The Boston Baptists

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Fierce bigotry and intolerance did much for the ancient Baptists in Jerusalem of old, and this history repeated itself in Boston during the year 1651. The story is very simple. William Witter, a plain old farmer, lived at Swampscott, near Lynn, and was a member of the Congregational Church there. As far back as February 28th, 1643, he renounced infant baptism, and was brought before the Court, charged with speaking indecently of that ordinance. But having made some sort of an apology, he was arraigned a second time, February 18th, 1646, and was formally excommunicated July 24th, 1651, "for absenting himself from the public ordinances nine months or more and for being rebaptized."[1] Meanwhile he had become a member of Clarke's Church at Newport; at what time does not appear, but evidently some time before, as he had not attended the Church at Lynn for more than nine months. Having become blind as well as old, and living little, if any thing, less

[1] Ms. Rec. Essex Court, 25, 9mo, 1651.

than seventy-five miles from his Church, he was unable to attend its communion or to share its Christian sympathy and fellowship, all his surroundings being hostile to him. Whether he had invited a visit from representatives of the Newport Church, or they were prompted to visit him in his affliction, is not stated, but the Church records say: "Three of the brethren, namely, Mr. John Clarke, pastor, Obadiah Holmes and James Crandall, were taken upon the Lord's day, July 20th, 1651, at the house of one of the brethren whom they went to visit; namely, William Witter, in the town of Lyn." But it is clear from the record itself that he was a "brother" in that Church, as Backus calls him; also Arnold, in his "History of Rhode Island," calls him "an aged member," and Dr. Palfrey mentions him as a "brother in the Church of Baptists."

The above named three started on this mission of love worthy of Jesus himself and an honor to his servants. They passed quietly on their long journey, possibly through Boston, and reached Witter's home on Saturday night, hoping for a quiet Sabbath under a Christian roof. But this was criminal, much as Peter and John sinned against Jerusalem by helping a poor cripple there. When the Sabbath dawned they thought that they would "worship God in their own way on the Lord's day" in Witter's family. Yes; but what right had they to think any such thing? Did they not know that it was a crime to worship God "in your own way," even under your own roof, in Massachusetts? Notwithstanding this Clarke began to preach God's word, from Revelation 3:10, to Witter's family, his two traveling companions, and,

as he says, to "four or five strangers that came in unexpected after I had begun." Quite likely those sinners of the Gentiles, John Wood, Joseph Rednap and Roger Scott, were all present. Wood had been tried, February 19th, 1616, for "professing Anabaptist sentiments and withholding his children from baptism;" Rednap had broken the law in usually "departing from the congregation at the time of administering the seal of baptism;"[2] and Scott was that drowsy sinner who was tried by the Court, February 28th, 1643, "for common sleeping at the public exercise upon the Lord's day, and for striking him that waked him," and was "severely whipped" for the same in the ensuing December. This deponent saith not whether he really was at Witter's, or, if so, whether he wanted a quiet nap unaroused by a pugnacious Puritan Dogberry; perhaps he thought that a stirring Baptist sermon was just the novelty to keep him wide awake on that Sunday and in that particular place.

But no matter who was there, Clarke had begun to preach powerfully on the faithfulness of God to his people in the hour of temptation, when two constables invaded the farm-house, rushing in with a warrant from Robert Bridges, the "ordinary;" and the Newport brethren were brought before this officer of justice as prisoners. Bridges insisted that they should attend service at the State Church, and they insisted that they would not. Clarke said, "If thou forcest us into your assembly we cannot hold communion with them." Clarke was very clear-headed, but he mistook the squire, for it was not "communion"

[2] Felt, Ece. Hist., ii, p.46

that he was aiming at. The law required all to attend the State Church, and, therefore, them; and go they should anyhow, so they were forced into the assembly. Clarke says that when he was taken in he removed his hat and "civilly saluted them," but when he had been conducted to a seat he put on his hat, "opened my book and fell to reading." This troubled the "ordinary," and he commanded the constable to "pluck off our hats, which he did, and where he laid mine there I let it lie." When the service closed Clarke desired to speak to the congregation, but silence was commanded and the prisoners were removed. Some liberty was granted them on Monday, which they used, as Paul and Silas used theirs at Philippi, when they entered into the house of Lydia and exhorted the brethren. So here, Clarke and his brethren entered the house of Witter and actually shocked the magistrates by commemorating the love of Jesus together in observing the Lord's Supper. This act filled the cup of their iniquity to the brim, and it was probably the main object of their visit.

On Monday they were removed to Boston and cast into prison, the charges against them being, for "disturbing the congregation in the afternoon, for drawing aside others after their erroneous judgments and practices, and for suspicion of rebaptizing one or more amongst us." Clarke was fined £20, Holmes £30, Crandall £5, and on refusal to pay they were "to be well whipped," although Winthrop had told the English government that they had no law "to whip in that kind." Edwards says that while "Mr. Clarke stood stripped at the whipping-

post some humane person was so affected with the sight of a scholar, a gentleman and reverend divine, in such a situation, that he, with a sum of money, redeemed him from his bloody tormentors." Before this he had asked the Court: "What law of God or man had he broken, that his back must be given to the tormentors for it, or he be despoiled of his goods to the amount of £20?" To which Endicott replied: "You have denied infant baptism and deserve death, going up and down, and secretly insinuating into them that be weak, but cannot maintain it before our ministers." Clarke tells us "that indulgent and tender-hearted friends, without my consent and contrary to my judgment, paid the fine."[3] Thus some one paid the fine of Clarke and Crandall, and proposed to pay that of Holmes. The first two were released, whether they assented or not, but Holmes who was a man of learning, and who afterward succeeded Dr. Clarke as pastor of the Newport Church, would not consent to the paying of his fine, and because he refused he was whipped thirty stripes, September 6th, 1651. He said that he "durst not accept of deliverance in such a way." He was found guilty of "hearing a sermon in a private manner," or, as the *mittimus* issued by Robert Bridges expresses it,

> For being taken by the constable at a private meeting at Lin, upon the Lord's day, exercising among themselves, to whom divers of the town repaired and joined with them, and that in time of public exercise of the worship of God; as also for offensively disturbing the peace of the congregation, at their coming into the public meeting in the time of prayer, in the afternoon, and for saying and manifesting that the Church in Lin was not constituted according

[3] Materials for Hit. R.I. Baptists.

