

GOOD CHEER FOR AMERICA

What Made America Great: the Timeless Christian Faith

Examples: Our Puritan Founding Fathers: Excerpts from [Great Awakening minister of the First Church in Boston,] Thomas Foxcroft [1697-1769], *Observations Historical and Practical on the Rise and Primitive State of New England, with a special reference to the old or first gathered church in Boston. A Sermon preached to the said congregation Aug. 23, 1730. Being the last Sabbath of the first century since its settlement (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, for S. Gerrish, 1730), pp. 10-39, 45-46* (some footnotes have been omitted, and numbers have been assigned to all of them, with some being renumbered.):

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[*****] For a considerable time these persecuted Puritans [in England] remained very much in privacy under their sufferings, waiting still for more of reformation, or for more of liberty and indulgence to conscientious dissenters. But after some years of fruitless expectation, severities being multiplied upon them, and the increasing tyranny of the ecclesiastical courts destroying all hope of a religious pacification, it drove many to a more open separation from the things that were by law established.

A noble army of confessors (martyred with scandal and oppression, and not able to live in quiet at home) being conducted by that *Wisdom, which is first pure, then peaceable*, left their native country, and sought rest to their souls abroad. Some retired into various parts of Europe, and found comfort in the bosom of foreign churches.

Others sought a refuge and covert from the storm in some quiet recess of the NEW WORLD. Here they hoped still to enjoy the freedoms and privileges of English government, and to enlarge the British dominions: Here they hoped to be the blessed instruments of spreading the Gospel of Christ among the heathen natives: Here they hoped to prosecute the design of a Scriptural Reformation, according to the example of the best reformed parts of the Protestant world, to form churches truly evangelical, and to enjoy the spiritual liberties and blessings of the purest church state under a faithful ministry. In a word, here they hoped they should be out of the reach of

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persecution, or that their angry brethren would be ashamed to pursue them in their distant retreats; and that they should entail pure religion, with liberty of conscience, as the goodliest heritage, unto their children in succeeding generations.

Upon such excellent views, our pious ancestors transplanted themselves, families, and estates into these remote regions of NEW ENGLAND(1), *a Land that God had espied for them*; as it was said in the case of Israel, when brought up out of Egypt into Canaan.

Late in the year 1620, arrived the first body of American Reformers, who laid the foundation of the most ancient church and colony of Plymouth.(2)

Early in the year 1629, arrived at Salem, the original settlers of that part of the country, who soon prosecuted their great intention, in the voyage, by entering into the church state of the Gospel, and planting a reformed congregation in that most ancient town of the Massachusetts.

In the summer of 1630 came over divers honourable persons(3), ministers, and worthy Christians: among whom were those servants of Christ, that founded the church society, of which we are the present members, the most ancient congregation in this place.

They first embodied into church order at Charlestown, under the pastoral care of the famous old Mr. Wilson. But not liking their situation so well, the greatest part (with their excellent pastor) very quickly agreed to remove over on this side the river, and planted the town of Boston. Those of the church, who stayed behind, still retaining their relation to it, “until Octob. 1632, when, those members desiring a dismissal from the congregation to enter into a new church body at Charlestown, and having first solemnly sought unto God, with the rest of the church, for direction herein, they were accordingly dismissed upon the 14th day of the said month.”(4) And now upon this separation, I find the number of males in the church of Boston (after nigh two years continuance here, in which time doubtless additions were made to it) amounted but to about 70 or 80: the body of the inhabitants.

You see, from how minute an origin hath risen this great and populous town, which has so many worshipping assemblies now belonging to it. It was truly at first a *Day of small things* with this people of the Lord, with the country in general, and with the town in particular.

As to number, their beginning was small, and so in general as to external figure: which exposed them to many fears, and to the insults of their enemies, who were ready to mock these contemptible New Englanders, as Sanballat and Tobiah did the Jews in old time, when attempting to rebuild Jerusalem: The one said, *What do*

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these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an End in a day? And the other said, Even that which they build, if a Fox go up, he shall even break down the Stone-wall — Yea, Judah herself said, The Strength of the Bearers of Burdens is decayed, and we are not able to build the wall. Neh. 4:2, 3, 10.

In like manner our forefathers were a despised handful of men; looked upon with contempt by proud and haughty scorers, and at the same time when the adversary said, *Let us cause the Work to cease*, the builders themselves almost sinking under the weight of many discouragements, were ready to say, *Even let it fall, we are not able to go through with it.* They were in a wilderness condition; seeing nothing round them but uncultivated wilds and savage creatures; distant a thousand leagues from their native country, capable of being but little served by foreign amities, and for a while without any vicinity of Christian habitation among themselves; enduring various hardships, wants and straits; meeting with sore losses, grievous sicknesses, many deaths, and lamentable bereavements of some that seemed to be pillars in the church and commonwealth.

