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THE HISTORY OF THE ORIGINAL PURITAN THE-
OLOGY OF NEW ENGLAND, 1620-1720.

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THE first immigrants to New England were the Pilgrim Fathers, who landed at Plymouth in 1620. Though the church collected at Scrooby was the direct result of the Puritan movement in the English universities, the Pilgrims were for the most part themselves of humble origin, and were little fitted to contribute much to the theological development of the new state. There is but one figure among them of sufficient intellectual eminence to engage the attention of subsequent generations, that of John Robinson,¹ the pastor of the little flock at Leyden, who was member of two universities, and a foremost disputant in the ranks of the defenders of Congregationalism. His heroic devotion to principle, the picturesque vicissitudes of his career, his intellectual power and breadth, his prophetic vision, and above all his sincere and deep piety, made him a constant subject of quotation and an acknowledged authority among all the New England churches.

The writings of Robinson which have come down to us² are chiefly occupied with those matters which lay nearest to his heart as a Separatist. We have thus a long and elaborate discussion of ecclesiastical polity, treating nearly all the topics in controversy between the Independents and the Church of England. There is, however, one considerable treatise upon doctrinal the-

¹ Born 1575, died in Leyden 1625; graduated at Cambridge, became a fellow in 1598-9, minister in Norfolk in the English church, suspended for scruples about vestments, etc., ministered some time secretly to the congregation at Scrooby, emigrated with them to Holland in 1608; member of the University of Leyden, 1615. Discussed Arminianism publicly with Episcopius. See the "Life" in the edition of his works.

² Collected in an edition entitled *The Works of John Robinson, etc., with Memoir, etc.*, by ROBERT ASHTON, 3 vols., London, 1851.

ology, the *Defence of the Doctrine Propounded by the Synod at Dort*, which serves to show the harmony of doctrinal view between the Separatists and the Puritan movement in general, and later exerted a positive influence in prolonging that harmony throughout New England. It is what it purports to be, strictly a "defense," and in no respect goes beyond the common Calvinism of the day, or rises above its level. It is completely deficient in the philosophical element; but this is less to be wondered at in an age when Descartes had not yet introduced the methods, and called forth the spirit, of modern philosophy. It is, therefore, scarcely necessary to dwell upon this, the first in the long series of doctrinal treatises produced by the Congregational leaders. It may be dismissed with the following brief extracts, which will be sufficient to exhibit its flavor and distinguishing characteristics.

Robinson's reticence upon one of the great perplexities of theology is indicated in the following passage:³

If any demand how this can be, that God who forbiddeth and hateth sin, yet should so order persons and things, by his providence, and so from eternity purpose to order them, as that the same cannot but be? I answer, by free acknowledgment, that the manner of God's working herein is to me, and to all men, inconceivable; and withal avouch, that he, who will not confess, that God can, and could in Adam's sin, by his infinite wisdom and power, most effectually, and infallibly, in regard of such event, order and dispose of things, without violation to his holiness, or violence to the creature's will, as no mortal man is able to conceive the manner thereof, is himself in a high degree guilty of that pride which was Adam's ruin, by which he desired to be as God in knowledge. Gen., chap. 3. Who is able to understand the manner of God's working, in giving the Holy Ghost to men, and in directing the tongues and pens of the prophets infallibly, and so as they could not err? Much less discernible is God's manner of working in, and about the creature's sinful actions. And because many take great offense at this doctrine of truth and work of God, I will, the Lord assisting me, plainly and briefly as I can, prove that all events, even those most sinful, in regard of the creature's work in, and of them, come to pass necessarily, after a sort, in respect of God's providence, as being a hand steady and which swerveth not, in ordering the creature in and unto the same.³

He thinks that the alleged inconsistency of God's commanding Adam not to sin and yet decreeing that he should sin, is sufficiently removed by the following distinctions:⁴

³ ROBINSON, *Works*, I, pp. 274-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 280-1.

For us, we do not hold, that God decreed Adam's sin, as they conceive, that is, either to approve it or command it or compel unto it, nothing less ; but we affirm that God decreed to leave Adam to himself, in the temptation and not to assist him with that strength of grace, by which he could if he would, have upheld him ; and so to order both him and all things about him, in that his temptation, as that, he by the notion and sway of his own free will following his natural appetite to the pleasant but forbidden fruit and that false persuasion wherewith his understanding was by Satan overclouded, should both choose and eat the forbidden fruit.

There is an evident struggle in his mind to maintain a certain freedom of the will of man from compulsion,⁵ and in general to hold to that more generous type of theology characteristic of English Puritanism in distinction from continental.⁶ Thus he is distinctly sublapsarian,⁷ though he holds firmly to a limited atonement.⁸ But when all credit for the influence upon his system of clearer intuitions of truth, or of the plain common sense of which he had a considerable share, has been given, the general accord of the whole with that extreme application of the doctrine of divine sovereignty and of the helplessness of man which was to spread a deadly paralysis through all the spiritual life of New England, is apparent from such passages as the following :⁹

They [Calvinists] believe, as the Scriptures teach, that all men in Adam have sinned, Rom. 5 : 12-15 ; and by sin lost the image of God in which they were made ; so as the law is impossible, Rom. 8 : 3 ; unto them by reason of the flesh, and so cannot possibly but sin, by reason of the same flesh reigning in the unregenerate, and dwelling in all : which these light persons, expressly confess . . . : and that this so comes to pass by God's holy decree, and work of providence answerable, not forcing evil upon any, but ordering all persons in all actions, as the supreme Governor of all : and that the wicked, being left of God, some, destitute of the outward means, the gospel ; all of them, of the effectual work of the Spirit, from that weak flesh, and natural corruption, daily increased in them, sin both necessarily as unable to keep the law, and willingly, as having in themselves the beginning and cause thereof, the blindness of their own minds, and perverseness of their will and affections ; and so are inexcusable in God's sight.

The founding of the Massachusetts colony, about ten years

⁵ *Works*, I, p. 274 *et al.*

⁶ Compare the Westminster Confession, chaps. iii, ix, and x.

