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## The Wondrous Chain of Providence: Thomas Prince, the Puritan Past, and New England's Future, 1660-1736

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The Wondrous Chain of Providence: Thomas Prince, the Puritan Past, and  
New England's Future, 1660–1736

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Winter Springs, Florida

Bachelor of Arts, University of Central Florida, 2008

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

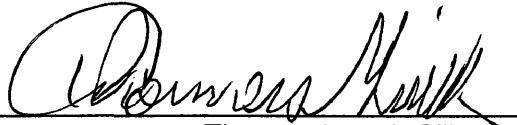
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The College of William and Mary  
May 2011

# APPROVAL PAGE

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

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Thomas Joseph Gillan

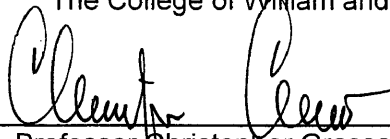
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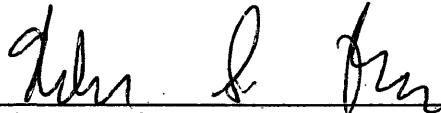
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## ABSTRACT PAGE

Thomas Prince (1689–1758), minister to Boston's Third (Old South) Church, was the leading exponent of a reading of the past that interpreted New England's history in light of an emerging narrative of Whig politics. By the eighteenth century, New England's identity had come to rest less on the purity of its churches—their doctrinal precision, their system of covenants, their Congregational church polity, and their public conversion testimonies—and more on New England's particular contribution to the history of Anglo-American Protestantism. A book collector, antiquarian, and historian, Prince is perhaps best known as the curator of the New England Library and author of *A Chronological History of New-England*. Housed in the steeple chamber of Boston's Old South meetinghouse, the New England Library represented one of the first concerted efforts to preserve the documentary record of New England's earliest years. The years between 1660 and 1736, the year in which Prince published his *Chronological History*—itself the record of Prince's herculean attempt to master New England's past—supplies the context of this thesis, which traces the various historical and intellectual currents that came to inform Prince's account of New England history. Prince's interpretation of New England's past was conditioned by a particular historical context and represented Prince's struggle to impose meaning and order on the past and present. However, Prince's *Chronological History*, which he never completed, remained a partial narrative whose ultimate meaning finally eluded the Puritan historian. If, for Prince, history constituted a single, unbroken "Line of Time," his perspective represented but one link in that continuous "Chain of Providence." Prince's life speaks to larger cultural issues within both New England and the broader Anglo-Protestant world, for although it remained bound by the religious-political establishment that it served and the context that produced it, the historical narrative that Prince helped to forge dominated the public discourse of New England and defined its place within the British Empire in the years between 1688 and 1736. By revealing the ways in which Prince marshaled history on behalf of New England, this thesis opens new lines of inquiry, allowing historians to reconsider New England's role in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world.

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## DEDICATION

To my closest friends,

I dedicate this, especially to Alexa, Angela, Anna, Brittany, Jessica, and Larissa.

“I am willing to distinguish *you* from the rest.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have accrued many debts in the process of writing this thesis. I would like to thank these in particular: Brett Rushforth and my fellow grad students in History 710, the research seminar in which I first conceived this project. Thanks to the Colonial Society of Massachusetts for organizing the Society's 2010 Graduate Student Forum at which I presented some of my initial ideas on Prince. Thanks belong especially to Bob Gross for his extensive and insightful comments. Thanks to Emily Curran, executive director of Old South Meeting House, for arranging a tour of Old South's steeple chamber, where Thomas Prince housed his New England Library. Thanks to the staff at both the Massachusetts Historical Society and Harvard's Houghton Library, where I perused Prince's manuscript journals. Thanks to Mike McGiffert, who during my first weeks in Williamsburg welcomed a fellow student of New England. Thanks to the staffs at Harbour Coffee, Williamsburg, and Bernie's Coffee and Tea Co., Waterford, who helped me balance concentration and distraction during the most intense days of research and writing. Special thanks to Maureen and Peter for their hospitality during my many trips to Boston. Thanks to my committee: Chandos M. Brown, Christopher Grasso, and Nicholas S. Popper. Thanks to my family, especially my parents, Tom and Nancy; my sister, Leah; and her husband, Kyle. Thanks finally to my closest friends, Alexa, Angela, Anna, Brittany, Jessica, and Larissa, to whom I dedicate this thesis. Your friendship has sustained me over these last few years and means the world to me.

## INTRODUCTION

Between the years 1660 and 1760, New Englanders witnessed a vast cultural transformation, one which forever altered New England's social landscape and its historical consciousness. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries New Englanders were at various times the objects of historical forces originating from across the Atlantic and the participants in historical events whose consequences reached far beyond New England's shores. If, as Phillip H. Round has demonstrated, even seventeenth-century New Englanders "were still very much part of an expanding cultural field whose center was London," their eighteenth-century descendants had been drawn even more tightly into the orbit of an expanding British empire.<sup>1</sup> In the years after 1660, British provincials became increasingly aware of the growing interdependence between the provinces and the metropolis. Even if, as Perry Miller once suggested, the New England Puritans, having "failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on the hill" in the wake of England's civil war, were thereafter "left alone with America," their isolation was short-lived.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in 1660, Massachusetts suffered, one after another, what its ministers could only interpret as a series of public crises. Following the 1660 Restoration of Charles II to the English throne, New England could no longer count on an indifferent England to resist meddling in its affairs. Every royal attempt to assert imperial control over Massachusetts was met with stiff resistance from New England's Congregational establishment, and every effort to evade imperial regulation, especially the Navigation

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip H. Round, *By Nature and by Custom Cursed: Transatlantic Civil Discourse and New England Cultural Production, 1620-1660* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 15.



Acts, was treated as further evidence of New England's insubordination. Internal divisions, too, had begun to chip away at the myth of New England's Congregational consensus. New England's ministers had divided over the Halfway Covenant, the result of the Synod of 1662. In 1669, a group of members belonging to Boston's First Church, disappointed with the selection of the Reverend John Davenport as John Wilson's successor, founded Boston's Third (Old South) Church on Halfway principles.

There existed outside of Congregationalism even more dissatisfaction with the establishment. An ever-growing number of dissenters—Anglicans, Baptists, Quakers, and merchants, some of whom privileged profit over piety because of their transatlantic commercial ties—chafed under the Congregational establishment, which, for its part, had to reconcile itself to the new pluralism. The Anglican presence in Boston was perhaps most disturbing, for in 1686 Governor Andros had forced Boston's Third Church to allow Anglican services at its meetinghouse. Shortly thereafter the Anglicans would construct King's Chapel, their own meetinghouse, perhaps disturbing what had been until then the peaceful sleep of the colony's founders who had hoped to find eternal rest in the adjacent burial ground. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), each an arm of the Anglican Church, disseminated the literature of Anglo-American Protestantism and sent Anglican missionaries throughout New England. Worse still than Massachusetts's growing pluralism, King Philip's War had erupted in 1675, its violence giving further evidence of the deteriorating diplomatic relationship between Natives and English colonists and giving cause for further imperial oversight and intervention.

It was, Increase Mather lamented in his diary, “the saddest time with N E that ever was known.”<sup>3</sup> Latter-day Jeremiahs in the pulpit, New England’s ministers lamented a decline in piety and a corresponding rise in worldly distractions. They sought evidence of God’s favor or displeasure, more often the latter than the former, in what seemed to be God’s ready willingness to violate the very laws of nature and to intervene directly in human affairs by way of his miraculous providence. God had sent earthquakes, comets, and fires in anticipation of what would soon be his final judgment.

The worst, however, was yet to come. With the support of the Crown the Massachusetts charter was revoked in 1684 and its government consolidated under the Dominion of New England. Massachusetts’s fate looked grim in the four years between 1684 and 1688, but the Congregational establishment quickly rallied behind the Protestant cause after word of the Glorious Revolution reached Boston. William and Mary, having reaffirmed the principles of constitutional monarchy, were hailed as the new guardians of British Protestantism both at home and abroad. The Glorious Revolution, it seemed, had breathed new life into New England’s sense of historical purpose. In contrast to their reaction to the crypto-Catholic Stuarts’ attempts to rein in Massachusetts, the Congregational establishment cautiously embraced royal authority, reaffirming their commitment to the British Empire and emphasizing their particular role in the triumph of Anglo-American Protestantism. New Englanders, that is, had reason to celebrate at once their local and global identities, their provinciality and their cosmopolitanism, their common English origins and their unique American experience.

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<sup>3</sup> Increase Mather, “Diary of Increase Mather,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 2, vol. 13 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1900), 400.

The new order, of course, demanded significant compromises from the Massachusetts Congregationalists. Under the new Massachusetts charter of 1691, the royal governor was to be appointed by the king, but Massachusetts retained control of its legislature, the most powerful of any in England's mainland American colonies. Members of the Massachusetts establishment were likewise plugged into various commercial, religious, and political networks abroad, and they frequently cashed in on the political capital they had earned among their London sympathizers and fellow religious nonconformists. Massachusetts's ministers no longer envisioned themselves as the moral opponents of commerce, but instead as eager promoters of an Anglo-Protestant commercial empire against the imperial ambitions of Catholic France.<sup>4</sup> Finally, New England was all but compelled to embrace principles of toleration, universalism, and ecumenism. New England, many believed, had entered a new, post-confessional, post-Puritan age.

