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A Prophet of Democracy.

EARL C. DAVIS.

TO have sown the seed and then to be forgotten at the time of harvest has been the fate of John Wise, pastor of a church in Ipswich. Unknown and unhonored to-day yet the minister of a small country parish in New England was the prophet of American Democracy.

He lived in a critical period of New England history from 1650 to 1725; he was a commanding power in settling the problems of his day, and in moulding public opinion for the future America; he was an original thinker, a man of common sense, a brave follower of the truth. He has been called "the first logical and clear headed American Democrat."

Though his life was not adventurous yet it was full of interest. His father, Joseph Wise, had come to this country as an indentured serving man to Dr. George Alcock of Roxbury, one of Gov. Winthrop's Company. Upon the death of Dr. Alcock in 1640 Joseph Wise became a freeman. Twelve years later in 1652 John Wise was born and christened in Roxbury, Mass. His early education was attained in the Roxbury Free School, of which his father was a patron. In 1669 he appeared at Cambridge, and was admitted to Harvard College in the class of 1673. Born in the humblest circumstances the true American was purchasing the riches of freedom by paying the price of education. Four years at Harvard followed by five years of unsettled work now as chaplain in the army in King Phillip's war, now as preacher at Hatfield, Conn., brought him to 1678 when he was married in Roxbury. Two years later in 1680 he was preaching in the newly organized church at Chebacco in the town of Ipswich. He was ordained pastor of that church in 1683 and remained in the same parish until his death in 1725. An active vigorous life he lived. He distinguished himself for bravery as chaplain of the ill-fated expedition for the Conquest of Canada in 1690; at the risk of his own life he rescued his neighbor, John Proctor, from the witchcraft persecutors. During a long pastor-

ate his fearless, resolute way of living won for him a place of respect and affection among the people of his parish, and stamped John Wise as one of the choice spirits of New England.

Two events of his life are of unusual significance. In one he is a man of fearless, independent action; in the other he is a broad, independent thinker.

Even as he was beginning his work in Chebacco, events of unusual importance in the political life of New England were developing into a crisis. The dearly cherished liberties which had been granted to the colonists by the charter of 1629 had long been in danger, but in 1684, one year after John Wise's ordination, the crisis came when Charles II annulled the charter and by this one act swept aside the freedom and rights of the colonists. By 1686 Sir Edmund Andros, invested with sovereign power from James II, had taken control of the government in New England.

John Wise had been a keen observer. When the report reached Ipswich, on Sunday morning, August 31, 1687, that Gov. Andros had levied a tax on all property in the colony, and had appointed the town officers collectors, the sturdy pastor was convinced that something must be done. On Monday morning, Sept. 1, 1687, the minister and two of his parishioners called together the leading men of the town to see by what right an appointed governor could tax the colonists without consulting the General Court. A meeting of the citizens was called on the following day. John Wise was the leading spirit. In a bold, eloquent speech he defended the rights and liberties of the colonists and led the citizens of Ipswich to take one of the earliest steps in the long series of revolutionary measures against taxation without representation. They voted, to a man, to resist all attempts at collecting the tax. Resist, they did, and the Rev. John Wise and five others were arrested, taken to Boston, and lodged in jail to await trial. A fine of £50, suspension

from the ministry, and being placed under bonds of £1,000 to keep the peace, was the price paid by the parish minister for making a firm stand in defence of American liberty. The brave conduct of John Wise and his followers in 1687 is the foreshadowing of that spirit of independence that was the life of the Revolutionary War. Such resolute independent action by a man convinced of the truth of his position has been and always will be a distinguishing characteristic of the spirit of democracy.

That the conduct of John Wise was not that of an enthusiastic upstart, or an impulsive, unthinking agitator, becomes apparent in his controversy in regard to church government. A keen insight into existing conditions, a wide and intelligent study of the past in the light of which to judge the present, mark him as a true prophet, the scholar and thinker as well as the man of action.

Seventy-five years had brought many changes in New England church life. The old ideal of a Puritan Commonwealth had to meet many problems that the great increase of population, the establishment of other churches and the changed conditions in general forced upon it. In the gradual process of readjustment, the clergy of the Puritan Churches were being forced to understand that their autocratic power was fast slipping from their hands. The final convulsive effort to retain and strengthen their control was made in 1705 when the Boston Ministers Association formulated, and sent out for approval sixteen "proposals." The acceptance of these proposals, would have been a serious menace to the very existence of the congregational system of church Government in New England.

Again John Wise is at the front. In 1710 he published "The Churches Quarrel Espoused," a satirical rapier-like reply, which he thrust home to the very heart of the problem raised by these proposals. With a pungency that is refreshing, with a common sense that is rare, with a fearlessness that is seldom equalled, he turned the full force of his power upon the proposals formulated by men of his own profession, and passed a criticism upon them that remains unanswered to this day.

The fundamental principles upon which the criticism rested were given a thorough and exhaustive treatment in a book which John Wise published in 1717, under the title, "A vindication of the Government of New England churches." This is probably the first attempt on American soil to defend in literary form the theories and practical workings of Democracy.

In his justification of the Democratic form of Government from right reason, the fearless originality of his thought appears most clearly. His argument given almost entirely in his own words is as follows:—"It is agreeable that we attribute the system to God whether we receive it from Reason or from Revelation, for each is an emanation of his wisdom. The internal native liberty of man's nature in general implies a faculty of doing or omitting things according to the direction of his judgment. Reason is congenite with his nature wherein by a law immutable, in stamp upon his frame, God has provided a rule or men in all their actions, the which is nothing else but the dictate of right reason founded in the soul of man. That which is drawn from man's reason is a law of nature. The way to discover a law of nature in our own state is by the narrow watch, and accurate contemplation of our natural conditions." Such contemplation shows in man "(1) a principal of self love, and elf preservation that is very prominent in every man's being. (2) A sociable disposition. (3) An affection or love to mankind in general. But a Democracy is a form of Government which the the light of nature does highly value and often directs to as most agreeable to the just and natural prerogatives of Human nature." Such is his argument; with equal clearness and common sense he gives a thorough exposition of the practical workings of Democracy, from which we have yet much to learn.

With great justice has this book been called the text book of the Revolution. In the year 1772, when the colonists were welding themselves together for the defense of their rights, two editions of one thousand copies each were published and sold in New England. The subscription list to one of these editions shows that copies went to sixty-seven New England towns.

Men at Concord took 38 copies, at Lexington seven, and scores of them were taken up in Boston and Cambridge. Certainly the spirit and probably some of the phrases of the Declaration of Independence are suggested in these two sentences, —

“The end of all good government is to cultivate humanity, and promote the happiness of all, and the good of every man in all his rights, his life, liberty, estate, honor, without injury or abuse to any.” “All men are born free and nature having set all men upon a level and made them equals no servitude or subjection can be conceived without inequality.” He who had been one of the

first to defend the liberties of the colonists in 1687, was still working for the Freedom of America in 1775 through the influence of this book published in 1717.

Unknown, and unhonored to-day, yet a great force in American life, was Rev. John Wise, pastor of a country church in Ipswich. In the hands of many a prophet such as he, rests the safety of our nation to-day as it faces the problems which beset it in these days of its terrible prosperity. The rewards of their labor will be the glory of the nation, as the living principles of Democracy to-day are a monument to John Wise, pastor and patriot.