresented the part borne by Cotton Mather in the proceeding connected with the Witchcraft Delusion and prosecutions, in 1692. Various other complaints are made of inaccuracy and unfairness, particularly in reference to the position of Increase Mather and the course of the Boston Ministers of that period, generally. Although the discussion, to which I now ask attention, may appear, at first view, to relate to questions merely personal, it will be found, I think, to lead to an exploration of the literature and prevalent sentiments, relating to religious and philosophical subjects, of that period; and, also, of

an instructive passage in the public history of the Province of Massachusetts Bay.

I now propose to present the subject more fully than was required, or would have been appropriate, in my work on Witchcraft.

# I

## THE CONNECTION OF THE MATHERS WITH THE SUPERSTITIONS OF THEIR TIME

In the first place, I venture to say that it can admit of no doubt, that Increase Mather and his son, Cotton Mather, did more than any other persons to aggravate the tendency of that age to the result reached in the Witchcraft Delusion of 1692. The latter, in the beginning of the Sixth Book of the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, refers to an attempt made, about the year 1658, "among some divines of no little figure throughout England and Ireland, for the faithful registering of remarkable providences. But, alas," he says, "it came to nothing that was remarkable. The like holy design," he continues, "was, by the Reverend Increase Mather, proposed among the divines of New England, in the year 1681, at a general meeting of them; who thereupon desired him to begin and publish an Essay; which he did in a little while; but there-withal declared that he did it only as a specimen of a larger volume, in hopes that this work being set on foot, posterity would go on with it." Cotton Mather did go on with it, immediately upon his entrance to the ministry; and by their preaching, publications, correspondence at home and abroad, and the influence of their

learning, talents, industry, and zeal in the work, these two men promoted the prevalence of a passion for the marvelous and monstrous, and what was deemed preternatural, infernal, and diabolical, throughout the whole mass of the people, in England as well as America. The public mind became infatuated and, drugged with credulity and superstition, was prepared to receive every impulse of blind fanaticism. The stories, thus collected and put everywhere in circulation, were of a nature to terrify the imagination, fill the mind with horrible apprehensions, degrade the general intelligence and taste, and dethrone the reason. They darken and dishonor the literature of that period. A rehash of them can be found in the Sixth Book of the *Magnalia*. The effects of such publications were naturally developed in widespread delusions and universal credulity. They penetrated the whole body of society, and reached all the inhabitants and families of the land, in the towns and remotest settlements. In this way, the Mathers, particularly the younger, made themselves responsible for the diseased and bewildered state of the public mind, in reference to supernatural and diabolical agencies, which came to a head in the Witchcraft Delusion. I do not say that they were culpable. Undoubtedly they thought they were doing God service. But the influence they exercised, in this direction, remains none the less an historical fact.

Increase Mather applied himself, without delay, to the prosecution of the design he had proposed, by writing to persons in all parts of the country, particularly clergymen, to procure,

for publication, as many marvelous stories as could be raked up. In the eighth volume of the Fourth Series of the *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, consisting of *The Mather Papers*, the responses of several of his correspondents may be seen. [Pp. 285, 360, 361, 367, 466, 475, 555, 612.] He pursued this business with an industrious and pertinacious zeal, which nothing could slacken. After the rest of the world had been shocked out of such mischievous nonsense, by the horrid results at Salem, on the fifth of March, 1694, as President of Harvard College, he issued a Circular to "The Reverend Ministers of the Gospel, in the several Churches in New England," signed by himself and seven others, members of the Corporation of that institution, urging it, as the special duty of Ministers of the Gospel, to obtain and preserve knowledge of notable occurrences, described under the general head of "*Remarkables*," and classified as follows:

"The things to be esteemed memorable are, especially, all unusual accidents, in the heaven, or earth, or water; all wonderful deliverances of the distressed; mercies to the godly; judgments to the wicked; and more glorious fulfilments of either the promises or the threatenings, in the Scriptures of truth; with apparitions, possessions, enchantments, and all extraordinary things wherein the existence and agency of the invisible world is more sensibly demonstrated."—*Magnalia Christi Americana*. Edit. London, 1702. Book VI., p. 1.

All communications, in answer to this missive were to be

addressed to the "President and Fellows" of Harvard College.

The first article is as follows: "To observe and record the more illustrious discoveries of the Divine Providence, in the government of the world, is a design so holy, so useful, so justly approved, that the too general neglect of it in the Churches of God, is as justly to be lamented." It is important to consider this language in connection with that used by Cotton Mather, in opening the Sixth Book of the *Magnalia*: "To regard the illustrious displays of that Providence, wherewith our Lord Christ governs the world, is a work than which there is none more needful or useful for a Christian; to record them is a work than which none more proper for a Minister; and perhaps the great Governor of the world will ordinarily do the most notable things for those who are most ready to take a wise notice of what he does. Unaccountable, therefore, and inexcusable, is the sleepiness, even upon the most of good men throughout the world, which indisposes them to observe and, much more, to preserve, the remarkable dispensations of Divine Providence, towards themselves or others. Nevertheless there have been raised up, now and then, those persons, who have rendered themselves worthy of everlasting remembrance, by their wakeful zeal to have the memorable providences of God remembered through all generations."

These passages from the Mathers, father and son, embrace, in their bearings, a period, eleven years before and two years after the Delusion of 1692. They show that the Clergy, generally,

were indifferent to the subject, and required to be aroused from "neglect" and "sleepiness," touching the duty of flooding the public mind with stories of "wonders" and "remarkables;" and that the agency of the Mathers, in giving currency, by means of their ministry and influence, to such ideas, was peculiar and pre-eminent. However innocent and excusable their motives may have been, the laws of cause and effect remained unbroken; and the result of their actions are, with truth and justice, attributable to them—not necessarily, I repeat, to impeach their honesty and integrity, but their wisdom, taste, judgment, and common sense. Human responsibility is not to be set aside, nor avoided, merely and wholly by good intent. It involves a solemn and fearful obligation to the use of reason, caution, cool deliberation, circumspection, and a most careful calculation of consequences. Error, if innocent and honest, is not punishable by divine, and ought not to be by human, law. It is covered by the mercy of God, and must not be pursued by the animosity of men. But it is, nevertheless, a thing to be dreaded and to be guarded against, with the utmost vigilance. Throughout the melancholy annals of the Church and the world, it has been the fountain of innumerable woes, spreading baleful influences through society, paralysing the energies of reason and conscience, dimming, all but extinguishing, the light of religion, convulsing nations, and desolating the earth. It is the duty of historians to trace it to its source; and, by depicting faithfully the causes that have led to it, prevent its recurrence. With these views, I feel bound, distinctly,

to state that the impression given to the popular sentiments of the period, to which I am referring, by certain leading minds, led to, was the efficient cause of, and, in this sense, may be said to have originated, the awful superstitions long prevalent in the old world and the new, and reaching a final catastrophe in 1692, and among these leading minds, aggravating and intensifying, by their writings, this most baleful form of the superstition of the age, Increase and Cotton Mather stand most conspicuous.

This opinion was entertained, at the time, by impartial observers. Francis Hutchinson, D.D., "Chaplain in ordinary to his Majesty, and Minister of St. James's Parish, in St. Edmund's Bury," in the life-time of both the Mathers, published, in London, an *Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft*, dedicated to the "Lord Chief-justice of England, the Lord Chief-justice of Common Pleas, and the Lord Chief Baron of Exchequer." In a Chapter on *The Witchcraft in Salem, Boston, and Andover, in New England*, he attributes it, as will be seen in the course of this article, to the influence of the writings of the Mathers.

In the Preface to the London edition of Cotton Mather's *Memorable Providences*, written by Richard Baxter, in 1690, he ascribes this same prominence to the works of the Mathers. While expressing the great value he attached to writings about Witchcraft, and the importance, in his view, of that department of literature which relates stories about diabolical agency, possessions, apparitions, and the like, he says, "Mr. Increase Mather hath already published many such histories of things

done in New England; and this great instance published by his son"—that is, the account of the Goodwin children—"cometh with such full convincing evidence, that he must be a very obdurate Sadducee that will not believe it. And his two Sermons, adjoined, are excellently fitted to the subject and this blinded generation, and to the use of us all, that are not past our warfare with Devils." One of the Sermons, which Baxter commends, is on *The Power and Malice of Devils*, and opens with the declaration, that "there is a combination of Devils, which our air is filled withal:" the other is on *Witchcraft*. Both are replete with the most exciting and vehement enforcements of the superstitions of that age, relating to the Devil and his confederates.

My first position, then, in contravention of that taken by the Reviewer in the *North American*, is that, by stimulating the Clergy over the whole country, to collect and circulate all sorts of marvelous and supposed preternatural occurrences, by giving this direction to the preaching and literature of the times, these two active, zealous, learned, and able Divines, Increase and Cotton Mather, considering the influence they naturally were able to exercise, are, particularly the latter, justly chargeable with, and may be said to have brought about, the extraordinary outbreaks of credulous fanaticism, exhibited in the cases of the Goodwin family and of "the afflicted children," at Salem Village. Robert Calef, writing to the Ministers of the country, March 18, 1694, says: "I having had, not only occasion, but renewed provocation, to take a view of the mysterious doctrines, which

have of late been so much contested among us, could not meet with any that had spoken more, or more plainly, the sense of those doctrines" [*relating to the Witchcraft*] "than the Reverend Mr. Cotton Mather, but how clearly and consistent, either with himself or the truth, I meddle not now to say, but cannot but suppose his strenuous and zealous asserting his opinions has been one cause of the dismal convulsions, we have here lately fallen into."—*More Wonders of the Invisible World*, by Robert Calef, Merchant of Boston, in New England. Edit. London, 1700, p. 33.

The papers that remain, connected with the Witchcraft Examinations and Trials, at Salem, show the extent to which currency had been given, in the popular mind, to such marvelous and prodigious things as the Mathers had been so long endeavoring to collect and circulate; particularly in the interior, rural settlements. The solemn solitudes of the woods were filled with ghosts, hobgoblins, spectres, evil spirits, and the infernal Prince of them all. Every pathway was infested with their flitting shapes and footprints; and around every hearth-stone, shuddering circles, drawing closer together as the darkness of night thickened and their imaginations became more awed and frightened, listened to tales of diabolical operations: the same effects, in somewhat different forms, pervaded the seaboard settlements and larger towns.

Besides such frightful fancies, other most unhappy influences flowed from the prevalence of the style of literature which the Mathers brought into vogue. Suspicions and accusations of

witchcraft were everywhere prevalent; any unusual calamity or misadventure; every instance of real or affected singularity of deportment or behavior—and, in that condition of perverted and distempered public opinion, there would be many such—was attributed to the Devil. Every sufferer who had yielded his mind to what was taught in pulpits or publications, lost sight of the Divine Hand, and could see nothing but devils in his afflictions. Poor John Goodwin, whose trials we are presently to consider, while his children were acting, as the phrase—originating in those days, and still lingering in the lower forms of vulgar speech—has it, "like all possessed," broke forth thus: "I thought of what David said. *2 Samuel*, xxiv., 14. If he feared so to fall into the hands of men, oh! then to think of the horrors of our condition, to be in the hands of Devils and Witches. Thus, our doleful condition moved us to call to our friends to have pity on us, for God's hand hath touched us. I was ready to say that no one's affliction was like mine. That my little house, that should be a little Bethel for God to dwell in, should be made a den for Devils; that those little Bodies, that should be Temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in, should be thus harrassed and abused by the Devil and his cursed brood."—*Late Memorable Providences, relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*. By Cotton Mather. Edit. London, 1691.