A number of other transformations accompanied New England's entrance onto the eighteenth-century stage. New England's sons increasingly found themselves serving in the empire's various wars on the American continent. Many among New England's Congregational clergy followed the lead of Benjamin Colman, Thomas and William Brattle, and the rest of the Brattle Street Church, absorbing the spirit, even if not the letter, of Anglicanism, and embracing, sometimes reluctantly but often readily, its sense of Protestant universalism, its latitude, and its toleration of other Protestants, all without

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<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between New England's ministers and the emerging eighteenth-century market culture, see especially Mark Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

abandoning their Calvinism.<sup>5</sup> New England's gentry, and shortly thereafter its merchants and artisans, began acquiring a taste for the cosmopolitan culture, genteel manners, and polite letters of London. The faculty, overseers, tutors, and students at Harvard adopted the latest ideas in science and logic, everything from Newtonian physics and Copernican astronomy to Cartesian logic and Lockean psychology, and merged them with the Protestant humanism and providential cosmology inherited from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> New Englanders greeted with open arms and open pocketbooks the eighteenth-century consumer revolution, as merchants and ministers entered into alliance and merged older notions of moral economy with the newer practices of the marketplace.

These changes in taste, consumption, literature, and ideas accompanied a larger shift in the ways New Englanders conceived of their regional identity. Bruce Tucker has demonstrated that in the wake of the Glorious Revolution New England's ministers "began to recast relations between England and New England," and out of this effort emerged "an Anglo-American dissenting front that diminished the exclusivity of the Puritans' original errand and highlighted a transatlantic partnership."<sup>7</sup> "Whatever else New England was," he insists, "it was a story, a creation of mind that each generation of ministers retold in order to connect New Englanders to a central purpose that transcended

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<sup>5</sup> On the eighteenth-century "catholick" tendencies among Boston's ministers, see especially John Corrigan, *The Prism of Piety: Catholick Congregational Clergy at the Beginning of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> On the "New Logic," see especially Rick Kennedy's extensive biographical accounts of Charles Morton and William Brattle as well as his historical accounts of the adoption and use of their respective logic textbooks: Rick Kennedy, ed., *Aristotelian and Cartesian Logic at Harvard: Charles Morton's A Logic System and William Brattle's Compendium of Logick* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1995), 1-138. See also Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), esp. 207-294.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Tucker, "The Reinvention of New England, 1691-1770," *New England Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (September 1986): 316.

their own time and place.”<sup>8</sup> New England’s errand, Tucker concludes, “was a part of the memory of the past, re-created over time for the sake of the coherence of New England’s story.”<sup>9</sup> Whereas the first generation of New England settlers had considered themselves the saving remnant, “a people set apart to lead their English friends back to purity of worship,” by the eighteenth century many New Englanders had come to “embrace union, toleration, and catholicity and to abandon sectarian differences.”<sup>10</sup>

While it is true, as Tucker suggests, that a marked difference characterizes the ways that eighteenth-century New Englanders portrayed themselves and their place in history, it would be a mistake to assume that New England’s distinct identity became subsumed within a larger, transatlantic and imperial British identity. Within their growing sense of a shared Englishness, eighteenth-century New Englanders carved out a distinctly Anglo-American identity, which emerged in the wake of England’s Glorious Revolution, when King William III and Queen Mary assumed the English throne and reaffirmed England’s commitment to the cause of international Protestantism. After the ousting of James II in England and Sir Edmund Andros, his appointed governor, in New England, Boston’s political, ministerial, and mercantile elite, having long chafed under Stuart rule and the Catholic threat, immediately allied themselves with the new Protestant monarchs. This alliance was forged by Increase Mather, whose shrewd diplomatic maneuvering in England secured New England’s new charter in 1691, and was championed in Massachusetts by Cotton Mather, Increase’s son and minister to Boston Second (Old North) Church.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 319.

Throughout the reigns of William and Mary, Queen Anne, and the Hanoverians, during King William's and Queen Anne's wars, and in the face of Jacobite threats that continued well into the eighteenth century, Massachusetts remained committed to the cause of Anglo-American Protestantism and the British imperial project. From Boston's various pulpits, New England's past was reinterpreted in light of the emerging narrative of Whig politics. By the eighteenth century, New England's identity had come to rest less on the purity of its churches—their doctrinal precision, their system of covenants, their Congregational church polity, and their public conversion testimonies—and more on New England's particular contribution to the history of Anglo-American Protestantism.

Thomas Prince (1689–1758), minister to Boston's Third (Old South) Church, was the leading exponent of this interpretation of New England's past. A book collector, antiquarian, and historian, Prince is perhaps best known as the curator of the New England Library and author of *A Chronological History of New-England*. Housed in the steeple chamber of Boston's Old South meetinghouse, the New England Library represented one of the first concerted efforts to preserve the documentary record of New England's earliest years. The years between 1660 and 1736, the year in which Prince published his *Chronological History*—itself the record of Prince's herculean attempt to master New England's past—supplies the context of this thesis, which traces the various historical and intellectual currents that came to inform Prince's account of New England history. Prince's interpretation of New England's past was conditioned by a particular historical context and represented Prince's struggle to impose meaning and order on the past and present. However, Prince's *Chronological History*, which he never completed, remained a partial narrative whose ultimate meaning finally eluded the Puritan historian.

If, for Prince, history constituted a single, unbroken “Line of Time,” his perspective represented but one link in that continuous “*Chain of Providence*.”<sup>11</sup>

Prince’s life speaks to larger cultural issues within both New England and the broader Anglo-Protestant world, for although it remained bound by the religious-political establishment that it served and the context that produced it, the historical narrative that Prince helped to forge dominated the public discourse of New England and defined its place within the British Empire in the years between 1688 and 1736. By revealing the ways in which Prince marshaled history on behalf of New England, this thesis opens new lines of inquiry, allowing historians to reconsider New England’s role in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Sermon Delivered at the South Church in Boston, N. E. August 14, 1746. Being the Day of General Thanksgiving for the Great Deliverance of the British Nations by the Glorious and Happy Victory near Culloden...* (Boston, 1746), 7.

## CHAPTER ONE

Although the events of 1688 occurred too early in Prince's life to have left him with any firsthand memories, the legacy of the Glorious Revolution—the Protestant settlement, the extension of religious toleration, and the renewed commitment to English liberties—formed the framework within which Prince would interpret New England's past, present, and future. For decades, the Massachusetts Bay Colony's original 1629 charter had sheltered New England Congregationalism from outside interference. Under its protection, New England Congregationalism had withstood the attacks of its enemies among both Antinomians and Anglican sympathizers, it had weathered the storm of the Halfway controversy, and it had endured despite the failure of religious nonconformity in England. However, after the Restoration in 1660, the charter had come to represent in the eyes of the Crown New England's defiant assertion of independence from English attempts to impose uniform standards across the British Empire.

Throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, and despite its continued resistance, New England was slowly drawn into the orbit of England's expanding empire.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1684, in response to New England's intransigence, Charles II had revoked the Massachusetts charter. Following his death in February 1685, his successor, the Catholic James II, had decided to consolidate the New England colonies under the Dominion of New England, appointing Joseph Dudley its interim governor. Denied a representative assembly and forced to adopt a policy of religious toleration, New England

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<sup>12</sup> On Stuart policy toward the colonies during this period, see especially David S. Lovejoy who writes, "A colonial policy which had begun at the Restoration, had gathered momentum under the Lords of Trade, and had taken several strong spurts in the last few years of Charles's reign gave promise of fulfillment under James II. Despite sporadic movement, its goals, particularly in the late 1670's, were dependence, uniformity, centralization, and profit." David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 178.



had, in Harry S. Stout's words, almost overnight "ceased to be a society of self-governing Bible commonwealths and became a royal colony."<sup>13</sup> On December 20, 1686, Sir Edmund Andros was appointed the Dominion's permanent governor. As Cotton Mather later recalled, Governor Andros had been imposed upon New England "with as *arbitrary* and as *treasonable* a commission, perhaps, as ever was heard of—a commission, by which the governour, with three or four more, none of whom were chosen by the people, had power to make what laws they would, and levy taxes, according to their own humours, upon the people."<sup>14</sup> Among his many affronts to the Congregational establishment was Andros's insistence that Samuel Willard's Third Church—whose congregation Prince would later serve as minister—be used for Anglican services. Prince's earliest years then were spent under the rule of Sir Edmund Andros whose government, most New Englanders agreed, "was among *the worst of Treasons*."<sup>15</sup>

However, in 1688, later described by Cotton Mather as that "*twice wonderful-year*," England witnessed the expulsion of James II and the accession of King William and Queen Mary to the English throne. When news of the Glorious Revolution reached New England in April 1689, the residents of Massachusetts quickly rebelled against the Andros regime. As Bruce Tucker makes clear, the second generation of New England ministers "had begun to grapple with the problem of preserving the religious aims of the first American Puritans within the context of a new political arrangement" as early as the

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<sup>13</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 111.

<sup>14</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; Or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 1: 175.

<sup>15</sup> A. B. "An Account of the Late Revolutions in New-England," in *The Andros Tracts*, vol. 2, ed. W. H. Whitmore (Boston: Prince Society, 1869), 192.

1690s.<sup>16</sup> The Mathers, Increase and Cotton, were among the first to recognize the new circumstances in which New England found itself and aligned themselves accordingly with the new monarchs. Perhaps more than anyone else, the Mathers helped locate rhetorically New England's place within the British Empire, placing it firmly within the triumphal narrative of Anglo-Protestantism. Their task, however, was fraught with difficulty for it required the reconciliation of two different readings of New England's place in sacred history: the first, a reading that had prevailed before 1688, identified New England as a covenanted people set apart from the rest of the world, and the second, having emerged in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, defined New England in reference to a larger historical drama whose setting was global and whose protagonists, the forces of Protestant liberty, were pitted against the international forces of Catholic tyranny.