Innumerable evils compassed them about: They were in perils on every side, in perils of robbers, in perils by their own countrymen, in perils of the heathen, in perils by false brethren, in perils in the sea, and in perils in the wilderness: in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

They dearly purchased (with many tears, prayers, mortifications and self-denials) those happy Gospel privileges and religious liberties, which too many among us at this day are so ready to make light of, and the Royal Charter for which was the grand inducement to our forefathers, to come over into this wilderness and plant the same at their own charge. They did not aim at a worldly, but spiritual interest: Nor had they any temporal attractives to bring them hither. They could not come (as Israel of old into Canaan) with hopes to enter into other men's labours and build on foundations already laid. No! They came expecting, neither cities and houses prepared for their reception, nor gardens, fields, and orchards for their entertainment: but a great and terrible wilderness, a land of deserts, and of pits, and of the shadow of death. Here they expected they must (like the builders of Jerusalem) work with one hand, and hold a weapon in the other; and looked to get their bread not only with the sweat of their brows, but even with the peril of their lives. And it was not without indefatigable application, much labour, and great expence, that they subdued this desert land, for a dwelling place and inheritance.

But I proceed now

II. *To make some reflections on the growth and progress of this religious settlement, and the means thereof.*

The little inconsiderable seed, sown in this place, quickly took root, sprung up, and grew, increased and flourished, in an admirable and almost unexampled manner.

The country flourished, under the protection of the Royal Charter, a mild and equal administration of civil government, and the smiles of Heaven, very remarkably; that scarce any history affords a parallel.

This town filled very fast with people, and waxed rich, and made an eminent figure among the tribes of our Israel. A waste howling wilderness became a pleasant habitation, like the garden of God, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord.

Also the church here had added to it daily such as should be saved, multitudes, both men and women. As it is said, Act. 6:7. *The Word of God increased, and the Number of the Disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.* And as it is said of the church at Rome in its first days, Rom. 1:8. *Their Faith was spoken of throughout the whole World.* In this respect our land might once be called the glory of all lands; this town, the golden city, and this church a fruitful field, which the Lord hath blessed. Glorious things have been spoken of thee, O City of GOD, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, and Heaven's delight, as Jerusalem of old.

And now if the REASONS of their prosperity and growth be inquired into, it may be said,

1. We must resolve all into the gracious presence of CHRIST with them, as the principal cause, the fundamental ground.

The presence of Christ with our forefathers was the fountain of all their temporal prosperity, safety and increase. It is remarkable, that several repeated attempts for the settlement of an English plantation in the Bay of Massachusetts, upon worldly views, proved abortive; though undertaken by gentlemen of considerable powers and estates, attended with a multitude of servants: "The difficulties of a wilderness were too hard for them; they met with such cross providences, as did quickly discourage; and at last dissipate them." (5) But it pleased GOD to put a visible distinction upon the undertakers of this religious settlement, and crown their nobler enterprise with glorious success. This he did for his *own Name's* sake. They had been eminent confessors, and suffered not a little in the cause of Christ, ventured their lives and estates over the dangerous seas, and exposed their persons in the thickets

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of a hideous Indian desert, that they might pursue the designs of Christianity in rightly constituted churches, serve GOD in the Gospel of his Son, with liberty of conscience, according to their best light, and set up the kingdom of Christ, where Satan's seat was. The honour of Christ therefore was concerned in the success of their undertaking, and engaged his favourable presence to distinguish them. As it was said in the case of Israel, Ezek. 23:14. *But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out.*

It was a precious Word, our pious ancestors by faith lived upon(6), 2 Sam. 7:10. *I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more: neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime.* It was the GOD of Israel, who conducted his people over the wide and hazardous ocean, and prepared a sanctuary for them in a strange land, here in this obscure corner of the world. [*****] The errand of our forefathers into a waste wilderness was not to seek this world's good, but to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness: Nevertheless they by the bounty of Providence received an increase of earthly comforts, as additional blessings.