No wonder that the country was full of the terrors and horrors of diabolical imaginations, when the Devil was kept before the minds of men, by what they constantly read and heard, from their

religious teachers! In the Sermons of that day, he was the all-absorbing topic of learning and eloquence. In some of Cotton Mather's, the name, Devil, or its synonyms, is mentioned ten times as often as that of the benign and blessed God.

No wonder that alleged witchcrafts were numerous! Drake, in his *History of Boston*, says there were many cases there, about the year 1688. Only one of them seems to have attracted the kind of notice requisite to preserve it from oblivion—that of the four children of John Goodwin, the eldest, thirteen years of age. The relation of this case, in my book [*Salem Witchcraft*, i., 454-460] was wholly drawn from the *Memorable Providences* and the *Magnalia*.

## II

### THE GOODWIN CHILDREN. SOME GENERAL REMARKS UPON THE CRITICISMS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

The Reviewer charges me with having wronged Cotton Mather, by representing that he "got up" the whole affair of the Goodwin children. He places the expression within quotation marks, and repeats it, over and over again. In the passage to which he refers—p. 366 of the second volume of my book—I say of Cotton Mather, that he "repeatedly endeavored to get up cases of the kind in Boston. There is some ground for suspicion that he was instrumental in originating the fanaticism in Salem." I am not aware that the expression was used, except in this passage. But, wherever used, it was designed to convey the meaning given to it, by both of our great lexicographers. Worcester defines "*to get up*," 'to prepare, to make ready—to get up an entertainment;' 'to print and publish, as a book.'" Webster defines it, "to prepare for coming before the public; to bring forward." This is precisely what Mather did, in the case of the Goodwin children, and what Calef put a stop to his doing in the case of Margaret Rule.

In 1831, I published a volume entitled *Lectures on Witchcraft*,

comprising a history of the Delusion, in Salem, in 1692. In 1867, I published *Salem Witchcraft, and an account of Salem Village*; and, in the Preface, stated that "the former was prepared under circumstances which prevented a thorough investigation of the subject. Leisure and freedom from professional duties have now enabled me to prosecute the researches necessary to do justice to it. The *Lectures on Witchcraft* have long been out of print. Although frequently importuned to prepare a new edition, I was unwilling to issue, again, what I had discovered to be an inadequate presentation of the subject." In the face of this disclaimer of the authority of the original work, the Reviewer says: "In this discussion, we shall treat Mr. Upham's *Lectures* and History in the same connection, as the latter is an expansion and defence of the views presented in the former."

I ask every person of candor and fairness, to consider whether it is just to treat authors in this way? It is but poor encouragement to them to labor to improve their works, for the first critical journal in the country to bring discredit upon their efforts, by still laying to their charge what they have themselves remedied or withdrawn. Yet it is avowedly done in the article which compels me to this vindication.

The *Lectures*, for instance, printed in 1831, contained the following sentence, referring to Cotton Mather's agency, in the Goodwin case, in Boston. "An instance of witchcraft was brought about, in that place, by his management." So it appeared in a reprint of that volume, in 1832. In my recent publication,

while transferring a long paragraph from the original work, *I carefully omitted*, from the body of it, the above sentence, fearing that it might lead to misapprehension. For, although I hold that the Mathers are pre-eminently answerable for the witchcraft proceedings in their day, and may be said, justly, to have caused them, of course I did not mean that, by personal instigation on the spot, they started every occurrence that ultimately was made to assume such a character. The Reviewer, with the fact well known to him, that I had suppressed and discarded this clause, flings it against me, repeatedly. He further quotes a portion of the paragraph, in the *Lectures*, in which it occurs, omitting, *without indicating the omission*, certain clauses that would have explained my meaning, *taking care, however, to include the suppressed passage*; and finishes the misrepresentation, by the following declaration, referring to the paragraph in the *Lectures*: "The same statements, in almost the same words, he reproduces in his History." This he says, knowing that the particular statement to which he was then taking exception, was not reproduced in my History.

It may be as well here, at this point, as elsewhere, once for all, to dispose of a large portion of the matter contained in the long article in the *North American Review*, now under consideration. In preparing any work, particularly in the department of history, it is to be presumed that the explorations of the writer extend far beyond what he may conclude to put into his book. He will find much that is of no account whatever; that would load down

his narrative, swell it to inadmissible dimensions, and shed no additional light. Collateral and incidental questions cannot be pursued in details. A new law, however, is now given out, that must be followed, hereafter, by all writers—that is, to give not a catalogue merely, but an account of the contents, of every book and tract they have read. It is thus announced by our Reviewer: "We assume Mr. Upham has not seen this tract, as he neither mentioned it nor made use of its material."

The document here spoken of was designed to give Increase Mather's ideas on the subject of witchcraft trials, written near the close of those in Salem, in 1692. As I had no peculiar interest in determining what his views were—as a careful study of the tract, particularly taken in connection with its *Postscript*, fails to bring any reader to a clear conception of them; and as its whole matter was altogether immaterial to my subject—I did not think it worth while to encumber my pages with it. So in respect to many other points, in treating which extended discussions might be demanded. If I had been governed by such notions as the Reviewer seems to entertain, my book, which he complains of as too long, would have been lengthened to the dimensions of a cyclopædia of theology, biography, and philosophy. For keeping to my subject, and not diverting attention to writings of no inherent value, in any point of view, and which would contribute nothing to the elucidation of my topics, I am charged by this Reviewer, in the baldest terms, with ignorance, on almost every one of his sixty odd pages, and, often, several times on the

same page.

All that I say of Cotton Mather, mostly drawn from his own words, does not cover a dozen pages. Exception is taken to some unfavorable judgments, cursorily expressed. This is fair and legitimate, and would justify my being called on to substantiate them. But to assume, and proclaim, that I had not read nor seen tracts or volumes that would come under consideration in such a discussion, is as rash as it is offensive; and, besides, constitutes a charge against which no person of any self respect or common sense can be expected to defend himself. I gave the opinion of Cotton Mather's agency in the Witchcraft of 1692, to which my judgment had been led—whether with sufficient grounds or not will be seen, as I proceed—but did not branch off from my proper subject, into a detail of the sources from which that opinion was derived. If I had done so, in connection with allusions to Mather, upon the same principle it would have been necessary to do it, whenever an opinion was expressed of others, such as Roger Williams, or Hugh Peters, or Richard Baxter. It would destroy the interest, and stretch interminably the dimensions, of any book, to break its narrative, abandon its proper subject, and stray aside into such endless collateral matter. But it must be done, if the article in the *North American Review*, is to be regarded as an authoritative announcement of a canon of criticism. Lecturers and public speakers, or writers of any kind, must be on their guard. If they should chance, for instance, to speak of Cotton Mather as a pedant, they will have the

reviewers after them, belaboring them with the charge of "a great lack of research," in not having "pored over" the "prodigious" manuscript of his unpublished work, in the Library of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the whole of his three hundred and eighty-two printed works, and the huge mass of *Mather Papers*, in the Library of the American Antiquarian Society; and with never having "read" the *Memorable Providences*, or "seen" the *Wonders of the Invisible World*, or "heard" of the *Magnalia Christi Americana*.

### III

## **COTTON MATHER AND THE GOODWIN CHILDREN. JOHN BAILY. JOHN HALE. GOODWIN'S CERTIFICATES. MATHER'S IDEA OF WITCHCRAFT AS A WAR WITH THE DEVIL. HIS USE OF PRAYER. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CASE OF THE GOODWIN CHILDREN AND SALEM WITCHCRAFT**

The Reviewer complains of my manner of treating Cotton Mather's connection with the affair of the Goodwin children. The facts in the case are, that the family, to which they belonged, lived in the South part of Boston. The father, a mason by occupation, was, as Mather informs us, "a sober and pious man." As his church relations were with the congregation in Charlestown, of which Charles Morton was the Pastor, he probably had no particular acquaintance with the Boston Ministers. From a statement made by Mr. Goodwin, some years subsequently, it seems that after one of his children had, for "about a quarter of a year, been laboring under sad circumstances from the invisible world," he called upon "the four Ministers of Boston, together with his own Pastor, to keep a day of prayer at his house. If

so deliverance might be obtained." He says that Cotton Mather, with whom he had no previous acquaintance, was the last of the Ministers that "he spoke to on that occasion." Mr. Mather did not attend the meeting, but visited the house in the morning of the day, before the other Ministers came; spent a half hour there; and prayed with the family. About three months after, the Ministers held another prayer-meeting there, Mr. Mather being present. He further stated that Mr. Mather never, in any way, suggested his prosecuting the old Irish woman for bewitching his children, nor gave him any advice in reference to the legal proceedings against her; but that "the motion of going to the authority was made to him by a Minister of a neighboring town, now departed."

The Reviewer, in a note to the last item, given above, of Goodwin's statement, says: "Probably Mr. John Baily." Unless he has some particular evidence, tending to fix this advice upon Baily, the conjecture is objectionable. The name of such a man as Baily appears to have been, ought not, unnecessarily, to be connected with the transaction. It is true that, after the family had become relieved of its "sad circumstances from the invisible world," Mr. Baily took one of the children to his house, in Watertown; but that is no indication of his having given such advice. The only facts known of him, in connection with Witchcraft prosecutions, look in the opposite direction. When John Proctor, in his extremity of danger, sought for help, Mr. Baily was one of the Ministers from whom alone he had any ground to indulge a hope for sympathy; and his

name is among the fourteen who signed the paper approving of Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience*. The list comprises all the Ministers known as having shown any friendly feelings towards persons charged with Witchcraft or who had suffered from the prosecutions, such as Hubbard, Allen, Willard, Capen and Wise, but not one who had taken an active part in hurrying on the proceedings of 1692.

If any surmise is justifiable, or worth while, as to the author of the advice to Goodwin—and perhaps it is due to the memory of Baily, whose name has been thus introduced—I should be inclined to suggest that it was John Hale, of Beverly, who, like Baily, was deceased at the date of Goodwin's certificate. He was a Charlestown man, originally of the same religious Society with Goodwin, and had kept up acquaintance with his former townsmen. His course at Salem Village, a few years afterwards, shows that he would have been likely to give such advice; and we may impute it to him without any wrong to his character or reputation. His noble conduct in daring, in the very hour of the extremest fury of the storm, when, as just before the break of day, the darkness was deepest, to denounce the proceedings as wrong; and in doing all that he could to repair that wrong, by writing a book condemning the very things in which he had himself been a chief actor, gives to his name a glory that cannot be dimmed by supposing that, in the period of his former delusion, he was the unfortunate adviser of Goodwin.

