Main Currents in American Thought

An Interpretation of American Literature
From the Beginnings to 1920

Vernon Louis Parrington

Volume One: 1620-1800
The Colonial Mind

Volume Two: 1800-1860
The Romantic Revolution in America

Volume Three: 1860-1920
The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America

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TO THE MEMORY

OF

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SCHOLAR TEACHER DEMOCRAT GENTLEMAN

Omnium Amicus erat
gui
Justicium ament.
FOREWORD

to many students are too great to be adequately acknowledged in a few words; they appear at large in the footnotes. I find myself especially indebted to the critical historians who for the past score of years have been working with such fruitful results in the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods of our development. Without the assistance of their searching investigations the difficulties in the way of understanding those complex times would have proved insuperable. To the sane and acute scholarship of my friend and colleague, Prof. Edward McMahon, and to the generous counsel and encouragement of the late Prof. J. Allen Smith, I am under particular obligations; but in those instances in which I may unwittingly have gone astray, the fault is mine. In a study dealing with so long a period of time and with such diverse and difficult fields, I can scarcely hope to have escaped the many traps laid for the unwary. Perhaps I should add that the seeming neglect, in the present volume, of southern backgrounds, has resulted from the desire to postpone the detailed consideration of the mind of the South to a later volume.

Seattle, January 1, 1926

V. L. P.

INTRODUCTION

I have undertaken to give some account of the genesis and development in American letters of certain germinal ideas that have come to be reckoned traditionally American—how they came into being here, how they were opposed, and what influence they have exerted in determining the form and scope of our characteristic ideals and institutions. In pursuing such a task, I have chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belligeristic; and the main divisions of the study have been fixed by forces that are anterior to literary schools and movements, creating the body of ideas from which literary culture eventually springs. The present volume carries the account from early beginnings in Puritan New England to the triumph of Jefferson and back-country agrarianism. Volume II concerns itself with the creative influence in America of French romantic theories, the rise of capitalism, and the transition from an agricultural to an industrial order; and Volume III will concern itself with the beginnings of dissatisfaction with the regnant middle class, and the several movements of criticism inspired by its reputed shortcomings.

Such a study will necessarily deal much with intellectual backgrounds, and especially with those diverse systems of European thought that from generation to generation have domesticated themselves in America, and through cross-fertilization with native aspirations and indigenous growths, have resulted in a body of ideas that we reckon definitively American. In broad outline those germinal contributions were the bequests successively of English Independency, of French romantic theory, of the industrial revolution and laissez faire, of nineteenth-century science, and of Continental theories of collectivism. Transplanted to American soil, these vigorous seedlings from old-world nurseries took root and flourished in such spots as proved congenial, stimulating American thought, suggesting programs for fresh Utopian ventures, providing an intellectual sanction for new experiments in government. Profoundly liberalizing in their influence, they gave impulse and form to our native idealisms, and contrib-
uted largely to the outcome of our social experience. The child of two continents, America can be explained in its significant traits by neither alone.

In the present volume, I have examined with some care the bequests of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe to the colonial settlements, and in particular the transplanting to America of old-world liberalisms. In the main those liberalisms derived from two primary sources, English Independency and French romantic theory, supplemented by certain contributions from English Whiggery. From the first came the revolutionary doctrine of natural rights, clarified by a notable succession of thinkers from Roger Williams to John Locke, a doctrine that destroyed the philosophical sanction of divine right, substituted for the traditional absolutism the conception of a democratic church in a democratic state, and found exemplification in the commonwealths of Rhode Island and Connecticut. But unfortunately the liberal doctrine of natural rights was entangled in New England with an absolutist theology that conceived of human nature as inherently evil, that postulated a divine sovereignty absolute and arbitrary, and projected caste divisions into eternity—a body of dogmas that it needed two hundred years' experience in America to disintegrate. From this clash between a liberal political philosophy and a reactionary theology, between English Independency and English Presbyterianism, sprang the broad features of the struggle that largely determined the course of development in early New England, with which Book One is concerned.

Book Two deals with new beginnings from the raw materials of European immigrants, in other colonies than New England, who came hither singly and unorganized, and took immediate imprint from the new environment, creating during the eighteenth century the great body of yeomanry that was to determine in large measure the fate of America for a hundred years or more. It was to these scattered and undistinguished colonials that French romantic theory was brought by a group of intellectuals in the later years of the century, a philosophy so congenial to a decentralized society that it seemed to provide an authoritative sanction for the clarifying ideals of a republican order, based on the principle of local home rule, toward which colonial experience was driving. Exploring the equalitarian premises of the doctrine of natural rights, it amplified the emerging democratic theory by substituting for the Puritan conception of human nature as vicious, the conception of human nature as potentially excellent and capable of indefinite development. It asserted that the present evils of society are the consequence of vicious institutions rather than of depraved human nature; and that as free men and equals, it is the right and duty of citizens to re-create social and political institutions to the end that they shall further social justice, encouraging the good in men rather than perverting them to evil. Romantic theory went further and provided a new economics and a new sociology. Since the great desideratum is man in a state of nature, it follows, according to the Physiocratic school, that the farmer is the ideal citizen, and agriculture the common and single source of wealth; and that in consequence the state should hold the tillers of the soil in special regard, shaping the public policy with a primary view to their interests. And since social custom is anterior to statutory laws, since the individual precedes the state, government must be circumscribed in its powers and scope by common agreement, and held strictly to its sole concern, the care of the social well-being. The political state, rightly conceived, must be reckoned no other than a great public-service corporation, with government as its responsible agent.

But while French romantic theory was spreading widely through the backwoods of America, providing an intellectual justification for the native agrarianism, another philosophy, derived from English liberalism of the later eighteenth century, was taking possession of the commercial towns. Realistic and material rather than romantic and Utopian, it was implicitly hostile to all the major premises and ideals of the French school. It conceived of human nature neither as good nor bad, but as acquisitive; and it proposed to erect a new social and political philosophy in accordance with the needs of a capitalistic order. It was concerned with exploitation and the rights of trade, rather than with justice and the rights of man. Its aspirations were expressed in the principle of laissez-faire, and in elaborating this cardinal doctrine it reduced the citizen to the narrow dimensions of the economic man, concerned only with buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. It would reduce the political state to the rôle of policeman, to keep the peace. With humanitarian and social interests, the state must not intermeddle—such functions lie outside its legitimate sphere. An expression of the aspirations of trading and
speculating classes, it professed to believe that economic law—by which term it glorified the spontaneous play of the acquisitive instinct—was competent to regulate men in society, and that if freedom of trade were achieved, all lesser and secondary freedoms would follow.

In the light of such over-seas bequests to the American venture, the choice of materials for the present volume is predetermined. The line of liberalism in colonial America runs through Roger Williams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. The first transported to the new world the plentiful liberalisms of a great movement and a great century; the second gathered up the sum of native liberalisms that had emerged spontaneously from a decentralized society; and the third enriched these native liberalisms with borrowings from the late seventeenth-century natural-rights school and from French romantic theory, engraving them upon the vigorous American stock. Over against these protagonists of liberalism must be set the complementary figures of John Cotton, Jonathan Edwards, and Alexander Hamilton, men whose grandiose dreams envisaged different ends for America and who followed different paths. The Carolinian Seeker and the Jacobean theocrat, the colonial democrat and the colonial Calvinist, the Physiocratic republican and the capitalistic financier, embody in concrete form the diverse tendencies of primitive America; and around these major figures lesser ones will group themselves, parties to the great struggle of those early years, the eventual outcome of which was the rejection of the principles of monarchy and aristocracy, and the venturing upon an experiment in republicanism continental in scope.

That our colonial literature seems to many readers meager and uninteresting, that it is commonly squeezed into the skinniest chapters in our handbooks of American literature, is due, I think, to an exaggerated regard for esthetic values. Our literary historians have labored under too heavy a handicap of the genteel tradition—to borrow Professor Santayana’s happy phrase—to enter sympathetically into a world of masculine intellects and material struggles. They have sought daintier fare than polemics, and in consequence mediocre verse has obscured political speculation, and poetasters have shouldered aside vigorous creative thinkers. The colonial period is meager and lean only to those whose “disegded appetites” find no savor in old-fashioned beef and puddings. The seventeenth century in America as well as in England was a saeculum theologicum, and the eighteenth century was a saeculum politicum. No other path leads so directly and intimately into the heart of those old days as the thorny path of their theological and political controversies; and if one will resolutely pick his way amongst the thorns, he will have his reward in coming close to the men who debated earnestly over the plans and specifications of the Utopia that was to be erected in the free spaces of America, and who however wanting they may have been in the lesser arts, were no mean architects and craftsmen for the business at hand. The foundations of a later America were laid in vigorous polemics, and the rough stone was plentifully mortared with idealism. To enter once more into the spirit of those fine old idealisms, and to learn that the promise of the future has lain always in the keeping of liberal minds that were never discouraged from their dreams, is scarcely a profitless undertaking, nor without meaning to those who like Merlin pursue the light of their hopes where it flickers above the treacherous marshlands.
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BOOK ONE

LIBERALISM AND PURITANISM

Common report has long made out Puritan New England to have been the native seat and germinal source of such ideals and institutions as have come to be regarded as traditionally American. Any critical study of the American mind, therefore, may conveniently seek its beginnings in the colonies clustered about Massachusetts Bay, and will inquire into the causes of the pronounced singularity of temper and purpose that marked off the New England settlements from those to the south, creating a distinctive New England character, and disciplining it for later conquests that were to set a stamp on American life. The course of its somewhat singular development would seem from the first to have been determined by an interweaving of idealism and economics—by the substantial body of thought and customs and institutions brought from the old home, slowly modified by new ways of life developing under the silent pressure of a freer environment. Of these new ways, the first in creative influence was probably the freehold tenure of landholdings, put in effect at the beginning and retained unmodified for generations; and the second was the development of a mercantile spirit that resulted from the sterility of the Massachusetts soil, which encouraged the ambitious to seek wealth in more profitable ways than tilling barren acres. From these sources emerged the two chief classes of New England: the yeomanry, a body of democratic freeholders who constituted the rank and file of the people, and the gentry, a group of capable merchants who dominated the commonwealth from early days to the rise of industrialism. And it was the interweaving of the aims and purposes of these acquisitive yeomen and gentry—harmonious for the most part on the surface, yet driving in different directions—with the ideal of a theocracy and the inhibitions of Puritan dogma, that constitutes the pattern of life to be dealt with here. The Puritan and the Yankee were the two halves of the New England whole, and to overlook or underestimate
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the contributions of either to the common life is grossly to mis-
interpret the spirit and character of primitive New England. The Puritan was a contribution of the old world, created by the rugged idealism of the English Reformation; the Yankee was a product of native conditions, created by a practical economics.

PART ONE: THE PURITAN HERITAGE
1620–1660

CHAPTER I
ENGLISH BACKGROUNDS

1

The body of thought brought to America by the immigrant Puritans, and which gave a special cast to the New England mind, may be summed in a phrase as Carolinian liberalism. It was the confused bequest of a hundred years of English idealism, struggling with the knotty problems of a complex society in transition from the old static feudal order to the modern capitalistic; and it took a particular form and received a narrow ideology from the current ecclesiastical disputes concerning the nature and governance of the true church. It was exclusively a product of the Reformation, unleavened by the spirit of the Renaissance. But though English Puritanism was wholly theological in its immediate origins, it gathered about it in the century and a half of its militant career all the forces of unrest fermenting in England. Economics and politics joined hands with theology; the center of gravity of the total movement tended to sink lower in the social scale; and in the end all England was involved in the great struggle.