GOD had compassion on them for his covenant's sake, and permitted not the sword of the wilderness to devour, or cold and hunger to destroy them, or fatal sickness to make the land desolate. Though sometimes thick and dark clouds, charged with thunder, and shooting out their fiery arrows, rolled over them; yet GOD prevented destruction coming upon them, and soon dissipated the threatening appearance: In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his Presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. The righteous saw it and rejoiced: and all iniquity stopped her mouth, or every curse was turned into a blessing: the wrath of man praised him; and the remainder thereof he did restrain.

The beauty of the Lord our GOD was upon his people, and he established the work of their hands. He instructed the husbandman to discretion, and satisfied the earth with the fruit of his works: causing the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

He blessed them also in the city, as well as field. Boston, though originally a plantation for religion, not trade, yet hath been a prosperous town. GOD has been pleased to smile on our merchandise and navigation, trade and business, in years past; so that Zabulon rejoiced in his goings forth, as well as Issachar in his tents.

Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the

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lovingkindness of the Lord in a very remarkable instance. The presence of GOD with our fathers was their strength and defence, and the source of all their victories, successes, and external tranquility and happiness.

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It might be premised here, the flourishing of religion among our fathers had a powerful efficacy, as the best natural means, to promote their universal prosperity, peace, and external glory. For as the wise man observes, Prov. 14. *The Fear of the Lord is a Fountain of Life: — Righteousness exalteth a Nation.* — And let me speak freely, without offence to any: The first beginners of this plantation, as to the body of them, were an excellent set of real and living Christians, who felt the power of vital religion in their hearts, and not such as desired only to make a fair show in the flesh.

Doubtless indeed they had a mixture of false professors among them: but these being awed by the prevailing example of serious godliness and the common zeal against sin, were generally careful to preserve an appearance of religion in their lives; so that in the first days of Boston and New England, all iniquity was forced to hide its head: it fled the open light, it sought for shelter in darkness, and lurked privily in secret places: while virtue was triumphant, and religion reigned every where, in the conversation, language and actions of the generality. — It must further be observed, as to the worthiest of our fathers, they were *but men*; in a state of imperfection; and therefore subject to temptations and sinful infirmities: And *some* in our best times might be of too rigid and severe a temper, have less candour and more heat with relation to certain modalities and minute points of church order, than became them, and as one might be of too levelling principles, so another of too close and narrow a spirit, and not liberally enough disposed towards the servants of the public. *Some* I say, among the first and best generation of this people, I readily concede, might be deficient and reprobable on such heads as these: Yet even *they* were in general men of an excellent spirit, and in other regards appeared with shining characters of the Divine image upon them. But many others there were, who possessed their graces and virtues, without those their distempered frames.

There were among them many plants of renown, trees of righteousness, some of the choicest in the whole garden of Christ: and their transplantation from Britain to New England did but add to their beauty, verdure and refinement. They flourished in this soil, and multiplied and brought forth abundantly the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise of GOD. Here the glorious Jesus (and GOD in him) had the sincerest honours, the purest love and most faithful obedience paid to him: — which engaged his covenant presence, and drew down his blessing on this

people.

And then the excellent virtues, which in a flourishing state of religion, were continually and almost universally in practice, contributed by a necessary and powerful influence (in their own nature) to the good regulation of all kinds of societies, to the happiness of conversation, to the security and success of commerce, and an universally prosperous state of externals. By their industry, sobriety, temperance, mortification and self-denial, justice, integrity, and the like, they took a most effectual method to secure the happiness of the social life, and prevented abundance of such mischiefs and disorders, as are the natural results of those vices, which have been the ruin of many a people.

But it will be inquired,

What were the peculiar instrumental causes, and were immediate reasons and occasions of such an extraordinary flourishing of religion in that day? What the means under GOD, the special means?

As to the Gospel, the great instrument of religion, that's in itself the same at all times, and the power and grace of Christ in themselves the same. We have just ground then to think there was something in the men and the circumstances of that age or generation, which might have some instrumentality, and conduce as a means, to the uncommon success of the Gospel, and flourishing of Christianity among them.

I will give you my thoughts under a few distinct heads. Let it be considered,

1. *The initial generation of New England was very much a select and a puritanical people, in the proper sense of the word.* They were not (as to the body of them) a promiscuous and heterogeneous assemblage: but in general of an uniform character, agreeing in the most excellent qualities, principles and tempers, Christians very much of the primitive stamp. As one of our worthies of the second generation(7) has aptly expressed it, "God sifted a whole nation that he might send a choice grain over into this wilderness": — Seeking a godly seed to serve him, which should be counted before him for a generation, even a generation of his praise.

