

“Oft Have I Seen Thee Look with Mercy’s”: A Brief Biography of John Cotton¹

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John Cotton (1584–1653) is perhaps best remembered today as the theocratic foil in the debate with Roger Williams over religious toleration. Or he represents the forces of patriarchy in contest with Anne Hutchinson. In his own day, however, Cotton was respected as a man of principled non-conformity, genuine piety, immense pulpit gifts, and formidable intellectual acuity. His emigration to the new world at the height of his ministerial career supplied New England with its greatest preacher of the initial generation. He quickly became “the acknowledged leader in the acknowledged leading class” of New England Puritanism.² And yet his arrival in the wilderness did not isolate his influence to the new world. Rather, the Massachusetts Bay Colony elevated his visibility in old England. Cotton went on to correspond with Oliver Cromwell, to win both Gisbertus Voetius and John Owen to the cause of Congregationalism, and to present the Westminster Assembly with *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*, a work sent in his stead designed to do the same.

The resurgence of Puritan studies inaugurated over the early decades of the twentieth century, however, has largely passed Cotton by. The most recent biographical examinations he has received came in the 1960s, and from critics not entirely sympathetic to Cotton’s own convictions.³ Paving

1. Upon his death in 1652, Cotton’s heirs discovered a brief autobiography written in verse. The five stanzas of the poem, each comprised of four lines, proceed through his birth, physical condition, youth, ministry, and spiritual state. The poem was included in John Norton’s biography of Cotton, published in 1658. The title is taken from the first line of the final stanza. John Norton, *Abel being Dead yet Speaketh; Or, the Life and Death Of that deservedly Famous Man of God, Mr John Cotton, Late Teacher of the Church of Christ, at Boston in New-England* (London, 1658), 45.

2. Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), vii.

3. Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*; Everett Emerson, *John Cotton* (Boston, Mass.:

the way for a new biography, Cotton letters have been impressively edited by Sargent Bush.⁴ In addition, some of his more accessible works have recently been presented to a broader audience.⁵ Nevertheless, no critical edition of Cotton's historically significant and spiritually vibrant body of work is currently underway. This short biography does not attempt to fill these unfortunate gaps. By suggesting, even in brief compass, the significant influence Cotton's life and work exercised over Puritan individuals and institutions on both sides of the Atlantic, the aim of this article is to introduce John Cotton as a man and minister worthy of academic consideration and spiritual emulation.

Cotton at Cambridge

John Cotton was the second of four children born to the "pious" lawyer Rowland Cotton (c.1550–1604), and the "gracious" Mary Hurlbert Cotton (1560–1595).⁶ Born on December 4, 1584, Cotton was baptized at St. Alkmund's Church in Derby eleven days later.⁷ In Cotton Mather's words, his maternal grandfather grew up, "of a clear, fair, sanguine complexion, and like David of a ruddy countenance. He was rather low than tall, and rather

Twayne Publishers, 1965). The second edition of Emerson's work, published in 1990, does not substantially revise his bewilderment at Cotton's popularity with his contemporaries.

4. Sargent Bush ed., *The Correspondence of John Cotton* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

5. Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "Christ the Fountaine of Life by John Cotton (1584–1652)," in Kelly Capic and Randall Gleason, eds., *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 66–78; Nate Pickowicz and John Manning eds., *John Cotton: Christ the Fountain of Life* (Gilmanton Iron Works, N.H.: Entreating Favor Books, 2017); Nathan Tarr, "Whatever May Befal Thee, Know it is so much Soap to Cleanse Thee: John Cotton of God's Design in a Believer's Suffering," *The Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 6 (Fall, 2017): 45–58; Nathan Tarr, "A Pervasive and Self-Effacing Spirit: John Cotton's Chief Contribution to Puritan Spirituality," *Churchman*, Summer (2016): 161–77.

6. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1853 ed.; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 1:253. Cotton's older sister was Mary. His two younger brothers were Roland and Thomas. To trace Cotton's descendants, see LaVerne C. Cooley, *A Short Biography of The Rev. John Cotton of Boston and a Cotton Genealogy of His Descendants* (Batavia, N.Y.: Higginson Book Company, 1945).

7. The baptismal records of St. Alkmund's Church in Derby have Cotton born and baptized there in 1584. Bush, *Correspondence*, 17. This record can adjudicate between the biographical sketches of Cotton's life that disagree over whether he was born in 1584 or 1585. Bremer, for example, has Cotton born in 1585, but cites no support. Francis Bremer, "Cotton, John" in *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 13, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 613–17.

fat than lean, but of a becoming mediocrity. In his younger years his hair was brown, but in his latter years as white as the driven snow.”⁸

The vicar of St. Alkmund’s during the years of Cotton’s attendance was Thomas Swetnam. Swetnam mingled conformity to the demands of his bishop, William Overton (c.1525–1609), with sympathy to the Puritan cause, sending his son Joseph, the future Presbyterian minister in Derby, to Cambridge.⁹ Cotton found a similar model of what he would later call “the old non-conformity” at the Derby Grammar School, mastered by Richard Johnson. An ordained Anglican priest and graduate of Trinity College, Johnson successfully prepared Cotton for entrance into his own college. The doctrine Cotton imbibed from both the Anglican vicar and Anglican master was Calvinism. At this time, Larzer Ziff reminds us, “a man’s doctrine was no accurate reflection of the degree of his conformity.”¹⁰ What distinguished non-conformists from bishops, Cotton learned, was not their theology but their polity.¹¹

Cotton entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1598.¹² He was thirteen years old. If Derby taught him that a man’s doctrine did not guarantee

8. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:253.

9. Overton licensed less than one fifth of the Derbyshire clergy to preach according to Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 8. For this and other reasons, Overton does not come off well in the Marprelate Tracts. See William Pierce, ed., *An Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts: A Chapter in the Evolution of Religious and Civil Liberty in England* (London: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1909), 90, 156–57.

10. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 11. This is illustrated by the expulsion of two Lady Margaret Professors of Divinity at the hands of Archbishop Whitgift. In 1595, Whitgift ejected Peter Baro for preaching predestination in a Lutheran manner. But in 1570, while Master of Trinity, Whitgift had also evicted Thomas Cartwright for the latter’s Presbyterian polity.

11. The theological sea change that was taking place as Cotton entered Cambridge meant he would soon see the rise of doctrinal as well as ecclesiological distance from Calvin in the form of an ascendant Arminianism. Regarding the Calvinism of Cotton’s day, R. T. Kendall identifies Cotton with Calvin while calling into question the “Calvinism” of the majority of the post-Bezan Reformers. See R. T. Kendall, “John Cotton—First English Calvinist?,” in *The Puritan Experiment in the New World* (London: Westminster Conference, 1976), 38–50. More broadly, see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1997). For a thorough discussion of the state of the “Calvin and the Calvinists” question, see Shawn Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Carlisle, Pa.: Paternoster, 2004).

12. For the curriculum Cotton would have encountered at Cambridge see William Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958). Margo Todd provides a helpful corrective when Costello over-interprets the statutory requirements to argue for an indebtedness in Tudor

his conformity, Trinity would teach him that neither did it assure his conversion. His principal tutor in this painful lesson was William Perkins (1558–1602), fellow at Christ's College and a frequent preacher in Cambridge pulpits. Perkins preached Calvin's doctrine with an immediacy that unsettled the adolescent Cotton. He not only emphasized the absolute freedom of God in dispensing (or withholding) saving grace, but Perkins also insisted that orthodox belief, facility with Scripture, and even zeal for continued reformation in the church were but shifting sands in the issue of salvation. Salvation required one to feel God's Spirit moving within him, a feeling anticipated by a prolonged and prayerful vigil kept over one's soul. Cotton responded to this picture of his own passivity by absenting himself from Perkins' lectures. When Perkins died in the final year of Cotton's time at Trinity, he may have imagined that he had eluded such troubling questions about the state of his soul.

Cotton's academic success, especially in rhetoric and ancient languages, assured him of an offer of a fellowship as graduation approached in 1602.¹³ As a sizar at Trinity, the lowest class of paying students, Cotton had performed menial tasks for scholarship students, such as waiting on their tables and running their errands. His father's fortunes had now improved, but Cotton sought a fellowship both for its maintenance and its academic mobility.¹⁴ Funds for fellowships at Trinity were severely depleted in 1603, however, as Thomas Neville (d. 1615) led the College through extensive architectural revisions. And so Cotton looked elsewhere within Cambridge. He accepted a fellowship at Emmanuel College.

Emmanuel, founded in 1584 by Sir Walter Mildmay (c.1523–1589) and mastered by the extraordinarily long-lived Laurence Chaderton (1536–1640), was a circumspectly Puritan college in its theology as well as in its polity. Public prayer at Emmanuel did not follow the Prayer Book. Clerical vestments and academic regalia were abandoned. Students received communion in both kinds, seated around the large communion table, in an

and Jacobean Cambridge to medieval views. Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

13. Cotton's biographer relates that in testing for his fellowship, Cotton was examined on the Hebrew of Isaiah 3, which "hath more hard words in it, than any place of the Bible within so short a compass." And still his examiner could not impede the promptness of his answers. Norton, *Abel being Dead yet Speaketh*, 10.

14. This proved to be a providential decision as Cotton's father died in 1604, a year after Cotton commenced his graduate work. Bush has Rowland dying "while Cotton was still an undergraduate." Bush, *Correspondence*, 17.

unconsecrated chapel, which did not face east. For John Cotton to move into Emmanuel College, therefore, was to make his Puritan sympathies explicit.¹⁵

Still, if non-conformity at Emmanuel was biblically derived, it was not radical or bellicose. Chaderton remarked that, “Those who dislike the government of the Church by bishops will substitute something far less beneficial to both Church and State.”¹⁶ Even Perkins had not spoken against graduates agreeing to the Three Articles.¹⁷ This was still the Elizabethan age and, though many anticipated the ascension of James I, there was a certain degree of wideness to the Puritan tent.¹⁸ Such was the milieu in which Cotton absorbed Cambridge Puritanism.

After receiving his MA in 1606, Cotton continued at Emmanuel for another six years. It was during these years that he distinguished himself as both teacher and preacher. Cotton served the young college as tutor, catechist, dean, and head lecturer.¹⁹ Cotton Mather reports that he was “much admired” by students and colleagues alike.²⁰ But it was as a preacher that Cotton’s star shone most brightly. When, in 1609, he delivered the funeral sermon for Robert Some (1542–1609), the sermon was, “so accurately performed in respect of Invention, Elegancy, Purity of Style, Ornaments of

15. I will use the term “Puritan,” following Crawford Gribben, as those who craved “further reformation of the protestant church within the three kingdoms.” This definition agrees with Cotton’s own occasional use of the term when he includes himself among those who sought reformation of the Church of England. Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature & Theology, 1550–1682* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 7–8.

16. William Dillingham, *Laurence Chaderton, D.D. (First Master of Emmanuel)*, ed. Richard Farmer (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowes, 1884), 5–10. Quoted in Bush, *Correspondence*, 17.

17. Such a pledge, required after 1608, compelled one to agree that “The Book of Common prayer, and of ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, containeth in it nothing contrary to the word of God, and that it may lawfully be used, and that he himself will use said Book prescribed in public Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and none other.” *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, 1604* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), Canon xxvi.

18. Chaderton was one of four Puritan divines appointed to make their case before James I at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604. The conference was a failure for the Puritan cause. James left unchanged both the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity initiated under Elizabeth. The king did agree to a new translation of the Bible, however, to which Chaderton also contributed.