In its deeper purpose Puritanism was a frank challenge of the traditional social solidarity of English institutional life by an emergent individualism, and far-reaching social readjustments followed inevitably in its train. If the evolution of modern society is conceived of as falling into two broad phases, the disintegration of a corporate feudal order into unregimented individual members of society, and the struggles of those free individuals to regroup themselves in new social commonwealths, the historical significance of English Puritanism may perhaps become clear: it was one of the disruptive forces that disintegrated the traditional solidarity of church and state by creating a revolutionary philosophy of individual rights that purposed to free the individual, both as Christian and subject, from subjection to a fixed corporate status.
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Platform is seen to be only the aberration of a passing bigotry. In his anniversary speech at Plymouth he said:

Their situation demanded a parceling out and division of the lands, and it may be fairly said, that this necessary act fixed the future frame and form of their government. The character of their political institutions was determined by the fundamental laws respecting property. The property was all freehold... alienation of the land was every way facilitated, even to the subjecting of it to every species of debt. The establishment of public registries, and the simplicity of our forms of conveyance, have greatly facilitated the change of real estate from one proprietor to another. The consequence of all these causes has been, a great subdivision of the soil, and a great equality of condition; the true basis, most certainly, of a popular government. “If the people,” says Harrington, “hold three parts in four of the territory, it is plain there can neither be any single person nor nobility able to dispute the government with them; in this case, therefore, except force be interposed, they govern themselves.”

With such a clue it is easier to understand how the liberalism implicit in Plymouth Congregationalism—its theory of compact in church and state—should find support from an independent yeomanry and eventually rise against the oligarchical rule. The new world would ultimately throw off the old-world repressions and explore the reaches of those generous idealisms that were the bequest of English Separatism. The fathers were engaged in an impossible undertaking. Sanctuaries were close at hand for all dissenters from the theocracy, in Connecticut for the Congregationalists, in Rhode Island for the Separatists, along the Maine frontier for the rebellious individualists. Seated securely in these regions beyond the reach of the Massachusetts magistrates, the diverse idealisms that were being stifled by the oligarchy prospered and brought forth after their kind. Differentiation in the provinces was the natural counterpart of coercive conformity at the capital; and from very early days New England divided into three diverse groups journeying to their Utopias by different roads. Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, were variant answers to the question of what might be expected to result from the domestication in a free environment of the inchoate idealisms of English Puritanism. How they differentiated themselves from the norm, and why, will perhaps become clearer from an examination of the diverse philosophies of their intellectual leaders.


CHAPTER III
THE CHIEF STEWARDS OF THEOCRACY

I
MASTER JOHN COTTON

Priest

The most authoritative representative in New England of the ideal of priestly stewardship was the excellent John Cotton, first teacher to the church at Boston. While pastor of the church of St. Botolph, in old Boston, he had dreamed of a Utopia of the Saints, unharassed by tyrannous prelates; and while sweetening his mouth with a morsel of Calvin, as he was fond of doing, no doubt he turned over in his mind the plans and specifications of that Utopia. “When God wraps us in his ordinances,” he said in his sermon to Winthrop’s company on the eve of its departure from England, “and warms us with the life and power of them as with wings, there is the land of Promise.” Left behind by the departing brethren, he lingered for a while in an England that was every day becoming colder for such as dreamed of other Canaans than Laud’s, until urged by many invitations, at the age of forty-six he followed overseas to devote his remaining life to the great work being done there. For more than a score of years he labored faithfully, and the New England which the emigrant generation bequeathed to its sons bore upon it the marks of John Cotton’s shaping hand more clearly than those of any other minister.

It is not easy today to judge fairly the life and work of John Cotton. No adequate biography has been written, and his dreams and aspirations lie forgotten in the grave of lost causes and forsaken faiths. But to the Boston freemen of his own day, Master John Cotton was a very great man. Of excellent family and sound university training, he was both a notable theologian and a courteous gentleman. “Twelve hours in a day he commonly studied, and would call that a scholar’s day,” his grandson reported of him. From the hour when he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, at the age of thirteen, to his death in 1652, he was a bookman, and in sheer bulk of acquisition probably no man of his time outdid him.
In Cotton Mather’s judgment he was “a most universal scholar, and a living system of the liberal arts, and a walking library.” His intellectual equipment was so highly regarded that many excellent persons “believed that God would not suffer Mr. Cotton to err”; and that “if ever there be any considerable blow given to the Devil’s kingdom,” Master Cotton was the man for the business. No other New England champion was so renowned for “beating out the truth in controversy”; and when he turned to the work of answering Roger Williams, the latter exclaimed: “I rejoice it hath pleased [God] to appoint so able, and excellent, and conscientious Instrument to bolt the Truth to the brazen.” But he was bred in Elizabethan days and entered college in the year when Shakespeare’s Henry IV and Jonson’s Every Man in his Humour first appeared on the stage, there is no touch of Renaissance splendor in his cramped style and ascetic reasoning. That was early washed out of him by the rising tide of Hebraism slowly submerging the England of poets and playwrights.

But however much he loved cloistered scholarship, immediate source of his great influence was the spoken rather than the written word. By the universal testimony of his generation he was “a soul-melting preacher,” whose reasoned eloquence swayed congregations trained to solid argumentative discourse. When he ascended the pulpit on Sundays and lecture days, he spoke as a prophet in Israel; and on occasions of public ceremonial, or when dissensions arose touching the polity of church or state, he was summoned by the magistrates to convince with his logic and persuade with his eloquence. The strong-minded Anne Hutchinson was but one of many who chose exile in New England rather than lose the edification of Mr. Cotton’s preaching. Good men were drawn to him by his sweetness of temper, and evil men were overawed by his venerable aspect. He seems to have been an altogether lovable person, with white hair framing a face that must have been nobly chiseled, gentle-voiced, courteous, tactful, by nature “a tolerant man” who placidly bore with a dissentient and gladly discovered a friend in an antagonist. If his quiet yielding before opposition suggests that he may have been given to opportunism, or his fondness for intellectual subtleties drew from his grandson the comment “a most excellent casuist,” we must not too hastily conclude that he served the cause of truth less devotedly than the cause of party.

For a score of years before his coming over, his position in the rising Puritan party had been honorable. Few among the dissenting ministers were better known, none more esteemed. He had shone as an intellectual light at the university, he had long been pastor of one of the loveliest churches in England, he counted among his friends some of the ablest contemporaries of the Lord; to Cromwell he was one whom I love and honour in the Lord; to Lord Say and Sele, to the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Lincoln, and a notable company of Puritan gentlemen, he was a trusted friend and lieutenant; to thousands of the substantial burgesses who were drawing together to form the new Puritan-Whig party, he was “a fixed and conscientious light.” That such a leader should have been received with thanksgiving by the Boston congregation was to be expected; that he should have taken high place at once among the members of the Massachusetts oligarchy was equally to be expected. Thenceforth his busy career was no more than a reflection of the ambitions of the theocracy.

Unfortunately his daily contact with narrow-minded and intolerant men gave him an unhappy bias to his later career. Cotton seems to have been something of a Puritan intellectual, with an open-minded curiosity that made him receptive to new ideas and tempted him to play with doctrines that were intolerable to his bigoted associates. It was possibly this native sympathy with free speculation that drew him into the camp of Mistress Hutchinson with her doctrine of the inner light. When the schism became serious, dividing the commonwealth into warring camps, Cotton seems to have become frightened and broke with the Boston Antinomians. In this matter he came near to being a shuffler. The Hutchinson trial, with its resulting banishments was the turning point of his career in America as it was a crisis in the history of early New England. He was not a man to persecute and harry, nor was he one to stand in isolated opposition to associates whom he respected, and he allowed himself to be coerced by narrower-minded men like Endicott and Dudley. After 1657 the better nature of John Cotton was submerged by the rising intolerance, and “the most tolerant, as he was the ablest of the Massachusetts divines,” was brought so low as to defend the meanest and cruellest acts of the oligarchy. He descended to disgraceful casuistry in defense of the first whippings of the Quakers, and he urged the death penalty upon King Philip’s son and the enslavement of the remnant of
PHILIP’S TRIBE, AGAINST THE PLEA OF JOHN ELIOT THAT “TO SELL SOULES FOR MONY SEEMETH TO ME A DANGEROUS MERCHANTIZE.” THE SINS OF THE OLIGARCHY REST IN LARGE MEASURE ON THE HEAD OF JOHN COTTON, AND THE JUDGMENT OF THE MOST RECENT HISTORIAN OF NEW ENGLAND MUST STAND:

With a broader mind and wider vision than any of the other clergy of the colony, he had not the courage to stand alone, beyond a certain point, against their unanimity in intolerance. The higher promptings of his nature were crushed by the united voice of the priesthood, as Winthrop’s had been so short a time before, and the noblest of the colony’s leaders, lay and clerical, from that time tended to sink to the lower level of their fellows.¹

An apologist—and whoever has felt the charm of John Cotton’s personality easily becomes an apologist—will perhaps find some grounds of excuse for his later conduct. He was in an unhappy position. He was ill at ease in his mind, and his frequent tacking in the face of adverse winds was characteristic of the intellectual who sees all sides of a question. He heartily approved of the theocratic ends that his associates were seeking, and his influential position made him the defender of acts which his better nature must have disapproved. The historian, however, will seek a more adequate explanation in the roots of his environment. The idealism of John Cotton was the fruit of his training, and his theocratic dreams were conditioned by the facts that he was both a Calvinist and a Carolinian gentleman. The fusion of these two influences resulted in the unique political theory of an ethical aristocracy, consecrated to moral stewardship in the state. A lifelong student of Calvin’s Institutes, he found there a system of social organization that responded to every demand of the theologian and the aristocrat. The very texture and pattern of Cotton’s political philosophy is exemplified in such a passage as this, over which he must have brooded much:

When these three forms of government of which philosophers treat, are considered in themselves, I, for my part, am far from denying that the form which greatly surpasses the other is aristocracy, either pure or modified by popular government; not indeed in itself, but because it very rarely happens that kings so rule themselves as never to dissent from what is just and right, or are possessed of so much acuteness and prudence as always to see correctly. Owing therefore to the vices or defects of men, it is safer and more tolerable when several bear rule, that they may thus


MUTUALLY ASSIST, INSTRUCT, AND ADMONISH EACH OTHER, AND SHOULD ANY BE DISPOSED TO GO TOO FAR, THE OTHERS ARE CENSORS AND MASTERS TO CURB HIS EXCESS. THIS HAS ALREADY BEEN PROVED BY EXPERIENCE, AND CONFIRMED ALSO BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE LORD HIMSELF, WHEN HE ESTABLISHED AN ARISTOCRACY BORDERING ON POPULAR GOVERNMENT AMONG THE ISRAELITES, KEEPING THEM UNDER THAT AS THE BEST FORM, UNTIL HE EXHIBITED AN IMAGE OF THE MESSIAH IN DAVID.²

As a Carolinian gentleman, this was as far as Cotton would go on the path of liberalism. The elders were responsible to God for the spiritual well-being of the people, and the state must aid and not hinder them in their leadership. The doctrine of unlimited popular sovereignty was for him no other than a thistle in the garden of the Lord. The desire for liberty he regarded as the sinful prompting of the natural man, a denial of the righteous authority of God’s chosen rulers. If democracy were indeed the best form of government, was it not strange that divine wisdom should have failed to discover the fact? In the history of the chosen people nowhere does God approve the democratic as the best form, but the theocratic; was He now to be set right by sinful men who courted popularity by appealing to the selfishness of depraved hearts? To the scripturist the logic of his argument was convincing:

It is better that the commonwealth be fashioned to the setting forth of God’s house, which is his church; than to accommodate the church frame to the civil state. Democracy, I do not conceive that ever God did ordain a fit government ewther for church or commonwealth. If the people be governors, who shall be governed? As for monarchy, and aristocracy, they are both of them clearly approved, and directed in scripture, yet so as refereth the sovereigntie to himselfe, and setteth up Theocray in both, as the best forme of government in the commonwealth, as well as in the church.³

IF JOHN COTTON, LIKE OTHER CAROLINIAN GENTLEMEN, WAS A CONFIRMED ARISTOCRAT, he was at the same time a social revolutionary, who would substitute an aristocracy of the Saints for the landed aristocracy, and refashion society upon ethical rather than economic lines. At what time the ideal of a Presbyterian Bible commonwealth took shape in his mind, it is impossible to determine; but it was a natural outcome of his most cherished beliefs. A

² Institutes, Book IV, Chapter XX, Paragraph 8.
devout scripturist, he accepted the Bible as a rule of universal application, perfect and final. The sufficiency of the Scriptures to all social needs was axiomatic with him; "the more any law smells of man the more unprofitable," he asserted in his draft of laws offered for acceptance by the commonwealth; and at another time he exclaimed, "Scripturae plenitudinem adora." He chose exile rather than yield to what he regarded as the unscriptural practices of Laud, and now that he was come to a new land where a fresh beginning was to be made, was it not his Christian duty to "endeavour after a theocracy, as near as might be, to that which was the glory of Israel, the 'peculiar people'"? The old Common Law must be superseded by the Mosaic dispensation; the citizen of the commonwealth must become the subject of Jehovah; the sovereignty of temporal authorities must serve the higher sovereignty of God.