It was as little of a mixed generation, in regard of their moral character and religious profession, that came over first to New England, as perhaps was ever known in the earth. We read, when Israel went up out of Egypt in such pomp and glory, there went a *mixt Multitude* with them, who were a snare and disgrace to the Israelites, and by a profane and vicious example spread infection among them. But now the first generation of this people were very much a *chosen* generation: collected from a variety of places, and by a strange conduct of Divine Providence agreeing in

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the same enterprise, to form a plantation for religion in this distant part of the world, where they might worship GOD according to the light of their own consciences, without the depraving intermixture of human inventions, and without hazard of persecution from the bigots for papistical ceremonies.

The genius or spirit of the age was such as indisposed the generality to this sort of men, I mean the Puritans, who were despised as hypocritical or ignorant precisians; like the primitive Christians, *a Sect every where spoken against*, and suffering like things of their own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews. And then the remoteness of these American shores, the dangers of the voyage, the difficulties of a settlement in an hideous waste, and the former defeat of several essays for a plantation here, these were considerations that tended to strike terror upon the worldly minded: insomuch that few men of that complexion had spirit enough to join in so arduous and expenceful an adventure. Few had the heart and the courage to leave their native land, and pleasant habitations, friends and relatives, and exchange them for the society of strangers, and for hardships, straights & distresses in a foreign rude and wild country; but those who felt the power of that faith, which worketh by love, which over cometh the world, and is the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for.

“There being a royal patent for the Massachusetts government, many out of England flocked into this country almost every year, chiefly on the account of religion.”(8) But scarce any of a profane character mingled themselves with the first comers; and of those that came hither upon secular views, some were disheartened by the toils and difficulties they met with, and soon returned, and others finding this reformed climate disagreeable to their vitiated inclinations, took their speedy flight away.(9)

Now being such a select and unmixed generation, this was one reason of the extraordinary flourishing and bright appearance of religion in that day. It was in the general a shining collection of sincere professors; who enlivened and animated one another, in following after holiness, by the reciprocal influences of an alluring example.

Let it further be observed,

2. *They were, for the generality, such as had been trained up in the school of patience.*

The body of the first comers were men in their middle age or declining days; who had been inured to sufferings for righteousness-sake: being among those Puritan reformers, who had for many years been witnessing against the relicts of popish

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superstitions in Protestant worship, and had been persecuted for their zeal in the cause of a further reformation. *Many a time have they afflicted me from my Youth*, might Israel say.

Now their afflictions being sanctified to 'em, they served to their establishment and growth in grace: which made them the more meet and prepared to conflict with the difficulties of this new settlement, to encounter oppositions, and triumph over discouragements. They learned obedience by the things which they had suffered; were purified in the furnace of affliction, and came forth as gold out of the fire refined. They were not like him in the parable of the sower, that received seed into stony places; who heareth the Word and entertains it with joy, yet *hath he not Root* in himself, and therefore continues *but a while*; for when *Tribulation* or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is *offended*, discouraged and falls away. No, but they were like him, that received seed into good ground, which brought forth fruit to perfection. They were something in the Apostle's case, who had long been serving the Lord, with many tears, and temptations, which befell him by the laying in wait of the Jews, and the trial of their faith (like his) wrought patience: so that although afflictions awaited them continually, yet none of these things moved them, neither counted they their life dear unto them, if so be they might finish their course with joy, and the work which GOD had committed to them. They staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but in some sort like Abraham, the father of the faithful, were strong in faith, giving glory to GOD. Though in some days of temptation, they might seem almost shaken in mind, and ready to give up their undertaking as desperate: yet they were enabled to overcome at the last, and their faith failed not. They confessed they were pilgrims and strangers upon earth, had a spirit in some singular measure weaned from this vain world by the afflictions and trials they had met with; and looked for a city to come, that hath foundations, whose Maker and Builder is GOD. Hence laying aside every weight, they could run with patience the race set before them.

Having received the Word in much affliction all their days from their youth up, it was the less a discouragement to them now, that they must through much tribulation (though of another nature) enter into the kingdom of God. Nay, the prospect of difficulties might several ways be of service to the work in hand; particularly by keeping them humble, by putting an edge on their zeal, by exciting them to diligence and dispatch, by disposing them to study union, and (like the builders of Jerusalem) to strengthen one another's hands for this good work.

3. *They had newly experienced the goodness of God in eminent works done for*

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their salvation: which had its sanctifying effects upon them.

