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In discussing these three words almost no reference has been made to other languages, because the changes have obviously gone on within the Latin itself. They are strictly *res domesticæ*. In such subordinate branches of etymology each language should be allowed to mind its own business.

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## ARTICLE V.

### COTTON MATHER AND THE WITCHCRAFT DELUSION.

BY PROF. R. D. C. ROBBINS, NEWTON HIGHLANDS, MASS.

#### *The Views of Cotton Mather and his Age concerning Unseen and Spiritual Agency.*

BEFORE proceeding to the direct investigation of Cotton Mather's connection with witchcraft, for which he has been so severely censured, and his name been made a synonyme for all that is harsh and unloving, it seems appropriate to examine briefly his views of the influence of unseen agents in moulding the destiny of human beings. And in doing this, it may not be amiss to bear in mind now what we shall have occasion more than once to refer to, that his belief was substantially that of the best and most intelligent men of his age in this country, and to a great extent that of the most religiously inclined in England.

In the education of his children he dwelt much upon the presence and influence of good angels, "who love them, help them, guard them from evil, and do many good offices for them; who likewise take a very diligent notice of them, and ought not in any way to be disobliged." In reference to evil angels, his kindness of nature took precedence of his theology, for he did not say much about them, his son says, lest his children should be haunted by "frightful fancies" and "apparitions of devils." Still, "he would not have them ignorant that there are devils who tempt them to wickedness, who are glad when they do wickedly, and who may get leave of God to kill them for it."

In his own experience, when on a certain occasion "he looked over his catalogue of mercies from the God of heaven" and compared "what he read in the book of heaven of the agency of angels, he enumerates fourteen distinct particulars in which he thinks he discovers angelical agency in his affairs, and quotes passages of Scripture appropriate to, or corroborative of, each."<sup>1</sup> By this contemplation he is so transported in spirit that he casts himself on his study-floor before the Lord, and in his rapturous praise to the God of angels, he exclaims: "If any good angels of the Lord are now nigh unto me, do you also bless the Lord, ye heavenly ministers; and, oh! adore that free grace of his which employs you to be serviceable to so poor, so mean, so vile a wretch as is here prostrate before him." In connection with his supplications to God for a continuation of the aid of angels, which he needs in so many particulars, he also supplicates for preservation from the "illusions and injuries of evil angels."

Cotton Mather expresses vividly in a sermon his belief in the activity and influence of evil spirits, and although the passage has been often quoted, it is too apposite to my purpose to be omitted here: "No place that I know of has got such a spell upon it as will always keep the devil out. The meeting-house wherein we assemble for the worship of God is filled with many holy people and many holy concerns continually; but if our eyes were so refined as the servant of the prophet had his of old, I suppose we should now see a throng of devils in this very place. The apostle has intimated that angels come in among us. There are angels, it seems, that hark how I preach and how you hear at this hour. And our own sad experience is enough to intimate that the devils are also rendezvousing here. It is reported in Job i. 5, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them. When we are in our church assemblies, oh, how many devils do you imagine crowd in among us? There is a devil that rocks one

<sup>1</sup> See *Life*, by Samuel Mather, p. 119 sq., and also Dr. Chandler Robbins's *History of the Old North Church*, p. 102 sq.

to sleep. There is a devil that makes another to be pleasing himself with wanton and wicked speculations. It is also possible that we have our closets or our studies gloriously perfumed with devotions every day; but, alas! can we shut the devil out of them? No, let us go where we will, we shall find a devil nigh unto us. Only when we come to heaven we shall be out of his reach forever."

But the devil, though the foe and opposer of all improvement in knowledge and civilization everywhere, was supposed to be specially active in this new world. His own territory was invaded. He had held full sway over the aborigines of this country before the inroads of Europeans. He even, it was supposed, had induced these descendants of the Israelites to come upon this continent, so as to have full control over them. Cotton Mather says: "Though we know not when or how those Indians first became inhabitants of this mighty continent, yet we may guess that probably the devil decoyed these miserable salvages hither, in hopes that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ would never come here to destroy or disturb his absolute empire over them." In England, too, this same notion prevailed. Joseph Mede, one of "the most profound scholars of his time," and esteemed for "brilliant genius and an enlightened spirit," says, "that the devil, being impatient of the sound of the gospel and cross of Christ in every part of the Old World, . . . and foreseeing that he was like to lose all here, . . . drew a colony out of some of those barbarous, nations dwelling upon the Northern ocean, into America, where they have increased since into an innumerable multitude. And where did the devil ever reign more absolutely and without control since mankind first fell under his clutches?"<sup>1</sup>

"No intelligent person in those times," Mr. Poole says, rejected the theory of diabolical agency, unless he rejected also the authority of the Old and New Testaments, the existence of angels, and a life beyond the grave. A belief in

<sup>1</sup> See Upham's Salem Witchcraft, Vol. i. p. 396 sq., where much more to the same effect is quoted.

witchcraft was essential to the maintenance of a Christian character.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Upham, too, allows "that the errors that led to the [witchcraft] delusion were not attacked from any quarter at any time during that generation, and have remained lurking in many minds, in greater or less degree, to our day."<sup>2</sup>

What better soil could be found for the delusion of witchcraft to spring up upon than such a belief in the power and dominion of evil spirits over the human mind? The responsibility which the belief that was prevalent, both abroad and here, in reference to New England as the stronghold of the adversary of souls, imposed upon the colonists especial activity in resisting his influence; and they naturally wished to discharge their duty in this respect, "faithfully and manfully." "They were told," Upham says, "and they believed, that it had fallen to their lot, to be the champions of the cross of Christ against the power of the devil. They felt that they were fighting him in his last stronghold, and they were determined to tie him up forever."<sup>3</sup>

"It was the blades and learned wittlings of the coffee-house who ridiculed the doctrine of satanic possession," whilst "Cotton Mather, his father, and all the religious men of that day went to their graves in full belief of its reality."<sup>4</sup> And, at the same time, it should not be forgotten that the reason is to be found in the infidelity and the careless disregard of religion and good order in the one class, and a conscientious determination to crush out impiety and every evil work in the other.

*Are Cotton Mather and the Clergy and Authorities of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay Sinners above all other Men in Matters pertaining to Witchcraft?*

I have no inclination to apologize, contrary to justice, for the actors in "the saddest tragedy of early New England

<sup>1</sup> North American Review, April, 1869, p. 396 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Salem Witchcraft, Vol. ii. p. 457.

<sup>3</sup> Salem Witchcraft, Vol. i. p. 400.

<sup>4</sup> See Calef, p. 10, and North American Review, April 1869, p. 397.

history"; but it seems to me that our fathers have received, and are constantly receiving, more opprobrium than justly belongs to them, as compared with the rest of the world. The majority of the community, I imagine, feel that the early settlers of Massachusetts Bay, with Cotton Mather at their head, leading them on, are not only sinners above other men, but almost the only men that had the hardness to take the life of their fellows for supposed complicity with evil spirits. It would scarcely be believed, by those who have not examined the matter, that no form of religion and no nation or age prior to the Salem witchcraft "can claim immunity from this superstition." Little is known of the two hundred thousand persons executed, and mostly burned, in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Who speaks of the thirty thousand who in England were the victims of this superstition? or of one thousand who were executed in Germany, annually, during the century from 1580 to 1680?<sup>1</sup> Whilst all the details of the execution of the twenty victims at Salem are known and read of all men. Who ever notices the fact that, as Howell says, "in the compass of two years, near upon three hundred witches were arraigned, and the major part of them executed, in Essex and Suffolk Counties in England; and that more witches have been put to death in a single county in England, in a short space of time, than have ever suffered in New England altogether, from first to last"? "Scotland swarms with them now [in 1647] more than ever, and persons of good quality are executed daily."<sup>2</sup> "In Scotland," too, "seven men were executed for witches, in 1697, upon the testimony of one girl about eleven years old."<sup>3</sup>

In judging of the actors in the trials of witches in Salem village, and elsewhere in New England, do we not too often forget that at that time, in all countries, witchcraft was not only treated as a reality as much as any of the processes of

<sup>1</sup> See S. G. Drake's Introduction to the Witchcraft Delusion, p. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Familiar Letters of James Howell, Historiographer Royal (p. 427), quoted by Poole in North American Review, Vol. cviii. p. 343.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, Vol. ii chap. 1.

nature, but by the laws of all nations, Catholic and Protestant, it was regarded as a capital crime more heinous than any other? To let it pass unpunished was to have complicity with the devil, and to be guilty of treason to laws civil and divine.<sup>1</sup>

But my present object is not to discuss witchcraft in general, or New England witchcraft, at length. Still, some idea of the state of feeling of the time seemed necessary to an intelligent view of any particular actor in it. It is one thing to live in a community and an age where a belief in witchcraft was an essential requisite of Christian character, and the disbeliever in it ranked as a disbeliever in the Bible and its doctrines of angelic existences and a future life, and quite a different matter to live when the idea of satanical possessions is the acme of all superstition, and as inconsistent with mental sanity as religion.

