

WITCHES & HISTORIANS

INTERPRETATIONS OF SALEM

Edited by **Marc Mappen**
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Introduction to the Second Edition

I am grateful for the opportunity presented by Krieger Publishing Company to do a revised edition of *Witches and Historians: Interpretations of Salem*. I have added two chapters to reflect recent scholarship on New England witchcraft, and I have updated the bibliography.

The Verdict of Contemporaries

To the majority of orthodox Puritans at the onset of the Salem trials, the outbreaks of witchcraft were just what they appeared to be: a certain number of wicked persons were in league with the Devil and had supernatural powers to afflict their innocent neighbors. But there were some in Massachusetts who had their doubts, and their numbers increased as the trials progressed. They were disturbed by the flimsy nature of the evidence and by the spread of accusations in ever-widening circles. It was inevitable that COTTON MATHER (1663–1728) should be drawn into this controversy. The third-generation Puritan minister had established himself as an authority on witchcraft when, in 1689, he published Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions. Now, three years later, the governor of the colony asked him to speak in defense of the Salem trials.

The result was The Wonders of the Invisible World, published in late 1692. The twenty-nine-year old author took pains to state, "I Report matters not as an Advocate but as an Historian." It is possible to take Mather at his word and to regard The Wonders of the Invisible World as the first historical interpretation of Salem. The thesis is simple: the sentences of death were fully deserved because the witches were guilty. It was no accident, said Mather, that the outbreak had occurred at Salem, "the Center, and after a sort, the First-born of our English Settlements." New England had been a land ruled by the Devil until the Puritans had arrived to establish a holy commonwealth. Now the Devil was launching a counterattack to regain his dominion, and because the people of New England had fallen away from the piety of their ancestors, this invasion had come close to succeeding. Indeed, those who doubted the wisdom of the magistrates were themselves contributing to the Devil's cause. By repentance and unity, however, Satan could be defeated.

To prove that the case against the witches was overwhelming, and that "spectral evidence" provided by witnesses was reliable, Mather described in detail the proceedings against several of the accused. Included in the following excerpt is his account of the case against Bridget Bishop, the first witch to be hung at Salem.

3. Satan's Attack on New England

The New-Englanders are a People of God settled in those which were once the Devil's Territories; and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was

exceedingly disturbed when he perceived such a People here accomplishing the Promise of old made unto our Blessed Jesus, That He should have the Utmost Parts of the Earth for his Possession. There was not a greater Uproar among the Ephesians when the Gospel was first brought among them than there was among The Powers of the Air (after whom those Ephesians walked) when first the Silver Trumpets of the Gospel here made the Joyful Sound. The Devil, thus Irritated, immediately try'd all sorts of Methods to overturn this poor Plantation: and so much of the Church as was Fled into this Wilderness, immediately found The Serpent cast out of his Mouth a Flood for the carrying of it away. I believe that never were more Satanical Devices used for the Unsettling of any People under the Sun, than what have been Employ'd for the Extirpation of the Vine which God has here Planted. . . .

But, All those Attempts of Hell have hitherto been Abortive, many an Ebenezer [i.e., prayer] has been Erected unto the Praise of God by his Poor People here and Having obtained Help from God, we continue to this Day. Wherefore the Devil is now making one Attempt more upon us; an Attempt more Difficult, more Surprizing, more snarl'd with unintelligible Circumstances than any that we have hitherto Encountered; an Attempt so Critical that if we get well through, we shall soon enjoy Halcyon Days with all the Vultures of Hell Trodden under our Feet. He has wanted his Incarnate Legions to Persecute us, as the People of God have in the other Hemisphere been Persecuted: he has therefore drawn forth his more Spiritual ones to make an Attacque upon us. We have been advised by some Credible Christians yet alive that a Malefactor, accused of Witchcraft as well as Murder, and Executed in this place more than Forty Years ago, did then give Notice of An Horrible Plot against the Country by Witchcraft, and a Foundation of Witchcraft, then laid, which if it were not seasonably discovered would probably Blow up, and pull down all the Churches in the Country. And we have now with Horror seen the Discovery of such a Witchcraft! An Army of Devils is horribly broke in upon the place which is the Center, and after a sort, the First-born of our English Settlements: and the Houses of the Good People there are fill'd with the doleful Shrieks of their Children and Servants, Tormented by Invisible Hands, with Tortures altogether preternatural. After the Mischiefs there Endeavoured, and since in part Conquered, the terrible Plague of Evil Angels hath made its Progress into some other places, where other Persons have been in like manner Diabolically handled. These our poor Afflicted Neighbors quickly after they become Infected and Infested with these Demons, arrive to a Capacity of Discerning those which they conceive the Shapes of their Troublers; and notwithstanding the Great and Just Suspicion that the Demons might Impose the Shapes of Innocent Persons in their