⁷ *Works*, I, p. 289.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 398 f.

later than the Plymouth, brought a different class to New England. There were many men of education and wealth among the laymen of Boston, and its clergymen were largely university men, well read in divinity, and intense in their attachment to the Calvinistic system. The overthrow of the monarchy in England resulted in 1646 in the formation of the Westminster standards. They were hardly issued when they were adopted in Massachusetts (1648) as the general standard of doctrine among the churches, and were later (1708) welcomed in Connecticut with equal cordiality. Old Calvinism, shaped by the prevailing acceptance of the Westminster Confession, continued to be the dominant and well-nigh unchallenged system in the New England churches even after Arminianism had begun to make serious inroads at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

For a while there could, of course, be little theological production amid the labors of subduing the wilderness. The standard writers of the old countries were enough for the time. Among these Wollebius,¹⁰ a sublapsarian, free from the deformities of scholasticism, and Ames,¹¹ whose *Medulla* was employed as a text-book in the colleges, were the principal favorites. Indigenous production was called forth by a cause of a somewhat startling and unpleasant nature. This was the appearance of a book entitled *The Meritorious Price of our Redemption*,¹² by a layman, a man of considerable prominence as the founder of Springfield, William Pynchon,¹³ which contained sentiments too much at variance with the current system to be received with equanimity. It was the first outbreak of the independent spirit of Congregationalism, and it was sternly suppressed. The book was first burned, and then refuted by order of the General Court,

¹⁰ *Compendium Theologiæ Christianæ*, etc., published in many editions, 1633 and subsequently. In 1650 it was translated.

¹¹ *Medulla Theologica*, etc. Amsterdam, 1623. Many editions subsequently.

¹² Published in London, 1650. The refutation by John Norton was entitled: *A Discussion of that Great Point in Divinity, The Sufferings of Christ*, etc. London, 1653.

¹³ An incorporator of the Massachusetts Company, came to America in 1630, first settled at Dorchester, then at Roxbury, was soon treasurer of the colony, emigrated to Springfield in 1636, returned to England in 1652, died October 29, 1662.

and Mr. Pynchon found it convenient to return to England, where he died.

Pynchon's work was the protest of plain common sense against the current representations of the atonement which taught that Christ suffered the very torments of the lost, and against the theory of imputation upon which such representations depended. He objected most strongly to these ideas because they involved the thought that Christ bore the wrath of God, whereas in fact his sufferings were inflicted upon him by the rage and enmity of "the old serpent."¹⁴ His argument is principally scriptural, and is derived both from the silence of Scripture, which relieves us from the necessity of believing that Christ suffered the infinite wrath of God, and from its positive affirmations, which he often discusses at great length. It is, further, not necessary that Christ should bear the punishment of our sins, since his obedience is enough to satisfy for the sins of the elect. We see thus that Pynchon did not abandon the idea of a limited atonement.¹⁵ And then Christ could not suffer the pains of hell, for they consist either in the "pain of loss," or separation from God, which he did not suffer, or in the "pain of sense," which consists in eternal sufferings, which also he did not suffer. He gives utterance to an axiomatic truth, afterwards to play a considerable part in New England: "The rule of God's justice doth require that soul only to die which sins Ezek., chap. 18. By this rule of justice God cannot inflict the torments of hell upon an innocent, to redeem a guilty person."¹⁶ He also suggests the word "chastisement" as a suitable one to describe the nature of Christ's sufferings. Against imputation, he urges its injustice, for God's imputation is always connected with guiltiness; and also the fact that imputation would destroy the possibility of Christ's being a redeemer, for the redemption consists in the mediatorial obedience, and Christ would then have been a disobedient sinner.

Pynchon then goes on to say:¹⁷

That which Christ did to redeem us from the curse of the law was not by

¹⁴ Preface to the Reader.

¹⁶ Page 81.

¹⁵ Page 2, comp. pp. 87, 88.

¹⁷ Pages 83, 84.

bearing the said curse really in our stead (as the common doctrine of imputation doth teach), but by procuring his Father's atonement by the invaluable price or performance of his own mediatorial obedience, whereof his mediatorial sacrifice of the atonement was the finishing masterpiece. This kind of obedience was that rich thing of price which the Father required and accepted as satisfactory for the procuring of his atonement for our full redemption, justification, and adoption.

And then he adds, with an idea closely akin to that of Anselm, if not actually a filtration down through the ages from that first great writer upon this theme:¹⁸

God the Father was more highly pleased with the obedience of the Mediator than he was displeased with the disobedience of Adam. If so, then there is no need that our blessed Mediator should pay both the price of his mediatorial obedience and also bear the curse of the law really for our redemption. I never heard that ever any Turkish tyrant did require such a double satisfaction of any redeemer for the redemption of galley slaves . . . to pay both the full price which they demanded for this redemption of their galley slaves and to bear the punishment of their curse and slavery also in their stead. . . . Why then doth the doctrine of imputation make God the Father to be a harder creditor in the point of satisfaction than ever any rigid creditor was among men? . . . The gross substance of that blood that was shed . . . is not to be taken by itself alone considered for that precious price. . . . We must take the blood of Christ . . . for his mediatorial obedience.

Pyncheon consistently rejected the imputation of Christ's obedience to the believer, which he thinks inconsistent with justice, as well as useless, for "the law binds every singular person to perform exact obedience by his own natural power, without any help from any surety whatsoever, or without any supernatural help of faith." Besides, the active obedience of Christ cannot be imputed to us for a variety of reasons. He did not perform all the acts required of us, since he did not enter all the conditions of life. Then, he was bound to obey for himself, and the acts of his legal obedience were not mediatorial. Pyncheon also explains the true nature of justification as consisting simply in "the Father's merciful atonement, pardon, and forgiveness. It is a gracious acquittal, as when a father forgives his son and receives him into favor."

¹⁸ Pages 84, 85.

Norton in his refutation of Pynchon thus expressed his own doctrine :

The Lord Jesus Christ, as God-man mediator according to the will of the Father and his own voluntary consent, fully obeyed the law, doing the command in a way of works and suffering the essential punishment of the curse [note the word "essential"] in a way of obedient satisfaction unto divine justice, thereby explicitly fulfilling the first covenant ; which active and passive obedience of his, together with his original righteousness as a surety, God of his rich grace actually imputeth unto believers, whom upon the receipt thereof by the grace of faith, he declareth and accounteth as perfectly righteous, and acknowledgeth them to have right unto eternal life.

The reply was keen and able, but it was simply a defense of the old theology according to the command of the General Court, and added nothing to the common understanding of the theme. In a personal interview with him, Norton seems to have made more impression upon Pynchon, for in a communication to the General Court¹⁹ he stated that he was now "inclined to think that his [Christ's] sufferings were appointed by God for a further end, namely, as the due punishment of our sins by way of satisfaction to the divine justice." After his return to England he recurred to the theme, publishing in 1655 *A Further Discussion of that Great Point in Divinity, The Sufferings of Christ*, etc., in which he reaffirmed his old positions. He tried to do something in the way of a development of the doctrine, bringing out with more distinctness the fact that Christ's sufferings were not substitutionary, since they do not fulfill the covenant made with Adam, but a new one "made by the persons of the Trinity from eternity." And he finally expresses his own theory somewhat more fully in the following language. Referring to his former treatise, he says: "The dialogue doth oppose the way of vindicative justice ; but yet it makes all Christ's sufferings to be performed in a way of justice according to the order of justice in the voluntary cause and covenant. . . . The dialogue shows from God's declaration in Gen. 3:15, that the devil must combat against the seed of the deceived woman, and that Christ in his human nature must combat against him and break his head plot by continuing obedient to the death, and that, therefore,

¹⁹ *Massachusetts Records*, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 48.

his sufferings and death were meritorious because it was all performed in a way of justice, namely, in exact obedience to all the articles of the voluntary covenant."²⁰

Thus Pynchon's work was one-sided, incomplete, and immature. It was essentially a protest, not in any way a constructive effort. It had no immediate effect in producing modification of theory in New England, for most of the following writers pass over all he said as if they had never heard of him, or at least, never read him;²¹ and doubtless few had. No trace of positive influence exerted upon the later New England writers has yet been discovered. The book seems to have exhaled its life in the flames in which it was burnt upon Boston market place. But the same sturdy protest against scholastic deformations of Christian doctrine was at a later day to receive a more cordial hearing.