Moreover, if our fathers in general have received a greater than the just measure of reprobation, in comparison with others who have had to do with the punishment of witches, is it not even more apparent that Cotton Mather has received more than his share of censure, as compared with his compeers not only in old, but also in New, England? "This delusion received the sanction of all the learned and distinguished English judges who flourished within the century (the seventeenth), from Sir Edmund Coke to Sir Matthew Hale."<sup>2</sup> Do we hear their names in the mouth of every school-boy, as the designation of the embodiment of superstitious credulity? Has not the latter, especially, though

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson says that there was no Colonial law in force at Salem against witchcraft at the time of the first execution at Salem, and that the whole action of the court was based upon that passed under James L, 1603, by which all who were convicted were to be consigned to the pains and penalties of death as felons. There was a law passed in the colony as early as 1641: "If any man or woman be a witch, that is hath, or consulted with, a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death," and this law the General Court which was in session at the time of the first execution made "a law of the province."— See Upham, ii. pp. 256, 258, and S. G. Drake's Introduction to the Witchcraft Delusion, p. 21 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Upham, Salem Witchcraft, Vol. i. p. 400.

acknowledged as the leading authority in the trial of witches,<sup>1</sup> been ever revered, even in New England, "for his knowledge of law, and gravity and piety"?

Richard Baxter published his book on the "Certainty of the World of Spirits"; kept up a constant correspondence with the Mathers, urging them to faithfulness in their efforts to suppress witchcraft; published in England, with a Preface, often quoted from and encouraged the sale of, Cotton Mather's "Memorable Providences"; and pronounced those who did not receive it, with "its full and convincing evidence," as "obdurate Sadducees who will not believe."<sup>2</sup> And yet no one, for all this, is filled with hatred and scorn for the author of the "Saint's Rest," as unchristian or foolishly credulous. Such writers as Dr. Henry More, of Christ's College, Cambridge, Dr. Calamy, and others, wrote volumes to prove the reality, and instruct in the detection, of satanic possession; and yet their names are scarcely tarnished by these things that would, if his enemies could accomplish their ends, utterly blacken that of Cotton Mather.

It would seem, too, that New England and Cotton Mather owe their prominence in the dealing with witches over Pennsylvania and the good Quaker, William Penn, rather to a special providence in favor of, or a want of legal acumen in, the latter, than to any immunity from superstition. For Upham says: "William Penn presided, in his judicial character, at the trial of two Swedish women for witchcraft; the grand jury, acting under instruction from him, having found bills against them, they were saved not in consequence of any peculiar reluctance to proceed against them arising out of the nature of the alleged crime, but only from some technical defect in the indictment." Otherwise, as the annalist of Philadelphia suggests, "scenes similar to those subsequently occurring in Salem village might have darkened the history

<sup>1</sup> He published his *Trial of Witches in Suffolk*, in 1664. See Hutchinson's *History*.

<sup>2</sup> See his *Letter to Increase Mather*, quoted in *Drake's Witchcraft Delusion*. Introduction, p. 30, and *Magnalia*, Vol. ii. p. 403. See also Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts Bay*, Vol. ii. p. 20, and Upham, Vol. i. p. 401.



480 COTTON MATHER AND THE WITCHCRAFT DELUSION. [July, of the Quakers, Swedes, Germans, and Dutch who dwelt in the City of Brotherly Love and the adjacent colonies."¹

### *What was Witchcraft?*

Some idea of what is meant by the term "witchcraft," and the relation of the witch to Satan and to men, as held by the actors in it, and by people generally in the seventeenth century, should be taken into the account in judging of the culpability of those who took severe measures against it.² A witch was a person who had made a formal compact with Satan to do his behests, to oppose all good, to aid him in his opposition to God, to Christ, to the church; whilst, on the other hand, the devil was to use his supernatural power in behalf of his disciple, and to communicate the same to him as he should show himself worthy.

The power of the two united was almost unlimited. The human element brought the satanic into connection with the life of men, and there was scarcely anything of evil or suffering that might not in this way be wrought out for mortal endurance. Knowledge, too, of the past, of the future, of the spiritual world, the ability (such as modern spiritualists claim) to bring back departed spirits, who could give an account of their experiences in another life, and seduce from the paths of virtue and allure to vice whomever they might wish, were a part of the power of this combined human and satanic agency.³

¹ See Upham, Vol. i. p. 414.

² See various definitions of it in Drake's *Witchcraft Delusion*. Introduction, p. 11 sq.

³ A passage in Mr. Brattle's Letter referred to below well characterizes the spirit of the time to rely upon the utterances of those supposed to be under the influence of unseen spiritual agents, and the desire of the Mathers to counteract this hurtful and dangerous tendency: He says, "A person from Boston, of no small note, carried up his child to Salem, near twenty miles, on purpose that he might consult the afflicted about his child; which accordingly he did, and the afflicted told him that his child was afflicted by Mrs. Cary and Mrs. Obinson. The man returned to Boston and went forthwith to the justices for a warrant to seize," etc. But he adds: "The Rev. I. M. (Increase Mather), of Boston, took occasion severely to reprove the said man; asking whether there was not a God in Boston, that he should go to the devil in Salem for advice; warning him very seriously against such naughty practices," etc.

This was not, it should be remembered, a mere hallucination of the ignorant, credulous, uneasy, speculating few, but sanctioned by learning, philosophy, and theology, embalmed by centuries of almost unbroken adherence, and firmly established in the conscientious belief of the most devout and wary. Who can wonder that a mortal terror of such an influence — creeping in no one knew whence or how until its results became apparent — stirred up our fathers to eradicate it, root and branch, from the colony which had been especially devoted to Christ and his church? Their culpability, it must be acknowledged, was not in waging a war of extermination against such an enemy as they supposed<sup>1</sup> was among them, but in not rising above the intelligence of the then existing world, and employing other than carnal weapons in this warfare.

*Some Early Cases of Witchcraft in New England.*

The cases of witchcraft that occurred before Cotton Mather was born, or when he was in his cradle, are, of course, to be left out of the account; although he would almost seem to be held responsible, by many writers on the subject, for all that was done in the preceding generations. It is noticeable, however, that, fifteen years before his birth, the first execution in New England of which the particulars are on record was that of Margaret Jones of Charlestown, under Governor Winthrop, "the staid and judicious founder of the Massachusetts Colony," who not only presided at the trial, and signed the death-warrant, but wrote out, in his journal of June 4, 1648, the particulars of the evidence relied upon and deemed satisfactory.

Soon after this, there were several trials and two executions in the Connecticut Colony. In 1656 Mrs. Ann Hibbins, the wife of a Boston merchant, was hanged. According to Hutchinson, three witches were condemned in Hartford,

<sup>1</sup> The feeling of the community upon the subject is well exemplified in such publications of the time as that of Rev. Mr. Turell of Medford, on the Detection of Witchcraft, printed in Mass. Hist. Coll. (2d Series), Vol. x. p. 6 sq.

on the 20th of January 1662(3), twenty-three days before Cotton Mather's birth. Several other executions followed in Connecticut; and, in imitation of the English trials, the water test, by which the death of one hundred persons was accomplished in three counties in England, was tried there. It is almost to be wondered at that some one, in his desire to stigmatize Cotton Mather's credulity, has not hinted that the air had become tainted, and the moral sense of the community perverted, by his approach to the earth at this time, so as to influence the decisions in these cases.

It is unnecessary to enumerate other instances of trial and execution that occurred during Cotton Mather's early years. It is enough to say "that the colonies were in a constant ferment from supposed diabolical agency, for more than forty years before 1692. In every community there were suspicions and accusations which never came to a public examination";<sup>1</sup> the same was true to a still greater extent in England.

The first case of witchcraft that Cotton Mather can be accused of having been concerned in, or in any way aiding and abetting, was that of the Goodwin children (four in number), in 1688. The family seem to have been reputable people, who had recently come from Charlestown to reside at the North End of Boston. The father, Hutchinson says, "was a grave man and a good liver"; and "the children were all remarkable for ingenuity of temper, had been religiously educated, and were thought to be without guile."<sup>2</sup> The first unusual developments were with the eldest daughter, thirteen or fourteen years old, who, after the abusive language of an Irish woman of bad character, whose daughter (a laundress) she had accused of purloining some of the family linen, fell into fits supposed to be diabolical in their origin. Three other children, a sister and two brothers, were soon after similarly affected. All of them it is said,

<sup>1</sup> See Poole in *North American Review*, April 1869, p. 346; see also accounts of other cases in *Magnalia*, Vol. ii. p. 389 sq.; and also in Drake and Upham.

<sup>2</sup> Governor Hutchinson, *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, Vol. ii. pp. 19, 20.

were sometimes "tormented in the same part of their bodies at the same time, although kept in separate apartments, and ignorant of each other's complaint. Sometimes they would be deaf, then dumb, then blind, and sometimes all these disorders together would come upon them. Their tongues would be driven down their throats, then pulled out upon their chins; their jaws, necks, shoulders, elbows, and all their joints would appear to be dislocated; and they would make most piteous outcries of burnings, of being cut with knives, beaten, etc.; and marks of wounds were afterwards to be seen."<sup>1</sup>

The father, after he found that the aid of friends and physicians was of no avail, concluded that this kind were not to be cast out but by prayer, and made application to the "four ministers, Mr. Moody, Mr. Willard, and Mr. C. Mather of Boston, and to Mr. Norton of Charlestown, members of whose church the parents were; considering . . . that as his afflictions were more than ordinary, they called for more than ordinary prayer; . . . and earnestly desiring them that they, with some other praying people of God, would meet at his house, and there be earnest with God on the behalf of himself and his children."