Spectral Exhibitions upon the Sufferers, (which may perhaps prove no small part of the Witch-Plot in the issue) yet many of the Persons thus Represented, being Examined, several of them have been Convicted of a very Damnable Witchcraft: yea, more than One Twenty have Confessed that they have signed unto a Book which the Devil show'd them, and Engaged in his Hellish Design of Bewitching and Ruining our Land. We know not, at least / know not, how far the Delusions of Satan may be Interwoven into some Circumstances of the Confessions; but one would think all the Rules of Understanding Humane Affairs are at an end, if after so many most Voluntary Harmonious Confessions, made by Intelligent Persons of all Ages, in sundry Towns, at Several Times, we must not Believe the main strokes wherein those Confessions all agree: especially when we have a thousand preternatural Things every day before our eyes, wherein the Confessors do acknowledge their Concernment [i.e., involvement], and give Demonstration of their being so Concerned. If the Devils now can strike the minds of men with any Poisons of so fine a Composition and Operation, that Scores of Innocent People shall Unite in Confessions of a Crime, which we see actually committed, it is a thing prodigious, beyond the Wonders of the former Ages, and it threatens no less than a sort of Dissolution upon the World. Now, by these Confessions 'tis Agreed That the Devil has made a dreadful knot of Witches in the Country, and by the help of Witches has dreadfully increased that Knot: That these Witches have driven a Trade of Commisioning their Confederate Spirits to do all sorts of Mischiefs to the Neighbours, whereupon there have ensued such Mischievous consequences upon the Bodies and Estates of the Neighborhood, as could not otherwise be accounted for: yea, That at prodigious Witch-Meetings the Wretches have proceeded so far as to Concert and Consult the Methods of Rooting out the Christian Religion from this Country, and setting up instead of it, perhaps a more gross Diabolism than ever the World saw before. . . .

But that which most of all Threatens us in our present Circumstances is the Misunderstanding, and so the Animosity, whereinto the Witchcraft now Raging has Enchanted us. The Embroiling, first of our Spirits and then of our Affairs is evidently as considerable a Branch of the Hellish Intrigue which now vexes us as any one Thing whatsoever. The Devil has made us like a Troubled Sea, and the Mire and Mud begins now also to heave up apace. Even Good and Wise Men suffer themselves to fall into their Paroxysms; and the Snake which the Devil is now giving us fetches up the Dirt which before lay still at the bottom of our sinful Hearts. If we allow the Mad Dogs of Hell to poyson us by biting us, we shall imagine that we see nothing but such things about us, and like such things, fly upon all that we see. Were it not for what is

in us, for my part I should not fear a thousand Legions of Devils: 'tis by our Quarrels that we spoil our Prayers; and if our humble zealous, and united Prayers are once hindered: Alas, the Philistines of Hell have cut our Locks for us; they will then blind us, mock us, ruine us. . . .

The Tryal of Bridget Bishop, alias Oliver, At the
Court of Oyer and Terminer Held at Salem, June 2, 1692

She was indicted for Bewitching of several Persons in the Neighbourhood, the Indictment being drawn up according to the Form in such Cases usual. And pleading Not Guilty, there were brought in several persons who had long undergone many kinds of Miseries, which were preternaturally inflicted, and generally ascribed unto an horrible Witchcraft. There was little occasion to prove the Witchcraft, it being evident and notorious to all beholders. Now to fix Witchcraft on the Prisoner at the Bar, the first thing used was the Testimony of the Bewitched; whereof several testifi'd That the Shape of the Prisoner did oftentimes very grievously Pinch them, Choak them, Bite them, and Afflict them; urging them to write their Names in a Book, which the said Spectre called Ours. One of them did further testifie that it was the Shape of this Prisoner, with another, which one day took her from her Wheel, and carrying her to the Riverside, threatend there to Drown her if she did not Sign to the Book mentioned: which yet she refused. Others of them did also testifie that the said Shape did in her Threats brag to them that she had been the Death of sundry Persons, then by her named; and that she had Ridden a Man then likewise named. Another testifi'd, the Apparition of Ghosts unto the Spectre of Bishop, crying out, you Murdered us! About the truth whereof, there was in the Matter of Fact but far too much suspicion.

