THE PURITAN WAY

by John C. Miller

THE Puritans exposed themselves to the casualties of the sea and to "famine and nakedness, . . . sore sickness and grievous diseases" in order to establish the kind of churches, government and social order that they believed God had ordained in the Bible. Their goal was absolute purity; to live without sin in a sinful world was to them the supreme challenge of life. They were derisively called "Puritans" because they sought to purify the Church of England of "the popish and antichristian stuff" with which they believed the simplicity of the primitive Christian church had been encrusted. But fleeing from the corruptions of the Old World was the least important part of their quest for righteousness: of far more consequence was the task they set themselves of erecting in the New World a "City Upon a Hill" that would serve as a model of the true church for all Christendom.

Thus, in the eyes of the Puritan leaders, the settlement of New England appeared to be the most significant act of human history since Christ bade farewell to His disciples. The City of God was about to be built upon earth and the Puritans intended to take up residence on the ground floor. An entire community living as God had directed men to live—this was the vision that impelled thousands of people to cross the Atlantic. It has fallen to the lot of few men to engage themselves in an enterprise where the stakes were so high and the reward so glorious.

To facilitate the accomplishment of this holy work, God had laid down in the Bible, the Puritans believed, full and explicit directions. The Puritans, it has been said, substituted an infallible book for an infallible pope; certainly they looked to the Bible for guidance in every phase of belief and conduct. Their Heavenly City was built according to the specifications they found in Holy Writ; they not only believed in the Bible, they believed in nothing but the Bible.

While Puritans internalized the struggle between good and evil—every man was a battleground between God and the Devil—Puritanism was also a way of life. To the question Why was man created?, the Puritans had a ready answer: man's only purpose was to glorify God on earth and, if he were especially fortunate, to continue the good work in Heaven.

For the Puritans, glorifying God meant concentrating one's whole being upon God, working diligently in one's "calling," and living by the strict moral code enjoined by the Bible. Life could not be separated into religious and secular activities: every act and thought was a glorification of God—or its opposite. Thus, working hard in one's "calling," as well as prayer, fasting, churchgoing and Bible-reading, was a form of homage to the Almighty. The important thing was to be mindful of God at all times: pride, complacency or mere gratification of the senses must not be permitted to usurp the place that belonged rightfully to the Almighty. When one enjoyed a pot of beer, a pipe of tobacco or took pretty Priscilla upon one's knee, it was essential to keep one's thoughts upon holy things.

So, when the Puritan shied from the delights of the senses, it was because he feared that they would divert his attention from the main business of life. Mere pleasure, including sport and recreation, tended to be regarded as snares of Satan. Nevertheless, the Puritans did not come to New England to mortify the flesh—in that respect, they received more than they had bargained for—for Puritanism was not a religion of asceticism. Austere by comparison with the roistering, sport-loving, hard-drinking Englishmen of this time, the Puritans aspired to live as well in other respects as did other middle-class Englishmen.

They did not necessarily identify Sin with the Flesh. Eating and drinking well, sexual indulgence within the bounds of matrimony, and enjoying the comforts of life were not proscribed in New England.

In actuality, the Puritans were waging war upon certain human propensities that they regarded as evils: covetousness, materialism, the love of ostentation, and concern with the externals of religion rather than with the things of the spirit. As a result, no Puritan could have conceived of the phrase "the pursuit of happiness." Theirs was the pursuit of godliness: the question they put to themselves was: "What can I do for God this day?" When they felt that they had fallen short of the standards set for them by the Almighty, they flagellated themselves remorselessly with introspective cross-examinations that usually took the form of "thoughts of eternal reprobation and torment." Engaged as they were in a struggle with Original Sin, Puritans could not afford to let down their guard for an instant.

A true Puritan was equipped with a built-in clock that insistently reminded him of the passage of time and the necessity of spending it profitably. Idleness was deemed a trap laid by the Old Deluder, but no Puritan worth his salt was taken in by that threadbare trick. The rule of life in New England was work and pray, and then work and pray some more. As the Reverend Cotton Mather said: "I tell you, with *Diligence*, a man may do marvellous things. Let your *Business* engross the most of your time."