The goodness of GOD served to lead them to repentance, and engage them to obedience. The impression of their deliverances, and of the enlargements given them by a gracious Providence, was now fresh upon their minds, and had doubtless a holy influence into their lives. So it was with the first generation of the Israelites that settled in Canaan, Judg. 2:7. *And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the Elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel.* “They that saw those wonders, which GOD wrought for his people, had so much sense as to believe their own eyes, and so much reason as to serve that GOD, who had appeared so gloriously on their behalf.” The succeeding generation indeed forgot the works of the Lord, the great things he did for their fathers in bringing them out of Egypt, and planting them in a good land; and so had very little value for the religion of their fathers, but corrupted their ways, and forsook the Lord. Whereas the first generation, who had the great actions of Providence done for them fresh in remembrance, these were by a principle of ingenuous gratitude excited to a zealous serving the Holy One of Israel. So in the first times of New England.

Their religious liberties and privileges being *new* to them, increased their value with them, inflamed their zeal, and made them more diligent in employing aright the happy opportunities and seasons of grace they enjoyed; and which were esteemed by them a plentiful reward of all the hazards they had exposed themselves to, and difficulties they were struggling with.

4. *The business and occasion of that day were extraordinary, and such as might conduce to the flourishing of religion among the first generation of this people.*

One observes⁽¹⁰⁾, “When GOD doth in a more than ordinary way of Providence, form a people to himself, there is ever that which is eminent in the primitive frame of things amongst them. Thus GOD speaks of his vineyard, Isa. 5:2. *It was planted with the choicest Vine.* Thus also GOD speaks of judges as *at the first*, and counsellors as *at the beginning*, Isa. 1:26. David had his *first ways*, 2 Chron. 17:3. And so churches have their first ways, when they newly come out of the forming hand of GOD.” Ephesus had her *first Love* and her *first Works*. And thus it has been with New England. Surely GOD hath often spoke concerning his churches here, as in Jer. 2:2, 3. *I remember the Kindness of thy Youth, the Love of thine Espousals, when thou wentest after me in the Wilderness, in a Land that was not sown.* Israel was *Holiness unto the Lord*. O how much of holiness to the Lord was written upon all their affairs and transactions!

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Now there was something in the nature of things and in the peculiar circumstances of that day, which might contribute not a little to the prosperous state of religion among the first generation of New England.

Religion was the one grand design upon which they came hither; the securing of it among themselves, propagating it to their posterity, and planting it among the heathen: and this design took up the chief of their thoughts, cares and prayers.

The success of their undertaking depended very much on the exemplary piety, reputation and good conduct of the first engagers.

They were (as they hoped) laying the foundation of many generations; the foundation for a glorious superstructure: and in this work they were to be made a spectacle to the world, angels, and men. Therefore as they needed GOD to be with them now in a peculiar manner, they were very careful not to forfeit the Divine presence by any provoking evils: but did all they could to secure that blessing of Heaven, which was necessary to give prosperity to the work in hand. “It was needful that the first advances of such a work should be great and considerable, and that some very notable progress should be made in the beginning, as the church and interest of Christ here lay now more exposed, and liable to be insulted and crushed in its infant state.” — Upon this account, as they needed, they therefore solicitously sought, to have the hand of GOD more remarkably with them at that critical juncture.

They made it their care to avoid every thing, that might open the mouths of envious enemies, to speak evil of the way of truth on their account, and it was their concern that their light might so shine before others, as that they might glorify GOD in them, and acknowledge the work they were engaged in was *of the Lord*. In a word, the threatenings of Zion’s adversaries, did but quicken them in their work, so that they took the greater pains and made the more haste in building the walls of Jerusalem.

Thus, in such regards as these, the extraordinary nature and season and peculiar circumstances of their pious undertaking, had a natural influence to the eminent prosperity it met with.

Again, let it be considered,

5. *They were men of an extraordinary character, for the best accomplishments, that were the leaders of the first generation in this great work.*

