

John Adams
Library.



IN THE CUSTODY OF THE
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.



SHELF N^o

ADAMS

151.7

SOME PHASES
OF
SEXUAL MORALITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE
IN
COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND.

BY
CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

[REPRINTED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL
SOCIETY, JUNE, 1891.]

CAMBRIDGE:
JOHN WILSON AND SON.

University Press.

1891.

SOME PHASES OF SEXUAL MORALITY IN COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND.

IN the year 1883 I prepared a somewhat detailed sketch of the history of the North Precinct of the original town of Braintree, subsequently incorporated as Quincy, which was published and can now be found in the large volume entitled "History of Norfolk County, Massachusetts." In the preparation of that sketch I had at my command a quantity of material of more or less historical value, — including printed and manuscript records, letters, journals, traditions both oral and written, etc., — bearing on social customs, and political and religious questions or conditions. The study of this material caused me to use in my sketch the following language: —

"That the earlier generations of Massachusetts were either more law-abiding or more self-restrained than the later, is a proposition which accords neither with tradition nor with the reason of things. The habits of those days were simpler than those of the present; they were also essentially grosser. The community was small; and it hardly needs to be said that where the eyes of all are upon each, the general scrutiny is a safeguard to morals. It is in cities, not in villages, that laxity is to be looked for." But "now and again, especially in the relations between the sexes, we get glimpses of incidents in the dim past which are as dark as they are suggestive. Some such are connected with Quincy. . . . The illegitimate child was more commonly met with in the last than in the present century, and bastardy cases furnished a class of business with which country lawyers seem to have been as familiar then as they are with liquor cases now."¹

Being now engaged in the work of revising and rewriting the sketch in which this extract occurs, I have recently had

¹ History of Norfolk County, Massachusetts, p.231.

occasion to examine again the material to which I have alluded; and I find that, though the topic to which it relates in part is one which cannot be fully and freely treated in a work intended for general reading, yet the material itself contains much of value and interest. Neither is the topic I have referred to in itself one which can be ignored in an historical view, though, as I have reason to believe, there has been practised in New England an almost systematic suppression of evidence in regard to it; for not only are we disposed always to look upon the past as a somewhat Arcadian period, — a period in which life and manners were simpler, better and more genuine than they now are, — not only, I say, are we disposed to look upon the past as a sort of golden era when compared with the present, but there is also a sense of filial piety connected with it. Like Shem and Japhet, approaching it with averted eyes we are disposed to cover up with a garment the nakedness of the progenitors; and the severe looker after truth, who wants to have things appear exactly as they were, and does not believe in the suppression of evidence, — the investigator of this sort is apt to be looked upon as a personage of no discretion and doubtful utility, — as, in a word, a species of modern Ham, who, having unfortunately seen what ought to have been covered up, is eager, out of mere levity or prurience, to tell his “brethren without” all about it.

On this subject I concur entirely in the sentiments of our orator, Colonel Higginson, as expressed in his address at the Society’s recent centennial. The truth of history is a sacred thing, — a thing of far more importance than its dignity, — and the truth of history should not be sacrificed to sentiment, patriotism or filial piety. Neither, in like manner, when it comes to scientific historical research, can propriety, whether of subject or, in the case of original material, of language, be regarded. To this last principle the published pages of Winthrop and Bradford bear evidence; and, in my judgment, the Massachusetts Historical Society has, in a career now both long and creditable, done nothing more creditable to itself than in once for all, through the editorial action of Mr. Savage and Mr. Deane, settling this principle in the publications referred to. I am, of course, well aware that Mr. Savage did not edit Winthrop’s History for this Society, but nevertheless he is so

identified with the Society that his work may fairly be considered part of its record. Whether part of its record or not, Mr. Savage and Mr. Deane, — than whom no higher authorities are here recognized, — in the publications referred to, did settle the principle that mawkishness is just as much out of place in scientific historical research as prurience would be, or as sentiment, piety and patriotism are. These last-named attributes of our nature, indeed, — most noble, elevating and attractive in their proper spheres, — always have been, now are, and I think I may safely say will long continue to be, the bane of thorough historical research, and ubiquitous stumbling-blocks in the way of scientific results.

But in the case of history, as with medicine and many other branches of science and learning, there are, as I have already said, many matters which cannot be treated freely in works intended for general circulation, — matters which none the less may be, and often are, important and deserving of thorough mention. Certainly they should not be ignored or suppressed. And this is exactly one of the uses to which historical societies are best adapted. Like medical and other similar associations, historical societies are scientific bodies in which all subjects relating to their department of learning both can and should be treated with freedom, so that reference may be made, in books intended for popular reading, to historical-society collections as pure scientific depositories. It is this course I propose to pursue in the present case; and such material at my disposal as I cannot well use freely in the work upon which I am now engaged, will be incorporated in the present paper, and made accessible in the printed Proceedings of the Society for such general reference as may be desirable.

Among the unpublished material to which I have referred are the records of the First Church of Quincy, — originally and for more than a century and a half (1639–1792) the Braintree North Precinct Church. The volume of these records covering the earliest period of the history of the Society cannot now be found. It was in the possession of the church in 1739, for it was then used and referred to by the Rev. John Hancock, father of the patriot, and fifth pastor of the church, in the preparation of two centennial sermons preached by him at that time; but eighty-five years later, when, in 1824, the parish was separated from the town, the earliest book of regu-

lar records then transferred from the town to the parish clerk went no farther back than Jan. 17, 1708.

There is, however, another volume of records still in existence, apparently not kept by the regular precinct clerk, the entries in which, all relating to the period between 1673 and 1773, seem to have been made by five successive pastors. Small and bound in leather, the paper of which this volume is made up is of that rough, parchment character in such common use during the last century, and the entries in it, in five different handwritings, are in many cases scarcely legible, and frequently of the most confidential character. In the main they are records of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths; but some of them relate to matters of church discipline, and these throw a curious light on the social habits of a period now singularly remote. In view of what this volume contains, the loss of the previous volume containing the record of the church's spiritual life from the time it was organized to 1673, a period of thirty-four years, becomes truly an *hiatus valde deflendus*.¹

For a full understanding of the situation it is merely necessary further to say that, during the period to which all the entries in the volume from which I am about to quote relate, Braintree was a Massachusetts sea-board town of the ordinary character. It numbered a population ranging

¹ In 1839 the Rev. William P. Lunt prepared and delivered before the First Congregational Church of Quincy two most scholarly and admirable historical discourses on the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the gathering of the society. In the appendix to these discourses (p. 93) Dr. Lunt states that the earlier records of the church had never been in the possession of either of its then ministers, the Rev. Peter Whitney or himself; and he adds: "In a conversation with Dr. Harris, formerly the respected pastor of Dorchester First Congregational Church, I understood him to say that Mr. Welde, formerly pastor of what is now Braintree Church, had these records in his possession; but when he obtained them, and for what purpose, was not explained. They are probably now irrecoverably lost. As curious and interesting relics of old times, their loss must be regretted."

The extent of this loss is here stated by Dr. Lunt with great moderation. The records in question cover the history of the Braintree church during the whole of the theocratic period in Massachusetts; and, for reasons which will appear in my forthcoming history of Quincy, the loss of these records causes not only an irreparable but a most serious break, so far as Braintree is concerned, in the discussion of one of the most interesting of all the problems connected with the origin and development of the New England town, and system of town-government. There is room for hope that the missing volume may yet come to light.

from some seven hundred souls in 1673, to about twenty-five hundred a century later; the majority of whom during the first half of the eighteenth century lived in the North Precinct of the original town, now Quincy. The meeting-house, about which clustered the colonial village, stood on the old Plymouth road, between the tenth and the eleventh mile-posts south of Boston. The people were chiefly agriculturists, living on holdings somewhat widely scattered; the place had no especial trade or leading industry, and no commerce; so that, when describing the country a few years before, in 1660, — and since then the conditions had not greatly changed, — Samuel Maverick said of Braintree, — “It subsists by raising provisions, and furnishing Boston with wood.”¹ In reading the following extracts from the records, it is also necessary to bear in mind that during the eighteenth century the whole social and intellectual as well as religious life of the Massachusetts towns not only centred about the church, but was concentrated in it. The church was practically a club as well as a religious organization. An inhabitant of the town excluded from it or under its ban became an outcast and a pariah.

The following entry is in the handwriting of the Rev. Moses Fiske, pastor of the church during thirty-six years, from 1672 to 1708, and it bears date March 2, 1683: —

“Temperance, the daughter of Brother F——, now the wife of John B——, having been guilty of the sin of Fornication with him that is now her husband, was called forth in the open Congregation, and presented a paper containing a full acknowledgment of her great sin and wickedness, — publicly bewayed her disobedience to parents, pride, unprofitableness under the means of grace, as the cause that might provoke God to punish her with sin, and warning all to take heed of such sins, begging the church’s prayers, that God would humble her, and give a sound repentance, &c. Which confession being read, after some debate, the brethren did generally if not unanimously judge that she ought to be admonished; and accordingly she was solemnly admonished of her great sin, which was spread before her in divers particulars, and charged to search her own heart wayes and to make thorough work in her Repentance, &c. from which she was released by the church vote unanimously on April 11th 1698.”

The next entry of a case of church discipline is of a wholly different character. The individual subjected to it bore the

¹ Proc. Mass. Hist. Soc., 2d series, vol. i. p. 239.

same family name as the earliest minister of the town, the Rev. William Tompson, who was the first to subscribe the original covenant of Sept. 16, 1639, but was not descended from him. Neither must this Samuel Tomson, or Tompson, be confounded with Deacon Samuel Tompson, who, born in 1630, lived in Braintree, and whose name is met with on nearly every page of the earlier records. The Samuel Tompson referred to in the following entry seems to have been the son of the deacon, and was born Nov. 6, 1662. His name frequently appears in the town records, and usually (pp. 29, 35, 39, 40), as dissenting from some vote providing for the minister's salary or the maintenance of the town school. He was, though the son of a deacon, evidently a man otherwise-minded. This entry, like the previous one, is in the handwriting of Mr. Fiske.