In Puritan thinking, getting on in the world and getting to Heaven were not wholly dissimilar pursuits. Prospering in one's "calling" was accounted presumptive, but not conclusive, evidence of God's favor; in the Puritan scheme of things, property was distributed not by economic laws but by Divine Decree, and it was usually granted to those whose conduct was pleasing to Jehovah. Particularly if wealth were acquired through the exercise of hard work, thrift and sobriety, there was a strong presumption that the Almighty had a hand in it; but monopolizing, squeezing the poor, forestalling and extortion were condemned by the Puritan clergy. Moreover, a great deal depended upon what one did with one's money: if a rich man squandered his substance upon luxuries, frivolity and other forms of self-indulgence, he was, according to Puritan doctrine, courting God's displeasure. If, on the other hand, he lived frugally, opened his purse to the church and supported good works, his chances of being counted among the elect were excellent.

But the Puritans did not base their hopes of salvation upon material success. Particularly during the early period, they attached much more significance to the spiritual and intellectual qualities of man. John Winthrop died in the odor of sanctity that, to the Puritans, was far more important than the smell of money. The Puritan ideal was an enterprise where religion and profit went hand in hand. Until materialism gained the upper hand, the Puritans believed that the settlement of New England epitomized this happy conjunction of spiritual and material betterment.

In founding New England, the Puritans flattered themselves that God had sifted a whole nation in order to plant the choice seed in the wilderness. As John Winthrop said, the holy work in Massachusetts Bay required very different people from the kind that had settled Virginia: "unfitt instruments—a multitude of rude and misgoverned persons, the very scumm of the people." But, admittedly, the separation of the wheat from the chaff had not been so thorough as many Puritans desired. Some "profane and debauched persons" unaccountably filtered through the sieve. In 1635, the Reverend Nathaniel Ward said that "our thoughts and fears grow very sad to see such multitudes of idle and profane young men, servants and others, with whom we must leave our children, for whose sake and safety we came over." Some discouraged Puritans even contemplated leaving these unregenerates to their wicked ways in New England and seeking another refuge in the hope that a second winnowing would eliminate all undesirables.

Because the Calvinistic theology to which the Puritans

adhered emphasized the total depravity of man and his utter loathsomeness in the eyes of God, they did not suppose that every man was capable of rising to the level of thought and conduct demanded by the Almighty. In their opinion, only a minority of mankind was destined to be redeemed by Christ's sacrifice. Accordingly, they confined church membership and voting privileges—to the precious remnant of "visible Saints," "the Elect of God," who had received unequivocal assurances of salvation by means of a sanctifying spiritual rebirth. True, the bleak Calvinistic doctrine of predestination was softened by the Puritan belief in a covenant—the so-called Covenant of Grace—whereby each individual who executed his part of the bargain could claim salvation from God. But, in practice, comparatively few were able to give convincing evidence of their right to demand fulfillment of the terms of the contract. As a result, they were debarred from membership in the Congregational churches and, presumably, from Heaven. In 1641, the Reverend Thomas Shepard said that "the devil hath his drove and swarms to go to hell as fast as bees to their hives; Christ hath his flock, and that is but a little flock." In this competition, the Devil seemed to have much the better of it. Two-thirds of the population failed to qualify as church members.

In consequence, in the "City on a Hill" built by the New England Puritans, the mansions of the blessed where the "sons of God, of the blood royal," resided were in close proximity to a large spiritual slum where dwelt the majority of the people. These were the damned, living in a state of total depravity and consigned to everlasting torment by an incensed but just God. Nevertheless, they were not excused for that reason from living godly lives. Non-church members were required to conform in every particular to the moral code prescribed for the "Saints"; they, too, were obliged to glorify God even though their chances of meeting Him in the hereafter were very small. Accordingly, attendance at church was made compulsory for all. Regenerates and unregenerates sat together in the same meetinghouse, but the latter were not permitted to partake of the Communion nor to have their children baptized. In effect, therefore, the Massachusetts Puritans created two churches, one for the elect, the other for those outside the pale of salvation.