As his son later wrote in the *Magnalia*, Increase Mather, "beholding his country of New-England in a very deplorable condition" under Governor Andros, set off for England in the summer of 1688 to plead New England's cause before King James II.<sup>17</sup> After the Glorious Revolution, however, and with the ear of the new king and queen, Increase helped negotiate the terms of Massachusetts's new charter. "In New-England," Increase advised King William III, "they differ from other plantations; they are called 'Congregational' and 'Presbyterian.' So that such a governor will not suit with the people of New-England as may be very proper for other English plantations."<sup>18</sup> In 1691,

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce Tucker, "The Reinvention of New England, 1691-1770," *New England Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (September 1986): 316.

<sup>17</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1: 197.

<sup>18</sup> Increase Mather quoted in Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1: 198.

Massachusetts's charter was revised and reinstated. Thus, according to Cotton Mather, was the "*colony...made a province.*"<sup>19</sup>

The Mathers had nothing but praise for the new charter, for, according to Increase, by this new charter, great Priviledges are granted to the People in *New-England*, and, in some Particulars, greater than they formerly enjoyed: For all *English* Liberties are restored to them: No Persons shall have a Penny of their Estates taken from them; nor any Laws imposed on them, without their own Consent by Representatives chosen by themselves. Religion is secured; for Liberty is granted to all Men to Worship God after that manner which in their Consciences they shall be perswaded is the most Scriptural way. The General Court may by Laws Encourage and Protect that *Religion* which is the general Profession of the Inhabitants there.<sup>20</sup>

Cotton similarly praised the new charter later when he published the *Magnalia*, writing that Massachusetts's "general court has, with the King's approbation, as much power in New-England, as the King and parliament have in England."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, New Englanders "have all English liberties, and can be touched by no law, by no tax, but of their own making. All the liberties of their holy religion are for ever secured, and their titles to their lands...are now confirmed unto them."<sup>22</sup>

While the new charter had certainly marked an improvement over the Andros government and, according to the Mathers, even over Massachusetts Bay's former

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<sup>19</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1: 200.

<sup>20</sup> Increase Mather, *A Brief Account Concerning Several of the Agents of New-England...*, in *The Andros Tracts*, vol. 2, ed. W. H. Whitmore (Boston: Prince Society, 1869), 288-9.

<sup>21</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1: 200.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-1.

charter, it had also brought about certain changes in New England's identity. According to Thomas S. Kidd, "the Glorious Revolution and the subsequent revision of the charter marked an important turning point not only in Massachusetts politics but also in provincial New English cultural identity."<sup>23</sup> This turning point can be located in both words and deeds, not only in Cotton Mather's public pronouncements following the accession of William and Mary and the reinstatement of the New England charter but also in the actions taken by the New England community.

As Cotton Mather later recalled in the *Magnalia*, Governor Andros's conduct during the 1688 French Canadian and Indian raids had aroused the suspicions of New Englanders, suspicions which, according to Mather, were later confirmed upon the discovery that it was James II's "full purpose to have set up Roman-Catholick religion in the English plantations of America."<sup>24</sup> Mather, of course, was quick to discredit the "more extream" suspicions, writing, "there was more made of the *suspicions* then flying like wild-fire about the country, than a strong *charity* would have countenanced."<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, when the opportunity arose for New Englanders to express their loyalty to England's new king and queen and their commitment to Anglo-American Protestantism, they seized it. By overthrowing the Andros regime, Mather wrote, New Englanders had asserted "their title to the common rights of Englishmen; and except the plantations are willing to degenerate from the temper of true Englishmen, or except the revolution of the whole English nation be condemned, their *action* must so far be

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1: 179.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

justified.”<sup>26</sup> The success of England Revolution was offered as evidence of the legitimacy of New England’s. The two Revolutions were coextensive; both were expressions of the same principles and sentiments, of constitutional monarchy, English liberty, and Protestant toleration. Caught up in the euphoria of the Glorious Revolution, New England initiated its own assault on Catholic tyranny, attacking the forts of French Canada, which, according to Mather, “was the chief source of New-England’s miseries.”<sup>27</sup> New Englanders rationalized these actions by linking them to the larger cause of Anglo-Protestantism. As Mather later explained, the French, “uniting with the salvages, barbarously murdered many innocent New-Englanders, without any provocation on the New-English part, except this, that New-England had proclaimed King William and Q. Mary, which they said were usurpers.”<sup>28</sup> The expedition, clearly an attempt to prove that New England was committed to the larger cause of Anglo-Protestantism, failed miserably and plunged New England into severe debt.<sup>29</sup>

As New England settled into its new charter, Cotton Mather was called upon to deliver two election sermons before the governor and General Court, the first in 1689 and the second in 1692, the same year the saw the infamous prosecution of the Salem witches in which Mather himself had a hand. *Good Things Propounded*, the 1692 sermon, opened with an assessment of the state of New England. “The Steers-Men, of this poor shattered, sinking *Bark*,” Mather exclaimed, “are in a *General Assembly* this day convened.”<sup>30</sup> There was, however, hope yet, for, as Mather pointed out, “there is a Bright Star in the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>29</sup> For a fuller account of what came to be called King William’s War in New England, see Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 253-67.

<sup>30</sup> Cotton Mather, *Optanda: Good Men Described, and Good Things propounded...* (Boston, 1692), 31.

*Firmament of the Bible*, which I would humbly recommend unto their *Observation*.”<sup>31</sup>

That bright star was the verse Mather had taken as his text: “*Also in Judah Things went well*.”<sup>32</sup> To this phrase, “*Things went well*,” and variations of it, Mather returned throughout the sermon as a kind of rhetorical refrain. After all, “Is it not *Well*,” he asked his audience, “That all *Christian Liberties*, and all *English Liberties*, are by the Royal Charter effectually Secured unto us?”<sup>33</sup> This rhetorical refrain was Mather’s way of assuring Massachusetts of its bright future, if only it would fulfill the conditions he laid out in his sermon.

However, it had become clear by the time Mather delivered this sermon that Congregationalism had come to mean something different from the vision of its founders, for the Glorious Revolution had transformed the Bible commonwealth into a tolerating English province whose laws would have to fall into line with those of the parent country. After all, “’Tis by its Laws, that *England* is the *Paradise* of the *old* World; and by its *Laws* may *New-England* be the *Paradise* of the *New*.”<sup>34</sup> No longer the de facto religion, Congregationalism represented only one of the various Protestant traditions dotting the New England landscape. Aware of the changes wrought by the Glorious Revolution—indeed, embracing them—Mather emphasized toleration and liberty of conscience. “Wherefore, that things may *go well*,” he said, “I would humbly put in a Bar against the *Persecution* of any that may conscientiously dissent from *Our Way*.”<sup>35</sup> Mather called on his fellow Congregationalists “*To Leave the otherwise-minded unto God*,” and he insisted that “when Things *go well*, there are Magistrates that will set themselves to Advance all

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

the *Truths* and *Ways* of God, among their people.”<sup>36</sup> It was still the duty of New England’s magistrates, Mather reminded them, “to *Profess* the Truths, and *Practice* the Ways of God” and “to *Protect* and *Favour* all them that shall do the like.”<sup>37</sup> Mather still believed that “*Liberty of Conscience* is not to be permitted as a cloak for *Liberty of Profaneness*.”<sup>38</sup> Truth still required favor and protection, but its boundaries had become somewhat less narrow, its definition much more broad and inclusive.

Above all, Mather was concerned “That the Blessed *Unity* wherein our Churches do Agree, not only among themselves, but also with the *biggest part of the Reformed Protestants abroad*, may be still continued.”<sup>39</sup> Mather, reminding his hearers of their past, insisted that New England owed its “Sudden and Matchless thriving” to “the Blessing of God upon the *Church-Order*, for the sake whereof, [*Let all Mankind know*] this Plantation was first Erected: Things have *Gone Well*, while our worldly accommodations have been Subordinated unto that GREAT INTEREST,” namely, the Protestant Interest of England’s Whigs and religious nonconformists.<sup>40</sup> “Our *Church-State*,” Mather firmly believed, “is our *Glory*.”<sup>41</sup> Despite all the turmoil that New England had endured, this was the link that continued to connect the past to the present: New England’s unique relationship between religion and the state.

The only hope of securing that link, Mather realized, was by imparting it to the next generation: “Where young people are generally so well-disposed, that it may be said of them, *Behold they pray!* Oh! How *well* are Things like to *Go*, among such a people.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 81.

Speaking directly to the young people of New England, Mather said, “*My son, know thou the God of our New-English Fathers; and Serve him with a Perfect Heart, and a Willing Mind; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee.* And we shall all fare the better for it.”<sup>43</sup> Already, in 1689, Mather had been looking toward “the *succeeding Generations.*”<sup>44</sup> “The *Youth of this Countrey,*” he said, “are very *sharp*, and early *ripe* in their Capacities, above most in the world; and were the Benefits of a Religious and Ingenuous *Education* bestowed upon them, they would soon prove an Admirable People.”<sup>45</sup> New England, Mather felt certain, would “soon produce them that shall be *Commanders* of the greatest Glories that America can pretend unto.”<sup>46</sup> Cotton, still a relatively young man himself, was already preparing to convey to subsequent generations his commitment to New England’s past as it had come to be redefined in the wake of the Glorious Revolution.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>44</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Way to Prosperity...* (Boston, 1690), 34.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 33.