“Samuel Tomson, a prodigie of pride, malice and arrogance, being called before the church in the Meeting-house 28, July, 1697, for his absenting himselfe from the Publike Worshipe, unlesse when any strangers preached; his carriage being before the Church proud and insolent, reviling and vilifying their Pastor, at an horrible rate, and stileing him their priest, and them a nest of wasps; and they unanimously voated an admonition, which was accordingly solemnly and in the name of Christ, applyed to him, wherein his sin and wickedness was laid open by divers Scriptures for his conviction, and was warned to repent, and after prayer to God this poor man goes to the tavern to drink it down immediately, as he said, &c.”

Then, under date of August 27, 1697, a month later, Mr. Fiske proceeds:—

“He delivered to me an acknowledgment in a bit of paper at my house in the presence of Leif't Marsh and Ensign Penniman, who he brought. ’T was read before the Church at a meeting appointed 12. 8. They being not willing to meet before. Leif't Col. Quinsey gave his testimony against it, and said that his conversation did not agree therewith.”

The next entry, also in the same handwriting, is dated Dec. 25, 1697:—

“At the church meeting further testimony came in against him: the church generally by vote and voice declared him impenitent, and I was to proceed to an ejection of him, by a silent vote in Public. But I deferred it, partly because of the severity of the winter, but chiefly

for that his pretended offence was originally against myself, and [he] had said I would take all advantages against him, I deferred the same, and because 4 or 5 of the brethren did desire that he might be called before the church to see if he would own what they asserted: and having

the church, 1 April, 98, he came, brought an additional acknowledgment. Of 15 about 9 or 10 voted to accept of it, &c.”

This occurred on the 11th of April, 1698; and on the 17th Mr. Fiske proceeds:—

“After the end of the public worship his confession was read publicly, and the major part of the Church voted his absolution.”

The next case of discipline in order of the entries relates to an earlier period, 1677. It records the excommunication of one Joseph Belcher. The proceedings took place at meetings held on the 7th of October and the 11th of November.

“Joseph Belcher, a member of this Church though not in full communion, being sent for by the Church, after they had resolved to inquire into the matter of scandall, so notoriously infamous both in Court and Country, by Deacon Basse and Samuel Tompson, to give an account of these things; they returning with this answer from him, that he would consider of it and send the church word the next Sabbath, whether he would come or no; on which return by a script, whereunto his name was subscribed, which he also owned to the elder, in private the weeke after, wherein he scornfully and impudently reflected upon the officer and church, and rudely refused to have anything to doe with us; so after considerable waiting, he persisting in his impenitence and obstinacy, (the Elders met at Boston unanimously advising thereto) the Church voted his not hearing of them, some few brethren not acting, doubting of his membership but silent. He was proceeded against according to Matthew 18, 17,¹ and rejected.”

The next entry also records a case of excommunication, under date of May 4, 1683:—

“Isaac Theer, (the son of Brother Thomas Theer) being a member of this Church but not in full communion, having been convicted of notorious scandalous thefts multiplied, as stealing pewter from Johanna Livingstone, stealing from John Penniman cheese, &c., and others, and stealing an horse at Bridgewater, for which he suffered the law, after much laboring with him in private and especially by the officers of the

¹ “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

church, to bring [him] to a thorough sight and free and ingenuous confession of his sin ; as also for his abominably lying, changing his name, &c., was called forth in public, moved pathetically to acknowledge his sin and publish his repentance, who came down and stood against the lower end of the foreseat after he had been prevented (by our shutting the east door) from going out ; stood impudently, and said indeed he owned his sin of stealing, was heartily sorry for it, begged pardon of God and men, and hoped he should do so no more, which was all he could be brought unto, saying his sin was already known. and that there was no need to mention it in particular, all with a remisse voice, so that but few could hear him. The Church at length gave their judgment against him, that he was a notorious, scandalous sinner, and obstinately impenitent. And when I was proceeding to spread before him his sin and wickedness, he (as 't is probable), guessing what was like to follow, turned about to goe out, and being desired and charged to tarry and hear what the church had to say to him, he flung out of doors, with an insolent manner, though silent. Therefore the Pastor applied himself to the congregation, and having spread before them his sin, partly to vindicate the church's proceeding against him, and partly to warn others ; sentence was declared against him according to Matthew 18, 17."

The next also is a case of excommunication. It appears from the records (p. 658) that " Upon the 9th day of August ther went out a fleet Souldiers to Canadee in the year 1690, and the small pox was aboard, and they died, sixe of it ; four thrown overbord at Cap an." Among these four was Ebenezer Owen, who left a widow and a brother Josiah ; and it is to them that this entry relates : —

" Josiah Owen, the son of William Owen (whose parents have been long in full communion), a child of the covenant, who obtained by fraud and wicked contrivance by some marriage with his brother Ebenezer Owen's widdow, as the Pastor of the church had information by letters from the Court of Assistance touching the sentence there passed upon her (he making his escape). And living with her as an husband, being, by the Providence of God, surprised at his cottage by the Pastor of the Church with Major Quinsey and D. Tompson (of whom reports were that he was gone, we intending to discourse with her and acquaint [her] with the message received from the said Court informing her their appointment of an open confession of their sin in the congregation), he was affectionately treated by them, and after much discourse, finding him obstinate and reflecting, he was desired and charged to be present the next Sabbath before the Church,

to hear what should be spoken to him, but he boldly replied he should not come. And being after treated by D. Tompson and his father to come, and taking his opportunity to carry her away the last weeke, after a solemn sermon preached on 1 Cor. 5. 3, 4 and 5,¹ and prayers added, an account was given to the church and congregation of him, the Brethren voting him to be an impenitent, scandalous, wicked, incestuous sinner, and giving their consent that the sentence of excommunication should be passed upon and declared against him, which was solemnly performed by the Pastor of the Church according to the direction of the Apostle in the above mentioned text: this 17 of January, 169½.”

The above, four in number, are all the cases of church discipline recorded as having been administered during the Fiske pastorate. Considering that this pastorate covered more than a third of a century, and that during it the original township had not yet been divided into precincts, — all the inhabitants of what are now Quincy, Randolph and Holbrook as well as those of the present Braintree, being included in the church to which Mr. Fiske ministered, — the record indicates a high standard of morality and order. The town at that time had a population of about seven hundred souls, which during the next pastorate increased to one thousand.

Mr. Fiske died on the 10th of August, 1708, and the Rev. Joseph Marsh was ordained as his successor on the 18th of the following May (1709). At this time the town was divided for purposes of religious worship into two precincts, the Records of the North Precinct — now Quincy — beginning on the 17th of January, 1708. It then contained, “by exact enumeration,” seventy-two families, or close upon four hundred souls. The record now proceeds in the handwriting of Mr. Marsh: —

“The first Church meeting after my settlement was in August 4, 1713, in the meeting-house. It was occasioned by the notoriously scandalous life of James Penniman, a member of the Church, though not in full communion. The crimes charged upon him and proved

¹ 3. “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed.

4. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5. “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

were his unchristian carriage towards his wife, and frequent excessive drinking. He behaved himself very insolently before the church when allowed to speak in vindication of himself, and was far from discovering any signs of true repentance. He was unanimously voted guilty and laid under solemn admonition by the Church."

The next entry is one of eight years later, and reads as follows:—

"1721. Samuel Hayward was suspended from the Lord's supper by the Brethren for his disorderly behaviour in word and deed, and his incorrigibleness therein."

Up to this time it had been the custom of the Braintree church that any person "propounded" for membership should, before being admitted, give an oral or written relation of his or her religious experience,— a practice in strict accordance with the usage then prevailing, with perhaps a few exceptions, throughout Massachusetts.¹ The record, under date of December 31, 1721, contains the following in relation to this:—

"Dr. Belcher's son Joseph, junior Sophister, [admitted.] He made the last Relation, before the brethren consented to lay aside Relations.

"Because some persons of a sober life and good conversation have signified their unwillingness to join in full communion with the Church, unless they may be admitted to it without making a Public Relation of their spiritual experiences, which (they say) the Church has no warrant in the word of God to require, it was therefore proposed to the Church the last Sacrament-day that they would not any more require a Relation as above said from any person who desired to partake in the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper with us, and after the case had been under debate at times among the brethren privately for the space of three weeks, the question was put to them January 28 172 $\frac{1}{2}$ being on a Lord's Day Evening in the Meeting-house, whether they would any more insist upon the making a Relation as a necessary Term of full communion with them?"

"It passed in the negative by a great majority.

Two months later the case of James Penniman again presented itself. It was now nearly nine years since he had been solemnly admonished; and on the 4th of April, 1722, —

"Sabbath day. It was proposed to the church last Sabbath to excommunicate James Penniman for his contumacy in sin, but this day

¹ Ellis, *The Puritan Age in Massachusetts*, 206-208.

he presented a confession, which was read before the Congregation, and prayed that they would wait upon him awhile longer, which the Church consented to, and he was again publicly admonished, and warned against persisting in the neglect of Public Worship, against Idleness, Drunkenness and Lying; and he gave some slender hopes of Reformation, seemed to be considerably affected, and behaved himself tolerably well."

The following entries complete the record during the Marsh pastorate of sixteen years, which ended March 8, 1726, Mr. Marsh then dying in his forty-first year: —

"September 9. Brother Joseph Parmenter made a public Confession, in the presence of the Congregation for the sin of drunkenness.

