

Introduction to *Magnalia Christii Americana*

A General Introduction

By [Cotton Mather](#)

ê(greek) *Dicam hoc propter utilitatem eorum qui Lecturi sunt hoc opus.* - Theodorit.¹

1. I WRITE the WONDERS of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION, flying from the depravations of Europe, to the American Strand; and, assisted by the Holy Author of that Religion, I do with all conscience of Truth, required therein by Him, who is the Truth itself, report the wonderful displays of His infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and Faithfulness, wherewith His Divine Providence hath irradiated an Indian Wilderness.

I relate the Considerable Matters, that produced and attended the First Settlement of COLONIES, which have been renowned for the degree of REFORMATION, professed and attained by Evangelical Churches, erected in those *ends of the earth*; and a *Field* being thus prepared, I proceed unto a relation of the *Considerable Matters* which have been acted thereupon.

I first introduce the *Actors*, that have in a more exemplary manner served those Colonies; and give Remarkable Occurrences, in the exemplary LIVES of many Magistrates, and of more Ministers, who so lived as to leave unto Posterity *examples* worthy of everlasting remembrance.

I add hereunto, the Notables of the only Protestant University that ever *shon* in that hemisphere of the New World; with particular instances of Criolians, in our Biography, provoking the whole world with vertuous objects of emulation.

I introduce then, the *Actions* of a more eminent importance, that have signaled those Colonies: whether the Establishments, directed by their Synods; with a rich variety of Synodical and Ecclesiastical Determinations; or, the Disturbances, with which they have been from all sorts of temptation and enemies tempestuated; and the Methods by which they have still weathered out each horrible tempest.

And into the midst of these Actions, I interpose an entire Book, wherein there is, with all possible veracity, a Collection made of Memorable Occurrences, and

¹ "This I say for the benefit of those who may happen to read this book."

amazing Judgments and Mercies befalling many particular persons among the people of New- England.

Let my readers expect all that I have promised them, in this *Bill of Fare*; and it may be they will find themselves entertained with yet many other passages, above and beyond their expectation, deserving likewise a room in History: in all which, there will be nothing but the Author's too mean way of preparing so great entertainments, to reproach the Invitation.

The reader will doubtless desire to know, what it was that *tot Volvere casus Insignes Pietate Viros, tot adire Labores, Impulerit.*²

And our History shall, on many fit occasions which will be therein offered, endeavour, with all historical fidelity and simplicity, and with as little offence as may be, to satisfy him. The sum of the matter is, that from the very beginning of the REFORMATION in the English Nation, there hath always been a generation of Godly Men, desirous to pursue the Reformation of Religion, according to the Word of God, and the Example of the best Reformed Churches; and answering the character of Good Men, given by Josephus, in his Paraphrase on the words of Samuel to Saul, (greek) (They think they do nothing right in the service of God, but what they do according to the command of God.) And there hath been another generation of men, who have still employed the *power* which they have generally still had in their hands, not only to stop the progress of the desired Reformation, but also, with innumerable vexations, to persecute those that most heartily wished well unto it. There were many of the Reformers, who joyned with the Reverend JOHN FOX, in the *complaints* which he then entred in his Martyrology, about the "baits of Popery" yet left in the Church; and in his wishes, "God take them away, or ease us from them, for God knows they be the cause of much blindness and strife amongst men!" They zealously decreed the *policy* of complying always with the ignorance and vanity of the *People*; and cried out earnestly for purer Administrations in the house of God; and more *conformity* to the *Law of Christ* and *primitive Christianity*: while others would not hear of going any further than the first Essay of Reformation. 'Tis very certain, that the first Reformers never intended that what they did should be the absolute boundary of Reformation, so that it should be a sin to proceed any further; as, by their own going beyond Wickliff; and changing and growing in their own Models also, and the confessions of Cranmer, with the *Scripta Anglicana* of Bucer, and a thousand other things, was abundantly demonstrated. But after a fruitless expectation, wherein the truest friends of the Reformation long waited for to have that which Heylin himself owns to have been the design of the first Reformers, followed as it should have been, a party very unjustly arrogating to themselves the venerable name of *The Church of England*, by numberless oppressions, grievously smote those their Fellow-Servants. Then 'twas that, as our great OWEN hath expressed it, "Multitudes of pious, peaceable Protestants, were driven, by their severities, to

² "Drove forth those pious heroes to withstand The sea's rough rage and rougher toil on land."
(Virgil's Aeneid, i.9. (altered.)

leave their native country, and seek a refuge for their lives and liberties, with freedom for the worship of God, in a wilderness, in the ends of the earth."

3. It is the History of these PROTESTANTS that is here attempted: PROTESTANTS that highly honoured and affected the CHURCH of ENGLAND, and humbly petition to be a *part* of it: but by the mistake of a few powerful brethren, driven to seek a place for the exercise of the Protestant Religion, according to the light of their consciences, in the deserts of America. And in this attempt I have proposed, not only to preserve and secure the interest of Religion in the Churches of that little country NEW-ENGLAND, so far as the Lord Jesus Christ may please to bless it for that end, but also to offer unto the Churches of the Reformation, abroad in the world, some small Memorials, that may be serviceable unto the designs of Reformation, whereto, I believe, they are quickly to be awakened. I am far from any such boast, concerning these Churches, *that they have need of nothing*; I wish their works were more *perfect before God*. Indeed, that which Austin called "the perfection of Christians," is like to be, until the term for the anti-christian apostasie be expired, "the perfection of Churches" too; *ut agnoscant se nunquam esse perfectas*.³ Nevertheless, I perswade myself, that *so far as they have attained*, they have given great examples of the methods and measures wherein an Evangelical Reformation is to be prosecuted, and of the qualifications requisite in the instruments that are to prosecute it, and of the difficulties which may be most likely to obstruct it, and the most likely Directions and Remedies for those obstructions. It may be, 'tis not possible for me to do a greater service unto the Churches on the *best Island* of the universe, than to give a distinct relation of those great examples which have been occurring among Churches of *exiles*, that were driven out of that Island, into an horrible wilderness, merely for their being well-willers unto the Reformation. When that blessed Martyr Constantine was carried, with other Martyrs, in a *dung-cart*, unto the plane of execution, he pleasantly said, "Well, yet we are a precious odour to God in Christ." Though, the Reformed Churches in the American Regions have, by very injurious representations of their brethren, (all which they desire to forget and forgive!) been many times thrown into a *dung-cart*; yet, as they have been a "precious odour to God in Christ," so, I hope, they will be a precious odour unto His people; and not only *precious*, but *useful* also, when the History of them shall come to be considered. A Reformation of the Church is coming on, and I cannot but thereupon say, with the dying Cyrus to his children in *Xenophon*, (greek) (Learn from the things that have been done already, for this is the best way of learning.) The reader hath here an account of the "things that have been done already." Bernard, upon that clause in the Canticles, ["O thou fairest among women!"] has this ingenious gloss: *Pulchram, non omnimode quidem, sed pulchram inter mulieres eam docet; videlicet cum distinctione, quatenus ex hoc amplius exprimatur, et sciat quid desit sibi*.⁴ Thus, I do not say, that the Churches