## CHAPTER TWO

At Harvard College Thomas Prince had been, according to the later recollection of Increase Mather, “a *Praying Student*.”<sup>47</sup> He might easily have been classed among those whom Cotton Mather had addressed in 1690 as the romanticized “*Youth* of this Country.”<sup>48</sup> Prince had been born on May 15, 1687, to Samuel Prince of Sandwich and his second wife Mercy Hinckley, daughter of Thomas Hinckley, the last of Plymouth’s governors. Thomas Prince had descended from a family whose genealogy boasted three generations of English and American Puritans.<sup>49</sup> As a young man, Prince had inherited the bookish inclinations of his parents and grandfather Hinckley. Prince’s mother taught him to read, giving him copies of the Westminster Assembly’s *Shorter Catechism* at age eight, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* at age eleven, and, as Hugh Amory notes, “prophetically for his later scholarship,” John Fox’s history, *Time and the End of Time*, at age fifteen.<sup>50</sup>

Like his father, whom he described as “a zealous Lover and Asserter of the New English Principles & Liberties,” Prince was instilled with a profound appreciation for history, especially that of his native New England.<sup>51</sup> As Prince later recalled in his *Chronological History*, “Next to the sacred History, and that of the Reformation, I was from my early Youth instructed in the History of this Country. And the first Book of this

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<sup>47</sup> Increase Mather, preface to *God brings to the Desired Haven: A Thanksgiving-Sermon Deliver’d at the Lecture in Boston N.E. on Thursday September 5, 1717...*, by Thomas Prince (Boston, 1717), ii.

<sup>48</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Way to Prosperity...* (Boston, 1690), 34.

<sup>49</sup> For an account of the Prince family, see the obituary written by Prince for his father in *The New-England Weekly Journal*, (Boston, Mass.), July 15, 1728, [2].

<sup>50</sup> For these accounts of Prince’s early acquisitions, I have relied on Hugh Amory, “A Boston Society Library: The Old South Church and Thomas Prince,” in *Bibliography and the Book Trades: Studies in the Print Culture of Early New England*, ed. David D. Hall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 150-1.

<sup>51</sup> *The New-England Weekly Journal*, (Boston, Mass.), July 15, 1728, [2].

Kind put into my Hand was *the New-England Memorial*” by Nathaniel Morton.<sup>52</sup> The various histories of New England’s Indian wars by William Hubbard and the Mathers “gave me a sufficient View of those calamitous Times.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, “Mr. *Matthew Mayhew*’s Account of the *Vineyard-Indians*, Mr. *Increase Mather*’s Record of Remarkable Providences, Mr. *Cotton Mather*’s Lives of Mr. *Cotton, Norton, Wilson, Davenport, Hooker, Mitchel, Eliot*, and Sir *William Phipps*, increas’d my Knowledge.”<sup>54</sup>

In 1703, at the age of seventeen, Prince enrolled at Harvard College. It was at Harvard that Prince first conceived of what eventually became the New England Library.<sup>55</sup> Prince later described the moment this way: “Upon my entering into the *College*, I chanced in my leisure Hours to read Mr. *Chamberlain*’s Account of the *Cottonian Library*: Which excited in me a Zeal of laying hold on every Book, Pamphlet, and Paper, both in *Print* and *Manuscript* which are either written by Persons who lived here, or that have any Tendency to enlighten our History.”<sup>56</sup> This was a significant moment, as important for Prince as it would prove for posterity. It was at Harvard that Prince encountered Samuel Willard, Vice President of the College, eminent minister to Boston’s Old South Church, and one of New England’s most systematic thinkers, and it was at Harvard, Prince later recalled, that Willard had “taken me aside...to encourage & direct me in the Affairs of my Soul.”<sup>57</sup> Prince graduated in a class of nineteen in 1707.

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England In the Form of Annals...* (Boston, 1736), i.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> For the most comprehensive study of the New England Library, see Hugh Amory, “A Boston Society Library: The Old South Church and Thomas Prince,” in *Bibliography and the Book Trades: Studies in the Print Culture of Early New England*, ed. David D. Hall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 146-62.

<sup>56</sup> Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England*, i.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Sermon Delivered By Thomas Prince...at his Ordination* (Boston, 1718), [iv].

Among his classmates was Joseph Sewall, son of the judge and diarist Samuel Sewall, and Prince's future colleague at Boston's Old South Church.

Upon graduating, Prince returned to Sandwich to teach and applied for a position as Harvard's librarian. Having been turned down, however, he decided to embark for England. As Increase Mather later explained, Prince "had a strong inclination on his Spirit to travel into Foreign Lands."<sup>58</sup> His travels abroad would prove pivotal in shaping Prince's intellectual temperament, giving him far more exposure to England's cosmopolitan culture than what many of his peers—if they were so lucky—had gleaned from their brief stays abroad. His extended time abroad gave Prince a perspective that even Cotton Mather lacked. Cotton Mather himself, after all, had never left the safety and comfort of New England. Prince's travels provided him with a cosmopolitan perspective and instilled him with a new appreciation for the unique political position of New England's Congregationalists, who, as the religious majority, enjoyed far more political and cultural flexibility in Massachusetts than did their dissenting counterparts in England.

On March 29, 1709, Prince boarded the *Thomas and Elizabeth*, bound for London by way of Barbados. Prince, who was instructed by the ship's captain "to draw up some Laws for ye good goverment of our ship," seems to have been entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the souls of the ship's passengers and crew.<sup>59</sup> Prince kept journals on these voyages abroad, and in them he recorded the weather, casually copied out lines of secular verse, noted the texts from which he occasionally preached, and documented the spiritual and physical health of those aboard the ship. In short, the

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<sup>58</sup> Mather, preface to *God brings to the Desired Haven*, i.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Prince, "Journal, 1709-1711," Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

journals constitute a record of what Prince later described as “God’s Merciful & providential Dealings with those who travel on the tempestuous Ocean.”<sup>60</sup>

The *Thomas and Elizabeth* first anchored in Barbados, where Prince had the chance to observe firsthand the culture and reflect on the horrors of slavery. “’Tis computed,” he wrote in his journal, “that in this Island, to no more than 8000 whites, there are no less than 4 score- thousand negroes; all absolute slaves, till kind Death wrests ‘em out of the hands of their tyrannick masters.”<sup>61</sup> He went on:

But alas! the miserables are intirely restrained from Reflecting on themselves: and Thinking on a Future state. They know no Interest but theirs that own them, who Engross all their Strength and Labor., and their Time also, except what the Supreme Governour has mercifully Reserved for himself: Then they are at Liberty to Enjoy their own thoughts, and to Regale themselves in the mean Pleasures of a Brutal appetite, and which scarce reach any farther than a Drowsy Joy for their transitory intermission of their slavery.<sup>62</sup>

These pleasures of brutal appetite the slaves indulged, endeavoring “to Drown or Forget their burthensom Cares, by the most Frantick amusements they can Imagine.”<sup>63</sup> Prince, however, judged their spirits to be “so abject and Feable, and their minds so effectually Debased, that they can neither Think of nor Relish any Refined Delight, but Charm or rather Doze themselves: with their most Prodigious expressions of a confused Folly, as can scarce lay claim to their Grossest of Pleasures.”<sup>64</sup>

While it is unclear whether Prince thought the slaves’ “Debased” condition derived from their environment, biological inferiority, or some combination of the two, we can safely assume that this was not Prince’s first encounter with the peculiar

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Prince, *God brings to the Desired Haven: A Thanksgiving-Sermon Deliver’d at the Lecture in Boston N.E. on Thursday September 5, 1717...* (Boston, 1717), 4.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

institution. As Mark A. Peterson points out, “In the closing decade of the seventeenth century and the first third of the eighteenth, rapidly changing circumstances within Boston and in the larger Atlantic community brought slavery and related issues to the forefront of public concern.”<sup>65</sup> Prince, we can be certain, would have considered himself a minister first and foremost, and in no sense would he have considered himself a proto-abolitionist. This is confirmed by his primary concern for the slaves’ “Future state” rather than their present conditions.<sup>66</sup> The slaves of Barbados, Prince believed, had but a “Faint Prospect” of “their Entrance into another World.”<sup>67</sup> As a result, they ran “the Risque of a Future Reckoning; and in the mean while think it impossible that the Almighty shall be severer to them than mortals.”<sup>68</sup> If, according to Peterson, the “efforts of Boston’s religious community to take more seriously its responsibilities to the souls of those in bondage” developed in “ambiguous ways,” Prince similarly seems to have been at best ambivalent toward the physical suffering of Barbados’ slaves.<sup>69</sup> The physical brutality the slaves faced in this world, he seems to have believed, paled in comparison to the spiritual suffering they stood to face before God’s final judgment. Prince’s brief time in Barbados reminds us that the English liberties he would soon join the Mathers in celebrating rested uneasily on the foundation of an imperial system whose economic success depended largely on African slave labor.