Holding to such views the duty devolving upon him was plain: to assist the magistrates in checking the dangerous drift towards a democratic organization of church and state, which the new environment encouraged; and to defend the theocratic ideal against all critics. The first he sought to accomplish by creating a more perfect theocratic machinery. As we catch glimpses of him moving tactfully back and forth through the brisk little scenes, he seems always to have a finger in some magisterial affair. Three months after his arrival in Boston he preached a sermon, the purport of which Winthrop noted in his Journal:

After much deliberation and serious advice the Lord directed the teacher Mr. Cotton, to make clear by the scripture, that the minister’s maintenance, as well as all other charges of the church, should be defrayed out of a stock, or treasury, which was to be raised out of the weekly contribution: which accordingly was agreed upon. 

In his first election sermon, preached in the May following, he joined issue with the democratic spirit of the deputies, by supporting a principle which was flagrantly oligarchical:

That a magistrate ought not to be turned into the condition of a private man without just cause, & to be publicly convict, no more than the magistrates may turn a private man out of his freehold, etc., without like public trial, etc. 

Unrebuffed by the rejection of this curious doctrine of the freehold tenure of magistrates, Cotton made a more ambitious attempt to theocratize the state, when at the October court of 1656, in response to the persistent pressure for a fundamental law, he presented his code for adoption by the commonwealth, the scriptural origin of which is revealed in the title, "Model of Moses his Judiciales." Cotton Mather tells of this venture in constitution making, in the following glowing but inaccurate words:

On Mr. Cotton’s arrival he found the whole country in a perplexed & a divided state, as to their civil constitution . . . It was then requested of Mr. Cotton that he would, from the laws wherewith God governed his ancient people, form an abstract of such as were of a moral and a lasting equity; which he performed as acceptably as judiciously. But inasmuch as very much of an Athenian democracy was in the mould of the government, by the royal charter . . . Mr. Cotton effectually recommended it unto them that none should be electors, nor elected therein, except such as were visible subjects of our Lord Jesus Christ, personally confederated in our churches. In these, and many other ways, he propounded unto them an endeavour after a theocracy, as near as might be, to that which was the glory of Israel, the “peculiar people.”

Cotton’s code was rejected in favor of one, somewhat less Hebraic, prepared by Nathaniel Ward, but he continued to be the chief guide and mentor to the magistrates in political as well as theological matters, and his theocratic philosophy determined in large measure the policy of the oligarchy. To found an Hebraic state in which political rights should be subordinate to religious conformity, in which the magistrates should be chosen from a narrow group, with authority beyond the reach of the popular will, and with the ministers serving as court of last resort to interpret the divine law to the citizen-subjects of Jehovah—this was the great ambition of John Cotton; and the untiring zeal and learned scriptural authority which he dedicated to that ambition justify us in regarding him as the greatest of the New England theocrats. In the categories of the Puritan philosophy of ethical stewardship there was no recognition of the profane doctrine of natural rights. Freedom was the prerogative of righteousness; the well-being of society required that the sinner should remain subject to the Saint. Nowhere does he lay down this principle more unmistakably than in an important state paper:


Magnalia, Vol. I, p. 265. Compare with this Cotton’s own words: “The law, which your Lordship instancest (in that none shall be chosen to magistracy amongst us, but a church member) was made and enacted before I came into the country; but I have hitherto wanted sufficient light to plead against it” (Hutchinson, History of Massachusetts Bay Colony, Vol. I, p. 498).
Now if it be a divine truth, that none are to be trusted with public permanent authority but godly men, who are fit materials for church membership, then from the same grounds it will appear, that none are so fit to be trusted with the liberties of the commonwealth as church members. For, the liberties of this commonwealth are such, as require men of faithful integrity to God and the state, to preserve the same. Now these liberties are such as carry along much power with them, either to establish or subvert the commonwealth, and therewith the church, which power, if he be committed to men according to their godliness, then, in case worldly men should prove the major part, as soon as they might do, they would readily set over us magistrates like themselves, such as might turn the edge of all authority and laws against the church and the members thereof, the maintenance of whose peace is the chief end which God aimed at in the institution of magistracy:5

This, quite evidently, is the negation of democracy, and it has been freely charged against his reputation by later critics. But in fairness it must be added, that it is equally the negation of the principle of hereditary aristocracy; and to reject the latter was a severer test of his integrity than to deny the former. He wanted neither a democracy nor an aristocracy to control the church-state. “Hereditary honors both nature and scripture doth acknowledge,” he argued cautiously in reply to “Certain Proposals made by Lord Say, Lord Brooke, and other Persons of quality, as conditions of their removing to New-England.” “Two distinct ranks we willingly acknowledge... the one of them called Princes, or Nobles, or Elders (amongst whom gentlemen have their place), the other the people.” To the former he willingly accorded the right of rulership so long as they were of approved godliness, faithful to their stewardship. But “if God should not delight to furnish some of their posterity with gifts fit for magistracy, we should expose them rather to reproach and prejudice, and the commonwealth with them, than exalt them to honor, if we should call them forth, when God doth not, to public authority.” It must be set down in John Cotton’s accounts that he discouraged the transplanting of English aristocracy to the soil of Massachusetts.

There remains to consider how he conducted himself in another weighty matter that was laid upon his shoulders—the defense of the New England polity against old-world critics. Congregationalism had been somewhat caustically handled by the English


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Presbyterians, as smacking both of democracy and Separatism, and John Cotton was called to justify to them the apparent innovations. His most notable work in this field was his celebrated volume, The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared, a treatise crammed, in the language of a contemporary admirer, with “most practical Soul-searching, Soul-saving, and Soul-solacing Divinitie”; “not Magisterially laid down, but friendly debated by Scripture, and argumentatively disputed out to the utmost inch of Ground.” Into the subtleties of this learned work we need not enter; its main thesis alone need detain us, and that thesis was an implied denial of the democratic tendencies of the “New England way.” Cotton was greatly concerned over the charge of Joseph Baille, a vigorous Scotch Presbyterian, that Congregationalism was only a different form of lower-class Brownism, “a native branch of Anabaptism”; and that in resting ecclesiastical sovereignty upon “the particular, visible Church of the Congregation,” it was Separatist in principle as well as in practice. The charge was true, but John Cotton was too thoroughly a Jacobean gentleman to concede it; dishonor would come upon the New England churches, he believed, if it were conceded. So he was driven to casuistry: “Nomarvall, if Independents take it ill to be called Brownists... He separated from Churches and Saints: we, only from the world, and that which is of the world”; and then to a categorical denial, “for New England there is no such church of the Separation at all that I know of.” From this it was a natural step to a downright rejection of the democratic principle of Congregationalism:

Neither is it the Scope of my whole Book, to give the people a share in the Government of the Church. Nay, further, there be that blame the Book for the other Extreme, That it placeth the Government of the Church not at all in the hands of the People, but of the Presbytery.8

The same note of disingenuous casuistry runs through his well-known controversy with Roger Williams over the question of toleration. In seeking to parry the thrust that the Saints, after quitting England to escape persecution, had themselves turned persecutors, he argued: “There is a vast difference between men’s inventions and God’s institutions; we fled from men’s inventions, to which we else should have been compelled; we compel none to men’s inventions.” From which it followed, that “if the worship

8 Ibid., Part II, p. 15.
be lawful in itself, the magistrate compelling him to come to it, compelleth him not to sin, but the sin is in his own will that needs to be compelled to a Christian duty." The brethren of Massachusetts were not singular in believing that they were very near to God and privy to His will; nor were the dissenters to their policy singular in their skepticism concerning such infallibility; and when skepticism blows its cold breath upon it, the logic of John Cotton turns to ashes. Not freedom to follow the ways of sin, but freedom to follow the law of God as he expounded that law—such was Cotton's restriction upon the "natural liberties" of the subject of Jehovah. Let there be freedom of conscience if it be under no error, but not otherwise; for if freedom be permitted to sinful error, how shall the will of God and John Cotton prevail upon earth?

After the battle has been fought and lost it is easy to see the strategic mistakes; but it is not so easy to keep one's head in the thick of the struggle. As John Cotton looked overseas at the social revolution then threatening to submerge, not only Presbyterianism, but the very social order in which he had been nurtured; as he considered the logical implications of the strange, heretical doctrines that were bandied about in pamphlet and sermon, he was put almost in a panic. The solid foundations of church and state were threatened by mischievous men, not only in England but in the new Canaan which had cost so much in prayer and sacrifice; should he keep silent while, in the name of toleration, the gunpowder was being put in place for the work of destruction? Even today we can feel the anxious concern of John Cotton's mind in such a vibrant passage as this:

I confess we. . . have cause to admire, and adore the wise, and dreadfull Justice of God herein, That seeing Mr. Williams hath been now as a branch cut off from the Church of Salem these many yeares, he should bring forth no spiritual good fruit: and that in such a season, when the Spirit of Error is let loose to deceive so many thousand soules of our English Nation: So that now their hearts are become as Tinder, ready to catch and kindle at every sparke of false light. Even so, O Father, because thy good pleasure is such, to let loose this Spirit of Error in the mouth of this Backslider, in the very houre and power of darknesse: for these are the dayes of vengeance: when the Antinomians deny the whole law; the Anti-sabbatarians deny the Morality of the fourth Commandement; the Papists deny the Negative part of the second Commandement. It is a

How easy it is for good men, in presence of the new and strange, to draw back in timid reaction; and failing to understand, or fearing for their prestige, to charge upon the new and strange a host of evils that exist only in their panic imaginations! In this great matter of toleration of conscience, it is quite clear today that the eyes of the troubled theocrat, "so piercing and heavenly (in other and precious Truths of God)—as Roger Williams acknowledged—were for the moment sadly "over-clouded and bloud shuts." For this the age was more to blame than the man. It was no fault of John Cotton's that he was the child of a generation reared under the shadow of absolutism, fearful of underling aggression, unable to comprehend the excellence inhering in the democratic faith. He reasoned according to his light; and if he rather too easily persuaded himself that the light which shined to him was the single divine light, he proved himself thereby an orthodox Puritan if not a catholic thinker. It is a pity that the priest in his later years overcame the intellectual, nevertheless the epitaph carved on his headstone does no violence to truth:

Johannes Cottonus
Cujus Ultima Laus est,
Quod fuerit inter Non-Anglos Primus.

To have been accounted by his fellows first among the notable company of Puritan emigrants was no slight testimony to the sterling qualities of Master John Cotton.


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II

JOHN WINTHROP
Magistrate

If John Cotton embodied the ideal and polity of the theocratic ministry, John Winthrop represented the ideal and polity of the theocratic magistracy. Rulership in the new church-state, while nominally the function of lay officers, in reality was quite as much ecclesiastical as political. The civil authorities were chosen by a narrow body of orthodox electors with a single view to theocratic ends. To the traditional conception of magistracy, in which the gentlemen of the Migration had been reared, was now added a special function, the care of the church, "the maintenance of whose peace," John Cotton asserted, "is the chief end which God aimed at in the institution of magistracy." The career of John Winthrop in Massachusetts must be judged, therefore, from this twofold point of view. He was not exclusively, or chiefly, a civil governor, but a magistrate-elder; and his political conduct was determined by this dual character of his office. Unless one keeps in mind the theocratic framework of the early Massachusetts commonwealth, one cannot understand the limitations of his authority, or judge his conduct intelligently.