Besides listening to interminable sermons, the non-church members were subjected to the full force of the discipline administered by the clergy and the magistrates. This discipline took the form of "good and wholesome laws" rigorously executed. Puritan lawmakers compiled seemingly exhaustive lists of prohibited "carnall delights," such as attending plays, dancing round a Maypole, bowling on the green, playing at shuffleboard, quoits, dice and cards. The Selectmen of Boston refused to permit an exhibition of tight-rope walking "lest the said divertisement may tend to promote idleness in the town and great mispense of time, and, in 1681, a French dancing master was ordered out of town lest "profane and Promiscuous Dancing" corrupt the morals of the citizens. Acting upon the principle that "an hour's idleness is as bad as an hour's drunkenness," the Massachusetts General Court enacted laws against beachcombing and rebuked "unprofitable fowlers"—i.e., bad shots who wasted their time and powder on the birds. Even though fowling was his favorite recreation, Governor John Winthrop gave it up. But Winthrop was an uncommonly poor marksman and, being a good Puritan, he suffered a twinge of conscience whenever he missed the bird.

For a time, even tobacco was put under the ban. In early Massachusetts Bay, indulgence in the weed was restricted to a pipe after dinner; and in New Haven the authorities offered informers part of the fine assessed upon violators of the law:

> It is ordered that no tobacco shall be taken in the streets, yards, or about the houses in any plantation or farm in this jurisdiction, or without doors near or about the town, or in the meeting-house, or body of the train soldiers, or any other places where they may do mischief thereby, under the penalty of six pence a pipe or a time, which is to go to him that informs and prosecutes; which, if refused, is to be recovered by distress; in

which case, if there be difference, it may be issued without a court by any magistrate, or where there is no magistrate by any deputy or constable; but if he be a poor servant and hath not to pay, and his master will not pay for him, he shall then be punished by sitting in the stocks one hour.[1]

To the Puritans' way of thinking, there was a close connection between hair and holiness. The wearing by men of long hair ("long" was defined as covering the ears) was enough to bring an offender under suspicion of being a subversive. As evidence of God's displeasure with the custom, fashionable among dapper young Puritans, the Biblical passage was quoted: "God shall wound the hairy scalp of such a one as goes on still in his wickedness." In Boston, frequent visits to the barber were regarded as a form of insurance against Divine wrath.

Certainly there seemed to be no end of ways in which a Puritan could sin: swearing, Sabbath-breaking, sleeping during sermons, drinking in the taverns, sexual laxity, health-drinking, overdressing, etc. Wherever the Puritan turned, a sin was lying in wait for him—and someone was ready to nab him if he yielded to temptation. Even the amount of liquor consumed in a tavern was strictly regulated. In 1637, Boston had two taverns, a traveler reported,

into which, if a stranger went, he was presently followed by one appointed to that Office, who would thrust himself into his Company uninvited, and if he called for more drink than the Officer thought in his judgment he could soberly bear away, he would presently countermand it, and appoint the proportion, beyond which he could not get one drop.[2]

Even so, some of these sumptuary laws were repealed after a few years' trial or observed only in the breach. The Bible, for example, could not be cited authoritatively against the use of tobacco and even some of the clergy were soon finding consolation in their pipes. Health-drinking was too deeply rooted in English custom to be exorcised by a law. As for gay apparel, John Winthrop noted that since "divers of the elders' wives being in some measure partners in this disorder," the law tended to become a dead letter—killed by the very people who were supposed to set an example to the less godly citizens.

Many of the acts punishable in New England as sinful, "carnall," and a waste of precious time were expressly permitted in England. The *Book of Sports*, issued by James I and reissued by Charles I, enumerated among the rights of Englishmen most of the recreations, with the exception of bear-baiting, condemned by the Puritans. Thus, in crossing the Atlantic, an Englishman forfeited, among other things, the freedom to spend his leisure as he pleased. On the other hand, he gained, according to the Puritans, the inestimable advantage of enjoying the company of the pure in spirit and of living according to God's Holy Ordinances.

