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Cotton Mather

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Cotton Mather.

In the person of Cotton Mather we find the man, who at once represents the highest aspirations of the Puritans, 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 Puritanism, and its final consummation effort to retain the position of influence it once held.

Cotton Mather, was born Feb. 12. 1662-3. He was a very fervent youth, and ^{very readily} responded to the influence of his early life. For in his own life he wrote for his son Samuel some account of his early life. "I desire to be wayl unto the very end of my life, the early & brilliant of Original Sin, which appeared at the very beginning of it. Indeed your grandfather, tho' he were a wise and strict

parent, would from the observation of some dis-
 positions 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 were 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 Form in it; and
 yet I composed Form of prayer for my school-
 mates (I suppose when I 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 flay wotes for their wicked words and way; and sometimes I suffered from them, the persecution of not only Scoffs but Blorus also, for my Rebukes."

Wendell's Letters, Volume P. 38.

His wicked consciousness of sin, and a rigid 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. 24. P. 87.

The supreme conceit of the man, and his most apparent self consciousness appear in the following passage written for his son. "The special fault of my childhood

(against which I would have you, my son be^d
continued) 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 finished my business, that through the
Blessing of God upon my endeavours, 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 votes of
senours of the English preachers, in it. I
had conversed with Cato, Corderius, Seneca
Lully, Lucretius, and Virgil. I had wrote Epistles
and Letters; presenting my first theme
to my Tutor, with that his requiring

or expecting as yet any such thing of me; 5
whereupon the complimented me Pandabilis
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 that before
I come to Fourteen, I composed Hebrew
exercises and Ran thro' the other Sciences,
that academical Students ordinarily fall
upon" Wendell. P. 35.

Such was Cotton Mather's estimate of his
own powers as a youth, at the age of 12 he
entered Harvard, and graduated in due time.
At commencement President Coker in presenting
the members of the class said, "The next is
named Cotton Mather, How notable a
name! I am wrong, my friends; I should
rather have said, what notable name!
I will say nothing of his name and

father, the most watchful of guardians,
 the most distinguished Fellow of the College;
 I dare not raise him here to his very
 face. But if this youth bring, both with
 being the piety, the learning, the elegant ac-
 complishment, the sound sense, the judicious
 and the gravity of his very reverend
 grand father, John Cotton and Richard
 Wooster, he may be said to have done
 the ^{his} highest duty. Nor is my joy small
 that in this youth, Cotton and Wooster
 still in fact, as well as in name, join
 together and once more appear in life.

Sibley III. 6. 7. cited in Wensell. 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 ~~to~~ for the ministry

on account of an infirmity in his 7
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
such considerable light on his character "I
renounce all the Vanities and Cursed
Idols and Evil Courses of this world. I
engage that I will ever have the Great God
my best Good, my best End, and my
only Good. 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
when in I find myself to fall short, I
will ever wake it my grief, my shame
and for pardon betake myself unto
the blood of the everlasting Covenant.
Now, & Humbly desiring the grace

of the Tueliator, to be sufficient for me
I do as a further Solemnitie, hereunto sub-
scribe my name with both Hand and Heart."

One work 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 days work is as follows.

"Read Exodus, etc; Prayed; Examined the
Children; read Descartes; read Commentator, etc;
broke fasted; prepared sermon; took part in
family prayers; heard pupils recite; read Solomon
on medicine; dined; visited my friends;
read various books; prepared sermon; heard
pupils recite; meditated etc; prayed; supper;
prepared sermon; took part in family prayer;"

Wendel 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 annullment of the Charter took his
Father-in-law to England and left him
at home to take charge of the work of the
Church. This annullment 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 mistige of what they wanted. But out
of the wreck they attempted to regain their
control by securing through their influence
in the political world the appointment of
Sir W^m. Phips as colonial Governor.

This availed them nothing.

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(2) The several blow at the Wothers come in their relations with ~~Conrad~~ the Mitchcroft persecutions. Cotton Wether 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, Col. Robert Cole, published a book which puts the Wothers in rather undesirable situations. Sewell's diary describes the situation of one of the executions. "A very great number of Spectators present. Mr. Cotton Wether was there. All of them said they were innocent. Mr. Wether said they all died by righteous sentence." Mendel. 101.

Perhaps the following written at a time when he was accused of witchcraft by a Clementine ~~young~~ young woman. He feared the loss of his influence should these rumors rumors be accepted. He writes. "I was just yfou...."

Agonies, and Singular.... efforts of soul, in the
Resignation of my vowe unto the Lord;
his content that if he had no further Service
for my Terme, it should be tou to pieces....
But I cried unto the Lord as for Deliverance
of my vowe from the wolde of Hell,
so for the deliverance of the young woman
whom the power of Hell had seized upon.
And behold.... the fouered person.... was
delivered.... on the very same day, and
the whole flott of the diuel to Refusech a
foor Seruant of the Lord Jesus Christ was
defeated." Wendell 120.

The witchcraft persecution brought him much
trouble. and cost him great loss of Power.

(3) - The Fouching of the Brottle Street
Chuch in Cambridge, in 1695. under the
Leadership of Brottle and Severett, who
represented the Liberal or popular movement

12
that were gaining head way, were the third
terrible blow to the Wobblers. Concerning this
Cotton Wobler writes, "A conspiracy of backsliding
men in the town, the chief of whom are full
of voliquity to the holy ways of the church
our churches here built in the town another
meeting house." Wendell. 142,

In January of 1699-1700, he writes. "I
see Satan beginning a terrible stroke of
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 cry of Hypocrites among us. The
men are Ignorant, Arrogant, Obstinate,
and full of malice and slander, and
they fill the land with lies, in the mis-
representation whereof I am a very sing-
ular sufferer. Wherefor I set a fast
this day again for prayer in my study

to cry with mighty unto God." (13)
Wrothell 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 Wrothells. Harvard college had been founded for the purpose of preparing men for the ministry in the Abolition Society, already signs were not wanting to show that the heresies were finding their way into Harvard. Increase Wrothell had been President of Harvard for years, having been chosen in 1687, but declined, and accepted the second offer in 1685. He still retained his pastorate over the Second Church, and could not be pre-

waited upon to take of his residence in ¹⁴
Cambridge, but finally after many efforts
he moved to Cambridge, Sept 2nd ^{17th}, he began
his work as he collect it - of expounding 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 Slavery
was not over. Oct 17th 1700, Increase
Wether, 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 found into other hands. The
Wether had to bear the burden, and it is
not an idle thought to imagine that
Cotton Wether had cherished the idea
of becoming its President.

(5). But such was to be defeat with

for grace. In 1705 the ¹⁵Twothers formulated
and sent out for approval to a document
known as 16 proposals, which was a
great aid to them in their efforts
to re-establish the influence of the
clergy, and maintain the hierarchy.
These were defeated and dealt with
very severely, and their defeat marks
the final victory over the hierarchy. The
reply to these proposals was made by
John Mire, whom we will take up
next Sunday.

Amongst in a certain sense, superstitions
about beyond confession, a man
whose prospects in life were bright at the
outset, Cotton Mather commends on
sympathy and respect, to for his

strict adherence to what he stood for. ¹⁶

No amount of defeat, nor amount of
frivolous sorrow, could shake the
firmness and consistency of the
last of the Puritans.

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 Scoffs 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.

- (3) The founding of the Brattle Street Church in 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.