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God's Controversy with New-England (1662, 1871)

Michael Wigglesworth

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MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH

God's Controversy with New-England.
Written in the time of the great drought
Anno 1662

MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH (1631-1705), Puritan minister, popular poet, and physician, was born in Yorkshire, England. His parents moved to the Bay in 1638 and eventually settled in New Haven, Connecticut. Here, the famous teacher Ezekiel Cheever held sway over the progress of his young charges, preparing Michael for his entrance exam at Harvard College. He received his B. A. in 1651 and remained as tutor until 1654. Shortly thereafter he was invited to minister to the Malden congregation, was ordained in 1656, and served his parishioners for nearly fifty years. His lifelong struggle with ill health may account for his practice of medicine—even though most frontier clergyman of the period ministered to both soul and body. He married three times, and the last of his eight children, Edward Wigglesworth, became the first Hollis Professor at Harvard.

Today, Michael Wigglesworth is best remembered as a Puritan poet and diarist. *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653-1657* (1970) dates back to his years as tutor at Harvard. It is a psychological case study of the Puritan conscience at work. His best-known work *The Day of Doom* (1662) became a colonial bestseller and earned him the nickname “Mr. Doomsday.” A poem of 224 stanzas in ballad meter on the Second Coming and Judgment Day attracted so many readers that it sold more than eighteen hundred copies in the first year, an astounding achievement given the low population density of New England. His *Meat out of the Eater or Meditations Concerning the Necessity, End, and Usefulness of Afflictions Unto Gods Children* (1669) consists of a series of about twenty meditations on certain paradoxes in theology: the suffering of the saints and the prosperity of the wicked, strength out of weakness, light out of darkness, the fortunate fall, and so on.

Reprinted below is Wigglesworth's manuscript poem *God's Controversy with New-England* (1871)—courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Composed in 1662 on the occasion of a terrible drought, the poem is a versified jeremiad bewailing the backsliding of the rising generation. Thus, God uses nature's drought as a secondary cause to punish the exsiccation of the spirit among the offspring of New England's patriarchs, whose children were either unable (or unwilling) to accept the Half-Way Covenant (1662) governing church admission. More than that, *God's Controversy* encapsulates the Federal Covenant between God and Saints, whose chastisement, paradoxically, is a sign of God's loving kindness for the whole colony.

Reiner Smolinski
Georgia State University

GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH NEW-ENGLAND.

Written in the time of the great drought Anno 1662.

BY A LOVER OF NEW-ENGLAND'S PROSPERITY

ISAIAH 5. 4.—What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wilde grapes?

THE AUTHORS REQUEST UNTO THE READER.

Good christian Read^r judge me not
As too censorious,
For pointing at those faults of thine
Which are notorious.
For if those faults be none of thine 5
I do not thee accuse:
But if they be, to hear thy faults
Why shouldest thou refuse.

I blame not thee to spare my self:
But first at home begin, 10
And judge my self, before that I
Reprove anothers sin.
Nor is it I that thee reprove
Let God himself be heard
Whose awfull providence's voice 15
No man may disregard.

Quod Deus omnipotens regali voce minatur,
Quod tibi proclamant uno simul ore prophetæ
Quodq' ego cum lachrymis testor de numinis irâ,
Tu leve cōmentū ne ducas, Lector Amice. 20

NEW-ENGLAND PLANTED, PROSPERED, DECLINING, THREATNED,
PUNISHED.

Beyond the great Atlantick flood
There is a region vast,
A country where no English foot
In former ages past :
A waste and howling wilderness, 25
Where none inhabited
But hellish fiends, and brutish men
That Devils worshiped.

This region was in darkness plac't
 Far off from heavens light, 30
 Amidst the shaddows of grim death
 And of eternal night.
 For there the Sun of righteousness
 Had never made to shine
 The light of his sweet countenance, 35
 And grace which is divine:

Until the time drew nigh wherein
 The glorious Lord of hostes
 Was pleas'd to lead his armies forth
 Into those forrein coastes. 40
 At whose approach the darkness sad
 Soon vanished away,
 And all the shaddows of the night
 Were turned to lightsome day.

