1973

New England Reactions to the English Civil Wars, 1640-1660

James Michael O'Toole

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation


https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-f1xy-v007

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
NEW ENGLAND REACTIONS
TO THE
ENGLISH CIVIL WARS,
1640 - 1660

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
James M. O'Toole
1973
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Approved, August 1973

Bruce T. McCully

Thad W. Tate

Michael McGiffert
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. SYMPATHY</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. NONINVOLVEMENT</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. AUTONOMY</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. REFUGE</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Bruce T. McCully, under whose care and guidance this study was conducted. At all times he served as a model for me, both as historian and as human being. I am also indebted to Professors Thad W. Tate, Michael McGiffert, and John J. McCusker, all of the Institute of Early American History and Culture, for their reading and criticism.
ABSTRACT

This study seeks to discern and describe the reactions of the colonists of New England to the English civil wars and interregnum of 1640 - 1660. It is based on the assumption that the events of these years were of central importance for English history, and seeks to understand how Englishmen living in North America viewed those events.

The New Englanders took a great deal of interest in following the conflicts in their mother country, and in so doing their sympathies were decidedly with the forces of rebellion, the Puritan Parliamentary armies. The colonists supported these opponents of the king, and made that support widely known by means of letters, pamphlets and other writings, official government actions, and days of prayer.

For all this concern and interest, however, the New Englanders evidenced no general desire to return to England to actually participate in the struggles themselves, even though they had been in America for only a decade. On the contrary, there are repeated expressions of thanks among the colonists for being out of England, away from the turmoil. Despite their strong statements of sympathy for the English Puritans, the New Englanders were not anxious to give up their peace and security and return home.

Two reasons for this ambiguous and ambivalent reaction to the English civil wars are suggested. The first is that the New Englanders were extremely independent-minded, and that they therefore wanted to minimize the amount of mutual involvement and intercourse between themselves and Old England. The second is that these settlers had come to New England in the first place looking for a refuge and a hiding place from the troubles they feared and foresaw were coming to England. The lack of involvement in England in the face of great concern over the situation there can be explained by the fact that the colonists had come to New England precisely to avoid such involvement.
NEW ENGLAND REACTIONS TO THE
ENGLISH CIVIL WARS,
1640 - 1660
INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century was the decisive one for English history. England entered the century more than half medieval and emerged from it more than half modern. The change was marked in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation. The change in English politics was radical, from a government dominated by the Crown to a government dominated by the Parliament. This was a gradual process throughout the whole of the century, of course, but the most crucial years came exactly in the middle of it, 1640 through 1660, the years of the civil wars, the "Puritan Revolution."

The causes of the political upheaval were legion and stretched far back into the reign of Elizabeth and beyond. The results were drastic: the elected representatives of the people opposed the king's government, took up arms and warred against him, imprisoned him, tried him, and finally executed him in January 1649. They then proceeded to establish a democratic Commonwealth, attempting to run the government solely through the legislature. Finding this form unable to preserve order in the state, the nation submitted in 1653 to a military dictatorship, directed by the most popular and successful military leader of the age. With his death five years later, the failure
of these constitutional experiments became obvious, and steps were taken to restore the monarchy, which was finally accomplished in May 1660.

It had been an eventful two decades for Englishmen. They were subjected to changes unlike any they had experienced before. They became extremely excited about and involved in the political and religious state of their nation, and pursued that excitement and involvement to the unheard of limit of beheading their king, the ruler that God Himself had anointed and set over them.

But not all Englishmen participated in these events. A substantial number were not in England during these years. They had decided, only ten years before, for a number of reasons, to leave their native land and to remove themselves three thousand miles across the Atlantic, to establish a plantation in the New World, which they appropriately called "New England." They had much to do in building this settlement out of the nothingness of the North American wilderness, and yet they always considered themselves English men, always kept their eyes on events in their mother country.

What did these men think about the turmoil in their homeland between 1640 and 1660? Were they as excited about the issues as their English brothers were? As they watched the
changes take place, with which side did their sympathies lie? If they did support one side over another, what form did this support take? Did any or many of them return to England to participate in the struggle? This thesis attempts to answer those questions and, after reviewing the evidence, is confronted by another and more difficult question: why did these New Englanders react to the English civil wars as they did? This thesis attempts to answer that question too.
I. SYMPATHY

The colonies of New England, the foremost of which was Massachusetts Bay with its center on the peninsula of Boston, were peopled by men and women of strongly Puritan leanings in religion. Thinking that the reformation of the Church of England under Henry VIII and Elizabeth had not gone far enough, they sought further changes, which they perceived as a purification of the church from the last vestiges of Romanism. They had attempted to bring these changes about in their own parishes in England, but had run into stiff opposition from the royal government and the episcopacy. King Charles I pursued a vigorously anti-Puritan policy, directed by his Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud. Many Puritans attempted to live as best they could under these circumstances of persecution, but with the founding of a colony in the New World by the Puritan-dominated Massachusetts Bay Company in 1629, more and more of them escaped from the hard times of Old England to the relative peacefulness of New England.

That these colonists maintained close connections with their friends in England was entirely natural. Communications between the two sides of the Atlantic were slow and difficult, but news still passed back and forth regularly. The settlers of New England were extremely interested in the events in their mother
country, especially those events in the continuing struggle over religion.

For the most part, during the decade of the 1630s, the news was not good for the Puritans. Archbishop Laud continued to deprive Puritan ministers of their livings and seemed to be bringing to fruition James I's threats to harry the Puritans out of the land. In 1640, however, the news took a turn for the better. Charles I, after eleven years of personal rule, had been forced by foreign and domestic crises to summon a Parliament. This news was happily received in New England: "the calling of a parliament, and the hope of a thorough reformation" was a welcome turn of events for Massachusetts Bay.¹ New England's Puritans were especially interested in the matters of religion which this Parliament, heavily dominated by Puritans of one sort or another, might consider.

The effort at cooperation between Charles and the House of Commons was a failure and civil war shortly broke out between them. New England's Puritans were not shocked at this development, and made it clear that their sympathies lay with the Parliamentary forces. They had hopes that a final, apocalyp-

tical battle had begun and that the forces of Antichrist, repre-
sented by the king and his armies, were at last to be engaged and
destroyed. They were even proud of the fact that their own
activity in building and maintaining a pure, godly society might
have helped to bring about this confrontation. A New Englander
later compared the colony to "a little cloud about the bignesse
of a mans hand" which "is suddenly come up" in England, ready
to destroy the arbitrary power of the king and his bishops.

The details of the campaigns of the war were slow to ar-
rive in New England, but the support for the Parliamentary ar-
mies was consistent. Anne Bradstreet, the poet then living in
Ipswich in Massachusetts Bay, gave this support literary ex-
pression by having "New England" recite a litany to "Old England"
once the wars had started:

Blest be the nobles of thy noble land,
With ventured lives for truth's defence that stand.
Blest be thy commons, who for common good,
And thy infringed laws have boldly stood.
Blest be thy counties, who did aid thee still,
With hearts and states to testify their will.
Blest be thy preachers, who do cheer thee on,
O cry, "the sword of God and Gideon";

---

1Robert Middlekauff, The Mathers: Three Generations of

2Edward Johnson, Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence of
Sion's Savior in New England, J. Franklin Jameson (New York,
And shall I not on them wish Mero's curse,
That help thee not with prayers, arms and purse?¹

Mrs. Bradstreet was joining the preachers in cheering on the Parliament and cursing its opponents, declaring everyone in England "Blest" except the king and those who supported him.

More direct expressions of support for the Parliament were given in the letters of some of the leading men of New England. Stephen Winthrop wrote from the Canary Islands to his father John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Bay at Boston, in March 1646, conveying "good newes from England. The Parlement still prevaileth[,] the Kinge hath beeone once more beaten."² For both the older and the younger Winthrop, the success of Parliament was good news and the success of the king was bad news. There was some fear that the king might recover and eventually defeat the Parliamentary armies, a fear which prompted an English correspondent to write to Governor Winthrop: "all clouds are not scattered; sometimes wee feare they will gather agaime."³ But the final defeat of Charles in 1647 removed such clouds, and


²Stephen Winthrop to John Winthrop, March 1645/46; Winthrop Papers (Boston, 1927-1947), V, 62. Stephen Winthrop, having lived in Boston for several years, was returning to England as he wrote.

³Giles Firmin to John Winthrop, July 1, 1646; ibid., V, 88.
Stephen Winthrop was happy to report to his father that "the Kingdome is now upon a great turne. God is doeing some great worke, for when the Adversarys were with all violence setting up injustice and persecution of the saints it pleased God by the Army to put them to a standy and quite turned the bywas of their proceedings."\(^1\) The New Englanders took encouragement from what God by the Army was doing in and for England.

One of the more formal ways in which New Englanders demonstrated their sympathy for the Puritan cause in England was in the holding of days of fast and prayer.\(^2\) These days were occasions for the colonists to gather in their churches and to pray for their coreligionists in the mother country. The meaning of such days was heightened by contrasting the different conditions on either side of the Atlantic. Edward Johnson, one of the founders of Woburn in Massachusetts Bay, described one such day (August 28, 1645), saying that it was held not only for

\(^1\)Stephen Winthrop to John Winthrop, July 29, 1647; Winthrop Papers, V, 174.

the "deepest distress" of England, but also for the "former
deliverances and wonderful mercies received" in New England.¹

Such days also presented the opportunity for the ministers
of New England to preach sermons reflecting the colonies' opinions.
Rev. William Hooke of Taunton was chosen to speak on the day
Johnson described, "a day of general Humiliation... . . In
the behalfe of Old-England and Ireland's Sad condition."²
Hooke's sermon was far more partisan than its title might suggest,
and he took the occasion to strongly denounce the allies of the
king, especially the bishops of the Church of England. "The
Prelats in England doe this day stinke in the nostrils of God's
People," he declared, asking his congregation to be "earnest with
God for England, that he would purge the Land of this filth; for
otherwise how noysome will that Countrey be wherein there are so
many unsavory creatures."³ He concluded his denunciation of the
Royalist forces with what must have been a popular pun among the
Puritans: "Laud, Laud, why persecutest thou me?"⁴

¹Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 238; Mass. Records, II, 12
³Ibid., 104, 107.
⁴Ibid., 110.
Hooke left no doubt that it was to be the Parliament which would cleanse England of "this filth," and that God was directing the Parliament's actions. He asked his listeners to note carefully "how direct a way it hath pleased the Lord herein to guide both Houses of Parliament to walke in, viz., A way of undaunted courage and resolution." He was clear in adding New England's approval of what the Puritan forces were doing to that of "God and England."

The partisan tone which Hooke assumed in this 1645 sermon is even more striking when compared to the tone of a sermon he delivered on a similar occasion in 1640, before the civil war had started, even before Parliament had been assembled. On that occasion he had only called upon New Englanders "to condole with them [i.e., the people of Old England] this day in their afflictions." Job's friends had commiserated with him for seven days, Hooke said; surely New England could spend one day consoling Old England. He calmly asked the "merciful God [to] stirre up all our affections, and give us that godly sympathy,

---

1Hooke, New-Englands Sence, 115.