John Winthrop was a skillful executive upon whose shoulders largely rested the success or failure of the undertaking during the difficult early years. But he was very much more than that; he was a Puritan steward of temporal affairs, who accepted his stewardship as a sacred duty lying upon his conscience. A cultivated gentleman, "brought he among booke & learned men," with a tender and sympathetic nature—inclining overmuch to mildness, as he confessed apologetically—by every right he belongs with that notable group of Puritans, with Eliot and Vane and Hutchinson and Milton, in whom the moral earnestness of Hebraism was tempered to humaner issues by a generous culture. There was in him not a little fruitful sap of Elizabethan poetry to quicken his thought, lifting him out of the petty world of Jacobean lawyer and landed gentleman, and opening his eyes to a vision of the future significance of the great venture to which he dedicated his later years. Grave and dignified, he looks out at us from his portrait with a certain stoic calm not untouched with sadness, as if this life had proved a serious business, filled with responsibilities and weighty matters, and darkened by sorrow and disappointment. The pagan joie de vivre of Elizabethan times is gone, and in its stead is a serious intelligence that must grapple with realities and shape them to its will.

He had lived amply in England before his removal, with much that was feudal lingering in the habits of his patriarchal household; and in the little village of Boston he kept twenty male servants, some of them heads of families. A decay of fortune had come upon him during his last years on the family estate, and the hope of recouping his losses may have been an additional reason for venturing to remove to the new world. In his Considerations for J. W., he explains that "he cannot live in the same place and calling (as before) and so, if he should refuse this opportunity, that talent which God hath bestowed upon him for publick service were like to be buried." Something to the same purpose is suggested in another passage, which touches upon the economic disturbances of the time, with the attendant extravagance and ostentation of the new rich:

This Land growes weary of her Inhabitants. . . . We are goune to that height of Intemperance in all excess of Riot, as noe man's estate allmost will suffice to keepe saile with his aequall. . . . The fountains of Learning & Religion are soo corrupted as—men straine at knatts & swallowe camells, use all severitie for mainetaynce of cappe & other accomplyments, but suffer all ruffianlike fashions & disorder to passe uncontrolled.11

Writing to his wife Margaret in 1629, he gave expression to apprehensions that were very likely quickened by his own failure to keep pace with his neighbors:

My dear wife, I am very persuaded, God will bring some heavy affliction upon this lande & that speedily. . . . The Lorde hath admonished, threatened, corrected, & astonished us, yet we grew worse & worse, so as his Spirit will not always strive with us, we must needs give way to his furye at last.12

But material considerations alone scarcely suffice to explain the motives of one who wrote: "It were happy for many if their parents had left them only such a legacy as our modern spirit of poetry makes his motto, Ut nec habeant, nec cureant, nec current."13

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Such consolation—that the Christian should possess nothing, desire nothing, trouble about nothing—may have been only the refuge of the stoic from the impending loss of material possessions; but the conscious discipline in ascetic Hebraism which was to change the Jacobean gentleman into a militant Puritan had already created a temper to which such stoic abnegation must appeal. Winthrop's diary, running from his fourteenth to his thirty-second year, is a homely record in self-discipline, not unlike Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. It is introspective and tediously moralizing, but it reveals how long and arduous was the training before he felt confident that he was "improved in all the points of experimental Godliness."

But Winthrop was the child of a great age before he was born into the fellowship of the Saints; and when we come upon the natural man beneath the theological wrappings, we discover a many-sided, rich and sympathetic human nature. He had gone to school to the English Bible, and the noble Hebrew poetry stirred the poetic imagination that was his Elizabethan birthright. Like so many of his fellow Puritans he delighted in the Book of Canticles, and the rich oriental imagery flowed easily from his pen. In one of his last letters before he quitted the old home, he took leave of a friend in these words:

> It is time to conclude, but I know not how to leave you, yet since I must, I will put my beloved into his arms, who loves him best, & a faithful keeper of all that is committed to him. Now, Thou, the hope of Israel, and the sure help of all that come to thee, knit the hearts of thy servants to thyself in faith and purity. Draw us with the sweetness of thine odours, that we may run after thee—Allure us, and speak kindly to thy servants, that thou mayest possess us as thine own, in the kindness of youth, and the love of marriage—Seal us up, by that holy spirit of promise, that we may not fear to trust in thee—Carry us into thy garden, that we may eat and be filled with those pleasures, which the world knows not—Let us hear that sweet voice of thine, my love, my dove, my undefiled—Spread thy skirt over us, and cover our deformity—Make us sick with thy love—Let us sleep in thine arms, and awake in thy kingdom. The souls of thy servants, thus united to thee, make us one in the bonds of brotherly affection—let not distance weaken it, nor time waste it, nor changes dissolve it, nor self-love eat it out; but when all means of other communion shall fail, let us delight to pray for each other; and so let thy unworthy servant prosper in the love of his friends, as he truly loves thy good servants . . . and wishes true happiness to and to all theirs—Amen.  

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When his heart was touched Winthrop's tenderness flowed out in a wealth of affectionate sympathy, that lends a rich and lovely cadence to his English prose. To a sister who had suffered the loss of her husband, he wrote:

> Go on cheerfully (my good sister), let experience add more confidence still to your patience. Peace shall come. There will be a bed to rest in, large and easy enough for you both. It is preparing in the lodging appointed for you in your Father's house. He that vouchsafer to wipe the sweat from his disciple's feet, will not disdain to wipe the tears from those tender affectionate eyes. Because you have been one of his mourners in the house of tribulation, you shall drink of the cup of joy, and be clothed with the garments of gladness, in the kingdom of his glory. The former things, and evil, will soon be passed; but the good to come shall neither end nor change.

At another time, writing to his son the death of his father, Adam Winthrop, he said:

> He hath finished his course; and is gathered to his people in peace, as the ripe corn into the barn. He thought long for the day of his dissolution and welcomed it most gladly. Thus is he gone before; and we must go after in our time: This advantage he hath of us—he shall not see the evil which we may meet with ere we go hence. Happy those who stand in good terms with God and their own conscience: they shall not fear evil tidings; and in all changes they shall be the same.

A lovable man was John Winthrop, richly endowed and admirably disciplined, gracious in manner, persuasive in speech, generous in action—in all England there could scarcely have been found a leader better equipped for the work in hand, when at the age of forty-three he became head of the emigrant church-state, which by reason of its charter and the removal of the corporation to New England, was become effectively an independent commonwealth, free to shape its domestic polity as seemed best. During the score of years that remained to him, he was the guiding spirit of the Massachusetts settlements, impressing his will upon others by sheer force of character. It was inevitable that in so strange and unprecedented an experiment, undertaken in an environment so unfamiliar, serious and often bitter divisions would arise touching the fundamental principles of government. In the frequent discussions Winthrop bore a leading part; he marshaled his arguments with the skill of a lawyer; he separated the broad principle
from the special circumstance; and in the end he usually carried
the assent of his fellow counselors to his proposals. His social
and political philosophy, in consequence, greatly influenced the
development of Massachusetts Bay during the early years when
its institutions and polity were taking shape, and throws much
light on the spirit and purpose of that development.

Winthrop's political bias was unconsciously shaped by his
experience, of which the determining fact was the principle and
practice of Jacobean magistracy. As an English squire he had
long served as magistrate, and this experience he brought to New
England as a legacy from an autocratic past. In that old world
the magistrate exercised a patriarchal police power well-nigh
absolute, sanctioned by ancient custom, upheld by the church,
and acquiesced in by subjects well trained in subordination.
Transported to New England and adapted to theocratic ends, the
principle of magistracy was both augmented in power and ennobled
in conception. To the police power over things temporal was
added a police power over things spiritual. In the Bible common-
wealth the legislative function was regarded as of minor im-
portance. The law being already set down in the Scriptures, the chief
authority in the commonwealth naturally rested with the magis-
trates who were responsible for its strict fulfillment. As stewards
intrusted with a divine stewardship, they exercised absolute legis-
latative and judicial powers; in their councils the ministers were
summoned to participate, but no others. It was the duty of the
magistrates to debate and determine, and the duty of the people to obey.

To a modern this is no other than sheer absolutism, but it was
deeply embedded in Calvinistic theory and practice, and was
justified by the Puritan principle of special talents. God calls
to the post of duty those best fitted to serve. As a devout follower
of Calvin, Winthrop must have often pondered upon the passages
in the Institutes which set forth the nature of magistracy and the
duties of the magistrate, and in particular this: "If they remember
that they are the vicegerents of God, it behooves them to watch
with all care, diligence, and industry, that they may exhibit a
kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness,
benevolence, and justice." 16 To a devout Jacobean like Winthrop,
this patriarchal conception of stewardship would appear as a

16 Book IV, Chapter XX, Paragraph 6.

noble ideal, worthy of a Christian. The potential absolutism
implied would scarcely trouble one who had grown up in a society
where absolute authority was interwoven with everyday life.
The Christian magistrate was still a magistrate, but with the
great difference that his hands must be kept clean and his con-
science clear. This nobler spirit of Calvinistic stewardship is
revealed in Winthrop's Modell of Christian Charity, written on
shipboard during the voyage out. A sense of profound respon-
sibility devolving upon the leaders imparts dignity to the thought:
they must bear and forbear, knitting themselves together in a
common purpose, and seeing that "the care of the public" should
"oversway all private interests." And this "care of the public,"
remained in theory if not always in practice, the guiding principle
of Winthrop's official activities.

The bearing of this doctrine of magistracy upon the early move-
ment of democracy in Massachusetts is not far to seek. If magis-
tracy was a duty laid upon those of fit talents, they would serve
God ill who should turn a willing ear to popular protests against
magisterial policy. On this point Winthrop was adamant. He
would have no meddling on the part of those who had not been
called. When it was attempted to bring him to account before the
congregation for an unpopular judicial decision, he denied the
competency of the congregation in such matters, and then as he
often did in cases of doubt, he made a "little book" in which he elaborated
the thesis, "That a Church hath not Power to call any
Civil Magistrate to give Account of his Juditiall proceedings in
any Court of Civill Justice: and what the Church may doe in
such Causes." 17 The shoemaker should stick to his last, Winthrop
believed, and he would suffer no interference by the congregation
with his duties as magistrate. On another occasion when difficulti-
ies had arisen in certain negotiations with the Connecticut settle-
ments, he noted in his journal:

These and the like miscarriages in point of correspondency were con-
ceived to arise from these two errors in their government: 1. They chose
divers scorns men, who had no learning nor judgment which might fit
them for those affairs, though otherwise men holy and religious. 2. By
occasion hereof, the main burden for managing of state business fell upon
one or other of their ministers, (as the phrase and style of these letters will
clearly discover), who, though they were men of singular wisdom and

godliness, yet stepping out of their course, their actions wanted that blessing which otherwise might have been expected.\textsuperscript{14}

The political philosophy which underlay Winthrop’s theory and practice of magistracy, was a Puritan modification of the commonly accepted English theory of a “mixt aristocratie.” He had been trained in the law but was little given to speculative thought. There is evidence that he read somewhat in the fast accumulating political literature of the times, but little indication that his reading modified his theory or influenced his conduct. He was an administrator rather than a philosopher, and from the fragmentary records that have survived it is difficult to piece together a consistent political theory. As a magistrate under the dominance of the English Common Law, he seems to have accepted the constitutional theory of Coke, who sought to interpose the customary and ancient law of the land between the growing absolutism of the Crown, and the increasing importance of the Commons, with sovereignty inhering in the judiciary. As a Puritan, however, he superimposed the law of Moses on the law of the land, and by ignoring the King on the one hand, and denying power to the representatives of the people on the other, he created the framework of a magisterial theocracy.

The two chief sources to which we must turn for his political views, in addition to his letters and journals, are: \textit{A Replye to the Answ: Made to the Discourse about the Neg: Vote, and Arbitrary Governmt Described: of the Governmt of the Massachusetts Vindicated from that Aspersion}, both of which have been preserved in the form of heads of argument.\textsuperscript{15} The principle that underlies these skeleton arguments is the theory of a state held static by exact constitutional arrangements. King and people represent the great supplementary functions of constitutional government, sovereignty and liberty; both are necessary in a well ordered society, and neither may encroach upon the other. This Winthrop regarded as the vital principle of the English constitution, which had been embodied in the government of Massachusetts.