It was testifi'd, That at the Examination of the Prisoner before the Magistrates, the Bewitched were extreemly tortured. If she did but cast her Eyes on them, they were presently struck down; and this in such a manner as there could be no Collusion in the Business. But upon the Touch of her Hand upon them when they lay in their Swoons, they would immediately Revive; and not upon the Touch of any one else. Moreover, Upon some Special Actions of her Body, as the shaking of her Head, or the turning of her Eyes, they presently and painfully fell into the like postures. And many of the like Accidents now fell out, while she was at the Bar. . . .

One Deliverance Hobbs, who had confessed being a Witch, was now tormented by the Spectres for her Confession. And she now testifi'd That this Bishop tempted her to sign the Book again, and to deny what she had confess'd. She affirm'd That it was the Shape of this Prisoner which whipped

her with Iron Rods, to compel her thereunto. And she affirmed that this Bishop was at a General Meeting of the Witches in a Field at Salem-Village, and there partook of a Diabolical Sacrament in Bread and Wine then administered. . . .

Samuel Shattock testify'd That in the Year 1680, this Bridget Bishop often came to his House upon such frivolous and foolish Errands that they suspected she came indeed with a purpose of mischief. Presently whereupon his eldest Child, which was of as promising Health and Sense as any Child of its Age, began to droop exceedingly; and the oftner that Bishop came to the House, the worse grew the Child. As the Child would be standing at the Door, he would be thrown and bruised against the Stones by an invisible Hand, and in like sort knock his Face against the sides of the House, and bruise it after a miserable manner. . . .

To crown all, John Bly and William Bly testify'd That being employ'd by Bridget Bishop to help to take down the Cellar-wall of the old house wherein she formerly lived, they did in holes of the said old Wall find several Poppets [i.e., dolls], made of Rags and Hogs-bristles, with headless Pins in them, the Points being outward; whereof she could give no account unto the Court that was reasonable or tolerable. . . .

One thing that made against the Prisoner was her being evidently convicted of gross Lying in the court, several times, while she was making her plea; but besides this, a Jury of Women found a preternatural Teat upon her Body: But upon a second search, within 3 or 4 hours, there was no such thing to be seen.* There was also an Account of other People whom this Woman had Afflicted; and there might have been many more, if they had been enquired for; but there was no need of them.

There was one very strange thing more, with which the Court was newly entertained. As this Woman was under a Guard, passing by the great and spacious Meeting-house of Salem, she gave a look towards the House: And immediately a Demon invisibly entering the Meeting-house, tore down a part of it, so that tho' there was no Person to be seen there, yet the People, at the noise, running in, found a Board, which was strongly fastend with several Nails, transported unto another quarter of the House.

**Editor's note:* When an unusual mark or growth was found on the body of an alleged witch, it was usually assumed that this was a teat provided by the Devil to enable the witch to nurse a demon. The fact that such a "preternatural teat" seemed to appear and disappear on the body of Bridget Bishop is used as evidence by Mather to prove that she was guilty of witchcraft.

The Wonders of the Invisible World failed to convince Cotton Mather's countrymen. The same governor who had urged him to write a defense of the trials later dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer and pardoned those who remained in prison. Mather had hoped that the people of New England would repent their scepticism; what they repented instead was their part in the tragedy of Salem. And in the course of this change in opinion, Mather himself came under attack. In 1697 the Boston merchant ROBERT CALEF (1648–1719) wrote a vitriolic denunciation of the trials and of Cotton Mather's role. This book was published in London in 1700 with the sarcastic title *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. Not surprisingly, Cotton Mather angrily described *More Wonders* as a libelous book, and called its author a "sort of Saducee . . . who makes little Conscience of lying."

These two books—*The Wonders* and *More Wonders*—represent the polarized attitudes toward witchcraft of seventeenth century New Englanders. To Mather the trials were a timely and proper exercise of authority against a monstrous evil; to Calef the trials themselves constituted the evil. In the centuries since Salem it has been Calef's view that has prevailed.

4. An Attack on the Trials

In a time when not only England in particular, but almost all Europe had been labouring against the Usurpations of Tyranny and Slavery, The English America has not been behind in a share in the Common calamities; more especially New-England has met not only with such calamities as are common to the rest, but with several aggravations enhancing such Afflictions, by the Devastations and Cruelties of the Barbarous Indians in their Eastern borders, etc.

But this is not all, they have been harrast (on many accounts) by a more dreadful Enemy, as will herein appear to the considerate.

[In the following three paragraphs, Calef summarizes Cotton Mather's version of the witchcraft episode. The number at the beginning of each paragraph refers to the corresponding page number in the 1692 edition of Mather's *The Wonders of the Invisible World*.]