³ To acknowledge their imperfections.

⁴ The sacred writer calls her fair, not in an absolute sense, but fair among women; implying a distinction, in order that his praise may have due qualification, and that she may apprehend her deficiencies.

of New England are the most *regular* that can be; yet I do say, and am sure, that they are very like unto those that were in the first ages of Christianity. And if I assert that, in the Reformation of the Church, the state of it in those first Ages is to be not a little considered, the great Peter Ramus, among others, has emboldened me. For when the Cardinal of Lorrain, the *Maecenas* of that great man, was offended at him, for turning Protestant, he replied: *Inter Opes illas, quibus me ditfsti, has etiam in ternum recordabor, quod Beneficio P ssiacae Responsionis tuae didici, de quindecim a Christo saeculis, primum vere esse aureum; Reliqua, quo longius abscederent, esse nequiora, atque deteriora: tum igitur cum fieret optio, Aureum saeculum delegi.*⁵ In short, the *first* Age was the *golden* Age: to return unto *that*, will make a man a Protestant, and, I may add, a Puritan. 'Tis possible that our Lord Jesus Christ carried some thousands of Reformers into the retirements of an American desert, on purpose that, with an opportunity granted unto many of his faithful servants, to enjoy the precious *liberty* of their Ministry, though in the midst of many temptations all their days, He might there, *to* them first, and then *by* them, give a *specimen* of many good things, which He would have His Churches elsewhere aspire and arise unto; and *this* being done, he knows not whether there be not *all done*, that New England was planted for; and whether the Plantation may not, soon after this, *come to nothing*. Upon that expression in the sacred Scripture, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness," it hath been imagined by some, that the *Regiones exterae*⁶ of America, are the *Tenebrae exteriores*⁷ which the unprofitable are there condemned unto. No doubt, the authors of those Ecclesiastical impositions and severities, which drove the English Christians into the Dark regions of America esteemed those Christians to be a very unprofitable sort of creatures. But behold, ye European Churches, there are golden Candlesticks [more than twice seven times seven!] in the midst of this "outer darkness:" unto the upright children of Abraham, here hath arisen *light in darkness*. And, let us humbly speak it, it shall be profitable for you to consider the *light* which, from the midst of this "outer darkness," is now to be darted over unto the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. But we must therewithal ask your Prayers that these "golden Candlesticks" may not quickly be "removed out of their place!"

4. But whether New England may *live* any where else or no, it must *live* in our History! HISTORY, in general, hath had so many and mighty commendations from the pens of those numberless authors, who, from Herodotus to Howel, have been the professed writers of it, that a tenth part of them transcribed, would be a furniture for a *Polyanthea in folio*.⁸ We, that have neither liberty, nor occasion, to quote these commendations of History, will content ourselves with the opinion of

⁵ Among the many favors with which your bounty has enriched me, I shall keep one in everlasting remembrance--I mean the lesson I have learned through your Reply to the Poissy Conference, that of the fifteen centuries since Christ, the first was the truly golden era of the Church, and that the rest have been successive periods of degeneracy; when therefore I had the power of choosing between them, I preferred the golden age.

⁶ Remote regions.

⁷ Outer darkness.

⁸ An anthology

one who was not much of a professed historian, expressed in that passage, whereto all mankind subscribe, *Historia est Testis temporum, Nuntia vetustatis, Lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae*.⁹ But of all History it must be confessed, that the palm is to be given unto Church History; wherein the dignity, the suavity, and the utility of the subject is transcendent. I observe, that for the description of the whole world in the Book of Genesis, that first-born of all historians, the great Moses, implies but one or two chapters, whereas he implies, it may be seven times as many chapters, in describing that one little Pavilion, the Tabernacle. And when I am thinking what may be the reason of this difference, methinks it intimates unto us, that the Church wherein the service of God is performed, is much more precious than the world, which was indeed created for the sake and use of the Church. 'Tis very certain, that the greatest entertainments must needs occur in the History of the people whom the Son of God hath redeemed and purified unto himself, as a peculiar people, and whom the Spirit of God, by supernatural operations upon their minds, does cause to live like strangers in this world, conforming themselves unto the Truths and Rules of his Holy Word, in expectation of a Kingdom, whereto they shall be in another and a better World advanced. Such a people our Lord Jesus Christ hath procured and preserved in all ages visible; and the dispensations of his wondrous Providence towards this People, (for, "O Lord, thou dost lift them up and cast them down!") their calamities, their deliverances, the dispositions which they have still discovered, and the considerable *persons* and *actions* found among them, cannot but afford matters of *admiration* and *admonition*, above what any other story can pretend unto: 'tis nothing but Atheism in the hearts of men, that can perswade them otherwise. Let any person of good sense peruse the History of Herodotus, which, like a river taking rise where the Sacred Records of the Old Testament leave off, runs along smoothly and sweetly, with relations that sometimes perhaps want an *apology*, down until the Grecians drive the Persians before them. Let him then peruse Thucydides, who, from *acting*, betook himself to *writing*, and carries the ancient state of the Grecians down to the twenty first year of the Peloponnesian wars, in a manner which Casaubon judges to be *Mirandum potius quam imitandum*.¹⁰ Let him next revolve Xenophon, that "Bee of Athens," who continues a narrative of the Greek affairs from the Peloponnesian wars to the battle of Mantinea, and gives us a Cyrus into the bargain, at such a rate, that Lipsius reckons the character of a *Suavis, Fidus et Circumspectus Scriptor*,¹¹ to belong unto him. Let him from hence proceed unto Diodorus Siculus, who, besides a rich treasure of Egyptian, Assyrian, Lybian and Grecian, and other Antiquities, in a phrase which, according to Photius's judgment, is (greek) [of all most becoming an historian,] carries on the thread begun by his predecessors, until the end of the hundred and nineteenth Olympiad; and where he is defective, let it be supplied from Arrianus, from Justin, and from Curtius,