If Pynchon thus exerted little positive influence, it seems to have been due to the stimulus afforded by such a phenomenon as heresy in New England that there soon began to be a series of systematic treatises upon divinity, John Norton²² who had refuted Pynchon in 1653 appearing with his *Orthodox Evangelist* in 1654. This book, though small,—for it comprises but 355 quarto pages,—possesses a high degree of minuteness, accuracy, and technicality. Its epistle dedicatory expresses confidence in the progress of the truth. "Even fundamental truths . . . have been and shall be transmitted more clear from age to age in the times of reformation." The body of the work begins with chapters upon the divine essence and the Trinity, and

²⁰ *Further Discussion*, p. 176.

²¹ CHARLES CHAUNCY, in a volume of sermons (1659) entitled in Hebrew *The Lord our Righteousness*, says, pp. 52, 53: "Christ by way of satisfaction for sinners suffered the full and utmost punishment due to the sins of the elect . . . the punishment of the second death. JOHN ELIOT, in *The Harmony of the Gospels in the Holy History of the Humiliation and Sufferings of Jesus Christ* (1678), teaches that Christ suffered the pains of hell, using the distinction which Norton had employed between a "penal" and a "local" hell (p. 119).

²² Born in Stortford, England, May 6, 1606. Educated at Cambridge, came in 1635 to Plymouth, Mass., but soon became the minister of Ipswich. In 1652 became associate minister in Boston. Sent to England after the Restoration to assure the king of the loyalty of Massachusetts. Returning, died at Boston, April 5, 1663.

closes with a treatment of the state of the blessed; but it is chiefly occupied with the discussion of the way of salvation, thus foreshadowing the interest in anthropological themes characteristic of New England divinity. On the order of the decrees it is predominantly supralapsarian. On the will, it teaches that "the liberty of man, though subordinate to God's decree, freely willeth the very same thing and no other than that which it would have willed if (upon a supposition of impossibility) there had been no decree."²³ Again: "Man acts as freely as if there were no decree; yet as infallibly as if there were no liberty." There is no theory of the will, properly speaking, though Norton finds some help in the idea that the will is a second cause. He rejects the "indifferency of the will to act or not to act independent of the decree," but has no positive theory to offer, and upon the allied subject of conversion is led by his desire to meet the Arminians to lay so much stress upon divine sovereignty as to emphasize passivity in conversion overmuch.

Isaac Chauncy²⁴ published in 1694 *The Doctrine which is according to Godliness*, etc., which was a system of divinity in the form of question and answer, upon the basis of the Westminster Catechism. It was a vigorous and independent work, in complete conformity to the Westminster standards in every important point. On the will Chauncy says that God's decree "maintains the liberty of the creature's will, that all free agents act as freely according to the decree as agents by necessity do act necessarily." For the sake of maintaining the true deity of Christ he even ventured to contradict the Nicene Creed. "The Father doth not communicate Godhead in begetting, but Sonship only. It is very improper to say Christ is God of God [the Nicene phrase], but every person is essentially absolutely first, having the whole Godhead in it."

There exists in manuscript in the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society *A Whole Body of Divinity in a Catechetical Way* by Samuel Stone²⁵ of Hartford, copied by Samuel

²³ *Evangelist*, pp. 74-76.

²⁴ Son of Charles, president of Harvard College.

²⁵ Born in Hertford, England, about 1602; emigrated to Cambridge, New England,

Willard,²⁶ marked by the same originality of expression and the same agreement with Westminster. It serves to continue the line of systematic writers to Willard himself, who from 1688–1707 delivered a course of expository lectures upon the Shorter Catechism which was published in 1726 in a folio of 914 pages, under the title of *A Complete Body of Divinity*. It is a big, but not a great, work. In the treatment of the Scriptures he reverses the order of the proof as given in the Confession, putting the character of the Bible, such as its contents, work in the soul, majesty, etc., first, and coming to the testimony of the Spirit last, and that under the head of "Testimony," which is subdivided into two heads, the human, and the divine. Under the subject of the fall he has the remarkable statement that God "gave not to Adam those influences of confirming and assisting grace that were needful to his standing; and yet providence is not to blame, because Adam did not want any of those influences till he was willing to want them."²⁷ Thus sin comes from lack of grace, and lack of grace comes from sin! There is a blind effort here to place the responsibility of the existence of sin upon the free will of man, as Willard says elsewhere: "Adam sinned voluntarily or by consent, in that he abused his own free will."²⁸ As to the order of the decrees, Willard was a supralapsarian. The means of grace, preaching, etc., "have no efficiency in the production of this habit [of faith] by moral suasion,"²⁹ *i. e.*, preaching has no efficiency in regeneration.

Thus to all appearance the ancient Calvinism had fully maintained itself down to the close of the century. There was still found in 1707 a minister in one of the chief churches of Boston who was regularly lecturing upon divinity with the minuteness only to be expected in a theological school, and adhering with absolute faithfulness to the Westminster system. And yet beneath the surface there was widespread departure and alienation from

in 1633; pastor there; removed to Hartford, Conn., 1636, with the founders of that town; pastor there till his death, in 1663.

²⁶ Born in Concord, Mass., 1640; graduated at Harvard 1659; pastor of the Old South Church, Boston, 1676 (?) to his death, 1707.

²⁷ Pages 178, 179.

²⁸ Page 186.

²⁹ Page 434.

that system. Another side of the history of the first century needs now to be reviewed.

There is an analogy between ideas and material bodies in the particular of their gravity; and the first century of New England history was to show how the Puritan divinity, in the proportion and with the emphasis with which it was held, by a natural gravitation tended downward.