19. Joan Schenck Ibish, “Emmanuel College: The Founding Generation, with a Biographical Register of Members...1584–1604” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985), 390–91. Larzer Ziff provides a list of the responsibilities in each of these roles. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 27.

20. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:234.

Rhetorick, Elocution, and Oratious beauty of the whole, as that he was henceforth looked on as another *Xenophon*, or *Musa Attica* throughout the University.”²¹

The sermon was a triumph that could solidify his career. But all was not well. Cotton’s increasing public profile only accentuated his spiritual uneasiness. Larzer Ziff paints the picture: “Once achieved, his outward gains seemed less sweet, for they were not matched by any change in his inner disposition...as the index of John Cotton’s fame rose, his spiritual barometer sank until, in desperation, he all but convinced himself of the most horrible fact known in the world—he would die in sin never to live again; he was not a saint; he was damned.”²²

Success had not muted the questions formerly raised through Perkins’s preaching. It was by availing himself of the counsel of Richard Sibbes (1577–1635), lecturer at Holy Trinity Church, in whose hand the doctrine of double predestination ministered humility and hope rather than despair, that Cotton came to a spiritual apprehension of his own election.²³ Both the Spirit’s gracious agency and the believer’s resultant “sense” of salvation are apparent in the record of Cotton’s conversion: “The grace of God made him a thoroughly renewed Christian, and filled him with a sacred joy, which accompanied him unto the fullness of joy forever.”²⁴

Significantly, the evangelical humility and hope he experienced under Sibbes’s preaching now became Cotton’s own homiletical aim; a commitment that raised the question of sermonic style. At the time, his reputation traded on a style adorned for academic acceptance. Cotton had come to see, however, that without the Spirit, his elegant words were empty; “their divinity proveth humanity.”²⁵ Sibbes, on the other hand, preached in the plain

21. Norton, *Abel Being Dead Yet Speaketh*, 13.

22. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 26.

23. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 29–31. See also Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 40–41.

24. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:255. Notice the way these two themes continue and intensify in Mather’s account of Cotton’s experience of assurance: “And it was remarkable that on the very day of his wedding to [Elizabeth Horrocks], he first received the assurance of God’s love to his own soul, by the Spirit of God, effectually applying his promise of eternal grace and life unto him...for which cause he would afterwards often say, ‘God made that day, a day of double marriage to me!’” Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:255. Cotton was married on July 3, 1613.

25. Cotton explained his view of the difference between the two styles in a letter prefixed to Arthur Hildersham, *Lectures upon the Fourth of John* (London, 1629): “When scholars furnish themselves with store of other writers, besides the Scriptures, and being

style. But if it was plain, it was also profitable, speaking not only to the mind but "to the conscience" of the hearer. Sibbes's apologetic for an unadorned delivery best explained Cotton's own experience under the preached Word: "When the love of God in Christ and the benefits by Christ are laid open in preaching of the Gospel to us, God gives His Holy Spirit."²⁶ The plain style was the saving style.²⁷

Thus, while it meant humiliating himself and scandalizing the fellows, Cotton resolved to preach in a manner that matched the matter of his subject.²⁸ If his audience required a work of the Spirit, he would preach in a way that honored the Spirit's work. His first plain, evangelical sermon was delivered at Great St. Mary's between 1610 and 1612. After the sermon, during which "many of his listeners pulled their caps about their ears," Cotton returned, disconsolate, to his rooms.²⁹ His conviction was rewarded that very afternoon, however, as John Preston (1587–1628), philosopher

little conversant in the Scriptures...their divinity proveth humanity, and their ministry speaketh to the brain, but not to the conscience of the hearer. But he that diggeth all the treasures of his knowledge and the ground of religion out of the Scriptures, and maketh use of other authors, not for ostentation of himself, nor for the ground of his faith, but for the better searching out of the deep wisdom of the Scriptures, such a one believeth what he teacheth, not by an human credulity from his author, but by a divine faith from the Word." Cited in Everett Emerson, *John Cotton* (New York: Twayne, 1965), 35.

26. Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862–1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 1:23–24. Cotton had tasted what he would later teach in his popular catechism; "Q: How do we come to have part and fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection?" And the answer, "By the power of His word and Spirit." "Milk for Babes," reproduced in Emerson, *John Cotton*, 128.

27. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 32.

28. Thomas Allen gives us a glimpse into the wrestling match Cotton endured, as he heard the story from Cotton himself: "He, being according to his course to preach before the University and scholars in Cambridge, had a great conflict in himself about the composing of his sermon, viz. whether after the plain and profitable way, by raising of doctrines, with propounding the reasons and uses of the same, or after the mode of the University at that time, which was to stuff and fill their sermons with as much quotation and citing of authors as might possibly be. On the one side 'twas suggested to him that if he should not go the former way, he should not be faithful to the Lord in seeking His glory, but his own &c. And on the other side, if he should not show his learning, it would not only be a disparagement unto himself but also unto the College." Thomas Allen, "Prefatory epistle to John Cotton," *An Exposition upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation* (London, 1655), 34.

29. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 32. The exact date of Cotton's sermon is unknown. Bush places this St. Mary's sermon in "about 1608." Bush, *Correspondence*, 18. Haller, following the old DNB, gives a date of 1611. See William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism, or the Way to the New Jerusalem set forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570–1643* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 71. In his biography of Preston,

and future master of Emmanuel, visited Cotton to confess, "it has pleased God to speak effectually unto [my] heart by that sermon."³⁰

Cotton at St. Botolph's in Boston, Lincolnshire

With his skill in the Scriptures now matched by a spiritual sense of his own salvation, Puritan leaders were eager to see Cotton begin a pulpit ministry. He had been ordained in 1610, before serving a further two years at Emmanuel. With the retirement of Thomas Wooll (m. 1600–1612), St. Botolph's in Boston, Lincolnshire, sought Cotton as its vicar. As an Emmanuel graduate, and a justly famous scholar, carrying the recommendation of both Sibbes and Paul Baynes (1573–1617), Cotton was well equipped to extend the tradition of non-conformity in Lincolnshire.³¹

The process of Cotton's appointment in 1612 proved to be a microcosm of his twenty-year pastorate. The Bishop of Lincoln, William Barlow (d. 1613), initially resisted Cotton as "too young a man to be set over so turbulent a parish."³² The aldermen of Boston, however, were of a different mind, and understanding that one Simon Biby was to be spoken with, which was near the Bishop, they presently charmed him; and so the business went on smooth, and Mr. Cotton was a learned man with the Bishop, and he was admitted into the place, after their manner in those days.³³

The bishop lost the battle over Cotton's appointment but his words cast a long shadow. Under Bishop Barlow, and his successors Richard

Jonathan Moore gives a date of 1610. Jonathan Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 5.

30. Norton, *Abel Being Dead Yet Speaketh*, 14; Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:256.

31. See, for example, Church of England and Diocese of Lincoln, *An Abridgement of That Booke Which the Ministers of Lincolne Diocesse Delivered to His Majestie upon the First of December 1605*. In December of 1605, ministers from the Diocese of Lincoln petitioned James I against the "subscription and conformitie" then being required. Their apology worked to describe, "in what the State of the Church shall be in this last age of the world." This eschatological state, the ministers maintained, was decidedly non-conformist. Though this was well before Cotton's tenure began in Boston, Robert Sanderson's *Ad Clerum* sermons of 1621 worked to paint Cotton with this same "troubling" brush.

32. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 39. The bishop's concerns were well founded. See "The Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace," in Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), 26–47.

33. Samuel Whiting, "Concerning the Life of the Famous Mr. John Cotton, Teacher to the Church of Christ at Boston, in New-England," in Alexander Young, *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, Mass.: Little and Brown, 1846), 419–31. The quote is from page 423. Whiting, related to Cotton through his second wife, is considered to have written the first biography of Cotton, upon which Norton drew.

Neile (1562–1640), George Montaigne (1569–1628), and John Williams (1582–1650), Cotton's ministry experienced the ebb and flow of ecclesiastical supervision and investigation. He was twice suspended: in 1616 for gathering the elect in the congregation, while using a chaplain to perform the church ceremonies that he found offensive; and again in 1621, when the stained-glass windows and statuary were shattered in the beautiful church. But Cotton was never silenced.³⁴ His examiners came away impressed by his learning, his "sweete temper of spirit,"³⁵ and the loyalty of his people.³⁶

The popular response to Cotton's ministry proved the wisdom of his supporters. The "feast of preaching" now offered at St. Botolph's, set against the restriction suffered by many other Puritan ministers, drew large numbers of congregants from the surrounding villages. Soon lecture days were added throughout the week—Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays—as "the People...doe very diligently, & throngly frequent the Publique Prayers of the Church."³⁷

Within a year of beginning at St. Botolph's, Cotton had returned to Emmanuel to fulfill the obligations for his Divinity Act and receive his BD. Cotton's opponent for the required disputation was William Chappell (1582–1649), a fellow at Christ's, an enemy of Calvinism, and considered

34. The indulgence Cotton received was widely observed. Samuel Ward, minister at Ipswich, Suffolk, remarked, "Of all men in the world I envy Mr Cotton, of Boston, most; for he doth nothing in way of conformity, and yet hath his liberty, and I do everything that way, and cannot enjoy mine." Cited in Bush, *Correspondence*, 30.

35. Norton, *Abel being Dead yet Speaketh*, 33. The full quote, from John Davenport, runs, "The reason of our desire to confer with him rather than any other touching these weighty points, was our former knowledge of his approved Godliness, excellent learning, sound judgment, eminent gravity, candor, and sweet temper of Spirit, whereby he could placidly bear those that differed from him in their apprehensions." Cotton Mather painted his grandfather's temperament with his usual flare, "He would not set the beacon of his great soul on fire at the landing of a little cockboat." Mather, *Magnalia* 1:277.

36. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 51–54. For a helpful overview of Cotton's role in the struggle over conformity in the Church of England, see Jesper Rosenmeier, "Eaters and Non-Eaters': John Cotton's *A Brief Exposition Of...Canticles* in Light of Boston's (Lincs.) Religious and Civil Conflicts, 1619–22," *Early American Literature* 36 (2001): 149–81. For the struggle over the scope of Elizabethan conformity more generally see Alan Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013).

37. "Cotton to Bishop Williams," in Bush, *Correspondence*, 98–103. Cotton Mather reports that, on the Lord's Day in Lincolnshire, Cotton preached through John, Ecclesiastes, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and "many other Scriptures." On Lecture Days, he covered 1 and 2 John, Song of Solomon, and the parables to Matthew 17. There are also regular references to him preaching at home on various texts. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:259–260.

the University's best disputant.³⁸ Nevertheless, Cotton defended his thesis to the satisfaction of the president. Within this same year, Paul Baynes introduced Cotton to Elizabeth Horrocks (1588–1631), who came from a nonconformist family in Lancashire. They were married in 1613. While they had no children, the Cotton home was often full. John Preston, now Master of Emmanuel, regularly sent recent graduates to Boston to serve as Cotton's apprentice. The stream of students was so steady that Cotton became known as "Dr. Preston's seasoning vessel."³⁹

Cotton's marriage to Elizabeth lasted until 1631, when they both contracted malaria from the mosquitoes thriving in the marshy fens around Boston. They convalesced at the home of Theophilus Clinton (c.1600–1667), the fourth Earl of Lincoln. A staunch Puritan, the Earl's seat served as a staging area for emigration, especially to New England. Cotton was aware of the migration to Massachusetts Bay, and had given careful thought to legitimate motives for emigration. He had laid these out in 1630 when he traveled to Southampton to preach the farewell sermon for John Winthrop's (1587–1649) party of some 400 emigrating settlers.⁴⁰ But news from the Naumkeag church, pastored by his former Cambridge colleague Samuel Skelton (c.1592–1634), concerned him. Skelton was evidencing a separatist mindset that Cotton found objectionable.⁴¹ Nevertheless, during the twenty-one fits of malarial fever Cotton endured over the next year, he began to regard New England as preferable to Continental havens.