When Calef's book reached this country, in 1700, a

Committee of seven was raised, at a meeting of the members of the Parish of which the Mathers were Ministers, to protect them against its effects. John Goodwin was a member of it, and contributed the Certificate from which extracts have just been made. It was so worded as to give the impression that Cotton Mather did not take a leading part in the case of Goodwin's children, in 1688. It states, as has been seen, that he "was the last of the Ministers" asked to attend the prayer-meeting; but lets out the fact that he was the first to present himself, going to the house and praying with the family before the rest arrived. Goodwin further states, as follows: "The Ministers would, now and then, come to visit my distressed family, and pray with and for them, among which Mr. Cotton Mather would, now and then, come." The whole document is so framed as to present Mather as playing a secondary part.

In an account, however, of the affair, written by this same John Goodwin, and printed by Mather, in London, ten years before, in *The Memorable Providences relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, a somewhat different position is assigned to Mather. After saying "the Ministers did often visit us," he mentions "Mr. Mather particularly." "He took much pains in this great service, to pull this child and her brother and sister, out of the hands of the Devil. Let us now admire and adore that fountain, the Lord Jesus Christ, from whence those streams come. The Lord himself will requite his labor of love." In 1690, Mather was willing to have Goodwin place him in the foreground of the picture, representing

him as pulling the children out of the hand of the Devil. In 1700, it was expedient to withdraw him into the background: and Goodwin, accordingly, provided the Committee, of which he was a member, with a Certificate of a somewhat different color and tenor.

The execution of the woman, Glover, on the charge of having bewitched these Goodwin children, is one of the most atrocious passages of our history. Hutchinson<sup>1</sup> says she was one of the "wild Irish," and "appeared to be disordered in her senses." She was a Roman Catholic, unable to speak the English language, and evidently knew not what to make of the proceedings against her. In her dying hour, she was understood by the interpreter to say, that taking away her life would not have any effect in diminishing the sufferings of the children. The remark, showing more sense than any of the rest of them had, was made to bear against the poor old creature, as a diabolical imprecation.

Between the time of her condemnation and that of her execution, Cotton Mather took the eldest Goodwin child into his family, and kept her there all winter. He has told the story of her extraordinary doings, in a style of blind and absurd credulity that cannot be surpassed. "Ere long," says he, "I thought it convenient for me to entertain my congregation with a Sermon on the memorable providence, wherein these children had been

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<sup>1</sup> When, in this article, I cite the name "Hutchinson," without any distinguishing prefix, I mean Thomas Hutchinson, Chief-justice, Governor, and Historian of Massachusetts; so also when I cite the name "Mather," I mean Cotton Mather.

concerned, (afterwards published)."

In this connection, it may be remarked that had it not been for the interference of the Ministers, it is quite likely that "the sad circumstances from the invisible world," in the Goodwin family, would never have been heard of, beyond the immediate neighbourhood. It is quite certain that similar "circumstances," in Mr. Parris's family, in 1692, owed their general publicity and their awful consequences, to the meetings of Ministers called by him. If the girls, in either case, had been let alone, they would soon have been weary of what one of them called their "sport;" and the whole thing would have been swallowed, with countless stories of haunted houses and second sight, in deep oblivion.

In considering Cotton Mather's connection with the case of the Goodwin children, and that of the accusing girls, at Salem Village, justice to him requires that the statements, in my book, of the then prevalent notions, of the power and pending formidableness of the Kingdom of Darkness, should be borne in mind. It was believed by Divines generally, and by people at large, that here, in the American wilderness, a mighty onslaught upon the Christian settlements was soon to be made, by the Devil and his infernal hosts; and that, on this spot, the final battle between Satan and the Church, was shortly to come off. This belief had taken full possession of Mather's mind, and fired his imagination. In comparison with the approaching contest, all other wars, even that for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, paled their light. It was the great crusade, in which hostile

powers, Moslem, Papal, and Pagan, of every kind, on earth and from Hell, were to go down; and he aspired to be its St. Bernard. It was because he entertained these ideas, that he was on the watch to hear, and prompt and glad to meet, the first advances of the diabolical legions. This explains his eagerness to take hold of every occurrence that indicated the coming of the Arch Enemy.

And it must further be borne in mind that, up to the time of the case of the Goodwin children, he had entertained the idea that the Devil was to be met and subdued by Prayer. That, and that only, was the weapon with which he girded himself; and with that he hoped and believed to conquer. For this reason, he did not advise Goodwin to go to the law. For this reason, he labored in the distressed household in exercises of prayer, and took the eldest child into his own family, so as to bring the battery of prayer, with a continuous bombardment, upon the Devil by whom she was possessed. For this reason, he persisted in praying in the cell of the old Irish woman, much against her will, for she was a stubborn Catholic. Of course, he could not pray *with* her, for he had no doubt she was a confederate of the Devil; and she had no disposition to join in prayer with one whom, as a heretic, she regarded in no better light; but still he would pray, for which he apologized, when referring to the matter, afterward.

Cotton Mather was always a man of prayer. For this, he deserves to be honored. Prayer, when offered in the spirit, and in accordance with the example, of the Saviour—"not my will but thine be done," "Your Father knoweth what things ye have

need of before ye ask him—" is the noblest exercise and attitude of the soul. It lifts it to the highest level to which our faculties can rise. It

"opens heaven; lets down a stream  
Of glory on the consecrated hour  
Of man, in audience with the Deity."

It was the misfortune of Cotton Mather, that an original infirmity of judgment, which all the influences of his life and peculiarities of his mental character and habits tended to exaggerate, led him to pervert the use and operation of prayer, until it became a mere implement, or device, to compass some personal end; to carry a point in which he was interested, whether relating to private and domestic affairs, or to movements in academical, political, or ecclesiastical spheres. While according to him entire sincerity in his devotional exercises, and, I trust, truly revering the character and nature of such expressions of devout sensibility and aspirations to divine communion, it is quite apparent that they were practiced by him, in modes and to an extent that cannot be commended, leading to much self-delusion and to extravagances near akin to distraction of judgment, and a disordered mental and moral frame. He would abstain from food—on one occasion, it is said, for three days together—and spend the time, as he expresses it "in knocking at the door of heaven." Leaving his bed at the dead hours of the night, and retiring to his study, he would cast himself on the floor, and "wrestle

with the Lord." He kept, usually, one day of each week in such fasting, sometimes two. In his vigils, very protracted, he would, in this prostrate position, be bathed in tears. By such exhausting processes, continued through days and nights, without food or rest, his nature failed; he grew faint; physical weakness laid him open to delusions of the imagination; and his nervous system became deranged. Sometimes, heaven seemed to approach him, and he was hardly able to bear the ecstasies of divine love; at other times, his soul would be tossed in the opposite direction: and often, the two states would follow each other in the same exercise, as described by him in his Diary:<sup>2</sup>—"Was ever man more tempted than the miserable Mather? Should I tell in how many forms the Devil has assaulted me, and with what subtlety and energy his assaults have been carried on, it would strike my friends with horror. Sometimes, temptations to vice, to blasphemy, and atheism, and the abandonment of all religion as a mere delusion, and sometimes to self-destruction itself. These, even these, do follow thee, O miserable Mather, with astonishing fury. But I fall down into the dust, on my study floor, with tears, before the Lord, and then they quickly vanish, and it is fair weather again. Lord what wilt thou do with me?"

His prayers and vigils, which often led to such high wrought and intense experiences, were, not infrequently, brought down

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<sup>2</sup> The passages from Cotton Mather's Diary, used in this article, are mostly taken from the *Christian Examiner*, xi., 249; *Proceedings of Massachusetts Historical Society*, i., 289, and iv., 404; and *Life of Cotton Mather*, by William B. O. Peabody, in Sparks's *American Biography*, vi., 162.

to the level of ordinary sublunary affairs. In his Diary, he says, on one occasion: "I set apart the day for fasting with prayer, and the special intention of the day was to obtain deliverance and protection from my enemies. I mentioned their names unto the Lord, who has promised to be my shield." The enemies, here referred to, were political opponents—Governor Dudley and the supporters of his administration.

At another time, he fixed his heart upon some books offered for sale. Not having the means to procure them in the ordinary way, he resorted to prayer: "I could not forbear mentioning my wishes in my prayers, before the Lord, that, in case it might be of service to his interests, he would enable me, in his good Providence, to purchase the treasure now before me. But I left the matter before him, with the profoundest resignation."

The following entry is of a similar character: "This evening, I met with an experience, which it may not be unprofitable for me to remember. I had been, for about a fortnight, vexed with an extraordinary heart-burn; and none of all the common medicines would remove it, though for the present some of them would a little relieve it. At last, it grew so much upon me, that I was ready to faint under it. But, under my fainting pain, this reflection came into my mind. There was *this* among the sufferings and complaints of my Lord Jesus Christ. My heart was like wax melted in the middle of my bowels. Hereupon, I begged of the Lord, that, for the sake of the heart-burn undergone by my Saviour, I might be delivered from the other and lesser heart-burn

wherewith I was now incommoded. Immediately it was darted into my mind, that I had Sir Philip Paris's plaster in my house, which was good for inflammations; and laying the plaster on, I was cured of my malady."

These passages indicate a use of prayer, which, to the extent Mather carried it, would hardly be practised or approved by enlightened Christians of this or any age; although our Reviewer fully endorses it. In reference to Mather's belief in the power of prayer, he expresses himself with a bald simplicity, never equalled even by that Divine. After stating that the Almighty Sovereign was his Father, and had promised to hear and answer his petitions, he goes on to say: "He had often tested this promise, and had found it faithful and sure." One would think, in hearing such a phraseology, he was listening to an agent, vending a patent medicine as an infallible cure, or trying to bring into use a labor-saving machine.

The Reviewer calls me to account for representing "the Goodwin affair" as having had "a very important relation to the Salem troubles," and attempts to controvert that position.

On this point, Francis Hutchinson, before referred to, gives his views, very decidedly, in the following passages: [*Pp.* 95, 96, 101.] "Mr. Cotton Mather, no longer since than 1690, published the case of one Goodwin's children. \* \* \* The book was sent hither to be printed amongst us, and Mr. Baxter recommended it to our people by a Preface, wherein he says: 'That man must be a very obdurate Sadducee that will not believe it.' The

year after, Mr. Baxter, perhaps encouraged by Mr. Mather's book, published his own *Certainty of the World of Spirits*, with another testimony, 'That Mr. Mather's book would Silence any incredulity that pretended to be rational.' And Mr. Mather dispersed Mr. Baxter's book in New England, with the character of it, as a book that was ungainsayable."

Speaking of Mather's book, Doctor Hutchinson proceeds: "The judgment I made of it was, that the poor old woman, being an Irish Papist, and not ready in the signification of English words, had entangled herself by a superstitious belief, and doubtful answers about Saints and Charms; and seeing what advantages Mr. Mather made of it, I was afraid I saw part of the reasons that carried the cause against her. And first it is manifest that Mr. Mather is magnified as having great power over evil spirits. A young man in his family is represented so holy, that the place of his devotions was a certain cure of the young virgin's fits. Then his grandfather's and father's books have gained a testimony, that, upon occasion, may be *improved* one knows not how far. For amongst the many experiments that were made, Mr. Mather would bring to this young maid, the Bible, the *Assembly's Catechism*, his grandfather Cotton's *Milk for Babes*, his father's *Remarkable Providences*, and a book to prove that there were Witches; and when any of these were offered for her to read in, she would be struck dead, and fall into convulsions. 'These good books,' he says, 'were mortal to her'; and lest the world should be so dull as not to take him right, he adds, 'I hope

I have not spoiled the credit of the books, by telling how much the Devil hated them."