> to the order of our Lord. ... And for suspicion of their having their hands in rebaptizing of one or more.

Bancroft says that he was whipped "unmercifully," and Governor Jenks, "that for many days, if not some weeks, he could take no rest but upon his knees and elbows, not being able to suffer any part of his body to touch the bed whereon he lay." While enduring this torture, he joined his Lord on the cross and Stephen, in praying that this sin might not be laid to the charge of his persecutors; and when his lacerated flesh quivered and blood streamed from his body, so powerfully did the grace of the Crucified sustain him that he cheerfully said to his tormentors: "You have struck me as with roses!"

His remarkable words call to mind the superhuman saying of another noted Baptist, James Bainham, the learned Barrister of the Middle Temple, who was martyred in the days of Henry VIII. Fox shows (ii, p. 246) that he repudiated the baptism of infants. Sir Thomas More lashed him to the whipping-post in his own house at Chelsea, and the whip drew blood copiously from his back; then, when he was burning at the stake, his legs and arms being half-consumed, he exclaimed in triumph: "O, ye Papists! behold ye look for miracles, and here you may see a miracle. In this fire I feel no more pain than if I were in a bed of down; it is to me as a bed of roses!" Holmes had much of this noble martyr's spirit. Most touchingly he himself wrote:

> I said to the people, though my flesh should fail and my spirit should fail, yet God will not fail; so it pleased the Lord to come in and so to fill my heart and tongue as a vessel full, and with an audible voice I break forth, praying unto the Lord not to lay this

> sin to their charge, and telling the people that now I found he did not fail me, and, therefore, now I should trust him forever who failed me not. For, in truth, as the strokes fell upon me I had such a spiritual manifestation of God's presence as the like thereof I never had, nor can with fleshy tongue express, and the outward pain was so removed from me, that, indeed, I am not able to declare it to you. It was so easy to me that I could well bear it; yea, and in a manner felt it not, although it was grievous, as the spectators said, the man striking with all his strength—yea, spitting on his hands three times, as many affirmed—with a three-corded whip, giving me therewith thirty strokes. When he had loosened me from the post, having joyfulness in my heart and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I told the magistrates, you have struck me as with roses, and said, moreover, although the Lord hath made it easy to me, yet I pray God it may not be laid to your charge.

The vengeful feeling of the authorities toward these harmless men illustrates the severity which was intended. During their examination, Governor Endicott charged them with being "Anabaptists," said they "deserved death," and that "they would not have such trash brought into their dominion." The Court lost its temper, and even John Wilson, a clergyman of a very gentle spirit, struck Holmes, and said: "The curse of God go with thee;" to which the sufferer replied: "I bless God I am counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus." After the whipping of Holmes, thirteen persons suffered in one way or another for the sympathy which they manifested for him and were unable to repress. John Spur and John Hazel were sentenced to receive ten lashes, or a fine of forty shillings each. Their crime was, that they had taken

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the holy confessor by the hand when he was led to the whipping-post by the executioner. This fine was paid by their friends without their consent. The story which they both tell in detail, of their arrest under warrants issued by Increase Nowel, as well as of their trial and sufferings for greeting their abused brother, are most affecting. Hazel being about sixty years of age and infirm, had come fifty miles to comfort his friend Holmes in prison. Professor Knowles tells us that this old Simeon from Rehoboth died before he reached his home. The saint paid a severe penalty for allowing his soft old heart to pity a poor lacerated brother, who had left his noble wife and eight children to visit the blind in his affliction.

This outrage aroused the most bitter resentment everywhere, and to his honor it should be known to the end of the world, that Richard Slatonstall, one of the first magistrates of Massachusetts, who was then in England, sent a dignified and indignant letter, dated April 25th, 1652, to Rev. Messrs. Cotton and Wilson, in which he wrote:

> It doth not a little grieve my spirit to hear what sad things are reported daily of your tyranny and persecutions in New England, as that you fine, whip, and imprison men for their consciences. First, you compel such to come into your assemblies as you know will not join with you in worship, and when they show their dislike thereof, and witness against it, then you stir up your magistrates to punish them for such as you conceive their public affronts. These rigid ways have laid you very low in the hearts of the saints. I do assure you that I have heard them pray in the public assemblies that the Lord would give you meek and humble spirits, not to strive so much for uniformity as to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. When I was in Holland, about the beginning of our wars, I remember some Christians there, that then had serious thoughts of planting in New England, desired me to write to the governor

> thereof, to know if those that differ from you in opinion, yet holding the same foundation in religion, as Anabaptists, Seekers, Antinomians, and the like, might be permitted to live among you, to which I received this short answer from your then governor, Mr. Dudley: "God forbid," said he, "our love for the truth should be grown so cold *that we should tolerate errors*." I hope you do not assume to yourselves infallibility of judgment. ... We pray for you and wish you prosperity every way; hoped the Lord would have given you so much light and love there, that you might have been eyes to God's people here, and not to practice these courses in the wilderness which you went so far to prevent.[4]

Cotton undertook in reply to justify the dark deed, and made as shameful a failure as ever an inquisitor made in defense of the Inquisition. He saw nothing in Holmes's conduct but willful obstinacy, and if a citizen is obstinate in his opinions is it not the bounden duty of the magistrates to whip it out? And so he threw the entire responsibility upon the victim himself. These are his words:

> As for his whipping, it was more voluntarily chosen by him than inflicted on him. His censure by the Court was to have paid, as I know, thirty pounds or else be whipped; his fine was offered to be paid by friends for him freely; but he chose rather to be whipped; in which case, *if his suffering of stripes was any worship of God at all, surely it could be accounted no better than will-worship*.