After Elizabeth died from the disease, Cotton anticipated a return to Boston but discovered that the contours of ministry had been redrawn with the ascendancy of William Laud (1573–1645). Laud, Chancellor of Oxford and Bishop of London, was also at this time exercising the powers of the sequestered Archbishop of Canterbury before his own appointment to that office in 1633. Now, not even a favorable bishop and loyal parishioners

38. This is the Chappell who would "go on to astound King James with his ability in disputation, to tutor John Milton, and to become a recipient of Laud's favors." Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 27, n. 37.

39. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:260.

40. This sermon was printed as John Cotton, *God's Promise to His Plantation* (London, 1630).

41. See "John Cotton to Samuel Skelton," in Bush, *Correspondence*, 141–49. Cotton wrote, "Two things herein I conceive to be erroneous, first that you think that no man may be admitted to the Sacrament, though a member of the catholic church, unless he also be a member of some particular reformed church: secondly that none of our congregation in England are particular reformed churches, but Mr. Lathrop's [a Jacobite congregation] is."

could shield their vicar from the court of high commission.⁴² When Cotton received a summons to appear before Laud in the Fall of 1632, he disappeared into the Puritan underground. In so doing he left behind his wife of less than one year, Sarah Hawkridge Story Cotton (c.1598–1676), and a young daughter the widow had brought into the marriage. The threat against Cotton’s life is palpable in the letter he wrote to her from hiding: “[My friends] desire also to see thee here, but I think it not safe yet, till we see, how God will deal with our neighbors at home. For if you should now travel this way, I fear you will be watched, & dogged at the heels. But I hope, shortly God will make way for thy safe coming.”⁴³

Husband and wife were re-united, but only to flee for New England. On May 7, 1633, Cotton wrote to Bishop Williams, resigning his post, and on July 13, the Cottons boarded the *Griffin* bound for the new world.⁴⁴ The urgency they felt in escaping England is evident in the fact that Sarah Cotton was eight months pregnant when they put to sea.

Cotton at Boston, Massachusetts

The Cottons arrived in Boston Harbor on September 4, 1633. The following Saturday Cotton was invited to address the church of Boston, pastored

42. Under Bishop Williams, “the huge diocese of Lincoln remained the great loophole in the Laudian system.” But that loophole closed as Williams fell out of favor with Charles I, carrying consequences for Cotton. Clive Holmes, *Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire History of Lincolnshire 7* (London: History of Lincolnshire Committee, 1980), 113–14. For an overview of Bishop Williams see John Dew, *Mitre and Musket: Lord Keeper, Archbishop of York, 1582–1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).

43. “John Cotton to Sarah Hawkridge Cotton,” in Bush, *Correspondence*, 173–75. This letter is of significant interest since it is the only surviving copy of Cotton’s correspondence to an immediate family member. This period of concealment also proved seminal for Cotton’s ecclesiology. It was during this period, at the invitation of Henry Whitefield, that Cotton and Thomas Hooker met with Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, John Davenport, and William Twisse to argue the merits of non-conformity. The purpose of the meeting was to convince Cotton and Hooker to compromise in matters of church practice so that their ministry would not be lost to the church in England. Instead, Cotton and Hooker so thoroughly persuaded their friends of the idolatrous nature of the disputed ceremonies that all, except for Twisse, soon departed England as a result of their own non-conformity. This meeting thus prepared the way for the partnership of this same group during the Westminster Assembly exercised, for example, in the preface by Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye to John Cotton, *The Grounds and Ends of the Baptism of the Children of the Faithful* (London, 1647).

44. See “John Cotton to John Williams,” in Bush, *Correspondence*, 178–81. For the date of Cotton’s departure see Francis Bremer, “John Cotton (1585–1652),” in H. C. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13:614.

by John Wilson (1591–1667).⁴⁵ After speaking from Canticles 6 on the marks of a true church, Cotton and his wife were admitted to membership, and Seaborn (1633–1686), their infant son, was baptized.⁴⁶ One month later, on October 10, Cotton was chosen as Teacher of First Church, a post he would hold until his death in 1652.⁴⁷ At forty-eight years old, Cotton gave himself to this new ministry with customary vigor. The practice of weekday lectures was carried over from old Boston, and the next two decades of ministry saw Cotton preach through the Old Testament once and again to Isaiah 13, and the New Testament once and again to Hebrews 11.⁴⁸ He studied some twelve hours a day, depending on his ruling elders to inform him about the state of his flock.⁴⁹

This approach did not yield entirely happy results.⁵⁰ Initially, it served him well. John Winthrop recorded: “It pleased the Lord to give special

45. Wilson came to new England with John Winthrop in 1630. Originally settling in Charlestown, he moved to Boston that same year. He was elected pastor of First Church Boston on November 23, 1632 and served in that capacity until his death in 1667. Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 104–5.

46. It is significant that Cotton waited to baptize his son until being received into membership in Boston. Though at least three men onboard the *Griffin* were ordained in the Church of England, and in spite of the compounding threat an open-ocean voyage represented to a newborn, Cotton declined to have him baptized because of what he had come to believe about the nature and power of the church, expressed in its local congregation. Winthrop records, “He gave two reasons why he did not baptize [Seaborn] at sea: (1) because they had no settled congregation there; (2) because a minster hath no power to give the seals but in his own congregation.” John Winthrop, *Winthrop’s Journal* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 1:96–100.

47. Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:105–113. If Thomas Shepard “saw the Lord departing from England when Mr. Hooker & Mr. Cotton were gone,” the faithful in Massachusetts rejoiced at the arrival of their first eminent ministers. Thomas Shepard, “Autobiography,” ed. Allyn Bailey Forbes, *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 27 (Boston, Mass.: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1932), 375.

48. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:271.

49. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1:276.

50. Williston Walker reminds us that Puritans distinguished between the offices of pastor and teacher in the ministry of a local church. “The Pastor’s special work is, to attend to exhortation... the Teacher is to attend to Doctrine.” Since Cotton was the Teacher of the Boston church, he was only infrequently called upon to reprove unruly members. Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 211. In *Mr. Cotton’s Rejoynder*, Cotton makes use of this distinction in an attempt to demonstrate his own fidelity, “Reproof you know doth rather belong to the Pastors office: The truth of Doctrine, as I have here expressed it to you, our Church can bear me witness I have plainly taught it (according to my place) and have refuted to contrary.” David D. Hall, ed.,

testimony of his presence in the church of Boston, after Mr. Cotton was called to office there. More were converted and added to that church, than to all the other churches in the bay.... Divers profane and notorious evil persons came and confessed their sins, and were comfortably received into the bosom of the church.”⁵¹

Cotton’s preaching, used to stir these embers of awakening in Boston, emphasized the absolute covenant God made with the believer. Rather than holding out an “if” that, when fulfilled, motivated a divine “then” in response, Cotton proclaimed a God who took responsibility for requirements on both sides of the covenant. He downplayed man’s responsibility to prepare himself for God. Rather, he spoke of God giving His Spirit to convict of sin, to bring to faith, and to empower our subsequent obedience. In stressing an absolute covenant, and in making the primitive proof of salvation the witness of the Spirit rather than the marks of progressive sanctification, Cotton differed in emphasis from John Wilson and the rest of his New England colleagues.

This difference was accentuated by Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643), lately arrived from England.⁵² A skilled midwife, Hutchinson hosted a weekly gathering to discuss the doctrine and application of Cotton’s sermons. In the reports he received, Hutchinson stressed that good works may prove a lying evidence of salvation, since they could rise from a heart dependent on its own works for right standing with God. This much Cotton too regularly warned. When she began to weave deprecations of other Bay ministers together with her commendation of Cotton, however, he rebuked her. His concern, at this point, was that her lack of propriety was corrosive to unity among the churches. He had not detected any doctrinal deficiency.⁵³

The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 84. Nevertheless, such a tidy division of labor is difficult to maintain in practice, and the dynamic of the Antinomian Controversy, where members of the church were claiming the cover of Cotton’s doctrine for their positions, refused to allow him this refuge.

51. Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:116. Church records show that the membership grew from 80 to 124 within the first four months of Cotton’s arrival. Another 93 were added in 1634. Bremer, “Cotton, John,” 615.

52. The Hutchinsons had lived in Alford, some 24 miles from St. Botolph’s, but they were frequent auditors of Cotton’s preaching. When her brother-in-law, John Wheelwright, was silenced in 1632, and Cotton emigrated in 1633, Hutchinson, her husband, and their twelve children followed him to Boston in the Fall of 1634. Emerson, *John Cotton*, 86.

53. Michael Winship argues that, “for a conflict assumed to be irrepressible, the Antinomian Controversy was slow to emerge.” He credits Cotton and Wilson, the teacher and

In October of 1636, a consortium of Bay elders confronted Cotton on the pneumatological deviance that the Hutchinsonians continued to teach in his name. Alarmed at their report, and the discrepancy with his own understanding of the matter, Cotton again interviewed Hutchinson. And again he heard only his own views mirrored in her claims. In November, therefore, the elders presented Cotton with *16 Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence*, asking him to spell out what he believed, in an attempt to smoke out those who hid behind his name while transgressing his doctrine. Cotton's *Rejoynder* to the elders made their differences clear, but resisted carrying the attack to his colleagues as Hutchinson and John Wheelwright regularly did.⁵⁴

The next step, according to fledgling congregational polity, was to call a synod of area ministers. The aim of the synod, convened in Newtown in August of 1637, was to convince Cotton to abandon a series of (84!) positions the elders identified as questionable, and thus to reconcile with the rest of the New England ministry. The synod did result in Cotton's surprise, not at his own opinions but at those positions many in his congregation proved willing to defend.⁵⁵ Writing to Samuel Stone just five days after Hutchinson's excommunication in March of 1638, Cotton lamented,

the Iniquities of sundry members of our Church, who (like Achan, without my Privety) had harbored & secretly disseminated such Erroneous & dangerous Opinions, as (like a Gangrene) would have corrupted & destroyed Faith and Religion had not they been timely discovered, & disclaimed both by our own & other Churches.⁵⁶

pastor the Boston church respectively, for maintaining harmony in the midst of diversity. He lays the blame for the division on Henry Vane and Thomas Shepard, who were "convinced that doctrinal purity overrode the practical realities of a diverse movement." Michael Winship, "'The Most Glorious Church in the World': The Unity of the Godly in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1630s," *Journal of British Studies* 39 (January, 2000): 77, 82.

54. Compare Cotton's *Rejoynder* with John Wheelwright's "Fast Day Sermon" of January 1637. See Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, 79–151 and 152–172.

55. Perry Miller suggested that Cotton was forced to surrender to the elders. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 62. Emery Battis, however, has convincingly shown that, "Although subjected to humiliating pressures, he was, in the last analysis, obliged to do little more than restate his original position in less equivocal terms." Battis, *Saints and Sectaries*, 172.

56. "John Cotton to Samuel Stone," in Bush, *Correspondence*, 272–75. As Cotton repented to John Davenport, he had been too slow to see that "they propagated their opinions under my expressions." Bush, *Correspondence*, 52.