This language, published by Doctor Hutchinson, in England, during the life-time of the Mathers, shows how strong was the opinion, at that time, that the writings of those two Divines were designed and used to promote the prevalence of the Witchcraft superstition, and especially that such was the effect, as well as the purpose, of Cotton Mather's publication of the case of the Goodwin children, put into such circulation, as it was, by him and Baxter, in both Old and New England. In the same connection, Francis Hutchinson says: "Observe the time of the publication of that book, and of Mr. Baxter's. Mr. Mather's came out in 1690, and Mr. Baxter's the year after; and Mr. Mather's father's *Remarkable Providences* had been out before that; and, in the year 1692, the frights and fits of the afflicted, and the imprisonment and execution of Witches in New England, made as sad a calamity as a plague or a war. I know that Mr. Mather, in his late Folio, imputes it to the Indian Pawaws sending their spirits amongst them; but I attribute it to Mr. Baxter's book, and his, and his father's, and the false principles, and frightful stories, that filled the people's minds with great fears and dangerous notions."

Our own Hutchinson, in his *History of Massachusetts*, [II., 25-27] alludes to the excitement of the public mind, occasioned by the case of the Goodwin children. "I have often," he says, "heard persons who were of the neighborhood, speak of the great

consternation it occasioned."

In citing this author, in the present discussion, certain facts are always to be borne in mind. One of his sisters was the wife of Cotton Mather's son, towards whom Hutchinson cherished sentiments appropriate to such a near connection, and of which Samuel Mather was, there is no reason to doubt, worthy. In the Preface to his first volume he speaks thus: "I am obliged to no other person more than to my friend and brother, the Reverend Mr. Mather, whose library has been open to me, as it had been before to the Reverend Mr. Prince, who has taken from thence the greatest and most valuable part of what he had collected."

Moreover, this very library was, it can hardly be questioned, that of Cotton Mather; of which, in his Diary, he speaks as "very great." In an interesting article, to which I may refer again, in the *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, [IV., ii., 128], we are told that, in the inventory of the estate of Cotton Mather, filed by his Administrator, "not a single book is mentioned among the assets of this eccentric scholar." He had, it is to be presumed, given them all, in his life-time, to his son, who succeeded to his ministry in the North Church, in 1732.

When the delicacy of his relation to the Mather family and the benefit he was deriving from that library are considered, the avoidance, by Hutchinson, of any unpleasant reference to Cotton Mather, by name, is honorable to his feelings. But he maintained, nevertheless, a faithful allegiance to the truth of history, as the following, as well as many other passages, in his invaluable work,

strikingly show. They prove that he regarded Mather's "printed account" of the case of the Goodwin children, as having a very important relation to the immediately subsequent delusion in Salem. "The eldest was taken," he says, "into a Minister's family, where at first she behaved orderly, but after some time suddenly fell into her fits." "The account of her sufferings is in print; some things are mentioned as extraordinary, which tumblers are every day taught to perform; others seem more than natural; but it was a time of great credulity. \* \* \* The printed account was published with a Preface by Mr. Baxter. \* \* \* It obtained credit sufficient, together with other preparatives, to dispose the whole country to be easily imposed upon, by the more extensive and more tragical scene, which was presently after acted at Salem and other parts of the county of Essex." After mentioning several works published in England, containing "*witch-stories*," witch-trials, etc., he proceeds: "All these books were in New England, and the conformity between the behavior of Goodwin's children, and most of the supposed be-witched at Salem, and the behavior of those in England, is so exact, as to leave no room to doubt the stories had been read by the New England persons themselves, or had been told to them by others who had read them. Indeed this conformity, instead of giving suspicion, was urged in confirmation of the truth of both. The Old England demons and the New being so much alike."

It thus appears that the opinion was entertained, in England and this country, that the notoriety given to the case of the

Goodwin children, especially by Mather's printed account of it, had an efficient influence in bringing on the "tragical scene," shortly afterwards exhibited at Salem. This opinion is shown to have been correct, by the extraordinary similarity between them—the one being patterned after the other. The Salem case, in 1692, was, in fact, a substantial repetition of the Boston case, in 1688. On this point, we have the evidence of Cotton Mather himself.

The Rev. John Hale of Beverly, who was as well qualified as any one to compare them, having lived in Charlestown, which place had been the residence of the Goodwin family, and been an active participator in the prosecutions at Salem, in his book, entitled, *A modest Enquiry into the nature of Witchcraft*, written in 1697, but not printed until 1702, after mentioning the fact that Cotton Mather had published an account of the conduct of the Goodwin children, and briefly describing the manifestations and actions of the Salem girls, says: [p. 24] "I will not enlarge in the description of their cruel sufferings, because they were, in all things, afflicted as bad as John Goodwin's children at Boston, in the year 1689, as he, that will read Mr. Mather's book on *Remarkable Providences*, p. 3. &c., may read part of what these children, and afterwards sundry grown persons, suffered by the hand of Satan, at Salem Village, and parts adjacent, *Anno 1691-2*, yet there was more in their sufferings than in those at Boston, by pins invisibly stuck into their flesh, pricking with irons (as, in part, published in a book printed 1693, viz:

*The Wonders of the Invisible World*). " This is proof of the highest authority, that, with the exceptions mentioned, there was a perfect similarity in the details of the two cases. Mr. Hale's book had not the benefit of his revision, as it did not pass through the press until two years after his death; and we thus account for the error as to the date of the Goodwin affair.

In making up his *Magnalia*, Mather had the use of Hale's manuscript and transferred from it nearly all that he says, in that work, about Salem Witchcraft. He copies the passage above quoted. The fact, therefore, is sufficiently attested by Mather as well as Hale, that, with the exceptions stated, there was, "in all things," an entire similarity between the cases of 1688 and 1692.

Nay, further, in this same way we have the evidence of Cotton Mather himself, that his "printed account," of the case of the Goodwin children, was actually used, as an authority, by the Court, in the trials at Salem—so that it is clear that the said "account," contributed not only, by its circulation among the people, to bring on the prosecutions of 1692, but to carry them through to their fatal results—Mr. Hale says: [*p.* 27] "that the Justices, Judges and others concerned," consulted the precedents of former times, and precepts laid down by learned writers about Witchcraft. He goes on to enumerate them, mentioning Keeble, Sir Matthew Hale, Glanvil, Bernard, Baxter and Burton, concluding the list with "Cotton Mather's *Memorable Providences, relating to Witchcraft*, printed, anno 1689." Mather transcribes this also into the *Magnalia*. *The*

*Memorable Providences* is referred to by Hale, in another place, as containing the case of the Goodwin children, consisting, in fact mainly of it. [p. 23]. Mather, having Hale's book before him, must, therefore be considered as endorsing the opinion for which the Reviewer calls me to account, namely, that "the Goodwin affair had a very important relation to the Salem troubles." What is sustained touching this point, by both the Hutchinsons, Hale, and Cotton Mather himself, cannot be disturbed in its position, as a truth of History.

The reader will, I trust, excuse me for going into such minute processes of investigation and reasoning, in such comparatively unimportant points. But, as the long-received opinions, in reference to this chapter of our history, have been brought into question in the columns of a journal, justly commanding the public confidence, it is necessary to re-examine the grounds on which they rest. This I propose to do, without regard to labor or space. I shall not rely upon general considerations, but endeavor, in the course of this discussion, to sift every topic on which the Reviewer has struck at the truth of history, fairly and thoroughly. On this particular point, of the relation of these two instances of alleged Witchcraft, in localities so near as Boston and Salem, and with so short an interval of time, general considerations would ordinarily be regarded as sufficient. From the nature of things, the former must have served to bring about the latter. The intercommunication between the places was, even then, so constant, that no important event could happen in one

without being known in the other. By the thousand channels of conversation and rumor, and by Mather's printed account, endorsed by Baxter, and put into circulation throughout the country, the details of the alleged sufferings and extraordinary doings of the Goodwin children, must have become well known, in Salem Village. Such a conclusion would be formed, if no particular evidence in support of it could be adduced; but when corroborated by the two Hutchinsons, Mr. Hale, and, in effect, by Mather himself, it cannot be shaken.

As has been stated, Cotton Mather, previous to his experience with those "pests," as the Reviewer happily calls "the Goodwin children," probably believed in the efficacy of prayer, and in that alone, to combat and beat down evil spirits and their infernal Prince; and John Goodwin's declaration, that it was not by his advice that he went to the law, is, therefore, entirely credible in itself. The protracted trial, however, patiently persevered in for several long months, when he had every advantage, in his own house, to pray the devil out of the eldest of the children, resulting in her becoming more and more "saucy," insolent, and outrageous, may have undermined his faith to an extent of which he might not have been wholly conscious. He says, in concluding his story in the *Magnalia*, [Book VI., p. 75.] that, after all other methods had failed, "one particular Minister, taking particular compassion on the family, set himself to serve them in the methods prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the Lord being besought thrice, in three days of prayer, with

fasting on this occasion, the family then saw their deliverance perfected."

It is worthy of reflection, whether it was not the fasting, that seems to have been especially enforced "on this occasion," and for "three days," that cured the girl. A similar application had before operated as a temporary remedy. Mather tells us, in his *Memorable Providences*, [p. 31,] referring to a date previous to the "three days" fasting, "Mr. Morton, of Charlestown, and Mr. Allen, Mr. Moody, Mr. Willard, and myself, of Boston, with some devout neighbors, kept another day of prayer at John Goodwin's house; and we had all the children present with us there. The children were miserably tortured, while we labored in our prayers; but our good God was nigh unto us, in what we called upon him for. From this day, the power of the enemy was broken; and the children, though assaults after this were made upon them, yet were not so cruelly handled as before."

It must have been a hard day for all concerned. Five Ministers and any number of "good praying people," as Goodwin calls them, together with his whole family, could not but have crowded his small house. The children, on such occasions, often proved very troublesome, as stated above. Goodwin says "the two biggest, lying on the bed, one of them would fain have kicked the good men, while they were wrestling with God for them, had I not held him with all my power and might." Fasting was added to the prayers, that were kept up during the whole time, the Ministers relieving each other. If the fasting had been continued

three days, it is not unlikely that the cure of the children would, then, have proved effectual and lasting. The account given in the *Memorables* and the *Magnalia*, of the conduct of these children, under the treatment of Mather and the other Ministers, is, indeed, most ludicrous; and no one can be expected to look at it in any other light. He was forewarned that, in printing it, he would expose himself to ridicule. He tells us that the mischievous, but bright and wonderfully gifted, girl, the eldest of the children, getting, at one time, possession of his manuscript, pretended to be, for the moment, incapacitated, by the Devil, for reading it; and he further informs us, "She'd hector me at a strange rate for the work I was at, and threaten me with I know not what mischief for it. She got a History I was writing of this Witchcraft; and though she had, before this, read it over and over, yet now she could not read (I believe) one entire sentence of it; but she made of it the most ridiculous Travesty in the world, with such a patness and excess of fancy, to supply the sense that she put upon it, as I was amazed at. And she particularly told me, That I should quickly come to disgrace by that History."