It should be noticed here that this was the first connection of Cotton Mather with this case, and that it was at the invitation of the father, and in common with that to other ministers in Boston. But we will quote the father's testimony, under his own signature, that neither Cotton Mather nor others of the clergy had anything to do with this matter, except to offer their prayers as asked by him, until *after* the condemnation of the supposed witch.

"Let the world be informed," he says, "that when one of my children had been laboring under sad circumstances from the invisible world for about a quarter of a year, I desired the ministers of Boston, with Charlestown, to keep a day of prayer at my house, if so be deliverance might be obtained. Mr. Cotton Mather was the last [perhaps on

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, Vol. ii. p. 19, and Mather's *Magnalia*, Vol. ii. p. 399.

account of his youth and inexperience, as he was then only twenty-six years old, and had been settled only four years] of the ministers that I spoke to on that occasion ; and though, by reason of some necessary business, he could not attend, yet he came to my house in the morning of that day, and tarried about half an hour, and went to prayer with us before any other minister came. Never before had I the least acquaintance with him. About two or three months after this, I desired that another day of prayer might be kept by the aforesaid ministers, which accordingly they did ; and Mr. Cotton Mather was then present ; but *he never gave me the least advice, neither face to face nor by way of epistles, neither directly or indirectly.* But the motion of going to the authority was made to me by a minister of the neighboring town [probably, Mr. Poole thinks, Mr. Bailey, of Watertown], now departed ; and matters were managed by me, in prosecution of the supposed criminal, wholly without the advice of any minister or lawyer or any other person. The ministers, and among them Cotton Mather, would now and then come to visit my distressed family, and pray with and for them. Yet all the time he never advised me to anything concerning the law or trial of the accused persons ; but after that wicked woman had been condemned about a fortnight Mr. Cotton Mather invited one of my children to his house ; and within a day or two after that the woman was executed.”<sup>1</sup>

Cotton Mather, “according to his custom with all prisoners, visited the Glover woman (the supposed witch) twice after her condemnation, as a spiritual adviser,” and, as it has been said, “her soul went to its last judgment on the wings of his prayer.” She, in her conversation with him, revealed the names of four other persons who had been present with her in her meeting with her prince, whom she intimated was the devil. But Cotton Mather refused to give the names of

<sup>1</sup> See a Book published in Boston, 1701, by parishioners of the South Church, in defence of their pastors, entitled : “Some Few Remarks upon a Scandalous Book by one Robert Calef,” with the motto, “Truth will come off Conqueror.” See also Mather’s Memorable Providences, Magnalia, Vol. ii. p. 467.

these individuals, because, as he characteristically says, "we should be very tender in such relation, lest we wrong the reputation of the innocent by stories not enough inquired into." After beseeching her "to break her covenant with hell," and "to pray for herself, which she denied that she could do," he prayed with her against her will, which, he adds, "if it were a fault, it was in excess of pity."

I cannot doubt that it was in pity, too, and with a hope of benefiting the eldest daughter, that he took her into his house, and kept her during the autumn and winter, and endured all sorts of annoyances from her vexatious pranks mixed with affected piety, without a reproach or complaint. He doubtless, as has been said, believed that prayer was the proper antidote against the influence of the evil one; and he, having, as he believed, received manifest answers to prayer for specific objects, hoped that he might avail in this case. How easily, if he had been (as he is often accused of being) desirous to perpetuate this delusion, he might have brought not only the cases of these children, but also of those criminated persons whose names he refused to divulge, before the courts, instead of persevering in his acts of charity and mercy, until, as he supposed, he had exorcised the demons by his importunate supplications.

We have from him this simple record of the final result of his efforts for this family: "One particular minister [himself, doubtless], taking a particular compassion on the family, set himself to serve them in the methods prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the Lord being *besought thrice*, in *three* days of prayer, with fasting on this occasion, the family then saw their deliverance perfected."<sup>1</sup>

It may not be amiss to quote here what Hutchinson says of the subsequent developments of this family: The children returned to their ordinary behavior, lived to an adult age, made profession of religion, and the affliction they had been under they publicly declared to be one motive to it. One of them I knew many years after. She had the char-

<sup>1</sup> *Magnalia*, Vol. ii. p. 403.

acter of a very sober, virtuous woman.”<sup>1</sup> The parents brought letters to Mr. Mather’s church, of which the children subsequently became members.

Thus far, it should seem that Cotton Mather’s influence was entirely *opposed to*, rather than in favor of, any judicial proceedings in cases of witchcraft, or any other than the kindest treatment of those afflicted by the supposed satanic influence. Furthermore, his endeavor was manifestly not to extend, but to suppress this delusion, as appears especially in his refusal to divulge the names of those who had been implicated by the confession of the woman condemned for bewitching the Goodwin children.

*Cotton Mather’s “Memorable Providences.”*

After these Goodwin children had been recalled to a proper course of life, and rescued, as it was supposed, from the power of the devil by prayer, it is not strange that Cotton Mather, whose pen was ever ready for use in every cause that he considered as good, felt compelled to give to the world an account of this whole matter, which he deemed so manifest an exhibition of God’s willingness to aid Christians in their opposition to all evil. It is not to be denied, of course, that he maintained to its fullest extent, in his “*Memorable Providences*,” the reality of witchcraft;<sup>2</sup> which, too, all of his colleagues in the ministry, and indeed all Christians in New England, were in their own minds fully assured of.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson’s *History*, Vol. ii. p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> He says, after challenging all men to detect any false representations in it “from the egg to the apple”: “I am resolved after this never to use but just one grain of patience with any man that shall go to impose upon me a denial of devils or of witches. I shall count that man ignorant who shall suspect [i.e. I suppose, those not guilty of complicity with the devil]; but I shall count him downright impudent if he asserts the non-existence of things which we have had such palpable convictions of.” — p. 40 of the 1st ed., published in 1689, and reprinted in London, 1691.

<sup>3</sup> The American edition was accompanied by a commendatory Preface by three other Boston ministers, as the English edition by one even laudatory by Richard Baxter.

In his Prefatory Remarks he gives the key-note to the whole narrative: "Prayer is the powerful and effectual remedy against the malicious practices of devils and those who covenant with them." And in the conclusion he echoes the same sentiment: "Prayer and faith was the thing that drove the devils from the children." And he adds: "I am to bear this testimony unto the world — that the Lord is nigh to all them that call upon him in truth, and that blessed are all they that wait for him."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, it has been truly said that "a spirit of kindness and charity towards persons afflicted and accused pervades the volume from beginning to end." Thus it well corresponds to his whole action in the case. We should not forget, too, that this publication was made after English books of a similar nature had become numerous, and sanctioned by such men as the sage Sir Matthew Hale, and, indeed, it has been said, "constituted the light reading of the day." "It cannot be gainsaid, then, that there is nothing in his whole conduct in this case — *literally nothing* — which is unbecoming to his character for thoughtful, sympathetic, and gracious piety."<sup>2</sup>

*Initiatory Development of Witchcraft in the Family and Parish of Mr. Parris in Salem Village.*

There is not extant, it is believed, any evidence that the initiatory development of the Salem witchcraft, connected with the family of Rev. Mr. Parris in Salem Village, was in any way aided or abetted by Cotton Mather. That he was there in person, or had any personal intercourse or acquaintance with any of those concerned in it, is not pretended. But he is accused of fostering the delusion there by publishing his account of the Goodwin children in his "Memorable Providences." We have seen above the nature and spirit of that book, and if it was abused, the most that can be said is,

<sup>1</sup> See *Memorable Providences*, p. 49, and Poole, *North American Review*, April 1869, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 9, 1870. See also Richard Baxter's opinion of this treatise, p. 479, above.



that he erred in judgment where any other serious-minded man of his age, if situated as he was, and with his facility in writing, and if he had equal faith and desire to do good, would have done the same. The book, without doubt, met the approbation of leading minds in this country and in England.<sup>1</sup>

But, as a matter of fact, no persons who gave an account of these proceedings, and are relied upon as authority, mention the name of Cotton Mather in connection with them. Mr. Thomas Brattle, who wrote a letter, at the request of some clergyman not named, October 8, 1692,<sup>2</sup> and was personally acquainted with the prominent actors, gives the names of other persons who incited and abetted, and those who utterly disapproved and denounced the proceedings; but he never, except incidentally, and that in a manner favorable to his innocence, mentions him. Governor Hutchinson, whose faithfulness and accuracy cannot be impeached, and who wrote with all the documents and records before him, many of which are now lost, does not allude to any agency, or connect the

<sup>1</sup> That it was considered desirable and a duty to put on record the more wonderful and unusual dispensations of Divine Providence among men, such as "apparitions, possessions, and enchantments, is indicated variously in the history of the time; as for instance, in the request of the President and Fellows of Harvard College in 1694, to "the ministers throughout the land" to manifest their pious regards unto the work of the Lord and the operation of his hands," by taking care "to observe and record the more illustrious discoveries of Divine Providence in the government of the world." With the Mathers were associated Rev. Messrs. Allen, Willard, and Morton, and Mr. Brattle; two of them, (Willard and Brattle), the men, if not the only men, of any account, who wrote formal criticisms of the Salem trials soon after they took place; Mr. Brattle's Letter, elsewhere referred to, and Mr. Willard's "Some Miscellany Observations," published anonymously. This alone would be a sufficient refutation of the accusation that Cotton Mather rushed into the publication of such matters from an inordinate desire for notoriety.