It was the beginning of a chapter of misfortunes when Mrs. Anne Hutchinson³⁰ arrived in Boston in 1635. She was a woman of talent, of a deeply religious nature, very much attached to her pastor, Rev. John Cotton,³¹ who had left her home, Boston, England, to become the minister of the New England Boston. Much prayer had brought her to the conviction that she had been "trusting in a covenant of works," and in connection with the higher spiritual experiences which she had gained in her effort to throw herself more fully upon the mercy of God, she had become visionary and fanatical. So she conceived that it was "revealed" to her that she must go to New England and "be persecuted and suffer much trouble." Arrived here, she began soon to assemble the women in her house for religious meetings, repeating the sermons of Mr. Cotton with comments of her own, and before long had become the head of a considerable party, who were charged with Antinomian errors, and thus stirred up a controversy which divided the church and town, and excited so much feeling as to become the cause of a serious crisis in the life of the young community. A synod was called against her errors in 1637, and they were condemned. Subsequently she was banished, and died at the hands of the Indians upon Long Island.

³⁰The best general view of this episode is found in PUNCHARD, *History of Congregationalism*, Vol. IV, pp. 196 ff. Original authorities are: WELDE, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians*, etc., 1644; E. JOHNSON, *The Wonder-working Providence of Sions Saviour*, 1654 (reprinted, Andover, 1867); COTTON MATHER, *Magnalia*, 1702 (Hartford ed., 1853, always cited in the following pages, Vol. II, p. 508), gives an account of no great value; C. CHAUNCY, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 1743, reproduces something from Welde.

³¹Born in Derby, England, 1585; fellow of Emanuel College, Cambridge, subsequently dean; settled at Boston, Eng., in 1612; emigrated to Boston, New England, in 1632 and died there in 1652.

It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at this late day at an exact and reliable estimate of the nature and tendency of Mrs. Hutchinson's views. No one can read the various contemporary accounts without the feeling that misunderstanding played a great part in creating the conviction that she had seriously departed from the orthodoxy of the day. The most valuable source of information, Welde's *Short Story*, is of no great historical worth. It is marred by superstition,³² its common honesty is somewhat doubtful,³³ and it must hence be employed with the greatest caution. As commonly understood, her peculiar views gathered about two points: the doctrine of the indwelling of the Spirit; and the assurance of justification. The Holy Spirit dwelt in a justified person personally. "Gifts and graces" were of no value in evidencing Christian character, but the witness of the Spirit was the only evidence. Hence the assurance of justification was immediately given to the soul by the Spirit. It was not evidenced by the sanctification of the believer, but was totally independent of this. Hence works were of no value, and hence the Christian might live in sin. Justification was entirely separated from faith. A man was justified before he believed. A further distinction was drawn between the covenant of works and that of grace. All who rested their evidence upon the fruits of the Spirit were said to be trusting in a covenant of works. The covenant of grace was restricted to those who experienced the inward witness of the Spirit.

It is at least probable that these expressions were only individual methods of emphasizing the dominant ideas of the Calvinistic system as then commonly preached, and especially as presented in the ordinary ministrations of Mr. Cotton, Mrs. Hutchinson's favorite minister. The second error which Welde mentions, "that a man is united to Christ and justified without faith; yea, from all eternity," seems nothing but an extreme formulation of the doctrine of election. In fact, Rev. John Wheelwright,

³²It contains a most incredible account of the birth of a monster to the wife of a certain Wm. Dyer.

³³See references under DEXTER, *Bibliography*, title No. 972.

in defending himself against Welde's charges, says³⁴ of this very charge: The writer holds it to be true "if it be meant respecting God's decree," but in no other sense. Many of the expressions quoted seem also to be of the same nature as that extreme application of the doctrine of union with Christ which was to appear subsequently in Rellyanism, itself only an exaggerated Calvinism. Such, for example, are these: "Christ is the new creature;" "All graces are in Christ as the subject and none in us, so that Christ believes, Christ loves," etc.³⁵ And Mr. Wheelwright's denials that he held that sanctification was no evidence of justification are repeated and explicit.

The mere unraveling of a snarl of insignificant temporary aberrations from truth is of no interest or importance in the present history. But besides the evident tendency to overemphasize the divine sovereignty and allied truths which already appears, there is one farther phenomenon, exhibited in connection with the synod, which is of the greatest significance. This is the substantial ignorance of the nature of saving faith brought to light by the discussions upon justification. Mr. Cotton seems, at first sight, to have been farther from the truth than his colleagues, and was brought with some difficulty to a partial agreement with them. He held that our "union with Christ" is complete before and without the work or act of faith, though not before or without the "habit" or gift of faith. It is evident from his own subsequent expressions³⁶ that he was after all in substantial agreement with the rest, for he says: "I looked at union with Christ as equivalent to regeneration." This as the divine part in conversion does at least logically precede the act of faith. But, however they might be divided upon this point, Mr. Cotton and all the rest were united in viewing man as passive in faith. For the sake of securing the honor of God as the author of regeneration, they held views of divine sovereignty, inability, and regeneration which in effect rendered man totally passive till the indispensable condition was fulfilled, upon

³⁴ *Mercurius Americanus*, 1645 (reprinted by the Prince Society 1876), p. 9.

³⁵ *Short Story*, errors 17, 16.

³⁶ *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, etc., 1648, pp. 41 ff.

which faith followed, as a spontaneous act, it is true, but still as necessary.

In this confusion the New England fathers were not alone. It was generally true that but little light was to be found upon the nature of the action of the human mind in religious matters in any of the standard writers of the day. The will was still linked inseparably with the emotions in the common psychology, and its office and operation hence most obscured. The Westminster Confession confounds saving faith with historical faith in the expression: "By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word."³⁷ Even Calvin had said: "Faith . . . is a certain and steady knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us." And though in case of both of these authorities there can be found other expressions calculated to give a good practical impression to the popular mind, yet when the emphasis was laid upon man's inability to repent which was laid in those days, the activity of man was brought into so great darkness and doubt that paralysis of the spiritual forces of the soul often followed, and the work of repentance which man "could not do" remained largely undone.

The consequences of this confused and paralyzing theology soon became apparent. Cotton Mather may tell the piteous story.³⁹

When our churches were come to between twenty and thirty years of age, a numerous posterity was advanced so far into the world, that the first planters began apace in their several families to be distinguished by the name of grandfathers; but among the immediate parents of the grandchildren, there were multitudes of well-disposed persons, who, partly through their own doubts and fears, and partly through other culpable neglects, had not actually come up to the covenanting state of communicants at the table of the Lord. The good old generation could not, without many uncomfortable apprehensions, behold their offspring excluded from the baptism of Christianity, and from the ecclesiastical inspection which is to accompany that baptism; indeed, it was to leave their offspring under the shepherdly government of our Lord Jesus Christ in his ordinances, that they had brought their lambs into this wilderness. When the apostle bids churches to "look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God," there is an ecclesiastical word used for that "looking diligently;" intimating that God will ordinarily

³⁷ Chapter xiv.

³⁸ *Institutes*, III, ii, 7.