The dark and dismal western woods 45
 (The Devils den whilere)
 Beheld such glorious Gospel-shine,
 As none beheld more cleare.
 Were sathan had his scepter sway'd
 For many generations, 50
 The King of Kings set up his throne
 To rule amongst the nations.

The stubborn he in pieces brake,
 Like vessels made of clay:
 And those that sought his peoples hurt 55
 He turned to decay.
 Those curst Amalekites, that first
 Lift up their hand on high
 To fight against Gods Israel,
 Were ruin'd fearfully. 60

Thy terrours on the Heathen folk,
 O Great Jehovah, fell:
 The fame of thy great acts, O Lord,
 Did all the nations quell.
 Some hid themselves for fear of thee 65
 In forrests wide & great:
 Some to thy people crouching came,
 For favour to entreat.

Some were desirous to be taught
 The knowledge of thy wayes, 70
 And being taught, did soon accord
 Therein to spend their dayes.
 Thus were the fierce and barbarous
 Brought to civility,
 And those that liv'd like beasts (or worse) 75
 To live religiously.

O happiest of dayes wherein
 The blind received sight,
 And those that had no eyes before
 Were made to see the light! 80
 The wilderness hereat rejoyc't,
 The woods for joy did sing,
 The vallys & the little hills
 Thy praises ecchoing.

Here was the hiding, which thou, 85
 Jehovah, didst provide
 For thy redeemed ones, and where
 Thou didst thy jewels hide
 In per'lous times, and saddest dayes
 Of sack-cloth and of blood, 90
 When th' overflowing scourge did pass
 Through Europe, like a flood.

While almost all the world beside
 Lay weltering in their gore:
 We, only we, enjoyd such peace 95
 As none enjoyd before.
 No forrein foeman did us fray,
 Nor threat'ned us with warrs:
 We had no enemyes at home,
 Nor no domestick jarrs. 100

The Lord had made (such was his grace)
 For us a Covenant
 Both with the men, and with the beasts,
 That in this desart haunt:
 So that through places wilde and waste 105
 A single man, disarm'd,
 Might journey many hundred miles,
 And not at all be harm'd.

Amidst the solitary woods
 Poor travellers might sleep 110
 As free from danger as at home,
 Though no man watch did keep.
 Thus were we priviledg'd with peace,
 Beyond what others were.
 Truth, Mercy, Peace, with Righteousness, 115
 Took up their dwelling here.

Our Governour was of our selves,
 And all his Bretheren,
 For wisdom and true piety,
 Select, & chosen men. 120
 Who, Ruling in the fear of God,
 The righteous cause maintained,
 And all injurious violence,
 And wickedness, restrained.

Our temp'rall blessings did abound: 125
 But spirituall good things
 Much more abounded, to the praise
 Of that great King of Kings.
 Gods throne was here set up; here was
 His tabernacle pight: 130
 This was the place, and these the folk
 In whom he took delight.

Our morning starrs shone all day long:
 Their beams gave forth such light,
 As did the noon-day sun abash, 135
 And's glory dazle quite.
 Our day continued many yeers,
 And had no night at all:
 Yea many thought the light would last,
 And be perpetuall. 140

Such, O New-England, was thy first,
 Such was thy best estate:
 But, Loe! a strange and suddain change
 My courage did amate.
 The brightest of our morning starrs 145
 Did wholly disappeare:
 And those that tarried behind
 With sack-cloth covered were.

Moreover, I beheld & saw
 Our welkin overkest, 150
 And dismal clouds for sun-shine late
 O'respread from East to West.
 The air became tempestuous;
 The wilderness gan quake:
 And from above with awfull voice 155
 Th' Almighty thundring spake.

Are these the men that erst at my command
 Forsook their ancient seats and native soile,
 To follow me into a desart land,
 Contemning all the travell and the toile, 160
 Whose love was such to purest ordinances
 As made them set at nought their fair inheritances?