It is noticeable that the Goodwin children, like their imitators at Salem Village, the "afflicted," as they were called, were careful, except in certain cases of emergence, not to have their night's sleep disturbed, and never lost an appetite for their regular meals. I cannot but think that if the Village girls had, once in a while, like the Goodwin children, been compelled to go for a day or two upon very short allowance, it would have soon brought

their "sport" to an end.

Nothing is more true than that, in estimating the conduct and character of men, allowances must be made for the natural, and almost necessary, influence of the opinions and customs of their times. But this excuse will not wholly shelter the Mathers. They are answerable, as I have shown, more than almost any other men have been, for the opinions of their time. It was, indeed, a superstitious age; but made much more so by their operations, influence, and writings, beginning with Increase Mather's movement, at the assembly of the Ministers, in 1681, and ending with Cotton Mather's dealings with the Goodwin children, and the account thereof which he printed and circulated, far and wide. For this reason, then, in the first place, I hold those two men responsible for what is called "Salem Witchcraft."

I have admitted and shown that Cotton Mather originally relied only upon prayer in his combat with Satanic powers. But the time was at hand, when other weapons than the sword of the Spirit were to be drawn in that warfare.

## IV

### **THE RELATION OF THE MATHERS TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF MASSACHUSETTS, IN 1692. THE NEW CHARTER. THE GOVERNMENT UNDER IT ARRANGED BY THEM. ARRIVAL OF SIR WILLIAM PHIPS**

No instance of the responsibility of particular persons for the acts of a Government, in the whole range of history, is more decisive or unquestionable, than that of the Mathers, father and son, for the trials and executions, for the alleged crime of Witchcraft, at Salem, in 1692.

Increase Mather had been in England, as one of the Agents of the Colony of Massachusetts, for several years, in the last part of the reign of James II. and the beginning of that of William and Mary, covering much of the period between the abrogation of the first Charter and the establishment of the Province under the second Charter. Circumstances had conspired to give him great influence in organizing the Government provided for in the new Charter. His son describes him as "one that, besides a station in the Church of God, as considerable as any that his own country can afford, hath for divers years come off with honor, in

his application to three crowned heads and the chiefest nobility of three kingdoms."

Being satisfied that a restoration of the old Charter could not be obtained, Increase Mather acquiesced in what he deemed a necessity, and bent his efforts to have as favorable terms as possible secured in the new. His colleagues in the agency, Elisha Cooke and Thomas Oaks, opposed his course—the former, with great determination, taking the ground of the "old Charter or none." This threw them out of all communication with the Home Government, on the subject, and gave to Mr. Mather controlling influence. He was requested by the Ministers of the Crown to name the officers of the new Government; and, in fact, had the free and sole selection of them all. Sir William Phips was appointed Governor, at his solicitation; and, in accordance with earnest recommendations, in a letter from Cotton Mather, William Stoughton was appointed Deputy-governor, thereby superceding Danforth, one of the ablest men in the Province. In fact, every member of the Council owed his seat to the Mathers, and, politically, was their creature. Great was the exultation of Cotton Mather, when the intelligence reached him, thus expressed in his Diary: "The time for favor is now come, yea, the set-time is come. I am now to receive the answers of so many prayers, as have been employed for my absent parent, and the deliverance and settlement of my poor country. We have not the former Charter, but we have a better in the room of it; one which much better suits our circumstances. And, instead of my

being made a sacrifice to wicked rulers, all the Councillors of the Province are of my father's nomination; and my father-in-law, with several related to me, and several brethren of my own Church, are among them. The Governor of the Province is not my enemy, but one whom I baptized, namely, Sir William Phips, and one of my flock, and one of my dearest friends."

The whole number of Councillors was twenty-eight, three of them, at least, being of the Mather Church. John Phillips was Cotton Mather's father-in-law. Two years before, Sir William Phips had been baptized by Cotton Mather, in the presence of the congregation, and received into the Church.

The "set-time," so long prayed for, was of brief duration. The influence of the Mathers over the politics of the Province was limited to the first part of Phips's short administration. At the very next election, in May, 1693, ten of the Councillors were left out; and Elisha Cooke, their great opponent, was chosen to that body, although negatived by Phips, in the exercise of his prerogative, under the Charter.

Increase Mather came over in the same ship with the Governor, the *Nonsuch*, frigate. As Phips was his parishioner, owed to him his office, and was necessarily thrown into close intimacy, during the long voyage, he fell naturally under his influence, which, all things considered, could not have failed to be controlling. The Governor was an illiterate person, but of generous, confiding, and susceptible impulses; and the elder Mather was precisely fitted to acquire an ascendancy over such a

character. He had been twice abroad, in his early manhood and in his later years, had knowledge of the world, been conversant with learned men in Colleges and among distinguished Divines and Statesmen, and seen much of Courts and the operations of Governments. With a more extended experience and observation than his son, his deportment was more dignified, and his judgment infinitely better; while his talents and acquirements were not far, if at all, inferior. When Phips landed in Boston, it could not, therefore, have been otherwise than that he should pass under the control of the Mathers, the one accompanying, the other meeting him on the shore. They were his religious teachers and guides; by their efficient patronage and exertions he had been placed in his high office. They, his Deputy, Stoughton, and the whole class of persons under their influence, at once gathered about him, gave him his first impressions, and directed his movements. By their talents and position, the Mathers controlled the people, and kept open a channel through which they could reach the ear of Royalty. The Government of the Province was nominally in Phips and his Council, but the Mathers were a power behind the throne greater than the throne itself. The following letter, never before published, for which I am indebted to Abner C. Goodell, Esq., Vice-president of the Essex Institute, shows how they bore themselves before the Legislature, and communicated with the Home Government.

"My Lord:

"I have only to assure your Lordship, that the generality

of their Majesties subjects (so far as I can understand) do, with all thankfulness, receive the favors, which, by the new Charter, are granted to them. The last week, the General Assembly (which, your Lordship knows, is our New England Parliament) convened at Boston. I did then exhort them to make an Address of thanks to their Majesties; which, I am since informed, the Assembly have unanimously agreed to do, as in duty they are bound. I have also acquainted the whole Assembly, how much, not myself only, but they, and all this Province, are obliged to your Lordship in particular, which they have a grateful sense of, as by letters from themselves your Lordship will perceive. If I may, in any thing, serve their Majesties interest here, I shall, on that account, think myself happy, and shall always study to approve myself, My Lord,

*"Your most humble, thankful*

*and obedient Servant,*

*Increase Mather.*

"Boston, N. E.

June 23, 1692.

"To the Rt. Hon<sup>ble</sup> the *Earl of Nottingham*, his Maj<sup>ties</sup>  
Principal Secretary of State at Whitehall."

While they could thus address the General Assembly, and the Ministers of State, in London, the Government here was, as Hutchinson evidently regarded it, [*i.*, 365; *ii.*, 69.] "a Mather Administration." It was "short, sharp, and decisive." It opened in great power; its course was marked with terror and havoc;

it ended with mysterious suddenness; and its only monument is Salem Witchcraft—the "*judicial murder*," as the Reviewer calls it, of twenty men and women, as innocent in their lives as they were heroic in their deaths.

The *Nonsuch* arrived in Boston harbor, towards the evening of the fourteenth of May, 1692. Judge Sewall's Diary, now in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society, has this entry, at the above date. "Candles are lighted before he gets into Town House, 8 companies wait on him to his house, and then on Mr. Mather to his, made no volleys, because 'twas Saturday night."

The next day, the Governor attended, we may be sure, public worship with the congregation to which he belonged; and the occasion was undoubtedly duly noticed. After so long an absence, Increase Mather could not have failed to address his people, the son also taking part in the interesting service. The presence, in his pew, of the man who, a short time before, had been regenerated by their preaching, and now re-appeared among them with the title and commission of Governor of New England, added to the previous honors of Knighthood, at once suggested to all, and particularly impressed upon him, an appreciating conviction of the political triumph, as well as clerical achievement, of the associate Ministers of the North Boston Church. From what we know of the state of the public mind at that time, as emphatically described in a document I am presently to produce, there can be no question as to one class of topics and exhortations,

wherewithal his Excellency and the crowded congregation were, that day, entertained.

Monday, the sixteenth, was devoted to the ceremonies of the public induction of the new Government. There was a procession to the Town-house, where the Commissions of the Governor and Deputy-governor, with the Charter under which they were appointed, were severally read aloud to the people. A public dinner followed; and, at its close, Sir William was escorted to his residence. At the meeting of the Council, the next day, the seventeenth, the oaths of office having been administered, all round, it was voted "that there be a general meeting of the Council upon Tuesday next, the twenty-fourth of May current, in Boston, at two o'clock, post-meridian, to nominate and appoint Judges, Justices, and other officers of the Council and Courts of Justice within this their Majesties' Province belonging, and that notice thereof, or summons, be forthwith issued unto the members of the Council now absent."

The following letter from Sir William Phips, to the Government at home, recently procured from England by Mr. Goodell, was published in the last volume of the *Collections of the Essex Institute*—Volume IX., Part II. I print it, entire, and request the reader to examine it, carefully, and to refer to it as occasion arises in this discussion, as it is a key to the whole transaction of the Witchcraft trials. Its opening sentence demonstrates the impression made by those who first met and surrounded him, on his excitable nature:

"When I first arrived, I found this Province miserably harassed with a most horrible witchcraft or possession of devils, which had broke in upon several towns, some scores of poor people were taken with preternatural torments, some scalded with brimstone, some had pins stuck in their flesh, others hurried into the fire and water, and some dragged out of their houses and carried over the tops of trees and hills for many miles together; it hath been represented to me much like that of Sweden about thirty years ago; and there were many committed to prison upon suspicion of Witchcraft before my arrival. The loud cries and clamours of the friends of the afflicted people, with the advice of the Deputy-governor and many others, prevailed with me to give a Commission of Oyer and Terminer for discovering what Witchcraft might be at the bottom, or whether it were not a possession. The chief Judge in this Commission was the Deputy-governor, and the rest were persons of the best prudence and figure that could then be pitched upon. When the Court came to sit at Salem, in the County of Essex, they convicted more than twenty persons being guilty of witchcraft, some of the convicted confessed their guilt; the Court, as I understand, began their proceedings with the accusations of afflicted persons; and then went upon other humane evidences to strengthen that. I was, almost the whole time of the proceeding, abroad in the service of their Majesties, in the Eastern part of the country, and depended upon the judgment of the Court, as to a method of proceeding in cases of witchcraft; but when I came home I found many persons in a strange ferment of dissatisfaction,

which was increased by some hot spirits that blew up the flame; but on inquiring into the matter I found that the Devil had taken upon him the name and shape of several persons who were doubtless innocent, and, to my certain knowledge, of good reputation; for which cause I have now forbidden the committing of any more that shall be accused, without unavoidable necessity, and those that have been committed I would shelter from any proceedings against them wherein there may be the least suspicion of any wrong to be done unto the innocent. I would also wait for any particular directions or commands, if their Majesties please to give me any, for the fuller ordering this perplexed affair.