³⁹ *Magnalia*, Vol. II, pp. 277 ff.

bless a regular church-watch, to maintain the interests of grace among his people; and it was therefore the study of those prudent men, who might be called our seers, that the children of the faithful may be kept, as far as may be, under a church-watch, in expectation that they might be in the fairer way to receive the grace of God; thus they were "looking diligently," that the prosperous and prevailing condition of religion in our churches might not be *Res unius ætatis*,—"a matter of one age alone." Moreover, among the next sons or daughters descending from that generation, there was a numerous appearance of sober persons, who professed themselves desirous to renew their baptismal-covenant and submit unto the church-discipline, and so have their houses also marked for the Lord's; but yet they could not come to that experimental account of their own regeneration, which would sufficiently embolden their access to the other sacrament. Wherefore, for our churches now to make no ecclesiastical difference between these hopeful candidates and competents for those our further mysteries; and pagans, who might happen to hear the word of God in our assemblies, was judged a most unwarrantable strictness, which would quickly abandon the biggest part of our country unto heathenism. And, on the other side, it was feared that, if all such as had not yet exposed themselves by censurable scandals found upon them, should be admitted unto all the privileges in our churches, a worldly part of mankind might, before we are aware, carry all things into such a course of proceeding, as would be very disagreeable unto the kingdom of heaven.

No one can fail to perceive the surprise with which Mather, and doubtless all the rest of the New England leaders, looked upon this state of things. There were, no doubt, many elements entering into the production of the result,⁴⁰ some of which cannot now be fully understood. The early plan of requiring of candidates for church membership a long and detailed account of gracious exercises, however appropriate when the first little companies had gathered together under the stress of persecution in England, and when all their religious exercises must of necessity have been marked, could only serve as an unfortunate and embarrassing condition among a later generation, born and brought up in the perfect freedom of the New World, and without the thrilling experiences of their fathers to give point to

⁴⁰ It has been common to ascribe the movement for the "Half-Way Covenant" to the desire to enlarge the franchise, which was at first restricted in Massachusetts to church members. But there is no evidence that this consideration had any influence. See DEXTER, *Congregationalism as seen in its Literature*, p. 468. Also, *New Englander and Yale Review*, February 1892, article by PROFESSOR W. WALKER.

their views and depth to their experience. But with all the rest, there was a theological root to the trouble, and this was that doctrine of inability, one application of which we have already seen. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is one which affects the church differently at different times. The first Puritans, sure in their own hearts that they were the elect of God, found the doctrine necessary to sustain them in the tremendous struggles through which they passed. As the waves of the storm rose higher about them, they looked more and more to God, who was yet ruler above all the commotion of the elements, and would save his people. Hence the doctrine nerved to greater activity; and it produced a similar effect, during the first period of the promulgation of Calvinism, among every nation which accepted the system. The Calvinists were the great active forces of an advancing Protestantism. But when such mighty stimulus was removed, when inability was preached to men who were not conscious that they were the elect, when passive waiting for the gracious deliverance of God was inculcated upon men whom the tide of events no longer forced to activity in spite of themselves and of their theories, it produced sluggishness, apathy, self-distrust, despair. It has never been a good way to induce men to repent to tell them that they cannot. Thus, in part, it was the theology of the period which wrought the paralysis which Mather sketches, and which continued in spite of all the ecclesiastical nostrums of the Half-Way Covenant, and sunk the churches lower and lower.

An inspection of the preaching of the early ministers of New England would show how predominantly depressing and discouraging their ministrations were. There were not lacking many appeals which were adapted to stir the conscience, produce repentance, and call out faith, for, when men are moved by the great forces of the soul, and the truths of the gospel are presented to them, they will respond in the natural manner, regardless of the theories which they may be taught and which at other times may paralyze their action. But when every allowance has been made for the brighter and better side of the early preaching, it still remains that the general impression of the

pulpit was that the sinner is "dead," helpless, cannot be interested in divine things, and has nothing to do but to wait for God. Innumerable quotations might be made to illustrate this statement;⁴² but unless counterbalanced by others which space forbids, the impression they would give would be even too gloomy and hopeless. Suffice it to say that to the time of Increase Mather there was scarcely a single preacher who seemed to possess the evangelistic instinct and who could wield the evangelistic methods. In Mather's case hard common sense and practical tact outweighed theory. He flung the doctrine of inability into the depths and preached sermons which live and breathe today. But he only serves to show by contrast how unfavorable the general style was in its effect upon the majority of hearers.

Thus out of the undue and unseasonable emphasis which the Puritan theology laid upon the divine sovereignty and man's inability there had sprung a blighting influence which had reduced the number of conversions greatly, and was beginning to

⁴² For example: JOHN HIGGINSON, minister of Salem, 1659-1708 (*Our Dying Saviour's Legacy of Peace*, 1686), was a rather cheerful preacher, bringing out man's activity in faith. JONATHAN MITCHELL, minister of Cambridge, 1650-1668 (*A Discourse of the Glory to which God hath called Believers by Jesus Christ*, 1721), is like the average. THOMAS COBBETT, minister in Lynn from 1637 to (?) 1657 (*A Practical Discourse of Prayer*, 1654), cannot deny the duty of the unregenerate to pray, and yet spends his time in finding reasons for their prayer though they are entirely wicked in praying; SOLOMON STODDARD, minister of Northampton, 1669-1729, takes up so much time, even in his *Guide to Christ* (1714), in getting around the difficulties of inability, that he has no time left for directions actually to exercise faith (compare also his *The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment in the Righteousness of Christ*, etc., 1687, and his *The Nature of Saving Conversion*, 1719). To the same effect are: CHARLES CHAUNCY, *The Lord our Righteousness*, 1659; JOHN COTTON, *The Church's Resurrection*, 1642, *The Way of Life*, 1641 (rather helpful, but upon p. 187 hopelessly lost in reconciling election with the heinousness of sin upon the basis of inability), *The Covenant of God's Free Grace*, 1645, *Christ the Fountain of Life*, 1651 (see p. 173, The grace of Christ "conveys such a spirit of grace into us as gives us power to receive Christ"); THOMAS HOOKER, minister in Hartford, 1636-1647, *The Soul's Humiliation*, 1638, *The Unbeliever's Preparing for Christ*, 1638, *The Soul's Vocation*, 1638, and *The Poor Dying Christian drawn to Christ*, 1743 (all very gloomy); JOHN DAVENPORT, minister in New Haven, 1638-1668, then in Boston till he died in 1670 (see quotations in COTTON'S *Covenant of Free Grace*, pp. 34-40). Of Mather it is enough to quote the titles of two collections of sermons, *The Greatest Sinners Exhorted and Encouraged to Come to Christ and that Now, without Delaying*, 1686, and *Now or Never*, 1713.

