

have been observed in carrying on the affairs of ||that|| Plantation of New England.

CHAP. XXVIII.

Ecclesiastical affairs of the Massachusetts, during the first lustre of years after the transferring of the Patent and Government thither, from Anno 1631 to 1636.

WHATEVER sinister apprehensions are, or were, ever taken up about the religion of the Colony of New England, they aimed only at the primitive pattern described in the Word of God, and practice of the Apostolical Churches. If they have missed of their aim they are not to be blamed for levelling at the right mark, having a fairer opportunity thereunto than ever men had in many ages past.

It must not be denied that they were the offspring of the old Nonconformists, who yet always walked in a distinct path from the rigid Separatists, nor did they ever disown the Church of England to be a true church, as retaining the essentials of faith and order. And although they could not persuade themselves to live contentedly under the wing of Episcopal government, yet their offence was rather at the ceremonies than the discipline and government thereof. But intending not to write an apology but an history of their practice, nothing shall here be interposed by way of defence of their way, only to give a clear discovery of the truth, as to matter of fact, both what it was at first and still continues to be.

Those that came over soon after Mr. Endicot, ||²namely|| Mr. Higginson and Mr. Skelton, Anno 1629, walked something in an untrodden path; therefore it is the less to be wondered at, if they went but in and out, in some things complying too much, in some things too little, with those of the Separation, and it may be in some things not sufficiently attending to the order of the Gospel, as themselves thought they understood afterwards. For in the beginning of things they only accepted of one another, according to some general pro-

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fession of the doctrine of the Gospel, and the honest and good intentions they had one towards another, and so by some kind of covenant soon moulded themselves into a church in every Plantation, where they took up their abode, until Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hooker came over, which was in the year 1633,¹ who did clear up the order and method of church government, according as they apprehended was most consonant to the Word of God. And such was the authority they (especially Mr. Cotton) had in the hearts of the people, that whatever he delivered in the pulpit was soon put into an Order of Court, if of a civil, or set up as a practice in the church, if of an ecclesiastical concernment. After that time the administration of all ecclesiastical matters was tied up more strictly than before to the rules of that which is since owned for the Congregational Way, as may be seen in a treatise published not long after by Mr. Cotton himself, in the name of the rest of the elders of the country, called the Way of the Churches in New England; which, indeed, is as a middle way between that which is called Brownism, and the Presbyterian government, as it is practised in those places where either of the said governments is owned. As for the Brownists, or rigid Separatists, there were sundry companies of them in England in the end of Queen Elizabeth's, and the beginning of King James's reign; until, being out of all hopes of liberty for their practice, under the shelter of their royal government, many of them removed into Holland. These do in effect put the chief, if not the whole, of the rule and government of the church into the hands of the people, and drown the elders' vote, (one or more,) in the major part of the brethren's; being contented the elders should sit in the saddle, provided they might hold the bridle, as some have expressed it. On the other hand, in the Presbyterian Way, the sole power of government or rule is put into the hands of the Presbytery of each congregation, or into the hands of the common Presbytery of many congregations, combined together by mutual consent, so swallowing up the interests of the people in every single

¹ See page 169.—H.

congregation in the major part of the Presbyters of the Classis or combination. But those of the Massachusetts kept the middle path between the forementioned extremes, accounting the right disposal of church power to lie in a due and proportioned allotment and dispersion (as some of the Congregational Way have expressed it) into divers hands, according to the several concernments and interests that each rank in the church may have, rather than an entire and sole trust committed to any one man, (though never so able,) or any sort or kind of men, or officers, although diversified into never so many subordinations under one another. And this middle way, thus delineated, principally by Mr. Cotton, is that wherein the churches of New England have walked ever since. The principal points wherein they differ from others may be reduced to these four heads.