"September 21. At a Church meeting of the Brethren to consider his case, the question was put whether they would accept his confession [to] restore him; it passed in the negative, because he has made several confessions of the sin, and is still unreformed thereof: the Brethren concluded it proper to suspend him from Communion in the Lord's Supper, for his further humiliation and warning. He was accordingly suspended.

"March 3^d, 1722-3. Sabbath Evening. Brother Parmenter having behaved himself well (for aught anything that appears) since his suspension, was at his desire restored again by a vote of the Brethren, *nemine contradicente*.

"March 10. Joseph, a negro man, and Tabitha his wife made a public confession of the sin of fornication, committed each with the other before marriage, and desired to have the ordinance of Baptism administered to them.

"May 26. The Brethren of the Church met together to consider what is further necessary to be done by the Church towards the reformation of James Penniman. He being present desired their patience towards him, and offered a trifling confession, which was read, but not accepted by the Brethren, because he manifested no sign of true repentance thereof: they came to (I think) a unanimous vote that he should be cast out of the Church for his incorrigibility in his evil waies, whenever I shall see good to do it, and I promised to wait upon him some time, to see how he would behave himself before I proceeded against him.

"At the same church meeting Major Quincey was fairly and clearly chosen by written votes to the office of tuning the Psalm in our Assemblies for Public Worship.

"January 26, 1723³ Lord's-day. In the afternoon, after a sermon on 1 Cor. 5.5.¹ James Penniman persisting in a course of Idleness,

¹ "5. To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Drunkenness, and in a neglect of the Public Worship, &c. had the fearful sentence of excommunication pronounced upon him.

“February 2, 172 $\frac{3}{4}$. Lord’s Day. After the public service the Church being desired to stay voted — that Benjamin Neal, David Bass and Joseph Neal jun. members in full communion have discovered such a perverse spirit and been guilty of such disorderly behaviour in the House and Worship of God that they deserve to be suspended from communion with us at the Lord’s table.

“February 9. Lord’s Day evening. David Bass acknowledging his offensive behavior and promising to be more watchfull for time to come, the brethren signified their consent that he be restored to full communion with them.

“March 1. This day (being Sacrament day) Benjamin Neal and Joseph Neal, confessing their offensive behavior in presence of the Brethren, were restored to the liberty of full communion.”

The above are all the record entries relating to matters of discipline during the Marsh pastorate, which ended March 8, 1726. They cover a period of sixteen years. On the 2d of November following the Rev. John Hancock was ordained, and the following entries are in his handwriting: —

“January 21, 1728. Joseph P—— and Lydia his wife made a confession before the Church which was well accepted for the sin of Fornication committed with each other before marriage.

“August 12, 1728. The Church met again at the house of Mrs. Marsh to examine into the grounds of some scandalous reports of the conduct of Brother David Bass on May the 29th who was vehemently suspected of being confederate with one Roger Wilson in killing a lamb belonging to Mr. Edward Adams of Milton. The witnesses, viz. Capt. John Billings, Mr. Edward and Samuel Capons of Dorchester, being present, the Church had a full hearing of the case, who unanimously agreed that brother Bass, though he denied the fact of having an hand in killing the lamb, yet was guilty of manifest prevaricating in the matter, and could not be restored to their communion without giving them satisfaction, and desired the matter might be suspended.

“[Nov. 11, 1728.] On Monday November the 11, 1728 we had another church meeting to hear and consider Brother David Bass’s confession, which (after some debate) was accepted; and it was unanimously voted by the Church that it should be read before the whole Congregation, with which brother Bass would by no means comply, and so the matter was left at this meeting.

“But on December the 15 following David Bass’s confession was read publicly before the Church and Congregation, which he owned publicly, and was accepted by the brethren by a manual vote.

“November 17, 1728. Mehetabel the wife of John B—— Junr made a confession before the Church and Congregation for the sin of fornication, which was well accepted.

“September 28, 1729. Elizabeth M—— made a confession before the whole congregation for the sin of fornication, which was accepted by the Church.

“July 2, 1732. Abigail, wife of Joseph C——, made a confession of the sin of fornication, which was well accepted by the Church, though she was ill and absent.

“August 6, 1732. Ebenezer H—— and wife made their confession of the sin of fornication.

“July 1, 1733. Tabitha, a servant of Judge Quincy, and a member of this Church, made her confession for stealing a 3 pound bill from her Master, which was accepted.

“August 11, 1734. Nathan S—— and wife made their confession of the sin of fornication which was well accepted by the church.

“September 28, 1735. Elizabeth P——, widow, made her confession of the sin of fornication and was accepted.

“[Sept. 8, 1735.] At a meeting of the First Church of Christ in Braintree at the house of the Pastor, September the 8th 1735, after prayer—Voted, That it is the duty of this Church to examine the proofs of an unhappy quarrel between Benjamin Owen and Joseph Owen, members in full communion with this Church on May 30th 1735, whereby God has been dishonored and religion reproached.

“After some examination thereof it was unanimously voted by the brethren—That the Pastor should ask Benjamin Owen whether he would make satisfaction to the Church for his late offensive behaviour, which he refused to do in a public manner, unless the charge could be more fully proved upon him. Whereupon there arose several debates upon the sufficiency of the proof to demand a publick confession of him; and there appearing different apprehensions among the brethren about it, it was moved by several that the meeting should be adjourned for further consideration of the whole affair.

“Before the meeting was adjourned Benjamin Web acquainted the brethren with some scandalous reports he had heard of Elizabeth Morse, a member of this Church, when it was unanimously voted to be the duty of this Church to choose a Committee to examine into the truth of them and make report to the Church. And Mr. Benjamin Web, Mr. Moses Belcher Junr and Mr. Joseph Neal, Tert. were chose for the committee.

“Then the meeting was adjourned to the 29th Inst. at 2 oclock P. M.

“The brethren met upon the adjournment, and after humble supplication to God for direction, examined more fully the proofs of the late quarrel between Benj. Owen and Joseph Owen but passed no vote upon them.

“ [Oct. 22, 1735.] At a meeting of the 1st Church in Braintree at the house of the Pastor, Oct. 22, 1735 — after prayer, Benj. Owen offered to the brethren a confession of his late offensive behavior which was not accepted.

“ Then it was voted by the brethren that he should make confession of his offence in the following words, viz: Whereas I have been left to fall into a sinful strife and quarrel with my brother Joseph Owen, I acknowledge I am greatly to blame that I met my brother in anger and strove with him, to the dishonor of God, and thereby also have offended my Christian brethren. I desire to be humbled before God, and to ask God’s forgiveness: I desire to be at peace with my brother, and to be restored to the charity of this Church, and your prayers to God for me.

“ To which he consented, as also to make it in public.

“ At the desire of the brethren the meeting was adjourned to Friday the 24 Inst. at 4 o’clock P. M. that they might satisfy themselves concerning the conduct of Joseph Owen in the late sinful strife between him and his brother. And the Pastor was desired to send to him to be present at the adjournment.

“ The brethren met accordingly, and after a long consideration of the proof had against Joseph Owen, it was proposed to the brethren whether they would defer the further consideration of Joseph Owen’s affair to another opportunity. It was voted in the negative.

“ Whereupon a vote was proposed in the following words viz: Whether it appears to the brethren of this Church that the proofs they have had against Joseph Owen in the late unhappy strife between him and his brother be sufficient for them to demand satisfaction from him. Voted in the affirmative.

“ And the satisfaction the brethren voted he should make for his offence was in the following words: — I am sensible that in the late unhappy and sinful strife between me and my brother Benj. Owen, I am blameworthy, and I ask forgiveness of God and this Church, and I desire to be at peace with my brother and ask your prayers to God for me.

“ Then it was proposed to the brethren whether they would accept this confession, if Joseph Owen would make it before them at the present meeting — Voted in the negative.

“ Whereupon it was voted that he should make this satisfaction for his offence before the Church upon the Lord’s day immediately before the administration of the Lord’s supper. With which he refusing to comply though he consented to make it before the Church at the present meeting, the meeting was dissolved.

“ October 26, 1735. Benj’n Owen made a public confession of his offence, and was restored to the charity of the Church.

“Memorandum. At the adjournment of the Church meeting Sept. the 29th 1735, Mr. Moses Belcher and Mr. Joseph Neal, two of the committee chosen Sept. the 8th, made report to the brethren, that they had been with Eliz. Morse, and that she owned to them she had been delivered of two bastard children since she had made confession to the church of the sin of fornication, and she promised them to come and make the Church satisfaction for her great offence the latter end of October.

“[Nov. 10, 1735.] At a church meeting, Nov. 10th, 1735, the case of Elizabeth Morse came under consideration. And she having neglected to come and make satisfaction for her offence according to her promise, though she was in Town at that time, the brethren proceeded and unanimously voted her suspension from the communion of this church. It was likewise unanimously voted that the Pastor should admonish her in the name of the Church in a letter for her great offence.

“Upon a motion made by some of the brethren to reconsider the vote of the church Oct. 24 relating to Joseph Owen, it was voted to reconsider the same. Voted also that his confession be accepted before the brethren at the present meeting, which was accordingly done, and he was restored to their charity.

“December 7, 1735. Lieutenant Joseph Crosbey made confession of the sin of fornication, and was restored to the charity of the church.

“December 21, 1735. John Beale made confession of the sin of fornication, and was restored to the charity of the brethren.

“April 18, 1736. Susanna W—— made confession of the sin of fornication, and was restored to the charity of the brethren.

“May 1, 1737. Sam. P—— and wife made public confession of the sin of fornication. Accepted.

“January 22, 1737–8. Charles S—— and wife made a public confession of the sin of fornication.

“June 11, 1738. Benj'n Sutton and Naomi his wife, free negroes, made confession of fornication.