\textit{The Government of the Massachusetts consists of Magistrates & Freemen: in the one is placed the Auth’ye, in the other the Lib’ye of the Com: W: either hath power to Acte, both alone, & both together, yet by a distinct power, the one of Lib’ye, the other of Auth’ye: the Freemen}.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. II, p. 236.
\textsuperscript{15} Both are given in the appendix to Vol. II of the \textit{Life and Letters}.

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Acte alone in all occurrences out of Court: & both Acte together in the Gen’l Court: yet all limited by certaine Rules, bothe in the greater & smaller affaires: so as the Governmt is Regular in a mixt Aristocratie, & no wayes Arbitrary.\textsuperscript{20}

In settled times and places this nice balance between sovereignty and liberty is maintained by use and wont; but in periods of disturbance, such as then existed in England, and in new experiments, such as marked the setting up of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, there was certain to be much pulling and straining between these antagonistic principles; and his refusal to accept this fact, and his stubborn insistence on transferring to New England the old English static order, brought on Winthrop’s head many of the difficulties that greatly troubled his administration. Both in the old world and the new, the principle of liberty was encroaching on feudal authority. With the rise of the middle class, many Englishmen, and particularly the colonial New Englanders, were fast outgrowing the old paternalisms, and coming to regard them as no other than tyranny. The freemen of the Massachusetts towns were restive under the strict rule of the magistrate-elders, and a growing party of democratic deputies was eager to try its hand at government. All such democratic pretensions Winthrop held in contempt, although he was at pains to deny the arbitrary nature of magisterial rule.

Some of the deputies had seriously conceived, that the magistrates affected an arbitrary government. . . . For prevention whereof they judged it not unlawful to use even extrema remedia, as if salus populi had been now the transcendent rule to walk by, and that magistracy must be no other, in effect, than a ministerial office, and all authority, both legislative, consultative, and judicial, must be exercised by the people in their body representative.\textsuperscript{21}

If government were regular it could not be arbitrary—this was Winthrop’s brief reply to the deputies. In his arguments he deliberately avoided the difficult question of sovereignty; in part, no doubt, because of the delicate situation resulting from fear of royal interference, but chiefly because he was unwilling to bring into jeopardy the unlimited powers of magistracy. That he denied sovereignty to the people is abundantly clear from his actions, as well as from specific comment. By the law of the corporation, namely, the written terms of the charter, authority

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. II, p. 454.
was vested in a limited body of freemen; and he saw no reason in expediency or otherwise to extend that authority. Thus he argued, "it is well proved & concluded by a late Juditious writer, in a booke newly come over, intituled an Answ. to Dr Fern, that though all Lawes, that are sup'rtive, may be altered by the representative bodye of the Comw: yet they have no power to alter anythinge w'ch is fundamental." 22 What delimitations were to be drawn between "superstructure" and "fundamental," he was not careful to make clear; but it is certain that he regarded as fundamental not only the charter terms and the British constitution but the will of God. Doubtful as this last may seem to students of political science, and difficult to determine, it was neither doubtful nor difficult to Winthrop and his fellow magistrates and ministers. The Mosaic law was specific. Back of the citizen-legislator was the subject of Jehovah, and he was politically free only to do the will of God. There must be divine sanction for all human law; lacking such sanction all majority votes and legislative enactments were null and void. Sovereignty inheres finally in God, and it is by his fundamental law that all superstructural laws and institutions must be judged.

In theocratic philosophy, therefore, the magistrate became no other than God's vicegerent, with authority beyond popular limitation or control. No English squire presumed to exercise the magisterial powers which Winthrop and his associates quietly usurped. Among other innovations they early claimed the right of veto on the acts of the deputies, and in reply to the dissatisfaction voiced at such arbitrary encroachment, Winthrop argued that the magisterial veto was no infringement on the liberties of the people, but was a means to "preserve them, if by any occasion they should be in danger: I cannot liken it better to anything than the brake of a windmill: w'ch hathe no power, to move the runninge worke: but it is of speciall use, to stoppe any violent motion, w'ch in some extraordinary tempest might endanger the wholl fabricke." 23 The convenient weapon of divine sanction Winthrop did not scruple to use at need. Thus when a petition was presented for the repeal of a law which arbitrarily decreased the number of deputies, he denied the lawfulness of the procedure:


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When the people have chosen men to be their rulers, now to combine together . . . in a public petition to have an order repealed . . . savors of resisting an ordinance of God. For the people, having deputed others, have no right to make or alter laws themselves, but are to be subject. 24 The old English right of petition, in short, was not a right in theocratic Massachusetts, and any unauthorized joining together of citizens for political purposes was a conspiracy against the will of God. The practical result of this doctrine of magisterial viceroyalty was that a small group of freemen set up an unlimited oligarchy over some four or five thousand of their fellow Englishmen, even going so far as to advance the novel doctrine of a freehold tenure of power.

Winthrop's extreme jealousy of popular power cannot be explained away by the doctrine of stewardship. Hooker of Hartford had no such distrust of the people, but he was not a gentleman, like Winthrop, and had not grown up with an aristocratic contempt for democracy. The preposterousness of democratic aspiration was a stock jest among English gentlemen, and in seeking to refute the arguments of the deputies for greater popular power Winthrop did little more than give a Hebraic twist to his aristocratic prejudices:

Where the chief Ordinary power & administration thereof is in the people, there is a Democracie . . . the Deputies are the Democraticall p'te of o'r Governm't. Now if we should change from a mixt Aristocratie to a meere Democracie: first we should have no warr't in scripture for it: there was no such Governm't in Israel. 25: we should hereby voluntarily abuse o'reselfes, & deprive o'reselfes of that dignity, w'ch is a manifest breach of the 5th Com't: for a Democracie is, among most Civill nations accounted the meanest & worst of all forms of Governm't: & therefore in writers, it is branded w'th Reproachfull Epithets as Bellua multorii capitii, a monster, &c: & Histories doe recorde, that it hath been allwayes of least continuance & fullest of trouble. 26

In an often quoted letter to Thomas Hooker, then engaged in erecting a democratic commonwealth in Connecticut, Winthrop diplomatically moderated his terms and put the aristocratic doctrine in more attractive form. "I expostulated about the unwarrantableness & unsafeness of referring all matter of counsel or judicature to the body of the people, quia the best is always the least, & of that best part the wiser part is always the lesser." 27

But he must have agreed heartily with another English gentleman, who writing to Winthrop under date of July 9, 1640, remarked pithily:

I say agayne no wise man shoule be soe fowlish as to live whear every man is master, & masters must not correct theyr servants: Where wise men propound &fooles determine, as it was sayde of the cities of Greece.

As the responsible steward of God’s plan for New England, Winthrop would not flatter the people by pretending to the doctrine of *vox populi, vox dei*. The multitude he regarded as factious, overswayed by expediency and self-interest, incapable of governing wisely. Law, by its nature, was ethical, the expression of God’s absolute and just will; and this law, the magistrates were called of God to enforce.

From this conception of the absolute nature of law, came the famous discussion of liberty and authority, known as the “little speech,” which is the most highly praised of Winthrop’s utterances. In a certain police-court matter that had loosed the class prejudices of all parties, he had held against the popular feeling, and was impeached before the general court. Upon his acquittal he rose and addressed the court in words which he afterwards set down in his journal. No other episode in his varied career reveals so well the admirable poise of the man—the dignity, the self-control, the fair-mindedness, despite an attack that hurt him to the quick.

For the other point concerning liberty, I observe a great mistake in the country about that. There is a twofold liberty, natural (I mean as our nature is now corrupt) and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evile, and in time to be worse than brute beasts: *omnes rumus licentia deterioris*. This is that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast, which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it. The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal; and it may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man, in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions amongst men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard (not only of your goods,

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**Letter of Lord Say and Sele, in ibid., Vol. II, p. 426.**

authority to set up any other exercise beside what authority hath already set up."

In this arbitrary judgment of Winthrop's—the natural fruit of the tree of theocratic stewardship—the "little speech" discovers its suitable commentary. Urged on by his bigoted associates, the kind-hearted governor descended to their level, and began the unhappy business of playing the tyrant under pretense of scourging God's enemies. The lords-brethren served notice upon all dissenters that henceforth there must be no dissent in New England. The admirable courage of Mistress Hutchinson availed no more against the magisterial interpretation of the good, just, and honest, than the boldness of Roger Williams before her; or later, the zeal of the Baptists who were sent away by Endicott; or later still, the piety of the Quakers, who were whipped at the cart-tail and hanged, men and women both. The policy of the political stewardship of the best and wisest never had fuller trial, with abler or more conscientious agents, than in Massachusetts Bay; and its failure was complete. Such progress as Massachusetts made towards freedom and tolerance was gained in the teeth of theocratic opposition; New England democracy owes no debt to her godly magnates.

Bred up in a half-feudal world, the leaders of the Migration remained patriarchal in their social philosophy, unable to adapt old prejudices to new conditions. Human motives are curiously mixed, human actions rarely consistent; and if the shortcomings of John Winthrop show blacker by contrast with the excellence of the ideal which he professed, the fault must be charged against his time and associates and not against his manly, generous nature. Most English gentlemen of his day were steeped in a somnolent Toryism, yet he earnestly desired to be a faithful steward of church and state. If as a gentleman he held firmly to the privilege of rulership, as a Christian he endeavored to rule honorably and in the fear of the Lord. If he followed the beaten path and tried to shape the great experiment by the traditional principles of his class; if his zeal at times led him into indisputable tyrannies; it was because he was led away from the light, not because he sought selfish ends. Godliness has its own special temptations, and it would be ungenerous to bear ill-will against so lovable a man.

CHAPTER IV
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDEPENDENCY

Other ideals than those of Winthrop and Cotton, fruitful or feculent according to the special bias of whoever judges them, came out of England in the teeming days of the Puritan revolution to agitate the little settlements. A Hebraized theocracy could not satisfy the aspirations of advanced English liberals who were exploring all the avenues to freedom, and who, now that the old feudal bonds were loosening, were projecting a more generous basis for the reorganization of society. The democratic elements were beginning to make their voices heard in England; the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was bearing fruit in the minds of obscure Independents; and the eventual outcome would be the shouldering aside of a snug Presbyterian order, and the clarification of a program for a democratic commonwealth. In those excellent words commonweal and commonwealth—words much on men's tongues in the creative later years of the Puritan revolution—was fittingly summed up the political ideal of Independence. English liberalism had come to believe that social conformity, established in the practice of coercion, with its monarchical state and hierarchical church, must give way to an order founded in good will, that conceived of the political state as a public-service corporation, concerned solely with the res publica, or public thing, careful of the well-being of all, allowing special rights or grants to none. The state, it was coming to be argued freely, rightly understood, was no other than society organized to further the great end of the commonweal; no longer must it remain a private preserve for gentlemen to hunt over.

But before that should come about a great battle must be fought, in New England as well as in old England. The principle of individual freedom must first be established securely in the public mind, and to that business the party of Independents devoted its energies. In the theory and practice of Independence two fundamental rights were implied: the right of the individual
to determine his own belief, uncoerced by external authority; and the right to join freely with his fellows in the institutional expression and spread of such belief. In order to realize the first, it was a necessary preliminary to establish the right of free inquiry on a firm constitutional basis—the principle that the state shall safeguard the citizen in the exercise of such right, and not hinder or thwart him; and in order to realize the second, it was necessary to establish in social practice a much more fiercely disputed principle, namely, the right to proselytize, to spread one’s views freely, to endeavor to make them prevail over contrary views. Certainly neither right would be freely granted; they must be won in the teeth of supposedly divine sanctions to conformity. However intimately the two are related, it is over the second that the long fierce battle has been waged in modern history. Liberalism faces no severer test than in its attitude towards the right of unpopular minority propaganda. The broad principle of toleration of differences, so vital to a democratic society, searches out and lays bare every insincerity of liberal professions. The will to power is so universal in appeal, it is so quick to attack every threatening nonconformity, that no other social right has traveled so arduous a road, or lags so far in the rear of the liberal advance. The principle of religious toleration that was involved in the movement of Independency was the ecclesiastical form of a struggle, which, shifting later to the field of politics and then to economics, is still raging about us. The long battle is still far from being won. In few countries today do more than a small minority regard the principle of toleration otherwise than as a social luxury to be indulged in only when times are settled.