1. The subject matter of the visible church, saints by calling, such as have not only attained the knowledge of the principles of religion, and are free from gross and open scandal, but are willing, together with the profession of their repentance and faith in Christ, to declare their subjection to him in his ordinances, which they account ought to be done publicly before the Lord and his people, by an open profession of the doctrine of the Gospel and by a personal relation of their spiritual estate, expressive of the manner how they were brought to the knowledge of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and this is done either with their *viva voce*, or by a rehearsal thereof by the elders in public, before the Church Assembly, (they having before hand received private satisfaction,) the persons openly testifying their assent thereunto, provided they do not scandalize their profession by an unchristian conversation; in which case a profession is with them of small account.

2. In the constitutive form of a particular visible church, which they account ought to be a restipulation, or mutual covenanting to walk together, in their Christian communion, according to the rules of the Gospel; and this they say is best to be explicit al-

though they do not deny but an implicit covenant may suffice to the being of a true church.

3. In the quantity or extensiveness of a particular church, concerning which they hold that no church society of Gospel institution ought to be of larger extent or greater number than may ordinarily meet together in one place, for the enjoyment of all the same numerical ordinances, and celebrating of all divine worship; nor ordinarily fewer than may conveniently carry on church work.

4. That there is no jurisdiction to which such particular churches are, or ought to be, subject, (be it placed in Classis or Synod,) by way of authoritative censure, nor any church power, extrinsic to the said churches, which they ought to have dependence upon any other sort of men for the exercise of.

After this manner have their ecclesiastical affairs been carried on ever since the year 1633, when Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hooker first arrived there. But of these matters there may be occasion to make a fuller relation in the year 1647, when the Platform of Discipline was set forth by the elders and messengers of the churches assembled in the Synod at Cambridge, in the Massachusetts.

Some have feared that in the beginning of times was occasioned much disadvantage to the government of the church by making it too popular; and no less to the civil government, by too much contriving to advance the liberties of the people, which some others, that were not a little instrumental to promote both the one and the other at the first, would willingly have retrieved, when they, too late, discerned their error, but failed in their endeavoring a redress.

And many yet think they hit upon the right joint in settling each government as they did. Possibly they might see, where others in the reformation of the church, since Calvin's time, had committed errors, and run into mistakes, and hoped to prevent it in their own. But it must always be considered that extremes on either hand are dangerous. They had need be very good artists, and go exactly to work, that lay the foundation of

a building; for a little error there may appear very great and formidable in the superstructure, if any thing be done out of square in the bottom, which at the first is not easily discerned. Such a constitution of government as doth sufficiently secure the liberties of the people from oppression is the safest; for popular confusion hath, in all experience, been found as destructive to societies as tyrannical usurpation. Extremes are to be avoided; but those that have lately felt the inconvenience of the one, are not so sensible of the danger of the other as oft times is to be wished they were. However, by this experience it is evident, that whatever advantage wise and good men have to shape for themselves the best contrived government, it will be very difficult, if possible, to pitch upon such a constitution wherein all parties shall acquiesce; which renders it the duty of all to rest satisfied in what Providence hath put them under, either by a willing compliance, or patient submission.

Thus much being premised, to show what form of church discipline was aimed at by those that came over into the Massachusetts, Anno 1630, it will be expected that, in the next place, some account should be given of their particular proceedings in their church administrations.

On' the 27th of August, 1630, the whole congregation that belonged to Charlestown and Boston kept a solemn fast to seek the face of God, partly in reference to the sickness and mortality, that many of the people were then visited withal, and partly also for direction and blessing in choosing officers for their church: and then they chose Mr. Wilson to be their teacher, and ordained him thereunto by imposition of hands, but with this protestation by all, that it was only a sign of election and confirmation, without any intention that the said Mr. Wilson should renounce his ministry he received in England. Mr. Increase Nowell was at the same time chosen to be the ruling elder of the same church: and one Mr. Gager and Mr. Aspinwall,² were also chosen to be deacons thereof, who were likewise, by imposition of hands, invested in their several offices.

¹ Friday.—H.

² For notices of William Aspinwall, see Sav. Win. 32-3, and Young's Chronicles of Mass. pp. 382-3.—H.