So obtuse was his conscience in all that related to the freedom of man's soul in the worship of God, that he could not see the base injustice of fining a man for his convictions of duty to God, and then whipping him because he would not consent to recognize the righteousness of his own punishment by paying an unjust fine. Governor Jenks, of Rhode Island, understood the matter as Holmes understood it, and in writing, early in the eighteenth century, said:

[4] Hutchinson's Col. Original Papers, pp. 401, 3-8.

> The paying of a fine seems to be but a small thing in comparison of a man's parting with his religion, yet the paying of a fine is the acknowledgment of a transgression; and for a man to acknowledge that he has transgressed, when his conscience tells him he has not, is but little, if any thing at all, short of parting with his religion.

But, with the heartlessness of a stone, Cotton says: "The imprisonment of either of them was no detriment. I believe they fared neither of them better at home, and I am sure Homes had not been so well clad in many years before." He evidently respected Holmes's coat more than the shoulders which it covered. He continues:

> We believe there is a vast difference between men's inventions and God's institutions. We fled from men's inventions, to which we else should have been compelled; we compel none to men's inventions. If our ways, rigid ways as you call them, have laid us low in the hearts of God's people, yea, and of the saints, as you style them, we do not believe it is any part of their saintship.[5]

All this is rendered the more humiliating, when we keep in mind that the entire transaction was unlawful. The statute of November 13th, 1644, called for the "banishment" of Baptists, but Winslow said that they had no law "to whip in that kind;" hence, the wanton cruelty of the whole case, without even the show or pretense of law. Possibly this may account for the fact that so many able historians have passed it by in silence. Johnson does not refer to it in his History of 1654, nor Morton in his Memorial of 1669, nor Hubbard in his History of 1680, nor Mather in his of 1702. Others, who did make the record, generally palliated the conduct of the persecutors as best they could. But it was left for Dr. Palfrey, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, to make

[5] Mass. Hist., iii, pp. 403-406.

light of this helpless confessor's suffering, by-expressing his suspicion that the magistrates sought "to vindicate what they thought the majesty of the law, at little cost to the delinquent." It is difficult to understand how a grave historian can, with any show of seriousness, maintain that the majesty of law was jeoparded by refusing to attend a State Church, and by taking the Lord's Supper elsewhere without disturbing any one; or if it were, that it could be vindicated by plowing furrows amongst the muscles and nerves of a Christian's back till it was raw. Besides, there was no law to be vindicated in this case. The statutes against the Baptists, as we see, provided that they should be banished, not flogged. If this brutal beating were a mere perfunctory farce, why was it necessary to deal out upon the quivering flesh of Holmes the last lash up to thirty? Increase Nowel was a ruling elder in the Church, the judges sat in its chief seats, and should have remembered the cruel scourging of their Saviour by a heartless judge. Instead, as Edwards says, "with a whip of three cords belaboring his back till poor Holmes's flesh was reduced to jelly," so they recollected their Redeemer in his servant. The thirty lashes with the three-corded whip counted ninety strokes in all; though others, whipped at the same time for rape and counterfeiting money, received but ten! And what does it count to the honor of his tormentors that the patient sufferer said: "You have struck me as with roses?" The spiritual exaltation of martyrs in all ages has asserted itself by lifting them above physical sufferings, which, in themselves, have been most excruciating. Can it be pretended that because poor Bainham cried that

the flames were like a bed of down, they therefore did not reduce his body to a cinder? Neither can it be claimed that what Holmes called "a whip of roses" did not almost flay him alive. He, himself, tells us that his pangs were so "grievous" that with strong crying and tears he prayed to him who was able to save him, so that neither his flesh nor spirit "failed," but like his Master he was heard and strengthened to endure what he feared. Surely, Dr. Palfrey's notions of law and its "majesty" needed as much revision as did his suspicions and tender mercies. This whipping of Holmes was as grievous a piece of tyranny as ever was inflicted at the hands of Christian men, and it can find no palliation in the divine grace vouchsafed to his spiritual support. Often when the body of a holy man is the most severely racked, his spirit seems consciously to glance aside and, as it were, stand apart front the body to exult in its own superiority to his suffering flesh. But all cynical pooh-poohment of their agonies is unworthy of a man who pretends to human consciousness. That soullessness which excuses the whipping of Holmes would justify the burning of Latimer and Ridley.

It was sufficiently painful that Dr. Palfrey should tinge the cheek of the nineteenth century by a gratuitous fling at Holmes's stripes as harmless; but it was reserved for a learned and aged minister of that lowly One who said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," to select for himself the distinction of sneering at this bleeding child of God. In 1876 Rev. Dr. Dexter, in his work on Roger Williams, not only cites

Palfrey's unworthy remark with approval, but on page 145 reveals an unlovely *animus* in doing so, by the sneer: "*Holmes whipped—having insisted upon it*." Palfrey might well have spared the sensibilities of Christ-like men despite the studied finish of his sentence, but much less was it needful for this venerable scholar of three-score years to wound refined humanity by studied coarseness. Though thrust out of the text, in contrast with Palfrey's words and carefully veiled in his Index, no charitable man can persuade himself that the red sores on Holmes's back would have suited the doctor's gloating better had such flowers glowed in a heap at the sufferer's feet, as in the case of Bainham. Palfrey knew that his ground was delicate and trod lightly, but to use Paul's words of Isaiah, Dr. Dexter "is very bold," and rushes where Palfrey "suspected" that he would like to tread softly.