2William Hooke, New Englands Teares, For Old Englands Feares (London, 1641; American Culture Series microfilm, reel 5, #33), 7.
which that Land deserveth at our hands, and teach us to express it upon all occasions of ill tydings comming to our eares from thence."¹ The full open support of Parliament in Hooke's 1645 sermon, after partisan sides had been drawn and taken, was a considerable development from his moderate tone in 1640, when the issues had not yet been joined. As soon as it became necessary to favor one side or the other, once the fighting had broken out, Hooke knew he would be joined by his congregation in expressing support for the opponents of the king.

One reason that Hooke and his fellow residents of Massachusetts Bay gave support to the rebels of England was that they hated the bishops of the Church of England, who naturally sided with the king. In these sentiments they were joined by the more radical Puritans of the older colony of Plymouth. Having been so opposed to the episcopacy (among other things) that they had openly separated from the Church of England long before, a final step which the Puritans of the rest of New England had hesitated to take, the Puritans of Plymouth also supported the Parliamentary armies and were cheered by their success. When the king's chances for success seemed utterly smashed in 1646, Governor William Bradford of Plymouth wrote: "The tyrannous Bishops are

¹Hooke, New Englands Teares, 23.
ejected, their courts dissolved, their canons forceless, their service cashiered, their ceremonies useless and despised, their plots for popery prevented, and all their superstitions discarded and returned to Rome from whence they came, and the monuments of idolatry rooted out of the land. And the proud and profane supporters and cruel defenders of these . . . marvelously overthrown. And are not these great things? Who can deny it?"  

The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth were united in their opposition to the bishops of England and their "proud and profane supporters," the foremost of whom was, of course, the king himself. The Puritans of New England went even further in their public support of Parliament than the preaching of fast day sermons. Such expressions, after all, took place in New England, before friendly audiences, and far out of the reach of the beleaguered king. New Englanders did not hesitate to make their opinions known in England, as well. Hooke's sermon of 1645 was published in London in that year. Equally strident was a pamphlet published in London two years later, written by a resident of a sea-coast town in New England. The era of the civil wars was the high-water

---

mark of pamphleteering in England, and Nathaniel Ward entered the fray with his *Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America* in 1647.

Ward wasted no time in placing the blame for the civil wars squarely on Charles I. "You owe the meanest true Subject you have, a close account of these open Warres," he lectured the king. "What you doe sculking in the suburbs of Hell, when your Royall Palaces stand desolate, through your absence? What moves you to take up Armes against your faithfull Subjects, when your Armes should be embracing your mournfull Queen? What incences your heart to make so many widdowes and Orphans, and among the rest your owne?"\(^1\) He followed these queries with several pages of similar accusatory questions.

In blaming the king for the war, he also justified the highly unusual step of taking up arms against him. Charles was engaged in "trampling your Subjects so under your feet, that they can finde no place to be safe in, but over your head."\(^2\) He did not deny that the king should rightly possess certain prerogative powers, but he reminded Charles that "Equity is as due to People, as Eminency to Princes: Liberty to Subjects, as Royalty


\(^2\)Ibid., 52.
to Kings," and warned him that "if ambitious windes get into Rulers Crownes, rebellious vapours will into Subjects Caps."  
Ward agreed with the Puritans of England that the king had overstepped the bounds of his legitimate authority and that resistance to him was thus fully justified.

Having justified the cause of rebellion, Ward went on to encourage the rebels. He expressed the hope that Charles would back down and agree to a compromise, but if that failed, he made clear his hope that Parliament would pursue the wars to their ultimate conclusion. "Goe on brave Englishmen," he said, "in the name of God, go on prosperously, because of Truth and Righteousnes . . . . Yee fight the battells of the Lord."  
He left no doubt that this support for the Puritan cause was shared by his fellow New Englanders. In addressing Parliament directly, he spoke for all New England, saying: "Wee your Brethren, though we necessarily abide beyond Jordan, and remaine on the American Sea-coasts, will send up armies of prayers to the Throne of Grace, that the God of power and goodnesse, would increase your hearts, . . . strengthen your arms, . . . and defeat the Enterprizes, deride the hopes,

1Ward, Simple Cobler, 45, 46.

2Ibid., 65-66.
disdain the insolencies, and wound the hairy scalps of your 
obstinate Enemies."¹ Like all good polemical writers, Ward warmed 
up as he went along and in the process left no doubt of the sympa­
thies which he and his fellow colonists had for Parliament. 
Ward's own feelings were so strong that he himself had returned 
to England to participate in the conflict by the time his pam­
phlet was published.²

Never really loved from the time of his accession to the 
throne in 1625, Charles was hated by the Puritans with increasing 
vigor as the civil wars continued and came to an end. The hatred 
extended to other members of the royal family as well, especially 
to the future Charles II. Roger Williams, founder of the Rhode 
Island colony, wrote of the younger prince, describing him as 
"vicious, a swearer from his youth, and an oppressor and perse­
cutor of good men (to say nothing of . . . his blasphemous father's 
cruelties[.])."³ Both members of the House of Stuart were 

¹Ward, Simple Cobler, 67.
²Frederick Lewis Weis, The Colonial Clergy and the Colonial 
³Roger Williams to Mrs. Anne Sadleir, Winter 1652; Letters 
It was because of this great dislike of Charles I, a sentiment which grew and was steadily reinforced throughout the decade of the 1640s, that the news of his execution in late January 1649 aroused no general anger or revulsion in Massachusetts or in the other Puritan colonies of North America. No record of the event was made in the official records of any of the colonies. Indeed, the only recorded comment on this extraordinary occurrence seems to have been made by John Hull, a prominent citizen of Boston who later became the mint-master for Massachusetts Bay. Hull made a brief note of the execution in his diary: "a very solemn and strange act; and God alone can work good by so great a change, both to the nation and to the posterity of the king." The restrained tone of this entry is highly revealing of Hull's opinion of the regicide. The act is, to be sure, "strange," but it is also "solemn." As unusual and drastic as it is, the action is not condemned; it is simply called a "great change." More important, Hull's statement that God can do it seems to express a confidence that He will in fact "work good" from it. The news of the death of their sovereign caused very little sorrow in Puritan New England.

The attitude of the New Englanders toward Oliver Cromwell, the most powerful man in England following the execution of the king in 1649, was quite different. John Cotton, the foremost minister of Boston, wrote to Cromwell in 1651, telling him of the great support he enjoyed in New England. Cotton praised him highly and defended him against charges that he and the army were exercising too much power in England. "I am fully satisfied," he said, "that you have all this while fought the Lords battells, and the Lord hath owned you, and honoured himselfe in you, in all your expeditions."¹ Cotton made it clear that he was speaking not only for himself but also for his fellow Puritans of Massachusetts Bay: "In like frame (as I conceive) are the spirits of our brethren (the elders and churches of these parts) carried forth, and the Lord accept us, and help you in Christ."² No matter what criticism Cromwell might be subjected to in England, he enjoyed the support of the settlers of New England. The representatives of the colonists, the Commissioners of the United Colonies of New England, confirmed what Cotton had said to Cromwell by thanking him for "the Religious care which the Right honorable the Lord

²Ibid., I, 264.
General Evidences in so promoting the service of Christ."\(^1\)
For the Puritans of New England, the cause of Cromwell was steadily identified with the cause of the Lord.

Cromwell faced a good deal of opposition during his five-year rule as Lord Protector in England, but his support from the colonies was unfailing. Rhode Island went farther than the others -- perhaps because that colony shared his liberal views regarding religious toleration -- by formally declaring that all legal transactions would have to be specifically worded so as to run in the name of the Lord Protector.\(^2\) This action was followed a year later in 1655 by an even stronger expression of support. An oath acknowledging the authority of the Protector was drawn up to be taken by every citizen of the colony. Anyone who refused to take it "shall have no benefit nor privilege in any law of the Colony in any case that shall befall, until they have subscribed the engagement."\(^3\)

The continuing nature of the support for Cromwell is also


\(^3\)Act of the Assembly, May 25, 1655; ibid., I, 306.
revealed in the diary of John Hull. The Lord Protector died on September 3, 1658, and when the news of this arrived in Boston several months later, Hull made the following entry: "We received the sad news of the death of the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, a man of excellent worth . . . . The Lord give suitable affections to bewail the loss of such choice ones!"1 This statement is in marked contrast to the impartial, even hopeful, noting of the execution of Charles I nine years before. While the earlier death was merely a "strange act," the death of Cromwell was "sad news" in New England. Even though Hull expressed his belief that Cromwell had been too liberal with regard to questions of religious toleration, it is clear that his death was the cause for genuine sadness that the death of the king had not been. There had been no one willing to "bewail" the loss of Charles Stuart.

The death of Cromwell created a power vacuum which was not easily filled, even though an effort was made by his eldest son Richard. Rhode Island again expressed the most confidence in him, quickly acknowledging him and his government. The Council of the colony arranged to have the proclamation announcing him as Lord Protector read in every town of the colony "with this addition, that we do joyfully accept of his said Highness succeeding

in that dignity and power of Protectorship; and as loyal subjects
do resolve to own his government, and yield all faithful obe­
dience thereto."¹ As unstable and short-lived as this govern­
ment of "Tumble-Down Dick" was, Rhode Islanders did not hesitate
to make their approval of him known. Massachusetts Bay was more
circumspect, simply having its agent approach the new Protector
with a general expression of support in the hopes of securing
his support in return. This cautious policy was a success, as
the agent, John Leverett, reported to the colony, with Richard
Cromwell promising "to lay forth himself for the good of that
people."²

The failure of the younger Cromwell to keep the various
competing factions in England under control made it obvious that
the Protectorate was an unworkable form of government. The way
was thus opened for a return of the monarchy in the person of
Charles II. The Restoration was extremely unwelcome news in
New England, and the Puritans there made this apparent. John
Eliot, one of the leading ministers of Massachusetts Bay, most
famous for his missionary work among the Indians, was solidly
opposed to the Restoration. He had already dismissed the argu-

¹Council Order, March 11, 1658/59; Rhode Island Records, I, 407.
²John Leverett to Edward Rawson, December 25, 1658; Hutchinson
Papers, II, 34.
ments of those who were reluctant to pass over the rightful heir to the throne by declaring that "Christ is the only right Heir of the Crown of England (a), and of all the other Nations also (b)."¹ Eliot and his fellow Puritans knew that the passing of the Protectorate meant the end of the "rule of the Saints" in England and the restoration of the Church of England as well as the monarchy. He opposed such an event because it meant that the rule of Christ would be blocked, perhaps permanently. Eliot's arguments notwithstanding, preparations for the return of the king proceeded and it soon became evident in England that the Restoration would be accomplished. News of the impending event was unhappily received in New England. John Davenport, one of the first settlers of New Haven in Connecticut, wrote to John Winthrop, Jr., then at Hartford, expressing his hope that the news "with many other rumours, will be found not true, in sundry particulars."² It is entirely likely that both Eliot and Davenport knew that the Restoration was, by this time, inevitably


²John Davenport to John Winthrop, Jr., April 20, 1660; Letters of John Davenport, Puritan Divine, ed. Isabel M. Calder (New Haven, 1937), 159-160.
coming; but still they held out the hope that it might somehow be averted.