“December 17, 1738. Jeffry, my servant, and Flora, his wife, servant of Mr. Moses Belcher, negroes, made confession of the sin of fornication.

“May 20th, 1739. Benjamin C—— and wife, of Milton, made confession of fornication.

“Jan'y 20, 17³/₄⁰. Joseph W—— and wife confessed the sin of fornication.

“October 25, 1741. This Church suspended from their communion Eleazer Vesey for his disorderly unchristian life and neglecting to hear the Church, according to Matt. 18, 17.”

The Hancock pastorate lasted eighteen years, ending with Mr. Hancock's death on the 7th of May, 1744; and no record of cases of church discipline seems to have been kept by any of his successors in the pulpit of the North Precinct church. In the year 1750 Braintree probably contained some eighteen hundred or two thousand inhabitants, and during the half-century between 1725 and 1775 there is no reason to suppose that any considerable change took place in their condition, whether social, material or religious. It was a period of slow maturing. The absence of a record, therefore, in no way implies change; if it indicates anything at all in this case, it indicates merely that the successors to Mr. Hancock, either because they were indolent or because they saw no advantage in so doing, made no written mention of anything relating to the church's life or action beyond what was contained in the book regularly kept by the precinct clerk. There are but two exceptions to this, both consisting of brief entries made, the one by the Rev. Lemuel Bryant, the immediate successor of Mr. Hancock, the other by the Rev. Anthony Wibird, who in 1755 followed Mr. Bryant. Both entries are to be found on the second page of the volume from which all the extracts relating to church discipline have been taken. Mr. Bryant was for his time an advanced religious thinker, and, as is invariably the case with such, he failed to carry the whole of his flock along with him. Owing to declining health he resigned his pastorate in October, 1753, having exactly two months before recorded the following case of discipline:—

“August 22, 1753. Ebenezer Adams was Suspended from the Communion of the Church for the false, abusive and scandalous stories that his Unbridled Tongue had spread against the Pastor, and refusing to make a proper Confession of his monstrous wickedness.”

The other of these two records bears date almost exactly twenty years later, and was doubtless made because of the preceding entry. It is very brief, and as follows:—

“November 3, 1773. The Church made choice of Ebenezer Adams for deacon, in the place of deacon Palmer, who resigned the stated exercise of his office.”

After 1741, therefore, the only records of the North Precinct church are those contained in the book kept by the suc-

cessive precinct clerks, which has often been consulted, but never copied. None of the entries in it relate to cases of discipline or to matters spiritual, they being almost exclusively prudential in character. No record is made of births, baptisms, deaths or marriages, which were still for several years to come noted in the small volume from which I have quoted. Accordingly the Braintree North Precinct records after Mr. Hancock's ministry are of far inferior interest, though as the volume containing them from 1709 to 1766 distinctly belongs to what are known as "ancient records," and as such is liable at any time to be lost or destroyed, I have caused a copy of it to be made, and have deposited it for safe keeping in the library of this Society. An examination of this volume only very occasionally brings to light anything which is of more than local interest, or which has a bearing on the social or religious conditions of the last century, though here and there something is found which constitutes an exception to this rule. Such, for instance, is the following entry in the record of the proceedings of a Precinct meeting held on the 19th of July, 1731, to take measures for properly noticing the completion of the new meeting-house then being built:—

"After a considerable debate with respect to the raising of the new meeting-house, &c., the Question was put whether the committee should provide Bred Cheap Sugar Rum Sider and Bear &c. for the Raising of said Meeting House at the Cost of the Precinct. It passed in the affirmative."

I have been unable to discover any subsequent detailed statement of expenses incurred and disbursements made under the authority conferred by this vote. Such a document might be interesting. Two years before, when in 1729 the Rev. Mr. Jackson was ordained as pastor of the church of Woburn, among the items of expense were four, aggregating the sum of £23 1s., representing the purchase of "6 Barrels and one half of Cyder, 28 Gallons of Wine, 2 Gallons of Brandy and four of Rum, Loaf Sugar, Lime Juice, and Pipes," all, it is to be presumed, consumed at the time and on the spot.

It has of course been noticed that a large proportion of the entries I have quoted relate to discipline administered in cases of fornication, in many of which confession is made by husband and wife, and is of acts committed before marriage. The

experience of Braintree in this respect was in no way peculiar among the Massachusetts towns of the last century. While examining the Braintree records I incidentally came across a singular and conclusive bit of unpublished documentary evidence on this point in the records of the church of Groton; for, casually mentioning one day in the rooms of the Society the Braintree records to our librarian, Dr. S. A. Green, he informed me that the similar records of the Groton church were in his possession, and he kindly put them at my disposal. Though covering a later period (1765-1803) than the portion of the Braintree church records from which the extracts contained in this paper have been made, the Groton records supplement and explain the Braintree records to a very remarkable degree. In the latter there is no vote or other entry showing the church rule or usage which led to these post-nuptial confessions of ante-marital relations; but in the Groton records I find the following among the preliminary votes passed at the time of signing the church covenant, regulating the admission of members to full communion:—

“ June 1, 1765. The church then voted with regard to Baptizing children of persons newly married, That those parents that have not a child till seven yearly months after Marriage are subjects of our Christian Charity, and (if in a judgment of Charity otherwise qualified) shall have the privilege of Baptism for their Infants without being questioned as to their Honesty.”

This rule prevailed in the Groton church for nearly forty years, until in January, 1803, it was brought up again for consideration by an article in the warrant calling a church meeting “ to see if the church will reconsider and annul the rule established by former vote and usage of the church requiring an acknowledgment before the congregation of those persons who have had a child within less time than seven yearly months after marriage as a term of their having baptism for their children.”

The compelling cause to the confessions referred to was therefore the parents' desire to secure baptism for their offspring during a period when baptism was believed to be essential to salvation, with the Calvinistic hell as an alternative. The constant and not infrequently cruel use made by the church and the clergy of the parental fear of infant damnation

— the belief “ that Millions of Infants are tortured in Hell to all Eternity for a Sin that was committed thousands of Years before they were born ” — is matter of common knowledge. Not only did it compel young married men and women to shameful public confessions of the kind which has been described, but it was at times arbitrarily used by some ministers in a way which is at once ludicrous and, now, hard to understand. Certain of them, for instance, refused to baptize infants born on the Sabbath, there being an ancient superstition to the effect that a child born on the Sabbath was also conceived on the Sabbath ; a superstition presumably the basis on which was founded the provision of the apocryphal Blue Laws of Connecticut, —

“ Whose rule the nuptial kiss restrains
On Sabbath day, in legal chains ” ;¹

and there is one well-authenticated case of a Massachusetts clergyman whose practice it was thus to refuse to baptize Sabbath-born babes, who in passage of time had twins born to him on a Lord’s day. He publicly confessed his error, and in due time administered the rite to his children.²

With the church refusing baptism on the one side, and with an eternity of torment for unbaptized infants on the other, some definite line had to be drawn. This was effected through what was known as “ the seven months’ rule ” ; and the penalty for its violation, enforced and made effective by the refusal of the rites of baptism, was a public confession. Under the operation of “ the seven months’ rule ” the records of the Groton church show that out of two hundred persons owning the baptismal covenant in that church during the fourteen years between 1761 and 1775 no less than sixty-six confessed to fornication before marriage.³ The entries recording these cases are very singular. At first the full name of the person, or persons in the case of husband and wife, is written, followed by the words “ confessed and restored ” in full. Somewhat later, about the year 1763, the record becomes regularly “ Confessed Fornication ; ” which two years later is reduced to “ Con. For. ; ” which is subsequently still further abbreviated into merely “ C. F. ” During the three years 1789, 1790 and 1791

¹ Trumbull’s Blue Laws, True and False, p. 37.

² Drake’s History of Middlesex County, vol. ii. p. 371.

³ Butler’s History of Groton, pp. 174, 178, 181.

sixteen couples were admitted to full communion; and of these nine had the letters "C. F." inscribed after their names in the church records.

I also find the following in regard to this church usage in Worthington's "History of Dedham" (pp. 108, 109), further indicating that the Groton and Braintree records reveal no exceptional condition of affairs:—

"The church had ever in this place required of its members guilty of unlawful cohabitation before marriage, a public confession of that crime, before the whole congregation. The offending female stood in the broad aisle beside the partner of her guilt. If they had been married, the declaration of the man was silently assented to by the woman. This had always been a delicate and difficult subject for church discipline. The public confession, if it operated as a corrective, likewise produced merriment with the profane. I have seen no instance of a public confession of this sort until the ministry of Mr. Dexter (1724–55), and then they were extremely rare. In 1781, the church gave the confessing parties the privilege of making a private confession to the church, in the room of a public confession. In Mr. Haven's ministry, (1756–1803) the number of cases of unlawful cohabitation, increased to an alarming degree. For twenty-five years before 1781 twenty-five cases had been publicly acknowledged before the congregation, and fourteen cases within the last ten years."

It will be noticed in the above extract that the writer says he had "seen no instance of a public confession of this sort" prior to 1724, and that until after 1755 "they were extremely rare." In the case of the Braintree records, also, it will be remembered there was but one case of public confession recorded prior to 1723, and that solitary case occurred in 1683.

The Record Commissioners of the city of Boston in their sixth report (Document 114—1880) printed the Rev. John Eliot's record of church members of Roxbury, which covers the period from the gathering of the church in 1632 to the year 1689, and includes notes of many cases of discipline. Among these I find the following, the earliest of its kind:—

"1678. Month 4 day 16. Hanna Hopkins was censured in the Church with admonition for fornication with her husband before they were married and for flying away from justice, unto Road Island." (p. 93.)