Are these the men that prized libertee
 To walk with God according to their light,
 To be as good as he would have them bee, 165
 To serve and worship him with all their might,
 Before the pleasures which a fruitfull field,
 And country flowing-full of all good things, could yield?

Are these the folk whom from the brittish Iles,
 Through the stern billows of the watry main, 170
 I safely led so many thousand miles,
 As if their journey had been through a plain?
 Whom having from all enemies protected,
 And through so many deaths and dangers well directed,

I brought and planted on the Western-shore, 175
 Where nought but bruits and salvage wights did swarm
 (Untaught, untrain'd, untam'd by Vertue's lore)
 That sought their blood, yet could do them no harm?
 My fury's flaile them thresht, my fatall broom
 Did sweep them hence, to make my people Elbow-room. 180

Are these the men whose gates with peace I crown'd,
 To whom for bulwarks I Salvation gave,
 Whilst all things else with rattling tumults sound,
 And mortall frayes send thousands to the grave?
 Whilst their own brethren bloody hands embrewed 185
 In brothers blood, and Fields with carcasses bestrewed?

Is this the people blest with bounteous store,
 By land and sea full richly clad and fed,
 Whom plenty's self stands waiting still before,
 And powreth out their cups well tempered? 190
 For whose dear sake an howling wildernes
 I lately turned into a fruitfull paradeis?

Are these the people in whose hemisphere
 Such bright-beam'd, glist-ring, sun-like starrs I placed,
 As by their influence did all things cheere, 195
 As by their light blind ignorance defaced,
 As errorrs into lurking holes did fray,
 As turn'd the late dark night into a lightsome day?

Are these the folk to whom I milked out
 And sweetnes stream'd from Consolations brest; 200
 Whose soules I fed and strengthened throughout
 With finest spirituall food most finely drest?
 On whom I rained living bread from Heaven,
 Withouten Errorr's bane, or Superstition's leaven?

With whom I made a Covenant of peace, 205
 And unto whom I did most firmly plight
 My faithfulness, If whilst I live I cease
 To be their Guide, their God, their full delight;
 Since them with cords of love to me I drew,
 Enwrapping in my grace such as should then ensew. 210

Are these the men, that now mine eyes behold,
 Concerning whom I thought, and whilome spake,
 First Heaven shall away together scrold,
 Ere they my lawes and righteous wayes forsake,
 Or that they slack to runn their heavenly race? 215
 Are these the same? or are some others come in place?

If these be they, how is it that I find
 In stead of holyness Carnality,
 In stead of heavenly frames an Earthly mind,
 For burning zeal luke-warm Indifferency, 220
 For flaming Love, key-cold Dead-heartedness,
 For temperance (in meat, and drinke, and cloaths) excess?

Whence cometh it, that Pride, and Luxerie
 Debate, Deceit, Contention and Strife,
 False-dealing, Covetousness, Hypocrisie 225

(With such like Crimes) amongst them are so rife,
 That one of them doth over-reach another?
 And that an honest man can hardly trust his Brother?

How is it, that Security, and Sloth,
 Amongst the best are Common to be found? 230
 That grosser sinns, in stead of Graces growth,
 Amongst the many more and more abound?
 I hate dissembling shews of Holiness.
 Or practise as you talk, or never more profess.

Judge not, vain world, that all are hypocrites 235
 That do profess more holiness then thou:
 All foster not dissembling, guilefull sprites,
 Nor love their lusts, though very many do.
 Some sin through want of care and constant watch,
 Some with the sick converse, till they the sickness catch. 240

Some, that maintain a reall root of grace,
 Are overgrown with many noysome weeds,
 Whose heart, that those no longer may take place,
 The benefit of due correction needs.
 And such as these however gone astray 245
 I shall by stripes reduce into a better way.