⁹ History is Time's witness, the messenger of Antiquity, the lamp of Truth, the embodied soul of Memory, the guide of human Life. --Cicero, de Oratore, ii.9. [Slightly transposed, showing that the writer quotes from recollection.]

¹⁰ Rather to be admired than imitated.

¹¹ An agreeable, faithful, and accurate writer.

who, in the relish of Colerus, is *Quovis melle dulcior*.¹² Let him hereupon consult Polybius, and acquaint himself with the birth and growth of the Roman Empire, as far as 'tis described in five of the forty books composed by an author who, with a learned Professor of History, is *Prudens Scriptor, si quis alius*.¹³ Let him now run over the table of the Roman affairs, compendiously given by Lucius Florus, and then let him consider the transections of above three hundred years reported by Dionysius Halicarnassaeus, who, if the censure of Bodin may be taken, *Graecos omnes et Latinos superasse videatur*.¹⁴ Let him from hence pass to Livy, of whom the famous critick says, *Hoc solum ingenium (de Historicis Loquor) populus Romanus par Imperio suo habuit*,¹⁵ and supply those of his *Decads* that are lost, from the best fragments of antiquity, in others (and especially Dion and Sallust) that lead us on still further in our way. Let him then proceed unto the writers of the Cesaerean times, and first revolve Suetonius, then Tacitus, then Herodian, then a whole army more of historians which now crowd our into our Library; and unto all the rest, let him not fail of adding the incomparable Plutarch, whose books, they say, Theodore Gaza preferred before any in the world, next unto the inspired oracles of the Bible: but if the number be still too little to satisfy an historical appetite, let him add Polyhistor unto the number, and all the Chronicles of the following ages. After all, he must sensibly acknowledge that the two short books of Ecclesiastical History, written by the evangelist Luke, hath given us more glorious enterainments than all these voluminous historians if they were put all together. The achievements of one Paul particularly, which that evangelist hath emblazoned, have more true *glory* in them, than all the acts of those execrable plunderers and murderers, and irresistible banditti of world, which have been dignified by the name of "conquerors." Tacitus counted *Ingentia bella, expugnationes urbium, fusos captosque reges*,¹⁶ the rages of war, and the glorious violences, whereof great warriors make a wretched ostentation, to be the *noblest matter* for an historian. But there is a nobler, I humbly conceive, in the planting and forming of Evangelical Churches, and the temptations, the corruptions, the afflictions, which assault them, and their salvations from those assaults, and the exemplary lives of those that Heaven employs to be patterns of holiness and usefulness upon earth: and unto such it is, that I now invite my readers; things, in comparison whereof, the subjects of many other Histories are of as little weight as the questions about Z, the last letter of our Alphabet, and whether *H* is to be pronounced with an aspiration, where about whole volumes have been written, and of no more account than the composure of Didymus. But for the manner of my treating this *matter*, I must now give some account unto him.

6. *Reader!* I have done the part of an impartial historian, albeit not without all

¹² Sweeter than honey.

¹³ A sagacious historian, if one ever existed.

¹⁴ Appears to have outdone all other Greek and Latin authors.

¹⁵ In him alone (so far as historians are concerned) the Roman people found a genius worthy of their matchless empire.

¹⁶ Great wars, sacked cities, kings in flight or chains.

occasion perhaps, for the rule which a worthy writer, in his *Historica* gives to every reader, *Historici legantur cum moderatione et venia, et cogitetur fieri non posse, ut in omnibus circumstantiis sint lyncei.*¹⁷ Polybius complains of those historians, who always made either the Carthagenians brave, or the Romans base, or *e contra*, in all their actions, as their affection for their own party led them. I have endeavoured, with all good conscience, to decline this writing merely for a party, or doing like the dealer in History, whom Lucian derides, for always calling the captain of his own party an Achilles, but of the adverse party a Thersites: nor have I added unto the just provocations for the complaint made by the Baron Maurier, that the greatest *part* of Histories are but so many panegyrics composed by interested hands, which elevate iniquity to the heavens, like Paterculus and like Machiavel, who propose Tiberius Cesar, and Cesar Borgia, as examples fit for imitation, whereas true History would have exhibited them as horrid monsters--as very devils. 'Tis true, I am not of the opinion that one cannot merit the name of an impartial historian, except he write bare *matters of fact* without all *reflection*; for I can tell where to find this given as the definition of History, *Historia est rerum gestarum, cum laude aut vituperatione, narratio:*¹⁸ and if I am not altogether a Tacitus, when *vertues* or *vices* occur to be matters of reflection, I well as of relation, I will, for my vindication, appeal to Tacitus himself, whom Lipsius calls one of the prudentest (though Tertullian, long before, counts him one of the *lyingest*) of them who have enriched the world with History: he says, *Praecipuum munus Annalium reor, ne virtutes sileantur, utque pravis Dictis, Factisque ex posteritate et Infamia metus sit.*¹⁹ I have not commended any person, but when I have really judged, not only that he *deserved* it, but also that it would be a benefit unto posterity to know wherein he deserved it: and my judgment of desert, hath not been biased by personas being of my own particular judgment, in matters of disputation, among the Churches of God. I have been as willing to wear the name of *Simplicius Verinus*, throughout my whole undertaking, as he that, before me, hath assumed it: nor am I like Pope Zachary, impatient so much as to hear of any Antipodes. That spirit of a Sehlusselbergius, who falls foul with fury and reproach on all who differ from him; the spirit of an Heylin, who seems to count no obloquy too hard for a reformer; and the spirit of those (folio-writers there are, some of them, in the English nation!) whom a noble Historian stigmatizes, as, "Those hotheaded, passionate bigots, from whom, 'tis enough, if you be of a religion contrary unto theirs, to be defamed, condemned and pursued with a thousand calumnies." I thank Heaven I hate it with all my heart. But how can the *lives* of the commendable be written without commending them? or, is that law of History, given in one of the eminentest pieces of antiquity we now have in our hands,

¹⁷ Readers should exercise leniency towards historians, and bear it in mind that they cannot be infallible in everything.