As for Mr. Gager, he continued not long enough in this world to purchase to himself a good degree, by using the office of a deacon well, being called ||hence|| on the 20th of September following, having yet left behind him a good report for soundness in the faith and purity of life and conversation;¹ and soon after Mr. Coleburn² was ordained deacon in his room.

But Mr. Nowell, in the year 1632, relinquished his ruling elder's office in the church, being satisfied upon a conference with the chief of Plymouth, (to whose opinion those of Boston did much adhere in their church matters, as those of Salem had done before,) that he could not conveniently or regularly hold the place of a ruler in the Church and Commonwealth, at one and the same time, and therefore betook himself wholly to a place of civil rule in the Commonwealth, where he was likewise chosen ||² Secretary||. Nor could it be looked upon as compatible to the same person, to be employed at once in two offices of so momentous a nature, and of so differing a kind.

It is said that Mr. Phillips of Watertown was, at the first, more acquainted with the way of church discipline, since owned by Congregational churches; but being then without any to stand by him, (for wo to him that is alone,) he met with much opposition from some of the magistrates, till the time that Mr. Cotton came into the country, who, by his preaching and practice, did by degrees mould all their church administrations into the very same form which Mr. Phillips labored to have introduced into the churches before.

A church was gathered at Dorchester soon after the coming over of the Governor and Assistants, the scattering inhabitants that had seated themselves there before, for conveniency of trade, being removed elsewhere, and left the place free for them that came with intent to plant the Gospel there; and in the church of that place Mr. Wareham was ordained the pastor, and Mr. Maverick the teacher. Those places that could not then be sup-

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¹ For information concerning this "right godly man," see Sav. Win. i. 33-4, and Young, p. 317.—H.

² William Colburn, chosen in October. Sav. Win. i. 37.—H.

plied with ministers were content to wait till some others fit for the employment were brought over to them.

It is notwithstanding affirmed, that Mr. Maverick was a minister ordained to a company that came over with him, while he lived in the west of England; which if it were so, there needed no ordination, or gathering of a church anew at Dorchester, as they did in the other towns.¹

Those that took up their habitations on each side of Charles River belonged all at the first to one congregation, and having called Mr. Wilson to be their teacher, and Mr. Nowell to be their ruling elder, so continued till the end of October 1632; about which time those of Charlestown, by reason of the difficulty of passage in the winter, and having at that time an opportunity of choosing a pastor for themselves, viz. Mr. James, then lately come from England, were dismissed from the congregation of Boston, and so became a distinct church of themselves.²

In the following month of November, Mr. John Eliot, that came over into New England the former year, having joined himself to the congregation or church at Boston, was dismissed to the church of Roxbury to be their teacher, although he was earnestly desired by them of Boston, yet the importunity of the other and the inclination of his own mind carried him thither.³

About the same time Richard Browne of Watertown was discharged from his office of a ruling elder there, because of the rash and violent spirit he was wont to be carried withal, upon all occasions, having been often admonished, but could not be brought to any amendment. He was a man of good understanding, and well versed in the discipline of the Separation, having been a ruler in one of their churches in London, where he was known to be very violent and passionate in his proceedings. One of the best things he deserved to be commended for, was his faithfulness and care of Doctor Ames and Mr. Robert Parker, safely conveying them (being himself one that kept a wherry) aboard their vessel at Graves-

¹ See Savage's Winthrop, i. 94-6.—H.

² Prince, pp. 405-6.—H.

³ See Prince, p. 408; and page 135.—H.

end, when they were pursued by some that would willingly have shortened their journey.

On the 22d of November, 1632, was kept a day of humiliation at Boston, when Mr. Wilson (formerly their teacher) was called to be their pastor, and one Mr. Oliver was chosen their ruling elder, and both ordained by the imposition of hands, first by the teacher and the two deacons, in the name of the congregation, on the elder, and then by the elder and the deacons upon the pastor.