Moreover some there be that still retain
 Their ancient vigour and sincerity;
 Whom both their own, and others sins, constrain
 To sigh, and mourn, and weep, and wail, and cry: 250
 And for their sakes I have forborn to powre
 My wrath upon Revolters to this present houre.

To praying Saints I always have respect,
 And tender love, and pittifull regard:
 Nor will I now in any wise neglect 255
 Their love and faithfull service to reward;
 Although I deal with others for their folly,
 And turn their mirth to tears that have been too too jolly.

For thinke not, O Backsliders, in your heart,
 That I shall still your evill manners beare: 260
 Your sinns me press as sheaves do load a cart;
 And therefore I will plague you for this geare.
 Except you seriously, and soon, repent,
 Ile not delay your pain and heavy punishment.

And who be those themselves that yonder shew? 265
 The seed of such as name my dreadfull Name!
 On whom whilere compassions skirt I threw
 Whilest in their blood they were, to hide their shame!
 Whom my preventing love did neer me take!
 Whom for mine own I mark't, lest they should me forsake! 270

I look't that such as these to vertue's Lore
 (Though none but they) would have Enclin'd their ear:
 That they at least mine image should have bore,
 And sanctify'd my name with awfull fear.
 Let pagan's Bratts pursue their lusts, whose meed 275
 Is Death: For christians children are an holy seed.

But hear O Heavens! Let Earth amazed stand;
 Ye Mountains melt, and Hills come flowing down:
 Let horreur seize upon both Sea and Land;
 Let Natures self be cast into a stown. 280
 I children nourisht, nurtur'd and upheld:
 But they against a tender Father have rebell'd.

What could have been by me performed more?
 Or wherein fell I short of your desire?
 Had you but askt, I would have op't my store, 285
 And given what lawfull wishes could require.
 For all this bounteous cost I lookt to see
 Heaven-reaching-hearts, and thoughts, Meekness, Humility.

But lo, a sensuall Heart all void of grace,
 An Iron neck, a proud presumptuous Hand; 290
 A self-conceited, stiff, stout, stubborn Race,
 That fears no threats, submitts to no command:
 Self-will'd, perverse, such as can beare no yoke;
 A Generation even ripe for Vengeance stroke.

Such were that Carnall Brood of Israelites 295
 That Joshua and the Elders did ensue,
 Who growing like the cursed Cananites
 Upon themselves my heavy judgements drew.
 Such also was that fleshly Generation,
 Whom I o'rewhelm'd by waters deadly inundation. 300

They darker light, and lesser meanes misused;
 They had not such Examples them to warn:
 You clearer Rules, and Precepts, have abused;

And dreadfull moments of others harm.
 My gospels glorious light you do not prize: 305
 My Gospels endless, boundless grace you clean despize.

My painfull messengers you disrespect,
 Who toile and sweat and sweale themselves away,
 Yet nought at all with you can take effect,
 Who hurrie headlong to your own decay, 310
 In vain the Founder melts, and taketh pains:
 Bellows and Lead's consum'd, but still your dross remains.

What should I do with such a stiff-neck race?
 How shall I ease me of such Foes as they?
 What shall befall despizers of my Grace? 315
 I'le surely beare their Candle-stick away,
 And Lamps put out. Their glorious noon-day light
 I'le quickly turn into a dark Egyptian night.

Of have I charg'd you by my Ministers
 To gird your selves with sack cloth, and repent. 320
 Of have I warn'd you by my Messengers;
 That so you might my wrathfull ire prevent:
 But who among you hath this warning taken?
 Who hath his Crooked ways, and wicked works forsaken?

Yea many grow to more and more excess; 325
 More light and loose, more Carnall and prophane.
 The sins of Sodom, Pride, and Wantonness,
 Among the multitude spring up amain.
 Are these the fruits of pious Education,
 To run with greater speed and Courage to Damnation? 330

If here and there some two, or three, shall steere
 A wiser Course, then their Companions do,
 You make a mock of such; and scoff, and jeere
 Becaus they will not be so bad as you.
 Such is the Generation that succeeds 335
 The men, whose eyes have seen my great and awfull deeds.