¹⁸ History is the narration of great transactions, with awards of praise or censure to the actors.

¹⁹ I deem it to be the highest office of History to blazon abroad the virtues of the race, and to hold up before depravity, whether it be in word or deed, the dread of eternal obloquy.--Tacitus, Annals, iii.65.

wholly antiquated, *Maxime proprium est Historiae, Laudem rerum egregie gestarum persequi?*²⁰ nor have I, on the other side, forbore to mention many censurable things, even in the best of my friends, when the things, in my opinion, were not good; or so bore away for Placentia, in the course of our story, as to pass by Verona; but been mindful of the direction which Polybius gives to the historian: "It becomes him that writes an History, sometimes to extol enemies in his praises, when their praise worthy actions bespeak it, and at the same time to reprove the best friends, when their deeds appear worthy of a reproof; in-as-much as History is good for nothing, if truth (which is the very eye of the animal) be not in it." Indeed, I have thought it my duty upon all accounts, (and if it have proceeded unto the degree of a fault, there is, it may be, something in my temper and nature that has betrayed me therein,) to be more sparing and easie, in thus mentioning of censurable things, than in my other liberty: a writer of Church History should, I know, be like the builder of the temple, one of the tribe of Napthali; and for this I will also plead my Polybius in my excuse: "It is not the work of an historian, to commemorate the vices and villanies of men, so much as their just, their fair, their honest actions; and the readers of History get more good by the objects of their emulation, than of their indignation." Nor do I deny that, though I cannot approve the conduct of Josephus; (whom Jerom not unjustly nor inaptly calls "the Greek Livy,") when he left out of his Antiquities, the story of the *golden Calf*, and I don't wonder to find Chamier, and Rivet, and others, taxing him for his partiality towards his country-men - yet I have left unmentioned some censurable occurrences in the story of our Colonies, as things no less unuseful than improper to be raised out of the grave, wherein Oblivion hath now buried them - lest I should have incurred the *pasquil* bestowed upon Pope Urban, who, employing a committee to rip up the old errors of his predecessors, one clapped a pair of spurs upon the heels of the statue of St. Peter; and a label from the statue of St. Paul opposite thereunto, upon the bridge, asked him, "Whither he was bound?" St. Peter answered, "I apprehend some danger in staying here - I fear they'll call me in question for denying my Master." And St. Paul replied, "Nay, then I had best be gone too, for they'll question me also for persecuting the Christians before my conversion." Briefly, my pen shall reproach none that can give a good word unto any good man that is not of their own faction, and shall fall out with none but those that can agree with no body else, except those of their own schism. If I draw any sort of men with charcoal, it shall be because I remember a notable passage of the best Queen that ever was in the world, our late Queen Mary. Monsieur Juvien, that he might justify the Reformation in Scotland, made a very black representation of their old Queen Mary; for which, a certain sycophant would have incensed our Queen Mary against that Reverend person, saying, "Is it not a shame that this man, without any consideration for your royal person, should dare to throw such infamous calumnies upon a Queen, from whom your Royal Highness is descended?" But that excellent Princess replied, "No, not at all; is it not enough that, by fulsome praises, great persons be lulled asleep all their lives; but must flattery accompany them to their very graves? How should they fear the judgment of posterity, if historians be not

²⁰ It is History's truest prerogative, to praise noble achievements.

allowed to speak the truth after their death?" But whether I do myself commend, or whether I give my reader an opportunity to censure, I am careful above all things to do it with truth; and as I have considered the words of Plato, *Deum indigne et graviter ferre, cum quis ei similem, hoc est, virtute praestantem, vituperet, aut laudet contrarium.*²¹ so I have had the Ninth Commandment of a greater law-giver than Plato, to preserve my care of Truth from first to last. If any mistake have been any where committed, it will be found merely *circumstantial*, and wholly *involuntary*; and let it be remembered, that though no historian ever merited better than the incomparable Thuanus, yet learned men have said of *his* work, what they never shall truly say of *ours*, that it contains *multa falsissima et indigna.*²² I find Erasmus himself mistaking *one* man for *two*, when writing of the ancients. And even our own English writers too are often mistaken, and in matters of a very late importance, as Baker, and Heylin, and Fuller, (professed historians) tell us that Richard Sutton, a single man, founded the Charter-House; whereas his name was Thomas, and he was a married man. I think I can recite such mistakes, it may be *sans* number occurring in the most credible writers; yet I hope I shall *commit* none such. But although I thus challenge, as my due, the character of an *impartial*, I doubt I may not challenge that of an *elegant* historian. I cannot say whether the style wherein this Church History is written, will please the modern critics; but if I seem to have used (greek)²³ a simple, submissive, humble style, 'tis the same that Eusebins affirms to have been used by Hegesippus, who, as far as we understand, was the first author (after Luke) that ever composed an entire body of Ecclesiastical History, which he divided into five books, and entituled, (greek)²⁴ Whereas others, it may be, will reckon the *style* embellished with too much of *ornament*, by the multiplied references to other and former concerns, closely couched, for the observation of the attentive, in almost every paragraph; but I must confess, that I am of his mind who said, *Sicuti sal modice cibis aspersus Condit, et gratiam saporis addit, ita si paulum antiquitatis admiscueris, Oratio fit venustior.*²⁵ And I have seldom seen that way of writing faulted, but by those who, for a certain odd reason, sometimes find fault that "the grapes are not ripe." These embellishments (of which yet I only *Veniam pro laude peto*²⁶) are not the puerile spoils of Polyantha's;) but I should have asserted them to be as choice *flowers* as most that occur in ancient or modern writings, almost unavoidably putting themselves into the author's hand, while about his work, if those words of Ambrose had not a little frightened me, as well as they did Baronius, *Unumquemque Fallunt sua scripta.*²⁷ I observe that learned men have been so terrified by the reproaches of pedantry, which little matters at reading and learning have, by their quoting humours, brought upon themselves, that, for

²¹ It is offensive to Deity himself when dishonor is cast on such as resemble Him in the loftiness of their virtue, or when praise is bestowed on their opposites.