P. 66. Were it as we are told in *Wonders of the Invisible World*, that the Devils were walking about our Streets with lengthened Chains making a dreadful noise in our Ears, and Brimstone, even without a Metaphor, was making a horrid and a hellish stench in our Nostrils,

From Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, reprinted in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, edited by G. L. Burr (New York, 1914), pp. 289–393.

P. 49. And that the Devil exhibiting himself ordinarily as a black-Man, had decoy'd a fearful knot of Proud, Froward, Ignorant, Envious and Malitious Creatures, to list themselves in his horrid Service, by entring their Names in a Book tendered unto them; and that they have had their Meetings and Sacraments, and associated themselves to destroy the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, in these parts of the World; having each of them their Spectres, or Devils Commissionated by them, and representing of them, to be the Engines of their Malice, by these wicked Spectres siezing poor People about the Country with various and bloody Torments. And of those evidently preternatural Torments some to[o] have died. And that they have bewitched some even so far, as to make them self destroyers, and others in many Towns here and there languish'd under their evil hands. The people thus afflicted miserably scratch'd and bitten; and that the same Invisible Furies did stick Pins in them, and scald them, distort and disjoint them, with a Thousand other Plagues; and sometimes drag them out of their Chambers, and carry them over Trees and Hills Miles together, many of them being tempted to sign the Devils Laws.

P. 7[0]. Those furies whereof several have killed more People perhaps than would serve to make a Village.

If this be the true state of the Afflictions of this Country, it is very deplorable, and beyond all other outward Calamities miserable. But if on the other side, the Matter be as others do understand it, That the Devil has been too hard for us by his Temptations, signs, and lying Wonders, with the help of pernicious notions, formerly imbibed and professed; together with the Accusations of a parcel of possessed, distracted, or lying Wenches, accusing their Innocent Neighbours, pretending they see their Spectres (*i.e.*) Devils in their likeness Afflicting of them, and that God in righteous Judgment (after Men had ascribed his Power to Witches, of Commissionating Devils to do these things) may have given them over to strong delusions to believe lyes, etc. And to let loose the Devils of Envy, Hatred, Pride, Cruelty, and Malice against each other; yet still disguised under the Mask of Zeal for God, and left them to the branding one another with the odious Name of Witch; and upon the Accusation of those above mentioned, Brother to Accuse and Prosecute Brother, Children their Parents, Pastors and Teachers their immediate Flock unto death; Shepherds becoming Wolves, Wise Men Infatuated; People hauled to Prisons, with a bloody noise pursuing to, and insulting over, the (true) Sufferers at Execution, while some are fleeing from that call'd Justice, Justice it self fleeing before such Accusations, when once it did but begin to refrain further proceedings, and to question such Practices, some making their Escape out of Prisons, rather than by an obstinate Defence of their

Innocency, to run so apparent hazard of their Lives; Estates seized, Families of Children and others left to the Mercy of the Wilderness (not to mention here the Numbers proscribed, dead in Prisons, or Executed, etc.)

All which Tragedies, tho begun in one Town, or rather by one Parish, has Plague-like spread more than through that Country. And by its Eccho giving a brand of Infamy to this whole Country throughout the World,

If this were the Miserable case of this Country in the time thereof, and that the Devil had so far prevailed upon us in our Sentiments and Actions, as to draw us from so much as looking into the Scriptures for our guidance in these pretended Intricacies, leading us to a trusting in blind guides, such as the corrupt practices of some other Countries, or the bloody Experiments of Bodin,* and such other Authors—Then tho our Case be most miserable, yet it must be said of New-England, Thou hast destroyed thy self, and brought this greatest of Miseries upon thee.

*Editor's note: Jean Bodin (1529–1596) was a French writer and jurist notorious for his persecution of witches.

"I have special reasons moving me to bear my testimony," said the REV. JOHN HALE (1636–1700) in his book *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*. Hale, the minister of Beverly, Massachusetts, was a participant in the Salem episode, and he had actively supported the work of the magistrates. But ironically, his own wife was accused of witchcraft in the fall of 1692, and Hale became convinced that the trials had been a ghastly mistake. Writing five years later, Hale tried to draw lessons from the tragedy. The historian Perry Miller (see selection 12) describes *A Modest Inquiry* as a "sad, troubled, and honest book," and one can see in it the tortured effort of a devout man who, lacking the arrogance of Mather or the anger of Calef, tried to arrive at the truth. Although the book was completed in 1697, it was not published until 1702—two years after the author's death. It is likely that this was Hale's wish.

5. The Lessons of Salem

The Holy Scriptures inform us that the Doctrine of Godliness is a great Mystery, containing the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven: Mysteries which require great search for the finding out: And as the Lord hath his

From John Hale, *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*, reprinted in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, edited by G. L. Burr (New York, 1914), pp. 399–432.

Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Glory; so Satan hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Ruine: Mysteries not easily understood, whereby the depths of Satan are managed in hidden wayes. So the Whore of Babylon makes the Inhabitants of the Earth drunk with the Wine of her Fornication, by the Mystery of her abominations, Rev. 17. 2. And the man of Sin hath his Mystery of iniquity whereby he deceiveth men through the working of Satan in signes and lying wonders, 2 Thes. 2. 3, 7, 9.

And among Satans Mysteries of iniquity, this of Witchcraft is one of the most difficult to be searched out by the Sons of men; as appeareth by the great endeavours of Learned and Holy men to search it out, and the great differences that are found among them, in the rules laid down for the bringing to light these hidden works of darkness. So that it may seem presumption in me to undertake so difficult a Theam, and to lay down such rules as are different from the Sentiments of many Eminent writers, and from the Precedents and practices of able Lawyers; yea and from the Common Law it self.

But my Apology for this undertaking is;

1. That there hath been such a dark dispensation by the Lord, letting loose upon us the Devil, *Anno*. 1692, as we never experienced before: And thereupon apprehending and condemning persons for Witchcraft; and nextly acquitting others no less liable to such a charge; which evidently shew we were in the dark, and knew not what to do; but have gone too far on the one or other side, if not on both. Hereupon I esteemed it necessary for some person to Collect a summary of that affair, with some animadversions upon it, which might at least give some light to them which come after, to shun those Rocks by which we were bruised, and narrowly escaped Shipwrack upon. And I have waited five years for some other person to undertake it, who might do it better than I can, but find none; and judge it better to do what I can, than that such a work should be left undone. Better sincerely though weakly done, then not at all, or with such a byas of prejudice as will put false glosses upon that which was managed with uprightness of heart, though there was not so great a spirit of discerning, as were to be wished in so weighty a Concernment.

2. I have been present at several Examinations and Tryals, and knew sundry of those that Suffered upon that account in former years, and in this last affair, and so have more advantages than a stranger, to give account of these Proceedings.

3. I have been from my Youth trained up in the knowledge and belief of most of those principles I here question as unsafe to be used. The first person that suffered on this account in New-England, about Fifty years since, was my Neighbour, and I heard much of what was charged upon her, and others in those times; and the reverence I bore to aged, learned and judicious persons,

caused me to drink in their principles in these things, with a kind of Implicit Faith. *Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem, Testa diu.* [Translation: "The fresh-made pot will long retain the odor in which once 'tis steeped."] A Child will not easily forsake the principles he hath been trained up in from his Cradle.

But observing the Events of that sad Catastrophe, *Anno* 1692, I was brought to a more strict scanning of the principles I had imbibed, and by scanning, to question, and by questioning at length to reject many of them, upon the reasons shewed in the ensuing Discourse. It is an approved saying *Nihil certius, quam quod ex dubio fit certum*; [Translation: "Nothing is surer than what out of doubt is made sure."] No truth more certain to a man, than that which he hath formerly doubted or denied, and is recovered from his error, by the convincing evidence of Scripture and reason. Yet I know and am sensible, that while we know but in part, man is apt in flying from a discovered error, to run into the contrary extream.

Incidit in Scyllam qui vult vitare Charybdim.

[Translation: "Into Scylla falls he who tries to keep clear of Charybdis."]

The middle way is commonly the way of truth. And if any can shew me a better middle way than I have here laid down, I shall be ready to embrace it: But the conviction must not be by vinegar or drollery, but by strength of argument.

4. I have had a deep sence of the sad consequence of mistakes in matters Capital; and their impossibility of recovering when compleated. And what grief of heart it brings to a tender conscience, to have been unwittingly encouraging of the Sufferings of the innocent. And I hope a zeal to prevent for the future such sufferings is pardonable, although there should be much weakness, and some errors in the pursuit thereof.

5. I observe the failings that have been on the one hand, have driven some into that which is indeed an extream on the other hand, and of dangerous consequences, *viz.* To deny any such persons to be under the New Testament, who by the Devils aid discover Secrets, or do work wonders. Therefore in the latter part of this discourse, I have taken pains to prove the Affirmative, yet with brevity, because it hath been done already by Perkins of *Witchcraft*. Glanvil his *Saducismus Triumphatus*, Pt. 1 p. 1 to 90 and Pt. 2 p. 1 to 80. Yet I would not be understood to justify all his notions in those discourses, but acknowledge he hath strongly proved the being of Witches.