Once Charles II was restored to his father's throne, the New Englanders' worst fears seemed ready to become reality. John Leverett wrote Governor John Endecott of Massachusetts Bay from London, referring to the Restoration as "a day of tryall" for God's people.¹ Roger Williams, who had been a friend of Cromwell, was also close to despair, thinking that he saw "the clouds gather mighty fast and thick upon our heads."² What concerned these Puritans most, of course, was the fear that the chance for the purification of religion would now be forever lost. Even worse, they feared that the entire work of the Reformation of the previous century would be undone. John Hull, taking this larger view, was sad to say that it looked "as if the reformation, purchased by so much war and blood should be given up again to heretics and Papists."³ At least twice during 1660, Hull's church kept days of fast and humiliation, hoping

¹ John Leverett to John Endecott and the Massachusetts Bay General Court, September 13, 1660; Hutchinson Papers, II, 42.
² Roger Williams to John Winthrop, Jr., September 8, 1660; Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 3d. Ser., X, 40.
for an improvement of the situation in England, an action in which they were undoubtedly joined by other churches. But fast and pray though they would, they could not escape concluding that the "interest of religion lies dreadfully in the dust." Try as they might to hope for the best from the new king, New England Puritans were openly disappointed that the Puritan cause had ultimately failed in England.

Mixed with the sorrow for this failure was not a little fear on the New Englanders' part. Their hatred for the House of Stuart was no secret and they had perhaps just cause to fear that Charles would at least retaliate against them, if not resume his father's persecutions of them altogether. The most conservative of the Puritan colonies and therefore the one with the most to fear, New Haven, seems to have gone so far as to consider an open repudiation of Charles in the face of this situation. They also considered uprooting themselves and starting a new

---


settlement outside English jurisdiction somewhere in the territory of the Dutch New Netherlands. Nothing came of either scheme, due at least in part to the conciliatory policy of Charles, and in 1661 New Haven followed the lead of Massachusetts and Connecticut in acknowledging Charles II as its lawful sovereign. Although the Puritan disapproval of all the Restoration stood for remained unabated, cooler and more realistic heads, like John Winthrop, Jr. of Hartford, seem to have prevailed in securing at least acquiescence to the new order in England.

Throughout the course of the English civil wars, then, it was evident and hardly unexpected that New England's sympathies were with the Parliament. These sympathies were made known not only through expressions of the colonies' sentiments, but also through official actions which the colonies took from the early stages of the conflict. Such official actions were generally taken in direct response to actions of the king.

In an effort to retain the traditional loyalty due him from

New England, as well as the other American colonies, Charles issued a proclamation addressed specifically to them. The immediate cause for this proclamation was the passage of an "Ordinance for the Government of the Plantations of the West Indies" by Parliament on November 2, 1643. The ordinance (which applied to all the American colonies, not just the West Indies) created a special commission to have general authority over colonial affairs. Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, was placed at the head of the commission with the titles of Governor in Chief and Lord High Admiral, and was joined by such eminent peers as Viscount Say and Sele and such eminent commoners as John Pym and Oliver Cromwell. The ordinance was passed over the objections of the beset king, who looked on it as an invasion of his prerogative power to administer colonial affairs as he wished.

Charles responded very shortly after this action by Parliament by issuing a proclamation which was designed to "preserve them [i.e., the colonies] in their due Obedience." He began

---


3"A Proclamation to give Assurance unto all His Majesties Subjects in the Islands and Continent of America, of His Majesties Royall Care over them, and to preserve them in their due Obedience," November 24, 1643; Clarence S. Brigham, ed., British Royal Proclamations Relating to America, 1603-1783 (Worcester, Mass., 1911), 94-96.
the proclamation by denouncing the act of the "pretended Houses of the Lords and Commons in Parliament," declaring that their intention "cannot reasonably be conceived to be other, then to spread the contagion of this horrid Rebellion, even unto those remoter parts." He warned the colonists that obedience to the Warwick commission rather than to himself would mean the disruption of their peace, and would certainly result in "Oppressions, Bloodshed, Rapine, Disorders and Confusion in Church and State."

In light of this, the king demanded that none of his subjects obey the traitorous Warwick and his cohorts, and that they "endeavor the suppression of all such Rebellious Attempts, as they shall have means and Opportunity to doe it." This was followed by a specific charge that all the colonies "persist in their due Allegiance and Obedience unto Us, whereto they are obliged by all Lawes Divine and Humane."2

The reaction to this proclamation in New England was hardly what the king had hoped for. The document, issued on November 24, 1643, did not reach the colonies until early the next spring, and when it did the New Englanders ignored it. No official acknowledgment was given it, and there is no evidence that it

1"A Proclamation," in Brigham, ed., British Royal Proclama-
tions, 94.

2Ibid., 95.
was widely published. The Massachusetts Bay General Court, however, went further. On May 24, 1644, the Court passed legislation aimed at restricting and preventing any activity on the king's behalf within the colony's borders. In what is surely an answer to Charles I's demand for loyalty, the Court declared that "what person soever shall, by word, writing, or action, endeavor to disturb our peace, directly or indirectly, by drawing a party, under pretence that he is for the King of England, and such as adjoin with him, against the Parliament, shall be accounted as an offender of an high nature against this commonwealth, and to be proceeded with either capitally or otherwise, according to the quality and degree of his offense."\(^1\) The king had demanded loyalty, and the Massachusetts Puritans responded by attaching very severe penalties to such loyalty. The king had sought to retain his authority over the colonies, and the Massachusetts Puritans responded by outlawing any activity on his behalf. It was a bold step, taken very shortly after the war had started, with the outcome still much in doubt, and prescribing very harsh penalties for the exercise of loyalty of subject to king. Its very boldness, however, revealed the strength of the New England sympathy for the Puritan cause in England.

Even before this action, however, the Puritans of the Bay

\(^1\)Mass. Records, II, 69.
colony had already taken steps toward cutting their bond of loyalty to the king. The governor and other magistrates had always taken an oath upon entering office, an oath in which they swore allegiance to the king and his successors. Several objections to this part of the oath were raised in May 1643, at the opening of a new session of the General Court, in light of the civil war then raging in England. After considerable discussion, the decision was made to omit the objectionable mention of the sovereign.¹ There was no substitute oath of loyalty to the Parliament, but the turning from the king represents a definite alignment of New England with the forces of rebellion in England.

Besides such proscriptions on loyalty to the king, other actions were taken in the colony designed to benefit the Parliament in its struggle with Charles I. One was a delicate matter arising in May 1644, involving the seizure in Boston harbor of a ship from Bristol, a city staunchly loyal to the king, by a Captain Stagg, a Parliamentary supporter commanding a ship from rebellious London. Stagg defended his action by producing a warrant from Lord High Admiral Warwick permitting any Parliamentary ship to seize and confiscate the goods of any ship still remaining loyal.²

¹Winthrop's Journal, II, 99; entry of May 10, 1643.
²Ibid., II, 184; entry of May 23, 1644.
The difficulty presented to Massachusetts by this incident was very great, and is recounted in detail by John Winthrop, then serving as Deputy Governor. Some of the colony's leading men feared the precedent that might be set and the insecurity of shipping which might result if Stagg were left unpunished. But it was finally decided to support him and his Parliamentary commission. Since Massachusetts had "so openly declared . . . affection to the cause of the parliament by . . . prayers, fastings, etc.," it was seen as unwise to change suddenly and oppose an agent of Parliament. The incident occurred almost immediately after the colony had outlawed activity on the king's behalf. Further, it was noted, the king was by this time hostile toward New England, leaving Parliament as the only source of defense for the colony. To offend them now would be a grave error. The specific conclusion to the case was that the Parliamentary warrant was honored and Captain Stagg allowed to keep his prize. But more important, New England Puritans had given another specific statement of their support for the Puritans of Old England. Even more such statements of adherence to the Parliamentary cause followed the conclusion of the wars with the king and his execution. These were based on more than a little expediency, of course, now that the Parliament had finally triumphed. And

1Winthrop's Journal, II, 185-187; entry of May 23, 1644.
yet they still represented an accurate description of New England sentiment, because they were words backed up by actions. New England's support for the Puritan cause had been constant since the beginning of the struggle, the colonists declared. Governor John Endecott of Massachusetts wrote to Parliament: "we have constantly adhered to you, not withdrawing ourselves in your weakest condition and doubtfullest times . . . . declaring to the world heerby, that such was the duty and love we beare unto the parlia­ment, that we were ready to rise and fall with them."¹

Such declarations of support and sympathy after the fighting had ended might legitimately have been questioned by some in England. In 1651, Sir Henry Mildmay, a member of the House of Commons, charged that the New Englanders had never done anything to show their support for Parliament. Edward Winslow, former governor of the Plymouth colony, then serving as agent for the United Colonies of New England in London, immediately retorted. He described the many days of prayer, the losses of New England ships and cargoes to royalist ships, and the wrath of the loyal colonists of Virginia and Barbados toward them. He readily acknowledged the dependency of New England on Parliament, and admitted

that their "outward weal, or woe, was bound up in it, and they
must stand or fall as that did." Winslow affirmed the support
of the Puritans of New England for the actions of those of
Old England.

The support which New England gave to the Parliament did
not go unnoticed by that body. Early in the war, Parliament
exempted goods shipped back and forth to those colonies from the
payment of customs duties. The Massachusetts General Court,
with a "humble thankfulness, and . . . a greatful remembrance
of the honorable respect of that high court," publicly thanked
them for it in May 1643. Perhaps the action had been taken
as much in anticipation of support from New England as in thanks
for support already received. Perhaps it had even been designed
to elicit support in the first place. In any case, the support
existed and continued.

The consistent pattern of sympathy for the Parliamentary
cause on the part of the New England colonists is the central
feature of their reactions to the English civil wars. Despite
the thousands of miles which separated the Puritans of New England

1Hutchinson, History, I, 149.

2Mass. Records, II, 34. Parliament's action of March 10,
1642/43 is recorded in the colony's records.
from the Puritans of Old England, the former watched the activity of the latter very closely, and were extremely interested in the outcome of the struggle with the king and the Church of England. In New England they rejoiced when the king and his forces were defeated, and looked forward to a time of purity in both church and state. Despite all the bonds of tradition which resisted rebellion and regicide, the sympathies of these Puritan colonists lay with those in England who were doing exactly such unheard of things.
II. NONINVOLVEMENT

That the sympathies of the New England colonies lay with the Puritans during the English civil wars and interregnum should hardly be surprising. The seventeenth century was one in which differences in matters of religion were of central importance. This makes it understandable that the ties of common religion would be able to overcome the long-standing traditions of obedience to royal authority. In opposing the king and supporting the Parliament, the Puritans of America were following their consciences in obedience to what they conceived to be an authority higher than any monarch.

Careful note must be made, however, of the precise nature of this support. If it be observed that the New England Puritans had a great sympathy for their fellow Englishmen, it must also be observed that their support was moral support only, stopping significantly short of any actual logistical assistance. There was no general movement from the colonies back to England to participate in the struggle, even though the relatives and good friends of many in New England were deeply involved. The Puritans of America felt no sense of responsibility for the outcome of the civil wars.¹ In short, a duality may be seen in the nature

of the New England reactions to the English civil wars: on the
one hand, the New Englanders were interested in the contest and,
on the other, were uninterested in becoming involved in it
themselves.