A faithful magistracy and ministry are two distinguishing articles of the public happiness, and contribute as much as any at all to the prosperity of virtue and religion in a place. This was one of the brightest glories of our primitive times. *God led his People like a Flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Their civil leaders were in general men of the best character, for governing abilities and virtues. The righteous were in authority: which made the people rejoice, and gave reputation to religion. There was much of the kingdom of Christ in the civil constitution and laws of the country, and in the spirit and conduct of our primitive rulers. They were, like David, men according to GOD's own heart; feeding Jacob his people with integrity and skill. They were as the heads of Issachar, understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. They had the temper of Moses, who chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of GOD, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. They considered themselves as rulers under and for CHRIST; as ministers of GOD, appointed for a terror to evil doers, and for a praise to them that do well. Accordingly they were warm and active enemies to vice, blasphemy, and profaneness: but diligent promoters of universal morality, and zealous patrons of pure religion. They were bright examples of all godliness and honesty; patterns of justice, benignity, gravity, temperance and self-denial: and applied their authority for the promoting piety and virtue in others. The interest of religion lay much on their hearts, and entered more or less into all their public actions, cares, and designs. Far were they from the spirit of the nobles of Tekoa, who (when Jerusalem was in repairing) *put not their Necks to the Work of the Lord*. But as those that *preferred Jerusalem above their chief Joy*, they employed a variety of the wisest methods for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and for the security and prosperity of his churches in this wilderness. Like godly Hezekiah they spake comfortable words to such as taught the good knowledge of the Lord, animating and encouraging them in the service of God. And as Joash did not disdain to take counsel of Jehojada the priest, nor Josiah of Hulda the prophetess; so neither did the ancient leaders in our civil government disdain to consult with the ecclesiastical leaders in matters of weight and general concernment to the churches and Commonwealth; but you might often see Moses and Aaron meet and kiss one another in the Mount of God. They were tender of the credit and honour of the sacred ministry; taught the people by their own example to reverence faithful messengers of the Lord, and were ready to screen such from the injuries of the malevolent. They were members of the churches themselves, and by setting a beautiful pattern of order, peaceableness, and submission to the elders, to their power and rule in the Lord, they much contributed to a regular and quiet state of things therein. They were ardent lovers of the Word and ordinances of Christ, and assembly of the saints; and gave their constant attendance both in season and out of season. Like Nehemiah they contended for the honour of the holy

Sabbath, and did many good deeds for the house of their GOD and the offices thereof. They were as eyes to his people in the wilderness. They were as nursing fathers: they delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon them: and they caused the widow's heart to sing. They put on righteousness, and it clothed them: their judgment was as a robe and a diadem. In a word, they sought the welfare of their people: were very tender of the young plant committed to their care, nursed and cherished it with their benign influences.

And then the ecclesiastical leaders, they were also in general men of the like approved character; eminent in all ministerial gifts and graces, which formed them visibly for great and extraordinary services. There were reforming rulers: *And there were with them the Prophets of God helping them.* The ministers of that day very much breathed the spirit of the old prophets and of the apostles; in all things studying to approve themselves as the ministers of GOD, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in labours, in watchings, in fastings, by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by love unfeigned, by the Word of truth, by the power of GOD, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand, and on the left; in honour and dishonour; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things. They were conspicuous examples of mortification to the world, and of fervent devotion; men of GOD; watchmen upon the wall; giving themselves continually to the ministry of the Word and prayer: preparing their hearts to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. They were burning and shining light, some of the purest and brightest; and diffused an uncommon luster, both by their holy administrations, and by their exemplary deportments. Their hearts and lips were touched by a lively coal from the altar: and their faces shone, as Moses just come down from the mount, where he had been admitted to glorious intimacies with Heaven. In a word, they were men singularly well accomplished, and full of a flaming zeal for the interest and honour of Christ and for the salvation of souls. — And now these things, as means, operated not a little to the success of the ministry, and so to the flourishing of religion. We read concerning Barnabas, Acts 11:24. *For he was a good man, and full of the holy Ghost, and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.* “His excellent character was that which contributed to his success. It's granted, that success is neither of Paul that planteth, nor of Apollos that watereth, but all of and from GOD, who giveth the increase. However we must allow, that GOD owns men of extraordinary grace and

faith and holiness above other men, and usually does greater things by *such* than by others.” And then their lovely character gives a singular repute to their profession, and their bright example by a natural efficacy adds peculiar weight and force to their preaching. This acquires a mighty interest in the hearts of all that know and see them; and in consequence thereof gives them a powerful influence. It was one happy circumstance of our first days, that the churches of Christ here were illuminated with a godly and learned ministry: and their eminency in sacred knowledge, and in grace and goodness, did subserve very much to the blessed ends of the pastoral care, and abundantly conduce to the prosperity of the kingdom of Christ in this place.(11)

Further it may be observed,

6. *They united in using the best methods, with the greatest diligence and wisest application, for the promoting of religion:* And this was one happy occasion of the distinguishing success of it in that day.

