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Cotton Mather

Earl Clement Davis

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Cottin Theother.

he the fusion of Cotton worther we find the wore, who at once refrescuts the highest afiration of the Sheveray, and also it down : foll. Could me but study the life of his fother oucrease Mother, and his grandfother John Cotton, or is foteword geard fother Richard Wather me could trace with considerable accu: very the developerant of the sheveracy, and its find commitive effect to retain the fosibirs of influence it once held. a very fecocion youth, and responded to the influence of his early life. Toke in his own life he mote for his son Formul sume account of his early life. " I desire to hervayl unto the very end of my life, the early E bulli = tion of Oliguard Eis, which offered at the very beginning of it. Indeed your grand = fother, the he mue a mise and shirt

farent, would from the observation of some dis = fasitions in me, comfat himself with an ofinion of my being Sometified by the Holy of int of God in My very inforcy. But he knew with tow will I wor, he sow not The instruces of my going ashary, even while I war yet an infort. Homener, there were some things in my childhood, in which I wish my child way do better third. I heger to fray, even when I begin to speak. I learned my self to mit lefter my going to school for it. Jused secut ficure out confining uppelf to Forms in it; and yet I surfused Forms of frager for my school: motes (I suffire when I was short server a eight year del , and obliged them to fray. Before I could with Servor in the fublic lissemblies, I commenty mote what I remembered when I arme home.

I rebuhed my flay wates for their unched words and worp; and sometimes I suffered from them, the fersecution of word only scoffs but Blorus also, for my Rebucher." WEvelel's lother worther P. 33. His workiel conscionmen of sin, and night sin at that, is shown in the following lamenta= tion of the sine of his youth, If the manifold sien which then I wer quilty of, some so stick you me as that, heing very young, dwor whitting on the Softoth- chy; and for pear of heing seen, I did it behind the door. A great referach of God! a specimen of that atheisen that brought into the world with we' winderts C. U. P. ST. The superne concert of the worn, and his wort affarent self consciousmen offen in the following focuoge unitter for his son. The special fault of my childhood

(against which I would have you, my son he cantined) un ichevers. and one thing that accasioned we very much calle time, we the distance of my Fother's Hobitaties from the School; which caused him out of confarsion for my Feucle and meakly constitutions to keep me at some in the Minter. However I then much suffyed upelf in Clunch Histry, and when summer holarined Iso fhick my busines, that Thurgh the blessing of good upon my encleaner, at the age of a little worr the eleven year I had confosed many tolin exercises, both in fiore and nerse, and could flook bothis so reachly, that I could mint votes of servour of the English freacher in it. I had connersed with Coto, Cordenus, Leneme July, thid, and Nigil .. I had worde Spitte and themes; presenting my first theme to my toother, without his requiring

or expecting as yet any such thing of me; 5 where up the complimented me Sandahilis Siligentia that " I had gove thurgh a great fast of the new Sectament in Such, Ihol read considerably in Poerotes and Howen and I had made serve entrance in my Herew grammae. and I think that befor I come to Fonten I confored Hehen exercises and han this the othe Sciences, that academicol Students ordinarily foll ufor" Windel. P. 35. Such wer Lotten Wother's estiwatz of his our formen as a growth, at the age of 12 he entersel Howard, and grachestech in dre time. at commencement President Clokes in fresenting the member of the closs said, the next is named Cotton Wother, How watchle a name! I am ming, my frierels; Ishold when have said what wrtable names! I will say wothing of his reverand

fother, the wort wotchford of quarchians, the wort distinguished Fellow of the College; I dave vot fraise him here to his very fore. But if this youth bring book alt heing the fiely, the learning, the elegent ac = simplishment, the second serve, the fundame and the gearity of his very severand grand fother. John Cotton and Michard Mother, he way be said to have done the highest duty. nor is my lofe swoll that in this youth, Cottins and Toother stoll in fort, or well as in nome join together and once wore offear in life. dikley III. 6. 7. cited in Wenchell. 0. 35. In 1681 he was colled to assist his fother as faster of the Securice Church of Boston the largest, and fertops the wort in fluentil Church in new England. This come after he had studied medicine, thinking that he wer wat designed to for the ministry