This lack of interest may be seen in an number of ways in
the different colonies of New England. Massachusetts, for all
its expressions of support for Parliament, did very little to aid
the Puritan forces. That side was definitely favored, but the
logistical participation of the Bay colonists in the struggle
was virtually nonexistent.¹ The same held true for the Plymouth
colony, which made very few comments on the English situation.
No official notice was taken even of the execution of the king,
all comments, both favorable and unfavorable, being kept dis-
creetly from public view.²

In fact, Plymouth showed itself to be far more cautious than
Massachusetts in its support for the Puritan cause in England.
While the Bay colony had been holding days of fast and prayer for
their English brethren regularly since 1640, the first such day
held in Plymouth was not until early 1652.³ The day was called

²George F. Willison, Saints and Strangers (New York, 1945), 375.
³Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England (Boston, 1855), II, 73.
to give thanks for Cromwell's victories over the royalist forces in Scotland and Ireland.\(^1\) Massachusetts Bay had been praying for twelve years for such victories; Plymouth cautiously waited until the fighting was over before expressing an opinion on the matter. In a similar manner, the oath for all Plymouth magistrates was amended, striking any mention of the king and his successors and substituting the promise "to be truly loyal to the State and Government of England as it now stands."\(^2\) Uncertain of what would happen next in the mother country, Plymouth decided that the safest course, the one promising to offend the fewest people, would be to make a vague commitment to the status quo, no matter how often it might change.

The lack of involvement on the part of the New England Puritans was not, of course, a sign of complete apathy. Their sympathies still went out to their coreligionists, but they declined any active role in England for themselves. Rev. John Cotton expressed this ambiguity in a sermon delivered in 1642 in

\(^1\)General Court session of March 2, 1651/52; Plymouth Records, III, 5.

\(^2\)Ibid., XI, 8. This action was presumably taken in 1649, although there is no indication of the precise date of the change in the records. The reasons for Plymouth's caution are problematic. Perhaps the principal reason was the uncertainty created by the colony's lack of an official charter. For this, see George D. Langdon, Jr., Pilgrim Colony; A History of New Plymouth (New Haven, 1966), 188-189.
which he thought he saw the imminent second coming of Christ and the end of the world in the events around him. His sympathies were obviously with the English Puritans, but when he came to the question of how the New Englanders might help them, all he could suggest was that "our work is to wrastle with God, that they may not perish for lack of knowledge." As Cotton saw it, Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic had their work to do: Englishmen were to "wrastle" with each other on the battlefields and in the churches, while the New Englanders undertook the equally (and perhaps more) difficult task of wrastling with God in prayer.

That the New Englanders were not apathetic is also demonstrated by the interest they took in the religious controversies of the mother country. As pamphlets defending positions on the entire spectrum of religious organization appeared in England, the New Englanders took up their pens to make their contributions to the discussions. Throughout the 1640s English Presbyterians, then on the ascendant in the Church of England, attacked the Independents of both Old and New England, and the New Englanders


2 Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650 (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), 281.
responded vigorously. William Rathband's highly critical Brief Narration of Church Courses in New England (London, 1644), for example, was countered almost immediately by Thomas Weld of Roxbury in An Answer to W. R. (London, 1644) and by Richard Mather in "A Plea for the Churches of Christ in New England" (written in 1644 but never published because of Rathband's death).¹ In the same year, Presbyterian John Ball published A Tryall of the New-Church Way in New England, touching off the most spirited of these debates. Thomas Shepard and others retorted quickly in 1645, and the transatlantic dispute continued at least until 1653.² Edward Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, published in 1654, is a part of this body of literature, extolling the religious virtues of New England and defending it against its critics by chronicling all the things God had done for the colonies. The Puritans of America clearly hoped to influence the Puritans of England to construct an ecclesiastical polity parallel to their own, and entered the religious discussions of England without reservations.³ These actions did not mean that


any New Englanders had to return to England to participate, but the interest they took evidences that they were not totally detached and aloof.

New England's role was further conceived to be that of providing a model for the English Puritans of how to establish and maintain a godly commonwealth. New England would offer guidance to Old England, a task which in no way necessitated any physical participation in the conflict.¹ The Puritans of the New World could make their contribution to the struggle from a distance, confident that their purity in church and state was being closely observed by their coreligionists in England.² The colonies' prayers and sufferings might be 3,000 miles removed from the scenes of battle, but when the power of the king was finally destroyed, said one New Englander confidently, all the world would be able to see how "these weake wormes instrumentally had a share in the great desolation the Lord Christ hath wrought."³ New England's role in the English civil wars was not to be physical or logistical,

¹Ziff, Career of John Cotton, 177.
but rather spiritual. It was to be indirect, yet it would remain "instrumental."

That the colony would provide an example for the mother country seems to have been one of the motivating forces for the original settlements of the 1630s. Perry Miller, the foremost scholar of the New England Puritans, has said that, in the minds of the first generation of colonists, New England was to be "the cynosure of all Protestant eyes, the shining example of the Christian commonwealth."¹ New England was to be the "working model" of true Christian government, a model which all the Protestants of Europe could use to guide their own efforts for complete reformation.² The colonies' role was to teach by example, and, when the civil wars actually began, they more openly assumed the role of "adviser."³

The New Englanders did not believe that their advice had to be given in person, but rather thought that it would be effective when presented in the form of books and pamphlets published for English audiences. The extent to which they did offer advice

¹Miller, Orthodoxy, 212.
²Perry Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," in Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (New York, 1956), 11.
³Miller, Orthodoxy, 276.
in this way --- whether unsolicited (e.g., Nathaniel Ward's *Simple Cobler*) or provoked by English Presbyterians (e.g., the responses to William Rathband and John Ball) --- has already been noted. That they were completely in earnest by acting in this way is demonstrated by the real disappointment they felt when, in the late 1640s and 1650s, it became obvious that England was not going to follow their carefully constructed model. As the influence of the Presbyterians waned, the New Englanders were horrified that the Independents, their former allies, were giving way to toleration.\(^1\) Instead of paralleling New England, Old England seemed to be going farther astray than ever.\(^2\) By this time, of course, there was nothing more the New Englanders could do to influence their coreligionists at home, and perhaps they came to regret their noninvolvement of the previous decade. They were certainly disappointed that their example was not followed, but the nonparticipatory course they had charted had never guaranteed that it would have been.

The actions of the New England Puritans demonstrated in a number of ways their lack of interest in physically involving

\(^1\)Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," in Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 13-14.

\(^2\)Miller, *Orthodoxy*, 301.
themselves in what was going on in England. The first and most obvious way is to determine how many of them returned to their old homes in England to participate in the fighting of 1642-1649 or in the constitutional experiments of 1649-1660. It has been amply proven by historians that with the outbreak of the fighting the exodus of Puritans from Old England to New ceased, as more and more of them remained at home to participate in the conflict. But the lack of any thorough investigation makes the size and nature of the return difficult to ascertain and assess. Enough may be pieced together, however, to give a general description of how many made the return trip.

Developments in England beginning in 1640 with the opening of the Long Parliament seemed to offer the Puritans hopes of better days than they had previously enjoyed in England, and men of all types and situations were inclined to return. They had once accepted exile for their beliefs and thus felt assured of receiving honorable treatment when they returned home to help put these beliefs into practice. The Parliamentary armies needed chaplains as well as soldiers, and New Englanders returned to

---

1See, for example, Carl Bridenbaugh, Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1590-1642 (New York, 1968), 472-473, for an up-dated restatement of the point first made by John Gorham Palfrey, History of New England During the Stuart Dynasty (Boston, 1865), I, 385.

fill both kinds of positions. Many of the more radical Puritans, whose main thoughts were still on England and the battles being waged there, were especially likely to return. Even Rev. John Davenport considered leaving the New Haven colony that he had helped to found and going back to help the Puritan cause.

The Puritans of the mother country certainly welcomed the return of New Englanders, and the more who returned, the more Englishmen desired others to do likewise. James Sherley, one of the original financial backers of the Plymouth colony, wrote to Governor Bradford: "Now, blessed be God, the times be much changed here. I hope to see many of you return to your native country again and have such freedom and liberty as the Word of God prescribes." The call of Sherley and others like him attracted many New Englanders, especially the well educated. Of the nine members of the first graduating class at Harvard College in 1642, seven returned to England, mostly to positions in the church. Enough Puritans of varying degrees of importance made

2Calder, New Haven Colony, 209.
3James Sherley to William Bradford, May 18, 1641; Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 399.
the return voyage so that William L. Sachse, the historian who has done the most careful research of this subject, has said that the reverse migration was of "notable" proportions.¹

At a closer look, numerous factors indicate that this return was not as significant as one might think or expect. In the first place, the lack of documentary evidence means that the exact numbers, or even close approximations, of emigrants from New England cannot be determined. The population of the colonies suffered no serious decline during these years. It must also be observed that the return fluctuated with events in England, increasing in times of Parliamentary success, decreasing in times of uncertainty or royal success.² The very beginning of the conflict was certainly such a time of uncertainty among the New Englanders.³ Historian Sachse has concluded that it "does not appear that mass migrations of towns or church groups, led by an influential clergy man or public figure, were duplicated in reverse. Thus, in large measure had the colonies been peopled;

¹Sachse, Colonial American in Britain, 89.
³Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I, 424.
...[rather,] the New Englanders generally trickled back singly or in families. 

The fact that many did return to England to aid the Puritan cause should not obscure the fact that many of equal stature were extremely reluctant to make the trip. There was little certainty at the outset of the success of that cause, an uncertainty that did not inspire confidence in those New Englanders who, after all, had had considerable success in building a new life for themselves in America. The failure of Oliver Cromwell's attempts to convince many New Englanders to remove to the West Indies and the migration of Puritans from elsewhere in America (especially Barbados) to New England suggests a general satisfaction with New England. It seems wisest, therefore, to conclude with Samuel Eliot Morison that the quality of those who left for the

---

1 Sachse, "Migration of New Englanders," AHR, LIII (1948), 259. Prof. Michael McGiffert has suggested to me that as yet unpublished research by himself and others indicates that the return to England may have been larger than Sachse contends, especially in regard to ministers and other intellectuals. On the face of it, this would seem damaging to my argument that there was little general desire on New England's part to participate personally in the struggles of England. If this is in fact shown to be the case, however, it will mean that those consciously choosing to remain in America were all the more loyal to New England, all the more likely to give it their primary attention and interest, less likely to want to involve themselves physically in the mother country's conflict.


3 Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, No Peace Beyond the Line (New York, 1972), 147.
the mother country was more significant than the quantity and that the vast majority of New Englanders were content to remain uninvolved in the actual struggles.¹

The more prominent men of New England evidenced little desire to go back to England, even when asked to do so. In the summer of 1642, three of the leading colonial clergymen, John Cotton of Boston, Thomas Hooker of Hartford, and John Davenport of New Haven, were invited to attend a general meeting of English and Scottish divines. The gathering, known as the Westminster Assembly, was designed to settle the polity of the Church of England, and the advice of these three, the leading spokesmen for the Independent Congregational form of church government, was naturally sought by those of this persuasion in England. The three New Englanders gave attendance serious thought, but after considering the disturbed state of England they thought it best to remain where they were.² Despite the great reputation which they (especially Cotton) enjoyed in England and the expectation that they would emerge as leaders of the Assembly,


they resolved to exert only such influence on its deliberations as could be done from America. Here was a matter in which they obviously had a very great interest. Yet that interest was not strong enough to impel them to return to England. They were wanted in England, but they preferred to stay in America.

To see in this refusal to return to England a complete aloofness from what was going on there is to overstate the case. Although Hooker, for example, had been most swift and decisive in his resolution not to participate in the Westminster Assembly, he still hoped to have some influence on the Assembly's deliberations. He retained a large following in England, and his three books published in London in 1645 were clearly designed to affect the outcome of the gathering's doctrinal discussions. He took a keen interest in the important debates going on in England and left no doubt of his opposition to the Presbyterians. But he chose to make his own contribution in the form of writings sent over from America, rather than appearing in person himself to defend his point of view.