Without honor to Massachusetts history, and without throwing one ray of light upon this dark blot on its pages, Dr. Dexter has offered himself as the apologist of this barbarity toward his Baptist brethren, and for this purpose adopts and elaborates a most astounding theory from Dr. Palfrey. He claims that the object of this pilgrimage to Swampscott was not to administer spiritual consolation to Witter, but as he puts it, to float "the red flag of the anabaptistical fanaticism" "full in the face of the Bay bull." In other words, taken from his Index again, "Clarke and his party leave Newport to obtain a little persecution in Massachusetts," and that to accomplish a purely political end. His statement of the case is briefly this. Some time before, Coddington,

of Rhode Island, had gone to London to obtain leave from England to institute a separate government for the islands of Rhode Island and Canonicut, he to be the governor. Dr. Dexter's words are:

> In the autumn of 1650 it was understood that he was on his way home with this new instrument, and it was further understood that it was Mr. Coddington's desire and intention to bring about under it, if possible, the introduction of Rhode Island into the confederacy then existing of the other colonies, if not absolutely to prevent its annexation to Massachusetts." Clarke and Coddington were not on good terms, and the "Anabaptist pastor was bitterly opposed to the new-coming order of things." "When the crisis approached, he seems to have felt that a little persecution of the Anabaptists — if such a thing could be managed — by Massachusetts, might serve an important purpose in prejudicing the Rhode Island mind against Coddington's scheme.

Accordingly, the visit to Witter was carefully planned and executed as a means of enraging the "Bay bull!"[6]

Possibly, Coddington had the above project in view, and he may have been opposed by Clarke; but certainly and naturally, this cruelty to Holmes raised a storm of indignation against its perpetrators. These are the only facts in addition to those of the journey itself which Dr. Dexter adduces in support of his proposition. It is one of the cardinal principles of jurisprudence that a man is to be held innocent until proved to be guilty, and that his motives are to be presumed good until shown to be evil. A Christian historian is bound to observe, at least, the same measure of just judgment that obtains in ordinary tribunals. And, no candid man will conclude that the facts recounted here are inconsistent with good intentions, or that they point to the conclusion that Holmes

[6] As to Roger Williams, p. 19.

and his associates went to Massachusetts to carry out a political plot. One who will read Dr. Dexter's own account of this transaction with care, will see that the alleged ulterior designs are not even inferences from facts. They are supplied entirely by the writer himself, and are artfully worked into the thread of the narrative. Outside of the common presumption of innocence, the actual occurrences tend distinctly to show that the real reason of the visit to Swampscott was the one openly avowed. The conduct of the three visitors was that of men who shunned rather than courted publicity. If their purpose had been to flaunt the "red flag full in the face of the Bay bull," they would not have gone quietly to Witter's house and held religious service there, almost in secret. They would have made their presence and their infraction of the local law as conspicuous as possible. As it was, they were dragged from their quiet and seclusion, and forced into a public congregation against their will and remonstrance, by a constable. Then, pre-eminent amongst the three, the behavior of Holmes after the arrest was simply that of strong convictions and heroic consistency.

Whatever may be said in extenuation of the action of the Puritans of Massachusetts in this case, and it is little at the most, they were intolerant and inquisitorial. They had come to New England not to establish religious freedom, but a religious absolutism of their own. As Dr. Dexter naively puts it, they had determined "to make their company spiritually homogeneous." Give them the credit of being children of their age for what it is worth; but the case is entirely different with a

minister of Jesus, who has breathed the air of New England for half a century, and is writing in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; who instead of asking for a charitable verdict upon their faults, seeks to justify them, in the warp and in the web, and to that end sets himself systematically to revile the dead who suffered their tyranny. His strictures show him to be so obviously the committed advocate of an untenable theory, that with all his acuteness, his dogmatizing is not even plausible. Upon him must rest the stain of having imputed to these confessors, without the slightest foundation, only wicked intentions in the performance of an act of Christian mercy. Bancroft is not alone in saying that Holmes was "whipped unmercifully," nor Arnold, that he was "cruelly whipped." Oliver, in his "Puritan Commonwealth," says that he was "livid with the bruises from the lash," and Gay writes in Bryant's "History of the United States:" "Such was his spiritual exaltation that when the ghastly spectacle was over, and his clothes were restored to him to cover his scored and bloody, back, he turned to the magistrates standing by, and said, 'You have struck me with roses.' "

A writer of the present day is no more responsible for this treatment of Baptists by the Massachusetts authorities, than were their victims, and it is honorable to the historic pen to hear men who have no special interest in those victims, beyond that of common humanity, express their honest convictions, as Mr. Winsor, Librarian of Harvard, does in his "Memorial History of Boston." He says that the

> Anabaptists" received "grievous treatment from the magistrates of the Puritan commonwealth. ... Our rulers were most perplexed and dismayed by the experience already referred to, namely, the alarming increase in the colony of unbaptized, because their parents were not members of the Church. ... it is a sad story. Most pure and excellent and otherwise inoffensive persons were the sufferers, and generally patient ones. But the struggle was a brief one. The Baptists conquered in it and came to equal esteem and love with their brethren. Their fidelity was one of the needful and effective influences in reducing the equally needful but effective intolerance of the Puritan commonwealth.[7]

There is, however, a sadly ludicrous side to Dr. Dexter's showing which few care to follow. He counts Massachusetts out of his theory entirely, for he fails to show that she was in such a lovable frame of mind as to court union with Rhode Island and with her frightful "red flag." Whether a public proposition for the wholesale importation of vipers into the Bay Colony, or a confederation with the "Anabaptistical fanaticism" of Rhode Island, would have most alarmed that commonwealth, it is hard to say. Bryant thinks that

> These Rhode Island people grew, from the beginning, more and more intolerable to the Boston brethren. It was bad enough that they should obstinately maintain the rights of independent thought and private conscience; it was unpardonable that they should assume to be none the less sincere Christians and good citizens, and should succeed in establishing a government of their own on principles which the Massachusetts General Court declared was criminal. Even in a common peril the Massachusetts magistrates could recognize no tie of old friendship—hardly, indeed, of human sympathy—that should bind them to such men.[8]

Another aspect of this very cheap persecution theory is the jocose assumption that the Rhode Island people were obtuse and slow to

[7] i, pp. 171-8-9, Boston, 1880.
[8] Hist. U.S., ii, pp. 47-9.

learn that the "Bay bull" ever did froth at the mouth and tear the turf in violence when he snuffed fresh breezes from the Providence plantations and Aquidneck. Sundry occasions had arisen in the schooling of the "fanatical" colony to educate her, touching the temper of this rampant bull of Bashan. Some of her best colonists had been driven out of Massachusetts, from Williams down; and Rhode Island must have been a dull scholar indeed to have needed a "little" new persecution to awaken her, after the lesson of November 13th, 1644.