It was in the nature of things that a clash should soon come in Massachusetts Bay. There Independency would certainly be looked upon as no better than a weed from the devil’s wilderness, and in the name of God and the theocracy it would be trampled under foot. Liberalism and the Cambridge Platform would no more mix than oil and water. But the more immediate and narrower question of religious toleration was only incidental to the broader divergencies that lay in antagonistic principles of church and state, and that brought on the clash. A general engagement was preparing between the principles of Presbyterianism and Independency, and the real issue at stake was the future form of society in New England—whether it was to be aristocratic or democratic. The free environment was a strong stimulus to idealists who looked upon the new field as a heaven-sent opportunity for their own special Utopias to take root, and who would bitterly resent any intrusion by a rival. Commonwealth building is a great adventure, and the Independents with their carefully elaborated plans would not sit quietly by and permit the Saints to preempt the land for their inhospitable theocracy without a struggle. In such a contest the more liberal party was fortunate in its leaders. Thomas Hooker and Roger Williams were men of creative ability, of inflexible purpose, of fine idealism, the ablest amongst the entire group of Puritan immigrants, in whom the great principles of Independency found worthy stewards; and the long struggle they carried on, each in his own way, with the theocratic leaders of Massachusetts was to affect profoundly the later development of New England. In the end the Presbyterianism of Boston was to surrender to the Congregationalism of Hartford. From Connecticut and Rhode Island, it must be recalled, rather than from the Bay colony, came those democratic principles and institutions that were to spread widely in later years, and create the New England that after generations have liked to remember.

II

THOMAS HOOKER
Puritan Liberal

Among the Englishmen who came to Massachusetts were some to whom the “New England way” seemed to promise a democratic organization of the church, and who looked with disapproval upon the Presbyterizing policy of the oligarchy. Of this number the congregations of Newtow, Dorchester, and Watertown were noteworthy for the quiet determination with which they seceded from the theocratic commonwealth, and set up for themselves in the Connecticut wilderness. Their leaders were liberals who believed that everything should be done decently and in order, but who were determined that the outcome of such decent orderliness should be a free church in a free state; and so while Roger Williams was engaged in erecting the democracy of Rhode Island, Thomas Hooker was as busily engaged in erecting the democracy of Hartford.
CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDEPENDENCY

846 pounds, 15 shillings, exclusive of his books, more than half of which modest sum was represented by the Hartford homestead.\(^1\)

Which scanty information is sufficient to tell us that Thomas Hooker was a simple man in worldly ambitions as well as in origin, not given to climbing or feathering his own nest, with none of the great associates or aristocratic ties of Winthrop and Ward and Cotton, a churchman more inclined to the ways of Independency than to Presbyterianism.

In his professional work he was rather the pastor than the teacher, caring more for experimental religion than for theological disputation. He was an embodiment of the moral fervor of the Reformation that protested against the scandal of “dumb priests.” He seems to have been the most stimulating preacher of early New England, and it was as a lecturer that he had made a name for himself before he was driven from his English charge by Laud. The lecturer was a characteristic Puritan innovation, much hated by the Anglicans. Translated into a modern equivalent, it meant an agitator who used the pulpit to spread the new gospel of free judgment in religious matters, and other gospels displeasing to absolutism. That such men were not liked by Charles and his Archbishop goes without saying; they were “the people’s creatures”—a certain Tory churchman complained to the King—and “blew the bellows of their sedition.” Such being the case it seemed but common prudence to muzzle them, and as early as 1622 James laid down an orthodox program, forbidding any of lesser rank than “a bishop or dean [to] presume to preach in any popular auditory on the deep points of predestination, election, reprobation, or of the universality, efficacy, irresistibility of God’s grace,” and restricting Sunday afternoon sermons to such innocuous themes as the “Catechism, Creed, or Ten Commandments.”\(^2\) It was an endeavor to stop men’s thinking by putting the crown of martyrdom on the lovers of truth. To forbid the Puritan to talk of such things, to shut up the Word of God from him, was to blow the bellows of his sedition indeed.

That Thomas Hooker was not a man to be muzzled must have been clear to all who knew his stubborn English will. In his homely vigor he was not unlike Hugh Latimer, direct and vigorous in speech and action, not easily turned aside from the path of duty,

\(^1\) See Walker, *Thomas Hooker, Preacher, Founder, Democrat.*

possessing much of the old bishop’s courage in dealing with great men and their follies. He knew a fool and a tyrant in high places, and was bold to call them by their true names. "He was a person," said Cotton Mather, "who while doing his Master’s work, would put a king in his pocket." He was the more dangerous because he had put his own temper under strict governance—"For though he were a man of choleric disposition, and had a mighty vigour and fervour of spirit ... yet he had ordinarily as much government of his choler as a man has of a mastiff dog in a chain; he could let out his dog, and pull in his dog, as he pleased.'"

So ardent a temperament, joined to remarkable powers of oratory, gave to Thomas Hooker very unusual popular influence, some measure of which is revealed in a letter of a certain sycophant of the court party, who wrote to Laud’s tool, Chancellor Duck, under date of May 20, 1629, as follows:

All men’s cares are now filled with ye obstreperous clamours of his followers against my Lord ... as a man endeavouring to suppress good preaching and advance Popery. All would be here very calm and quiet if he [Hooker] might depart. ... If he be suspended it is the resolution of his friends and himself to settle his abode in Essex, and maintenance is promised him in plenty for the fruition of his private conference, which hath already more impeached the peace of our church than his public ministry. His genius will still haunt all the pulpits in ye country, where any of his scholars may be admitted to preach. ... There be divers young ministers about us ... that spend their time in conference with him; and return home and preach what he hath bred. ... Our people’s pallets grow so out of tatt yt noe food contents them but of Mr. Hooker’s dressing. I have lived in Essex to see many changes, and have seen the people idolizing many new ministers and lecturers, but this man surpasses them all for learning and some other considerable partes and ... gains more and far greater followers than all before him. ... If my Lord tender his owne future peace ... let him connive at Mr. Hooker’s departure."

Clearly the England of Laud with its pursuivants and rattling tongues of “dumb ministers”—who might well be jealous of his eloquence—was no fit place for the activities of Thomas Hooker. Even though he should be suspended, he would still be reckoned dangerous to prerogative with his private conferences and his following of young ministers. So he was driven overseas into Holland, whence after a few years’ experience with the Archbishop’s spies, and dislike of the Presbyterian system there practiced, he

4 The testimony of Roger Williams seems to imply as much: “Mr. Haynes, Governor of Connecticut, though he pronounced sentence of my long banishment against me, at Cambridge, then Newton, yet said to me ... I think, Mr. Williams, I must now confess to you, that the most wise God hath provided and cut out this part of His work for a refuge and receptacle for all sorts of conscience. I am now under a cloud, and my brother Hooker, with the Bay, as you have been, we have removed from them thus far, and yet they are not satisfied.” (Letter to Major Mason [1670], in Narragansett Club Publications, Vol. VI, p. 133 ff.)
settlement. While we need not go so far as to assert, with the historians of Connecticut, that “the birthplace of American democracy is Hartford,” we must recognize in the Fundamental Orders adopted by the General Assembly, January 14, 1639, a plan of popular government so broadly democratic as to entitle it to be called “the first written constitution of modern democracy.” Concerning the important part played by Hooker in this work there can be no doubt. His influence was commanding, and the sneer of old Samuel Peters—“Hooker reigned twelve years high-priest over Hertford”—scarcely overstates the fact. And this great influence was thrown persistently in favor of democratic procedure in church and state. He definitely rejected the Boston practice of magisterial autocracy. In opposition to Winthrop, who asserted, “Whatsoever sentence the magistrate gives, the judgment is the Lord’s, though he do it not by any rule prescribed by civil authority,” Hooker argued:

That in the matter which is referred to the judge, the sentence should lie in his breast, or be left to his discretion, according to which he should go, I am afraid it is a course which wants both safety and warrant. I must confess, I ever looked at it as a way which leads directly to tyranny, and so to confusion, and must plainly profess, if it was in my liberty, I should choose neither to live nor leave my posterity under such a government.

At another time, replying to Winthrop’s justification of oligarchic rule on the ground that “the best part is always the least, and of that best part the wiser is always the lesser,” Hooker frankly rested his case for democracy on the good sense of the people as a whole:

It is also a truth that counsel should be sought from counsellors; but the question yet is, who should those be. Reserving smaller matters which fall in occasionally in common course, to a lower counsel, in matters of greater importance which concerns the common good, a general counsel chosen by all, I conceive, under favour, most suitable to rule and most safe for relief of the whole.

Before the General Court, on May 31, 1638, eight months before the Fundamental Orders were adopted, Hooker preached a remarkable sermon on popular sovereignty. Taking for his text

Deut. 1:13—the passage on which John Eliot later erected his fantastic Utopia—he elaborated the thesis that “the foundation of authority is laid, firstly, in the free consent of the people,” and therefore that “the choice of public magistrates belongs unto the people by God’s own allowance,” and “they who have the power to appoint officers and magistrates, it is in their power also, to set the bounds and limitations of the power and place unto which they call them.” This was Hooker’s reply to the oligarchic policy of the Bay in limiting the number of freemen in order to maintain the supremacy of the magistrates; and it throws light on the comment written out of England in the spring of 1636, to John Wilson, that “there is great division of judgment in matters of religion amongst good ministers & people which moved Mr. Hoker to remove”; and that “you are so strict in admission of members to your church, that more than half are out of your church in all your congregations, & that Mr. Hoker before he went away preached against ye (as one reports who hard him).” In the new commonwealth there was neither a property qualification nor a religious test limiting the right of franchise; the admission of freemen was reckoned a political matter and left to the several township democracies. The reaction against the oligarchic policy of Massachusetts Bay carried far.

If we had Hooker’s sermon in full we should know much more about his political theory; yet even from the meager and tantalizing notes that have been preserved, we can deduce fairly certainly the major principles of his philosophy. Three creative ideas seem to have determined his thinking: the compact theory of the state, the doctrine of popular sovereignty, and the conception of the state as a public-service corporation, strictly responsible to the will of the majority—ideas that Roger Williams elaborated in detail and during many years of service reduced to a working system in the commonwealth of Rhode Island. That Hooker should have grasped so firmly the essentials of the new democratic theory will surprise no one who is acquainted with the political speculations of English Independency. They were all implicit in the new theory of church and state that such thinkers as Williams and Vane and Milton were clarifying, and since the days of Robert Browne they had been familiar in one form or another to the young Puritan radicals at the universities. The compact idea, which held
in solution the doctrine of natural rights, had established itself firmly in New England with the coming of the Pilgrims. The Mayflower compact and the church covenant provided the basis for the social organization of Plymouth; and the covenant idea had taken so strong a hold on the popular mind of Massachusetts Bay that the astute leaders of the oligarchy were quick to see the advantage of investing the charter, in the popular imagination, with the sanctity of the compact idea; and by a subtle process of idealizing, they transmuted the charter of a trading company into a fundamental organic law, that was reckoned an adequate written constitution to safeguard the rights of the people. It was a clever political move, but it seems not to have satisfied Thomas Hooker, who was too liberal in his views to accept the shadow for the substance. As a left-wing Independent he would have a real compact, and a popular fundamental law to safeguard the liberties of the people; and he saw to it that the new commonwealth was broadly based on the common will, rather than narrowly on the rule of the gentry. The democratic order of Connecticut was English Independency transplanted to the new world.