New England Puritans remained unwilling to enter the tumult

---

1Ziff, Career of John Cotton, 179.

of English politics and religion even as the Puritans came to dominate England. In the later 1640s, with the king already defeated and captured, General Sir Thomas Fairfax, the most powerful and popular man in England next to Cromwell, asked Major John Mason of Connecticut, an old friend and fellow soldier, to accept a command under him. Mason refused, preferring the place he had already attained in New England to any he might win in Old England.¹ In the same way Rev. Marmaduke Matthews of Boston, a well-known Puritan preacher, declined a call to return to England to take up his duties in a parish there. At first he had been receptive to the idea, but later reconsideration "constrained me... to tack about, and to turne my thoughts to harbour in America a while longer." He attributed this change of heart to his own and his wife's "unwillingness to goe beyond-sea in these destructive dayes."² The worst of the trouble was long since over and the Puritans were in control of the mother country, but these New Englanders, like Cotton, Hooker, and Davenport, preferred to remain in the colonies.


²Marmaduke Matthews to John Winthrop, Jr., December 7, 1649; Winthrop Papers, V, 379. Matthews changed his mind again and finally did go back in about 1653, after the "destructive dayes" of fighting had passed, and settled in his native town of Swanzey. For this, see Weis, Colonial Clergy, 137.
Instead of a desire to return to England, there was among the settlers of New England a repeatedly stated thankfulness for being removed from the turmoil that was disturbing England. After recounting the latest news of the war in 1648, Thomas Harrison, a New Englander attempting to establish a Puritan settlement in Virginia, wrote to his friend and mentor John Winthrop: "The Saints in these goings downe of the Sun had never more light to see why their Father hath thus farre removed them, nor ever more strong engagements to be thankfull for it."\(^1\) Governor Winthrop himself shared this thankfulness, the civil wars serving to sharpen his sense of removal from Old England and enhance his primary loyalty to New England.\(^2\)

Puritans who remained in England recognized the fortunate situation of those in America. A few years before the outbreak of the war, a friend of Margaret Winthrop, the wife of the Massachusetts governor, wrote her from Suffolk, England, of the "heavy condition" of England. She added, in speaking of her son who had emigrated to New England, "I am sur it is hapy for him that he is removed from this place, wher all is a declining nay I

\(^1\)Thomas Harrison to John Winthrop, April 10, 1648; Winthrop Papers, V, 213.

\(^2\)Dunn, Puritans and Yankees, 45, 54. Dunn's phrase for Winthrop's attitude is "splendid isolation."
may say all good strongly aposed." Mrs. Winthrop's friend was joined in her opinion of the "hapy" condition of the colonies by Rev. Hugh Peter. Peter, formerly the pastor of the church at Salem, had returned to England as an agent for Massachusetts Bay and once there had become embroiled in the political upheaval of the 1640s. With the rampant factionalism of England on his mind, he wrote in 1645; "Ah sweet New England! and yet sweeter if divisions bee not among you."2

Puritans in New England also recognized their fortunate situation, especially when the contrast with Old England was clearly drawn. Rev. William Hooke of Taunton was keenly aware of this contrast and remarked upon it. "When we looke upon our selves at this time in this Land," he preached in 1640, "the Lord hath given us great cause of rejoycing, both in respect of civill and spirituall peace. . . . This is much, and more it would be, if the edge of these and other our comforts were not this day turned by the feare of civill strifes and combustions in the Land of our Nativitie, which doe not a little abate the sweetnesse of all other our happinesse to us."3 Hooke and his fellow

---

1Muriel Sedley Gurden to Margaret Winthrop, May 5, 1636; Winthrop Papers, III, 258.


3Hooke, New Englands Teares, 8.
colonists were understandably unwilling to give up their peaceful situation. "Of all the Christian people this day in the world," Hooke happily declared, "wee in this Land enjoy the greatest measure of peace and tranquilitie. Wee have beaten our swords into plough-shares and our speares into pruning hookes when others have beaten their pruning hookes into speares, and their plough-shares into sword."\(^1\) Given this view of the singular position that New England held, the lack of any sizable return to England is entirely comprehensible.

This widespread reluctance to participate in the civil wars was justified by the "Simple Cobler of Aggawam," Nathaniel Ward, even though he himself had returned to England. In explaining what some Englishmen might take to be America's apathy concerning the struggles in England, he said that "many here . . . make it an Article of our American Creed" to look upon themselves as latter-day Abrahams, who were called by faith into "the land of promise."\(^2\) Ward had no difficulty in equating America with the biblical promised land, which no godly man would willingly leave. A "necessity of Conscience" had caused the New Englanders to leave

\(^1\)Hooke, New Englands Teares, 21.  
\(^2\)Ward, Simple Cobler, 25.
England in the first place, and even though prayers might be offered for the mother country's distress, still the colonists "necessarily abide beyond Jordan, and remaine on the American Sea-coasts." In Ward's opinion the American decision to remain aloof from the English political and religious turmoil was not made lightly, but rather "necessarily."

Because of the noninvolvement of the settlers of New England many of them wished that their English brethren were with them, similarly removed from the troubles. John Davenport expressed this sentiment when he wrote, in 1660, of his desire that "sundrie of our relations and friends were well settled in these ends of the earth." He recognized that those in England were involved in the upheaval whether they wanted to be or not. He also knew that those in America were uninvolved and could remain so indefinitely.

Davenport's feelings were echoed by many in England who desired the comparative security of New England. Those who knew the relative advantages of the two places best were those in England who had at one time also been in the colonies. They had

2John Davenport to John Winthrop, Jr., August 1, 1660; *Davenport Letters*, 169.
experienced both the involvement of the mother country and the noninvolvement of New England. Having tasted both, they showed a clear preference for the latter.

Nehemiah Bourne, a merchant and ship owner, wrote to John Winthrop from London just prior to the opening of Parliament in 1640, telling him of the "breathings and longings" he had toward New England. Even though he was to go on and have a distinguished career as a Parliamentary admiral during the civil wars, Bourne was still desirous of returning to New England, which he eventually did in 1660 with the Restoration. An even more prominent Puritan, Rev. Hugh Peter, expressed his wish to return to Massachusetts Bay. "New England is a good country to be in," he wrote, declaring "how desirous am I to come unto you and how unwilling to stay from you." Peter was one of the most powerful men in England as he wrote, but his preference was still for New England. Despite his obvious interest in the struggle taking place in England, he wished that he were not a part of it.

Another prominent Puritan colonist who had gone back to England was Stephen Winthrop, the son of the Massachusetts governor

1 Nehemiah Bourne to John Winthrop, March 4, 1639/40; Winthrop Papers, IV, 214.
2 Hugh Peter to John Winthrop, Jr., March 15, 1648/49; ibid., V, 319.
who died in the early months of 1649. The younger Winthrop had returned to England in the mid-1640s to attend to some business matters and while there had decided to join the Parliamentary army. He had had a successful career at this, but by the time that Charles I was beheaded in early 1649 he was ready to abandon England and cross the Atlantic again for New England. "New England," he said to his brother, "seems to be the only safe place where I believe we must come good store at Length if we cann."¹ There was upheaval in England, and Puritans like Bourne, Peter, and Winthrop desired to be removed from that upheaval by returning to New England. Such desires would be completely normal if the royalist forces held the upper hand and the Puritans were once more being driven out of the kingdom by persecution. But exactly the opposite was true: the Puritans had triumphed. These men had much to gain by remaining in England. That they still desired to return to New England is a testament to how strongly they longed for the noninvolvement they could enjoy in the colonies.

For those who had remained in New England and had not even attempted to return to their former homes to participate in the

¹Stephen Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., March 16, 1648/49; Winthrop Papers, V, 320.
struggle, the letters of those who did could hardly have persuaded
them to attempt it. Hearing such reports as those of Peter and
Winthrop, they could hardly have been encouraged to pursue
such a course. The only view they could derive from their
correspondents was a negative or at least uncertain one, and so
what return there was slackened during the years of actual
fighting.¹

Even without such statements from their fellow New Englanders
the news the colonists received from all sources about events in
England was also discouraging. Naturally this was true at the
very beginning of the conflict: "To this Land in my foolish
Judgment," wrote Benjamin Gostlin to his uncle John Winthrop at
that time, "is nothing to be expected but confusion."² The
news was, however, still discouraging after the Parliamentary
victory. "For the state of things heer, it hath been very
various, not only in the time of warre but more since: . . .
no mortal eye could in the face of things see any thing but
ruine."³ Nor was the news in the time of the Protectorate any
better. "The State heere hangs still upon uncertaine points, . . .

¹Sachse, "Migration of New Englanders," AHR, LIII (1948), 259.
²Benjamin Gostlin to John Winthrop, May 8, 1640; Winthrop
Papers, IV, 237.
³Sir George Downing to John Winthrop, March 8, 1647/48; ibid., V, 206.
balanced only by the hand of the Almighty, who ruleth in the midst of our concussions," said Rev. William Hooke, who had finally returned to England in 1656 to become Cromwell's personal chaplain. "The land is full of discontents."¹

The discouraging picture of conditions in England prompted Anne Bradstreet to describe the mother country's troubles forcefully. In one of her poems, Old England lamented to New England:

But these may be beginnings of more woe.
Who knows, but this may be my overthrow.
Oh pity me in this sad perturbation,
My plundered towns, my houses' devastation,
My weeping virgins and my young men slain;
My wealthy trading fall'n, my dearth of grain.²

Even when the "sad perturbation" ended with the triumph of the Puritans in 1649, the situation remained uncertain enough so that the image of a disrupted England remained strong in the American mind. Just as it was not surprising that the Americans should support the Puritan cause in the fighting, it is also not surprising, given this image, that they should desire to stand aside from the struggle.

Because the great majority of New Englanders did not participate in the conflict in England, the colonies could legitimately


²Anne Bradstreet, "A Dialogue Between Old England and New," lines 199-204; Works, 185.
claim a sort of neutrality. This claim was not made during the
civil wars or the Protectorate; Puritan sympathies on both sides
of the Atlantic made this unnecessary. But after the Puritan
regime in England had fallen apart and the monarchy was restored,
such a claim was pressed, in the hope of obtaining favorable
(or at least deterring unfavorable) treatment from the new king.
This took the form of an address to Charles II from the Massachu­
setts Bay General Court, made in December 1660.¹

This petition is a very tricky historical document. It
contains some outright political lies, such as the assertion
that the Puritans who came to New England had had no dissatisfaction
with conditions in England during the reign of Charles I.²
But other statements in the document may be taken at their face
value as expressions of Massachusetts' activity and intent.
"Our lot . . . hath been only to act a passive part throughout these
late vicissitudes and successive overturnings of state," it
said.³ Despite the strong sympathies for the Puritan cause, and
even despite the actions taken in behalf of that cause (outlawing
the king's party in 1644, for example), this is an accurate

²Ibid., 450.
³Ibid.
portrayal of New England's activity during the twenty-year struggle. The colonists' feelings might not have been passive, but their actions certainly were. They were not lying, therefore, when they spoke of their "providential exemption from the late wars." Rather, they were simply giving final expression to what they had enjoyed all along.