During the next eighteen years I find in these records only seven entries of other cases generally similar in character to

the above, though the Roxbury records contain a number of entries descriptive of interesting cases of church discipline, besides many memoranda of "strange providences of God" and "dreadful examples of Gods judgment." It would seem, however, that the instances of church discipline publicly administered on the ground of sexual immorality were infrequent in Roxbury, as in Dedham and Braintree, prior to the year 1725. As will presently be seen, a change either in morals or in discipline, but probably in the latter more than in the former, apparently took place at about that time.

So far as they bear upon the question of sexual morality in Massachusetts during the eighteenth century, what do the foregoing facts and extracts from the records indicate? — what inferences can be legitimately drawn from them? And here I wish to emphasize the fact that this paper makes no pretence of being an exhaustive study. In it, as I stated in the beginning, I have made use merely of such material as chanced to come into my hands in connection with a very limited field of investigation. I have made no search for additional material, nor even inquired what other facts of a similar character to those I have given may be preserved in the records of the two other Braintree precincts. I have not sought to compare the records I have examined with the similar records I know exist of the churches of neighboring towns, — such as those of Dorchester, Hingham, Weymouth, Milton and Dedham. So doing would have involved an amount of labor which the matter under investigation would not justify on my part. I have therefore merely made use of a certain amount of the raw material of history I have chanced upon, bringing to bear on it such other general information of a similar character as I remember from time to time to have come across.

Though the historians of New England, whether of the formal description, like Palfrey and Barry, or of the social and economic order, like Elliott and Weeden, have little if anything to say on the subject, I think it not unsafe to assert that during the eighteenth century the inhabitants of New England did not enjoy a high reputation for sexual morality. Lord Dartmouth, for instance, who, as secretary for the colonies, had charge of American affairs during a portion of the North administration, in one of his conversations with Gover-

nor Hutchinson referred to the commonness of illegitimate offspring "among the young people of New England"¹ as a thing of accepted notoriety; nor did Hutchinson, than whom no one was better informed on all matters relating to New England, controvert the proposition.

And yet, speaking again from the material which chances to be at my own disposal, I find, so far as Braintree is concerned, nothing to justify this statement of Lord Dartmouth's in the manuscript record book of Col. John Quincy, which has been preserved, and is now in the possession of this Society. Colonel Quincy was a prominent man in his day and neighborhood; and the North Precinct of Braintree, in which he lived and was buried, when, nearly thirty years after his death, it was incorporated as a town, took its name from him. As a justice of the peace, Colonel Quincy kept a careful record of the cases, both civil and criminal, which came before him between 1716 and 1761, a period of forty-five years. These cases, a great part of them criminal, were over two hundred in number, and came not only from Braintree but from other parts of the old county of Suffolk. Under these circumstances, if the state of affairs indicated by Lord Dartmouth's remark, and Governor Hutchinson's apparent admission of its truth, did really prevail, many bastardy warrants would during those forty-five years naturally have come before so active a magistrate as John Quincy. Such does not seem to have been the case. Indeed I find during the whole period but four bastardy entries, — one in 1733, one in 1739, one in 1746, and one in 1761, — and, in 1720, one complaint against a woman to answer for fornication. Considering the length of time the record of Colonel Quincy covers, this is a remarkably small number of cases, and, taken by itself, would seem to indicate the exact opposite from the condition of affairs revealed in the church records of the same period, for it includes the whole Hancock pastorate. This record book of Colonel Quincy's I will add is the only original legal material I have bearing on this subject. An examination of the files of the provincial courts would undoubtedly bring more material to light.

I have only further to say, in passing, that some of the other cases mentioned in this John Quincy record are not without a

¹ Hutchinson's Diary and Letters, vol. i. p. 232.

curious interest. For instance, August 24, 1722, John Veasey, "husbandman," is put under recognizance in the sum of £5 "for detaining his child from the public worship of God, said child being about eleven years old." On the same day John Belcher, "cordwainer," is put under a similar recognizance "for absenting himself from the public worship of God the winter past." Eleazer Veasey, — the Braintree Veaseys I will say in passing were members of the Church of England in Braintree, and not members of the Braintree church, — Eleazer Veasey is, on the 20th of September, 1717, fined five shillings to the use of the town poor for "uttering a profane curse." So also Christopher Dyer, "husbandman," "did utter one profane curse," to which charge he pleaded guilty, and, on the 17th of May, 1747, was fined four shillings for the use of the poor. In this case the costs were assessed at six shillings, making ten shillings as the total cost of an oath in Massachusetts at that time; but as Dyer was a "soldier of His Majesty's service," the court added that if the fine was not paid forthwith, he (Dyer) "be publickly set in the stocks or cage for the space of three hours."

Returning to the subject of church discipline and public confessions of incontinence, it will be observed that in the case of the North Precinct Church of Braintree the great body of these confessions are recorded as being made during the Hancock pastorate, or between the years 1726 and 1744. This also, it will be remembered, was the period of what is known in New England history as "The Great Awakening," described in the first chapter of the recently published fifth volume of Dr. Palfrey's work. Some writers, while referring to what they call "the tide of immorality" which then and afterward "rolled," as they express it, over the land, so that "not even the bulwark of the church had been able to withstand" it, — these writers, themselves of course ministers of the church, have, for want of any more apparent cause, attributed the condition of affairs they deplored, but were compelled to admit, to the influence of the French wars, which, it will be remembered, broke out in 1744, and, with an intermission of six years (1749–1755), lasted until the conquest of Canada was completed in 1760. But it would be matter for curious inquiry whether both the condition of affairs referred to and the confessions made in public of sins privately committed

were not traceable to the church itself rather than to the army,—whether they were not rather due to the spiritual than to the martial conditions of the time.

I have neither the material at my disposal, nor the time and inclination to go into this study, both physiological and psychological, and shall therefore confine myself to a few suggestions only which have occurred to me in the course of the examination of the records I have been discussing.

“The Great Awakening,” so called, occurred in 1740,—it was then that Whitefield preached on Boston Common to an audience about equal in number to three quarters of the entire population of the town.¹ Five years before, in 1735, had occurred the famous Northampton revival, engineered and presided over by Jonathan Edwards; and previous to that there had been a number of small local outbreaks of the same character, which his “venerable and honoured Grandfather Stoddard,” as Edwards describes his immediate predecessor in the Northampton pulpit, was accustomed to refer to as “Harvests,” in which there was “a considerable Ingathering of Souls.” A little later this spiritual condition became general and, so to speak, epidemic. There are few sadder or more suggestive forms of literature than that in which the religious contagion of 1735, for it was nothing else, is described; it reveals a state of affairs bordering close on universal insanity. Take for instance the following from Edwards’s “Narrative” of what took place at Northampton:—

“Presently upon this, a great and earnest Concern about the great things of Religion, and the eternal World, became *universal* in all parts of the Town, and among Persons of all Degrees, and all Ages; the Noise amongst the *Dry Bones* waxed louder and louder: All other talk but about spiritual and eternal things, was soon thrown by . . . There was scarcely a single Person in the Town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great Things of the eternal World. Those that were wont to be the vainest, and loosest, and those that had been most disposed to think, and speak slightly of vital and experimental Religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings. . . . Souls did as it were come by Flocks to Jesus Christ. From Day to Day, for many Months together, might be seen evident Instances of Sinners brought *out of Darkness into marvellous Light*, and delivered *out of an horrible Pit, and from the miry Clay, and set upon a Rock*, with a new Song of Praise

¹ Palfrey, vol. v. p. 9.

to God in their mouths. . . . in the Spring and Summer following, Anno 1735 the Town seemed to be full of the Presence of God. It never was so full of *Love*, nor so full of *Joy*; and yet so full of Distress as it was then. There were remarkable Tokens of God's Presence in almost every House. . . . Our publick *Praises* were then greatly enlivened. . . . In all *Companies* on *other Days*, on whatever *Occasions* Persons met together, *Christ* was to be heard of and seen in the midst of them. Our *young People*, when they met, were wont to spend the time in talking of the *Excellency* and dying *Love* of JESUS CHRIST, the Gloriousness of the way of *Salvation*, the wonderful, free, and sovereign *Grace* of God, his glorious Work in the *Conversion* of a Soul, the *Truth* and Certainty of the great Things of God's Word, the Sweetness of the Views of his *Perfection* &c. And even at *Weddings*, which formerly were merely occasions of Mirth and Jollity, there was now no discourse of any thing but the things of Religion, and no appearance of any, but *spiritual Mirth*." ¹

And it was this pestiferous stuff, — for though it emanated from the pure heart and powerful brain of the greatest of American theologians, it is best to characterize it correctly, — it was this pestiferous stuff that Wesley read during a walk from London to Oxford in 1738, and wrote of it in his journal, — "Surely this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Such was the prevailing spiritual condition of the period in which the entries I have read were made in the Braintree church records. In the language of the text from which Dr. Colman preached on the occasion of the first stated evening lecture ever held in Boston, "Souls flying to Jesus Christ [were] pleasant and admirable to behold."

The brother clergyman ² who prepared and delivered from the pulpit of the Braintree church a funeral sermon on Mr. Hancock referred to the religious excesses of the time, and described the dead pastor as a "wise and skilful pilot" who had steered "a right and safe course in the late troubled sea of ecclesiastical affairs," so that his people had to a considerable degree "escaped the errors and enthusiasm . . . in matters of religion which others had fallen into." ³ Nevertheless it is almost impossible for any locality to escape wholly a general epidemic; and in those days public relations of experiences

¹ A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls, &c., 1738, pp. 8-10.

² The Rev. Ebenezer Gay, of Hingham.