To Hooker New England Congregationalism owes as great a debt as does New England democracy. The last great work he undertook was a defense of the New England way against the criticism of the English Presbyterians. He was to prove a powerful advocate, for not only was he intellectually equipped to write a knotty book in answer to other knotty books, but unlike Cotton and Davenport and Mather, he was wholly in sympathy with Congregationalism, and had no mind to conceal or equivocate concerning its democratic tendencies. He would write no apology, but a frank and vigorous defense. His church policy, as elaborated in his Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline, is professedly Hebraic. "Ecclesiastical Policy," he asserts boldly, "is a skill of ordering the affairs of Christ's house, according to the pattern of his word," and he then proceeds to postulate the principle of absolutism by accepting a divine sovereign will. But this divine sovereignty was a blow struck at all temporal absolutisms, for it spoke through no viceroy of pope, bishop, presbytery or magistrate, but only through the voice of the individual subject. It is the priesthood of all believers. "The Supreme and Monarchicall power resides onely in our Saviour, can onely be given and attributed to him, and to none other." There remained, then, the difficult business of determining how the sovereign will of Christ is to be wrought on earth, and into this Hooker delved with such convincing thoroughness that, in his own words, "no man that hathsuppon Logick, hath a forehead to gainsay" his conclusions. He was bold in innovation—"a cause is not the lesse true, because of late discovered"; but after quieting "the stomachs of such, whose expectations are not answered in any opinion, unless it be moldy with age," he proceeds to explain the true nature of church organization thus:

But whether all Ecclesiasticall power be impaled, impropriated, and rightly taken in to the Presbytery alone: Or that the people of the Particular Churches should come in for a share, according to their places and proportions; This is left as the subject of the inquiry of this age, and that which occasions great thought of heart of all hands: Great thoughts of hearts in the Presbytery, as being very loth to part with that so chief privilege, and of which they have taken possession so many years. Great Thoughts of heart amongst the Churches, how they may clear their right, and claim it in such pious sobriety and moderation, as becomes the Saints: being unwilling to loose their cause and comfort, meerly upon a nihil dicis: or forever to be deprived of so precious a legacy, as they conceive this is, though it hath been withheld from them, by the tyranny of the Pope and prescription of times. Nor can they conceive it lesse, then a heedlesse betraying of their speciall liberties, and not selling but casting away their inheritance, and right, by a careless silence, when the course of providence, as the juncture of times now present themselves, allows them a writ Ad malum injuriam... These are the times when people shall be fitted for such priviledges, fit I say to obtain them, and fit to use them... And whereas it hath been charged upon the people, that through their ignorance and unskilfulnessse, they are not able to wield such priviledges, and therefore not fit to share in any such power, The Lord hath promised: To take away the vail from all faces in the mountain, the weak shall be as David, and David as an Angel of God.16

The church of Visible Saints confederating together to walk in the fellowship of the faith... is Tutm essentiale. Election of the People rightly ordered by the rule of Christ, gives the essentials to an Officer, or leaves the impression of a true outward Call, and so an Office-power upon a Pastor... there is a communicating of Power by Voluntary Subjection when, though there be no Office-power, formaliter in the people, yet they willingly yielding themselves to be ruled by another, desiring and calling of him to take that rule; he accepting of what they yield, possessing that right which they put upon him, by free consent; hence arises this Relation and authority of Office-rule.17

16 Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline, Introduction.
17 Ibid., Part III, pp. 66, 72.
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It is crabbed prose, not altogether worthy of a man who kept the thorns crackling under the pot when he stood face to face with his congregation, and though we may feel inclined to accept the challenge of a certain old Puritan, and "lay a caveat against the author's sweet and solid handling" of his matter, we shall be little inclined to lay a caveat against his doctrine. Here is no casuistry like John Cotton's, denying Congregationalism while ostensibly defending it; but a frank acceptance of the supreme power of the people. "The Lord hath promised to take away the veil from all faces"—in this faith Thomas Hooker walked all his days, and what he could himself do to remove the veil from the faces of the common people, he did heartily as unto the Lord, thereby proving his right to be remembered among the early stewards of our American democracy.

III

ROGER WILLIAMS

Seeker

The gods, it would seem, were pleased to have their jest with Roger Williams by sending him to earth before his time. In manner and speech a seventeenth-century Puritan controversialist, in intellectual interests he was contemporary with successive generations of prophets from his own days to ours. His hospitable mind anticipated a surprising number of the idealisms of the future. As a transcendental mystic he was a forerunner of Emerson and the Concord school, discovering an indwelling God of love in a world of material things; as a speculative Seeker he was a forerunner of Channing and the Unitarians, discovering the hope of a more liberal society in the practice of the open mind; as a political philosopher he was a forerunner of Paine and the French romantic school, discovering the end of government in concern for the res publica, and the cohesive social tie in the principle of good will. Democrat and Christian, the generation to which he belongs is not yet born, and all his life he remained a stranger amongst men. Things natural and right to John Cotton were no better than anachronisms to him. He lived and dreamed in a future he was not to see, impatient to bring to men a heaven they were unready for. And because they were unready they could not understand the grounds of his hope, and not understanding they were puzzled and angry and cast him out to dream his dreams in the wilderness. There was abundant reason for his banishment. A child of light, he came bringing not peace but the sword. A humane and liberal spirit, he was grooping for a social order more generous than any theocracy—that should satisfy the aspirations of men for a catholic fellowship, greater than sect or church, village or nation, embracing all races and creeds, bringing together the sundered societies of men in a common spirit of good will.

Roger Williams was the most provocative figure thrown upon the Massachusetts shores by the upheaval in England, the one original thinker amongst a number of capable social architects. His intellectual barometer, fluctuating with every change in the intellectual revolution, he came transporting hither the new and untried, and "scatter'd wide the flames to ravage the sacred fields of the Presbyterian Utopia. He was the "first rebel against the divine church-order established in the wilderness," as Cotton-Mather rightly reported. But he was very much more than that; he was a rebel against all the stupidities that interposed a barrier betwixt men and the fellowship of their dreams. Those who found such stupidities serviceable to their ends, naturally disliked Roger Williams and believed they were serving God by undoing his work. There is a naive passage in the Magnalia that suggests how incomprehensible to the theocratic mind was this stormy petrel that came out of England to flutter and clamor about Boston and Salem, until he was driven forth to find such resting place as he might, there to bring forth after his kind.

In the year 1654, a certain windmill in the Low Countries, whirling round with extraordinary violence, by reason of a violent storm then blowing, the stone at length by its rapid motion became so intensely hot as to fire the mill, from whence the flames, being dispersed by the high winds, did set a whole Town on fire. But I can tell my reader that, above twenty years before this, there was a whole country in America like to be set on fire by the rapid motion of a Windmill in the head of one particular man.

And John Cotton, worsted in his bout with his brilliant antagonist, and perhaps frightened at the latter's free speculation, found such satisfaction as he could in epithets. Roger Williams was an "evill-worker"; his "head runneth round"; "it would weary a sober

of thought laid open by the Reformation, and marking out the several spheres of church and state in the ordering of a true commonwealth. He was the incarnation of Protestant individualism, seeking new social ties to take the place of those that were loosening; and as a child of a great age of political speculation his religion issued in political theory rather than in theological dogma. Like other Separatist-Levelers he had penetrated to the foundations of the New Testament and had taken to heart the revolutionary ideals that underlie its teachings. It was the spirit of love that served as teacher to him; love that exalted the meanest to equality with the highest in the divine republic of Jesus, and gave an exalted sanction to the conception of a Christian commonwealth. He regarded his fellow men literally as the children of God and brothers in Christ; and from this primary conception of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, he deduced his political philosophy. Like Channing two hundred years later, he sought to adjust his social program to the determining fact that human worth knows neither Jew nor Gentile, rank nor caste; and following the example of his Master he went forth into a hostile world, seeking to make it over.

With this spirit of Christian fellowship, warm and human and lovable, repudiating all coercion, there was joined an eager mysticism—a yearning for intimate personal union with Christ as symbolized in the parable of the vine and the branches, a union as close as that of the bride and her husband. Running through his writings is a recurrent echo of the Hebrew love-song that Puritan thought suffused with a glowing mysticism: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies. . . . I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth." But when he went out into the broad ways of Carolina land, seeking the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, he discovered only abominations. The lover was tempted by false kisses; the Golden Image was set up in the high places, and the voice of authority commanded to bow down to it. And so as a Christian mystic Roger Williams became a Separatist, and set his mind upon the new world as a land where the lover might dwell with his bride. Yet upon his arrival there he found the churches still "implicitly National," and "yet asleep in respect of abundant ignorance and negligence, and consequently grosse abominations and pollutions of Worship,

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14 The Seekers were thus described by a contemporary English pen: "Many have wrangled so long about the Church that at last they have quite lost it, and go under the name of Expecters and Seekers, and do deny that there is any Church, or any true minister, or any ordinances; some of them affirm the Church to be in the wilderness, and they are seeking for it there; others say that it is in the smoke of the Temple, and that they are groping for it there—where I leave them praying to God." (Paget, Heresography, quoted in Masson, Life of Milton, Vol. III, p. 153.)
in which the choicest servants of God, and most faithfull Witnesses of many truths have lived in more or lesse, yea in maine and fundamental points, ever since the Apostasie. Which "abominations and pollutions of Worship," he now proposed to sweep away altogether. It was not an easy program, nor one entered upon lightly. Better than most, Roger Williams understood how closely interwoven were the threads of church and state. Separatism, with its necessary corollary of toleration, could not be unraveled from Carolinian society without loosening the whole social fabric. It was a political question even more than ecclesiastical; and it could justify itself only in the light of a total political philosophy. No other man in New England comprehended so fully the difficulties involved in the problem, as Roger Williams, or examined them so thoroughly; and out of his long speculations emerged a theory of the commonwealth that must be reckoned the richest contribution of Puritanism to American political thought.

The just renown of Roger Williams has too long been obscured by ecclesiastical historians, who in emphasizing his defense of the principle of toleration have overlooked the fact that religious toleration was only a necessary deduction from the major principles of his political theory, and that he was concerned with matters far more fundamental than the negative virtue of non-interference in the domain of individual faith. He was primarily a political philosopher rather than a theologian—one of the acutest and most searching of his generation of Englishmen, the teacher of Vane and Cromwell and Milton, a forerunner of Locke and the natural-rights school, one of the notable democratic thinkers that the English race has produced. Much of his life was devoted to the problem of discovering a new basis for social reorganization, and his intellectual progress was marked by an abundant wreckage of

18 The Biblical authority for Separatism Williams found in both general and specific injunctions. The former, in the second commandment, in the third chapter of Daniel, in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Revelation—the "wine of her fornication" being the ceremonial and ordinances of the English church—and in the Song of Solomon. The latter were: Revelation, 19:4: "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins. . . ."; Isaiah, 53:11: "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not the unclean thing; go ye out in the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord"; 2 Corinthians, 6:17. "Wherfore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." On these texts he based his argument with Cotton for the total separation of the New England churches. (See Narragansett Club Publications, Vol. I, p. 320.)

19 For much of the material made use of here, I am indebted to The Political Theory of Roger Williams, a dissertation by Dr. James E. Ernst of the University of Washington.

regarded the state and God as distinct authorities, not to be confused—"Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The conclusion at which he arrived, then, from the merging of divine ordinances and natural law, was expressed in a doctrine that sets apart the individual citizen in all his spiritual and intellectual rights, from the subject of the commonwealth, and provides the basis for his principle of toleration. "A Civill Government is an ordinance of God, to conserve the Civill peace of the people, so farre as concerns their Bodies and Goods," and no farther.18 From this position he never retreated.

Every lawful Magistrate whether succeeding or elective, is not only the Minister of God, but the Minister or servant of the people also (what people or nation soever they be all the world over), and that Minister or Magistrate goes beyond his commission who intermeddles with that which cannot be given him in commission from the people...19

Having thus reduced the divine-right field within narrow limits and translated it into an abstraction, he preempts all the ground of practical politics for his compact theory. In accord with a long line of liberal thinkers running back through Richard Hooker to Augustine and the earlier Roman school, he accepted the major deductions from the compact theory of the state: that government is a man-made institution, that it rests on consent, and that it is founded on the assumed equality of the subjects. He had only to translate these abstractions into concrete terms, and apply them realistically, to create a new and vital theory. The covenant idea of church organization had long been familiar to Separatists. To this the Pilgrims had added the Mayflower compact and Thomas Hooker had drawn up the Connecticut compact. Government resting on consent and authorized by written agreement was then no untried novelty when Roger Williams began his long speculations on the nature and functions of the political state. With Hobbes he traced the origin of the state to social necessity. The condition of nature is a condition of anarchy—a war of all against all; and for mutual protection the state takes its rise. "The World otherwise would be like a sea, wherein Men, like Fishes, would hunt and devour each other, and the greater devour the lesse."20


But unlike the fiction assumed by Hobbes and Locke, this was no suppositious contract between ruler and ruled in prehistoric times, but present and actual, entered into between the several members of a free community for their common governance; nor on the other hand, like Burke's irrevocable compact, was it an unyielding constitution or fundamental law; but flexible, responsive to changing conditions, continually modified to meet present needs. It is no other than a mutual agreement, arrived at frankly by discussion and compromise, to live together in a political union, organizing the life of the commonwealth in accordance with nature, reason, justice, and expediency.