These ordinances applied to the most minute details of daily life. The unrelenting scrutiny maintained by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Puritan New England made the controls imposed by Archbishop Laud—who figures in Puritan annals as a cruel and tyrannous prelate—seem mild by comparison. Moreover, the official inspection in New England was supplemented by the practice of neighbor's spying upon neighbor in order to ferret sin out of its most secret hiding places.

A Puritan could not be content with personal holiness; to feel secure, he had to enjoy the assurance that the whole community was as free of sin as he could make it. His ideal was a Bible Commonwealth "wherein the least known evills are not to be tolerated" and where not even a sinful thought could find lodgement. It was therefore incumbent upon every individual who walked with God to make sure that none of his neighbors got out of line. The consequence of neglecting this duty promised to be catastrophic: the transgressions of one individual, it was believed, endangered the success of the entire Puritan experiment. For not only

[1] J. Hammond Trumbull, *The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New Haven* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1876), p. 251.
[2] John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New England* (Boston: William Veazie, 1915), pp. 132–33.

were the sins of one generation visited upon the next generation, but the sin of one individual might be the cause of the downfall of the entire community. Provoked by the delinquency of one reprobate, the Almighty was believed to vent His wrath upon whole cities, nations, and even upon the world itself.

Since every disaster that befell New England was traced to some private or community dereliction, the Puritan scrutinized his own conscience and that of the members of his social group with almost equal anxiety. In Boston, there was no such thing as "snooping": it came under the heading of "doing the Lord's work." Every Puritan had been commissioned by God to be his brother's keeper, and his own salvation might depend upon how thoroughly he did the job.

This work of keeping conduct under the close surveillance of clergy, magistrates and self-righteous individuals was greatly facilitated by the New England town system. The Puritan leaders built their Wilderness Zion upon a foundation of compact settlements in which everyone lived within convenient reach of the church and the school. To the town system, therefore, was owing a large measure of the social and religious solidarity that distinguished colonial New England. Like-mindedness was the goal of the Founding Fathers of Puritanism, and they attained it not so much by persecution and repression as by the town system.

This system ensured that domestic privacy was almost unknown in seventeenth-century New England. The passion for running other peoples' lives was given free rein. Certain musical instruments were forbidden and even diet was regulated by law—and offenders transgressed at the peril of being reported by observant neighbors. Young unmarried men and women were not permitted to live alone or in pairs. Sixteen young men were arraigned before the selectmen of the town of Dorchester on the charge of not living with families; in 1652, the town of Windsor, Connecticut, gave permission to two young men to keep house together provided that they lived soberly and did not "entertain idle persons to the evil expense of time by day or night." Harboring strangers or even relatives was sometimes construed into a serious offense: single women, or wives whose husbands were away, could not entertain lodgers or overnight guests lest they give the "appearance of sin."

In New England towns, groups of ten families were put under the charge of a tithing man, who checked on how people were spending their time and made sure that everyone who could walk got to church on the Sabbath. When not engaged in these labors, he inspected taverns, alerted the selectmen to any disorderly conduct and warned undesirables to leave town. His duties did not end here: inside the meetinghouse he kept order by throwing out stray dogs, waking those who dozed during the sermon and rapping the knuckles of unruly children.

Under these circumstances, no New Englander could boast that his house was his castle. If he tried to stand on *that* principle he was certain to find himself in serious trouble with the authorities of both church and state.

No part of domestic life was excluded from the probing eye of the authorities of church and state. Quarreling or separated couples were brought into court where the marriage counseling usually took the form of a court order to stop bickering and live together in Christian charity —or take a turn in the stocks or pillory, or, in particularly stubborn cases, to suffer a sound whipping. If this method did not promote love between ill-assorted spouses, it at least kept the family intact, which to the Puritan leaders was the cardinal objective.