deplete the churches of members. The Half-Way Covenant was the method hit upon to remedy the difficulty. It allowed parents, themselves baptized, of correct life, who would "own the covenant," that is, would acknowledge the rightfulness of God's claims upon them, and promise to submit to the discipline of the church, though not professing conversion, to have their children baptized. The arguments for this arrangement were strange. Though much drawn out, in substance they were all one. The infants in question were first proved members of the church (the position of the Episcopal church in England, but repudiated hitherto in New England), and from this their right to baptism was inferred. Thus, in effect, the character of the church was changed. The old Congregational idea had been that the church was the fellowship of believers, and that only they had a right to its privileges, including the baptism of their children. Thus while the church had an educational function and was to train up men to be Christians, it was viewed, in its strictly ecclesiastical character, not as a school, but as a fellowship of persons already thus trained and already converted. Now it was to perform the function of a school, and within its fold train up men to religion. The full scope of the change was not at first seen, but it was consummated when in 1707 Solomon Stoddard of Northampton proposed to admit the unregenerate to the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, that is, of conversion. Thus ultimately the doctrine of inability broke down the theory of the new birth in its relation to the church, as it early discouraged the actual exercise of repentance.

The precise causes leading to this remarkable result are somewhat difficult to trace. There was much dispute upon the subject, and the churches were brought to adopt the new method only with great reluctance. Increase Mather wrote in connection with John Davenport of New Haven strongly against it, but years afterwards took the other side.⁴² His treatises upon the side of the new scheme throw some light upon the previous history of

⁴² Against the synod, *An Apologetical Preface* to JOHN DAVENPORT'S *Another Essay*: for it, besides the book above mentioned, *A Discourse Concerning the Subject of Baptism*, etc., 1675.

the idea. He naturally attempts to gain some support for the plan from the earlier writers, and entitles his first book (of the year 1675): *The First Principles of New England concerning the Subject of Baptism*. In this he quotes John Cotton⁴³ as being in favor of the plan. The passages quoted pronounce, indeed, in favor of the baptism of the children of the unregenerate "children," but only upon condition that their "grandparents" assume the training of them. This was Cotton's position in public utterances of the year 1645. But the increasing pressure of the condition of things seems to have led him to waver, and at last, in a letter dated Nov. 8, 1648, and quoted by Mather⁴⁴ we have the following passage which looks somewhat doubtfully in the direction of the Half-Way Covenant:

It is not necessary that they [upon a reformation of the church] should take carnal members of the parish into the fellowship of this renewed election of their ministers, and yet it is not improper but the ministers may perform some ministerial acts to them, as not only to preach the word to them, but happily [*i. e.*, haply] also to baptize their children. For such members are like the church members with us baptized in their infancy yet not received to the Lord's Supper when they come to age, nor admitted to fellowship of voting in admissions, elections, censures, till they come to profess their faith and repentance, and lay hold of the covenant of their parents before the church. And yet, they being not cast out of the church nor the covenant thereof, their children may be capable of the first seal of the covenant, so in this case till the parents themselves grow scandalous and thereby cast out of the covenant of the church.

Other evidences of a tendency to change the early practice before the synod had actually recommended it are adduced by Mather, but most of them are derived from unpublished MSS. His father, Richard Mather, who had published a catechism in 1650 which was supposed to bear against the Half-Way Covenant, left a MS. in which he said that he was in favor of the Covenant, and that the catechism was to be interpreted in con-

⁴³ See pp. 2 ff. He quotes COTTON's *Book of the Way of the Churches*, pp. 87, 88, 106, 115, and his *Keyes*. The former quotations contain nothing decisive and in the *Keyes* of 1644 (reprinted, Boston 1843), and the *Vindicie Clavium* 1645, there is nothing to the point. He quotes also HOOKER, *Survey of Church Discipline*, pp. 8, 48; but he is discussing another point there.

⁴⁴ *First Principles*, p. 5.

sistency with this. Other less famous men are quoted by Mather, and among them is the utterance of John Norton upon his dying bed (1663), who when asked what the sins of New England were for which God was displeased with the country said, among other things, "and for the neglect of baptizing the children of the church, those that some call grandchildren, I think God is provoked by it."

Thus it is evident that it was the pressure of an unexpected state of things which led these fathers reluctantly to a change in their methods. But the particular change made was determined by a peculiarity of their view of the Scriptures, by which the Old and New Testaments were brought upon pretty much the same level as doctrinal authorities, and the distinction between the systems and the dispensations of the two almost obliterated. A very prominent idea with them was that of the "covenant," derived, no doubt, from the Federal School of Holland. God stands in a covenant with believers and their households. Now, as he stood in a covenant with Israel also, the style of interpretation common in New England led to an identification of these covenants in all possible respects; and as an uncircumcised person was outside of the ancient covenant, and excluded from all share in the privileges of the people of God, and in the condition of a pagan; so it was thought that a child brought up in the Christian community and remaining unbaptized would also be outside of the covenant, the recipient of none of the special blessings of grace, and to a considerable degree in a hopeless state. If unbaptized children were indeed outside of the covenant, and thus in a condition but little better than "pagans," as the piteous phrase ran, the thing to be done was to get them into covenant relations that they might be saved. The fact that their parents did not seem to be saved, though in the covenant, escaped the fathers.⁴⁵

It was therefore no superstitious regard for sacraments, no thought of baptismal regeneration, and no conscious lapse from the doctrine of the regenerate church to the view that the church is a school for the gradual training of Christians by the

⁴⁵ The full arguments of the synod are given in MATHER'S *Magnalia*, Vol. II, pp. 276 ff.

sacraments and Christian teaching, which created the Half-Way Covenant, but simply the passive theology of the times, which waited for God in the matter of conversion as for a sovereign whose gifts of grace were in his own inscrutable disposal, and without whom man was absolutely unable to do anything. To be sure, to baptize children was in the power of man, and this must be done. But repentance was the gift of God, and therefore not the act of man.⁴⁶

But the remedy had no curative effect. The Half-Way Covenant was introduced very largely into the churches and remained sometimes till into the present century,⁴⁷ but the course of things was downward. The Indian war broke out (1675-6), agriculture suffered from drought and blight, commerce suffered at sea, pestilences and epidemics arose, and the consciences of the people, educated under the Jewish ideas of which we have already seen an example in the discussions upon the covenant, saw in these calamities the visitations of God for their sins. A

⁴⁶The following extract is from MITCHELL and MATHER'S *Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod*, 1664, p. 45: "It is the Lord's own way and his institutions only, which he will bless, not man's invention, though never so plausible. Neither hath God in his wisdom so instituted the frame of his covenant, and the constitution of the church thereby, as to make a perfect separation between good and bad, or to make the work of conversion and initial instruction needless in the churches. Conversion is to the children of the covenant a fruit of the covenant, saith Mr. Cotton. *If we do not keep in the way of a converting, grace-giving covenant, and keep persons under those church dispensations wherein grace is given, the church will die of a lingering though not of a violent death.* The Lord hath not set up churches only that a few old Christians may keep one another warm while they live, and then carry away the church into the cold grave with them when they die: No, but that they might with all the care and with all the obligations and advantages to that care that may be, nurse up still successively another generation of subjects to Christ, that may stand up in his kingdom when they are gone, that so he might have a people and kingdom successively continued to him from one generation to another."