Last of all, this theory of managing to get up "a little persecution of the Anabaptists" to order does not accord with Clarke's acknowledged ability as a politician. To be sure he knew that old farmer Witter had been up before the Courts on the charge of being an "Anabaptist" on two occasions—eight years before this visit and five years before—and that he had not been to the Established Church for more than "nine months," all of which should have shown him that the "Bay bull" was not nearly as furious on that particular farm as in some other places. If this crafty elder had wanted to fire the Baptist heart of Rhode Island to some effect, why did he not make directly for Boston, instead of leaving it quietly; and, as he was there on Saturday, too, why did he not stay over Sunday, go to Cotton's Church, and "flout" the flag there? Cotton would have known it in a moment, and by Monday night the roaring of the "bull" would have traveled on the wings of the wind from Plymouth to Providence, from Boston to the horn of Cape Cod. But instead of that, he hides himself on Sunday in a Baptist family on an

obscure farm two miles from a Congregational Church, will not show his face till two constables drag him out, will not go to a Congregational Church till dragged into it, and does not act at all like a child of his generation, but altogether like an unsophisticated "child of light." What could the plotter be thinking of to let Mr. Cotton have peace when he was within ten miles of him, and when one wave of the "flag" would have turned Boston into Bedlam?

Still, these three Newport evangelists might not have been so verdant, after all, as they seemed. These things appear clear to Dr. Dexter, namely: 1. They knew that the "Bay" kept a persecuting "bull," with very long horns, on which to toss defenseless Baptists. 2. That it was very excitable, and a "red" Baptist flag "flouted full in its face was sure to disabuse all minds that had been soothed into the dangerous belief of its loving and lamb-like disposition, but, 3. They could hardly know that it was kept on that Swampscott farm, or that it would make all Bashan tremble, by tearing up the turf generally, even when the "red flag" was not "flouted full in its face." The meshes of Clarke's net are very open if these were his notions, and form an extremely thin veil for the eyes of the quick-sighted "Bay bull."

The entire chain of circumstances render it much more rational to interpret this visit as having in view the administration of the Lord's Supper to Witter by the authority of the Newport Church. This service, on Monday morning, throws a strong light upon the entire transaction. Backus, quoting from the Newport Church record, says that the three

were "representatives of the Church in Newport," and that Witter "being a brother in the Church, by reason of his advanced age, could not take so great a journey as to visit the Church." Arnold, the Rhode Island historian, says that "they were deputed by the Church to visit him, for he "had requested an interview with some of his brethren," and Holmes himself in his letter to Spilsbury and Kiffin, gives this account: "I came upon occasion of business into the colony of Massachusetts with two other brethren." On what "business" so natural as that of their Lord and his Church, being sent as a deputation to "break bread" with this infirm old brother, who for nearly a year had not been to the Congregational Church at Lynn, and could not get to his own at Newport.

Very early in the history of the English Reformation strong ground was taken against "hawking about" the Lord's Supper, as an act of superstition. Bingham, in harmony with all Christian antiquity, says that in the Primitive Church, the Eucharist was not offered in a corner "for the intention or at the cost of some particular persons, but for a communion to the whole Church, as the primitive Church always used it; and there is not an example to be found of the contrary practice."[9] But so far was this custom cast aside when the Church became corrupt, that the elements were commonly taken to the dying. According to Limborch in Spain, soldiers and a bellman attended the procession through the streets, and when the bell gave three strokes all the people fell on their knees, even the actors and dancers on the stage, if it passed

[9] Antiq. b. xv., ch. 4, Sec. 4

a theater.[10] Many reformers, therefore, deprecated the use of the Supper amongst the sick and dying, as savoring of the worst superstition. None, however, opposed this practice more resolutely than the Baptists, because they held that the Church, as a body, had control of the Supper, and should partake thereof only in its Church capacity.

In John Smyth's confession, (13) he says: "The Church of Christ has power delegated to themselves of announcing the word, administering the sacraments," and (15) that the Supper is the "sign of the communion of the faithful amongst themselves." Article XXXII, of the Baptist Confession of 1689, takes the ground that it is "to be observed in the Churches," and is a "pledge of their communion." The Philadelphia Confession, 1742, says (Art. XXXII) that the Supper is "to be observed in the Churches," and deprecates "the reserving of the elements for any pretended religious use, as contrary to the institution of Christ." Baptists have always held that the Supper is a purely Church ordinance, the whole body partaking of the "one loafs" when the Church "has come together into one place." They have regarded it as the family feast, to indicate family relationships, and hence have always kept it strictly under the custody of the Church, their pastors celebrating it only when and where the Church appoints it to be held; the body itself determining who shall or shall not partake of it in the fraternity; as it is the Lord's table, they have ever gathered about it as a family of the Lord. In 1641 the Boston Congregational Church guarded the table so closely

[10] Page 533.

in this respect, that "if any member of another Church be present, and wishes to commune, he mentions it to one of the ruling elders, 'who propounds his name to the congregation,' who, if having no objection, grant him the privilege."[11] Gill gives a clear statement of the Baptist position in this matter, he says of the place where it is to be celebrated:

> Not in private houses, unless when the *Churches* are obliged to meet there in time of persecution; but in the public place of worship, where and when the Church convened; so the disciples at Troas came together to break bread; and the Church at Corinth came together *in one place* to eat the Lord's Supper. Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18-33. For this, being a Church ordinance, is not to be administered privately to single persons; but to the Church in a body assembled for that purpose.[12]

We have no reason for believing that the Church at Newport differed from the Baptists in general on this subject, and Clarke would scarcely so far compromise his Church as to celebrate the Supper in Witter's house, if his Church had not exercised its right to control its administration by deputing him to do so, in its name and as its pastor, and by sending two laymen to accompany him as "representatives" of the Church on the occasion; "deputed by the Church to visit an aged member," as Arnold expresses himself. Such a delegated authority would give weight to the expression used by Holmes also, that he went to Lynn; "upon occasion of business," and that of importance too, being sent on the "King's business" by the Church. So far as we have information in the case, every hint, which the known facts give point

[11] Felt, i, 433.
[12] Body of Div., iii, p. 327.

in this direction, and justify Clarke in observing the Supper in Witter's house by the authority of the Church of which they were all members, and not on his own assumption.