Prince soon departed Barbados and was this time bound for London. His arrival there in 1709 coincided with the Sacheverell affair of 1709–1710. Prince soon found

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<sup>65</sup> Mark A. Peterson, “The Selling of Joseph: Bostonians, Antislavery, and the Protestant International, 1689–1733,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 4 (2002), 2.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>69</sup> Mark A. Peterson, “The Selling of Joseph,” 10.

himself caught up in London's political turmoil. The very fate of Anglo-American Protestantism as it had been defined by the Glorious Revolution and the settlement of 1688–1689, it seemed to Prince, depended on the outcome and England's handling of the Sacheverell affair. As Patricia Bonomi explains, "Following the Glorious Revolution many Anglican clergymen...had no difficulty taking the oath of allegiance to the new constitutional monarchs, William and Mary."<sup>70</sup> However, some high church Anglicans refused to do so. "These 'nonjurors,'" writes Bonomi, "constituted a small but vocal wing of the Anglican establishment after 1688, providing over the years a philosophical redoubt for Jacobites, divine right dogmatists, and disgruntled conservative clergymen."<sup>71</sup> The stage had been set for a standoff between Whigs and Tories, and to the extent that the corporate and historical identity of New England had become bound up with the principles and rhetoric of Whig politics in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, Massachusetts had a vested interest in the outcome of these metropolitan debates, especially since New England's charter liberties rested precariously on the policy of the crown and court.

When in England the Glorious Revolution's consensus began to unravel, Bonomi writes, "the high-church nonjurors and their tory allies in Parliament formed the vanguard of an emergent political opposition that reached its apogee in the near hysteria of the Sacheverell affair."<sup>72</sup> Henry Sacheverell, a high church Anglican clergyman, had been asked to preach the annual Fifth of November sermon at St. Paul's in London in 1709. In *The Perils of False Brethren, both in Church, and State*, Sacheverell insisted that the

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<sup>70</sup> Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 190.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

good order of church and state demanded perfect obedience to authority. “The *Grand Security of our Government*,” Sacheverell pronounced, “and the very *Pillar* upon which it stands, is founded upon the *steady Belief* of the *Subject’s Obligation to Absolute, and Unconditional Obedience to the Supream Power, in All Things Lawful*, and the utter *Illegality of Resistance upon any Pretence whatsoever*.”<sup>73</sup> For his remarks Sacheverell was charged with sedition and impeached. His impeachment trial, writes Bonomi, “contributed significantly to the development of eighteenth-century radicalism by dramatically recalling to robust life the passions of the previous century’s religious-political contests. At the same time it transmitted them with vivid immediacy to a new generation of Anglo-Americans.”<sup>74</sup>

The Sacheverell affair could not have had any more immediacy for an American than it did for Thomas Prince, who was in London to witness it unfold. “The violence of the Tory Party,” Prince complained, “has spread itself thro’ the Kingdom and multitudes of all Ranks, especially the mean and mob have espoused it.”<sup>75</sup> Sacheverell was convicted, but his punishment was light. He was suspended for three years, and his sermons were publicly burned. Despite this seeming victory for the high church Anglicans, the “temper and moderation” that Prince sought won the day.<sup>76</sup> As Bonomi writes, the “tory ascendancy” lasted “only until 1714,” and “Henry Sacheverell quickly fell from public view,” but the controversy sparked by his remarks “looms much larger in the history of Anglo-American radicalism” and “made a permanent contribution to popular political imagery,” especially “in the works of writers who transmitted the

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<sup>73</sup> Henry Sacheverell, *The Perils of False Brethren, both in Church, and State...* (London, 1709), 12.

<sup>74</sup> Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 191.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

English opposition heritage to the American colonies, where the debate over obedience and resistance to authority was waxing rather than waning.”<sup>77</sup>

Prince’s brush with English politics seems to have instilled in him a heightened appreciation for the political liberties and stability enjoyed by his native Massachusetts. In his journal Prince reflected on “the unhappy circumstances of” England, “the happiest Region on Earth.” Despite “the bountifull provisions of Nature & the admirable products of art, in the vastness of its Traffick & Riches, the Beauty Learning & Valour of its Inhabitants, the extent of their Liberties & the Figure they make in the World,” all of England’s glories, Prince believed, had been “sullied by the humorous Factions that Disturb her.”<sup>78</sup> This, however, did not prevent Prince, upon his return to America, from singing the praises of “the Illustrious House of Hanover” or celebrating the extension of “British Happiness” throughout the empire.<sup>79</sup> New Englanders, Prince would proclaim in 1728, “are a People known for our universal and most hearty Attachment to the present happy Succession in the Protestant Line.”<sup>80</sup> Prince hoped that Massachusetts would transcend the ecclesiastical politics of faction that had plagued England during his stay there, arguing that “God’s peculiar People are neither now confined to Lands nor Kingdoms, nor yet to any Sects or Parties among Professing Christians: But all that own and serve him according to the Scripture Revelations, are accepted of him.”<sup>81</sup>

Prince, it seems clear from these later statements, had learned a great deal during his stay in England. He would remain abroad for some eight years. According to Increase

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<sup>77</sup> Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 193.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1709-1711,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Prince, dedication to *A Chronological History of New-England In the Form of Annals...* (Boston, 1736), [6, 7].

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Prince, *Civil Rulers Raised up by God to Feed His People, A Sermon At the Publick Lecture in Boston, July 25, 1728...* (Boston, 1728), 22.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



Mather, Prince spent the remainder of his time in England “employed in Preaching the Gospel to several *Non-conformist* Congregations there,” first in “*Norwich*,” then for “half a Year in *Great Yarmouth*,” and finally in Coombs, Suffolk.<sup>82</sup> Prince spent four years serving the congregation in Coombs, which at last decided to offer him a permanent position as its minister. After long deliberation, however, Prince decided to turn down the offer and to return instead to his native New England. If Prince’s time abroad had taught him anything, it was of the continued importance of maintaining a historical connection between New England’s past and its commitment to English Protestantism and the system of constitutional monarchy that undergirded it.

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<sup>82</sup> Mather, preface to *God brings to the Desired Haven*, i.

## CHAPTER THREE

On May 15, 1717—his thirtieth birthday—Thomas Prince, the bibliophile, future historian, and soon-to-be minister of Boston’s Third Church, embarked on his journey home to Massachusetts, having spent eight years abroad. Spotting Cape Cod on July 20, the crew of Prince’s ship, the brigantine *Martha and Hanna*, dropped anchor in Boston Harbor on Sunday, July 21, 1717, where Prince disembarked on Castle Island, home to Castle William, the English fortification that had once served as the prison of Sir Edmund Andros and so named in honor of England’s King William III. Castle William was one of many palpable reminders of the Glorious Revolution, which, in the minds of many New Englanders, had ushered in a new era of Protestant liberty.

Prince, recalling the circumstances surrounding his return to Boston, later recorded them in his journal: “About 12, there came 2 young Gentlemen in a Boat from Boston, to Inquire after me, & to let me know that my Dear Parents were alive, had been a long while waiting for me at Boston; but Dissappointed, they went to Dorchester yesterday in their Return Home to Rochester.”<sup>83</sup> Prince immediately sent word to his parents that he had reached Boston. They returned later that evening. In the meantime, a crowd of some five-hundred people had gathered “on the wharf at noon-time” to greet him.<sup>84</sup> At about 1:30, “the Captain sent his Pinnace” to carry Prince ashore. Prince “landed at the long wharf, about ¼ of an Hour after the meeting Began,”—the meeting, of course, referring to the church meeting, it being Sunday—“and by that means escaped the crowds.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1710–1751,” Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

The crowds that had come to greet Prince had likely been relieved to discover that he had made it safely to Boston, for, as Increase Mather explained, word had reached Boston in November of 1716 that “a fatal Storm destroyed the Ship in which he was to have been a Passenger.”<sup>86</sup> Samuel Sewall, believing that New England had lost Prince, recorded “the dolefull News” in his diary.<sup>87</sup> Many in Boston were later relieved to discover that, in fact, Prince had not been aboard the ship but had been delayed by “bodily infirmities with a Concurrence of several other Providences.”<sup>88</sup> Sadly Prince’s friend and fellow Harvard graduate David Jeffries had been aboard the lost ship. Prince later reflected on these events, explaining that “Multitudes of Things intervene to divert our Minds from going in the Ship we first determined upon; that wou’d have only serv’d to carry us, with the rest of our Dear Companions, to the watery Grave.”<sup>89</sup>

“But now, the street being clear,” Prince “silently went up to the Old South-meeting,” where no one knew him “but Mr. Sewall, then in the pulpit.”<sup>90</sup> Joseph Sewall, the son of Judge Samuel Sewall, had been Prince’s friend and classmate at Harvard College. After the meeting had ended, Prince “made haste into the porch, on purpose to avoid Mr. Sewall’s taking notice of me in publick, & there meeting with my Landlord [Richard] Southgate,” with whom Prince had lived for two years in Coombs, England, “He showed me Brother Moses, whom else I could not have known, and turning the corner, cousin Joseph Prince overtook us, & carried us two Home with Him: From thence we went to cousin Hannover’s, & then to Cousin Loring’s where I took up my

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<sup>86</sup> Increase Mather, preface to *God brings to the Desired Haven: A Thanksgiving-Sermon Deliver’d at the Lecture in Boston N.E. on Thursday September 5, 1717...*, by Thomas Prince (Boston, 1717), ii.

<sup>87</sup> Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, vol. 2, ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 837.

<sup>88</sup> Mather, preface to *God brings to the Desired Haven*, i-ii.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Prince, *God brings to the Desired Haven: A Thanksgiving-Sermon Deliver’d at the Lecture in Boston N.E. on Thursday September 5, 1717...* (Boston, 1717), 24.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Prince, “Journal, 1710–1751,” Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Lodgings.”<sup>91</sup> While at Old South, Prince, donning “a Wigg” and “Russet Coat,” seems to have caught the eye of Samuel Sewall, who had otherwise failed to recognize him.<sup>92</sup> In his diary, however, Sewall, who was known in similar circumstances to condemn such fashion statements, chose instead to refrain from passing judgment on Prince, who had no doubt picked up the style in London.