In the year 1632¹ Mr. Thomas Weld came over. He had been minister of Terling, in Essex, and accounted a zealous preacher of the word. He had many invitations after he landed here, but at last was prevailed with by the importunity of Roxbury church, to accept of a pastor's office amongst them.²

In the year 1633, September 4, arrived Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hooker, in the Massachusetts. On the 17th of said September, Mr. Cotton, by the advice of the Governor and Council with the rest of the elders, was determined to settle at Boston, and accordingly on the 17th^a of October following he was solemnly ordained teacher of that church, by the imposition of the hands of the Presbytery, as was Mr. Leveret, an ancient professor of religion, of Mr. Cotton's congregation in England, ordained ruling elder of the same church, the congregation testifying their consent by lifting up their hands. Mr. Wilson, pastor of the same church, demanded of him if he accepted of that call. He paused, and then spake to this effect: that howsoever he knew himself unworthy and insufficient for that place, yet, having observed the passages of God's providence, (which he reckoned up in part,) in calling him to it, he could not but accept it. Then the pastor and the two ruling elders laying their hands upon his head, the pastor prayed, and, speaking to him by his name, did thereby design him to the said office, in the name of the Holy Ghost, and did give him the charge of the congregation, and did thereby, (as by a sign from God,) endue him, at least prayed that he might be endued, with gifts fit for his office, and

¹ He sailed from London in the *William and Francis*, Mr. Thomas master, March 9th, and arrived at Boston, June 5th. *Sav. Win.* i. 77-8.—H.

² *Ibid.* 82; *Prince*, pp. 395, 398-9.—H.

largely did bless him. Then the neighbor ministers that were present did, (at the pastor's motion,) give him the right hand of fellowship, and the pastor did make a stipulation between him and the congregation. These circumstances and order of procedure are more particularly set down in this place, because ever since that time they generally proceed after the same manner in the ordination of their minister in the Congregational churches of New England; where there is not a Presbytery preëxisting, either some of the brethren ordain the person as is above described, which is approved of by the learned Dr. Hornbeck, Professor of Divinity in Holland, and a Presbyterian in his judgment, and engaged in the defence of that cause, or otherwise, where the congregation, over whom the person is to be ordained, make use of the elders of neighbor churches, by virtue of communion of churches.

Much after the same manner, not long after,¹ was Mr. Hooker ordained pastor of the church at New-Town, which had all that time continued without a particular minister of their own, and Mr. Shepard, afterward, Feb. 1, 1635, Mr. Hooker leaving the place, and removing with his church to Hartford, was ordained pastor over a company at New-Town that come over with him from about Earl Colne, in Essex, being at that time gathered or formed into a church state the same way.²

The ministers about Boston being now increased to a convenient number, (for Mr. Wareham and Mr. Maverick were, in the compass of the first year after their landing, settled the ministers of the church at Dorchester, the one pastor, the other teacher) did use to meet once a fortnight at one of their houses in course, where some question of moment was debated. Mr. Skelton, pastor of Salem, and Mr. Williams, (as yet not ordained any officer there,) out of a rigid Separation jealousy took exception at it, prognosticating that it might in time bring forth a Presbytery, or superintendency to the prejudice of the churches' liberties, (a spirit of Separation had, it seems, so early fly-blown their understandings,) from whom issued the fiery flying serpents, that were, not

¹ Oct. 11th. Sav. Win. i. 115.—H.

² Ibid. 179-80.—H.

long after, so ready to annoy, and with bitter invectives sting, every magistrate and minister that did not approve of their sentiments; the venom of which spirit had soon after infected so many of that church and people of Salem, as will appear in the next chapter. But this fear was without cause; nor did it spring from a godly jealousy, but from the bitter root of pride, that vaunteth itself above order, and against love and peace. No such spirit was ever observed to appear in Mr. Cotton's days, but a spirit of love and meekness, or since his time to the present year.