Much of the freedom and individualism traditionally associated with American life was conspicuously absent in Puritan New England. Highly individualistic in their approach to God, in their insistence upon private judgment and in their method of establishing churches by means of covenants subscribed to by the congregation, the Puritans nevertheless emphasized discipline, conformity and collective action in their daily lives. They were firm believers in group activity: they mobilized the whole community

against sin and they sought to create a new Jerusalem by organized effort. The individual was subordinated to the group and to the cause; righteousness must prevail no matter how ruthlessly the individual was coerced.

Inevitably, from the point of view of some of those who stood outside the pale of church membership, the Puritan Establishment appeared in the guise of a repressive police state. Everyone was obliged to conform to a creed and obey a moral code; deviationists were classed as subversives and banished to the wilderness; and the powers of church and state were exercised by a minority that claimed the right to rule by virtue of superior godliness. The people were told that all this was in exact conformity to the will of God. Only the continued acceptance by the majority of the people of this assurance that they were indeed living in the City of God and that the rules laid down by the clergy and magistrates had the prior approval of Heaven sustained the Puritan church and state.

In the Puritan colonies and, indeed, everywhere in British America, the family was regarded as the cornerstone of the social order. Society was envisaged as an association of families rather than of individuals, and it was assumed that, unless these component parts were sound, the whole social structure would assuredly collapse. The Puritans acted upon the principle that religion, morality, deference to authority, and good conduct began in the home. In Puritan New England, the family was an instrument of church and state to aid in the promotion of piety, good order and orthodoxy in the community.

Accordingly, the government spared no effort to ensure that the family remained united and harmonious. To that end, the authority of the father was made well-nigh absolute. For the ideal was a patriarchy: as a husband and father, the American male never had it so good. Everyone knew that behind the figure of the father loomed the even more awesome presence of the magistrates and clergy, ready at all times to back up the exercise of his disciplinary powers. In consequence, the Puritan family was a model of piety and filial respect: every child and adult was exposed to family prayers at morning and night, family religious services and family reading of the Bible. Unremitting togetherness was an essential part of a Puritan upbringing.

Servants and apprentices were considered members of the family but black slaves were outside the pale. Besides children, the family often included grandparents and grandchildren, all living more or less cozily under the same roof. Immemorial custom decreed that grown sons and daughters should be responsible for the physical comfort of their aged or incapacitated parents—which meant, in most cases, that the old folks moved in with their children and spent their declining years in a household overflowing with their descendants. In such a family, the oldest male usually enjoyed patriarchal honors and authority. Even the most domineering females stood in awe of the old gentleman who ruled his domain from the chimney corner and who had only to call in the clergy and magistrates to put any and all of that sex, including mothers-in-law, in their place.

Family discipline was rigid and the father himself nipped in the bud all signs of incipient insubordination or delinquency. If he neglected to perform his parental duties, the town selectmen were ready to step in. If that occurred, the children were usually removed from their own home and placed in a household where no unruliness was permitted; often they were apprenticed to learn a useful trade in the home of some craftsman. In colonial New England, no child was permitted to grow up outside a God-fearing family that had been duly certified as pure and wholesome by the authorities of church and state.

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THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY

The prevalence of orthodoxy in Massachusetts Bay was in part owing to the fact that neighboring colonies provided an outlet for discontent and potential opposition to the ruling powers. Those who found fault with Massachusetts Bay—some regarded it as too liberal while others complained of its repressive conservatism—could always try Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine, the Connecticut Valley, New Haven, Long Island and points south. Some of these places afforded better land and more religious freedom than did Massachusetts Bay, but the Connecticut Valley and New Haven offered a refuge not only to land-seekers but to straitlaced Puritans who found Boston and its environs too lax in their ways.