<sup>2</sup> This Letter, although written at this date, was entirely of a confidential nature, and was not published until several years afterward. He shrinks from the public judgment upon what he writes: "I should be very loath to bring myself into any snare by my freedom with you, and therefore hope that you will put the best construction on what I write, and secure me from such as would interpret my lines otherwise than they are designed." I suppose Mr. Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., Treasurer of Harvard College, to be the author of this Letter, as it is attributed to him in Mass. Hist. Coll. (1st Series, Vol. v.), and not to Mr. William Brattle, merchant of Boston, as is done by Mr. Upham.

name of Cotton Mather in any way with these proceedings in Salem in the beginning of 1692.<sup>1</sup>

But further, the circumstances in which this most disastrous delusion appeared are not only sufficient to account for it; still more than this, they render it more than probable that the "Memorable Providences" had nothing to do with it at its first appearance, and too little influence afterward; as otherwise the results might have been more in accordance with those in the case of the Goodwin children.

It cannot, it should seem, be doubted that the two Indian servants of Rev. Mr. Parris had great, though unintentional, influence<sup>2</sup> in the first developments of the Salem witchcraft. A circle of young girls, eight or ten in number, including the daughter and niece of Mr. Parris, were accustomed, in the winter of 1691(2) to assemble in his house to practise "palmistry and other arts of fortune-telling, and of becoming experts in the wonders of necromancy, magic, and spiritualism."<sup>3</sup> They were probably interested and incited to these things by the stories of the slaves John Indian and Tituba his wife in reference to the wonders performed by the necromancers of their own native tribes "in the Spanish West Indies and the adjacent mainlands of central South America," who also seem to have acted as teachers of these young girls in the performance of their tricks. This is rendered probable, among other things, by the fact, stated by Mr. Upham, that "persons conversant with the Indians of Mexico and on both sides of the isthmus, discern many similarities in their systems of demonology with ideas and practices developed here."<sup>4</sup>

A proper watchfulness of the parents of these girls, and

<sup>1</sup> In this emergency Gov. Hutchinson says: "Several private fasts were kept at the minister's house, and several more public by the whole village, and then a general fast through the colony to seek God to rebuke Satan." "But the notice, and pity, and compassion" bestowed upon the children only "confirmed them" in their irregular courses." — See Hutchinson, Vol. ii. p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Other influences are enumerated by Mr. Upham, Vol. ii. p. 450, such as the spirit of the times, parish difficulties, characteristics of Mr. Parris.

<sup>3</sup> See Upham, Vol. ii. p. 2 sq., where the particular individuals are spoken of by name.

<sup>4</sup> History of Salem Witchcraft, Vol. ii. p. 2.

especially of Mr. Parris over both servants and children, would have put a stop to these proceedings. But they were allowed to go on until their experience and skill in tricks of legerdemain attracted "appreciating notice"; and after that, things went on from bad to worse. Their undisciplined minds began to lose the power or the willingness to distinguish between the imaginary and the real. Their bodies sympathized with the morbid state of their minds. "The trouble with these girls," Mr. Rice says, "arose with the long listening to stories which were bewildering, exciting, terrifying, and fascinating. These stories wrought upon their imagination, and their imagination upon their nerves. In a little time they were scarcely able, we may believe, to distinguish between what they imagined, and what they saw, heard, or felt. They grew to be excited, bewildered, bewitched. They were unnerved, unbalanced, unstrung, and in all things unlike healthy and sensible girls."<sup>1</sup>

The physician was then called in. He gave it as his opinion that they were bewitched. Mr. Parris, too, and the whole community, in accordance with the spirit of the times, readily fell in with the result of his diagnosis. Whether these girls had any of the English works on witchcraft to guide them in all of these matters does not seem certain. One or more of these books was found in Mr. Parris's library; but it is not at all impossible, as has been suggested, that Mr. Parris, after the physician's decision that his children were bewitched, sent to Boston and got Perkins's "Art of Damnable Witchcraft," or some other similar book, to see if their symptoms were delineated therein.

It seems, at least, quite certain that Cotton Mather's "Memorable Providences" had nothing to do with the early developments in Salem Village, since, as has been intimated, no mention is made of it in any of the proceedings of the occasion; and, furthermore, his method of dealing with the bewitched would have, it should seem, crept into some of

<sup>1</sup> Rice's History of the First Parish in Danvers. Appendix, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> History of the First Parish in Danvers, p. 213.

the conversations of Mr. Parris with those with whom he consulted, or of the children, who would, if his book had been in their hands and in any way an incitement to them, have betrayed a knowledge of it; and thus it would have come into notice in the proceedings of the occasion. "It is, however, an unfortunate circumstance," as has been well said, "that this book was not found [and perused] there; for the little manual would have taught the family and the Salem authorities a safe and judicious practice in treating the subtle enemy. Prayer and fasting were Mr. Mather's method of dealing with evil spirits, not hanging."

*The Method of Trial for Witchcraft that Cotton Mather  
Approved.*

In order to fully understand Cotton Mather's subsequent connection with the Salem witchcraft, it is necessary to state here, in brief, the two methods of procedure followed in England in the witchcraft trials, one or the other of which was adopted by those connected with such trials in this country. The one method was based upon the supposition that "the devil can employ only the spectres of such persons as are in league with him," and so it is necessary to accept the testimony of such persons as to the reality of the league; "since no other person was ever cognizant of the making of a contract with men by the devil, or saw the signing of his book; and hence the testimony of a witch is all the direct evidence that can be had, and must be accepted, or witches go unpunished."

On the other hand, Gaul, Perkins, and Bernard, and others contended that a trial for witchcraft should be conducted by the same rules of law as a trial for murder or arson; only that even greater circumspection should be used, inasmuch as there is greater danger of mistake in matters so uncertain, and where the devil is some way mixed up, who is a liar from the beginning, and will cheat, if he can, into a condemnation of those who are innocent. The testimony of a witch must, of course, be excluded, and the evi-

dence must be strictly *human*, i.e. what a person in the ordinary use of his faculties, and in their ordinary operation, has seen or known, without any supernatural or preternatural assistance, either from God or the devil.”<sup>1</sup>

It was the latter form of trial that Cotton Mather always contended for when a civil suit was supposed to be necessary. And if the judges at Salem had listened to him (and, indeed, most of the other ministers coincided with him in opinion), the judicial murders which have cast such a shadow over our Colonial history would in all probability have been avoided.

But, it may be asked, what proof is there that this was the sentiment and teaching of Cotton Mather? His son says: “Mr. Mather, for his part, was always afraid of proceeding to convict and condemn any person as a confederate with afflicting demons upon so feeble an evidence as a spectral representation. Accordingly, he ever testified against it, both publicly and privately; and particularly in his letter to the judges he besought them that they would by no means admit it.”<sup>2</sup> He himself says: “The world knows how many pages I have composed and published, and particular gentlemen in the government know how many letters I have written, to prevent the excessive credit of spectral accusations.”

Fortunately for the truth of these assertions, which have been called in question, one of the letters referred to has been preserved, written by Cotton Mather, May 31, 1692, to John Richards, his parishioner, and one of the judges at Salem. It should be noticed that this was three days before the trials commenced, and is the very first connection that he had in any form with Salem witchcraft. It is necessary to give a somewhat extended quotation, in order to show his feelings in reference to the matter and the influence he wished to exert over the judges.

“I most humbly beg you,” he says, “that in the management of the affair in your most worthy hands you do not lay

<sup>1</sup> North American Review, April 1869, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Mather's Life of Cotton Mather, p. 44.

more stress upon pure spectral testimony than it will bear. When you are satisfied, and have good, plain, legal evidence, that the demons which molest our poor neighbors do indeed represent such and such people to the sufferers, though this be a presumption, yet I suppose you will not reckon it a conviction, that the people so represented are witches, to be immediately exterminated. It is very certain that the devils have represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous; though I believe that the just God then ordinarily provides a way for the speedy vindication of the persons thus abused.

“Moreover, I do suspect that persons who have too much indulged themselves in malignant, envious, malicious ebullition of their souls may unhappily expose themselves to the judgment of being represented by devils, of whom they never had any vision, and with whom they have much less written any covenant.