INCREASE MATHER in his *Discourse Concerning the Subject of Baptism*, 1675, pp. 7 and 8, says: "The persons in question are either belonging to the visible church, or of the world only. The Scripture speaketh of those two terms, church and the world, etc. But to say that the persons in question and their children are of the world only, is in effect to say that they are visibly the devil's and none of the Lord's children."

⁴⁷For example, in the First Church in Cambridge (Mitchell's church) till 1828. See *Manual*, 1872. Still the lists of those received in this particular church under the scheme show that it could have had little influence on the vital religion of the church.

“reforming synod” was accordingly called, and met in Boston in 1679. The document put forth by the synod mentions a great many particulars in which the churches had fallen away from their duty and stood in need of a reformation. The reader must make considerable allowance for the phraseology of the day, and for the over-strict views upon many topics which prevailed in New England at the time. Cotton Mather in his account of the matter seems to have an inkling that the terms of the document would be likely to give posterity an unduly unfavorable view of the condition of things, for he says:⁴⁸

Indeed, the people of God in this land were not gone so far in degeneracy but that there were further degrees of disorder and corruption to be found, I must freely speak it, in other, yea, in *all* other places where the protestant religion is professed: and the most impartial observers must have acknowledged that there was proportionably still more of true religion, and a larger number of the strictest saints in this country, than in any other on the face of the earth.

Still, with all allowances, it is evident that there was decline in the community. The positive sins mentioned, the increase of profanity, intemperance, and licentiousness shows that there was rising a community about the church which deserved the name of “the world,” and that the church was not subduing it. Though the synod recommended vigorous measures, and though many churches held special meetings of reconsecration, the evil was not stayed. The Half-Way Covenant had a strong influence in this direction. Those who had come forward and owned the covenant and had their children baptized seemed satisfied with this, and as Mr. Stoddard said, there was a “general neglect” of the Lord’s Supper. “About forty years past,” he says in his sermon of the year 1707, “there were multitudes in the country unbaptized: but that neglect was taken into examination, and now there is an alteration in that particular. But to this day there are four to one that do neglect the Lord’s Supper, as if it did not belong to them to magnify God on account of the work of redemption.” The organized churches were, therefore, in danger of extinction, since the body of communicants,

⁴⁸ *Magnalia*, II, p. 317.

who were the members in full standing, and could alone perpetuate the organizations, was decreasing.⁴⁹ The evil began probably in connection with the difficulties which had led to the Half-Way Covenant; and we find that to meet it there had already been practiced some laxness in admitting members to the communion without a personal confession of faith. One of the remedies for the prevailing evils proposed by the "reforming synod" gives more than a hint of this. The synod said: "It is requisite that persons be not admitted unto communion in the Lord's Supper without making a personal and public profession of their faith and repentance, either orally or in some other way, so as shall be to the just satisfaction of the church; and that, therefore, both elders and churches be duly watchful and circumspect in this matter."⁵⁰ The careful phraseology shows that in some instances, at least, all proper confession of personal faith had been omitted.

But it was left to Rev. Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, Mass.,⁵¹ to make an open proposal to adopt this lax practice as the regular method of the churches. In 1707 he preached the sermon from which a quotation has already been made, and which bore this title: "The Inexcusableness of Neglecting the Worship of God under a Pretence of being in an Unconverted Condition." The occasion was a somewhat public one, as the "Inferior Court" was then sitting. It was thus, no doubt, intended to have a general application, and to introduce a practice at least in some respects new. Yet it seems to have grown out of Mr. Stoddard's own experiences as a parish minister. In seeking to restore the Lord's Supper to its proper place in the public observance, he had apparently tried to persuade certain persons to come to the Lord's table, who had met him with the

⁴⁹ TRUMBULL, in his *History of Connecticut*, Vol. I, p. 472, says that in the year 1696 "the practice of making a relation of Christian experiences, and of admitting none to full communion but such as appeared to be Christians indeed, yet prevailed; and the number of church members, in full communion, was generally small. In those churches where the owning of the covenant was not practiced, great numbers of children were unbaptized."

⁵⁰ *Magnalia*, II, p. 326.

⁵¹ Born 1643, died 1729, pastor at Northampton, 1669-1729.

excuse that they were unregenerate, and so had no right to the privilege he urged upon them. So he explains the object of his sermon, when it had been attacked by Increase Mather,⁵² as being "to answer a case of conscience and direct those that might have scruples about participating in the Lord's Supper because they have not a work of saving conversion, and not at all to direct the churches to admit any that were not to rational charity true believers."⁵³ The doctrine he propounded to this end he expresses thus: "That sanctifying grace is not necessary unto the lawful attending of any duty of worship." The general argument is characteristic of New England, though now applied in a new way. It acquires all its strength from the identification of the Jewish system with the Christian at a multitude of points in which they are in fact widely separated. The Lord's Supper ought as much to be observed as any other act of worship, and unconverted persons are just as inexcusable for not attending it as any others; and this all the more, since the passover in the Old Testament was kept by all the people without regard to their holy estate.

The most startling view proposed in the sermon was that the unconverted should be urged to come to the sacrament as a converting ordinance. At first sight this looks like a return to the sacramentarianism of the Roman church, but it was not such in fact. On the contrary, Stoddard seems to have held a view of the Lord's Supper too low, rather than too high. Among the reasons he gives for his doctrine are that "it is needful that others [than the regenerate] should attend duties of worship that the worship of God *may be carried on.*" And again, "This is very useful that men may obtain sanctifying grace . . . God in the Lord's Supper invites us to come to Christ, makes an affecting representation of his sufferings for our sins," etc.⁵⁴ He styles it a "seal of the covenant," but he says in his later treatise "that the sacraments do not seal up pardon and salvation to all that receive them, but they are seals to the truth of the covenant." Now, if Stoddard meant by the first clause of

⁵² In *A Dissertation*, etc., Boston, 1708.

⁵⁴ *Sermon* of the year 1707, pp. 15, 16.

⁵³ *Appeal to the Learned*, 1799, pp. 2, 3.