Those that lived in those times could not but observe, on the contrary, how it pleased the Lord to give a special testimony of his presence in the church of Boston, after Mr. Cotton was called to office there. More were observed to be converted and added to that church than to all the rest of the churches in the country.¹ Divers profane and notorious evil persons came and confessed their sins, and were comfortably received into the bosom of the church. An eminent spirit of grace was poured into the lips of that famous preacher, and other eminent gifts did abound in private brethren of that church, which forwarded the edification and salvation of others. The Lord was pleased also greatly to bless the discipline of that church, wherein he gave the pastor, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Leveret, a singular gift, to the great benefit of the whole congregation. Nevertheless, God was pleased to send or let loose, not long after, a messenger of Satan in that church, that they should not be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations. Satan desired to winnow the chief of the Apostles; no wonder if he were as desirous so to deal with other ordinary ministers of the Gospel in succeeding ages, and their churches.

On the 22d of December in the year following, viz. 1634, Mr. Simmes was, on a solemn day of humiliation, likewise ordained teacher of the church of Charlestown. But within a while after,² upon one account or other, there did arise a spirit of jealousy between Mr. James, the pastor of that church, and some of the brethren,

¹ See Savage's Winthrop, i. 121.—H.

² In 1636 —H.

although Mr. Simmes was not condemned for being any blameable cause thereof, yet was it within a year after blown up into an open flame, so as they were constrained to call in the help of the elders and messengers of the next churches; and it being the case of an elder, the neighbor churches, to whom they sent for advice, sent most elders, and but few other messengers. Upon hearing the whole case it appeared that the pastor (by his natural temper a melancholic man, and subject to jealousies) had been to blame for speaking as of certainty that which he only conceived out of jealousy; and also that the rest had not been without all fault, in that they had not proceeded with him in a due order, for, of the two witnesses produced against him, one was the accuser. They advised, therefore, that, if they could not comfortably close again, the pastor and such as stood on his part, (if they would,) should desire dismissal, which should be granted them, for avoiding extremities, which it seems they accepted of, and Mr. James soon after removed to the southward, and some years after returned back to England, where he was accepted as a faithful minister of the Gospel, and continued in that work till the year 1678, at Needham, in Suffolk, which was about the 86th year of his age, (though not of his ministry, as is said of Polycarpus,) and may yet be living, and waiting for his dissolution.¹ He went also to Virginia, with Mr. Thompson and Mr. Knowles, Anno 1642, as will be mentioned in the transactions of that lustre.

About the same time happened another uncomfortable agitation at Lynn, viz. March 15, 1634, where the elders of every church were called together to put an end to a difference in that church. One Mr. Bachelor, that came into the country the summer before,² (in the 71st year of his age,) in the want of a minister was called to take upon him the ministerial office in that place. Not long after divers of the brethren, not liking the proceedings of the pastor, and withal questioning whether they were a church or not, did separate from church communion. The pastor and the other brethren desired the

¹ See Prince, pp. 413-14; Sav. Win. i. 94, 182.—H.

² With Welde and others. Sav. Win. i. 77-8.—H.

advice and help of the rest of the churches, who, not thinking fit to judge of the case without hearing the other side, offered to meet at Lynn about it. Upon this the pastor required the separate brethren to deliver their grievances in writing, which they refusing to do, the pastor wrote to all the churches that for this cause they purposed to proceed against them, as persons excommunicable; and therefore desired them to stay their journey. This letter being read at the Lecture at Boston, (where all the ministers of every church generally used to be present,) they all agreed, with consent of their churches, to go presently to Lynn, (at that time called Sagust,) to stay this hasty proceeding. Accordingly, being met, and both parties, after much debate, being heard, it was determined that they were a true church, though not constituted in due order; yet after-consent and practice of church estate had supplied that defect; and so all were reconciled at that time.

Mr. John Maverick, teacher of the church of Dorchester, died the 3d of February, 1635, about the 60th year of his age. He was a man of an humble spirit, and a faithful preacher of the Gospel, very ready to further the work of the Lord, both in the church, and in the civil state.

About the year 1635 were churches gathered and ministers ordained in many places about the Bay, as at Bear Cove, called afterwards Hingham; where Mr. Peter Hubbert,¹ that came out of Norfolk, in England, was called to be their pastor; a man well qualified with ministerial abilities, though not so fully persuaded of the Congregational discipline as some others were.