The reaction from this cruel persecution was immediate and strongly marked. Thoughtful minds raised the universal inquiry: "What evil have these men done?" Every man's conscience answered promptly: "None at all, they have but obeyed God as they believed duty demanded; many, who had not before thought on the subject, found their attention called to the same line of duty, and, as usual, many were added to the Lord." Holmes says, that so far from his bonds and imprisonments hindering the Gospel, "some submitted to the Lord and were baptized, and divers were put upon the way of inquiry." Upon this state of things his second arrest was attempted, but he escaped. Henry Dunster, the President of Cambridge College (now Harvard), was so stirred in his mind, that he turned his attention to the subject of infant baptism, and soon rejected it altogether. A brief sketch of his life may be acceptable here.

He was born in England about 1612, and was educated at Cambridge, with Cudworth, Milton and Jeremy Taylor. He embraced Puritan principles and came to Boston in 1640, four years after Cambridge College, New England, was established. Of course, at that time it was a mere seminary, but, being one of the most learned men of his times, he was put at its head. He devoted his great powers to its up-building, collected large sums of money for it, giving to it a hundred

acres of land himself, and his success in furthering its interests was marvelous. After a scholarly and thorough examination of the question of baptism, he began to preach against infant baptism in the Church at Cambridge, 1653, to the great alarm of the whole community. For this crime he was indicted by the grand jury, was sentenced to a public admonition, put under bonds for better behavior, and compelled to resign his presidency, after a faithful service of fourteen years. Prince pronounced him "one of the greatest masters of the Oriental languages that hath been known in these ends of the earth," but he laid aside all his honors and positions in obedience to his convictions. His testimony against infant baptism was very strong. When forbidden to speak, he said, according to the Middlesex Court records: "The subjects of baptism were visible penitent believers and they only." After protesting against the christening of a child in the congregation, he said:

> There is an action now to be done which is not according to the institution of Christ. That the exposition as it had been set forth was not the mind of Christ. That the covenant of Abraham is not a ground of baptism, no, not after the institution thereof. That there were such corruptions stealing into the Church, which every faithful Christian ought to bear witness against.

So masterly were his arguments, that Mr. Mitchel, pastor of the Church, went to labor with him, and he says that Dunster's reasons were so "hurrying and pressing" that he had "a strange experience." They were "darted in with some impression, and left a strange confusion and sickliness upon my spirit." So thoroughly was Mitchel shaken, that he fell back "on Mr. Hooper's principle, that I would have an argument

able to remove a mountain before I would recede from, or appear against, a truth or practice received amongst the faithful."[13] After Dunster had resigned his presidency, April 7th, 1657, he was arraigned before the Middlesex Court for refusing to have his child baptized. But he was firm, and gave bonds to appear before the Court of Assistants. He removed to Scituate, in the Plymouth Colony, where he maintained his manly protest. Cudworth says of him there:

> Through mercy, we have yet amongst us the worthy Mr. Dunster, whom the Lord hath made boldly to bear testimony against the spirit of persecution.

He died February 27th, 1659, after great suffering and eminence, and in that magnanimous spirit which a man of holy conviction knows how to foster. Cotton Mather says of him, that he fell asleep

> In such harmony of affection with the good men who had been the authors of his removal from Cambridge, that he by his will ordered his body to be carried there for its burial, and bequeathed legacies to these very persons.[14]

There is abundant proof that, in many thoughtful minds, serious doubts had arisen concerning the scriptural authority of infant baptism and the right of the secular power to interfere in religious affairs. Dunster had done much to bring about this thoughtfulness, and others went further than he seems to have gone. It was obvious to all that the rejection of infant baptism and its enforcement by law must lead to a free Church and a free State, to the casting aside of infant

[13] Life of Mitchel, pp. 49-70.
[14] Magnalia, b. iii, p. 367.

baptism itself as a nullity, and the assertion of the rights of conscience and private judgment in submitting to Gospel baptism. Hence, in the very heart of the Puritan commonwealth, Dunster had planted seed which was indestructible. Cambridge and the adjoining town of Charlestown had been filled with these principles, and out of that center of influence came the first Baptist Church of Massachusetts Bay proper. For more than a generation Baptists had been struggling for a footing there, and at last it was secured. As noble a company of men as ever lived now banded together to withstand all the tyranny of the Puritan inquisition, come what might; and no body of magistrates on earth had their hands fuller of work to suppress the rights of man, than had those of that colony. The struggle was long and hard, but the triumph of manhood was complete at last.

The first record on the books of the First Baptist Church in Boston reads thus:

> The 28th of the third month, 1665, in Charlestown, Massachusetts, the Church of Christ, commonly, though falsely, called Anabaptists, were gathered together, and entered into fellowship and communion with each other; enagaged to walk together in all the appointments of our Lord and Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, as far as he should be pleased to make known his mind and will unto them, by his word and Spirit, and then were baptized, Thomas Gould, Thomas Osborne, Edward Drinker, John George, and joined with Richard Goodall, William Turner, Robert Lambert, Mary Goodall and Mary Newell, who had walked in that order in Old England, and to whom God hath since joined Isaac Hull, John Farnham, Jacob Barney, John Russell, Jr., John Johnson, George Farley, Benjamin Sweetzer, Mrs. Sweetzer, and Ellis Callender, all before 1669.