A similar lament appears often in his letters of this period. While there had been high points, the initial years of his New England ministry were humbling for John Cotton.⁵⁷ They came on the heels of the general court’s rejection of *Moses His Judicials*, Cotton’s civil code that proved too conservative for Boston’s needs;⁵⁸ a public retraction of his former ecclesiology in *A Sermon Delivered at Salem*;⁵⁹ the dissolution of the theocracy engineered with Henry Vane as the magistrates claimed the right to interview prospective settlers on religious opinions;⁶⁰ and the dispute with Roger Williams that ended with Williams’s eviction, but only because Cotton had failed in his preferred route of convicting Williams’s conscience.⁶¹ At the end of the Antinomian Controversy, Cotton briefly considered relocating to New Haven but was convinced by a conciliatory Winthrop to remain in Boston.

A significant motivation for Cotton to remain was that his removal would signal England that all was not well in Massachusetts. Cotton was aware that many in England were judging the viability of the New England Way through its viability in the new world.⁶² In February of 1637, as the Antinomian Controversy reached its pitch, Cotton asked that the heart of the dispute be represented to England as a celebration of grace, with one group celebrating the grace given to man in justification, while the other celebrated the grace working in man through sanctification.⁶³ When the

57. Not all believed him sufficiently humbled. Thomas Shepherd confided to his diary, “Mr. Cotton: repents not: but is hid only.” Thomas Shepard, *Autobiography*, 386. High points would have included the birth of his daughter Sarah in 1635, Elizabeth in 1637. John would be born in 1640, Mariah in 1642, and Rowland in 1643.

58. Though it did serve as the foundation for New Haven under Cotton’s friend John Davenport. See the discussion in Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 104–5.

59. See “A Sermon Delivered at Salem, 1636,” in Larzer Ziff, ed., *John Cotton on the Churches of New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 41–68.

60. Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 129. Henry Vane, son of the Comptroller to Charles I, came to the new world seeking to enjoy “the purity of the ordinances.” He built an addition to Cotton’s house and lodged with him during his time in Boston, even after becoming Governor.

61. See Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 89–91.

62. This is why Cotton could preach, in reference to the homeland, “Great pity were it that they should want any light which might possibly be afforded them.” John Cotton, *The Pourring Out of the Seven Vials: or, An Exposition of the Sixteenth Chapter of the Revelation, with an Application of it to our Time* (London, 1643), 4. A thorough analysis of the colonial contribution to England’s ecclesiastical debates is Ralph Young, “Good News from New England: The Influence of the New England Way of Church Polity on Old England, 1635–1660” (PhD diss., Michigan State University), 1971.

63. Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:209.

events of these years were eventually published in England, of course, such glosses did not prevent his Presbyterian opponents from suggesting that the instability periodically convulsing the colony exposed inherent deficiencies in a structure that lacked sufficient centralization.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, when the Puritan-controlled Parliament rooted episcopacy out of the Church of England in 1642, Cotton was one of three New England divines invited to attend the Westminster Assembly that would determine its replacement. While he sent his regrets, Cotton enhanced the New England way for the Assembly's consideration to the best of his epistolary ability. In 1642 Cotton published *The True Constitution of A particular visible Church, proved by Scripture*. This work was republished in 1643, and again in 1644, as *The Doctrine of the Church, To which is committed the Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*. That same year he published a treatise against set forms of prayer, and a work on Revelation 16 that equated the actions of the Long Parliament with the fifth vial.⁶⁵ Perhaps most significantly, in 1642 Cotton coined the term by which his model would be known: Congregationalism.⁶⁶

Cotton's labor on behalf of Congregationalism continued. In the following year, 1643, Cotton moderated a conference condemning Presbyterianism in New England, whose minutes reached England.⁶⁷ He also published a defense of his controversy with Williams, and wrote, but did not publish until 1647, a defense of infant baptism that displayed the compatibility between covenant theology and congregational polity. In 1644, his *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* went through six printings, easily the most influential, if not the most personal, of his apologies.⁶⁸ Despite

64. Thomas Weld published John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians* in 1644. Among the more stinging responses from the Presbyterian side were Robert Bailie, *Dissuasive from Errors of our Time* (London, 1645); Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia* (London, 1644); and Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries* (London, 1644).

65. Cotton, *Powrring Out*, 42.

66. Cotton coined the terms "Congregational way" and "Congregationalism" in the course of defending the New England polity from its (largely Presbyterian) critics during the 1640s. The terms only "gained currency after 1648." See Marion Starkey, *The Congregational Way: The Role of the Pilgrims and their Heirs in Shaping America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 2–3.

67. Frederick W. Loetscher, "Presbyterianism in Colonial New England Pt 1," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 11 (1921): 83–93. See also "Presbyterianism in Colonial New England Pt 2," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 11 (1921): 97–118.

68. Ziff rightly maintains that, because he is answering Baillies's personal attacks, Cotton's *The Way of the Congregational Cleared*, written in 1647 and published in 1648, is his most personally revealing work. Ziff, *Cotton on the Churches*, 33. Additional insight is gained

a small band of influential allies, the Congregational cause faltered at the Assembly.⁶⁹ In New England, however, this flurry of activity had returned Cotton to his prior position as chief among colonial divines.

Embodying the dynamic Francis Bremer terms “congregational communion,” Cotton remained as connected to events in England as the English Puritans were to the results emerging from the laboratory of the new world.⁷⁰ On January 30, 1649 the High Court of Justice carried out the execution of Charles I (1600–1649). When Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) defeated the Scottish supporters of Charles II (1630–1685) in September of 1650, Cotton preached a Thanksgiving sermon in which he applauded these recent events and sought to “rally his fellow colonists to support those English co-religionists whom he believed to be cooperating with God in bringing about the millennium.”⁷¹

Cotton also preached, in July of 1651, before the trial of three Baptists who had entered the colony from Newport: John Clark (1609–1676), John Crandall (1618–1676), and Obadiah Holmes (1610–1682). In his sermon, Cotton reminded the colony that while baptism did not make children into members of the local church, it is a sign of God’s covenantal favor that welcomes the children of believers into the care of that church. The means of grace, uniquely operative in the church, were what God used to bring children on to salvation.⁷² In denying infant baptism, therefore, Clark, Cran-

by reading the contemporaneous stream of personal correspondence during this period recorded by Bush.