²² Much that is most false and unworthy.

²³ The simplest style of writing.

²⁴ Memoirs of ecclesiastical transactions.

²⁵ As a little salt seasons food, and increases its relish, so a spice of antiquity heightens the charm of style.

²⁶ Ask pardon for this self-praise.

²⁷ Every writer forms mistaken judgments of his own productions.

to avoid all approaches towards that which those feeble creatures have gone to imitate, the best way of writing has been most injuriously deserted. But what shall we say? The best way of writing under heaven shall be the worst, when Erasmus, his monosyllable tyrant, will have it so! and if I should have resigned my self wholly to the judgment of *others*, what way of writing to have taken, the story of the two statues made by Policletus tells me what may have been the issue: he contrived one of them according to the rules that best pleased himself, and the other according to the fancy of every one that looked upon his work: the former was afterwards applauded by all, and the latter derided by those very persons who had given their directions for it. As for such unaccuracies as the critical may discover (*Opere in longo* ²⁸) appeal to the courteous for a favourable construction of them; and certainly they will be favourably judged of, when there is considered the variety of my other employments; which have kept me in continual hurries, I had almost said like those of the ninth sphere, for the few months in which this Work has been digesting. It was a thing well thought, by the wise designers of Chelsey-Colledge, wherein able historians were one sort of persons to be maintained; that the Romanists do in one point condemn the Protestants; for among the Romanists, they don't burden their Professor with any *Parochial incumbrances*; but among the Protestants, the very same individual man must preach, catechize, administer the Sacraments, visit the afflicted, and manage all the parts of Church- discipline; and if any books for the service of Religion be written, persons thus extremely incumbered must be the writers. Now, of all the Churches under heaven, there are none that expects so much *variety* of service from their Pastors as those of New-England; and of all the Churches in New England, there are none that require more than those in Boston, the metropolis of the English America; whereof *one* is, by the Lord Jesus Christ, committed unto the care of the unworthy hand by which this History is compiled. Reader, give me leave humbly to mention, with him in Tully, *Antequam de re, Pauca de me!*²⁹ Constant sermons, usually more than once, and perhaps three or four times in a week, and all the other duties of a pastoral watchfulness, a very large flock has all this while demanded of me; wherein, if I had been furnished with as many heads as a Typhoeus, as many eyes as an Argos, and as many hands as a Briareus, I might have had work enough to have employed them all; nor hath my station left me free from obligations to spend very much time in the Evangelical service of *others* also. It would have been a great sin in me to have *omitted*, or *abated* my just cares, to *fulfill my Ministry in these things*, and in a manner *give my self wholly to them*. All the time I have had for my Church- History hath been perhaps only, or chiefly, that which I might have taken else for less profitable recreations; and it hath all been done by *snatches*. My reader will not find me the person intended in his Littany, when he says, *Libera me ab homine unius negotii.*³⁰ nor have I spent thirty years in shaping this my History, as Diodorus Siculus did for his, [and yet both Bodinus and Sigonius

²⁸ In the course of a long work.

²⁹ Before I talk of my subject, I must say a few things about myself.

³⁰ Deliver me from a man of one idea.

complain of the (greek)³¹; attending it. But I wish I could have enjoyed, entirely for this work, one quarter of the little more than two years which have rolled away since I began it; whereas I have been forged sometimes wholly to throw by the work whole months together, and then resume it, but by a stolen hour or two in the day, not without some hazard of incurring the title which Coryat put upon his History of his Travels, "*Crudities hastily gobbled up in five months.*" Protogenes being seven years in drawing a picture, Apelles, upon the sight of it, said, "The grace of the work was much allayed by the length of the time." Whatever else there may have been to take off the "grace of the work" now in the reader's hands, (whereof the *pictures* of great and good men make a considerable part,) I am sure there hath not been the "length of the time" to do it. Our English Martyrologer counted it a sufficient *aplogy* for what meanness might be found in the first edition of our "acts and monuments," that it was "hastily rashed up in about fourteen months:" and I may apologize for this collection of our "acts and monuments," that I should have been glad, in the little more than two years which have ran out since I entred upon it, if I could have had one half of "about fourteen months" to have entirely devoted thereunto. But besides the *time*, which the daily services of my own first, and then many other Churches, have necessarily called for, I have lost abundance of precious time through the feeble and broken state of my health, which hath unfitted me for hard study; I can do nothing to purpose at lucubrations. And yet, in this time also of the two or three years last past, I have not been excused from the further diversion of publishing (though not so many as they say Mercurius Trismegistus did, yet) more than a score of other *books*, upon a copious variety of other subjects, besides the composing of several more, that are not yet published. Nor is this neither all the task that I have in this while had lying upon me; for (though I Am very sensible of what Jerom said, *Non bene fit, quod occupato Animo fit;*³² and of Quintilian's remark, *Non simul in multa intendere Animus totum potest;*³³ when I applied my mind unto this way of serving the Lord Jesus Christ in my generation, I set upon another and a greater, which has had, I suppose, more of my *thought*, and *hope* than this, and wherein there hath passed me, for the most part, *Nulla dies sine linea.*³⁴ I considered, that all sort of learning might be made gloriously subservient unto the illustration of the sacred Scripture; and that no *professed commentaries* had hitherto given a thousandth part of so much *illustration* to it, as might be given. I considered that multitudes of *particular texts* had, especially of later years, been more notably illustrated in the *scattered* books of learned men, than in any of the ordinary commentators. And I considered that the *treasures of illustration* for the Bible, dispersed in many hundred volumes, might be fetched all together by a labour that would resolve to *conquer all things*; and that all the *improvements* which the later ages have made in the sciences might be also, with an inexpressible pleasure, called in, to Christ the *illustration* of the holy oracles, at a rate that hast not been attempted in the vulgar Annotations; and that a common

³¹ Mistakes.