Two facts become clear from an examination of the New England Puritans' response to the English civil wars and interregnum. The first is that their sympathies were decidedly with their old country Puritan brethren. Quite unlike the people of all the other English colonies in America, they were gladdened by the successes of the English rebels and saddened by their defeats. They had little love for the monarchy and were unafraid to say so. The second fact offers some reservations to the first and reveals the ambiguity of the New England attitudes. Despite their approval of the English Puritan cause, most of these New Englanders were not personally involved in the actual conflict and steadfastly refused all opportunities to become so involved. They were removed from the struggle and were happy for it. Their support for their friends and relatives who were making a revolution

in their native land never went so far as to include their own participation in that revolution.

The fusion of these two, by no means contradictory, facts represents the character of the New Englanders' reactions to the political and religious turmoil of mid-seventeenth century English life. It was an ambivalent mixture of interest and lack of interest, of partisan observation and neutral noninvolvement.
Explanations of the two-sided reaction of New England to the English civil wars must be offered, explanations which are compatible with both aspects of the reaction revealed by the evidence. If New England's sympathy was so solidly with the Puritan cause, is it not somewhat unusual that there was so little interest in going directly to its assistance? If the New Englanders believed the issues involved to be of such cosmic importance, why was there no direct aid for their fellow Puritans in the great contest for control of English life? If they were so interested, why were they so uninterested? Like the reaction itself, the explanation has two parts.

The New England view of the nature of the relationship between the colonies and the mother country is the first part of the answer to these questions. From the very beginning of their settlements, these colonists were independent-minded. They openly rejected all attempts to subordinate themselves to any authority in England, and were determined to resist any substantial interference in their affairs by England.

Historians have long observed the independent nature of New England from the earliest years of its settlement. John Wingate Thornton, a historian of New England, remarked one hundred years ago that the "mere transfer to a trans-atlantic shore" gave the
New England colonists a chance to breathe "the more bracing air of absolute independence." Unlike other English settlers, the New Englanders, because of the hostility they faced from the rulers of England, were forced to band themselves together and form their own society and body politic in a way which led them to a high degree of self-sufficiency which they were unwilling to abandon. English historians, too, have seen in the colonists' attitude a desire to minimize the influence of the mother country, a desire which manifested itself in the structure of the Massachusetts Bay Company, formed in 1628, which conducted colonizing activities from 1629 onward. The transference of the Company's charter to the colony in 1630 was an extremely important act of independence with great consequences for the future. John Winthrop, the first governor of the Bay colony, desired autonomy above all for the colony, recognizing few obligations to the mother country on the settlers' part.

The independence of New England was demonstrated not only in...

1 John Wingate Thronton, The Historical Relation of New England to the English Commonwealth (Boston, 1874), 36, 37.

2 Ibid., 23-24. Thornton draws too straight a line from these early colonial independent feelings to the revolution of 1776, but his point with regard to the early period is well-taken.


4 Dunn, Puritans and Yankees, 26.
the independent Congregationalist churches they established, but also in secular matters, especially with regard to the law. It was assumed, and in some cases actually written into the colonial charters, that the legal structure of the colonies would closely resemble that of England. No one came to America to escape the common law or other aspects of English practice, widely believed then as later to be of singular genius. But in the New World, "conscientious repudiation and modification" of large parts of English law began. Additions were drawn from the Bible, with large sections of the Mosaic code being put into practice in order to insure saintliness. But other additions were also made, based upon the needs of the settlements at any given time.¹ Had the Puritans remained in England, even in closely-knit communities, there could have been no thought given to the idea of modifying their legal structure. With their removal to New England, however, modifications became not only possible but even necessary.

There was undoubtedly a firm emotional and psychological basis for such actions of independence: being in New England, quite simply, felt different from being in Old England. The first generation of colonists had all been born and had lived in England for a considerable time, and could not avoid noticing the differences

¹George L. Haskins, Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts (New York, 1960), 189.
between the two places. The most obvious fact of their settling in America was that they had had to cross a vast ocean, a "Ditch" which permanently separated them from their homeland.\(^1\) This isolation led them to feel both attraction and rejection for England: they still loved England and thought of themselves as Englishmen, but the home government was so hostile toward them that they could not give it their unfailing support. In the face of such ambiguous feelings about the place from which they had come, they had no choice but to put their first confidence in the place where they were. This self-confidence inclined them toward autonomy and independence.\(^2\)

The major threat to this autonomy in the first decade of the colonies' existence, the 1630s, was that a governor might be appointed by Charles I and sent over to govern New England according to the king's wishes. The threat of this was real enough, for the king seemed bent upon strict enforcement of the ecclesiastical laws in the foreign plantations as much as at home. The New Englanders' fear was justifiable, for they had left England to escape the harassment of Archbishop Laud and did not relish the prospect of being hounded by him even in the New World. It

\(^1\)Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness* (New York, 1969), 35.

was on the basis of these threats and fears that the colonists prepared themselves to resist a general governor loyal to the king, if one were sent.¹

The question of what the colonists would do if a royal governor-general arrived was seriously considered by New England's political leadership, especially by Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay. The overwhelming consensus among the magistrates was, as Winthrop reported, that resistance should be offered at all costs. In 1635, when the issue was first seriously raised, an assembly of ministers agreed that "if a general governor were sent, we ought not to accept him, but defend our lawful possessions, (if we are able;) otherwise to avoid or protract."² As late as April 1638, a day of fast was kept in all the churches of Massachusetts Bay, "seeking the Lord to prevent evil" by not allowing a governor to be sent.³ The determination to resist such an imposition of English authority was so strong that in the same month, Rev. John Davenport and a company of his followers left Boston to found a colony on the frontier at New Haven, for the

¹Joseph S. Clark, A Historical Sketch of the Congregational Churches in Massachusetts (Boston, 1858), 27.
²Winthrop's Journal, I, 145; entry of January 19, 1634/35.
³Ibid., I, 269; entry of April 12, 1638.
express purpose of removing themselves as far as possible from the reach of any potential general governor.¹

In Massachusetts Bay the basis of the resistance to an assertion of royal authority was to be the colony's charter. Winthrop and his associates had managed a considerable coup in bringing the charter of the Bay Company to the New World with them, an action which put control of the colony's government into the hands of the colonists themselves and took their patent well out of the reach of the king's lawyers. They were resolved to resist anything, especially a Crown-appointed governor, which would undermine the authority given them by their charter. Open resistance was declared to be sanctioned by the charter, with Winthrop declaring that "it is lawful to resist any authority, which was to overthrow the lawful authority of the king's grant."²

If the colony were to base its independence on its charter, it had to resist any attempt in England to change or repeal that charter. A serious effort was made to do just that late in the 1630s, and Massachusetts worked deliberately to prevent it. A demand for returning the charter to England for review and revision was made in the summer of 1638, but was refused in a letter from

¹Calder, New Haven Colony, 206.
²Winthrop's Journal, I, 229; entry of August 3, 1637.
Governor Winthrop on the grounds that, if he obeyed, "many bad minds, yea, and some weak ones, among ourselves, would think it lawful, if not necessary, to accept a general governor," an eventuality he wanted specifically to avoid. A second demand for it was made early in 1639. This time the colony made no reply at all and decided instead simply to ignore the demand, hoping that those pressing the affair in England would be hoodwinked into believing that the letter of demand had never been delivered in the colony. This was a risky, not to say devious, course of action, but it was one whereby these New Englanders hoped to preserve their independence. It was, in itself, a sign of that independence, for the colonists would never have dared to ignore the royal authority blithely had they not been in their own society in their own land. Fortunately for them, the growing domestic crises in England in 1639 and 1640 diverted the attention of the government of the king, and English interference in New England was for the time being averted. But it had been amply proven that the colonists would fiercely resist any effort to tamper with or destroy their autonomy.

Massachusetts' concern with maintaining its autonomy was not

1Winthrop's Journal, I, 274-275; entry of September 1638.
2Ibid., I, 300-301; entry of May 6, 1639.
manifested only in such major issues as the defense of their charter. It extended even to the question of enlisting aid in England to deal with particularly colonial problems. In 1635, when the colonists were on the verge of becoming embroiled in boundary disputes with the French settlers of Maine and the Dutch settlers of the New Netherlands, Edward Winslow, the former governor of Plymouth then serving as a colonial agent in London, petitioned the Privy Council for a special warrant to deal with the situation and prevent French and Dutch incursions into English territory. John Winthrop remarked that such an action was taken by "ill advice." He feared that "such precedents might endanger our liberty, that we should do nothing hereafter but by commission out of England." He was joined in this opinion by Rev. Hugh Peter of Salem, who had never viewed New England as a colony, but rather as an autonomous commonwealth.  

In Massachusetts, certain specific actions of independence followed the theories propounded by the political leadership. In 1640, money was so scarce in the colony that the General Court made certain kinds of grain legal tender, setting a precedent for

---

1 Winthrop's Journal, I, 164; entry of October 15, 1635.
2 Stearns, Strenuous Puritan, 153.
the establishment of an independent coinage in 1652.¹ There was no justification for either action in the colony's charter, and in both cases the Court was clearly overstepping the bounds of its authority. Steps were also taken by the colony to provide for its own shipping rather than continuing to rely on English ships exclusively.² These were unquestionably acts of sovereignty, acts which were founded on a view of Massachusetts not as a dependent colony but rather as a self-reliant government.³

The other New England colonies joined Massachusetts in adopting this posture of autonomy. The settlers of Connecticut seem to have been resolved to ignore the government of England as much as possible. It was by design that the Fundamental Orders of 1638, Connecticut's constitution, made no reference whatever to Charles I, even omitting the usual formula for reserving to him a percentage of all gold and silver found within the colony.⁴ No official recognition was ever given the king, either in

²Winthrop's Journal, II, 23; entry of February 2, 1640/41.
Connecticut or in the younger colony of New Haven. No actual declaration of independence was ever made, nor did one have to be: these colonists knew, as one historian put it, that "Charles I was too far away from Connecticut and too troubled with his own affairs" to interfere with the colony's independence of thought and action. 

The oaths which the freemen of Connecticut and New Haven took demonstrate how independent-minded those colonists were. The wording of them was almost exactly identical. The freemen acknowledged themselves to be subject only to the jurisdiction of the colony in which they resided and swore to be faithful only to that government. There was no open repudiation of the authority of England, but rather simply a failure to recognize that any such authority ever existed. Both oaths remained in force throughout the period of the civil wars and interregnum. Even when the friendly government of Cromwell controlled England, the freemen of Connecticut and New Haven still acknowledged only their own governments, implicitly denying any constitutional dependence whatever on England.

---

2 Jones, *Congregational Commonwealth*, 80.
Colonies such as Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Haven had, prior to the outbreak of the civil wars, a habit of pursuing an independent course. Other New England colonies found in the wars the chance to pursue such a course for the first time. The settlements in Maine at Piscataqua, Agamenticus (later York), and Wells were still young and small in the 1640s and had to spend most of their time fighting the control of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who claimed proprietorship over the entire region. Gorges died in 1647, however, and when his death was followed two years later by that of Charles I, the settlers of Maine asserted control over their own affairs. Without waiting for action on the part of anyone in England, the inhabitants "with one Free and unanimous Consent" bound themselves together into a government "to see these parts of the Country and province regulated according to such laws as formerly have been exercised and such other as may be thought meet."\footnote{Province and Court Records of Maine, I (Portland, 1928), 133.} In the face of the political confusion of the mother country, the people of Maine took control of their own government independent of any guidance or authority from England.