³ Lunt's Two Discourses, 1840, p. 48.

were not only usual in the churches, but they were a regular feature in all cases of admission to full communion. That this was the case in the Braintree church is evident from the extract already quoted from the records, when in 1722 "some persons of a sober life and good conversation signified their unwillingness to join in full communion with the church unless they [might] be admitted to it without making a Public relation of their spiritual experiences." It was also everywhere noticed that the women, and especially the young women, were peculiarly susceptible to attacks of the spiritual epidemic. Jonathan Edwards for instance mentions, in the case of Northampton, how the young men of that place had become "addicted to night-walking and frequenting the tavern, and leud practices," and how they would "get together in conventions of both sexes for mirth and jollity, which they called frolicks; and they would spend the greater part of the night in them"; and among the first indications of the approach of the epidemic noticed by him was the case of a young woman who had been one of the greatest "company keepers" in the whole town, who became "serious, giving evidence of a heart truly broken and sanctified."

This same state of affairs doubtless then prevailed in Braintree, and indeed throughout New England. The whole community was in a sensitive condition morally and spiritually, — so sensitive that, as the Braintree records show, the contagion extended to all classes, and, among those bearing some of the oldest names in the history of the township, we find also negroes, — "Benjamin Sutton and Naomi his wife," and "Jef-fry, my servant, and Flora, his wife," — grotesquely getting up before the congregation to make confession, like their betters, of the sin of fornication before marriage. It, of course, does not need to be said that such a state of morbid and spiritual excitement would necessarily lead to public confessions of an unusual character. Women, and young women in particular, would be inclined to brood over things unknown save to those who participated in them, and think to find in confession only a means of escape from the torment of that hereafter concerning which they entertained no doubts; hence perhaps many of these records which now seem both so uncalled for and so inexplicable.

So far, however, what has been said relates only to the

matter of public confession ; it remains for others to consider how far a morbidly excited spiritual condition may also have been responsible for the sin confessed. The connection between the animal and the spiritual natures of human beings taken in the aggregate, though subtile, is close ; and while it is well known that camp-meetings have never been looked upon as peculiar, or even as conspicuous, for the continence supposed to prevail at them, there is no doubt whatever that in England the license of the restoration followed close on the rule of the saints. One of the authorities on New England history, speaking of the outward manifestations of the "Great Awakening," says that "the fervor of excitement showed itself in strong men, as well as in women, by floods of tears, by outcries, by bodily paroxysms, jumping, falling down and rolling on the ground, regardless of spectators or their clothes." Then the same authority goes on to add : — "But it was common that when the exciting preacher had departed, the excitement also subsided, and men and women returned peaceably to their daily duties."¹ This last may have been the case ; but it is not probable that men and women in the condition of mental and physical excitement described could go about their daily duties without carrying into them some trace of morbid reaction. It was a species of insanity ; and insanity invariably reveals itself in unexpected and contradictory forms.

But it is for others, like my friend Dr. Green, both by education and professional experience more versed in these subjects than I, to say whether a period of sexual immorality should not be looked for as the natural concomitant and sequence of such a condition of moral and religious excitement as prevailed in New England between 1725 and 1745. I merely now call attention to the fact that in Braintree the Hancock pastorate began in 1726 and ended in 1743, and that it was during the Hancock pastorate, also the period of "the Great Awakening," that public confessions of fornication were most frequently made in the Braintree church ; further, and finally, it was during the years which immediately followed that the great "tide of immorality" which the clergy of the day so much deplored, "rolled over the land."

But it still remains to consider whether the entries referred

¹ Elliott's *The New England History*, vol. ii. p. 136.

to in the church records must be taken as conclusive evidence that a peculiarly lax condition of affairs as respects the sexual relation did really prevail in New England during the last century. This does not necessarily follow; and, for reasons I shall presently give, I venture to doubt it. In the first place it is to be remembered that the language used in those days does not carry the same meaning that similar language would carry if used now. For instance, when Jonathan Edwards talks of the youth of Northampton being given to "Night-walking . . . and leud practices," he does not at all mean what we should mean by using the same expression; and the young woman who was one of the greatest "company keepers" in the whole town, was probably nothing worse than a lively village girl much addicted to walking with her young admirers after public lecture on the Sabbath afternoons, — "a disorder," by the way, which Jonathan Edwards says he made "a thorough reformation of . . . which has continued ever since."¹

So far the relations then prevailing between the young of the two sexes may have been, and probably were, innocent enough, and nothing more needs be said of them; but coming now to the facts revealed in the church records, I venture to doubt the correctness of the inference as to general laxity which would naturally be drawn from them. The situation as respects sexual morality which prevailed in New England during the eighteenth century seems to me to have been peculiar rather than bad. In other words, though there was much incontinence, that incontinence was not promiscuous; and this statement brings me at once to the necessary consideration of another recognized and well-established custom in the more ordinary and less refined New England life of the last century, which has been considered beneath what is known as the dignity of history to notice, and to which, accordingly, no reference is made by Palfrey or Barry, or, so far as I know, by any of the standard authorities: and yet, unless I am greatly mistaken, it is to this carefully ignored usage or custom that we must look for an explanation of the greater part of the confessions recorded in the annals of the churches. I refer, of course, to the practice known as "bundling."

¹ Narrative, pp. 4, 5.

I do not propose here to go into a description of "bundling,"¹ or to attempt to trace its origin or the extent to which it prevailed in New England during the last century. All this has been sufficiently done in the little volume on the subject prepared by Dr. H. R. Stiles, and published some twenty years ago. For my present purpose it is only necessary for me to say that the practice of "bundling" has long been one of the standing taunts or common-place indictments against New England, and has been supposed to indicate almost the lowest conceivable state of sexual immorality;² but, on the other hand, it may safely be asserted that "bundling" was, as a custom, neither so vicious nor so immoral as is usually supposed; nor did it originate in, nor was it peculiar to, New England. It was a practice growing out of the social and industrial conditions of a primitive people, of simple, coarse manners and small means. Two young persons proposed to marry. They and their families were poor; they lived far apart from each other; they were at work early and late all

¹ TO BUNDLE. Mr. Grose thus describes this custom: "A man and woman lying on the same bed with their clothes on; an expedient practised in America, on account of a scarcity of beds, where, on such occasions, husbands and parents frequently permitted travellers to *bundle* with their wives and daughters." (*Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue.*)

The Rev. Samuel Peters, in his "General History of Connecticut" (London, 1781), enters largely into the custom of bundling as practised there. He says: "Notwithstanding the great modesty of the females is such, that it would be accounted the greatest rudeness for a gentleman to speak before a lady of a garter or leg, yet it is thought but a piece of civility to ask her to *bundle.*" The learned and pious historian endeavors to prove that *bundling* was not only a Christian custom, but a very polite and prudent one.

The Rev. Andrew Barnaby, who travelled in New England in 1759-60, notices this custom, which then prevailed. He thinks that though it may at first "appear to be the effects of grossness of character, it will, upon deeper research, be found to proceed from simplicity and innocence." (*Travels*, p. 144.)

Van Corlear stopped occasionally in the villages to eat pumpkin-pies, dance at country frolics, and *bundle* with the Yankee lasses. (*Knickerbocker, New York.*)

Bundling is said to be practised in Wales. Whatever may have been the custom in former times, I do not think *bundling* is now practised anywhere in the United States.

Mr. Masson describes a similar custom in Central Asia: "Many of the Afghan tribes have a custom in wooing similar to what in Wales is known as *bundling-up*, and which they term *namzat bazé*. The lover presents himself at the house of his betrothed, with a suitable gift, and in return is allowed to pass the night with her, on the understanding that innocent endearments are not to be exceeded." (*Journeys in Belochistan, Afghanistan, &c.*, vol. iii p. 287.) — BARTLETT, *Dictionary of Americanisms.*

² Knickerbocker's History of New York, book iii. chaps. vi., vii.

the week. Under these circumstances Saturday evening and Sunday were the recognized time for meeting. The young man came to the house of the girl after Saturday's sun-down, and they could see each other until Sunday afternoon, when he had to go back to his own home and work. The houses were small, and every nook in them occupied; and in order that the man might not be turned out of doors, or the two be compelled to sit up all night at a great waste of lights and fuel, and that they might at the same time be in each other's company, they were "bundled" up together on a bed, in which they lay side by side and partially clothed. It goes without saying that, however it originated, such a custom, if recognized and continued, must degenerate into something coarse and immoral. The inevitable would follow. The only good and redeeming feature about it was the utter absence of concealment and secrecy. All was open and recognized. The very "bundling" was done by the hands of mother and sisters.

As I have said, this custom neither originated in nor was it peculiar to New England, though in New England, as elsewhere, it did lead to the same natural results. And I find conclusive evidence of this statement in all its several parts in the following extract from a book published as late as 1804, descriptive of customs, etc., then prevailing in North Wales. For the extract I am indebted to Dr. Stiles:—

"Saturday or Sunday nights are the principal time when this courtship takes place; and on these nights the men sometimes walk from a distance of ten miles or more to visit their favorite damsels. This strange custom seems to have originated in the scarcity of fuel and in the unpleasantness of sitting together in the colder part of the year without a fire. Much has been said of the innocence with which these meetings are conducted; but it is a very common thing for the consequence of the interview to make its appearance in the world within two or three months after the marriage ceremony has taken place."

And again, referring to the same practice as it prevailed in Holland, another of the authorities quoted by Dr. Stiles, relating his observations also during the present century, speaks of a—

"courtship similar to bundling, carried on in . . . Holland, under the name of *queesting*. At night the lover has access to his mistress after she is in bed; and upon application to be admitted upon the bed, which is of course granted, he raises the quilt or rug, and

in this state *quests*, or enjoys a harmless chit-chat with her, and then retires. This custom meets with the perfect sanction of the most circumspect parents, and the freedom is seldom abused. The author traces its origin to the parsimony of the people, whose economy considers fire and candles as superfluous luxuries in the long winter evenings."

