THE PURITANS

A SOURCEBOOK OF THEIR WRITINGS

Edited by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson

Volume One

History
The Theory of the State and of Society
This World and the Next

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THE PURITANS

VOLUME I Revised Edition

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AND

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by George McCandlish

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FOREWORD

Jonathan Edwards cautioned himself in his Notes on Natural Science: "What is prefatorial, not to write in a distinct preface, or introduction, but in the body of the work; then I shall be sure to have it read by every one." The editors of the following selections have been mindful of his warning, and they here need merely to say that the volume portrays the Puritans who settled New England and those of the next two generations who lived there. The focus of the work has been Puritanism in the seventeenth century, when the word had a comparatively definite meaning, and in only one respect has any effort been made to trace the modifications of it in the eighteenth century. The selections from the writings of Jonathan Mayhew have been included for the purpose of giving a continuous view of political theory. Otherwise the consistent aim has been restriction to what might be called "pure" Puritanism, leaving later ramifications to be traced out elsewhere. It has for that reason been thought wise to leave the greatest of all Puritan intellectuals, Jonathan Edwards, to be studied in the context of his different intellectual environment.

To the end that the elusive terms Puritan and Puritanism should be clearly defined, at least in so far as they apply to the colonizers of America and their spiritual descendants, the selections have been grouped into chapters;—divisions which most naturally provide opportunity for discussion of all phases of Puritan ways and ideas, with such emphasis, selectivity, and proportion as seem representative and true. The General Introduction attempts to view Puritanism as a whole: to mete its boundaries, fix its location, supply guides to its monuments, and establish that unity which so clearly runs in Puritan thought, expression, and manners.

It has seemed best to let the Puritans speak for themselves as much as possible, for they were not a reticent people, nor were they wanting in ideas. As Ælfric remarked in the foreword to his *Lives of the Saints:* "We say nothing new in this work, for it all stood written long ago, albeit laymen did not know it." Much that the Puritans wrote has been deservedly forgotten, but the dust has gathered as well upon the works of some who, when brought into the light of the present, appear to have been powerful instruments in working out the social and political, as well as the religious and cultural, destiny of America. It therefore seemed wiser to give in general ample passages from a few pivotal documents, rather than to go wide afield in an effort merely

to extend the list of Puritan writers. The editors are aware that no American today can read a Puritan work without having a definite opinion of the author, and they in their turn have not been reticent in the introductory portions about speaking their minds; yet the larger purpose has been to supply enough of the Puritan literature itself to let each reader judge for himself.

The texts throughout follow the earliest edition, or the most accurately printed when the first seems inadvisable. Spelling and punctuation are reproduced exactly, except that the modern "s" has been uniformly adopted, and obvious printers' errors corrected. It should be stated that the map of New England which forms the end-papers of the volume, while based mainly upon the accurate surveys of more recent times, has been constructed to show certain features of the coast-lines and harbors as indicated by a study of many old maps, some of them published near the close of the Puritan period.

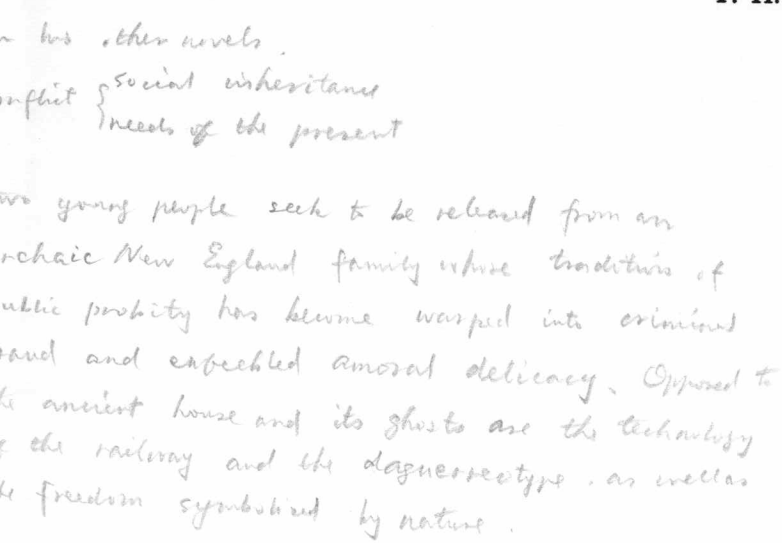
The editors have collaborated closely, and each has contributed something to almost every section; but the major task of preparation and annotation was divided, and final responsibility for expression of opinion must rest as follows: "The Puritan Way of Life" in the General Introduction, and Chapters I, II, III, and V are the work of Perry Miller; "The Puritans as Literary Artists" in the General Introduction, and Chapters IV, VI, VII, VIII, and IX are the work of Thomas H. Johnson.