³² Nothing is well done, which is undertaken with a mind preoccupied.

³³ No one can bestow his whole attention upon several things at the same time.

³⁴ Every day has added at least one line.

degree of sense would help a person, who should converse much with these things, to attempt sometimes also an *illustration* of his own, which might expect some attention. Certainly, it will not be ungrateful unto good men, to have innumerable Antiquities, *Jewish, Chaldee, Arabian, Grecian, and Roman*, brought home unto us, with a *sweet light* reflected from them on the *word*, which is our *light*; or, to have all the *typical* men and things in our Book of Mysteries accommodated with their Antitypes: or, to have many hundreds of references to our dearest Lord Messiah, discovered in the writings which *testifie of Him*, oftner than the most of mankind have hitherto imagined: or, to have the *histories* of all *ages*, coming in with punctual and surprising *fulfilments* of the divine Prophecies, as far as they have been hitherto fulfilled; and not mere *conjectures*, but even mathematical and incontestible *demonstrations*, given of *expositions* offered upon the Prophecies, that yet remain to be accomplished: or, to have in *one heap*, thousands of those "remarkable discoveries of the deep things of the Spirit of God," whereof *one or two*, or a few, sometimes, have been, with good success, accounted materials enough to advance a person into Authorism; or to have the delicious *curiosities* of Grotius, and Bochart, and Mede, and Lightfoot, and Selden, and Spencer, (carefully selected and corrected,) and many more giants in knowledge, all set upon one Table.

Travellers tell us, that at Florence there is a rich table, worth a thousand crowns, made of precious stones neatly inlaid; a table that was fifteen years in making, with no less than thirty men daily at work upon it; even such a table could not afford so rich entertainments, as one that should have the soul feasting thoughts of those learned men together set upon it. Only 'tis a pity, that instead of one poor feeble American, overwhelmed with a thousand other cares, and capable of touching this work no otherwise than in a digression, there be not more than thirty men daily employed about it. For, when the excellent Mr. Pool had finished his laborious and immortal task, it was noted by some considerable persons, "That wanting assistance to collect for him many miscellaneous criticisms, occasionally scattered in other authors, he left many better things behind him than he found." And more than all this, our Essay is levelled, if it be not anticipated with that Epitaph, *Magnis tamen excidit ausis*.³⁵ Designing accordingly, to give the Church of God such displays of his blessed word, as may be more entertaining for the rarity and novelty of them, than any that have hitherto been seen together in Any exposition; and yet such as may be acceptable unto the most judicious, for the demonstrative truth of them, and unto the most orthodox, for the regard had unto the *Analogy of Faith* in all, I have now, in a few months, got ready an huge number of *golden keys* to open the pandects of Heaven, and some thousands of charming and curious, and singular notes, by the new help whereof, the word of CHRIST *may run and be glorified*. If the *God of my life* will please to spare (my life my yet sinful, and slothful, and thereby forfeited life!) as many years longer as the barren fig tree had in the parable, I may make unto the Church of God an humble tender of our *Biblia Americana*,³⁶ a

³⁵ Nevertheless, he fell short of his great enterprise.

³⁶ American Scriptures.

volume enriched with better things than all the plate of the Indies; YET NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF CHRIST WITH ME. My reader sees why I commit the fault of a (greek)³⁷ which appears in the mention of these minute passages; 'tis to excuse whatever other fault of inaccuracy or inadvertency may be discovered in an History, which hath been a sort of rhapsody made up (like the paper whereon 'tis written!) with many little rags, torn from an employment multifarious enough to overwhelm one of my small capacities.

*Magna dabit, qui magna potest; mibi parva potenti, Parvaque poscenti, parva dedisse sat est.*³⁸

6. But shall I prognosticate thy fate, now that, *Parve (sed invideo) sine me, liber, ibis in urbem.*³⁹

Luther, who was himself owner of such an heart, advised every historian to get the *Heart of a lion*; and the more I consider of the provocation, which this our Church-History must needs give to that roaring Lion who has, through all ages hitherto, been tearing the church to pieces, the more occasion I see to wish myself a *Coeur de Lion*. But had not my heart been trebly oak'd and brass'd for such eneounters as this our history may meet withal, I would have worn the silk-worms motto, *Operitur dum operatur*,⁴⁰ and have chosen to have written Anonymously; or, as Claudius Salmasius calls himself *Walo Messelinus*, as Ludovicus Molinaeus calls himself *Ludiomaeus Colvinus*, as Carolus Scribanus calls himself *Clarus Bonarscius*, (and no less men than Peter du Moulin and Dr. Henry More, stile themselves, the one *Hippolytus Fronto*, the other *Franciscus Paleopolitanus*.) Thus I would have tried whether I could not have Anagrammatized my name into some concealment; or I would have referred it to be found in the second chapter of the second Syntagm of *Selden de Diis Syris*. Whereas now I freely confess, 'tis COTTON MATHER that has written all these things; *Me, me, adsum qui scripsi; in me convertite ferrum.*⁴¹

I hope 'tis a right work that I have done; but we are not yet arrived unto the day, "wherein God will bring every work into judgment," (the day of the kingdom that was promised unto David,) and a Son of David hath as truly as wisely told us, that until the arrival of that happy day, this is one of the *vanities* attending humane affairs: "For a right work, a man shall be envied of his neighbour." It will not be so much a surprise unto me, if I should live to see our Church-History vexed with *anie mad-versions* of calumnious writers, as it would have been unto Virgil, to read his *Bucolicks* reproached by the *Anti-bucolica* of a nameless scribbler, and his *Aeneids* travestied by the *Aeneidomastix* of Carbilus: or

³⁷ Egotistical discussion.

³⁸ Great things he gives who hath them; 'tis my lot to own and ask for little: but the call of Heaven is answered if I give my all.-Ovid, *Trist.i.1.1*

³⁹ Thou, little book, while I behind thee stay, To the great world dost take thine envied way.

⁴⁰ The more closely she toils, the more closely she hides.

⁴¹ I wrote it!--!!--vent all your spite on me!--Virgil, *Aeneid*, ix.427 (travestied).