From this conception of the flexible nature of compact law came the sharp delimitation between state and government that he was at pains to make clear, and that constitutes a significant phase of his theory. Having rejected in his thinking the fictitious abstract state, the repository of an equally fictitious abstract sovereignty, he located sovereignty in the total body of citizens embraced within the community consciousness, acting in a political capacity. The state is society organized, government is the state functioning—it is the political machinery devised by the sovereign people to effect definite ends. And since the single end and purpose for which the body of citizens erect the state is the furtherance of the communal wellbeing, the government becomes a convenient instrument to serve the common weal, responsible to the sovereign people and strictly limited by the terms of the social agreement. "The Sovereign power of all civill Authority," he asserted, "is founded in the consent of the People that every Commonwealth hath radically and fundamentally. The very Common-weales, Bodies of People... have fundamentally in themselves the Root of Power, to set up what Government and Governors they shall agree upon."21 Since governments are but "Derivatives and Agents immediately derived and employed as eyes and hands and instruments," the state or sovereign people can make their "own several Lawes and Agreements... according to their severall Natures, Dispositions and Constitutions, and their Common peace and welfare."22

Final appeal is to "the Bar of the People or Commonweal, where all may personally meet, as in some Commonweales of small number, or in greater by their Representatives"—a system that

suits with the “Nature, Conditions and circumstances of the People,” according to the “Circumstances of time and place.” 23 In a well-known passage he puts the matter more compactly, thus:

From this Grant I infer . . . that the Soveraigne, original, and foundation of civil power lies in the People. . . . And if so, that a People may erect and establish what forme of Government seems to them most meete for their civil condition: It is evident that such Governments as are by them erected and established, have no more power, nor for no longer time, then the civil power or people consenting and agreeing shall betrust them with. This is cleeer not only in Reason, but in the experience of all commonwealths, where the people are not deprived of their naturall freedom by the power of Tyrants.24

The state, then, is society working consciously through experience and reason, to secure for the individual citizen the largest measure of freedom and well-being. It is armed with a potential power of coercion, but only to secure justice. In such a state government can subsist only by making proselytes to sound reason, by compromise and arbitration, and not by force. But if sovereignty inheres in the majority will, what securities remain for individual and minority rights? What fields lie apart from the inquisition of the majority, and by what agencies shall the encroaching of power be thwarted? The replies to such questions, so fundamental to every democratic program, he discovers in a variety of principles; to the former in an adaptation of the spirit of medieval society that restricted political functions by social usage, and to the latter by the application of local home rule, the initiative and the referendum, and the recall. In the large field he ascribes to social custom, he was a follower of Luther and a forerunner of French romantic thinkers. His creative conception was an adaptation of the medieval theory of the corporation, or group of persons voluntarily joining for specific purposes under the law; and this idea he applies to the vexed question of the relation of church and state. The legal status of the church, he argued, is identical with that of a trading company; it is a corporate body with corporate rights, and the several members enjoy all the freedoms and privileges that inhere in them by law and nature in their civil capacity. The character of its membership and the content of its creed are of no different concern to the civil magistrates than those of any


other corporation. “The state religion of the world,” he asserted, “is a Politic invention of men to maintain the civil state.”25 Elaborated at greater length, his thesis is this:

The Church or company of worshippers (whether true or false) is like unto a . . . Corporation, Society, or Company . . . in London; which Companies may hold their Courts, keep their Records, hold dispositions; and in matters concerning their Societies, may dissent, divide, break, into Schisms and factions, sue and impale each other at the Law, yea wholly break up and dissolve into pieces and nothing, and yet the peace of the Citie not be in the least measure impaired or disturbed; because the essence or being of the Citie, and so the well-being and peace thereof is essentially distinct from those particular Societies; the Citie-Courts, Citie-Laws, Citie-punishments distinct from theirs. The Citie was before them, and stands absolute and intire, when such a Corporation or Societie is taken down.26

Having thus effectively secularized the church on its institutional side, he laid down twelve theses, of which these reach to the heart of the matter:

(1) God requireth not an uniformity of Religion to be inacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civil Warre, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hyprocritie and destruction of millions of souls. (2) It is the will and command of God, that . . . a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian conscience and worshipes, bee granted to all men in all Nations and Countries: and they are inely to bee fought against with that Sword which is onely (in Soule matters) able to conquer, to wit, the Sword of God’s Spirit, the Word of God. (3) True civility and Christianity may both flourish in a state or Kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of divers and contrary conscience, either of Jew or Gentile.27

Abhorrent as such doctrine was to the Massachusetts theocrats, Roger Williams did not cease to press it home to their minds and consciences. “I know and am persuaded,” he wrote Winthrop on July 21, 1637, “that your misguidings are great and lamentable, and the further you pass in your way, the further you wander, and the end of one vexation will be but the beginning of another, till conscience be permitted (though erroneous) to be free amongst you.”28 It was not toleration in the narrow sense of benevolent

non-interference by an authority that refrained from exercising its reserved right, that Roger Williams was interested in; it was rather religious liberty as a fundamental right, that had never been surrendered to the civil power, that lay beyond its jurisdiction and was in no way answerable to it, that he upheld in his great work *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*; and the long dispute with John Cotton was, in its deeper significance, a dispute between two schools of political theory and two experiments in commonwealth building. In that notable debate aristocracy and democracy joined issues, and the vital question of the rights and liberties of the individual citizen in the political state for the first time was critically examined in America.

From the foregoing analysis of his political theory it should be clear that Roger Williams was a confirmed individualist who carried to his logical conclusion the Reformation principle of the right of private inquiry. Only Vane and Milton of his generation of Englishmen went so far along that path. He had seen the liberalisms involved in Luther's premises submerged by the rising nationalism which ambitious princes found useful for selfish ends; and he had seen the policy of the Massachusetts magistrates driving boldly in the same direction. That Rhode Island should not repeat the old unhappy mistake of coercive absolutism, was a matter therefore of vital concern to him. A great experiment in democracy was to be tried, and to that experiment he devoted his life. Into the form and structure of the new commonwealth went the best thought of English Independency. It was founded on the principles of "liberty and equality, both in land and government," 28 and established in the sovereignty of the people. That government should not engross its powers, the compact entered into provided for frequent elections, a single-chambered legislature, joint and individual initiative of laws, compulsory referendum, the right of recall of all laws including the constitution, and appeal to arbitration. A rigid constitution, augmenting in authority with age and veneration, Roger Williams feared as acutely as did Paine or Jefferson. To vest sovereignty in the courts through the right of review and interpretation was repugnant to his whole political theory. The fundamental law could be interpreted only by the power that created it originally, namely,

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the sovereign people acting in a political capacity. Within the larger framework of the state the several towns retained the right of home rule in local matters. They were corporations, erected like the church in the spirit of medieval corporate law, competent to rule themselves, yet not infringing on the sovereignty that granted them their powers. In short, to adopt the words of a modern student, the state of Rhode Island as erected by Roger Williams in accordance with the principles of his political philosophy, was "nothing so much as a great public-service corporation." 30 Or, as another student has put it, "If democracy . . . in its ultimate meaning be held to imply not only a government in which the preponderant share of power resides in the hands of the people, but a society based on the principles of political and religious freedom, Rhode Island beyond any other of the American Colonies is entitled to be called democratic." 31

It was a hazardous experiment to undertake in an age when the ark of the democratic covenant found few places of refuge. Its friends were only a handful and its enemies many and powerful, and had it not been for a group of defenders in Parliament, the Rhode Island venture would have been brought to a speedy end. English Independency saved for America what English Presbyterianism would have destroyed. To Sir Harry Vane Rhode Island owes a debt of gratitude second only to that due Roger Williams. But though its godly neighbors were not permitted to destroy Rhode Island, they were free to slander and spread evil reports, and so thoroughly did they do their work that for upwards of two hundred years the little commonwealth was commonly spoken of in such terms as Rogues Island and the State of Confusion; not indeed, till it left off following agrarian and Populistic gods, till it had ceased to be democratic, did it become wholly respectable. It was not so much the reputed turbulence of Rhode Island that was disapproved by the Boston magistrates; but rather the disturbing example of a colony at their very doors, which, in denying the right of the godly to police society, gave encouragement to evil-disposed persons in their own sober commonwealth. Every democracy, they believed, was so notoriously mad and lawless—as both sacred and profane authorities had sufficiently demonstrated—that the Boston oligarchy never forgave Parliament for

29 *Duguit, Law in the Modern State*, p. 51.
30 *Gooch, History of Democratic Ideas*, p. 80.
refusing them permission to establish a mandatory over their self-willed neighbors.

It was to prevent such meddling that Roger Williams had been at pains to secure a Parliamentary charter; and he saw to it that the charter terms should not restrict the democratic liberties. His faith in the sobriety and good sense of the people of Rhode Island was never shaken. In spite of many difficulties that grew out of the sharp individualism of vigorous characters, the colony proved to be a good place to dwell for those who were content to share the common rights and privileges. In a letter to Vane, written in 1654, the founder apologizes for some of the things reported of them, but the apology does not detract from the just pride with which he contemplated the solid achievements of the Rhode Island experiment:

Possibly a sweet cup hath rendered many of us wanton. We have long drunk of the cup of as great liberties as any people we can hear of under the whole heaven. We have not only been long free (together with all New England) from the iron yolk of wolfish bishops, and their popish ceremonies...but we have sitten quiet and dry from the streams of blood split by that war in our native Country. We have not felt the new chains of Presbyterian tyrants, nor in this colony have we been consumed with the over-zealous fire of the (so called) godly christian magistrates. Sir, we have not known what an excuse means; we have almost forgotten what tithes are, yea, or taxes either, to church or commonwealth. We could name other special privileges, ingredients of our sweet cup, which your great wisdom knows to be very powerful (except more than ordinary watchfulness) to render the best of men wanton and forgetful.12

England gave her best when she sent us Roger Williams. A great thinker and a bold innovator, the repository of the generous liberalisms of a vigorous age, he brought with him the fine wheat of long years of English tillage to sow in the American wilderness. How much America owes to him is perhaps, after all the intervening years, not adequately realized; the shadow of Massachusetts Bay still too much obscures the large proportions of one who was certainly the most generous, most open-minded, most lovable, of the Puritan emigrants—the truest Christian amongst many who sincerely desired to be Christian. He believed in men and in their native justice, and he spent his life freely in the cause of humanity. Neither race nor creed sundered him from his fellows; the Indian was his brother equally with the Englishman. He was a Leveler be-

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cause he was convinced that society with its caste institutions dealt unjustly with the common man; he was a democrat because he believed that the end and object of the political state was the common well-being; he was an iconoclast because he was convinced that the time had come when a new social order must be erected on the decay of the old. "Liberavi animam meam," he said with just pride; "I have not hid within my breast my souls belief." "It was more than forty years after his exile that he lived here," wrote Cotton Mather, "and in many things acquitted himself so laudably, that many judicious persons judged him to have the root of the matter in him, during the long winter of this retirement." Since those words were written increasing numbers of "judicious persons" have come to agree with the reluctant judgment of Cotton Mather, and are verily persuaded that Master Roger Williams "had the root of the matter in him." In his own day he was accounted an enemy of society, and the commonwealth of Massachusetts has never rescinded the decree of banishment issued against him; yet like so many unshackled thinkers, he was a seeker after a better order, friend to a nobler and more humane society. If he transspotted to America the democratic aspirations of English Independency, it is perhaps well to recall the price that was exacted of him for his service:

Let the reader fancy him in 1649, a man of thirty-four, of bold and stout jaws, but with the richest and softest eyes, gazing out over the Bay of his dwelling, a spiritual Crusoe, the excommunicated even of Hugh Peters, and the most extreme and outcast soul in all America.21