First of all the editors wish to express their gratitude to Professor Harry Hayden Clark, the general editor of the series of which this volume is a part. It was he who first proposed the idea of the undertaking, and his assistance and encouragement have been constant and generous. They also wish to thank the Librarians and the staffs of Harvard College Library, Boston Public Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society, Princeton University Library, and New York Public Library for innumerable courtesies, always graciously extended. The demands on Mr. Gerald D. McDonald, Head of the Reserve Room of the last named institution, have been especially importunate, and always met with unfailing skill. Dr. Erdman Harris and Mr. Hugh King Wright have been good enough to read through and offer helpful suggestions about the chapters of the text prepared by Thomas H. Johnson. Perry Miller is indebted to Professor F. O. Matthiessen for his generous assistance in reading the introductory material and advising in the whole construction of the volume; he has also profited largely from the help of Professor David Prall, Dr. Richard B. Schlatter, and Mr. Edmund S. Morgan. To Catherine Rice Johnson and Eliza-

beth Williams Miller the debt is truly immense, for without their help the book could hardly have reached completion.

The editors' reliance upon the work of Professor Samuel Eliot Morison is testified by the frequent citation of his name in the Introduction and the notes; but the debt goes even further, and is acknowledged elsewhere.

P. M.
T. H. J.



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The Map of New England has been prepared especially for this volume. The page of Taylor's manuscript is reproduced through the courtesy of Yale University Library. All the other reproductions are by courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

INTRODUCTION

I. The Puritan Way of Life

1. *The Puritan in His Age*

Puritanism may perhaps best be described as that point of view, that philosophy of life, that code of values, which was carried to New England by the first settlers in the early seventeenth century. Beginning thus, it has become one of the continuous factors in American life and American thought. Any inventory of the elements that have gone into the making of the "American mind" would have to commence with Puritanism. It is, indeed, only one among many: if we should attempt to enumerate these traditions, we should certainly have to mention such philosophies, such "isms," as the rational liberalism of Jeffersonian democracy, the Hamiltonian conception of conservatism and government, the Southern theory of racial aristocracy, the Transcendentalism of nineteenth-century New England, and what is generally spoken of as frontier individualism. Among these factors Puritanism has been perhaps the most conspicuous, the most sustained, and the most fecund. Its role in American thought has been almost the dominant one, for the descendants of Puritans have carried at least some habits of the Puritan mind into a variety of pursuits, have spread across the country, and in many fields of activity have played a leading part. The force of Puritanism, furthermore, has been accentuated because it was the first of these traditions to be fully articulated, and because it has inspired certain traits which have persisted long after the vanishing of the original creed. Without some understanding of Puritanism, it may safely be said, there is no understanding of America.