In Plymouth the same independent course was taken in 1649. Just after the news of the execution of Charles I arrived, the
General Court there concluded that "whereas things are much unsettled in our native country in regard of the affairs of state, whereby the Court cannot so clearly proceed in election as formerly," all officers of the colony would remain in office for another year, "unless some special intelligent or order come over which shall at any time within the year aforesaid occasion the calling the body of freemen together for a new election."\(^1\) In one sense this action is another manifestation of Plymouth's caution in responding to the civil wars: the Pilgrims of Plymouth, not knowing what forces might have the upper hand in England as they acted, decided that the safest course would be to do as little as possible. In another sense, however, this action is highly unusual: they had no specific legal authority to take such a step, but the safety of their people and government seemed to demand this as a temporary expedient. They made their decision with their own best interests in mind without consulting any authority in England. A decision made in that manner was not the decision of a dependent colony, but rather of an independent commonwealth.

The desire to keep the colonies independent of the influence and control of the mother country remained steady in the 1640s.

\(^1\)General Court session of June 6, 1649; *Plymouth Records*, II, 139.
and 1650s when the English government became more favorable toward the Puritans. Even as the Puritan party triumphed over the king and established a new government, the New Englanders still wanted no interference from abroad. Even though the Long Parliament was more friendly toward them, they still feared subjecting themselves to its jurisdiction. John Winthrop and his fellow magistrates were concerned that "if we should put ourselves under the protection of the parliament, we must then be subject to all such laws as they should make, or at least such as they might impose upon us; in which course though they should intend our good, yet it might prove very prejudicial to us."\(^1\)

These New Englanders shrewdly deemed it too great a risk to establish a precedent of relying on England, even a favorably disposed England. The precedent was carefully avoided and from 1643, when the various colonies joined together in a loose confederation, the independence of the region was carefully nurtured.\(^2\)

The subject of the relationship between the colonies and the mother country was one which often occupied the New England Puritans' thinking during the first three decades of their set-

\(^1\) Winthrop's Journal, II, 24; entry of February 2, 1640/41.

tlements; various discussion of it are noted in the diary kept by Governor Winthrop, who gave the definitive statement of the colonists' position of independence. The question was most clearly raised when Dr. Robert Child and other "unchurched" residents of the Bay colony signed a petition to Parliament protest ing the restriction of the franchise to church members only. Claiming that they were being thus "deprived of all power and interest in civil affairs, and were subjected to an arbitrary government," Child and his associates asked Parliament to over-rule this Massachusetts law. At an assembly of the colony's religious and lay leaders in November 1646, called to deal with this situation, the topic of consideration was "in what relation we stood to the state of England; ... then what subjection we owed to that state." After the magistrates and ministers had spoken, the common opinion, formulated by Winthrop, was "that though we owed allegiance and subjection to them [i.e., Parliament], as we have always professed, ... yet by our charter we had absolute power of government; for thereby we have power to make laws, ... and rule the people absolutely, which word ... implies a self-sufficiency."¹ Since the colony's authority was absolute and self-sufficient, Child had no right to appeal

¹Winthrop's Journal, II, 289-290; entry of November 4, 1646.
to any other jurisdiction, even the Parliament of England. For
the magistrates, the Puritan colonies could stand constitutionally on their own. Any interference from England was not
only unwanted, it was also considered unnecessary and improper.

There were two main reasons that the New Englanders could
and did adopt such a policy of establishing their own "self-
sufficiency." The first was that control over colonial affairs
exerted from England could never be particularly rigorous. Not
only was the distance and time of travel between England and
America a significant hurdle, but the upheaval in the mother
country attracted all attention to itself, diverting attention
from all other topics. The pressure of domestic English events
was admitted by Cromwell himself to be the reason for his deferring
action on colonial affairs. In 1655, Cromwell wrote to Rhode
Island after the colony had laid certain matters before him,
saying: "By reason of the other great and weighty affairs of
this Commonwealth, we have been necessitated to defer the con-
sideration of them [i.e., Rhode Island's requests] to a further
opportunity; for the mean time we were willing to let you know,
that you are to proceed in your government according to the tenor
of your Charter formerly granted on that behalf, taking care of
the peace and safety of those plantations."¹

¹Letter of Cromwell to Rhode Island, March 29, 1655; Rhode
Island Records, I, 316-317.
This is an extremely important letter because it is so revealing of the outlook of the Lord Protector, an outlook which had been shared by Charles I. It gives formal expression to the pressures which the leaders of the English government at home felt in the two decades of the civil wars and interregnum. The problems of the British Isles themselves were too great to allow much time for consideration of American problems. The "great and weighty affairs of this Commonwealth" demanded all the attention of the home government, with colonial affairs a distinctly secondary priority. Because of this situation Cromwell authorized the colony to deal with its own problems as best it could, to function on its own, to be, in other words, independent for as long as his own distractions continued. He promised to turn to colonial affairs as soon as he could. "As for the things which are before us, they shall as soon as the other occasions will permit, receive a just and fitting determination."¹ But in the meanwhile, the independent, autonomous functioning of the colonial governments was given the full sanction of the Lord Protector of England. Needless to say, he seldom found time to deal with the problems of New England as he had promised, thus leaving the colonies' course of action free.

¹Cromwell to Rhode Island, March 29, 1655; Rhode Island Records, I, 317.
The second factor which encouraged New England's independence was the sheer, inescapable force of geography. The colonies were simply too far away, in distance and in time, from the mother country for the latter to hold them in complete dependence. In the midst of the 1646 debate, sparked by Dr. Robert Child, over whether appeals from the colonies to Parliament were permissible, the Massachusetts General Court declared that it "would be destructive of all government . . . if it should be the liberty of delinquents to evade the sentence of justice, and force us, by appeals, to follow them into England."\(^1\) The colonists were defending their right to dispense justice within their own borders as they saw fit, basing this right to exclude appeals on "the vast distance between England and these parts."\(^2\) The Puritan Commissioners for Foreign Plantations, headed by the Earl of Warwick, agreed with Massachusetts, stating that it would be best "to leave you with all that freedom and latitude that may, in any respect, be duly claimed by you; knowing that the limiting of you in that kind may be very prejudicial (if not destructive) to the government and public peace of the colony."\(^3\)

---

\(^1\) Address to the Earl of Warwick, November 4, 1646; Mass. Records, III, 97.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Letter of the Commissioners for Foreign Plantations, May 25, 1647; Winthrop's Journal, II, 337.
The New Englanders based their independence on geography, and Parliament agreed in granting them whatever "freedom and latitude" they needed. These were the conditions which led to New England's autonomy, an autonomy which allowed the Puritans on either side of the Atlantic to pursue very different courses in both church (the rise of toleration in England as opposed to the continuation of enforced orthodoxy in New England) and state (the continuation of legal modifications in the colonies).¹

The independent nature of the Puritan New Englanders' outlook is apparent in all their writings on the subject of their relationship to England. This independent nature was long ago noted by historians and is generally agreed upon now.² The point has been well established that the New England colonists wanted to be free from control by the English government.

This attitude bears very important consequences for the understanding of New England's reaction to the civil wars in England. Given this independent outlook, the consistent refusal


of the Puritans of the New World actually to become involved in the conflicts and struggles of the Puritans of the Old World is more understandable. The New Englanders wanted no interference from England. They wanted to have charge of their own affairs. They were centering their entire effort on the internal problems of the colonies, which were certainly many: keeping public peace, protecting themselves from the Indians, attempting to make the colonies an economic success, maintaining religious orthodoxy, to name only a few. Their disapproval of English interference shows their desire to concentrate on these problems themselves. And just as they wanted England to have little to do with them, they would have little to do with England. Independence from England meant American noninvolvement in England as much as it meant English noninvolvement in America. In short, they wanted a very real and practical kind of autonomy. When viewed in this context, their lack of logistical participation in events in England is entirely logical, even in spite of the strong sympathies they had for the Puritan cause. The ambivalence that characterized New England's thinking about events at home between 1640 and 1660 is resolved when it is realized that New Englanders desired a separate, autonomous station for themselves.
IV. REFUGE

The independent nature they possessed is only half of the explanation of the reaction of the New England Puritans to the English civil wars. Far more important in understanding the continuous noninvolvement in the face of great interest is the view which the New Englanders had of themselves and of their new homes in the New World. They had been dwelling in America for only a little more than a decade, and yet they had a very definite idea about their new country and the advantages it afforded them. The central feature of this idea was the belief that New England was a place of refuge, a hiding place given to them by God wherein they could be protected from the troubles disturbing England. They remained uninvolved in the civil wars precisely because they had come to New England to avoid participation in them and to live in peace instead. As Puritans, they could still express moral support for their fellow Puritans. But as settlers of New England, they wanted nothing to do with the actual conflicts themselves.

The very idea of migrating from their homes to a new land, practically unknown and certainly lacking the comforts and consolations of England, implies that these Puritans wanted, in a sense, to escape from the British Isles. No matter how heavily the advantages they expected to gain from the migration may have weighed with them, a very large factor in their decision to go
to America was the desire to get away from England.\(^1\) The "spiritual and mental isolation" from England they felt in the New World was a condition which they embraced.\(^2\) They wanted this kind of isolation to continue because they had purposely, says historian Peter Carroll, "sailed not only to New England, but also away from Old England."\(^3\)

The Puritans' intention to escape from their homeland was one of the causes that originally impelled them to make the difficult ocean crossing. To a certain extent, they foresaw the coming of turmoil in England. As early as 1619, the future settlers of Plymouth were resolved upon acting "according to the divine proverb, that a wise man seeth the plague when it cometh, and hideth himself . . . [in] some place of better advantage and less danger, if any such could be found."\(^4\) This escape from England was not something to be taken lightly. It was not taken "out of any newfangledness or any other such like


\(^3\) Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, 16.

giddy humor by which men are oftentimes transported to their great hurt and danger, but for weighty and solid reasons. The Puritans perceived conditions in England to be very serious, and they were extremely earnest in their desire to get away from them.

There were similar motives behind the colonization of Massachusetts Bay. John Winthrop, the leader of that effort, feared the trouble that was soon to descend upon England. "I am veryly perswaded," he wrote to his wife from London in 1629, "God will bringe some heavye Affliction upon this lande, and that speedylye." In the face of such a possibility, Puritans like Winthrop were anxious to get out of reach of the danger: "If the Lord seeth it wilbe good for us, he will provide a shelter and a hiding place for us." Winthrop and his fellow colonists were soon to come to look upon New England as that hiding place.

There was a strong sense among these men that God was looking after them by giving them this shelter to which they could remove and remain in peace. The colony was a singular gift from God to them. "All other Churches of Europe are brought to desolation," said Winthrop in a list of "Arguments for the Plantation of New England," drawn up in 1629, "and it cannot be, but the like Judgment

1Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 23.
2John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, May 15, 1629; Winthrop Papers, II, 91.
is comminge upon us; and who knows, but that God hathe provided this place, to be a refuge for manye, whom he meanes to save out of the general destruction."¹ Hard times were surely coming for England and its people, but God would not subject his chosen ones to the turmoil, so He gave them a colony in which to be safe from the "general destruction." God was ready to unleash His wrath on the England of Charles Stuart and William Laud, but His true children would be saved. A refuge was to be built in which the Puritans could be freed from their fears about the future.²

This view of New England as a "hidinge place" was the keynote of the colonizing ventures of New England. Rev. John Cotton, who would in a few years make the transatlantic journey himself, preached the farewell sermon to Winthrop and his party at their embarkation for Massachusetts Bay in March 1630. Cotton chose for this sermon a text from Samuel: "I will provide a place for my people Israel; I will plant them there and they shall dwell in that place and never be disturbed again." He repeatedly emphasized that all new settlements were provided by God for His people, New England being no exception, and he observed that the

²Bridenbaugh, Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 436-437.
"people of God's plantation shall enjoy their own place with safety and peace." Such a conclusion was evident from the biblical passage, he declared. "They shall dwell in their own place; But how? Peaceably, they shall not be moved any more. Then they shall dwell safely, then they shall live in peace."¹ This was surely welcome news to the Puritans about to set out for the great wilderness, especially because Cotton emphasized this as "God's Promise."