The Connecticut Valley, the first offspring of Massachusetts, was settled in 1636 by a group of Puritans led by the Reverend Thomas Hooker. While more fertile land was the principal magnet that drew these settlers to the Connecticut Valley—Hooker and his flock complained that Massachusetts was already overcrowded and that the best land had been preempted—there were also religious reasons behind this exodus. Hooker was alarmed by the religious discord he found in the Bay Colony and he resented the preeminence enjoyed by the Reverend John Cotton of Boston. Moreover, the Puritan urge for perfection compelled new experiments in godly living: never satisfied with what he had wrought, the Puritan always sought the absolute perfection that seemed to lie within the reach of those who followed God's Word implicitly.

After the first rush of settlers in the 1630's and '40's, comparatively few newcomers entered the colony. Nevertheless, so rapid was the increase in population that the Connecticut Valley settlements soon began to expand southward and, before the middle of the seventeenth century, had begun to undermine the position of the Dutch in New Netherlands. Wall Street was built by the Dutch to protect themselves against the Indians and New Englanders, but when the English fleet compelled the surrender of New Netherlands in 1664, the defenses of the colony had already been seriously undermined by the presence of thousands of New England Puritans.

Without a sizable seaport and therefore without much contact with the outside world, Connecticut became one of the most insular and decentralized of the American colonies—a land of steady habits, orthodox religion and traditional ways of voting, where unsettling ideas rarely disturbed the placidity of life. The people lived largely unto themselves and submitted willingly to the rule of their pastors and magistrates. Governors were elected annually, but once installed in office they served until senility or death put a period to their careers. In Connecticut people not only acted alike—they thought alike. Conformity was one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Connecticut Yankee: much as he liked to tinker and experiment with gadgets, he was content to leave church and state alone. For the man who wanted a quiet life, a modest competence, the feeling of belonging to a close-knit society, and who did not miss the kind of intellectual stimulation that comes from the expression of differences of opinion, Connecticut was a bit of heaven upon earth.

NEW HAVEN

To an even greater degree than did the Connecticut Valley towns, New Haven represented an effort to achieve a higher degree of purity of life and worship than prevailed in Boston. After spending a year in the Puritan metropolis, the Reverend John Davenport concluded that it was a City of the Plain, a scene of laxity, corruption and dissension. In 1638, bent upon establishing a truly apostolic church and society, Davenport and his congregation left Boston for New Haven. Here Davenport proposed to reveal the inadequacies of Boston by requiring a "full and exact conformity to heavenly rules and patternes." It was not the last time that New Haven undertook to point out the road

to godliness to Boston: Yale College was founded to show the way to Harvard.

To Davenport's way of thinking, the pattern laid up in Heaven for earthly government was a theocracy: the rule of the Elect of God, acting under Divine authority. "The word of God," said Davenport, "shall be the onely rule to be attended into in ordering affayres of government in this plantation." Accordingly, he insisted that magistrates should be godlike men dedicated to the service of Christ and versed in the "heavenly rules," and prepared in all doubtful cases to seek the advice of the clergy. Then would be established the Ordinances of God in their utmost purity and men would have the ineffable satisfaction of knowing that they were being ruled "according to His owne minde, in all things."

The attainment of this earthly paradise required, among other things, the restriction of church membership (and voting privileges) to an even narrower and more select group and the exercise of greater power over the civil government by the clergy than the Massachusetts way ordained. In New Haven, the lines between elect and unregenerate were so sharply drawn that the possibility that the latter were in league with the Devil could not wholly be dismissed. Likewise, the zeal and efficiency exhibited by the New Haven theocracy in ferreting out heretics set an edifying example to all Puritan communities. When the first schoolmaster at New Haven had the temerity to disagree with Davenport, he was called before the congregation, censured, and "cast out of the body, till the proud flesh be destroyed and he be brought into a more member-like frame." Those found guilty of traducing the ministers were whipped, branded, fined and banished. To hinder the reprobate from writing, he was branded upon his right hand. The first to win their letter at New Haven were those who were branded with the letter "H" for "heretic."

Under the Reverend John Davenport, the Puritan ideal of a Bible Commonwealth reached its apogee. All Puritans agreed that the Scriptures contained a perfect rule for the ordering of all the affairs of church and state, family and individual alike, but no Puritan community applied this principle as literally as did the New Haven theocrats. Insofar as possible, the laws of New Haven were derived directly from the Bible.