“I would say this: If, upon the bare supposal of a poor creature’s being represented by a spectre, too great a progress be made by the authority in ruining a poor neighbor so represented, it may be that a door may be thereby opened for the devils to obtain from the courts in the invisible world a license to proceed into most hideous desolations upon the repute and repose of such as have been yet kept from the great transgression. If mankind have thus for once consented unto the credit of diabolical representation, the door is opened! Perhaps there are wise and good men that may be ready to style him that shall advance this caution a witch-advocate.<sup>1</sup> But in winding up, this caution will certainly be wished for.”<sup>2</sup>

*Cotton Mather’s Connection with the Trials for Witchcraft at Salem.*

The court for the trial of witches first met at Salem, June

<sup>1</sup> It should be noticed, that Cotton Mather feels that in carrying cautionary measures in the trials so far as he wishes to, he may not carry the sense of the Christian community with him, but incur the odium of witch-advocate from them.

<sup>2</sup> Mass. Hist. Coll. (4th Series), Vol. viii. p. 392, 393.

2d, and, giving little heed, apparently, to the admonitions of Cotton Mather, tried and condemned one Bridget Bishop; and then, in seeming consternation at the number of the accused and the excitement that had arisen, took a recess until June 29th. In the meantime the Governor and Council, in accordance with the custom of the age, made application to the ministers of Boston and vicinity for advice in reference to what should be done in this trying emergency, which was soon after communicated to them.

Cotton Mather's ready pen was employed to draw up this paper. It reiterated, even more emphatically than his previous letter, the necessity of very "critical and exquisite caution," and of "exceeding tenderness toward those that may be complained of," and asked that "as little as possible of such noise, company, and openness as may too hastily expose those that are examined should be admitted." He further urges "that there may be nothing used as a test for the trial of the suspected, the lawfulness whereof may be doubted among the people of God, but that the directions given by such judicious writers as Perkins and Bernard be consulted in such a case."<sup>1</sup>

The whole paper is worthy of repetition here, did not its length exclude it. The only parts of the document generally referred to by writers on this subject are Articles ii. and vii., which, taken by themselves, make a very wrong impression. All of the rest advocates the most extreme delicacy and unstinted caution in these trials. In concluding their advice, how could these ministers, with their belief, and the belief of the community, in the reality of satanic possession, have said less than they did in reference to unflinching perseverance in these examinations of these supposed criminals? If they had advised to give up farther attention to these cases, would they not have outraged the feelings of the whole Christian community, who believed that the devil should be resisted, especially when his subjects had become the perverters of all law, human and divine?

"It was no fault of the clergy, as Hutchinson suggests, that

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson's History, Vol. ii. pp. 52, 53.

the magistrates paid more regard to the last article than to all that preceded it, and chose to carry on the prosecutions with all possible vigor to the neglect of the 'exquisite caution and excessive tenderness' which had been so earnestly recommended."<sup>1</sup> The wrong, in this case, it seems plain, was not in the advice given by the ministers, but in the failure of the magistrates to act in accordance with the spirit of their advice. If there were disorders in the community they should be dealt with as other misdemeanors, "in accordance with the directions given in the laws of God and the wholesome statutes of the English nation." It has been well said of this advice of the clergy that, "Take it altogether in its relations to the prevailing sentiment, as the expression of men who had no motive in life but the service of their fellow-men and the glory of God, as they understood it, this advice is as honorable a memorial to their fidelity as the wisdom and humanity of that age affords."<sup>2</sup> We are not now "called upon to undertake their championship in terms which will vindicate their superstitions or their severities." But are they not "justly entitled to be set forth in the light of their own age, under the guidance of their own sincere convictions, and with an intelligent, truthful recognition of their master motive" ?

At the time of the suspension of the trials, between June 2d and 29th, 1692, Cotton Mather, never content to be inactive when there was the least hope of the accomplishment of good, made another attempt, on his own personal responsibility, to put a stop to the proceedings now imminent, and to allay the excitement of the community. The cases of supposed satanic possession were multiplying, and the jails were fast filling up. What can be done? must have been in the thoughts of every good man; but all were not as fertile in expedients as the younger pastor of the Old North Church.

<sup>1</sup> See Rev. Chandler Robbins's *History of Old North Church*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 9, 1870, and see also Dr. Robbins's *History of the Old North Church*, p. 108 sq.; and Dr. Palfrey's *Semi-Centennial Discourse*.



I am unable to find a hint that any other one than Cotton Mather, at this stage of the excitement, was ready with hand and heart to make proposals to stay the hand of legal authority. Others, doubtless, were sufficiently burdened with anxiety, but had not the same confidence in the efficacy of prayer and personal influence. His proposition was to scatter those accused where personal influence would be exerted over them. He says: "After that storm was raised at Salem, I did myself offer to provide meat and drink and lodging for no less than six of the afflicted, that so an experiment might be made whether prayer with fasting, upon the removal of the distressed, might not put a period to the trouble then rising, without giving the civil authorities the trouble of prosecuting these things."<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the trials were in progress at Salem, Cotton Mather was never present at them either "as adviser, witness, or spectator." He did make visits to Salem at the time of the trials, which has been set down to his disadvantage, but is now plainly shown to be in favor of his kindness and compassion for the accused. Thomas Brattle, unquestioned authority, after speaking of the protestations of innocence of those condemned, says: "With great affection they entreated Mr. Cotton Mather to pray with them; they prayed that God would discover what witchcrafts were among us; they forgave their accusers"; they "seemed to be very sincere, upright, and sensible of their circumstances on all accounts, especially Proctor and Willard."<sup>2</sup> This Cotton Mather, the

<sup>1</sup> See Calef's "More Wonders," p. 11; Life by S. Mather; and *Magnalia*, i. p. 210, where Mr. Mather alludes to the offer without indicating that it was made by himself. Dr. Robbins says of this offer, that "it was refused, as we might suppose; for all men had not the same faith as our pastor in these remedies. But that he was earnest in his offer is evident, not only from the general tone of his opinions and practice, but also from the fact that he himself, during the witchcraft trials, spent a day almost every week in secret fasting and prayer in reference to it." — *Old North Church*, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Brattle's Letter in *Mass. Hist. Coll. (1st Series)*, Vol. v. p. 61 sq. This Letter, previously referred to (see p. 488), is exceedingly valuable in reference to the influence of the clergy generally and the Mathers in particular. He quotes Increase Mather by name as opposed to the proceedings, and in all prob-

only person mentioned as counsellor, was, without doubt, the one who has been accused of being especially instrumental of bringing them into a condition so much needing comfort. If it had been so, would his services in these last hours have been tolerated, much more asked for with great affection?

How comes it about, it may be asked, that Cotton Mather of Boston became the chaplain of prisoners in Salem? Very naturally. Proctor, in particular, had asked Rev. Mr. Noyes of Salem to pray with him, but had been refused, unless he would confess that he was guilty. Now, it appears from Felt's History of Salem, that Proctor and Willard had been previously in jail in Boston where they had doubtless known Mr. Mather and valued his services, since, as we have before intimated, "he was an habitual visitor of prisons." So we have not only one reason for Mr. Mather's visits to Salem, but that horse and rider which have cast such a shadow over Cotton Mather's character and our history in connection with the executions at Salem are naturally accounted for.<sup>1</sup> The rider was present, as was the custom then and now, to perform the last sad act of kindness to those whose counsellor he had been in prison; and the unoffending horse had brought him there, as modern conveniences for travelling were then unknown.

That Mr. Mather's course throughout these trials was most kindly to the sufferers, and most anxiously conscientious that no innocent person of a good character should suffer in person or name, is plain from various other passages in his writings besides those above alluded to. That his spirit was constantly burdened by the condition of things at this time is equally plain. "Oh condition truly miserable!" he ex-

ability Cotton Mather, without mentioning his name. At any rate the father and son both *claim* to be of one opinion in reference to these matters (see p. 499). Brattle, too, equally with the Mathers, believed in the reality of witchcraft and in the sincerity of the judges, although he believed that they greatly erred in judgment, and very severely condemned the Salem justices.

<sup>1</sup> See School Books. Quackenbos, for instance, says that at a certain execution "Cotton Mather appeared among the crowd on horseback," etc. See also, Calef's *More Wonders*, p. 104.

claims, "it is wonderfully necessary that some healing attempts should be made at this time. I should think dying a trifle to be undergone for so great a blessedness."<sup>1</sup>

*Cotton Mather's "Wonders of the Invisible World," and Increase Mather's "Cases of Conscience."*

In reference to Cotton Mather's "Wonders of the Invisible World," with a "Discourse concerning Temptations," published near the end of 1692, it is necessary to say but little. It was undertaken "by express command of the Governor as a record of the Salem trials." "The reports of the trials,"<sup>2</sup> he says, "are an abridgment collected out of the court papers on this occasion, put into my hands. . . . I have singled out four or five which may serve to illustrate the way of dealing wherein witchcraft use to be concerned." "I report matters," he affirms, "*not as an advocate*, but as an historian." In the excited state of feeling he feels compelled to pour oil upon the perturbed waters, and thus he recognizes the anxious solicitude of the judges, and expresses his belief that "if there have been mistakes, they have, at worst, been but the faults of well-meaning ignorance." Farther than this, he does not feel compelled to sit in judgment upon the action of the legally constituted authorities, albeit they had failed to act in accordance with his plainly expressed advice in his letter to them quoted above.