The most singular, and to me unaccountable, fact connected with the custom of "bundling" is that, though it unquestionably prevailed — and prevailed long, generally and from an early period — in New England, no trace has been reported of it in any localities of England itself, the mother country. There are well-authenticated records of its prevalence in parts at least of Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Holland; but it could hardly have found its way as a custom from any of those countries to New England. I well remember hearing the late Dr. John G. Palfrey remark — and the remark will, I think, very probably be found in some note to the text of his History of New England — that down to the beginning of the present century, or about the year 1825, there was a purer strain of English blood to be found in the inhabitants of Cape Cod than could be found in any county of England. The original settlers of that region were exclusively English, and for the first two centuries after the settlement there was absolutely no foreign admixture. Yet nowhere in New England does the custom of "bundling" seem to have prevailed more generally than on Cape Cod; and according to Dr. Stiles (p. 111) it was on Cape Cod that the practice held out longest against the advance of more refined manners. It is tolerably safe to say that in a time of constantly developing civilization such a custom would originate nowhere. It is obviously a development from something of a coarser and more promiscuous nature which preceded it. — some social condition such as has been often described in books relating to the more destitute portions of Ireland or the crowded districts in English cities, where, in the language of Tennyson, —

"The poor are hovell'd and hustled together, each sex, like swine."

Such a custom as "bundling," therefore, bears on its face the fact that it is an inheritance from a simple and comparatively primitive period. If, then, in the case of New England; it was not derived from the mother country, it becomes a curious question whence and how it was derived.

But no matter whence or how derived, it is obvious that the prevalence of such a custom would open a ready and natural way for a vast increase of sexual immorality at any time when surrounding conditions predisposed a community in that direction. This is exactly what I cannot help surmising occurred in New England at the time of "the Great Awakening" of the last century, and immediately subsequent thereto. The movement was there, and in obedience to the universal law it made its way on the lines of least resistance. Hence the entries of public confession in the church records, and the tide of immorality in presence of which the clergy stood aghast.

But in order to substantiate this theory of an historical manifestation it remains to consider how generally the custom of "bundling" prevailed in New England, and to how late a day it continued. The accredited historians of New England, so far as I am acquainted with their writings, throw little light on this question. Mr. Elliott, for instance, in his chapter on the manners and customs of the New England people, contents himself with some pleasing generalities like the following, the correctness of which he would have found difficulty in maintaining:—

"With this exalted, even exaggerated, value of the individual entertained in New England, it was not possible that men or women entertaining it should yield themselves to corrupt or debasing practices. CHASTITY was, therefore, a cardinal virtue, and the abuse of it a crying sin, to be punished by law, and by the severe reproof of all good citizens."¹

According to this authority, therefore, as "bundling" was unquestionably both a "corrupt" and a "debasing practice," "it was not possible that men or women" of New England "should yield themselves" to it; and that ends the matter.

Passing on from Mr. Elliott to another authority: in his recently published and very valuable "Economic and Social History of New England," Mr. Weedon has two references to "bundling." In one of them (p. 739) he speaks of it as "certainly an unpuritan custom" which was "extensively practised in Connecticut and Western Massachusetts," against which "Jonathan Edwards raised his powerful voice"; and

¹ Elliott's *The New England History*, vol. i. p. 471.

again he later on (p. 864) alludes to it as "a curious custom which accorded little with the New England character," and which "lingered among the lower orders of people . . . prevailing in Western Massachusetts as late as 1777." I am led to believe that the custom prevailed far more generally and to a much later date than these statements of Mr. Weeden would seem to indicate; that, indeed, it was continued even in eastern Massachusetts and the towns immediately about Boston until after the close of the Revolutionary troubles, and probably until the beginning of the present century. The Braintree church records throw no light on this portion of the subject; but the Groton church records show that not until 1803 was the practice discontinued of compelling a public confession before the whole congregation whenever a child was born in less than seven months after marriage. Turning then to Worthington's "History of Dedham" (p. 109), — a town only ten miles from Boston, — I find that the Rev. Mr. Haven, the pastor of the church there, alarmed at the number of cases of unlawful cohabitation, preached at least as late as 1781 "a long and memorable discourse," in which, with a courage deserving of unstinted praise, he dealt with "the growing sin" publicly from his pulpit, attributing "the frequent recurrence of the fault to the custom then prevalent of females admitting young men to their beds who sought their company with intentions of marriage." Again, in a letter of Mrs. John Adams, written in 1784, in which she gives a very graphic and lively account of a voyage across the Atlantic in a sailing-vessel of that period, I find the following, in which Mrs. Adams, describing how the passengers all lived in the common cabin, adds: — "Necessity has no law; but what should I have thought on shore to have laid myself down in common with half a dozen gentlemen? We have curtains, it is true, and we only in part undress, — about as much as the Yankee bundlers."¹ Mrs. Adams was then writing to her elder sister, Mrs. Cranch; they were both women of exceptional refinement, — granddaughters of Col. John Quincy, and daughters of the pastor of the Weymouth church. Mrs. Adams while writing her letter knew that it would be eagerly looked for at home, and that it would be read aloud and passed from hand to hand through all her

¹ Letters of Mrs. Adams, (1848,) p. 161.

acquaintance, and this was in fact the case; so it is evident, from this easy, passing allusion, that the custom of "bundling" was then so common in the community in which Mrs. Adams lived, that not only was written reference to it freely made, but the reference conveyed to a large circle of friends a perfect idea of what she meant to describe. At the same time the use of the phrase "the Yankee bundlers" indicates the social class to which the custom was confined.

The general prevalence of the practice of "bundling" throughout New England, and especially in southeastern Massachusetts, up to the close of the last century may therefore, I think, be assumed. I have already said that the origin of the custom was due to sparseness of settlement, the primitive and frugal habits of the people permitting the practice, and the absence of good means of communication. It becomes, therefore, a somewhat curious subject of inquiry whether traces of "bundling" can be found in the traditions and records of any of our large towns. That it existed and was commonly practised within a ten-mile radius of Boston I have shown; but I greatly doubt whether it ever obtained in Boston itself. Nevertheless, an examination of the church records of Boston, Salem, and more especially of Plymouth, would be interesting, with a view to ascertaining whether the spirit of sexual incontinence prevailed during the last century in the large towns of New England to the same extent to which it unquestionably prevailed in the rural districts. My own belief is that it did so prevail, though the practice of "bundling" was not in use; if I am correct in this surmise, it would follow that the evil was a general one, and that "bundling" was merely the custom through which it found vent. In such case the cause of the evil would have to be looked for in some other direction. It would then, paradoxical as such a statement may at first appear, probably be found in the superior general morality of the community and the strict oversight of a public opinion which, except in Boston, — a large commercial place, where there was always a considerable floating population of sailors and others, — prevented the recognized existence of any class of professional prostitutes. On the one hand, a certain form of incontinence was not associated either in the male or female mind with the presence of a degraded class, while, on the other hand, the natural appetites

were to a limited extent gratified. It was in their attempt wholly to ignore these natural appetites that Jonathan Edwards and the clergy of the last century fell into their error.

I have alluded to the early church records of Plymouth as probably offering a peculiarly interesting field of inquiry in this matter. I have never seen those records, and know nothing of them; but as long ago as the year 1642 Governor Bradford had occasion to bewail the condition of affairs then existing at Plymouth,—“not only,” he declared, “incontineencie betweene persons unmarried, for which many both men and women have been punished sharply enough, but some married persons allso”; and he exclaimed, “Marvilous it may be to see and consider how some kind of wickednes did grow and breake forth here, in a land wher the same was so much witnessed against, and so narrowly looked unto, and severly punished when it was knowne!” But finally, with great shrewdness and an insight into human nature which might well have been commended to the prayerful consideration of Jonathan Edwards and the revivalists of exactly one century later, Governor Bradford goes on to conclude that—

“It may be in this case as it is with waters when their streames are stopped or dammed up, when they gett passage they flow with more violence, and make more noys and disturbance, then when they are suffered to rune quietly in their owne chanel. So wikednes being here more stopped by strict laws, and the same more nerly looked unto, so as it cannot rune in a comone road of liberty as it would, and is inclined, it searches every wher, and at last breaks out wher it getts vente.”¹

There is one other episode I have come across in my local investigations, of the same general character as those I have referred to, which throws a curious gleam of light on the problems now under discussion. I have already mentioned the fact, quite significant, that during the very period when the church was most active in disciplining cases of fornication, the court record of John Quincy shows that but one case of fornication was brought before him in forty-five years. This was in 1720, and the woman was bound over in the sum of £5 to appear before the superior court. That woman I take to have been a prostitute. Her case was exceptional, so recognized, and summarily dealt with. In the Braintree town records

¹ History, pp. 384-386.

there are some mysterious entries which I am led to believe relate to another and similar case, but one in which the objectionable character was otherwise dealt with. In the midst of the Revolutionary troubles the following votes were passed at the annual town meeting held in the meeting-house of the Middle Precinct, now Braintree, on the 15th of March, 1779: —

“Voted That Doctor Baker be desired to leave this Town, also

“Voted, that the eight men that Doctor Baker gott a warrant for go immediately and Deliver themselves up to Justice.”

Fifteen days later, at another meeting held on the 30th of March, this matter again presented itself, and the following entry records the action taken: —

“A motion was made to chuse a Committee to be Ready to appear and make a stand against any vexatious Law suit that may be brought against any of the Inhabitants of this Town by Doctor Moses Baker Then,

“Voted, that Thomas Penniman, Esq^r Col^o Edmund Billings, Mr. Azariah Faxon, Capt. John Vinton and Capt. Peter B. Adams be a Committee to use their Influence with proper authority to suppress, any vexatious Law suits that may be brought by Doctor Moses Baker against any of the Inhabitants of this Town and that said Committee shall be allowed by the Town for their time.