In chief, the plantation was carried on, and religion upheld and promoted, by the power of prayer; yet at the same time, they were sound in the use of the most excellent means. Magistrates in their places, ministers in their station, heads of families in their capacity, courts of justice in their manner, churches and schools in their respective ways, all conspired with a holy zeal and vigour to establish and advance the kingdom of Christ, by an indefatigable application of proper methods. And these under the direction and blessing of Heaven were successful means to that glorious end. What prosperity might not, by a common blessing, be expected from such an union of human powers and rare exerting of their best endeavours! This is a circumstance, that deserves an asterisk to be set upon it, when we are speaking of those things, which might be of special advantage to the success of the Gospel in the first days of New England and of Boston in particular.

“Then,” says one(12) “might be seen magistrates and magistrates upon the seat of justice cemented together for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in this wilderness. ---- Then might be seen magistrates and ministers together in way of advice: — ministers and ministers cleaving together in way of communion: — ministers and their respective congregations together in way of prayer and holy worship: — churches and churches together in way of consultation by greater and lesser synods: — magistrates, ministers, and their people together,” — uniting hands and hearts in the common cause, and breathing a public spirit; looking not at their own things, but the things of Jesus Christ. Then might be seen elders, both ruling well and labouring in the Word and doctrine, watching for souls, as they that must give an account, also deacons using their office well, and purchasing to themselves

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a good degree. Then might be seen brethren walking together in love, and maintaining brotherly watch and fellowship. Then might be seen Christians meeting frequently in private for acts of social religion, and serious conference. Then might be seen the generality of heads of families walking in their houses with a perfect heart, endeavouring to make them fruitful seminaries of religion, bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord [...] [*****]

Well might the consequence of all this be the flourishing of the kingdom of Christ. The churches had rest, and were edified, and walking together in the faith and order of the Gospel, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

This brings me to the remaining head, under which I proposed,

III. *To say something upon the extraordinary degree of improvement, which this plant of the Lord has been remarkable for.*

But here I have in a great measure prevented my self by what has been already said. Shall therefore make no enlargement on this head.

Our text compares the increase of the Gospel church to the growth of a mustard plant; which, though in its first principle it be very small, yet when grown to maturity and perfection is *the greatest among Herbs, and becometh a Tree, so that the Birds of the Air come and lodge in the Branches thereof.*(13)

This description may denote the beauty, the stability, and the usefulness of the mustard plant: Which would naturally lead me (in further pursuance of my present design) to treat of the state of Christ's kingdom in this place, when grown to its maturity, under each of those heads distinctly.

It was beautiful, as a stately and spreading tree, shooting out its comely branches. *How goodly thy Tents, O Jacob! Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.*

It was steadfast, rooted and established, surviving many shocking storms, and threatening changes. *As the days of a Tree are the days of my People, saith the Lord, and mine Elect shall long enjoy the work of their Hands.*

It was a tree of righteousness, very fruitful, to the glory of GOD, and yielded seed for after-generations. In them was fulfilled that word; *The Lord called thy Name, A green Olive-Tree, fair, and of goodly Fruit.*

In a word, it was a refuge for many, who from other parts of the world have repaired hither, and under a shadowing shroud found shelter and refreshment. Worldly men obtruding themselves for worldly ends, and holy men for holy ends,

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have made their nests in the boughs of this once flourishing tree.

But I must not enter into any discourse on these things.

The APPLICATION remains: and here shall only offer a few hints by way of exhortation.

Use I. *Let us frequently look back to our original, and consider the beginning and progress of this religious settlement.*

We should do this, to keep us *humble*: by considering the meanness of our beginning as to externals, and yet the glory thereof as to spirituals; which spiritual glory is now so very much lost in the increase of temporal comforts.

Again, we should make reflections on our first beginnings and improvements, to stir up ourselves to give GOD the glory of his wonderful works in the days of our fathers, when he laid the foundations of our earth and stretched our heavens over us; when he brought a vine (as of old out of Egypt) and planted it here, and prepared room for it, and caused it to take root, to stand and grow and flourish, notwithstanding all the opposition made thereto by men and devils. “Those works belong to the *history of Providence*, which GOD would have known and read of all men.”

Again, we must make those reflections in order to encourage our faith and hope in GOD; who is still the same powerful and gracious GOD as ever, loves all them that seek him, and loves the posterity of his people the more *for their Fathers sake*, when they truly seek him.

In a word, we should make those reflections in order to direct and quicken ourselves in seeking and serving our fathers’ GOD.

Such reflections may be directive to us by a view of the example of our godly progenitors, who have left us an admirable pattern of orthodoxy in principles, purity of worship, strictness of discipline and government in the family, school, church, and Commonwealth, virtuous manners, modest apparel, grave and useful conversation.