"I have also put a stop to the printing of any discourses one way or other, that may increase the needless disputes of people upon this occasion, because I saw a likelihood of kindling an inextinguishable flame if I should admit any public and open contests; and I have grieved to see that some, who should have done their Majesties, and this Province, better service, have so far taken council of passion as to desire the precipitancy of these matters; these things have been improved by some to give me many interruptions in their Majesties service [*which*] has been hereby unhappily clogged, and the persons, who have made so ill improvement of these matters here, are seeking to turn it upon me, but I hereby declare, that as soon as I came from fighting against their Majesties enemies, and understood what danger some of their innocent subjects might be exposed to, if the evidence of the afflicted persons only did prevail, either to the committing, or trying any

of them, I did, before any application was made unto me about it, put a stop to the proceedings of the Court and they are now stopped till their Majesties pleasure be known. Sir, I beg pardon for giving you all this trouble; the reason is because I know my enemies are seeking to turn it all upon me. Sir,

*"I am*

*Your most humble Serv<sup>t</sup>*

*William Phips.*

"Dated at Boston in New England, the 14th of Oct<sup>r</sup> 1692.

"Mem<sup>dm</sup>

"That my Lord President be pleased to acquaint his Majesty in Council with the account received from New England, from Sir W<sup>m</sup> Phips, the Governor there, touching proceedings against several persons for Witchcraft, as appears by the Governor's letter concerning those matters."

The foregoing document, I repeat, indicates the kind of talk with which Phips was accosted, when stepping ashore. Exaggerated representations of the astonishing occurrences at Salem Village burst upon him from all, whom he would have been likely to meet. The manner in which the Mathers, through him, had got exclusive possession of the Government of the Province, probably kept him from mingling freely among, or having much opportunity to meet, any leading men, outside of his Council and the party represented therein. Writing in the ensuing October, at the moment when he had made up his mind to break

loose from those who had led him to the hasty appointment of the Special Court, there is significance in his language. "I have grieved to see that some, who should have done their Majesties, and the Province, better service, have so far taken counsel of passion, as to desire the precipitancy of these matters." This refers to, and amounts to a condemnation of, the advisers who had influenced him to the rash measures adopted on his arrival. How rash and precipitate those measures were I now proceed to show.

## V

### **THE SPECIAL COURT OF OYER AND TERMINER. HOW IT WAS ESTABLISHED. WHO RESPONSIBLE FOR IT. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE CONCENTRATED IN ITS CHIEF-JUSTICE**

So great was the pressure made upon Sir William Phips, by the wild panic to which the community had been wrought, that he ordered the persons who had been committed to prison by the Salem Magistrates, to be put in irons; but his natural kindness of heart and common sense led him to relax the unjustifiable severity. Professor Bowen, in his *Life of Phips*, embraced in Sparks's *American Biography*, [vii., 81.] says: "Sir William seems not to have been in earnest in the proceeding; for the officers were permitted to evade the order, by putting on the irons indeed, but taking them off again, immediately."

On Tuesday, the twenty-fourth of May, the Council met to consider the matter specially assigned to that day, namely, the nomination and appointment of Judicial officers.

The Governor gave notice that he had issued Writs for the election of Representatives to convene in a General Court, to be

held on the eighth of June.

He also laid before the Council, the assigned business, which was "accordingly attended, and divers persons, in the respective Counties were named, and left for further consideration."

On the twenty-fifth of May, the Council being again in session, the record says: "a further discourse was had about persons, in the several Counties, for Justices and other officers, and it was judged advisable to defer the consideration of fit persons for Judges, until there be an establishment of Courts of Justice."

At the next meeting, on the twenty-seventh of May, it was ordered that the members of the Council, severally, and their Secretary, should be Justices of the Peace and Quorum, in the respective Counties where they reside: a long list, besides, was adopted, appointing the persons named in it Justices, as also Sheriffs and Coroners; and a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer was established for the Counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Middlesex, consisting of William Stoughton, Chief-justice, John Richards, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Wait Winthrop, Bartholomew Gedney, Samuel Sewall, John Hathorne, Jonathan Corwin, and Peter Sargent, any five of them to be a quorum (Stoughton, Richards, or Gedney to be one of the five).

When we consider that the subject had been specially assigned on the seventeenth, and discussed for two days, on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth, to the conclusion that the appointment of Judges ought to be deferred, "*until there be an establishment*

*of Courts of Justice*,"—which by the Charter, could only be done by the General Court which was to meet, as the Governor had notified them, in less than a fortnight—the establishment of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, on the twenty-seventh, must be regarded as very extraordinary. It was acknowledged to be an unauthorized procedure; the deliberate judgment of the Council had been expressed against it; and there was no occasion for such hurry, as the Legislature was so soon to assemble. There must have been a strong outside pressure, from some quarter, to produce such a change of front. From Wednesday to Friday, some persons of great influence must have been hard at work. The reasons assigned, in the record, for this sudden reversal, by the Council, of its deliberate decision, are the great number of criminals waiting trial, the thronged condition of the jails, and "this hot season of the year," on the twenty-seventh of May! It is further stated, "there being no judicatures or Courts of Justice yet established," that, therefore, such an extraordinary step was necessary. It is, indeed, remarkable, that, in the face of their own recorded convictions of expediency and propriety, and in disregard of the provisions of the Charter which, a few days before, they had been sworn to obey, the Council could have been led to so far "take counsel of passion," as to rush over every barrier to this precipitate measure.

No specific reference is anywhere made, in the Journals, to Witchcraft; but the Court was to act upon all cases of felony and other crimes. The "Council Records" were not obtained from

England, until 1846. Writers have generally spoken of the Court as consisting of seven Judges. Saltonstall's resignation does not appear to have led to a new appointment; and, perhaps, Hathorne, who generally acted as an Examining Magistrate, and signed most of the Commitments of the prisoners, did not often, if ever, sit as a Judge. In this way, the Court may have been reduced to seven. Stephen Sewall was appointed Clerk, and George Corwin, High Sheriff.

Thus established and organized, on the twenty-seventh of May, the Court sat, on the second of June, for the trial of Bridget Bishop. Her Death-warrant was signed, on the eighth of June, the very day the Legislature convened; and she was executed on the tenth. This was, indeed, "precipitancy." Before the General Court had time, possibly, to make "an establishment of Courts of Justice" in the exercise of the powers bestowed upon it by the Charter, this Special Court—suddenly sprung upon the country, against the deliberate first judgment of the Council itself, and not called for by any emergency of the moment which the General Court, just coming on the stage, could not legally, constitutionally, and adequately, have met—dipped its hands in blood; and an infatuated and appalled people and their representatives allowed the wheels of the Juggernaut to roll on.

The question, who are responsible for the creation, in such hot haste, of this Court, and for its instant entrance upon its ruthless work, may not be fully and specifically answered, with absolute demonstration, but we may approach a satisfactory solution of

it. We know that a word from either of the Mathers would have stopped it. Their relations to the Government were, then, controlling. Further, if, at that time, either of the other leading Ministers—Willard, or Allen—had demanded delay, it would have been necessary to pause; but none appear to have made open opposition; and all must share in the responsibility for subsequent events.

Phips says that the affair at Salem Village was represented to him as "much like that of Sweden, about thirty years ago." This Swedish case was Cotton Mather's special topic. In his *Wonders of the Invisible World*, he says that "other good people have in this way been harassed, but none in circumstances more like to ours, than the people of God in Sweedland." He introduces, into the *Wonders*, a separate account of it; and reproduces it in his *Life of Phips*, incorporated subsequently into the *Magnalia*. The first point he makes, in presenting this case, is as follows: "The inhabitants had earnestly sought God in prayer, and yet their affliction continued. Whereupon Judges had a Special Commission to find, and root out the hellish crew; and the rather, because another County in the Kingdom, which had been so molested, was delivered upon the execution of the Witches."—*The Wonders of the Invisible World*. Edit. London, 1693, p. 48.

The importance attached by Cotton Mather to the affair in Sweden, especially viewed in connection with the foregoing extract, indicates that the change, I have conjectured, had come

over him, as to the way to deal with Witches; and that he had reached the conclusion that prayer would not, and nothing but the gallows could, answer the emergency. In the Swedish case, was found the precedent for a "Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer."

Well might the Governor have felt the importance of relieving himself, as far as possible, from the responsibility of having organized such a Court, and of throwing it upon his advisers. The tribunal consisted of the Deputy-governor, as Chief-justice, and eight other persons, all members of the Council, and each, as has been shown, owing his seat, at that Board, to the Mathers.

The recent publication of this letter of Governor Phips enables us now to explain certain circumstances, before hardly intelligible, and to appreciate the extent of the outrages committed by those who controlled the administration of the Province, during the Witchcraft trials.

In 1767, Andrew Oliver, then Secretary of the Province, was directed to search the Records of the Government to ascertain precedents, touching a point of much interest at that time. From his Report, part of which is given in Drake's invaluable *History of Boston*, [p. 728] it appears that the Deputy-governor, Stoughton, by the appointment of the Governor, attended by the Secretary, administered the oaths to the members of the House of Representatives, convened on the eighth of June, 1692; that, as Deputy-governor, he sat in Council, generally, during that year, and was, besides, annually elected to the Council, until his death,

in 1701. All that time, he was sitting, in the double capacity of an *ex-officio* and an elected member; and for much the greater part of it, in the absence of Phips, as acting Governor. The Records show that he sat in Council when Sir William Phips was present, and presided over it, when he was not present, and ever after Phips's decease, until a new Governor came over in 1699. His annual election, by the House of Representatives, as one of the twenty-eight Councillors, while, as Deputy or acting Governor, he was entitled to a seat, is quite remarkable. It gave him a distinct legislative character, and a right, as an elected member of the body, to vote and act, directly, in all cases, without restraint or embarrassment, in debate and on Committees, in the making, as well as administering, the law.

In the letter now under consideration, Governor Phips says: "I was almost the whole time of the proceeding abroad, in the Service of their Majesties in the Eastern part of the country."

The whole tenor of the letter leaves an impression that, being so much away from the scene, in frequent and long absences, he was not cognizant of what was going on. He depended "upon the judgment of the Court," as to its methods of proceeding; and was surprised when those methods were brought to his attention. Feeling his own incapacity to handle such a business, he was willing to leave it to those who ought to have been more competent. Indeed, he passed the whole matter over to the Deputy-governor. In a letter, for which I am indebted to Mr. Goodell, dated the twentieth of February, 1693, to the Earl of

Nottingham, transmitting copies of laws passed by the General Court, Governor Phips says: "Not being versed in law, I have depended upon the Lieu<sup>t</sup> Gov<sup>r</sup>, who is appointed Judge of the Courts, to see that they be exactly agreeable to the laws of England, and not repugnant in any part. If there be any error, I know it will not escape your observation, and desire a check may be given for what may be amiss."

The closing sentence looks somewhat like a want of confidence in the legal capacity and judgment of Stoughton, owing perhaps, to the bad work he had made at the Salem trials, the Summer before; but the whole passage shows that Phips, conscious of his own ignorance of such things, left them wholly to the Chief-justice.

The Records show that he sat in Council to the close of the Legislature, on the second of July. But the main business was, evidently, under the management of Stoughton, who was Chairman of a large Joint Committee, charged with adjusting the whole body of the laws to the transition of the Colony, from an independent Government, under the first Charter, to the condition of a subject Province.