Herennius taking pains to make a collection of the *faults*, and Faustinus of the *thefts*, in his incomparable composures: yea, Pliny and Seneca themselves, and our Jerom, reproaching him, as a man of no judgment nor skill in sciences; while Poedianus affirms of him, that he was himself, *Usque adeo invidiae expers, ut si quid erudite dictum inspiceret alterius, non minus gauderet ac si suum esset.*⁴² How should a book no better laboured than this of ours, escape Zoilian outrages when in all ages the moat exquisite works have been as much vilified as Plato's by Scaliger, and Aristotle's by Lactantius? In the time of our K. Edward VI. there was an order to bring in all the teeth of St. Appollonia, which the people of his one kingdom carried about them for the cure of the tooth-ach; and they were so many that they almost filled a tun. Truly *Envy* hath as many *teeth* as Madam Apollonia would have had, if all those pretended reliques had been really hers. And must all these *teeth* be fastened on thee, O my Book? It may be so! and yet the Book, when ground between these *teeth*, will prove like Ignatius in the *teeth* of the furious tygers, "The whiter manchet for the Churches of God." The greatest and fiercest rage of *envy*, is that which I expect from those IDUMAEANS, whose religion is all ceremony, and whose charity is more for them who deny the most essential things in the articles and homilies of the Church of England, than for the most conscientious men in the world, who manifest their being so, by their dissent in some little ceremony; or those persons whose hearts are notably expressed in those words used by one of them ['tis Howel in his *Familiar Letters*, vol. 1., see. 6, lett. 32,] "I rather pity, than hate, Turk or Infidel, for they are of the same metal, and bear the same stamp as I do, though the inscriptions differ; if I hate any, 'tis those schismaticks that puzzle the sweet peace of our Church; so that I could be content to see an Anabaptist go to hell on a Brownist's back." The writer whom I last quoted, hath given us a story of a young man in High-Holbourn, who being after his death dissected, there was a serpent with divers tails found in the left ventricle of his heart. I make no question, that our Church History will find some reader disposed like that writer, with an heart as full of serpent and venom as ever it can hold: nor indeed will they be able to hold, but the tongues and pens of those angry folks will scourge me as with scorpions, and cause me to feel (if I will feel) as many lashes as Cornelius Agrippa expected from their brethren, for the book in which he exposed their vanities. A scholar of the great JUELS made once about fourscore verses, for which the Censor of Corpus Christi Colledge, in the beginning of Queen *Maries* reign, publicly and cruelly scourged him, with one lash for every verse. Now, in those verses, the young man's prayers to the Lord JESUS CHRIST have this for part of the answer given to them:

Respondet Dominus, spectans de sedibus altis, Ne dubites recte credere, parve puer. Olim sum passus mortem, nunc occupo dextram Patris, nunc summi sunt mea regna poli. Sed tu, crede mihi, vires Scriptura resumet, Tolle turque suo

⁴² He was so incapable of envy that, whenever he fell in with an elegant expression from the pen of another, he was as much delighted as if it had been his own.

*tempore missa nequam.*⁴³

Reader, I also expect nothing but scourges from that generation to whom the *mass-book* is dearer than the *Bible*: but I have now likewise confessed another expectation, that shall be my consolation under a ... They tell us, that on the highest of the Capsian mountains, in Spain, there is a lake, whereinto if you throw a stone, there presently ascends a smoke which forms a dense cloud, from whence issues a tempest of rain, hail, and horrid thunder claps for a good quarter of an hour. Our Church-History will be like a stone cast into that lake, for the furious tempest which it will raise among some, whose Ecclesiastical dignities have set them as on the top of Spanish mountains. The Catholick spirit of communion wherewith 'tis written, and the liberty which I have taken to tax the schismatical impositions and persecutions of a party who have always been as real enemies to the English nation as to the Christian and Protestant interest, will certainly bring upon the whole composure the quick censures of that party at the firstceast of their look upon it. In the Duke of Alva's council of twelve judges, there was one Hessels, a Flemming, who slept always at the trial of criminals, and when they waked him to deliver his opinion, he rubbed his eyes and cried, between sleeping and waking, *Ad Patibulum! Ad patibulum! "to the gallows with them."* [And, by the way, this blade was himself, at the last, condemned unto the gallows without an hearing!] As quick censures must this our labour expect from those who will not bestow waking thoughts upon the representations of Christianity here made unto the world; but have a sentence of death always to pass, or at least wish, upon those generous principles without which 'tis impossible to maintain the Reformation: and I confess I am very well content, that this our labour takes the fate of those principles: nor do I dissent from the words of the excellent Whitaker upon Luther, "*Faelix ille, quem Dominus eo Honorare dignatus est, ut Homines nequissimos suos haberet inimicos.*"⁴⁴ But if the old epigrammatist when he saw guilty folks raving mad at his lines, could say: *Hoc volo; nunc nobis carmina nostra placent:*⁴⁵

certainly an historian should not be displeas'd at it, if the enemies of truth discover their madness at the true and free communications of his history; and therefore the more stones they throw at this book, there will not only be the more proofs that it is a tree which hath good fruits growing upon it, but I will build my self a monument with them, whereon shall be inscribed that clause in the epitaph of the martyr Stephen: *Excepit lavides, cui petra Christus erat:*⁴⁶

⁴³ The Lord, beholding from his throne, reply'd, "Doubt not, O Youth! firmly in me confide: I dy'd long since, now sit at the right hand of my bless'd Father, and the world command. Believe me, Scripture shall regain her sway, And wicked Mass in due time fade away."

⁴⁴ Happy Luther! whom the Lord signalized with the honour of having the greatest reprobates for his worst enemies.

⁴⁵ I'm pleas'd at last: victorious is my wit: The galled jade winces, and my mark is hit.--Martial, Epig. vi.614.

⁴⁶ A specimen of the bad tast for playing upon words which so much disfigures ancient scholastic literature: He died by stoning, but his Rock was Christ.

Albeit perhaps the epitaph ⁴⁷, which the old monks bestowed upon Wickliff, will be rather endeavoured for me, (if I am thought worth one!) by the men who will, with all possible *monkery*, strive to stave off the approaching Reformation.