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of the Tuccliator, to Mr. sufficient for me I do as a further Solemnitie herewith sof= sails my nome with both Hond and beart. Que work quotation from his chicany, to getter with what offears later will give a fair clea of the un, at this time of his by 2, age 23 His record of his days work is a follows. Read Exactus, ste; Grayed; Examined the Chilchen; reach Descarter; reach Commentators, to: break fosted: frefared server: took fart in formily frayers: heard fofils recite; read Johons on Tucclicine ; direct ; risited wry friench ; reach various books: frefered servin: heard fufils recite: meditated at: frayed; suffed: frefored server : took fart in formily frager !! WEndel 54 Thus me see him at the beginning of his ministry, Educated, a great reacher and worker, conceited, consecrated to

his work, and as will offear loter, a won who ching with themendous lenacity to the old theoriacy, even while he sourt crumbling beneath his very borchs. There are several events which we have sleachy spoken of that Cottin Wother is mondin, O the anulhuent of the charter took his Father clucrease to lenglond and left him at time to take charge of the work of the Church. This anulhurt wer the first quot How to the Sheveracy, and the wodefiel Charter that ducease wother was able to restue from the Home Honew ment wor but a vistage of what they wanted. But out of the week they attempted to regain their Control by securing through their influence in the folitive world the offinitionent of Sin Why Phiffs as colonial Governor.

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agoines, and Singular ... efforts of sonl, in the Resignation of my vome unto the book; to content that if he had no purther Service for my home, it should be touto pices But I cried unto the ferel as for Delinerance of my vome from the wolace of Hell, so for the deliverance of the young wown when the formen of Hell beach seized ofm. and hehold the forenect furon ... wor Selineed ... on the very some day, and the whole flott of the divel to Refevore a for Sewant of the Firel Jewe Chint was befeated." Urrelell 120, The Mitcheroft fermention brought him much toople. and cost him quest love of Vormen. (3) - The Founding of the Brottle Sheet Church in Combidge, in 1698, under The Leader ship of Brottle and Leverett, who represented the Liberol or fofular womennet

the wor gaining head way, wer the third terifle blow to the Wotters . Curemin, this Cottin Toother writes, & confirming of heachting men in the town, the cheif of whom are full of wolignity to the boly ways of the theman our churches for built in the tour avollen weeting home " low deel. 142, de formany of 1699-1700, he muter of we orten beginning a terribe Stoke of unto the churcher of hew England, and the Invovators that here set of a very Church in Bostin (a new one indeed!) have made a day of Temptation awang us. She men are Igvorant arogant, abstinote, and full of malice and slander, and they fill the lovel with her, in the wir refresentations where of Jam a very sing= when sufferer. Wherefor I set a fart this day again for frayer in my slocky

to any with mightly with god." (13 Windellig 43 The agonization of this church was an ortavel sign of what wer going on throughout here -Englined. The Ulil wer forming away, and the ven wer kinning into former. The fourth event which marked the down of new things in her England likemire feel heavily ofm the Wothers. Haward college hold hear founded for the furfire of freefaring men for the ministry is the altrely theveracy, Rheady sign mere vot writing to show that the beneries were finding their way into that vaid, Sucrease wother had been President of Hannel for years . having been aboven in 1681, but declined, and accepted the second offers in 1685. He still retained his fastinate one the Second church, and could wat be fre =

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Cotton Mather

Earl Clement Davis

Harvard University or Pittsfield, MA¹

No Date

In the person of Cotton Mather we find the man who at once represents the highest aspiration of the Theocracy, and also its downfall. Could we but study the life of his father, Increase Mather, and his grandfather, John Cotton, or his paternal grandfather, Richard Mather, we could trace with considerable accuracy the development of the Theocracy, and its final {???} effort to retain the position of influence it once held.

Cotton Mather was born Feb. 12, 1662-3. He was a very precocious youth, and responded very readily to the influence of his early life. Late in his own life he wrote for his son, Samuel, some account of his early life.