One person had been tried and executed; and the Court was holding its second Session when the Legislature adjourned. Phips went to the eastward, immediately after the eighth of July. Again, on the first of August, he embarked from Boston with a force of four hundred and fifty men, for the mouth of the Kennebec. In the Archives of Massachusetts, Secretary's office, State House,

Vol. LI., p. 9, is the original document, signed by Phips, dated on the first of August, 1692, turning over the Government to Stoughton, during his absence. It appears by Church's *Eastern Expeditions*, Part II., p. 82, edited by H. M. Dexter, and published by Wiggin & Lunt, Boston, 1867, that, during a considerable part of the month of August, the Governor must have been absent, engaged in important operations on the coast of Maine. About the middle of September, he went again to the Kennebec, not returning until a short time before the twelfth of October. In the course of the year, he also was absent for a while in Rhode Island. Although an energetic and active man, he had as much on his hands, arising out of questions as to the extent of his authority over Connecticut and Rhode Island and the management of affairs at the eastward, as he could well attend to. His Instructions, too, from the Crown, made it his chief duty to protect the eastern portions of his Government. The state of things there, in connection with Indian assaults and outrages upon the outskirt settlements, under French instigation, was represented as urgently demanding his attention. Besides all this, his utmost exertions were needed to protect the sea-coast against buccaneers. In addition to the public necessities, thus calling him to the eastward, it was, undoubtedly, more agreeable to his feelings, to revisit his native region and the home of his early years, where, starting from the humblest spheres of mechanical labor and maritime adventure, as a ship-carpenter and sailor, he had acquired the manly energy and enterprise that had conducted

him to fortune, knightly honor, and the Commission of Governor of New England. All the reminiscences and best affections of his nature made him prompt to defend the region thus endeared to him. It was much more congenial to his feelings than to remain under the ceremonial and puritanic restraints of the seat of Government, and involved in perplexities with which he had no ability, and probably no taste, to grapple. He was glad to take himself out of the way; and as his impetuous and impulsive nature rendered those under him liable to find him troublesome, they were not sorry to have him called elsewhere.

I have mentioned these things as justifying the impression, conveyed by his letter, that he knew but little of what was going on until his return in the earlier half of October. Actual absence at a distance, the larger part of the time, and engrossing cares in getting up expeditions and supplies for them while he was at home—particularly as, from the beginning, he had passed over the business of the Court entirely to his Deputy, Stoughton—it is not difficult to suppose, had prevented his mind being much, if at all, turned towards it. We may, therefore, consider that the witchcraft prosecutions were wholly under the control of Stoughton and those, who, having given him power, would naturally have influence over his exercise of it.

Calling in question the legality of the Court, Hutchinson expresses a deep sense of the irregularity of its proceedings; although, as he says, "the most important Court to the life of the subject which ever was held in the Province," it meets his

unqualified censure, in many points. In reference to the instance of the Jury's bringing in a verdict of "Not guilty," in the case of Rebecca Nurse, and being induced, by the dissatisfaction of the Court, to go out again, and bring her in "Guilty," he condemns the procedure. Speaking of a wife or husband being allowed to accuse one the other, he breaks out: "I shudder while I am relating it;" and giving the results at the last trial, he says: "This Court of Oyer and Terminer, happy for the country, sat no more." Its proceedings were arbitrary, harsh, and rash. The ordinary forms of caution and fairness were disregarded. The Judges made no concealment of a foregone conclusion against the Prisoners at the Bar. No Counsel was allowed them. The proceedings were summary; and execution followed close upon conviction. While it was destroying the lives of men and women, of respectable position in the community, of unblemished and eminent Christian standing, heads of families, aged men and venerable matrons, all the ordinary securities of society, outside of the tribunal, were swept away. In the absence of Sir William Phips, the Chief-justice absolutely absorbed into his own person the whole Government. His rulings swayed the Court, in which he acted the part of prosecutor of the Prisoners, and overbore the Jury. He sat in judgment upon the sentences of his own Court; and heard and refused, applications and supplications for pardon or reprieve. The three grand divisions of all constitutional or well-ordered Governments were, for the time, obliterated in Massachusetts. In the absence of Phips, the Executive functions

were exercised by Stoughton. While presiding over the Council, he also held a seat as an elected ordinary member, thus participating in, as well as directing, its proceedings, sharing, as a leader, in legislation, acting on Committees, and framing laws. As Chief-justice, he was the head of the Judicial department. He was Commander-in-chief of the military and naval forces and forts within the Province proper. All administrative, legislative, judicial, and military powers were concentrated in his person and wielded by his hand. No more shameful tyranny or shocking despotism was ever endured in America, than, in "the dark and awful day," as it was called, while the Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer was scattering destruction, ruin, terror, misery and death, over the country. It is a disgrace to that generation, that it was so long suffered; and, instead of trying to invent excuses, it becomes all subsequent generations to feel—as was deeply felt, by enlightened and candid men, as soon as the storm had blown over and a prostrate people again stood erect, in possession of their senses—that all ought, by humble and heart-felt prayer, to implore the divine forgiveness, as one of the Judges, fully as misguided at the time as the rest, did, to the end of his days.

As all the official dignities of the Province were combined in Stoughton, he seems hardly to have known in what capacity he was acting, as different occasions arose. He signed the Death-warrant of Bridget Bishop, without giving himself any distinctive title, with his bare name and his private seal. It is easy to imagine

how this lodging of the whole power of the State in one man, destroyed all safeguards and closed every door of refuge. When the express messenger of the poor young wife of John Willard, or the heroic daughter of Elizabeth How, or the agents of the people of the village, of all classes, combined in supplication in behalf of Rebecca Nurse, rushing to Boston to lay petitions for pardon before the Governor, upon being admitted to his presence, found themselves confronted by the stern countenance of the same person, who, as Chief-justice, had closed his ears to mercy and frowned the Jury into Conviction; their hearts sunk within them, and all realized that even hope had taken flight from the land.

Such was the political and public administration of the Province of Massachusetts, during the Summer of 1692, under which the Witchcraft prosecutions were carried on. It was conducted by men whom the Mathers had brought into office, and who were wholly in their counsels. If there is, I repeat, an instance in history where particular persons are responsible for the doings of a Government, this is one. I conclude these general views of the influence of Increase and Cotton Mather upon the ideas of the people and the operations of the Government, eventuating in the Witchcraft tragedy, by restating a proposition, which, under all the circumstances, cannot, I think, be disputed, that, if they had been really and earnestly opposed to the proceedings, at any stage, they could and would have stopped them.

I now turn to a more specific consideration of the subject

of Cotton Mather's connection with the Witchcraft delusion of 1692.

## VI

### **COTTON MATHER'S CONNECTION WITH THE COURT. SPECTRAL EVIDENCE. LETTER TO JOHN RICHARDS. ADVICE OF THE MINISTERS**

I am charged with having misrepresented the part Cotton Mather, in particular, bore in this passage of our history. As nearly the whole community had been deluded at the time, and there was a general concurrence in aiding oblivion to cover it, it is difficult to bring it back, in all its parts, within the realm of absolute knowledge. Records—municipal, ecclesiastical, judicial, and provincial—were willingly suffered to perish; and silence, by general consent, pervaded correspondence and conversation. Notices of it are brief, even in the most private Diaries. It would have been well, perhaps, if the memory of that day could have been utterly extinguished; but it has not. On the contrary, as, in all manner of false and incorrect representations, it has gone into the literature of the country and the world and become mixed with the permanent ideas of mankind, it is right and necessary to present the whole transaction, so far as possible, in the light of truth. Every right-minded man must rejoice to have wrong, done to the reputation of the dead or living, repaired; and

I can truly say that no one would rejoice more than I should, if the view presented of Cotton Mather, in the *North American Review*, of April, 1869, could be shown to be correct. In this spirit, I proceed to present the evidence that belongs to the question.

The belief of the existence of a personal Devil was then all but universally entertained. So was the belief of ghosts, apparitions, and spectres. There was no more reluctance to think or speak of them than of what we call natural objects and phenomena. Great power was ascribed to the Devil over terrestrial affairs; but it had been the prevalent opinion, that he could not operate upon human beings in any other way than through the instrumentality of other human beings, in voluntary confederation with him; and that, by means of their spectres, he could work any amount of mischief. While this opinion prevailed, the testimony of a witness, that he had seen the spectre of a particular person afflicting himself or any one else, was regarded as proof positive that the person, thus spectrally represented, was in league with the Devil, or, in other words, a Witch. This idea had been abandoned by some writers, who held that the Devil could make use of the spectre of an innocent person, to do mischief; and that, therefore, it was not positive or conclusive proof that any one was a Witch because his spectre had been seen tormenting others. The logical conclusion, from the views of these later writers, was that spectral evidence, as it was called, bearing against an accused party, was wholly unreliable and must be thrown out, entirely, in all cases.

The Reviewer says the "Clergy of New England" adopted

the views of the writers just alluded to, and held that spectral evidence was unreliable and unsafe, and ought to be utterly rejected; and particularly maintains that such was the opinion of Cotton Mather. It is true that they professed to have great regard for those writers; but it is also true, that neither Mather nor the other Ministers in 1692, adopted the conclusion which the Reviewer allows to be inevitably demanded by sound reason and common sense, namely, that "no spectral evidence must be admitted." On the contrary, they did authorize the "admission" of spectral evidence. This I propose to prove; and if I succeed in doing it, the whole fabric of the article in the *North American Review* falls to the ground.

It is necessary, at this point, to say a word as to the *Mather Papers*. They were published by a Committee of the Massachusetts Historical Society, in 1868. My work was published in 1867. The Reviewer, and certain journals that have committed themselves to his support, charge me with great negligence in not having consulted those papers, *not then in print*. Upon inquiry, while making my researches, I was informed, by those having them in hand preparatory to their going to press, that they contained nothing at all essential to my work; and the information was correct. Upon examining the printed volume, I cannot find a single item that would require an alteration, addition, or omission to be made in my work. But they are quite serviceable in the discussion to which the article in the *North American Review* compels me.

To return to the issue framed by the Reviewer. He makes a certain absolute assertion, repeats it in various forms, and confidently assumes it, all the way through, as in these passages: "Stoughton admitted spectral evidence; Mather, in his writings on the subject, denounced it, as illegal, uncharitable, and cruel." "He ever testified against it, both publicly and privately; and, particularly in his Letter to the Judges, he besought them that they would by no means admit it; and when a considerable assembly of Ministers gave in their *Advice* about the matter, he not only concurred with the advice, but he drew it up." "The *Advice* was very specific in excluding spectral testimony."

He relies, in the first place, and I may say chiefly, in maintaining this position—namely, that Mather denounced the *admission* of spectral testimony and demanded its *exclusion*—upon a sentence in a letter from Cotton Mather to John Richards, called by the Reviewer "his Letter to the Judges," among the *Mather Papers*, p. 891.