God was giving the Puritans the chance to settle in New England so they would be safe from the evils which they could not escape if they remained in their old homes. Such evils were unquestionably coming. When Rev. Thomas Hooker preached a farewell sermon to a 1633 party of emigrants of which he himself was a member, he entitled it "The Danger of Desertion." He was not concerned with the desertion of Englishmen from their homeland, but rather with God's desertion of England, leaving it to be destroyed by its own ungodly people.² Because of the inevitability of destruction in such an eventuality, God was giving New England to the Puritans so that "the sons of wickedness

¹ John Cotton, "God's Promise To His Plantations," Old South Leaflets, No. 53 (orig. publ. London, 1630), 11.
may not afflict you any more,"¹ "that our selves and posterity may be the better preserved from the Common corrupcions of this evill world."²

The flight from this latter-day Egypt to the new promised land was to be a success because God's providence would always be watching over the New Englanders. In encouragement of the migration one English Puritan had expansively declared: "For your full satisfaction, know this is the place where the Lord will create a new Heaven, and a new Earth in, new Churches, and a new Common-wealth together."³ The Puritans were sure that they were leaving the terrors of Old England and, if not totally certain of what their colonies would be like, they were at least hopeful that New England was a "potential paradise."⁴

The desire for escape continued to be a motive for migration to New England throughout the first decade of the colonies' existence. Richard Mather, the founder of the family which would

⁴Carroll, Puritanism and the Wilderness, 15.
have so great an influence on American intellectual life over the next century, came to New England in 1635 with this purpose in mind. After persecution by the episcopal authorities in England for his Puritan tendencies, Mather foresaw "a storm of calamities like to be hastened on the land, by the wrath of Heaven incensed." He wrote down elaborate logical arguments on whether or not he should remove to America, and after proving to his own satisfaction that "the remove from Old England to New, is to remove from a place where are signs of fearful Desolation, to a place where one may have well-grounded hope of Gods protection," he made the journey. Although Mather may have been unusual in the deliberateness of his decision-making (the argument with himself on whether or not to go to New England consumes eight printed pages), his desire to exchange the "fearful Desolation" for "Gods protection" was not unusual at all.

A year earlier than Mather, in 1634, Rev. Thomas Shepard decided to emigrate to New England for the same reasons. He noted in his autobiography that, like Thomas Hooker, he saw God


2Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana (Hartford, 1820), I, 405.

departing from England and felt sure he would "feel many miseries if I stayed behind." Shepard briefly thought that the nobler thing to do might be to remain in England and suffer for the Lord's sake, but he soon thought better of the matter. "Though my ends were mixed and I looked much to my own quiet," he frankly concluded, "yet the Lord let me see the glory of those liberties in New England." Like Mather he was happily exchanging persecutions for "liberties."

Other ministers followed the lead of Mather and Shepard for much the same reason. Samuel Whiting, a victim of many persecutions in England and a future settler of Lynn, Massachusetts, determined to leave England and found that New England "offered itself as the most hopeful and quiet, and indeed the only place that could be gone unto." He was driven across the Atlantic, away from the conflicts of England, to the "American stand." The Puritans came to New England in the 1630s because they feared and foresaw a time of great trial in England, and they wanted no part of it.

2Ibid., 56.
3Cotton Mather, Magnalia, I, 454.
Their worst fears and expectations were fulfilled when the struggle between the king and the Parliament broke out in the early 1640s. In opposing the return of any New Englanders to the mother country at that time, even to act as agents for the colonies, John Endecott told John Winthrop that he considered it "somewhat preposterous to goe from a place of safetie provided of God, to a place of danger." The outbreak of the civil wars was seen as the coming of God's just punishment which had so long been expected. Despite whatever sympathies the New Englanders might have for their old friends still in England, God's just judgment was being executed on that land while the colonists lived in peace. It was as preposterous to most New Englanders as it was to Endecott to abandon the refuge God had provided for just this purpose.

The disturbances of English life brought by the wars only made the Puritans of the colonies all the more thankful for the distance between them and England. "When I thinke of the trublesom times and manyfolde destractions that are in our native Countrye," Margaret Winthrop wrote to her son John, Jr., who was temporarily

1John Endecott to John Winthrop, February 1640/41; Winthrop Papers, IV, 315.

2Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, 100.
in London on business, "I thinke we doe not pryse our happynesse as we have case, that we should be in peace when so many troubles are in most places of the world."1 God had promised them a refuge in New England while He set about purging Old England of the evil men in it, and the Puritans were now finding that that was exactly what He had provided.

Governor Winthrop joined his wife in this opinion that the colony was, in fact, the place of safety all had hoped for. "All amounts to this summe," he wrote in mid-1643, at the height of the fighting in England, "the Lord hath brought us hither, . . . and hath here preserved us these many yeares from the displeasure of Princes, the envy and rage of Prelates, the malignant plots of Jesuits, the mutinous contentions of discontented persons."2 His feelings about what had happened to himself and his fellow settlers were evident: they had trusted in God to protect them from the destruction in their native land, and God had justified their trust by giving them a hiding place and preserving them in it.

Even when the fighting was over and the decision rendered in favor of the Puritans, the residents of New England still re-

---

1 Margaret Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., October 10, 1642; Winthrop Papers, IV, 357

2 John Winthrop to Richard Saltonstall, et al., July 1643; Hutchinson Papers, I, 146.
mained in their God-given refuge. The changed perspective of the end of the wars did not change the thankfulness for having been removed from them. If anything, the new perspective only gave them greater relief. In 1647, Samuel Symonds wrote to his father-in-law John Winthrop, referring to New England as "a hiding place for . . . people that stood for the truth," and expressing his thanks for having been in that place "while the nation was exercised unto bloud."¹ The worst of the struggle in England was over by then, but the recollection of all the "bloud" was still vivid, and the relief of New England was still very great.

These sentiments were officially expressed by the Massachusetts General Court two years earlier. The magistrates openly declared that they "came unto these parts of the world with desire to advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy his precious ordinances with peace." They thankfully noted that they had not been disappointed in this, but had found "safety, warmth, and refreshing" in their new home.² The Court's declaration made it plain that the desire for "safety" had been one of

¹Samuel Symonds to John Winthrop, January 6, 1646/47; Winthrop Papers, V, 126.

²"A Declaration of former Passages and Proceedings betwixt the English and the Narrowgansetts, . . . wherein the Grounds and Justice of the ensuing Warre are opened and cleared," August 11, 1645; Hutchinson Papers, I, 155.
the causes of the great Puritan migration of the 1630s. This cause was not concealed, but publicly and officially acknowledged.

The exemption of the colonies from the tumult of the civil wars was also noted in England, and many Englishmen longed for a similar exemption, as has already been observed. A prime example of this point of view was Hugh Peter. The story of Peter's life is a very interesting one and has been told in detail by historian Raymond Stearns. Peter seems to have been somewhat reluctant to come to New England in the first place in 1635, hoping to establish a successful Puritan settlement in Holland.¹ Even though he rose to prominence in America at Salem, his mind was apparently on English affairs most of the time, and he enthusiastically accepted the request that he return to his homeland in 1641 as a colonial agent, hoping that he would be able there to exert some influence in "the work of the reformation."² The turmoil of England dampened his enthusiasm, however, so that in 1647 he wrote to Governor Winthrop, telling him that "you all doe well to love new Engl: it will bee a precious Corner still.³

1Stearns, Strenuous Puritan, 84-85.
2Ibid., 172.
³Hugh Peter to John Winthrop, April 1647; Winthrop Papers, V, 146.
The New Englanders did not have to be told that they were in a "precious Corner." By and large they had gone there originally because that was what it seemed and that was what they wanted. They had gone there to avoid involvement and to enjoy what John Winthrop, Jr., called "stupendous dispensations."\(^1\)

This view that the New Englanders had of themselves and their new homes is very important in explaining their reactions to the English civil wars. Their desire for a sort of de facto political independence has already been observed. To this must now be added a sort of spiritual independence. They were in New England precisely because they wanted to escape from England, because they longed for a hiding place of safety, peace, and quiet, far removed from their troubled homeland. They had not only been attracted to New England, they had been repelled by Old England. They still maintained an interest in the upheaval in their mother country, but it was a detached interest. Their position was a deliberate, conscious combination of concern and lack of concern, with the emphasis always on their own personal noninvolvement.

CONCLUSION

The Puritans of the colonies of New England between 1640 and 1660 were, in a sense, passed over by history. If they had not migrated to North America but had stayed in their old homes in England, they would all have played some part in the civil wars there in those years. The results of that conflict might well have been quite different in that case. They had chosen instead, however, to establish themselves in the New World and to cut themselves off, at least physically, from the old.

And yet they still thought of themselves as Englishmen; in all their writings, they never refer to themselves as "Americans" or even "colonists." They still considered themselves as part of the English nation. That they should be interested in the political and religious turmoil of England is, therefore, hardly surprising. Whether the news was good or bad, they were always grateful to receive it, to learn what their friends and relatives were doing. Nor is it surprising that they should choose sides in the turmoil and hope for the success of one and the defeat of the other. They were men of strong beliefs and their sympathies could not be easily restricted or forgotten. Support for the Puritan, Parliamentary cause is at once the most basic and the most obvious reaction of the New England Puritans to the English civil wars.
New England's support, though genuine, was, however, passive. There was no large number of New Englanders anxious to return to England to give their sympathies an outlet in action on behalf of the side they preferred. For all their interest in the contest, they remained singularly uninterested in participating in it themselves. Their moral support for the Puritan cause is not diminished by the observation that they were singularly glad not to be involved.

This attitude might seem odd. One would perhaps expect, given their unabashed support for their Puritan brethren, that the New England Puritans would do everything they could to assist them in defeating the hated king and his bishops and even more in the constructive work of establishing a purer form of government for both the English church and state. But exactly the opposite is true: very little help for Old England was forthcoming from New England. This phenomenon has a dual explanation. First, the New Englanders had from the very foundation of their settlements been independent-minded, unwilling to have England interfere with them, and just as unwilling to interfere with England themselves. Second, and more significant, Puritans like the Winthrops and the Cottons and the Davenports had come to New England for the express purpose of removing themselves from active participation in the political and religious
life of Great Britain. They feared that bad times were coming to their native land, and they did not want to be there when they arrived. The migration to New England was, therefore, as much emigration as it was immigration. Once in America, however, the long, gradual process of change of these people from Englishmen to Americans began.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


Massachusetts Historical Society. Collections.


SECONDARY SOURCES


Clark, Joseph S. A Historical Sketch of the Congregational Churches in Massachusetts, From 1620 to 1858. Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1858.


James Michael O'Toole


In September 1972, the author entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate student and Library Apprentice for the Institute of Early American History and Culture.