Now therefore hearken and encline your ear,
 In judgement I will henceforth with you plead;
 And if by that you will not learn to fear,
 But still go on a sensuall life to lead: 340
 I'le strike at once an All-consuming stroke;
 Nor cries nor tears shall then my fierce intent revoke.

Thus ceast his Dreadful-threatning voice
 The High & lofty-One.
 The Heavens stood still Appal'd thereat; 345
 The Earth beneath did groane:
 Soon after I beheld and saw
 A mortall dart come flying:
 I lookt again, & quickly saw
 Some fainting, others dying. 350

The Heavens more began to lowre,
 The welkin Blacker grew :
 And all things seemed to forebode
 Sad changes to ensew.
 From that day forward hath the Lord 355
 Apparently contended
 With us in Anger, and in Wrath;
 But we have not amended.

Our healthfull dayes are at an end,
 And sicknesses come on 360
 From yeer to yeer, becaus our hearts
 Away from God are gone.
 New-England, where for many yeers
 You scarcely heard a cough,
 And where Physicians had no work, 365
 Now finds them work enough.

Now colds and coughs; Rhewms, and sore-throats,
 Do more and more abound:
 Now Agues sore & Feavers strong
 In every place are found. 370
 How many houses have we seen
 Last Autumn, and this spring,
 Wherein the healthful were too few
 To help the languishing.

One wave another followeth,
 And one disease begins 375
 Before another cease, becaus
 We turn not from our sins.
 We stopp our ear against reproof,
 And hearken not to God: 380
 God stops his ear against our prayer,
 And takes not off his rod.

Our fruitful seasons have been turnd
 Of late to barrenness,
 Sometimes through great & parching drought, 385
 Sometimes through rain's excess.
 Yea now the pastures & corn fields
 For want of rain do languish:
 The cattell mourn, and hearts of men
 Are fill'd with fear and anguish. 390

The clouds are often gathered,
 As if we should have rain:
 But for our great unworthiness
 Are scattered again.
 We pray & fast, & make fair shewes, 395
 As if we meant to turn:
 But whilest we turn not, God goes on
 Our fields & fruits to burn.

And burnt are all things in such sort,
 That nothing now appears, 400
 But what may wound our hearts with grief,
 And draw foorth floods of teares.
 All things a famine do presage
 In that extremity,
 As if both men, and also beasts, 405
 Should soon be done to dy.

This O New-England hast thou got
 By riot, and excess:
 This hast thou brought upon thy self
 By pride and wantonness. 410
 Thus must thy worldyness be whipt.
 They, that too much do crave,
 Provoke the Lord to take away
 Such blessings as they have.

We have been also threatened
 With worser things than these: 415
 And God can bring them on us still,
 To morrow if he please.
 For if his mercy be abus'd,
 Which holpe us at our need 420
 And mov'd his heart to pittie us,
 We shall be plagu'd indeed.

Beware, O sinful Land, beware;
 And do not think it strange
 That sorer judgements are at hand, 425
 Unless thou quickly change.
 Or God, or thou, must quickly change;
 Or else thou art undone:
 Wrath cannot cease, if sin remain,
 Where judgement is begun. 430

Ah dear New-England! dearest land to me;
 Which unto God hast hitherto been dear,
 And mayst be still more dear than formerlie,
 If to his voice thou wilt incline thine ear.

Consider wel & wisely what the rod, 435
 Wherewith thou art from yeer to yeer chastized,
 Instructeth thee. Repent, and turn to God,
 Who wil not have his nurture be despized.

Thou still hast in thee many praying saints,
 Of great account, and precious with the Lord, 440
 Who dayly powre out unto him their plaints,
 And strive to please him both in deed and word.

Cheer on, sweet souls, my heart is with you all,
 And shall be with you, maugre Sathan's might:
 And whereso'ere this body be a Thrall, 445
 Still in New-England shall be my delight.

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