Such a system of law was already at hand. In 1636, the Reverend John Cotton, a man of such consummate erudition that it was said that God would not permit him to be wrong, had drawn up a code of laws for Massachusetts. The provisions of this code regarding crimes and inheritances were biblical in origin and each law was annotated with marginal references to the Scriptures to prove that it was in harmony with the Word of God. Cotton's handiwork—usually known as "Moses his Judicialls"—was not adopted by Massachusetts but in 1639 the New Haven settlers appropriated the Cotton Code in its entirety and it served as the fundamental law of that colony until

The law decreeing death for "a stubborn and rebellious son" was designed not only to punish the offender but that "others may hear and fear." In New Jersey, where Puritan influence was strong, a similar law was enacted. The Scotch Presbyterians, even more thorough-going in their Calvinism than the New England Puritans, went beyond them by providing, in 1661 that any

> sonne or *daughter* above and of sixteen years not being distrated [demented] who shall beate or curse their father or mother shall be put to death without mercy.

These laws have helped fix the image of the Puritan as a blue-nosed, nasty-minded hypocrite and they give credence to the story that as soon as a New England child was able to master words of five syllables he or she was taught to spell "for-ni-ca-ti-on." Granted the Puritans' obsessive concern with sin, the Blue Laws do not prove that the New Havenites were particularly bloodthirsty. In England, during the reign of James I, 31 offenses were punishable by death whereas New Haven had only 14 capital crimes. Even so, those who did not walk the straight and narrow way were well advised to give New Haven a wide berth.

RHODE ISLAND

To the Puritan mind, the two most important things about religion were "the purity and the unity thereof." They did not traverse the Atlantic to establish the principle of religious freedom: they sought freedom only for themselves. In their Zion there was no place for a Tower of Babel where all creeds and opinions might be heard. Among a group as deeply committed as were the Puritans to a Heaven-directed mission to the wilderness, rampant individualism could not be tolerated. Moreover, frontier conditions always put a high premium upon social solidarity and group effort.

In theory, New England Puritanism was a monolithic creed that admitted of no dissent. Based upon immutable truths derived from the Word of God, the Puritan church-state and communal way of life were regarded as the ultimate in holiness. The Reverend John Cotton declared that Jesus Christ would approve of all the arrangements in Boston, and John Winthrop, surveying the wonders wrought by the Almighty in New England, exclaimed that he desired no more till he arrived in Heaven.

Imbued with the conviction that there was One Truth just as there was One God, the Puritans pursued unremittingly their ideal of uniformity of thought and conduct. In Connecticut, Massachusetts Bay and New Haven they achieved a large measure of success. Rhode Island, however, went its own way—and in almost every respect its direction was opposite to that followed by the rest of New England.

And yet, Rhode Island was founded by a Puritan. Roger Williams exemplified the aspects of Puritanism that were suppressed elsewhere in New England: extreme individualism, democracy, the complete separation of church and state, and the endless splintering process that always threatened to convert the Puritan movement into a chaos of competing sects. Like Governor John Winthrop and the Reverend John Cotton, his principal adversaries, Roger Williams resolved all questions by reference to the Bible, he was orthodox in his conception of the Trinity, and he accepted the doctrines of predestination, the depravity of man, and infant damnation. He believed that all his acts were approved by "the greatest and wisest politician that ever was, the Lord Jesus Christ," and he regarded the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth as the main purpose of human existence. In Providence, Rhode Island, he tried to establish a community dedicated, like that of Massachusetts Bay, to fostering the community of the Saints. His methods, not his objectives, differed from those who condemned him to exile.