6. I have special reasons moving me to bear my testimony about these matters, before I go hence and be no more; the which I have here done, and I

hope with some assistance of his Spirit, to whom I commit my self and this my labour, even that God whose I am and whom I serve: Desiring his Mercy in Jesus Christ to Pardon all the Errors of his People in the day of darkness; and to enable us to fight with Satan by Spiritual Weapons, putting on the whole Armour of God.

And tho' Satan by his Messengers may buffet Gods Children, yet there's a promise upon right *Resisting*, *he shall flee from them*, Jam. 4. 7. *And that all things shall work together for the good of those that Love the Lord*, Rom. 8. 28. So that I believe Gods Children shall be gainers by the assaults of Satan, which occasion'd this Discourse; which that they may, is the Prayer of, Thine in the Service of the Gospel.

* * *

I shall conclude this Discourse with some Application of the whole.

1. We may hence see ground to fear, that there hath been a great deal of innocent blood shed in the Christian World, by proceeding upon unsafe principles, in condemning persons for Malefick Witchcraft.

2. That there have been great sinful neglects in sparing others, who by their divinings about things future, or discovering things secret, as stolen Goods, etc., or by their informing of persons and things absent at a great distance, have implored the assistance of a familiar spirit, yet coloured over with specious pretences, and have drawn people to enquire of them: A sin frequently forbidden in Scripture, as Lev. 19. 31 and 20. 6, Isa. 8. 19, 20. and yet let alone, and in many parts of the World, have been countenanced in their diabolical skill and profession; because they serve the interest of those that have a vain curiosity, to pry into things God hath forbidden, and concealed from discovery by lawful means. And of others that by their enchantments, have raised mists, strange sights, and the like, to beget admiration, and please Spectators, etc., Whereas these divinations and operations are the Witchcraft more condemned in Scripture than the other.

3. But to come nigher home, we have cause to be humbled for the mistakes and errors which have been in these Colonies, in their Proceedings against persons for this crime, above forty years ago and downwards, upon insufficient presumptions and precedents of our Nation, whence they came. I do not say, that all those were innocent, that suffered in those times upon this account. But that such grounds were then laid down to proceed upon, which were too slender to evidence the crime they were brought to prove; and

thereby a foundation laid to lead into error those that come after. May we not say in this matter, as it is, Psal. 106. 6. *We have sinned with our fathers?* And as, Lam. 5. 7. *Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have born their iniquities?* And whether this be not one of the sins the Lord hath been many years contending with us for, is worthy our serious enquiry. If the Lord punished Israel with famine three years for a sin of misguided zeal forty years before that, committed by the breach of a Covenant made four hundred years before that: 2 Sam. 21. 1, 2, Why may not the Lord visit upon us the misguided zeal of our Predecessors about Witchcraft above forty years ago, even when that Generation is gathered to their Fathers.

4. But I would come yet nearer to our own times, and bewail the errors and mistakes that have been in the year 1692. In the apprehending too many we may believe were innocent, and executing of some, I fear, not to have been condemned; by following such traditions of our fathers, maxims of the Common Law, and Precedents and Principles, which now we may see weighed in the Balance of the Sanctuary, are found too light. I heartily concur with the Direction for our publick prayers, emitted December 17, 1696, by our General Assembly, in an order for a general Fast, *viz.* "That God would shew us what we know not, and help us wherein we have done amiss, to do so no more: And especially that whatever mistakes on either hand, have been fallen into, either by the body of this people, or any other of men, referring to the late tragedy raised among us by Satan and his Instruments, through the awful Judgment of God: He would humble us therefore, and pardon all the errors of his Servants and People, that desire to love his Name, and be attuned to his land." I am abundantly satisfied that those who were most concerned to act and judge in those matters, did not willingly depart from the rules of righteousness. But such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted, and the power of former precedents, that we walked in the clouds, and could not see our way. And we have most cause to be humbled for error on that hand, which cannot be retrieved. So that we must beseech the Lord, that if any innocent blood hath been shed, in the hour of temptation, the Lord will not lay it to our charge, but be merciful to his people whom he hath redeemed. Deut. 21. 8, And that in the day when he shall visit, he will not visit this sin upon our land, but blot it out, and wash it away with the blood of Jesus Christ.