Yet important as Puritanism has undoubtedly been in shaping the nation, it is more easily described than defined. It figures frequently in controversy of the last decade, very seldom twice with exactly the same connotation. Particularly of recent years has it become a hazardous feat to run down its meaning. In the mood of revolt against the ideals of previous generations which has swept over our period, Puritanism has become a shining target for many sorts of marksmen. Confusion becomes worse

confounded if we attempt to correlate modern usages with anything that can be proved pertinent to the original Puritans themselves. To seek no further, it was the habit of proponents for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment during the 1920's to dub Prohibitionists "Puritans," and cartoonists made the nation familiar with an image of the Puritan: a gaunt, lank-haired killjoy, wearing a black steeple hat and compounding for sins he was inclined to by damning those to which he had no mind. Yet any acquaintance with the Puritans of the seventeenth century will reveal at once, not only that they did not wear such hats, but also that they attired themselves in all the hues of the rainbow, and furthermore that in their daily life they imbibed what seem to us prodigious quantities of alcoholic beverages, with never the slightest inkling that they were doing anything sinful. True, they opposed drinking to excess, and ministers preached lengthy sermons condemning intoxication, but at such pious ceremonies as the ordination of new ministers the bill for rum, wine, and beer consumed by the congregation was often staggering. Increase Mather himself—who in popular imagination is apt to figure along with his son Cotton as the arch-embodiment of the Puritan—said in one of his sermons:

> Drink is in it self a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness, but the abuse of drink is from Satan; the wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the Devil.[1]

Or again, the Puritan has acquired the reputation of having been blind to all aesthetic enjoyment and starved of beauty; yet the architecture of the Puritan age grows in the esteem of critics and the household objects of Puritan manufacture, pewter and furniture, achieve prohibitive prices by their appeal to discriminating collectors. Examples of such discrepancies between the modern usage of the word and the historical fact could be multiplied indefinitely.[2] It is not the purpose of this volume to engage in controversy, nor does it intend particularly to defend the Puritan against the bewildering variety of critics who on every side today find him an object of scorn or pity. In his life he neither asked nor gave mercy to his foes; he demanded only that conflicts be joined on real and explicit issues. By examining

[1] *Wo to Drunkards* (Cambridge, 1673), p. 4.

[2] Cf. Kenneth B. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* (New York, 1928), chap. V.

his own words it may become possible to establish, for better or for worse, the meaning of Puritanism as the Puritan himself believed and practiced it.

Just as soon as we endeavor to free ourselves from prevailing conceptions or misconceptions, and to ascertain the historical facts about seventeenth-century New Englanders, we become aware that we face still another difficulty: not only must we extricate ourselves from interpretations that have been read into Puritanism by the twentieth century, but still more from those that have been attached to it by the eighteenth and nineteenth. The Puritan philosophy, brought to New England highly elaborated and codified, remained a fairly rigid orthodoxy during the seventeenth century. In the next age, however, it proved to be anything but static; by the middle of the eighteenth century there had proceeded from it two distinct schools of thought, almost unalterably opposed to each other. Certain elements were carried into the creeds and practices of the evangelical religious revivals, but others were perpetuated by the rationalists and the forerunners of Unitarianism. Consequently our conception of Puritanism is all too apt to be colored by subsequent happenings; we read ideas into the seventeenth century which belong to the eighteenth, and the real nature of Puritanism can hardly be discovered at all, because Puritanism itself became two distinct and contending things to two sorts of men. The most prevalent error arising from this fact has been the identification of Puritanism with evangelicalism in many accounts, though in histories written by Unitarian scholars the original doctrine has been almost as much distorted in the opposite direction.

Among the evangelicals the original doctrines were transformed or twisted into the new versions of Protestantism that spawned in the Great Awakening of the 1740's, in the succeeding revivals along the frontier and through the back country, in the centrifugal speculations of enraptured prophets and rabid sects in the nineteenth century. All these movements retained something of the theology or revived something of the intensity of spirit, but at the same time they threw aside so much of authentic Puritanism that there can be no doubt the founding fathers would vigorously have repudiated such progeny. They would have had no use, for instance, for the camp meeting and the revivalist orgy; "hitting the sawdust trail" would have been an action exceedingly distasteful to the most ardent among them.