But since an undertaking of this nature must thus encounter so much envy from those who are under the power of the *spirit that works in the children of unperswadeableness*, methinks I might persuade my self, that it will find another sort of entertainment from those good men who have a better spirit in them: for, as the Apostle James hath noted, (so with Monsieur Claude I read it,) "The spirit that is in us lusteth against envy;" and yet, even in *us*, also, there will be the *flesh*, among whose works one is *envy*, which will be *lusting* against the *spirit*. All good men will not be satisfied with every thing that is here set before them. In my own country, besides a considerable number of loose and vain inhabitants risen up, to whom the Congregational Church-discipline, which cannot live well where the power of godliness dyes, is become distasteful for the purity of it; there is also a number of eminently godly persons, who are for a larger way, and unto these my Church- history will give distaste, by the things which it may happen to utter in favour of that Church- discipline on some few occasions; and the discoveries which I may happen to make of my apprehensions, that *scripture*, and *reason*, and *antiquity* is for it; and that it is not far from a glorious resurrection. But that, as the famous Mr. Baxter, after thirty or forty years hard study, about the true instituted Church-discipline, at last not only owned, but also invincibly proved, that it is *the congregational*; so, the further that the *unprejudiced studies* of learned men proceed in this matter, the more generally the Congregational Church-discipline will be pronounced for. On the other side, there are some among us who very strictly profess the Congregational Church-discipline, but at the same time they have an unhappy narrowness of soul, by which they confine their value and kindness too much unto their own party: and unto those my Church-History will be offensive, because my regard unto our own declared principles does not hinder me from giving the right hand of fellowship unto the valuable servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, who find not our Church-discipline as yet agreeable unto their present understandings and illuminations. If it be thus in my own country, it cannot be otherwise in that whereto I send this account of my own. Briefly, as it hath been said, that if all *Episcopal* men were like Archbishop Usher, and all *Presbyterians* like Stephen Marshal, and all *Independents* like Jeremiah Burroughs, the wounds of the Church would soon be healed; my essay to carry that spirit through this whole Church-History will bespeak wounds for it, from those that are of another spirit. And there will also be in every country those good men, who yet have not had the grace of Christ so far prevailing in them, as utterly to divest them of that piece of ill-nature which the Comedian resents, *In*

⁴⁷ We take the effusion alluded to by our author, with the context, from Speed's Chronicle, [p.760, ed. 1623.]--"This famous Doctor, dying of a palsie, hat this charitable Euloge or Epitaph bestowed on him by a Monke: The Divells Instrument, Churches Enemy, Peoples Confusion, Hereticks Idoll, Hypocrites Mirrour, Schismes Broacher, Hatreds Sower, Lyes Forger, Flatteries Sinke; who at his death despaired like Cain, and stricken by the horrible judgment of God, breathed forth his wicked soule to the darke mansion of the black divell."

*homine imperito, quo nil quicquam injustius, quia nisi quod ipse facit, nil recte factum putat.*⁴⁸

However, all these things, and an hundred more such things which I think of, are very small discouragements for such a service as I have here endeavoured. I foresee a recompence which will abundantly swallow up all discouragements! It may be Strato the Philosopher counted himself well recompenced for his labours, when Ptolemy bestowed fourscore talents on him. It may be, Archimelus the poet counted himself well recompenced, when Hiero sent him a thousand bushels of wheat for one little epigram: and Saleius the poet might count himself well recompenced, when Vespasian sent him twelve thousand and five hundred philippicks; and Oppian the poet might count himself well recompenced, when Caracalla sent him a piece of gold for every line that he had inscribed unto him. As I live in a country where such recompences never were in fashion; it hath no preferments for me, and I shall count that I am well rewarded in it, if I can escape without being heavily reproached, censured, and condemned for what I have done: so I thank the Lord, I should exceedingly scorn all such mean considerations, I seek not out for benefactors, to whom these labours may be dedicated: there is ONE to whom all is due! from him I shall have a recompence: and what recompence? The recompence, whereof I do, with inexpressible joy, assure my self is this, that these my poor labours will certainly serve the Churches and interests of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think I may say, that I ask to live no longer than I count a service unto the Lord Jesus Christ and his Churches, to be it self a glorious recompence for the doing of it. When David was contriving to build the house of God, there was an order given from Heaven concerning him, "Go tell David my servant." The adding of that more than royal title unto the name of David was a sufficient recompence for all his contrivance about the house of God. In our whole Church- History, we have been at work for the house of the Lord Jesus Christ, [even that Man, who is the Lord God, and whose form seems on that occasion represented unto his David.] And herein 'tis recompence enough, that I have been a servant unto that heavenly Lord. The greatest *honour*, and the sweetest *pleasure*, out of heaven, is to serve our illustrious Lord Jesus Christ, who hath "loved us, and given himself for us:" and unto whom it is infinitely reasonable that we should give our selves, and all that we have and are: and it may be the Angels in Heaven, too, aspire not after an higher felicity.

Unto thee, therefore, O thou Son of God, and King of Heaven, and Lord of all things, whom the glorious Angels of Light unspeakable love to glorifie; I humbly offer up a poor History of Churches, which own thee alone for their Head, and Prince, and Law-Giver; Churches which thou hast purchased with thy own blood, and with wonderful dispensations of thy Providence hitherto protected and preserved; and of a people which thou didst form for thy self; to shew forth thy praises. I bless thy great Name, for thy inclining of me to, and carrying of me

⁴⁸ No one is more illiberal than he whom ignorance has bloated with conceit:--Nought is well done but what he does himself."-Terence, Adelphi, Act.i., Scene 2, ver. 18.

through, the work of this History: I pray thee to sprinkle the book of this History with thy blood, and make it acceptable and profitable unto thy Churches, and serve thy Truths and Ways among thy people, by that which thou hast here prepared; for 'tis THOU that hast prepared it for them. AMEN.

*Quid sum? Nil.--Quis sum? Nullus.--Sed gratia CHRISTI, Quod sum, quod vivo, quodque laboro, facit.*⁴⁹

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).

⁴⁹ What am I? Nothing.--Sovereign Grace alone lives in my life, and does what I have done.