The existence of devils and their malign influence over men, the necessity of resisting most strenuously and persistently all of their advances in every form, he most pointedly and repeatedly affirms and descants upon with language that could only be the outpouring of strong conviction. One of his first propositions is, "That there is a devil is a thing doubted by none but such as are under the influence of the

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Mather's *Life of Cotton Mather*.

<sup>2</sup> A passage in a letter to the Clerk of the Court at Salem, Mr. Stephen Sewall, an intimate acquaintance, to whom he wrote for the evidence given in at the trials, has been perverted to his discredit. But, if it needed any apology or comment, Dr. Pond in his account of "The Mather Family" has sufficiently explained it. See, *The Mather Family*, pp. 134, 135.

devil." But he reiterates his belief in Perkins's method of dealing with supposed witches; and thus, by implication at least, dissents from the principles upon which the judges had to a great extent acted. His heart's desire was that previous excitements and strife should be now ended; and he expresses the hope that "we are to unite in such methods for this deliverance as may be unquestionably safe, lest the latter end be worse than the beginning."<sup>1</sup>

Cotton Mather has often been censured as being more in fault in his course at this time than most of the other ministers of Boston and vicinity, and especially more so than his father, Increase Mather. But that matter has been set at rest, if what has already been said in this Article is not sufficient to refute it. Increase Mather, at the request of the ministers in and about Boston, gave a more extended statement of their views than could be comprised in their "Letter of Advice," drawn up by his son. The volume entitled "Cases of Conscience concerning Evil Spirits personating Men" was published early in 1693, and endorsed by fourteen ministers of Boston and vicinity. In a postscript to this book, Increase Mather says explicitly: "Some, I hear, have taken up the notion that the book published by my son [Wonders of the Invisible World] is contradictory to this of mine. 'Tis strange that such imaginations should enter into the minds of men. *I perused and approved of that book before it was printed*; and nothing but my relation to him hindered me from recommending it to the world." "Myself and son," he says also, "agreed unto the

<sup>1</sup> It is not without significance that the spirit of Mr. Brattle is the same with that of Cotton Mather, although in his confidential letter to his clerical friend he speaks more decidedly in reference to the mistakes that had been made at Salem. He says: "Far be it from me to have anything to do with those men your letter mentions, whom you acknowledge to be men of a factious spirit, and never more in their element than when they are declaiming against men in public place, and contriving methods that tend to the disturbance of the common peace. I never counted it a credit to my cause to have the good liking of such men. 'My son,' says Solomon, 'Fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change,' Prov. xxiv. 21. However, sir, I never thought judges infallible." — Hist. Coll., Vol. v. p. 61.

humble advice which twelve ministers concurringly presented before his Excellency and Council respecting the present difficulties, which let the world judge whether there be anything in it dissenting from what is attested by either of us."

Cotton Mather, too, expresses his entire acceptance of his father's view as expressed in his "Cases of Conscience." He says: "But what gave the most illumination to the country, and a turn to the tide, was the special service which he did in composing and publishing this book."<sup>1</sup>

*His Age and Position at the Time of the Witchcraft Excitement in Boston and Salem.*

Cotton Mather's age and position, too, have not been sufficiently taken into the account in judging of his responsibility in connection with witchcraft. He was simply a young clergyman, only twenty-five years old at the time of the exhibitions of the Goodwin children, and scarcely thirty when the Salem trials took place; and had not, of course, yet the established character in religious and political matters that he afterwards attained unto. He did not receive his degree of D.D. at Glasgow until 1710, seventeen or eighteen years after the excitement at Salem village. When spoken of and thought of in connection with witchcraft, he seems to be clothed with all the maturity and reputation which was his in riper years.<sup>2</sup> Although so young and inexperienced, he was put forward, doubtless, by his elder brethren, not only as a facile writer and a ready worker in every good cause, but also as conservative in the treatment of spiritual maladies; although no one could be found, perhaps, who was a firmer believer in the reality of satanic influence over the minds and bodies of men. Would not that have probably proved true which has

<sup>1</sup> Increase Mather's Book was mainly devoted to the detecting and punishing of witches; but he implies and strongly affirms his unswerving belief in the existence of witchcraft. "The Scriptures," he says, "assert it, and experience confirms it. They are the common enemies of mankind, and set upon mischief."

<sup>2</sup> Even Mr. Peabody speaks of the young man of twenty-nine as the "venerable doctor." See Sparks's American Biography, Vol. vi. p. 225.

been said of him, that "if he had *then* passed from the scene he would have been forgotten; or if he were remembered, it would have been as one who played a singular, but quite subordinate part" ?<sup>1</sup>

His youth and want of prominence in the community is not improbably a reason for Mr. Brattle's not mentioning Cotton Mather, in particular, as opposed to many of the proceedings at Salem. He only mentions by name two of the "Rev. elders,<sup>2</sup> Rev. Increase Mather, and Rev. Mr. Samuel Willard," among "several about the bay, men for understanding, judgment, and piety inferior to few if any in New England," who "do utterly condemn the said proceedings in the courts at Salem."

*Why did not Cotton Mather disapprove of all Civil Suits against Witches?*

The question probably arises in many minds, Why did he not more decidedly discountenance all civil tribunals for the trial of witches? In reply it may be asked, Why did not his father and all the clergy associated with him? Why did not Sir Matthew Hale, William Penn, Richard Baxter, and a host of others — indeed, almost every good man in England and America *at that time*?<sup>3</sup> It was hazardous to reputation as a Christian or patriot, if not to life, for one to do so. "The Catholics were ready to burn him as a heretic, and the Protestants had a vehement longing to hang him for an atheist."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Boston Daily Advertiser, April 9, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> He mentions in other stations only: "Hon. Simon Bradstreet, Esq. (our late governor); the Hon. Thomas Danforth, Esq. (our late deputy governor), and Maj. N. Saltonstall, one of the judges."

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Drake says: "The solitary individual who dared to stem so popular a torrent. . . . had nothing to expect on all hands but obloquy, derision, and contempt."

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Brattle nowhere protests against civil tribunals taking cognizance of the conduct of those supposed to be possessed of devils, but only of the manner of apprehending and trying upon "spectral evidence," especially that of "afflicted children," and "the confessors," i.e. these who acknowledge "that they have signed to the devil's book, were baptized by the devil," etc. (See Hist. Coll., First Series, Vol. v. p. 66). Mr. Drake says: "Those who questioned

Besides, the matter had been already, without his privity or consent, brought before the courts. The community was in a state of intense excitement, which not even the wisest and most wary had escaped. No one doubted that a most terrible infliction from the devil had fallen upon the community. The most vigorous measures must be resorted to in opposition to this diabolical spectre, which was insinuating itself into a secret alliance with so many, especially of the elderly women and the children, as the accused and the accusers. That it was really a satanic influence no one doubted. How little adequate any mild remedy would be, in the view of the community, to check this terrible disease, the silence with which Cotton Mather's proposition to relieve the courts by scattering the afflicted in private families, was received, is a sufficient proof. Not at all improbably the very persons who afterward wrote most severely against the doings of the courts, and have been so much commended for it, would have most violently condemned, at this time, any one who would have resisted judicial action, as himself in complicity with or in favor of the devil.

I do not suppose, however, that Cotton Mather was so much deterred by the danger to his person or fear of injury to his reputation as a man, as from shrinking from setting himself in opposition to civil authority, both at home and abroad, and an unwillingness to be, or seem to be, found as an opposer of good order, morality, and religion. His conviction of the power of the devil as the agent of all misdoing was so strong, and his hatred of him so real and ingrained, that he shrank even from an appearance of complicity with him. Had he been less conscientious and less faithful in defending what he supposed to be right, he would have avoided much of the censure that has been so persistently and abundantly heaped upon him.

He himself gives a clew to the ground of the insinuations against him, some time after the trials had ended at Salem.

the legality of their proceeding (punishers of witches), were at least infidels in the most obnoxious sense, and they were generally treated as such, and were to be shunned by society." — Witchcraft Delusion, Introduction.

After stoutly maintaining his advocacy of "great caution and charity" in dealing with those accused, which his own writings yet extant fully authorize him to do, he says: "How came it to pass that so many people took up a different notion of me? Surely, Satan knows. Perhaps it was because I thought it my duty always to speak of the honorable judges with as much honor as I could — a crime which I am generally taxed for, and for which I have been requited. This made people who judge at a distance to dream that I approved all that was done. Perhaps, also, my disposition to avoid extremes . . . . had caused me to be generally obnoxious to the violent of all parties. Or perhaps my great adversary always had people full of Robert Calef's malignity to serve him with calumnies and reproaches."

*The Best Authorities in reference to the Salem Trials do not criminate Cotton Mather.*

Governor Hutchinson, as is well known, wrote a "History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay," several times before referred to, which is acknowledged by all to be in every respect reliable. Upham says, that "he enjoyed an advantage over every other writer before, since, or hereafter, so far as relates to the witchcraft proceedings of 1692." All the "records and documents relating to it, which have since been lost, he had at hand." And "his treatment of that particular topic is more satisfactory than can elsewhere be found."<sup>1</sup> Now, if Cotton Mather's influence was so great as has been pretended in encouraging and abetting the proceedings in the Salem trials, how happens it that Governor Hutchinson never mentions him in connection with them? How could he have left out, in his account of them, the principal motive power?