What we know as "fundamentalism" would have been completely antipathetic to them, for they never for one moment dreamed that the truth of scripture was to be maintained in spite of or against the evidences of reason, science, and learning. The sects that have arisen out of Puritanism have most strikingly betrayed their rebellion against the true spirit of their source by their attack upon the ideal of a learned ministry; Puritans considered religion a very complex, subtle, and highly intellectualized affair, and they trained their experts in theology with all the care we would lavish upon preparing men to be engineers or chemists. For the same reasons, Puritans would object strenuously to almost all recent attempts to "humanize" religion, to smooth over hard doctrines, to introduce sweetness and light at the cost of hardheaded realism and invincible logic. From their point of view, to bring Christ down to earth in such a fashion as is implied in statements we sometimes encounter—that He was the "first humanitarian" or that He would certainly endorse this or that political party—would seem to them frightful blasphemy. Puritanism was not only a religious creed, it was a philosophy and a metaphysic; it was an organization of man's whole life, emotional and intellectual, to a degree which has not been sustained by any denomination stemming from it. Yet because such creeds have sprung from Puritanism, the Puritans are frequently praised or blamed for qualities which never belonged to them or for ideas which originated only among their successors and which they themselves would have disowned.

On the other hand, if the line of development from Puritanism tends in one direction to frontier revivalism and evangelicalism, another line leads as directly to a more philosophical, critical, and even skeptical point of view. Unitarianism is as much the child of Puritanism as Methodism. And if the one accretion has colored or distorted our conception of the original doctrine, the other has done so no less. Descendants of the Puritans who revolted against what they considered the tyranny and cruelty of Puritan theology, who substituted taste and reason for dogma and authority and found the emotional fervor of the evangelicals so much sound and fury, have been prone to idealize their ancestors into their own image. A few decades ago it had become very much the mode to praise the Puritans for virtues which they did not possess and which they would not have considered virtues at all. In the pages of liberal historians, and above all

in the speeches of Fourth of July orators, the Puritans have been hymned as the pioneers of religious liberty, though nothing was ever farther from their designs; they have been hailed as the forerunners of democracy, though if they were, it was quite beside their intention; they have been invoked in justification for an economic philosophy of free competition and laissez-faire, though they themselves believed in government regulation of business, the fixing of just prices, and the curtailing of individual profits in the interests of the welfare of the whole.[1]

The moral of these reflections may very well be that it is dangerous to read history backwards, to interpret something that was by what it ultimately became, particularly when it became several things. In order that the texts presented in this volume may be read for their proper meaning, it is necessary that the student divest himself as far as possible of those preconceptions which have been established only in later times, and approach the Puritans in terms of their own background. Only thus can we hope to understand what Puritanism was, or what it became and why. The Puritan had his defects, certainly, and he had his virtues, but the defects of one century may become the virtues of another, and what is considered commendable at one time may be viewed with horror by later generations. It is not easy to restrain one's own prejudices and to exercise the sort of historical imagination that is required for the understanding of a portion of the past according to its own intentions before we allow ourselves to judge it by our own standards. The Puritans were not a bashful race, they could speak out and did; in their own words they have painted their own portraits, their majestic strength and their dignity, their humanity and solidity, more accurately than any admirer has been able to do; and also they have betrayed the motes and beams in their own eyes more clearly than any enemy has been able to point them out.

2. *The Spirit of the Age*

Puritanism began as an agitation within the Church of England in the latter half of the sixteenth century. It was a movement for reform of that institution, and at the time no more

[1] See below p. 384. In 1639, John Cotton condemned as a "false principle" the assertion "that a man might sell as dear as he can, and buy as cheap as he can," and Mr. Robert Keayne was fined £200 by the General Court and admonished by the church of Boston for making a profit of sixpence or more in the shilling (*Winthrop's Journal*, ed. J. K. Hosmer [New York, 1908], I, 315–318).