Hutchinson informs us that Richards came into the country in low circumstances, but became an opulent merchant, in Boston. He was a member of Mather's Church, and one of the Special Court to try the witches. Its Session was to commence in the first week, probably on Thursday, the second day of June. The letter, dated on Tuesday, the thirty-first of May, is addressed to John Richards alone; and commences with a strong expression of regret that quite a severe indisposition will prevent his accompanying him to the trials. "Excuse me," he

says, "from waiting upon you, with the utmost of my little skill and care, to assist the noble service, whereto you are called of God this week, the service of encountering the wicked spirits in the high places of our air, and of detecting and confounding of their confederates." He hopes, before the Court "gets far into the mysterious affair," to be able to "attend the desires" of Richards, which, to him "always are commands." He writes the letter, "for the strengthening of your honorable hands in that work of God whereto, (I thank him) he hath so well fitted you." After some other complimentary language, and assurances that God's "people have been fasting and praying before him for your direction," he proceeds to urge upon him his favorite Swedish case, wherein the "endeavours of the Judges to discover and extirpate the authors of that execrable witchcraft," were "immediately followed with a remarkable smile of God." Then comes the paragraph, which the Reviewer defiantly cites, to prove that Cotton Mather agreed with him, in the opinion that spectre evidence ought not to be "admitted."

Before quoting the paragraph, I desire the reader to note the manner in which the affair in Sweden is brought to the attention of Richards, in the clauses just cited, in connection with what I have said in this article, page 16. Cotton Mather was in possession of a book on this subject. "It comes to speak English," he says, "by the acute pen of the excellent and renowned Dr. Horneck." Who so likely as Mather to have brought the case to the notice of Phips, pp. 14. It was urged upon Richards at about

the same time that it was upon Phips; and as an argument in favor of "*extirpating*" witches, by the *action of a Court of Oyer and Terminer*.

The paragraph is as follows: "And yet I must most humbly beg you that in the management of the affair in your most worthy hands, you do not lay more stress upon pure Spectre testimony than it will bear. When you are satisfied, and have good plain legal evidence, that the Demons which molest our poor neighbors do indeed represent such and such people to the sufferers, though this be a presumption, yet I suppose you will not reckon it a conviction that the people so represented are witches to be immediately exterminated. It is very certain that the Devils have sometimes represented the Shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous. Though I believe that the just God then ordinarily provides a way for the speedy vindication of the persons thus abused. Moreover, I do suspect that persons, who have too much indulged themselves in malignant, envious, malicious ebullitions of their souls, may unhappily expose themselves to the judgment of being represented by Devils, of whom they never had any vision, and with whom they have, much less, written any covenant. I would say this; if upon the bare supposal of a poor creature being represented by a spectre, too great a progress be made by the authority in ruining a poor neighbor so represented, it may be that a door may be thereby opened for the Devils to obtain from the Courts in the invisible world a license to proceed unto most hideous desolations upon

the repute and repose of such as have yet been kept from the great transgression. If mankind have thus far once consented unto the credit of diabolical representations, the door is opened! Perhaps there are wise and good men, that may be ready to style him that shall advance this caution, a Witch-advocate, but in the winding up, this caution will certainly be wished for."

This passage, strikingly illustrative, as it is, of Mather's characteristic style of appearing, to a cursory, careless reader, to say one thing, when he is really aiming to enforce another, while it has deceived the Reviewer, and led him to his quixotic attempt to revolutionize history, cannot be so misunderstood by a critical interpreter.

In its general drift, it appears, at first sight, to disparage spectral evidence. The question is: Does it forbid, denounce, or dissuade, its introduction? By no means. It supposes and allows its introduction, but says, *lay not more stress upon it than it will bear*. Further, it affirms that it may afford "presumption" of guilt, though not sufficient for conviction, and removes objection to its introduction, by holding out the idea that, if admitted by the Court and it bears against innocent persons, "the just God, then, ordinarily provides a way for their speedy vindication." It is plain that the paragraph refers, not to the *admission* of "diabolical representations," but to the *manner* in which they are to be received, in the "management" of the trials, as will more fully appear, as we proceed.

The suggestion, to reconcile Richards to the use of spectral

evidence, that something would "ordinarily" providentially turn up to rescue innocent persons, against whom it was borne, was altogether delusive. It was an opinion of the day, that one of the most signal marks of the Devil's descent with power, would be the seduction, to his service, of persons of the most eminent character, even, if possible, of the very elect; and, hence, no amount of virtue or holiness of life or conversation, could be urged in defence of any one. The records of the world present no more conspicuous instances of Christian and saintlike excellence than were exhibited by Rebecca Nurse and Elizabeth How; but spectral testimony was allowed to destroy them. Indeed, it was impossible for a Court to put any restrictions on this kind of evidence, if once received. If the accusing girls exclaimed—all of them concurring, at the moment, in the declaration and in its details—that they saw, at that very instant, in the Court-room, before Judges and Jury, the spectre of the Prisoner assailing one of their number, and that one showing signs of suffering, what could be done to rebut their testimony? The character of the accused was of no avail. An *alibi* could not touch the case. The distance from the Prisoner to the party professing to be tormented, was of no account. The whole proceeding was on the assumption that, however remote the body of the Prisoner, his or her spectre was committing the assault. No limitation of space or time could be imposed on the spectral presence. "Good, plain, legal evidence" was out of the question, where the Judges assumed, as Mather did, that "the molestations" then suffered by

the people of the neighbourhood, were the work of Demons, and fully believed that the tortures and convulsions of the accusers, before their eyes, were, as alleged, caused by the spectres of the accused.

To cut the matter short. The considerations Mather presents of the "inconvenience," as he calls it, of the spectral testimony, it might be supposed, would have led him to counsel—not as he did, against making "too great a progress" in its use—but its abandonment altogether. Why did he not, as the Reviewer says ought always have been done, protest utterly against its admission at all? The truth is, that neither in this letter, nor in any way, at any time, did he ever recommend caution *against* its use, but *in* its use.

It may be asked, what did he mean by "not laying more stress upon spectre testimony than it will bear," and the general strain of the paragraph? A solution of this last question may be reached as we continue the scrutiny of his language and actions.

In this same letter, Mather says: "I look upon wounds that have been given unto spectres, and received by witches, as intimations, broad enough, in concurrence with other things, to bring out the guilty. Though I am not fond of assaying to give such wounds, yet, the proof [*of*] such, when given, carries with it what is very palpable."

This alludes to a particular form of spectral evidence. One of the "afflicted children" would testify that she saw and felt the spectre of the accused, tormenting her, and struck at it. A

corresponding wound or bruise was found on the body, or a rent in the garments, of the accused. Mather commended this species of evidence, writing to one of the Judges, on the eve of the trials. He not only commends, but urges it as conclusive of guilt. Referring to what constituted the bulk of the evidence of the accusing girls, and which was wholly spectral in its nature—namely, that they were "hurt" by an "unseen hand"—he charges Richards, if he finds such "hurt" to be inflicted by the persons accused, "Hold them, for you have caught a witch." He recommends putting the Prisoners upon repeating the "Lord's prayer" or certain "other Systems of Christianity." He endorses the evidence derived from "poppits," "witch-marks," and even the "water ordeal." He advised a Judge, just proceeding to sit in cases of life and death, to make use of "cross and swift questions," as the means of bringing the accused "into confusion, likely to lead them into confession."

Whoever examines, carefully, this letter to Richards, cannot, I think, but conclude that, instead of exonerating Mather, it fixes upon him the responsibility for the worst features of the Witchcraft Trials.

The next document on which the Reviewer relies is the *Return of the Ministers consulted by his Excellency and the honorable Council, upon the present Witchcraft in Salem Village*. It is necessary to give it entire, as follows:

["I. The afflicted state of our poor neighbours, that are now suffering by molestations from the invisible world, we

apprehend so deplorable, that we think their condition calls for the utmost help of all persons in their several capacities.

"II. We cannot but, with all thankfulness, acknowledge the success which the merciful God has given to the sedulous and assiduous endeavours of our honorable rulers, to defeat the abominable witchcrafts which have been committed in the country, humbly praying, that the discovery of those mysterious and mischievous wickednesses may be perfected.]

"III. We judge that, in the prosecution of these and all such witchcrafts, there is need of a very critical and exquisite caution, lest by too much credulity for things received only upon the Devil's authority, there be a door opened for a long train of miserable consequences, and Satan get an advantage over us; for we should not be ignorant of his devices.

"IV. As in complaints upon witchcrafts there may be matters of enquiry which do not amount unto matters of presumption, and there may be matters of presumption which yet may not be reckoned matters of conviction, so it is necessary, that all proceedings thereabout be managed with an exceeding tenderness towards those that may be complained of, especially if they have been persons formerly of an unblemished reputation.

"V. When the first inquiry is made into the circumstances of such as may lie under any just suspicion of witchcrafts, we could wish that there may be admitted as little as possible of such noise, company, and openness, as may too hastily expose them that are examined; and that

there may nothing be used as a test for the trial of the suspected, the lawfulness whereof may be doubted among the people of God; but that the directions given by such judicious writers as Perkins and Bernard may be consulted in such a case.

"VI. Presumptions whereupon persons may be committed, and, much more, convictions whereupon persons may be condemned as guilty of witchcrafts, ought certainly to be more considerable than barely the accused persons being represented by a spectre unto the afflicted; [inasmuch as it is an undoubted and a notorious thing, that a Demon may, by God's permission, appear, even to ill purposes, in the shape of an innocent, yea, and a virtuous man.] Nor can we esteem alterations made in the sufferers, by a look or touch of the accused, to be an infallible evidence of guilt, but frequently liable to be abused by the Devil's legerdemain.

"VII. We know not whether some remarkable affront, given the Devil, by our disbelieving of those testimonies, whose whole force and strength is from him alone, may not put a period unto the progress of the dreadful calamity begun upon us, in the accusation of so many persons, whereof some, we hope, are yet clear from the great transgression laid to their charge.

["VIII. Nevertheless, we cannot but humbly recommend unto the Government, the speedy and vigorous prosecutions of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the directions given in the laws of God, and the wholesome Statutes of the English nation, for the detection

of Witchcrafts."]

I have enclosed the *first*, *second* and *eighth* Sections, and a part of the *sixth*, in brackets, for purposes that will appear, in a subsequent part of this discussion. The *Advice of the Ministers* was written by Cotton Mather. As in his letter to Richards, he does not caution *against* the use, but *in* the use, of spectral evidence. Not a word is said denouncing its introduction or advising its entire rejection. We look in vain for a line or a syllable disapproving the trial and execution just had, resting as they did, entirely upon spectral evidence: on the contrary, the *second* Section applauds what had been done; and prays that the work entered upon may be perfected. The first clauses in the *fourth* Section sanction its admission, as affording ground of "presumption," although "it may not be matter of conviction." The *sixth* Section, while it appears to convey the idea that spectral evidence alone ought not to be regarded as sufficient, contains, at the same time, a form of expression, that not only requires its reception, but places its claims on the highest possible grounds. "*A Demon may, by God's permission, appear, even to ill purposes, in the shape of an innocent, yea, and a virtuous man.*" It is sufficiently shocking to think that anything, *to ill purposes*, can be done by Divine permission; but horrible, indeed, to intimate that the Devil can have that permission to malign and murder an innocent person. If the spectre appears by God's permission, the effect produced has his sanction. The blasphemous supposition that God permits the Devil thus to bear

false witness, to the destruction of the righteous, overturns all the sentiments and instincts of our moral and religious nature. In using this language, the Ministers did not have a rational apprehension of what they were saying, which is the only apology for much of the theological phraseology of that day. This phrase, "God's permission," had quite a currency at the time; and if it did not reconcile the mind, subdued it to wondering and reverent silence. It will be seen that Mather, on other occasions, repeated this idea, in various and sometimes stronger terms. The *third*

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