Mr. Thomas Brattle, too, whose decided opposition to the method of the courts was fully expressed, fails to criminate Cotton Mather in this particular, or even mention his name. Could this have been, if he had exerted a tithe of the

<sup>1</sup> Upham, Vol. i. p. 415.



influence imputed to him in after times? It seems not improbable, however, that Mr. Brattle, without mentioning his name, speaks with high commendation of Cotton Mather in connection with the Salem trials. After referring to the influence of the clergy and some other leading men as opposed to the action of the judges, and naming several, he says that, "excepting Mr. Hale, Mr. Noyes, and Mr. Parris, the reverend elders almost throughout the whole country are very much dissatisfied."<sup>1</sup> Here it is plain that Mr. Brattle does not include Cotton Mather among those who are satisfied with the action of the judges.

But he goes on farther to say: "In particular, I cannot but think very honorably of the endeavors of a *Rev. person in Boston*, whose good affection to his country in general, and spiritual relation to three of the judges in particular, has made him very solicitous and industrious in this matter. And I am fully persuaded that had his notions and proposals been hearkened to and followed when these troubles were in their birth, in an ordinary way, they would never have grown to that height which now they have. He has as yet met with but little but unkindness, abuse, and reproach from many men; but I trust that in after times his wisdom and service will find a more universal acknowledgment; and if not, his reward is of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

This has been claimed as designating Mr. Samuel Willard, and there is no absolute certainty that it does not. But the internal evidence (and there appears to be no other extant) is against referring it to him. He has just been mentioned by name; it is not natural to refer to him anonymously in the same connection.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Mr. C. Mather is not elsewhere alluded to by Mr. Brattle in the *immediate* connection, and not at all except as the spiritual adviser of those condemned.<sup>4</sup> Besides, the language so well describes the character and relation of the young minister of the Old North Church that it seems almost strange that it has ever

<sup>1</sup> Mass. Hist. Coll. (1st Series), Vol. v. pp. 74, 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76, 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

been claimed for any one else. Three of the judges might be said to be "in spiritual relations" to him — Mr. Richards, who was a member of his church, Mr. Stoughton who was closely united in friendship with him, and Wait Winthrop, "whom," he says, "he reckoned among the best of his friends," and whom at his death he honored with a funeral sermon and an epitaph. And the latter part of the paragraph quoted could scarcely apply more naturally than to him who had offended both parties; the one, because he had spoken and written upon the reality of satanic possession with so much zeal; and the other, because he did not give the trials that support which was expected of him.<sup>1</sup>

*Calef's "More Wonders of the Invisible World."*<sup>2</sup>

This book, of which so much has been made in these latter days<sup>3</sup> by those who have written against the Mathers, seems to have originated as much, at least, from a personal ill-feeling toward them and others of the clergy, and especially toward Cotton Mather, as from any strong feeling of opposition to the witchcraft proceedings at Salem. Its spirit is sufficiently characterized by such passages as this: "It is rather a wonder that no more blood was shed; for if that advice of his<sup>4</sup> pastors [the Mathers] could have still prevailed with him, witchcraft had not been so shammed off as it was."<sup>5</sup>

It is full, too, of uneducated prejudices<sup>6</sup> and insinuations,

<sup>1</sup> See more extended discussion of this point in *North American Review*, April 1869, p. 387 sq.

<sup>2</sup> This book was first published in London in 1700, eight years after the executions at Salem. The Preface or Introduction is dated 1697, three years earlier. It was reprinted the same year (1700), at Salem. Much of it, however, had been circulated in manuscript as early as the beginning of 1693, when Mr. Mather's Letter was called forth.

<sup>3</sup> See Upham's *Salem Witchcraft*, Vol. ii. p. 471, 472.

<sup>4</sup> Governor Phipps.

<sup>5</sup> See *More Wonders*, p. 153, quoted also by Poole.

<sup>6</sup> Calef was a Boston merchant of apparently little culture, whose name would have, in all probability, been long since forgotten, but for the notoriety occasioned by the opposition to his book in his own time, and the use made of it within the last half-century by those who have written against Cotton Mather. He is nowhere mentioned by Brattle in his *Letter on Witchcraft* as exerting an influence against it.

and with some show of candor seems to me to be sadly wanting in it. One would suppose that he thought that education was at the basis of the whole trouble. "Witchcraft," he says, "was a relic of heathenism transplanted into Christian soil." "Among the pernicious weeds arising from this root, the doctrine of the power of devils and witchcraft, as it is now and has long been understood, is not the least. The fables of Homer, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, etc., being, for the elegance of their language, retained then [in primitive times of Christianity] and so are to this day in the schools, have not only introduced but established such doctrines to the poisoning of the Christian church."<sup>1</sup>

It is not, I imagine, always remembered that Calef did not write or show himself as disapproving of the proceedings at Salem until the heat of the excitement had cooled, so that there does not seem to be much occasion for the exercise of the moral courage so vauntingly attributed to him. And the book is certainly, notwithstanding the praise bestowed upon it by Upham, not, when examined critically, characterized by an accurate observation of facts and occurrences, or a clear and truthful statement of them. But it cannot be denied, I think, that Mr. Poole<sup>2</sup> is right in saying that "what it contains condemnatory of the Salem proceedings was stated earlier and in a clearer and more forcible manner in the writings of the two Mathers and of Samuel Willard." It is equally true that the letter that Cotton Mather wrote to Calef in refutation of his misrepresentations, and that other of "his composures" which Calef was "so uncivil as to print utterly without and against his consent," constitute the chief historical value of Calef's book. Cotton Mather himself says of it: "The good providence of God has therein overruled his (Calef's) malice; for if that may have impartial readers, he will have his confutation, and I my perpetual vindication."

It is not strange that Cotton Mather's temper was some-

<sup>1</sup> See his Preface and also p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See North American Review, April 1869, p. 379.

what aroused by what he considered a malicious perversion of his motives, and false statements of what he said and did, assiduously bandied about among all classes of people, to the detriment, as he at first supposed, of his character and that of his father. The ridicule that Calef attempted to heap upon him in the case of Margaret Rule, in giving an account of an interview with her, when both the Mathers and Calef and thirty or forty others were present, called forth from Cotton Mather a denial of the truthfulness of the representation more plain than courteous. "There are," he says, "as many lies as lines in it." And so confident is he of the injustice of the representation made, that he appeals to the "by-standers," who, he feels, will bear witness that he did not use such language as Calef puts into his mouth. After an examination of the manuscript of Calef, which he characterizes as "an indecent travesty," he gives his more deliberate judgment of it. "I do scarcely find any one thing in the whole paper, whether respecting my father or self either fairly or truly represented."<sup>1</sup>

As a specimen of Calef's perverse representations, and as explaining Cotton Mather's prominent object in visiting and questioning this woman, I quote from his letter to Calef: "When the main design in visiting the poor afflicted creature was to prevent the accusations of the neighborhood, can it be fairly represented that our design was to draw out such accusations?" Nothing is plainer than that, from the time of the interview with the Glover woman (the first case that came under his immediate cognizance) onward, it was his special object to prevent the accusations of others by those who were under the influence of evil spirits. But he further explains why he put the

<sup>1</sup> That Cotton Mather had any agency in "getting up the case of Margaret Rule," is so utterly without proof that I will not spend time to discuss it. He only visited her, as did his father, Calef, and many others, to learn the particulars of her case; and as ministers of the parish, the Mathers naturally were prominent in asking questions to bring them out. Cotton Mather, too, as we shall see, wished to guard against the bringing of others into trouble by her accusations. See Drake's *Witchcraft Delusion*, Introduction.

question which both Calef and others censure: "When we [he includes his father with himself] asked Rule whether she thought she knew who tormented her, the question was but an introduction to the solemn charges which we then largely gave, that she should rather die than tell the names of any whom she might imagine that she knew. Your informers have reported the question, and report nothing of what follows as essential to the giving of that question."<sup>1</sup>

It is not strange that Mr. Mather, annoyed and vexed by Calef's assiduous circulation of his slanders, commenced a prosecution for libel. It is equally characteristic and natural that when he found that no one whose opinion he most valued was influenced by them, he did not pursue the civil suit, trusting to the vindication of his friends in the "Some Few Remarks." In a letter published in this book he expresses his feeling in reference to Calef's accusations and his reason for disregarding his influence. "I have," he says, "had the honor to be aspersed and abused by one Robert Calef. I remember that when this miserable man sent unto an eminent minister in the town [Mr. Samuel Willard] a libellous letter, which he has now published, and when he demanded an answer that reverend person only said: 'Go tell him that the answer to him and his letter is in the twenty-sixth of Proverbs and the fourth.'"<sup>2</sup>

Still it cannot be denied that this book was a great annoyance to the sensitive nature of Cotton Mather. He believed that it was written in opposition to the best interests of religion, and was a hinderance to him in his work. Soon after it was published (in 1700) this entry is found in his diary:

5d. 2m., 1701. "I find the enemies of the churches are set with an implacable enmity against myself. And one vile

<sup>1</sup> See *More Wonders*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> In the Massachusetts Historical Society there is a copy of Calef's Book with a Note in Cotton Mather's own hand-writing. "Job xxxi. 35, 36: My desire is that mine adversary had written a book. Surely I would take it upon my shoulder and bind it as a crown to me. Co: Mather."

tool, namely one R. Calf,<sup>1</sup> is employed by them to go on with more of his filthy scribbles to hurt my precious opportunities of glorifying my Lord Jesus Christ. I had need be much in prayer unto my glorious Lord that he would preserve me, his poor servant, from the malice of this evil generation, and of that vile man in particular.”