This step, however, was not taken until the heroic band had paid a great price for their freedom, for their vexations and sufferings ran through a course of years, before the final organization was effected. Justice to the memory of these blessed ones demands further notice of several of them. Next after the influence of Dunster on the mind of Thomas Gould, of Charleston, a member of the Congregational Church there, the Boston Church may trace its origin to the birth of a child in Gould's family in 1655. When this little John the Baptist of Charlestown raised his first cry in that home, like Zacharias of old, its godly father called his neighbors together to unite with him in thanks to God for the precious gift. But he withheld it from baptism, and was summoned to appear before the Church to answer therefor, when still refusing to have it baptized, he was suspended from communion, December 30th, 1656. The Middlesex Court record says that he was then brought before that body "for denying infant baptism to his child, and thus putting himself and his descendants in peril of the Lord's displeasure, as in the case of Moses." He was brought before the same Court with Dunster, April 7th, 1657; and, worse and worse, before the Charlestown Church, February 28th, 1664, for having a meeting of "Anabaptists" in his house on the preceding 8th of November. October 11th, 1665, he was before the Court of Assistants, charged with "schismatical rending from the communion of the Churches here, and setting up a public meeting in opposition to the ordinance of Christ." Several other persons were tried with him for the same offense, and as they all professed "their resolution

yet further to proceed in such their irregular practices, thereby as well contemning the authority and laws here established for the maintenance of godliness and honesty, as continuing in the profanation of God's holy ordinances." Gould, Osborne, Drinker, Turner and George were "disfranchised," and threatened with imprisonment if they continued in this "high presumption against the Lord and his holy appointments." Zechariah Rhodes, a Rhode Island Baptist, being in Court at the time and hearing this decision, said publicly, that "they had not to do in matters of religion," and was committed, but afterward admonished and dismissed.

On April 17th, 1666, Gould, Osborne and George were presented to the grand jury at Cambridge, for absence from the Congregational Church "for one whole year." They pleaded that they were members of a Gospel Church, and attended scriptural worship regularly. They were convicted of "high presumption against the Lord and his holy appointments," were fined £4 each, and put under bonds of £20 each; but as they would not pay their fines, they were thrown into prison. On the 18th of August, 1666, according to the General Court papers of Massachusetts, the Assistant's Court decided that Gould and Osborne might be released from prison if they would pay the fine and costs, but if not they should be banished; they also continued the injunction against the assembling of Baptists for worship. March 3d, 1668, Gould was brought before the Court of Assistants in Boston, on an appeal from the County Court of Middlesex, when the previous

judgment was confirmed and he was recommitted to prison. Then, on the 7th of the same month, concluding that fines and imprisonments did nothing to win him, and having a wholesome dread of repeating the Holmes's whipping experiment, the governor and council deciding to reduce him and his brethren "from the error of their way, and their return to the Lord, ... do judge meet to grant unto Thomas Gould, John Farnham, Thomas Osborne and company yet further an opportunity of a full and free debate of the grounds for their practice." They also appointed Rev. Messrs. Allen, Cobbett, Higginson, Danforth, Mitchel and Shepard to meet with them on the 14th of April "in the meeting-house at Boston at nine in the morning." The Baptist and Pedobaptist brethren were then and there to publicly debate the following question: Whether it be justifiable by the word of God for these persons and their company to depart from the communion of these Churches, and to set up an assembly here in the way of Anabaptism, and whether such a practice is to be allowed by the government of this jurisdiction?" Now, who was flouting the "red flag of the Anabaptistical fanaticism full in the face of the Bay bull?" Gould was required to inform his Baptist brethren to appear, and the Baptist Church at Newport sent a delegation of three to help their brethren in the debate. A great concourse of people assembled and Mitchel took the laboring oar in behalf of the Pedobaptists, sided stoutly by others, but after two days" denunciation of the Baptists, they were not allowed to reply. The authorities, however, claimed the victory and berated them soundly as

"schismatics;" but as this did not convert them, they returned at once to the old argument of fine and imprisonment, notwithstanding many remonstrances were sent from England by such men as Drs. Goodwin and Owen, and Messrs. Mascall, Nye and Caryl. Mitchel gave this sentence against them, and that ended the matter: "The man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die, and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel." That sentence had been pronounced in Rome a hundred times, without half the noise about it which these new-fledged inquisitors made.

It may be well to add a few words in regard to Gould's companions in this holy war. Thomas Osborne appears to have been to Gould what Silas was to Paul. As far back as November 18th, 1663, the Charlestown church records say that he, "being leavened with principles of Anabaptism, and his wife leavened with the principles of Quakerism," that Church admonished them. But the admonition appears to have done no good, for July 9th, 1665, they were up before the Church again, with other "Anabaptists," on the charge that they had "embodied themselves in a pretended Church way." Osborne refused to have his babe baptized, and his wife said that she could not "conscientiously attend on ordinances with us," and they were excommunicated on the 30th "for their impenitency;" and on May 15th, 1675, he was fined because he worshiped with the Baptist Society, now in Boston. Edward Drinker, another of these worthies, is first heard of at Charlestown,

but was not a member of the Congregational Church there, yet the Roxbury Church records say that when the Baptist Church was formed, its brethren "prophesied in turn, some one administered the Lord's Supper, and that they held a lecture at Drinker's house once a fortnight." This good man was baptized into the fellowship of the new Church, but as disfranchised by the Court when he became a Baptist, and was imprisoned for worshiping with his Church, 1669. He suffered much for his conscience, and we find him writing to Clarke, at Newport, as late as November 30th, 1670, in respect to the trials of the Church, which at that time had left Charlestown, and met at Noddle's Island, now East Boston. In this letter he tells Clarke that Boston and its vicinity were "troubled," much as Herod was at the coming of the King to Bethlehem, "and especially the old Church in Boston and their elders. Indeed," he adds, that many "gentlemen and solid Christians are for our brother's (Turner) deliverance, but it cannot be had; a very great trouble to the town; and they had gotten six magistrates" hands for his deliverance, but could not get the governor's hand to it. Some say one end is that they may prevent others coming out of England; therefore, they would discourage them by dealing with us." He then states that they had received several additions to the Church at Noddle's Island, that one of their elders, John Russell, lived at Woburn, where already five brethren met with him, and others in that town were embracing their opinions. William Turner and Robert Lambert were from Dartmouth, England, and were members of Mr. Stead's Church there, but became freemen