And at Westaugustus, since called Weymouth, one Mr. Hull was at first their minister, though afterwards he gave place to some other, which hath been the lot of several that have successively been the officers of that church, though men of worth and learning. At the first it is thought their proceedings were not so orderly as should have been, which was not the least occasion of their after troubles.

The Plantation at Agawam² was, from the first year of its being raised to a township, so filled with inhabitants

¹ Hobart.—H.

² See page 155.—H.

that some of them presently swarmed out into another place, a little further eastward. The reverend and learned Mr. Parker was at first called to Ipswich,¹ to join with Mr. Ward; but he choosing rather to accompany some of his countrymen that came out of Wiltshire in England, to that new place, than to be engaged with such as he had not been acquainted withall before, therefore removed with them thither, and ||called it|| Newberry; which recess of theirs made room for others that soon after supplied their place.

In the latter end of this year, 1635, Mr. Bachelor, pastor of the church at Lynn, (whereof mention was made before,) was complained of to the magistrates, and convened before them on this occasion. He came out of England with a small body of six or seven persons, who settled with him at Lynn, where he received many of the inhabitants of ||^othat|| place into his church, or, at least, they had with the rest received him as their pastor; but contention growing between him and the greatest part of his church, he desired dismissal for himself and his first members, which being granted, upon supposition that he would leave the town, as he had given out he would, he, with the six or seven persons, renewed their old covenant, intending to raise another church in the place; whereat the most and chief of the town being offended, (for that it would cross their intentions of calling another minister,) complained to the magistrates, who, foreseeing the distraction which was like to come by this course, had forbid him to proceed in any such church way, until the cause were considered by the other ministers. But he refused to desist, whereupon they sent for him, and upon his delay, day after day, the marshal was sent to fetch him. Upon his appearance and submission, and promise to remove out of the town within three months, he was discharged. Accordingly he removed to the Plantation that then was new begun beyond Ipswich, called Newbery, where he stayed not long, in regard he could not accomplish his desire of being admitted to a pastoral office in the church of that place, waiting an opportunity of providing a suitable

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|| ^o the ||¹ In 1634.—H.

place for himself and his company elsewhere, which at last was found at Hampton, a Plantation begun towards Pascataqua, about the year 1638.

The next year¹ they of Lynn gathered another church, having invited Mr. Whiting to be their pastor, a man of great worth and learning, that not long before² came over from a parish³ adjoining to Boston, in Lincolnshire. There was some difficulty in settling them in church order anew, in regard they had many of them formerly belonged to another church in Mr. Bachelor's time, according to the usual observation, that many times it is more easy to raise a new building than repair an old one, especially when the persons concerned either want experience or skill in the kind of the architecture as was said to be the case there. But Anno 1637 Mr. Thomas Cobbet, that came over with Mr. Davenport,⁴ was called also to Lynn, where he was ordained teacher of the same church whereof Mr. Whiting was the pastor. The learning and abilities of Mr. Cobbet are well known by his writings, since published to the world.

CHAP. XXIX.

Memorable accidents during this lustre of years. The small-pox among the Indians; pestilential fever at Plymouth; with other occurrences worthy to be observed, from the year 1630 to 1636.

In the year 1633 it pleased God to visit the Colony of Plymouth with a pestilential fever, whereof many died, upwards of twenty, men, women, and children, which was a great number out of a small company of inhabitants. Some of them looked upon a numerous company of strange flies in the spring, like bumblebees, (which coming out of the ground, with a terrible kind of humming noise, so as the woods did ring therewith) to be a presage of that mortality which followed very hot, in the months of June, July and August.⁴ But in the end of that year and winter following a great mortality happened among the Massachusetts Indians, whereby thousands of them were swept away, which came by the

¹ Nov. 8, 1636.—H.

² He arrived in Boston, May 26, 1636.—H.

³ Skirbeck.—H.

⁴ Bradford, in Prince, pp. 432, 437; Davis's Morton, pp. 173-4.—H.