Within days of returning to America, Prince received an invitation to preach before the Congregational church in Hingham. He declined the invitation, and accepted instead the rival invitation of Boston’s Third Church. On September 5, 1717, Prince preached a thanksgiving sermon from the pulpit at Old South. In the preface to that sermon, Increase Mather observed that “Many times there is a Marvellous Attractiveness in a Native Land, which makes it to be desired, more than others that are far more desirable.”<sup>93</sup> Prince had indeed chosen to return to his native New England, for as he explained, “It seems to be a careful Instinct of Divine Providence, that our being born & educated in any Country does indear it to us, and generally make us to prefer it above all others in the World, tho’ They ever so much exceed it.”<sup>94</sup> The purpose of this was so that “Humane Society may be thereby preserved & improved, & every one may have a strong Propension to promote the Welfare & Prosperity of the Land of His Birth & Breeding.”<sup>95</sup> The welfare and prosperity of a society, moreover, depended on the “united Attraction of Kindred, Alliance & Friendship.”<sup>96</sup> Over the next decade, Thomas Prince would make

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Sewall, *Diary*, 858.

<sup>93</sup> Mather, preface to *God brings to the Desired Haven*, i.

<sup>94</sup> Prince, *God brings to the Desired Haven*, 8-9.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 10.

Boston his home, establishing alliances within its Congregational churches, starting a family of his own, and forging friendships with his fellow ministers.

Impressed by his thanksgiving sermon, Old South invited Prince to assist Joseph Sewall for two months in his pastoral duties. As Samuel Sewall recorded in his diary for December 8, 1717, “Mr. Thomas Prince’s two Moneths being compleat; Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> current is appointed for the Church to meet to Consider what further Steps are to be taken.”<sup>97</sup> On December 20, the Third Church voted to extend Prince an invitation to become its new minister.<sup>98</sup> On the evening of February 4, the following year, Prince dined at the house Joseph Sewall in the company of Samuel Sewall, Cotton Mather, and Jonathan Belcher.<sup>99</sup> Three days later, Cotton Mather expressed in his diary the hope that “By encouraging Mr. [Prince] to accept the Invitation of the Old South Church, I may have a Companion with whom I may unite, more than anyone upon Earth in doing services for the Kingdome of God.”<sup>100</sup> Two days later, Mather’s hopes were realized when Prince accepted Old South’s call.

Prince’s ordination was set for October 1, 1718. Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, William Wadsworth, Benjamin Colman, and Joseph Sewall all took part in the service. In attendance were Governor Dudley and his wife. In his ordination sermon, Prince recalled his “Reception into My *Native Country*” as “One of the happiest *Scenes* in all My Life.”<sup>101</sup> Speaking of his travels abroad, Prince noted that he had “not been able to see

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<sup>97</sup> Sewall, *Diary*, 872.

<sup>98</sup> According to Samuel Sewall, Prince received forty-eight votes to Samuel Fiske’s twelve (Sewall, *Diary*, 875.)

<sup>99</sup> Sewall, *Diary*, 881.

<sup>100</sup> Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather, 1709-1724, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 7, vol. 68 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), 505.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Sermon Delivered By Thomas Prince . . . at his Ordination* (Boston, 1718), [ii].

with Satisfaction the Reasonableness or Consistency of it.”<sup>102</sup> “I have,” he said, “been often surprised to consider, how I have been unaccountably governed by various Views & Motives, & successively led on from One to Another till they all intirely vanished but the Prospect & Love of My *Country*.”<sup>103</sup> Cotton Mather noted the ordination of this “very hopeful young Gentleman” in his diary and resolved to “here enter him as one of my Relatives; hoping to enjoy a Brother in him, and a Friend more useful than a Brother.”<sup>104</sup>

Over the next ten years Mather and Prince developed a close working relationship, and despite his seniority, Mather came to rely increasingly on Prince’s services and advice. Mather frequently called upon Prince to read his manuscripts, to enlist subscribers for their publication, and to see them into print. In 1719, for instance, Mather presented Prince with a draft of an account of the Aurora Borealis, leaving Prince to decide whether it merited publication. “If you think it may do any Good,” Mather wrote, “I leave it unto you, to give it unto what Bookseller you please.”<sup>105</sup> The piece was eventually published under the title of *A Voice from Heaven*. Prince likewise secured the financial support of “Madam *Saltonstal*,” a “Noble Subscriber,” for Mather’s *Ratio Disciplinae* when the funds for its publication had been exhausted. Prince, it turns out, was uniquely positioned for such tasks, for not only was Old South meetinghouse located down the street from Cornhill, Boston’s printing and publishing district, but many of Boston’s most prominent printers and booksellers—Batholomew Green, Samuel Gerrish, and Daniel Henchman—belonged to Prince’s congregation.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., [i].

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Mather, *Diary*, 557.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 596.

In 1722 Mather again asked Prince to see to it that one of his sermons, *The Minister*, find its way into print. In his letter to Prince, Mather enclosed “*fifty Shillings towards the Expence*” of its publication. In a particularly revealing passage Mather urged, “If you, or any of the Brethren, would correct any passage in it, I Entirely resign it unto your Pleasure. I could have Embellished it with many ornaments. But I conscientiously decline the ostentation of Erudition, Lest I disoblige that Holy Spirit, on whom alone I depend for the Success of the Essay.”<sup>106</sup> Mather, it seems, was acutely sensitive to the fact that his literary style often failed to conform to the fashionable tastes of New England’s youngest ministers and their audiences. Prince, however, had adopted the popular and polite style of his peers. His sermons reflect a broader trend within Anglo-American belles lettres toward a conversational style, one that combined urbane wit with reasoned arguments deduced from both nature and scripture.<sup>107</sup> Prince’s sermons, like those of his colleague Benjamin Colman at Brattle Street Church, appealed to both the head and the heart, to both the reason and the affections. Prince himself later acknowledged the gulf separating his style from Mather’s, writing that “In his *Style* indeed He was something singular, and not so agreeable to the Gust of the Age.”<sup>108</sup>

Despite, however, the significant intellectual and generational differences separating them, Mather and Prince shared a special bond. As Mather approached his death, their relationship only grew stronger. His correspondence during these years burst with effusive expressions of his fondness for Prince. When Mather felt like an outcast,

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 684.

<sup>107</sup> On eighteenth-century belles lettres generally, see especially David S. Shields, “British-American Belles Lettres,” in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, vol. 1, 1590–1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 307–343.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Prince, *The Departure of Elijah lamented. A Sermon Occasioned by the Great and Publick Loss in the Decease of... Cotton Mather...* (Boston, 1728), 24.

isolated from his Boston colleagues—when, for instance, in 1724 he felt the “the Ministers of this Town” to be “the *most unbrotherly and unsocial Tribe* of their Profession...in the whole World”—he chose to confide in Prince.<sup>109</sup> “I am willing,” Mather wrote Prince, “to distinguish *you* from the rest.”<sup>110</sup> Mather considered Prince his “dear Friend,—and one of my dearest!”<sup>111</sup> “That you are as Cordial and Constant a Friend unto me, as any I have in the world,” Mather again wrote Prince in 1726, “Endears you not unto me, so much as your being such a Friend of our glorious CHRIST, and of His Truth and Cause and Kingdome in the World.”<sup>112</sup>

Mather died on February 13, 1728, and although the loss was particularly painful for Prince, Mather’s departure from the New England scene had left in its wake a public void that Prince took upon himself to fill. Mather’s death proved a spur to Prince’s own literary-historical labors, releasing him from the deference he felt he owed his elder friend and fellow minister. Mather’s death occasioned a number of funeral sermons throughout the city. In addition to those preached by Benjamin Colman at Brattle Street Church and by Samuel Mather, Cotton’s son, before Mather’s own flock at North Church, Thomas Prince delivered his own at Old South entitled *The Departure of Elijah lamented*. On the morning of February 18, 1728, Prince mounted the pulpit of the congregation’s Old Cedar meetinghouse as he had on many Sundays since his ordination nearly ten years before. He took as his text 2 Kings Chapter 2, verses 12-13: “And Elisha saw it and He cried, My Father, my Father, the Chariot of Israel and the Horsemen

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<sup>109</sup> Mather, *Diary*, 792.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 811.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 812.