> I desire to {???} unto the very end of my life, the early {???} of Original Sin, which appeared at the very beginning of it. Indeed your grandfather, tho' he was a wise and strict parent, would from the observation of some dispositions in me, comfort himself with an opinion of my being Sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God in my very infancy. But he knew not how vile I was, he saw not the instances of my going astray, even while I was yet an infant. However, there were some good things in my childhood, in which I wish my child may do better than I. I began to pray, even when I began to speak. I learned myself to write before my going to school for it. I used secret prayer, not confining myself to Forms in it; and yet I composed Forms of prayer for my schoolmates (I suppose when I

¹ The manuscripts in this series covering early New England Congregational preachers have no date. They are hand-written, dating them before Earl Davis started typing his manuscripts in 1907. So, they date either from his time at Harvard University, or the first year or two of his ministry in Pittsfield.

was about seven or eight years old), and obliged them to pray. Before I could write sermons in the public assemblies, I commonly wrote what I remembered when I came home. I rebuked my playmates for their wicked words and ways; and sometimes I suffered from them, the persecution of not only <u>Scoffs</u> but blows also, for my Rebukes. ([Barrett] Wendell's *Cotton Mather*, p. 33)

His {???} consciousness of sin, and original sin at that, is shown in the following lamentation of the sins of his youth.

Of the manifold sins which then I was guilty of, none so sticks upon me as that, being very young, I was whittling on the Sabbath day, and for fear of being seen, I did it behind the door. A great reproach of God! A specimen of that Atheism that I brought into the world with me. (Wendell's *C.M.*, p. 81)

The supreme conceit of the man, and his most apparent self-consciousness appear in the following passage written for his son:

One special fault of my childhood (against which I would have you, my son, be cautioned) was idleness. And one thing that occasioned me very much idle time, was the distance of my Father's Habitation from the School; which caused him out of compassion for my tender and weakly constitution to keep me at home in the Winter. However I then much employed myself in Church History, and when summer had arrived I so plied my business, that through the blessing of God upon my endeavors, at the age of a little more than eleven years I had composed many Latin exercises, both in prose and verse, and could speak Latin so readily, that I could write notes of sermons of the English preacher in it. I had conversed with Cato, {???}, {???}, Sully, Ovid, and Virgil. I had made epistles and themes; presenting my first theme to my Master, without his requiring or expecting as yet any such thing of me; whereupon he complimented me "Tandahilis

Diligentia tua." I had gone through a great part of the New Testament in Greek. I had read considerably in Socrates and Homer and I had made some entrance in my Hebrew grammar. And I think before I came to fourteen, I composed Hebrew exercises and ran thro' the other sciences that academical students ordinarily fall upon. (Wendell, p. 81)

Such was Cotton Mather's estimate of his own power as a youth. At the age of 12 he entered Harvard, and graduated in due time. At commencement President Oakes in presenting the members of the class said,

> The next is named Cotton Mather. How notable a name! I am wrong my friend; I should rather have said what a notable name. I will say nothing of his reverend father, the most watchful of guardians, the most distinguished Fellow of the College; I dare not praise him here to his very face. But if this youth brings back into being the piety, the learning, the elegant accomplishment, the sound sense, the prudence and gravity of his very reverend grandfathers, John Cotton and Richard Mather, he may be said to have done his highest duty. Nor is my hope small that in this youth, Cotton and Mather shall in fact as well as in name join together and once more appear in life. (Sibley III 6. 7. Cited in Wendell, p. 38.)

In 1681 he was called to assist his father as pastor of the Second Church of Boston, the largest, and perhaps the most influential Church in New England. This came after he had studied medicine, thinking that he was not designed for the ministry on account of an impediment in his speech. On May 13th 1685 he was ordained. On May 4th prior to his ordination the following is recorded in his Diary, a passage that throws considerable light on his character:

> I renounce all the varieties and cursed Idols and Evil Courses of this world. I engage that I will ever have the Great God my best Good, my Last End, and my Only Lord. That I will ever be rendering of acknowledgements unto the Lord Jesus Christ in all the relations which he bears unto

me. That I will ever be studying what is my duty in these things; and wherein I find myself to fall short, I will ever make it my grief, my shame and for pardon to take myself unto the blood of the everlasting Covenant. Now I humbly imploring the grace of the Mediator, to be sufficient for me, I do as a further Solemnity, here unto subscribe my name with both Hand and Heart.

One more quotation from his diary together with what appears later will give a fair idea of the man. At this time of his life, age 23, his record of his day's work is as follows:

> Read Exodus, etc.; Prayed; Examined the Children; read Descartes; read Commentators, etc; breakfasted; prepared sermon; took part in family prayers; heard pupils recite; read Salman on medicine; dined; visited many friends; read various books; prepared sermon; heard pupils recite; meditated etc.; prayed; supped; prepared sermon; took part in family prayer. (Wendell 54.)