in Massachusetts Bay, and were disfranchised for becoming Baptists, and when, on May 7th, 1668, the Court demanded whether Lambert would cease attending the Baptist worship, he answered that he was bound to continue in that way, and was "ready to seal it with his blood;" he was sentenced to banishment, with Gould, Turner and Farnham. November 7th, 1669, inhabitants of Boston and Charlestown offered a petition to the Court in their favor, when ten persons were arrested for daring to sign this petition for mercy in their behalf. Most of them apologized for appearing to reflect upon the Court, but Sweetzer was fined £10, and Atwater £5. March 2d, 1669, the magistrates liberated Gould and Turner from prison, for three days, that they might "apply themselves" to the "orthodox" for the "further convincement of their many irregularities in those practices for which they were sentenced." But in order to enjoy this chance at "convincement" they must give good security to the prison keepers for their return to confinement. They were imprisoned because they would not move away. In November, 1671, Sweetzer writes: "Brother Turner has been near to death, but through mercy is revived, and so has our pastor Gould. The persecuting spirit begins to stir again." He afterward became a captain, and in a fight with the Indians on the Connecticut River. May 19th 1676, being ill, he led his troops into battle and fell at their head. He was a devout Christian, and beloved greatly in Boston.

> These and other Baptists were forbidden again and again to hold any meetings, to which measure the General Court was moved by an address from the elders in convention, April 30th, 1668. They say:

> "Touching the case of those that set up an assembly here in the way of Anabaptism," that it belongs to the civil magistrates to restrain and suppress these open "enormities in religion," and for these reasons. "The way of Anabaptism is a known and irreconcilable enemy to the orthodox and orderly Churches of Christ." They make "infant baptism a nullity, and so making us all to be unbaptized persons ... by rejecting the true covenant of God (Genesis 17:7-14) whereby the Church is constituted and continued, and cutting off from the Churches half the members that belong to them. Hence, they solemnly conclude that "an assembly in the way of Anabaptism would be among us as an anti-temple, an enemy in this habitation of the Lord; an anti-New England in New England, manifestly tending to the disturbance and destruction of those Churches, which their nursing fathers ought not to allow. ... To set up such an assembly is to set up a free school of seduction, wherein false teachers may have open liberty to seduce the people into ways of error, which may not be suffered. At the same door may all sorts of abominations come in among us, should this be allowed, for a few persons may, without the consent of our ecclesiastical and civil order, set up a society in the name of a Church, themselves being their sole judges therein; then the vilest of men and deceivers may do the like, and we have no fence nor bar to keep them out. Moreover, if this assembly be tolerated, where shall we stop? Why may we not, by the same reason, tolerate an assembly of Familists, Socinians," Quakers, Papists? yea, "tis known that all these have elsewhere crept in under the mask of Anabaptism."
>
> They say that "if this one assembly be allowed, by the same reason may a second, third, etc.; schools of them will soon be swarming hither. If once that party become numerous and prevailing, this country is undone, the work of reformation being ruined, and the good ends and enjoyments which this people have adventured and expended so much for, utterly lost. The people of this place have a clear right to the way of religion and order that is here established, and to a freedom from all that may be disturbing and destructive thereunto."[15]

After a long contest, the infant Church which had first been organized in Charlestown, and then removed to Noddle's Island, ventured to remove to Boston, and as by stealth, Philip Squire and

[15] The Rowley Ch. Records.

Ellis Callender built a small meeting-house in 1679 "at the foot of an open lot running down from Salem Street to the mill-pond, and on the north side of what is now Stillman Street," and Thomas Gould became the first pastor. This building was so small, plain and unpretending, that it did not disturb the "Bay bull" until it was completed, and the Church entered it for worship, February 15th. Then that amiable animal awoke and played very violent antics, without the aid of Clarke's "red flag." In May, the General Court passed a law forbidding a house for public worship without the consent of the Court or a town-meeting, on forfeiture of the house and land. Under this *post facto* law the Baptists declined to occupy their own church edifice until the king, Charles II., required the authorities to allow liberty of conscience to all Protestants. Then the Baptists went back again, for which the Court arraigned them, and March 8th, 1680, ordered the marshal to nail up the doors, which he did, posting the following notice on the door:

> All persons are to take notice that, by order of the Court, the doors of this house are shut up, and that they are inhibited to hold any meetings therein, or to open the doors thereof, without license from authority, till the Court take further order, as they will answer the contrary to, their peril. — "EDWARD RAWSON, Secretary.

The Baptists quietly petitioned in May, asking the right to eat their own bread, and the Court gave them this stone, prohibiting them, "as a society by themselves, or joined with others, to meet in that public place they have built, or any public place except such as are allowed by lawful authority." The Baptists did not break open the door, but held their public Sunday services on the first Sabbath in the yard, and then

prepared a shed for that on the second Sabbath. But when they came together they found the doors open! Never stopping to ask whether the marshal had opened them or the angel which threw back the iron gate to Peter, they went in boldly and said: "The Court had not done it legally, and that we were denied a copy of the constable's order and marshal's warrant, we concluded to go into our house, it being our own, having a civil right to it." Since that day there has always been a "great door and effectual" opened to Boston Baptists.[16]

[16] Editor's Note: This article is Chapter VI from the Section "The American Baptists" in *A History of the Baptists Traced From Their Vital Principles and Practices From the Time of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Year 1886* by Thomas Armitage, D.D., LL.D. (New York: Bryan, Taylor, & Co., 1887), pp. 686-703.