Thereof: and He saw Him no more: and He took hold of his own Cloaths and rent them in two pieces: He took up also the Mantle of Elijah that fell from Him.”<sup>113</sup>

In Prince’s sermon, Cotton Mather assumed the role of Elijah, prophet to the ancient Israelites, God’s chosen people. Prince exhorted his hearers to take up Elijah’s mantle, by which he meant “the excellent *Writings*” Mather had left behind.<sup>114</sup> These writings, said Prince, “like Elijah’s Mantle, were one special Means whereby [New England’s ministers] did such eminent Service while they lived: and which...may thro’ the Grace of God have the same Success as well after their Departure as before.”<sup>115</sup> How much, Prince asked, “are the present and future Generations indebted, for the noble Care He [Mather] has taken to preserve the *Memory* of the great and excellent Fathers and these religious Plantations, *that* was just a sinking into Oblivion?”<sup>116</sup> Prince believed that by turning to Mather’s writings, his hearers might themselves contribute something to the preservation of the “endearing Legacies of our spiritual Fathers.”<sup>117</sup>

Mather’s death, Prince believed, had represented a great loss for the community of Boston. “The Care of the *Churches* both in this and the Provinces round about,” Prince contended, “has for many Years lain chiefly upon Him,” who had long been “a Father to the Ministers in them, and to Him they reperi’d in their difficult Cases for Light and Direction.”<sup>118</sup> Cotton’s father, Increase, had died only a few years before in 1723. To lose such ministers, such friends, Prince despaired, was “no more to hear or see them in our Pulpits, to meet them in our Streets, or to receive them in our Houses!”<sup>119</sup> “For *my* self,”

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<sup>113</sup> Prince, *The Departure of Elijah lamented*, 1.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Prince revealed in a personal aside, “I must always account the particular Intimacy He was pleased to favour me with, as one of the richest Belssings of all my Life.”<sup>120</sup> Grateful for Mather’s friendship, Prince regretted only one thing: the loss of that “great Treasure of secret and curious *History*” he had accumulated over the years and “lodg’d in his Mind.”<sup>121</sup> Despite the vast body of historical writing produced by Mather in his lifetime, Prince feared that a greater portion of Mather’s knowledge of history had “irrecoverably vanished” with Mather’s death.<sup>122</sup>

Prince concluded his sermon on Mather, assuring his congregation that the deceased had ascended into heaven. Mather, Prince said, “thro’ Faith and Patience is gone before us to inherit the Promises.” Prince did not, however, end there. After all, in Puritan culture the purpose of mourning loved ones lost was not to memorialize the dead but to serve the living, to impel them to act in God’s service. “And how shall we come to *secure our future Ascention* to the same heavenly Places,” Prince asked, “but by observing his Councils and imitating his bright Example?”<sup>123</sup> He continued: “And what shall we do for *Power* to follow Him thither, but earnestly cry to the God of all Grace that He would fill us with his lively Spirit, uphold us with his mighty hand, and conduct us by his perfect Council, till he raises us to the *same Inheritance*.”<sup>124</sup>

Prince, it seems, had deeply internalized the message of his sermon, for in the months following Mather’s death he took some initial steps toward imitating his beloved mentor’s example. As Prince later recalled, it was in 1728, the same year as Mather’s death, that he had begun to seriously contemplate writing his own history of New

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

England. He had long delayed such a project, writing that although he had “been often urged here to undertake our History,” he had “as often declin’d,” until “at length in 1728 I determined to draw up a *short Account of the most remarkable Transactions and Events, in the Form of a meer Chronology.*”<sup>125</sup> What prompted this sudden decision to undertake the writing of so ambitious a history? Prince does not say exactly, but his funeral sermon for Cotton Mather offers clues as to what might have prompted him in that same year to set pen to paper as he began writing his history of New England. As Prince admitted in his *Chronological History*, he had until then aspired to “no other than to go on with my Collections, & Provide Materials for some other Hand.”<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps Prince hoped that in publishing his history he would, like Mather, continue to “shine and burn,” to “breath and speak,” to still “express” and “publish” his mind, in short, to “instruct, reprove, exhort, perswade; and appear as earnest as ever to promote the Kingdom of Christ” even long after he had passed into obscurity.<sup>127</sup> Perhaps Prince believed it his duty to assume the role of Elisha and to take up Mather’s mantle.

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England In the Form of Annals...* (Boston, 1736), iii.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

<sup>127</sup> Prince, *The Departure of Elijah lamented*, 15.

## CHAPTER FOUR

In the months following Mather's death, Prince began gathering information for a history he was tentatively calling "a *New-English Chronology*."<sup>128</sup> Placing an advertisement in the May 30 issue of Boston's *Weekly News-Letter*, Prince asked "that the several Ministers of the Towns and Precincts throwout this Country, wou'd send in either to *Him* or to Mr *Samuel Gerrish* Bookseller in *Boston*, an exact Account" of the history of their towns "with all convenient Speed, that these Material Passages may be Preserved and quickly Published for the Use and Entertainment of the present & Future Generations."<sup>129</sup> Below this solicitation appeared, not only a request for "Proposals for Printing by Subscription" for "the *Chronology* abovesaid," but also one for "the Life of the Learned and Reverend *COTTON MATHER*."<sup>130</sup> Published in 1729 and compiled by Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather* contained a preface written by Thomas Prince.

Clearly Mather continued to occupy Prince's thoughts well into 1729, but Prince had become determined to strike out on his own and, emerging from underneath Mather's shadow, had begun to undertake his own historical project. In doing so, Prince followed the conventions established by his predecessors, those whom Urian Oakes had once called "the Lords Remembrancers."<sup>131</sup> New England's earliest chroniclers—William Hubbard, Edward Johnson, and the Mathers—saw no need to reconcile the dual callings of historian and minister. Throughout their varied careers, they remained committed to interpreting historical events through the lens of religion. Published in 1736, *A*

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<sup>128</sup> *Weekly News-Letter*, (Boston, Mass.), May 30-June 6, 1728, [2].

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Urian Oakes, *New-England Pleaded with, And pressed to consider the things which concern her Peace...* (Cambridge, 1673), 23.

*Chronological History of New-England* along with Prince's historically occasioned sermons reveal that Prince likewise elided the seeming tensions between his historical and ministerial callings. Prince the historian, who sought to account empirically and objectively for all of history's facts and dates, was easily reconciled with Prince the minister, who was predisposed to read history in light of God's divine will. Prince's attempt to write a comprehensive and seemingly objective chronological history remained intimately bound up with his desire to interpret history providentially. The sheer abundance of compounded, contradictory, and competing "facts" discovered in the process of writing his *Chronological History*, however, ultimately defied Prince's ability to bring his project to completion.

Cotton Mather, a generation before the publication of Prince's *Chronological History*, had seen no conflict between his roles as minister and historian. Mather could, on the one hand, lay claim to the role of "an impartial historian" while, on the other, advising readers of history to "ever now and then make a convenient Pause; to think, *What can I see of the Glorious GOD in these Occurrences? And always remember, The Providence of the Glorious GOD in governing the World, is now under my Contemplation.*"<sup>132</sup> The two callings—of historian and minister, of chronicler and shepherd—were, in Mather's mind, complementary rather than contradictory.

Although he seems to have sensed the shifting currents of eighteenth-century historical practice and literary style, Prince continued to couch New England's past within the universal framework of sacred history adopted by Mather. Prince hoped that by adopting the "*the Form of a meer Chronology,*" whose "Nature and Design" was

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<sup>132</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; Or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 1: 29.  
Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium...* (Boston, 1726), 59.

“rather a *Register* or *Collections of Matters as described by Others*,” his work would not “so much admit of Partiality, as a *proper History* where the Writer allows himself the Freedom of using his own Expressions.”<sup>133</sup> The historical genre of chronological annals, as opposed to a pure narrative history, would, Prince hoped, allow him to transcend the interests of sect or party.

This need to shed one’s past in order to tell it faithfully owed a great deal to the post-confessional, post-Puritan intellectual milieu in which Prince found himself in early eighteenth-century Boston. Prince stated his subject position baldly in the preface to the *Chronological History*. “For myself,” Prince wrote,

I own, I am on the side of *pure Christianity*, as also of *Civil and Religious Liberty*; and this for the *Low* as well as *High*, for the *Laity* as well as the *Clergy*; I am for leaving every one to the *Freedom of Worshipping according to the Light of his Conscience*; and for *extending Charity to every one who receives the Gospel as the Rule of his Faith and Life*: I am on the side of *Meekness, Patience, Gentleness and Innocence*: And I hope, my Inclination to these great Principles will not byass me to a Misrecital of Facts; but rather to state them as I really find them for the publick Benefit.<sup>134</sup>

Prince’s commitment to civil and religious liberty was thus presented, not as a claim to partisanship, but as grounds for his impartiality.

In his *Magnalia*, too, Mather had staked out his subject position. “All good men,” Mather realized, “will not be satisfied with every thing that is here set before them.”<sup>135</sup> Mather, therefore, sought a middle course, one, he was convinced, that would prove unsatisfactory to both those more liberal Congregationalists who espoused “a larger way” and those conservatives whose “unhappy narrowness of soul” led them toward a stricter

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England In the Form of Annals...* (Boston, 1736), iii.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>135</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 36.

definition of church discipline.<sup>136</sup> Prince likewise sought a middle course, but one defined by his methodology rather than his theology. In order to appease, on the one hand, those who reveled in minutiae and, on the other, those who thought such minutiae “too needless or small to be noted,” Prince thought it a “a proper Rule” to “mention smaller Things in the *Infancy* of these Plantations,” which he would later “omit as they grow a greater People.”<sup>137</sup> In his *Chronological History* Prince continued to interpret history through the lens of religion, as a “Train of Providences,” sometimes “afflicting and then delivering, but preserving us thro’ all our Dangers, disappointing the Designs of Enemies, maintaining our invaluable Liberties, and causing us to grow and prosper.”<sup>138</sup>

When called upon in 1730 to preach Massachusetts’s annual election sermon, Prince thought it “extreamly proper,” in the year of the Bay Colony’s centennial,

To look back to the Beginning of this remarkable Transaction; and first Commemorate the Righteous and Signal *Works* of GOD toward us, both in our own Days and in the Days of our Fathers; and then consider the great & special Obligations they have laid upon us, with the Nature of our Carriage towards Him for the time past, and our Interest and Wisdom for the future.”<sup>139</sup>

Even in such sermons as this one, Prince presented the Lord’s Remembrancers’ standard reading of history’s purpose: “to *Remember* all his [God’s] signal *Operations*, both of *Judgment* and of *Mercy*, both to *Them* and their *Fathers*, to view them as Acts of *Faithfulness and Righteousness* to them, and consider the special and great *Obligations* arising from them.”<sup>140</sup> Prince proceeded to direct his audience’s attention to their special status as God’s chosen people, saying “there never was any People on Earth, so parallel

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<sup>136</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 36, 37.