*Did Mr. Mather's Complicity with Witchcraft prey upon his Spirits and undermine his Health?*

The accusation that Mr. Mather retired from his overweening exertions<sup>2</sup> in carrying on and perpetuating witchcraft broken in health and spirits seems too absurd and contrary to all the facts in the case to require much notice. After over *thirty years* of incessant literary and parochial labor, subsequent to the Salem trials, producing almost one book a month, pursued amid numerous domestic trials and anxieties,<sup>3</sup> Mr. Mather's health and spirits, three years before his death, gave way for a time. He gives in his diary a variety of causes that contribute to his low spirits and morbid repinings for a want of that success in his life-work which he would have desired; but nowhere gives an intimation that remorse for his conduct in reference to the witchcraft delusion, having lain smouldering these thirty years, has now just broken out and put in an outward show. This feeling, if it had been in him, would certainly have shown itself; since, as has been well said, “He wore no disguise. There is scarcely a character in history that had so little concealment. What he felt, he uttered. What he thought, he said. He had no tact to conceal his faults. If he had

<sup>1</sup> His name seems to have been sometimes written Calfe or Calf, and at others, Calef.

<sup>2</sup> For these accusations see Upham, Vol. ii. p. 503.

<sup>3</sup> Thirteen of his fifteen children had died, his son Increase under the most painful circumstances. His third wife, who, it is most charitable to suppose, was insane, had compelled him to seek a home elsewhere for his remaining daughter, “a child of so many afflictions all her days.” His numerous fastings and vigils, too, must have had influence in connection with his labors and trials upon the man of now more than three-score years in bringing about the beginning of the end, which took place three years later.

been more cunning, he would have passed for a much better man." <sup>1</sup>

It is unnecessary to pursue this subject here; and I will do little more than quote some passages from his writings to show with what entire conscientiousness he felt that he had acted, neither needing confession or allowing remorse. "In short," he says, "I do humbly, but freely affirm it, there is not that man living in this world who has been more desirous than the poor man I to shelter my neighbors from the inconveniences of spectral outcries. . . . The name of no one good person in the world ever came under blemish by means of any afflicted person that fell under my particular cognizance; yea, no man, woman, or child ever came into any trouble for the sake of any that was afflicted, after I had once begun to look after them." On the contrary, he says: "How often have I had this thrown into my dish, that many years ago I had the opportunity to have brought forth such people as have in the late storm of witchcraft been complained of, but that I smothered all." <sup>2</sup>

He even felt that he might have gone so far in that direction, as to be blameworthy. For he adds: "Yea, I am very jealous I have done so much *that way as to sin* in what I have done, such have been my cowardice and fearfulness whereunto my regard unto the dissatisfactions of other people has precipitated me." <sup>3</sup>

The above was written in 1698, the next year after the trials. Eight years later, writing to his parishioners, he says: "About the troubles we had from the invisible world, I have at present nothing to offer you, but that I believe they were too dark and too deep for ordinary comprehension; and it may be that errors on both hands have attended them, which will never be understood until the day when Satan shall be bound after another manner than he is this day. But for my own part, I know not that I have ever advanced any opinion on the matter of witchcraft but what all the ministers

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Robbins's History of the Old North Church, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Published in Calef's More Wonders, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> See Calef, p. 11.

of the Lord that I know of in the world, whether English, or Scotch, or French, or Dutch (and I know many), are of the same opinion with me." <sup>1</sup> Truth seems to bear out even the stronger assertion "that not a single person who held the faith of the Christian church at that day can be named who had any other belief." Even Calef,<sup>2</sup> Brattle, and Pike, whose authority is so often quoted, fully indorsed the popular theory as to the reality of witchcraft. "To deny the existence of it was precisely the same as to deny that the Bible was a revelation." <sup>3</sup>

In his visitations of the "afflicted," he feels that his motives have been pure and unselfish. He says: "Truly, the hard representations wherewith *some ill men have reviled my conduct*, and the countenance which other men have given to these representations, oblige me to give mankind some account of my behavior. No Christian can—I say, none but evil workers can—criminate my visiting such of my poor flock as have at any time fallen under the terrible and sensible molestations of evil angels; let their afflictions have been what they will, I could not have answered it unto my glorious Lord, if I had withheld my just counsels and comforts from them; and if I have also with some exactness observed the methods of the invisible world, when they have thus become observable, I have been but a servant of mankind in doing so; yea, no less a person than the venerable Baxter has more than once or twice, in the most public manner, invited mankind to thank me for that service." <sup>4</sup>

Even Mr. Peabody, who says that if Cotton Mather, after the frenzy was over, had lamented and publicly acknowledged the blind fanaticism under which he had acted, he would have been more generally forgiven, adds "that to the day of

<sup>1</sup> Some Few Remarks, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Calef says in his "More Wonders," "That there are witches is not the doubt; the Scriptures else were in vain, which assign their punishment to be death, but what this witchcraft is, or wherein it does consist, seems to be the whole difficulty." p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> See Drake's Witchcraft Delusion, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> See More Wonders, pp. 10, 11.



his death he seems to have retained his full conviction that all was preternatural"; and asserts "that it is clear that no uneasiness from within, no self-upbraiding for the part he had acted, ever disturbed his repose."<sup>1</sup> How could he have *lamented* and *publicly acknowledged* a fault which he did not feel that he had committed?

### *Conclusion.*

In conclusion of this perhaps too protracted discussion of Cotton Mather's connection with witchcraft, I will merely add, that whilst he was strongly imbued with the superstition of his age in his belief of satanic agency and of the hold that the evil one had upon individuals in the community; whilst a curiosity which may be deemed prurient led him to interest himself enthusiastically in any new phenomenon of mind or matter, and an ability to express on paper his own thoughts and those of his compeers, and a strong desire to exert an influence on the side of what he thought right living,<sup>2</sup> made him conspicuous in this most unfortunate movement,—I cannot find evidence that he was actuated by any other than the kindest feelings, which led him to counsel the most lenient treatment of the accused, and by the most conscientious belief that in all that he did he supposed himself not only an advocate for the best interests of the colony, but faithful in his duty to God in opposition to the devil.<sup>3</sup>

That he not only did nothing intentionally to bring men under the influence of civil tribunals, but that, on the contrary, he used his influence and devised means more than any of his compeers in clerical or civil life to prevent it, and

<sup>1</sup> Sparks's American Biography (1st Series), Vol. vi. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> These traits of Cotton Mather are specially conspicuous in his so successful advocacy of the introduction of inoculation for small-pox, in opposition to almost the whole medical faculty of the time.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Robbins well says: "That he was under the influence of any bad motives, any sanguinary feeling; that he did not verily think he was doing God service, and the devil injury; that he would not gladly have prevented the disorderly proceedings of the courts, the application of unlawful tests, and everything unmerciful in the trials, and inhuman in their issue,—the most careful examination has failed to make me believe."—Old North Church, p. 111.

that when they were thus arraigned he advocated the exercise of the most extreme caution, that no other than legal evidence should be brought to bear upon them, seems to us unquestionable. Can we censure the young man under thirty very severely because he did not rise entirely above the superstitions and prejudices of his age, and, in opposition to the clergy of his own and other nations, and the legal tribunals of the civilized world, anticipate the more elevated views which a century or two has disclosed to the more enlightened nations of the earth?

Those who accuse Cotton Mather with so much severity seem to forget that "by taking an individual of a past generation out of his relations with his own times, and putting him upon the background of modern civilization and refinement, and then reproaching him with opinions and practices now shown to be erroneous, but which he shared in common with all his contemporaries, it is very easy to make any character appear ridiculous, and even culpable. But this is not the historical method of dealing with the reputations of men of a former age. We of the present shall need a more charitable interpretation of our own opinions and acts on the part of those who follow us. Did the man act well his part with the light he had? Did he, in a time of intense excitement, when life and reputation were at stake, act with reference to his duty to God and in charity to his fellow-men?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Poole in the *North American Review*, April 1869, p. 349. I have often, as here, quoted from, and referred to, the able Article of Mr. Poole, and gladly acknowledge my obligation to it in the preparation of this Paper. I have so often found the view that my study of the character of Cotton Mather and his relation to the Witchcraft Delusion has given me, so well expressed by him, that I have felt constrained repeatedly to give his expression of it rather than my own.