⁵⁵ *Appeal*, pp. 22, 23.

this last sentence that the seals did not seal simply as outward elements, no one in New England would have disagreed with him; but he probably intended to deny that the sacraments had *any* personal application as seals of forgiveness to the believing recipient, and to limit their sealing efficacy to the covenant in general, that is, to make them mere monuments—a view far from the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the consensus of teaching in New England at the time. Thus the main thing about them was the affecting representation they made; their efficiency was that of a sermon, or a prayer, and hence they should be attended by the unregenerate, as these should be.⁵⁶

This sermon was, however, not only a factor in the decline of the New England churches, but also incidentally a witness that the decline had already proceeded to quite an alarming point. Upon nothing had the earliest Congregationalists insisted with greater or juster emphasis than upon the necessity of a godly ministry. The Cambridge Platform made the divine calling an indispensable prerequisite of the office.⁵⁷ The minute pains taken to secure a regenerate church membership would have had no significance, had not even greater been taken to secure a ministry who could impress the truths of the gospel with power because they had a deep experience of the divine word themselves. But a declining church had now produced a declining ministry, and we find Mr. Stoddard gravely arguing for his new position that sanctifying grace was not necessary unto attending any duty of worship, from the further position, which is stated as an acknowledged principle, that “sanctifying

⁵⁶ Stoddard was, however, not a man to use theological terms with accuracy, and there are many contradictions in his forms of presenting his ideas which cannot be fully cleared up. He said, for example, that “those that are saints by calling are to be accepted by the church, whether they be converted or not” (*Sermon*, p. 23). But “called saints” are converted, calling being the divine side, and conversion the human side of the same thing. Again, the whole contention of his sermon was that persons that knew themselves to be unconverted should come to the Lord’s table, and yet he said that it was not his object to “direct the churches to admit any that were not to *rational charity* true believers.” But how could “rational charity” call a man a true believer who knew and said himself that he was not? That would seem to be very *irrational* charity.

⁵⁷ Chap. viii, § 1.

grace is not necessary unto preaching of the word!" He says: "It is upon all accounts most desirable that preachers should be godly men, and, *ceteris paribus*, they that are converted themselves are most likely to be instruments of the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. Yet it is lawful for men in a natural condition to preach the word. Jesus Christ sent out Judas to preach the gospel as well as the other disciples."⁵⁸ And later he says again: "If a man do know himself to be unregenerate, yet it is lawful for him to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. The blessing of this ordinance doth not depend upon the piety of him that doth administer it. . . . Men that are destitute of grace are not prohibited in the word of God to administer the ordinances of God."⁵⁹ Now this, we are to note, is by no means the position that the unworthiness of the ministrant does not affect the validity of the sacrament administered, to him who receives it, though this acknowledged principle is used as an argument in its favor; but it is the position that an unconverted man may, so far as he is himself concerned, go on lawfully to administer the ordinances, or, in other words, that a man who knows himself to be in God's eye out of the church may do those things which belong alone to the members of the church to do!

How, now, could such a position be for an instant maintained had there not already been discussion among the churches upon this topic, which was called out by some patent and strange fact? How, unless there were already ministers who could not in honesty claim to be converted, and for whom some way of justification had been anxiously sought? The later complaint of Whitefield about "unconverted ministers," whom, to his own mind, he found in many places in New England, points in the same direction, and gives too much reason to fear that the decay in the churches had now confessedly reached even the ministers themselves.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Sermon*, p. 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ Mr. Stoddard claimed that the direction of the synod of 1679, cited above, was not contrary to his position in the *Sermon* of 1707, for the words, as they ran in the synod's result ("that persons be not admitted unto communion in the Lord's Supper without making a personal and public profession of their faith and repentance"), were

The main object of Mr. Stoddard, in his sermon, was accomplished, and though Increase Mather opposed him with strong logic of the reason, that stronger logic of events was with the innovator, and the practice became general in the valley of the Connecticut at least to admit persons to the communion who did not profess to be converted.⁶¹ Rev. Benjamin Colman, of Boston, also favored the idea,⁶² and doubtless many others, though there was also always a large number who repudiated both the Half-Way Covenant and its daughter, lax communion. The spiritual dearth increased, revivals were uncommon, immorality grew apace, and the state of religion went lower and lower.⁶³ Theological modifications naturally entered with lax practice, and the Arminian writings of Tillotson, Whitby, Taylor, and Clarke, and subsequently the Socinian treatises of Emlyn (reprinted in America in 1756, and no doubt read long before that) and others were read and had a large influence. How far the Congregational clergy became Arminian at this time (about 1720) it is impossible to say. The impression was abroad that many, both in the ministry and the churches, were in greater or less sympathy with this style of thought. Proofs and traces of it will be found at a later point in this history; but it is now enough to note that so keen an observer as Jonathan Edwards thought Arminianism "prevailing" and was led to devote his principal writing to opposing it, and, indeed, began the great

substituted at his request for the more precise and searching formula at first reported in which the phrase was found, "without making a relation of the work of God's Spirit" (*Appeal*, p. 94). But this was scarcely so. That he made the proposal to change the wording, and that it was done upon his request, we must accept upon his assertion; but that the change had, in the mind of the synod at large, any such significance is impossible. Indeed, an anonymous writer, in reply to Mr. Stoddard (*An Appeal of some of the Unlearned*, 1709), said (p. 17): "The story told as to the blotting of a passage in the result of the synod, we are upon good information from the moderator himself, who drew that result, assured it is a mistake, and a gross one."

⁶¹ TRUMBULL, *History*, Vol. II, p. 146: "A great proportion of the clergy at that time were of opinion that unregenerate men, if externally moral, ought to be admitted to all the ordinances." Cf. *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶² Sermon, 1727, title: *Parents and Grown Children should be together at the Lord's Table.*

⁶³ Cf. TRUMBULL, *History*, Vol. II, p. 137, with EDWARDS' *Works*, edition of 1830, Vol. IV, p. 19.

revival work of his life with a re preaching of the fundamental doctrines of Calvinism, the effects of which went far to show that his diagnosis of the disease was correct.

The course of this review has brought the reader to the lowest point of religious decline reached in New England, whether it be considered from a practical or a doctrinal point of view. Before he begins to trace the upward course of things, and to view the influences under which that took place, he should pause long enough to perceive that the progress downwards has its fruitful cause in the one fact of an alarming absence of vital piety in the New England communities. There was not regenerate material for the regenerate church. It was sought to remedy the difficulty in various ways, but they did not touch this underlying cause. The children of the unregenerate were baptized, but that did not secure their conversion, and the church continued to grow fewer and fewer in number. Then the unregenerate were invited to the Lord's table, but though a greater number of communicants was thus secured, the general condition of the community did not improve, and all that New England was founded for, or her pious sons still cared for, went slowly to ruin. And, doctrinally considered, the cause of all was the doctrine of inability, so preached as to deplete the churches, by discouraging repentance and faith.

The influence of the style of thought becoming largely prevalent in England has been hinted at. The complete understanding of this thought, of importance not only for its direct, but for many indirect, influences upon subsequent New England thinking, demands that a fuller consideration be given to it than is now possible.