“Messrs William Penniman and Joseph Spear entered their dissent to the Last Vote, as being Illegal and Improper, as there was no such article in the warrant only in General Terms.”¹

I have endeavored to learn something of the transaction to which these mysterious entries of over a century ago relate, and the result of my inquiries seems to indicate a state of affairs then existing in the neighborhood of Boston very suggestive of those “White-cap” and “Moonshiner” proceedings in the western and southern States, accounts of which from time to time appear in the telegraphic despatches to our papers. Dr. Moses Baker lived and practised medicine in what is now the town of Randolph, and in 1777 he was one of two physicians to whom the town voted permission to establish an inoculating hospital. In 1779 he was about forty years of age, and married. At the time there dwelt not far from where

¹ Braintree Records, pp. 480, 499, 500, 523.

Dr. Baker lived a woman of bad reputation, with whom Dr. Baker was, whether rightly or not, believed to have improper relations. Certain men living in the neighborhood accordingly undertook to act as a local committee to enforce good morals; and this committee decided to ride Dr. Baker and the woman in question together on horseback to a convenient locality near the meeting-house, and there tar and feather them. A broken-down old hack, deemed meet and appropriate for use as a charger in such case, was accordingly procured; and going to the woman's house, the *vigilantes* actually took her from her bed, and, without allowing her to clothe herself, put her on the horse, and then proceeded to Baker's house. He in the mean time had received notice of the proposed visit; and when the party reached their destination they found him indignant, armed and resolute. He threatened to shoot the first man who laid hands on him. This was a turn in affairs which the self-constituted vindicators of public morality had not contemplated, and accordingly they proceeded no further in their purpose. Dr. Baker was not molested, and the woman was released.

It is immaterial, so far as this paper is concerned, whether there was, or whether there was not, ground for the feeling against Baker. In the emergency he does not seem to have demeaned himself either as one guilty or afraid; and, as the action of the town meetings shows, he did not hesitate to bring the whole matter before the courts and into public notice. But for my present purposes this is of no consequence; the significance of the incident here lies in the confirmatory evidence which the extracts from the records afford of the inferences drawn from the facts set forth in the earlier part of this paper. The offending female in this case seems to have been what is known as a woman of bad or abandoned character; the man's relations with her are assumed as notorious. Here was a state of things which public opinion would not tolerate. Probably more than half of those who took part in the proposed vindication of decency and morals looked with indifference on the custom of "bundling." That was in anticipation of marriage, and in its natural results there was nothing which savored of promiscuous incontinence. The extraordinary entries in the records show how fully the town sympathized with and supported the *vigilantes*, as they would now be called in

Mexicanized parlance of the extreme Southwest. The distinction I have endeavored to draw between the excusable, if not permissible, incontinence of the New England country community of the last century, and the idea of promiscuous immorality as we entertain it, is clearly seen in this Baker episode.

Having now made use of all the original material the possession of which led me into the preparation of the present paper, it might at this point properly be brought to a close; but I am tempted to go on and touch on one further point which has long been with me a matter of doubt, and in regard to which I have been disposed to reach opposite conclusions at different times,—I refer to the comparative morality of the last century and that which is now closing. Has there been during the nineteenth century, taken as a whole, a distinct advance in the matter of sexual morality as compared with the eighteenth? Or has the change, which it is admitted has taken place, been only in outward appearance, while beneath a surface of greater refinement human nature remains ever and always the same? It is unquestionably true that in a large and widely differentiated community like that in which we live the individual, no matter who he is, knows very little of what may be called the real “true inwardness” of his surroundings. Any one who wishes to satisfy himself on this point need only seek out some elderly and retired country doctor or lawyer of an observing turn of mind and retentive memory, and then, if the inquirer should be fortunate enough to lead such an one into a confidential mood, listen to his reminiscences. It has been my privilege to accomplish this result on several occasions; and I may freely say that I have always emerged from those interviews in a more or less morally dishevelled condition. After them I have for considerable periods entertained grave and abiding doubts whether, except in outward appearance and respect for conventionalities, the present could claim any superiority over the past. A cursory inspection of the criminal and immoral literature of the day, which the printing-press now empties out in a volume heretofore undreamed of, tends strongly to confirm this feeling of doubt,—which becomes almost a conviction when, from time to time, the realistic details of some

Lord Colin Campbell or Sir Charles Dilke or Charles Stewart Parnell scandal are paraded in the newspapers.

Yet, such staggering evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, I find myself unable to get away from the record; and that record, so far as it has cursorily reached me in the course of my investigations, leads me to conclude that the real moral improvement of the year 1891, as compared with the conditions in that respect existing in the year 1691 or even 1791, is not less marked and encouraging than is the change of language and expression permissible in the days of Shakspeare and of Defoe and of Fielding to that to which we are accustomed in the pages of Scott, Thackeray and Hawthorne.

For instance, again recurring to my own investigations, I have from time to time come across things which, as indicating a state of affairs prevailing in the olden time, have fairly taken away my breath. Here is a portion of a note from the edition of Thomas Morton's "New English Canaan," prepared by me some years ago as one of the publications of the Prince Society, which bears on this statement:—

"Josselyn says of the 'Indesses,' as he calls them [Indian women] 'All of them are of a modest demeanor, considering their savage breeding; and indeed do shame our *English* rusticks whose ludeeness in many things exceedeth theirs.' (*Two Voyages*, 12, 45.) When the Massachusetts Indian women, in September, 1621, sold the furs from their backs to the first party of explorers from Plymouth. Winslow, who wrote the account of that expedition, says that they 'tied boughs about them, but with great shamefacedness, for indeed they are more modest than some of our English women are.' (Mourt, p. 59.) See, also, to the same effect Wood's *Prospect*. (p. 82). It suggests, indeed, a curious inquiry as to what were the customs among the ruder classes of the British females during the Elizabethan period, when all the writers agree in speaking of the Indian women [among whom chastity was unknown] in this way. Roger Williams, for instance [who tells us that 'single fornications they count no sin'] also says, referring to their clothing, — 'Both men and women within doores, leave off their beasts skin, or English cloth, and so (excepting their little apron) are wholly naked; yet but few of the women but will keepe their skin or cloth (though loose) neare to them, ready to gather it up about them. Custome hath used their minds and bodies to it, and in such a freedom from any wantonnesse that I have never seen that wantonnesse amongst them as (with grieffe) I have heard of in Europe' (*Key*, 110-11)."¹

¹ See, also, Proc. Mass. Hist. Soc., 2d series, vol. iv. p. 10.

Again, I recently came across the following, which illustrates somewhat curiously what may be called the social street amenities which a sojourner might expect to encounter in a large English town of a century ago. If ever there was a charming, innocent little woman, who, as a wife and mother, bore herself purely and courageously under circumstances of great trial and anxiety, — a woman whose own simple record of the strange experience through which she passed appeals to you so that you long to step forward and give her your arm and protect her, — if there ever was, I say, a woman who impresses one in this way more than Mrs. General Riedesel, I have not met her. Mrs. Riedesel, as the members of this Society probably all know, followed her husband, who was in command of the German auxiliary troops in Burgoyne's army, to America in 1777, and in so doing passed through England, accompanied by her young children. Here is her own account of a slight experience she had in Bristol, where, the poor little woman says, "I discovered soon how unpleasant it is to be in a city where one does not understand the language, . . . and wept for hours in my chamber": —

"During my sojourn in Bristol I had an unpleasant adventure. I wore a calico dress trimmed with green taffeta. This seemed particularly offensive to the Bristol people; for as I was one day out walking with Madame Foy more than a hundred sailors gathered round us and pointed at me with their fingers, at the same time crying out, 'French whore!' I took refuge as quickly as possible into the house of a merchant under pretense of buying something, and shortly after the crowd dispersed. But my dress became henceforth so disgusting to me, that as soon as I returned home I presented it to my cook, although it was yet entirely new."¹

It was at Bristol also that the little German woman, hardly more than a girl, describes how, the very day after her arrival there, her landlady called her attention to what the landlady in question termed "a most charming sight." Stepping hastily to the window, Mrs. Riedesel says, "I beheld two naked men boxing with the greatest fury. I saw their blood flowing and the rage that was painted in their eyes. Little accustomed to such a hateful spectacle, I quickly retreated into the innermost corner of the house to avoid hearing the shouts set up by the spectators whenever a blow was given or received."

¹ Letters and Journals, p. 48.

Street customs, manners and language are, to a very considerable extent, outward exponents of the moral condition within. It would not be possible to find any place in Europe now where women could be seen going about the streets in the condition as respects raiment which Josselyn, Winslow and Roger Williams seem to intimate was not unusual with the British females of their time; nor would a strumpet even, much less any decent woman, from a foreign land, be treated in the streets of any civilized city as Madame Riedesel describes herself as having been treated in the streets of Bristol in 1777. One cannot conceive of an adulterer or adulteress now doing public penance in a white sheet before a whole congregation assembled for the public worship of God, nor of a really respectable young married couple standing up under the same circumstances and confessing to the sin of fornication. Even if such a thing were done, it would be looked upon as rather suggestive than edifying. All the evidence accordingly indicates that, morally, the improvement made in the nineteenth century as compared with those that preceded it has been more than superficial and in externals only, — that it has been real, in essentials as well as in language and manners. So, while it would not be safe to adopt Burke's splendid generality, that vice has in our time lost half its evil in losing all its grossness, yet it is not unfair to adopt the trope in a modified form, and assert that, in the matter of sexual morality, vice in the nineteenth century as compared with the seventeenth or the eighteenth has lost some part of its evil in losing much of its grossness.