Thus we see him at the beginning of his ministry. Educated, a great reader and worker, conceited, consecrated to his work, and as will appear later, a man who clung with tremendous tenacity to the old Theocracy, even while he saw it crumbling beneath his very hands.

There are several events which we have already spoken of that Cotton Mather is involved in.

- (1) The annulment of the Charter took his Father, Increase, to England and left him at home to take charge of the work of the Church. This annulment was the first great blow to the Theocracy, and the modified Charter that Increase Mather was able to rescue from the Home Government was but a vestige of what they wanted. But out of the wreck they attempted to regain their control by securing through their influence of the political world the appointment of Sir Wm Phipps as Colonial Governor. This availed them nothing.
- (2) The second blow at the Mathers came in their relations with the witchcraft persecutions. Cotton

Mather was the leader of all the persecutions of 1692-3, and the reaction of the people against it lost him much of his influence. Especially one man, Robert Calef, published a book which puts the Mathers in rather undesirable situations. S{???}'s Diary describes the situation of one of the executions. "A very great number of spectators present. Mr. Cotton Mather was there. All of them said they were innocent. Mr. Mather said they all died by righteous sentence." (Wendell, 101). Perhaps the following written at a time when he was accused of witchcraft by a demented young woman. He feared the loss of his influence should these rumors be accepted. He writes, "I was put upon ... agonies, and singular ... efforts of soul, in the Resignation of my name unto the Lord; content that if he had no further Service for my name, it would be torn to pieces. ... But I cried unto the Lord as for Deliverance of my name from the {???} of Hell, so for the deliverance of the young woman whom the power of Hell had seized upon. And behold ... the possessed person ... was Delivered ... on the very same day, and poor Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ was Defeated." (Wendell, 120). The witchcraft persecution brought him much trouble and cost him great loss of power.

The founding of the Brattle Street Church in (3) Cambridge in 1698 under the leadership of Brattle and Leverett, who represented the Liberal or popular movement that was gaining headway, was the third terrible blow to the Mathers. Concerning this, Cotton Mather writes, "A company of headstrong men in the town, the chief of whom are full of malignity to the holy ways of our churches have built in the town another meetinghouse." (Wendell, 142). In January of 1699-1700, he writes, "I see Satan beginning a terrible stroke unto the churches of New England, and the Innovators that have set up a new Church in Boston (a New one indeed!) have made a day of Temptation among us. The men are Ignorant, Arrogant, Obstinate and full of malice and slander, and they fill the land with lies, in the misrepresentations whereof I am a very singular sufferer. Wherefor I set apart this day again for

prayer in my study to cry mightily unto God." (Wendell, 43). The organization of this church was an outward sign of what was going on throughout New England. The old was passing away, and the new was coming into power.

- (4) The fourth event which marked the dawn of new things in New England likewise fell heavily upon the Mathers. Harvard College had been founded for the purpose of preparing men for the ministry in the Orthodox Theocracy. Already signs were not wanting to show that the heresies were finding their way into Harvard. Increase Mather had been President of Harvard for years, having been chosen in 1681, but declined, and accepted the second offer in 1685. He still retained his pastorate over the Second Church, and could not be prevailed upon to take up his residence in Cambridge, but finally after many efforts he moved to Cambridge. Sept 2nd 1700 he began his work as he called it, "of {???} to 40 or 50 children." This was in reality a surrender to the new spirit. It was a bitter pill, and he remained there just a month and a few days. The fight of the Theocracy was most over. Oct 17th 1700, Increase Mather, on plea of ill health, returned from Cambridge, and expressed a desire by letter that another President be chosen. Harvard College, the last stronghold of the Puritan, passed into other hands. The Mathers had to bear the burden, and it is not an idle thought to imagine that Cotton Mather had cherished the idea of becoming its President.
- (5) But such men take defeat with poor grace. In 1705 the Mathers formulated and sent out for approval a document known as 16 proposals, which was a grasp at a passing straw in their efforts to reestablish the influence of the clergy, and maintain the Theocracy. These were defeated and dealt with very severely, and their defeat marks the final victory over the Theocracy. The reply to these proposals was made by John Wise, whom we will take up next Sunday.

Arrogant in a certain sense, superstitious almost beyond comprehension, a man whose prospects in life were bright at the outset, Cotton Mather commands our sympathy and respect for his strict adherence to what he stood for. No amount of defeat, no amount of private sorrow, could shake the firmness and persistence of the last of the Puritans.