5. I would humbly propose whether it be not expedient, that some what more should be publickly done then yet hath, for clearing the good name and reputation of some that have suffered upon this account, against whom the evidence of their guilt was more slender, and the grounds for charity for them more convincing. And this (in order to our obtaining from the Lord farther

reconcillation to our land,) and that none of their surviving relations, may suffer reproach upon that account. I have both read and heard of several in England, that have been executed for Capital crimes, and afterwards upon sense of an error in the process against them, have been restored in blood and honour by some publick act. My Lord Cook relates a story. A man going to correct a Girle his Neice, for some offence, in an upper room, the Girle strove to save her self, till her nose bled, and wiping it with a cloath, threw the bloody cloath out at the window, and cryed Murder; and then ran down staires, got away and hid her self. Her Uncle was prosecuted by her friends upon suspicion of Murdering her, because she could not be found. He declared that she made her escape, as above said. Then time was allowed him to bring her forth, but he could not hear of her within the time, and fearing he should dy if she could not be found, procures another Girle very like her, to appear in Court, and declare she was his Neice that had been missing: But her relations examine this counterfeit, until they find her out, and she confesseth she was suborned and counterfeited the true Niece. Upon these presumptions the man was found guilty of Murdering his Neice, and thereupon executed. And after his execution his true Neice comes abroad and shews her self alive and well. Then all that saw it were convinced of the Uncles innocency, and vanity of such presumptions. The Printing and Publishing of this relation Vindicates the good name of the Uncle, from the imputation of the crime of Murder. And this is one end of this present discourse, to take off (so far as a discourse of this nature can) infamy from the names and memory of such sufferers in this kind, as do not deserve the same.

6. Here it may be suitable for us to enquire, What the Lord speaks to us by such a stupendous providence, in his letting loose Satan upon us in this unusual way? *Ans.* 1. We may say of this, as our Saviour said of his washing his disciples feet, Joh. 13. *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hererafter. The Judgments of the Lord are a great deep,* Psal. 36. 6. *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.* 2. Yet somewhat of his counsel at present for our instruction may be known, by comparing the Word and works of God together.

1. As when Joshua the high Priest though an holy chosen man of God, stood before the Angel, Satan stood at his right hand to resist him, or to be his adversary: And the advantage Satan had was by the filthy garments Joshua was clothed with before the Angels: That is, some iniquity which yet was not passed away, Zech. 3. 1, 3, 4. So we may say here were among Gods own Children filthy garments. The sins of Lukewarmness, loss of our first love, unprofitableness under the Gospel, slumbering and sleeping in the wise, as well as foolish Virgins, worldliness, pride, carnal security, and many other

sins. By these and such like sins the accuser of the Brethren [i.e., Satan] got advantage to stand at our right hand (the place of an Accuser in Courts of Justice) and there accuse us and resist us.

2. When the Egyptians refused to let Israel go to sacrifice and keep a feast to the Lord in the Wilderness: The Lord cast upon [them] the fierceness of his wrath, by sending Evil Angels among them, Psal. 78. 49. Egypts sins were (1.) Coveteousness; they would not let Israel go, because they gained by their labours. (2.) Contempt of God and his Instituted Worship, and Ordinances. They did not count them of such concernment, that Israel should go into the Wilderness to observe them. Both these sins have too much increased in our Land. (1.) Coveteousness, an inordinate love of the World gave Satan advantage upon us. (2.) Contempt of Gods Worship and Instituted Ordinances. The Errand of our Fathers into this Wilderness, was to Sacrifice to the Lord; that is, to worship God in purity of heart and life, and to wait upon the Lord, walking in the faith and order of the Gospel in Church fellowship; that they might enjoy Christ in all his Ordinances. But these things have been greatly neglected and despised by many born, or bred up in the Land. We have much forgotten what our Fathers came into the Wilderness to see. The sealing Ordinances of the Covenant of Grace in Church-Communion have been much slighted and neglected; and the fury of this Storm raised by Satan hath fallen very heavily upon many that lived under these neglects. The Lord sends Evil Angels to awaken and punish our negligence: And to my knowledge some have been hereby excited to enter into the Chamber of Gods Ordinances, to hide themselves, until the indignation be over past.

3. David when he removed the Ark from Kirjathjearim, had the Ark put into a new Cart, which should have been carried by the Kohathites. Numb. 3.31. And David thought this was right, until the Lord slew Uzza for touching the Ark: But then he looked more exactly into the will of God; and confesseth that the Lord made a breach upon them, because they sought him not after the due order, 1 Chron. 13. 5, 7, 9, 10, and 15. 11, 12, 13. Had not the Lord made that breach upon them, they had persisted securely in their error. So I may say in this case. In the prosecution of Witchcraft, we sought not the Lord after the due order; but have proceeded after the methods used in former times and other places, until the Lord in this tremendous way made a breach upon us. And hereby we are made sensible that the methods formerly used are not sufficient to prove the guilt of such a crime. And this I conceive was one end of the Lords letting Satan loose to torment and accuse so many; that hereby we may search out the truth more exactly. For had it not been for this dreadful dispensation, many would have lived and dyed in that error, which they are now convinced of.