And then such reflections will tend to excite in us a care of imitating them; by a sense of the peculiar obligations lying on us, as we are the near descendants of such holy ancestors, whose names will be a reproach to us, if we do not also inherit their virtues; by a sense of the bonds of the Covenant upon us, and of the bonds of gratitude we are under, both with relation to GOD and our fathers; by a sense of the many prayers they have put up for us, and of the solemn charges they have left us, enforced by a very attractive example, the example of such as we’ve the highest

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reason to love and venerate the memory of; all which will but serve to aggravate the guilt of our apostasies, and will rise up in judgment against us, if we forsake the GOD of our fathers: — In fine, by a sense of the awfulness of our standing in GOD's vineyard, by the consideration that the axe is laid to the root of the trees, that every plant which is not of GOD's planting, shall be rooted up, and every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down.

Thus we see, those reflections are many ways of useful tendency to the ends of holiness and the Christian life; which should strongly recommend them to our frequent and affectionate entertainment.

Use II. *Let us also reflect seriously on our present state, and lay to heart the apostasies of this degenerate day.*

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Let us often recollect the errand of our forefathers into this land, and pursue that great interest, which brought them hither, when it was a land not sown, an inhospitable wilderness, where (as they were wont to say) they esteemed — *brown bread and the Gospel good fare*. Let us be mindful of the holy Covenant, wherein they have bound us to be the Lord's, and teach it our children, who shall tell it to the generation to come, that they also may set their hope in the Lord, and that our little ones may know the covenant care and faithfulness of the GOD of Israel, under whose wings their forefathers came hither to dwell in safety. Let us attend to the words of David's dying charge to the rulers and people of Israel, 1 Chron. 28:8. *Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.*

Let us imitate our godly ancestors in the wise methods and indefatigable pains they took for the security and advancement of the kingdom of Christ in New England. Let us cherish the same excellent spirit and principles, which were so much their distinction and glory. Let us be earnest at the throne of grace for a more plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit, in order to a happy revival of the work of GOD; that we may hear many inquiring the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, and that true and effectual conversions may be more frequently seen among us. We are prophesying as in the midst of a valley full of bones, dead men's bones, very dry: But if God cause breath to enter into them, they shall live, and renew their strength, and the dry bones shall flourish like an herb. O that we might see it, and our heart shall rejoice! May this ancient church be like a tree that spreadeth out her roots by the

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river, whose leaf withereth not, neither ceaseth she from yielding fruit. May this town be as a watered garden, that seeth not when heat cometh, abounding with fruits of righteousness: and let our Beloved come into His Garden, and eat of His pleasant fruits! May salvation be nigh to us, and glory dwell in our land! Return, O Lord, for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance: The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers; and let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that he may maintain the cause of his people at all times as the matter shall require; that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord he is God, the God of Israel, and our God, our fathers' God, and the God of our children. And let us all now agree in making that resolution, Isa. 62:1. *For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the Salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.*

AMEN.

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1. "This land had been for some years known by the name of the Northern Plantation, until King Charles the first (then Prince of Wales) gave it the name of NEW ENGLAND." Dr. I. Mather's *Relation of the first Indian Troubles in NE*.

2. Morton's New England's Memorial.

3. The Governour and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, which had hitherto resided in London, now removed to New England, bringing with them the patent or Charter of the Plantation.

4. Old Church records.

5. Dr. I. Mather's *Relation of Indian Troubles*.

6. See a sermon of the famous old Mr. Cotton's upon this text, entitled, *God's Promise to his Plantations*. — Printed in England, Anno 1634.

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7. Mr. Stoughton in his Election Sermon.

8. Dr. I. Mather, *ibid.*

9. “Some that came hither upon sudden undigested grounds, did soon return upon as slight reasons, carried by an unstayed spirit. Others that must have elbow room and could not abide to be so pinioned with the strict government in the Commonwealth and discipline in the church, also removed hence.” *Vid. New England’s First Fruits.*

10. Stoughton *ubi supra.*

11. For the confirmation of these characters and my other remarks, I refer the reader to the HISTORIES of New England, and in particular to that of the late Rev. Dr. Cotton Mather, which contains the lives of a great number of our patriots in the magistracy and worthies in the ministry of the first generation.

12. Mr. Shepard of Charlestown in his Election Sermon.

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13. Note, the mustard plant in Judea was much greater in its growth, than in these parts of the world. Some tell us of their having known it to rise to a great height and to large dimensions; so that the fowls of the air and beasts of the field lodged under the shadow of it. — *Pol. Synops.*