Williams's insistence upon religious freedom—the point wherein he departed most radically from the practice of Massachusetts Bay—proceeded originally from his conviction that the Visible Saints, whom he regarded as the happy few of the community, must be preserved from the contamination of the unregenerate majority. To his way of thinking, this end could be achieved only by keeping the civil government wholly out of the affairs of the church and by rigorously segregating the elect from the unregenerate mass of the people. By compelling church attendance and outward religious uniformity, the state, in Williams's opinion, produced a "racking and tormenting of souls" and filled the Church with hypocrites. The Massachusetts Bay Puritans, on the other hand, assumed that the regenerate minority could be preserved from pollution only by forcing church attendance and taxation for religious purposes upon every member of the community and by using the power of the civil government to punish heresy.

After his banishment to Rhode Island in 1636, Williams underwent a complete change of mind upon several of the issues that had brought him into trouble in the Bay Colony. Whereas in his earlier quest for purity he had separated himself from his congregation and, for a time, even from his wife, and had restricted church members to a handful of Visible Saints, he now threw open the doors to all Christians. In Rhode Island, he preached to and prayed with everyone who came to him. From the most rigidly exclusive of the New England Puritans, he became the most

liberal and inclusive. He decided that there were many paths to Heaven and that every man must be free to choose his own way. Until such time as truth should be made manifest by further revelations, he demanded "a Liberty of searching after God's most holy mind and pleasure." At one time, he declared himself to be a Baptist but no organized church could long contain his Heaven-oriented spirit. Eventually he dissociated himself from all churches and became a "Seeker."

To one principle, however, he consistently adhered: church and state must be wholly separate and the state must not be permitted to exercise any kind of spiritual authority over the individual. In Rhode Island, as long as Roger Williams's influence endured, the power of magistrates was limited to matters concerning "the Bodies and Goods and outward state of men."

Despite his uncomfortable proximity to Boston, Roger Williams made Rhode Island a bastion of religious freedom. Jews, Roman Catholics and Turks, he declared, were welcome in Providence. Nor did he draw the line at Indians: "Nature knows no difference," he said, "God having of one blood made all mankind." He was equally liberal as regards the suffrage. Although he did not value political liberty as an end in itself, he advocated democracy for the same reason that he became a Seeker—because only in a free society could men truly seek God. To this end, he established manhood suffrage and made office-holding the prerogative of all citizens. In 1647, the Rhode Island Assembly declared:

> The form of government established in Providence Plantations is Democratical, that is to say, a government held by the free and voluntary consent of all, or the greater part of the free inhabitants.

Rhode Island became the most democratic of all English colonies founded in the seventeenth century; indeed, in the nineteenth century some American states were less democratic than Rhode Island had been under Roger Williams.

Williams supposed that religious and political freedom, restrained by the sober good sense of the people, would produce an orderly society. But Rhode Island attracted religious eccentrics in whom sober good sense and love of order were conspicuously absent. Dreamers of Utopia and founders of new religions abounded.

In contrast to the uniformity that prevailed in Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut and New Haven, the colony founded by Roger Williams resembled a crazy quilt of strange sects, many of which were persecuted everywhere except in Rhode Island. Some of the local Messiahs made Roger Williams appear orthodox and old-fashioned by comparison. In the end, the anarchy that made Rhode Island a byword in other colonies proved too much for Williams himself. Like many other revolutionaries, he was dismayed by what he had wrought. "We have long drunk of the cup of great liberties," he said in 1653, "as any people that we can hear of under the whole heaven" but experience had taught him that "these freedoms have made men wanton and forgetful, and it may be that though we enjoy liberties of soul and body, it is license we desire." In 1669, 14 years before his death, he remarked that his brain was "worn and withered" as a result of 30 years of struggling with a stubborn and misguided people. After Roger Williams's death, Rhode Island settled down to more orderly—and less democratic—ways.

Throughout the colonial period, Rhode Island remained decentralized, hostile to a state-supported church, and jealous of local rights. Until 1647, each town went its own way, and even after a central government had been established, the exercise of its authority depended upon the cooperation of the towns. Long after the American Revolution, Rhode Islanders preserved the suspicion of outside authority derived from their early experience as an "outcast people" constantly threatened with invasion by their powerful neighbors.

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