69. See the *Apogetical Narration* issued by Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Jeremiah Burroughes, William Bridge, and Sidrach Simpson in 1643. John Owen would defend Cotton against the charge of self-contradiction in 1658.

70. Francis Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610–1692* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1994). As evidenced by Bush’s *Correspondence*, Cotton engaged prodigiously in letter writing during his entire ministry. For an analysis of colonial political and religious support of the Puritan revolt see Bremer, “Puritan Crisis: New England and the English Civil Wars, 1630–1670” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1972).

71. The sermon was delivered on November 10, 1650. Francis Bremer, “In Defense of Regicide: John Cotton on the Execution of Charles I,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (1980), 103–24. Bremer suggests that news of the execution may not have arrived until March, and possibly as late as June, 1650. Demonstrating his awareness of where Pride’s Purge and the first civil war might lead, Cotton had, in 1644, already distinguished between the role of the true church to endure persecution from an unjust magistrate, and the role of the civil authorities to ensure that “neither the church nor the state might suffer any loss.” Ziff, *Cotton on the Churches*, 125.

72. Cotton stressed the unique efficacy of preaching. In his sermons series *Christ the*

dall, and Holmes were exposed as “soul-murderers” whose doctrine would “overthrow all” in the way of a stable, godly society.⁷³ The fines of Clark and Crandall were paid, but rather than permit his fine to be paid, Holmes consented to be “well-whipped.”

When news of the whipping reached England, Cotton faced both public and private rebuke. In the court of English public opinion, John Clark’s *Ill News from New England* allowed Roger Williams to continue his publishing assault on the magistrates and ministers who had banished him.⁷⁴ Privately, Cotton received letters from the likes of Sir Richard Saltonstall (1586–1661), who was “not a little grieved to hear what sad things are reported daily of your tyranny and persecutions in New-England as that you fine, whip and imprison men for their consciences.”⁷⁵ How could the same men who fled persecution in England now take up the whip? Having corresponded with Oliver Cromwell after his endorsement of the Protectorate, Cotton was not over-awed at this rebuke, but chose to remind his old friend of “the vast difference between men’s inventions and God’s institutions. We fled from men’s inventions, to which we else should have been compelled. We compel none to men’s inventions.”⁷⁶ The issue was not persecution in itself, Cotton maintained, but the truth of the doctrine that was at stake. Besides, Boston’s position, along with the wider colony, was clear. There were plenty of other opportunities available in the new world if one insisted on a different polity.

Fountain of Life, preached in the first decade of his Lincolnshire ministry but only published in 1651, Cotton argued that the Scriptures, “have ever yielded matter to the ministers of the gospel, to preach and expound to the people, that by preaching they might bring on men to salvation.” In a curious argument Cotton then produced apostolic itineraries as evidence that the mere reading of Scripture, for all the good it can do, cannot beget faith. John Cotton, *Christ the Fountain of Life* (London, 1651). Charles Hambrick-Stowe, “Christ the Fountaine of Life,” in Kelly Kapic and Randall Gleason, eds., *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 71.

73. See Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 230–243. Much of Ziff’s attention is given to the differences between Baptist and covenantal (Puritan) hermeneutics. For an account of this trial from a Baptist perspective see Keith Durso, *No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s–1700s* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2007).

74. John Clark, *Ill News from New England: Or, a Narrative of New-England’s Persecution* (London, 1652). Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenet Yet More Bloody* (London, 1652). The full title of Williams’s book includes a reference to Clark’s narrative as well as a rebuke to John Endicott, governor of Boston. John Cotton would not live to read it.

75. “Sir Richard Saltonstall to John Cotton,” in Bush, *Correspondence*, 497.

76. “John Cotton to Sir Richard Saltonstall,” in Bush, *Correspondence*, 502. For Cotton’s letters from and then to Oliver Cromwell, see Bush, *Correspondence*, 458–64, 468–70.

Cotton continued to preach and to write to great effect to the end of his life. William Emerson has documented 1,034 children baptized in the 20 years of Cotton’s New England ministry, along with 652 adults admitted to membership.⁷⁷ Many of his auditors went on to pastor churches in New England, multiplying the impact of his theology and his polity.⁷⁸ Even in November 1652, when it was evident that he was dying, Cotton pressed on in his preaching, apologizing for covering so much of 2 Timothy at a time, but explaining that he desired to finish the book. He did; and as a comet fell across the New England sky, Cotton died on December 23, 1652.⁷⁹ He is buried in the King’s Chapel burying ground in Boston.

77. William Emerson, *An Historical Sketch of the First Church of Boston* (Boston, Mass.: Munroe and Francis, 1812), 81–21. Several of these would have been Cotton’s own children, including: Seaborn (b. 1633), Sarah (b. 1635), Elizabeth (b. 1637), John (b. 1640), Maria (b. 1642), and Rowland (b. 1643). Sarah and Rowland both died in the smallpox epidemic of 1649–1650.

78. James Cooper includes Richard Mather, John Eliot, John Davenport, Edward Norris, Zechariah Symmes, Thomas Allen, John Knowles, “and numbers other future divines” as early members of Boston’s First Church. James Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties: The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22. Cotton also served several terms on the Board of Governors of Harvard College, thereby continuing his interest in the education of future ministers.

79. Joshua Scottow explicitly connected the comet with Cotton’s death in Joshua Scottow, *Old Mens Tears for Their Own Declensions* (London, 1691), 16. Cited in Ziff, *Career of John Cotton*, 254.