<sup>137</sup> Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England*, x.

<sup>138</sup> Prince, dedication to *A Chronological History of New-England*, [iii].

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Prince, *The People of New-England Put in mind of the Righteous Acts of the Lord to Them and their Fathers, and Reasoned with concerning them. A Sermon Delivered at Cambridge...* (Boston, 1730), 21-2.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

in their general History to that of the ancient Israelites as this of New-England.”<sup>141</sup> He gave a brief account of the trials that had befallen New England’s people, placing them within the context of their covenant with God. The “sacred Covenant” figures prominently in Prince’s sermon.<sup>142</sup> It explained at the same time both God’s “censure and condemnation” and the “distinguishing *Advantages*” he had bestowed on His people.<sup>143</sup>

One passage from the sermon in particular illustrates Prince’s selective reading of the New England past and demonstrates also his attempt to move beyond the petty sectarian disagreements and toward a new post-Puritan, post-confessional era. “In *Points of Doctrine*,” Prince wrote of the first generation New England migrants, “they entirely held with the *Church* of England, their Judgment of *Orthodoxy* being the very same.”<sup>144</sup> Their contention with the Church of England had always been internal, a disagreement over what constituted “*Pure Religion*.”<sup>145</sup> According to Prince, the transformative event in New England’s relationship with the “native Country,” the event that had brought New England into closer harmony with England, had been “the *Glorious Revolution*.”<sup>146</sup> Whereas in “former Times,” among the first generation of New Englanders, England had been “as the Land of Egypt,” it had become since the *Glorious Revolution* “an happy Land of Ease and Liberty.”<sup>147</sup> By casting the Puritan exodus to New England as an internal dispute, one in which the goal all along had been that of Protestantism itself, namely to bring “Religion” into “*free Obedience to the known Laws of God*,” Prince

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



could thereby interpret the Glorious Revolution as the long-awaited fulfillment of the founders' vision for a purified and reformed Protestantism.<sup>148</sup>

Such historically occasioned sermons gave Prince free rein to interpret New England's past according to God's providential designs, but they had also forced him to distill the essence of New England's past into a single, coherent statement, to shear it of its complexity, and to fit it within an unambiguous interpretive framework whose meaning could be conveyed easily to an audience already receptive to its message. Prince's *Chronological History*, by contrast, required a different approach: "It is *Exactness*," Prince declared in its preface, "I aim at, and would not have the least Mistake if possible pass to the World."<sup>149</sup> In his *Chronological History* Prince committed himself to a faithful reading of the sources, a task dictated by Prince's adoption of the annalistic rather than the narrative mode.

With his *Chronological History* Prince aspired to universal history. Although an ostensive "summary and exact *Account* of the most material *Transactions* and *Occurrences* relating to This Country, in the Order of Time wherein they happened, from the *Discovery* by Capt. Gosnold in 1602, to the *Arrival* of Governor Belcher, in 1730," the *Chronological History of New-England* was in fact set within a universal framework, beginning with "the Creation" and including, in a "connected *Line of Time*, the Succession of *Patriarchs* and *Sovereigns* of the most famous Kingdoms & Empires, the gradual *Discoveries* of America, and the *Progress* of the Reformation to the *Discovery* of New-England."<sup>150</sup> The *History*, whose chronological format was intended to fix "not only the *Year* and *Month*, but even the *Day* of every Article," was intended to

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>149</sup> Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England*, ix.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, [title page].

serve as “a certain Guide to future Historians.”<sup>151</sup> The immediate purpose of the *Chronological History*, however, belied such universal aspirations, for Prince’s history had been offered as a corrective to Daniel Neal’s *History of New-England* (1720), which, according to Prince, had “fallen into many Mistakes of Facts.”<sup>152</sup>

Prince’s sources mirrored this tension between the universal and the particular. Like Mather, who had consulted “the *histories* of all ages,” Prince consulted texts both ancient and modern, both comprehensive and provincial, in an attempt to portray New England’s past as but the most recent link in the connected line of sacred history.<sup>153</sup> For the history of ancient Israel Prince kept strictly “to the Hebrew Bible;” for ancient history he stuck to “*Ptolemy’s famous Astronomical Canon;*” and for the history of England Prince made use of “*Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio, Herodian, Eusebius, Evagrius, Socrates Scholasticus, Calvisius, Helvicus, Petavitus*” as well as “the *ancient Authors* in Latin to the Reign of *Edward II.*”<sup>154</sup> When he turned, however, to New England Prince consulted the provincial sources comprising his New England Library of “*above a Thousand Books, Pamphlets, and Papers...in Print, and a great Numbers of Papers in Manuscript.*”<sup>155</sup> Prince had supplemented this material, printing a circular letter in Boston which he sent out across the New England countryside. These yielded “Near 200 *Chronological Letters...collected from the Records of several Towns & Churches,*” from “*private Registers, Gravestones, and the Information of aged and Intelligent Persons.*”<sup>156</sup> In doing this, Prince hoped “that such material Passages might be preserved from

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., iii, iv.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>153</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 33.

<sup>154</sup> Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England*, v.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., viii.

Oblivion.”<sup>157</sup> The *Chronological History* reflected then not only Prince’s aspirations for a universal history but also a provincial antiquarian consciousness, a desire to preserve local records which were “daily in Danger of perishing beyond Recovery.”<sup>158</sup>

Like Mather before him, who as Jan Stievermann has argued “seems to have aspired to an ultimate ‘polyhistory,’ or to what a modern critic might call a universal historiographic intertext,” Prince hoped to “produce an encyclopedic master-text,” one which would “harmonize” conflicting accounts of New England’s past.<sup>159</sup> Prince admits as much in the description of the task laid before him at the outset of the project: “The Reader,” he wrote,

will easily conceive how large and difficult a Field now lay before me; when all these *Manuscripts* were to be perused, examined, and compared both with *Themselves* and with those *Accounts already published*; their Varieties and Contradictions solved, their Mistakes discovered; the Chronological Order of all their Passages found out; one regular Abridgement taken from them; what several wanted, to be supplied from others; and the most material and proper Passages, Words and Phrases selected from them all, and placed together in a natural Order, and so as to enlighten each other.<sup>160</sup>

Prince, refusing to take “the least *Iota* upon trust,” insisted on examining only “*Original Authors*” and hoped that his reader would “see that so many precise Points of Time, are no where to be found, but by such a collection as I have for this Intent perused.”<sup>161</sup> Thus would the outward appearance of the *Chronological History*, as “a *Register or Collection of Matters as described by others*,” conceal its author’s hand in arranging and thereby silently interpreting the material bound between its covers.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>159</sup> Jan Stievermann, “Writing ‘To Conquer All Things’: Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* and the Quandary of Copia,” *Early American Literature* 39, no. 2 (2004): 270, 269.

<sup>160</sup> Prince, *A Chronological History of New-England*, viii.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

Like Mather, Prince had set for himself a difficult task, but, unlike his mentor, Prince failed to complete the task he had set for himself. *A Chronological History of New-England* comes to an abrupt end in 1630 with Prince having barely scratched the surface of New England's founding. In its final pages Prince was forced to offer an apology—one which strikes the modern reader as rather humorous—writing that the book, “growing beyond my Expectation, and the Bookseller informing me that if I now proceed to the *End* of this *Second Section*, as intended, it will make the *First Volume* too unsizeable; I must ask the Reader to excuse my referring the Rest to the *Second Volume*.”<sup>163</sup> Evidently Prince's material had not only exceeded the physical bounds dictated by Prince's publisher but had exhausted the finite abilities of the historian.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 250.

## CONCLUSION

Prince did, in fact, produce a sequel to his *Chronological History*, but it would not appear until 1755, almost twenty years after the first and three years before Prince's death. This second volume, however, brought Prince's *History* forward by only three years to 1633, still a long way from its intended end in 1730. Thomas Prince, we have seen, had shared with his predecessors, and especially Cotton Mather, a web of cultural assumptions about the relationships between old England and New England, constitutional monarchy and Protestant Christianity, his ministerial calling and historical practice.

Whereas Prince merely sought to reinterpret the various connections between theology and history, religion and the state, old England and New England, his successors sought to sever these connections. Later in the century, as the ministry lost its singular hold on the public imagination, history and theology began to part ways. The Great Awakening and later the Unitarian controversy would reveal the fractures within New England Congregationalism between Old Lights and New, moderates and Unitarians, the Standing Order and the state. The American Revolution, too, would shatter the British Empire, although not Protestant Christianity.

In a sense, Prince had confronted the challenge faced by all historians: to organize a vast array of competing sources around a coherent narrative, to make lifeless facts tell a lively story, and to define one's subjective relationship to one's historical materials. Insofar as Prince wrestled with such issues, he reminds us of the difficulties confronting historians of each and every generation. His inability and unwillingness finally to dissolve the connection between his general and particular callings—between, that is, his

personal convictions and his worldly pursuits—should humble us and remind us of the vital relationship between the stories we choose to tell and the personal experiences that imbue them with life.

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