4. The Lord delivered into the hand of Satan the Estate, Children, and Body of Job, for the tryal of Jobs faith and patience, and proof of his perfection and uprightness. So the Lord hath delivered into Satans hand mens Children and Bodies, yea names and estates into Satans hand for the tryal of their faith and patience, and farther manifestation of the sincerity of their professions.

7. From that part of the discourse which shews the power of Satan to torment the bodies, and disturb the minds of those, he is let loose upon. . . . I would infer, that Satan may be suffered so to darken the minds of some pious Souls, as to cause them to destroy themselves by drowning, hanging, or the like. And when he hath so far prevailed upon some, that formerly lived a Christian life, but were under the prevalency of a distracting Melancholy at their latter end, We may have Charity that their Souls are Saved, notwithstanding the sad conclusion of their lives. I speak not to excuse any that having the free use of their reason willingly destroy themselves, out of pride, discontent, impatience, etc. Achitophel who out of height of Spirit because his Counsel was not followed, and to prevent Davids executing of him, for his rebellion and treason, destroyed himself, hath left his name to stink unto all generations. And Judas who for his unparalleled treachery in betraying his Master, and the Lord of life, was justly left to hange himself; and the rope breaking or slipping he fell down head long, or with his face down ward, so that he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out, Math. 27. 5. with Act. 1. 13, left by his sin and punishment in the last act of his life the black character of a Son of perdition. But those that being out of their right minds, and hurried by an evil Spirit, as persons under a force to be their own executioners, are not always to be ranked with these.

8. Seeing we have been too fierce against supposed Malefick Witchcraft, let us take heed we do not on the contrary become too favourable to divining Witchcraft: And become like Saul who was too zealous against the Gibeonites, and at last turned to seek after one that had a familiar Spirit, to his own destruction. Let us not, if we can help it, suffer Satan to set up an ensuring office for stolen Goods. That after he hath brought the curse of God into the house of the thief, by tempting him to steal, he may not bring about the curse into the houses of them from whom the goods were stolen, by alluring them to go to the god of Ekron to enquire. That men may not give their Souls to the Devil in exchange, for his restoring to them their goods again, in such a way of divination. The Lord grant it may be said of New England, as is prophcyed of Judah, Mich. 5. 12. *I will cut off Witchcrafts out of thine hand, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers.*

9. Another extream we must beware of, is, *viz.* Because our fathers in the beginning times of this Land, did not see so far into these mysteries of iniquity, as hath been since discovered, Let us not undervalue the good foundations they laid for God and his people, and for us in Church and Civil Government. For Paul that eminent Apostle knew but in part; no wonder then, if our Fathers were imperfect men. In the purest times in Israel, there were some Clouds of ignorance over-shadowing of them. Abraham, David, and the best Patriarchs were generally ignorant of the sin of Polygamy. And although Solomon far exceeded Nehemiah in wisdom; yet Nehemiah saw farther into the evil of Marrying Outlandish Women, than that wisest of Kings, and meer fallen men. Neh. 13. 26. Josiah kept the Passeover more exactly, than David, and all the Reforming Kings of Judah, 2 Chron. 35. 18.

All the godly Judges and Kings of Judah were unacquainted with, and so negligent of the right observation of the feast of Tabernacles, until it came to Nehemiahs time: And he understood and revived an ordinance of God, that lay buried in oblivion, near about a thousand years. Now he that shall reject all the good in doctrine and practice, which was maintained, professed and practiced by so many Godly leaders, because of some few errors found among them, will be found to fight against God. A dwarf upon a giants shoulders, can see farther than the giant.

It was a glorious enterprize of the beginners of these Colonies, to leave their native Country to propagate the Gospel: And a very high pitch of faith, zeal, and courage that carryed them forth, to follow the Lord into this wilderness, into a land that was not sown. Then was New England holiness to the Lord, and all that did devour them, or attempted so to do, did offend, and evil did come upon them. And the Lord did graciously remember this kindness of their Youth, and love of their Espousals; In granting them many eminent tokens of his favour; by his presence with them in his Ordinances, for the Conversion of Souls, and edifying and comforting the hearts of his Servants: By signal answering their prayers in times of difficulty: By protecting them from their Enemies; By guiding of, and providing for them in a Desart. And the Lord will still remember this their kindness unto their Posterity, unless that by their Apostasy from the Lord, they vex his Holy Spirit, to turn to be their Enemy: And thereby cast off the Entail of his Covenant Mercies; which God forbid. *Oh that the Lord may be with us, as he was with our Fathers; and that he may not leave us, nor forsake us!*