

are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His ordinance and His laws, and the articles of our covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that our Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other gods, our pleasures and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it.

Therefore let us choose life,
that we and our seed
may live by obeying His
voice and cleaving to Him,
for He is our life and
our prosperity.

1630

1838

From The Journal of John Winthrop¹

[Sighting Mount Desert Island, Maine]

[June 8, 1630] About 3 in the afternoon we had sight of land to the NW about 15 leagues, which we supposed was the Isles of Monhegan, but it proved Mount Mansell.² Then we tacked and stood WSW. We had now fair sunshine weather and so pleasant a sweet ether³ as did much refresh us, and there came a smell off the shore like the smell of a garden. There came a wild pigeon into our ship and another small land bird.

[Overcoming Satan]

[July 5, 1632] At Watertown there was (in the view of divers⁴ witnesses) a great combat between a mouse and a snake, and after a long fight the mouse prevailed and killed the snake. The pastor of Boston, Mr. Wilson,⁵ a very sincere, holy man, hearing of it gave this interpretation: that the snake was the devil, the mouse was a poor contemptible people which God had brought hither, which should overcome Satan here and dispossess him of his kingdom. Upon the same occasion he told the governor⁶ that before he was resolved to come into this country he dreamed he was here, and that he saw a church arise out of the earth, which grew up and became a marvelous goodly church.

1. The text is from *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649* (1996), abridged ed., edited by Richard S. Dunn and Laetitia Yeandle.

2. Winthrop saw Mount Desert Island, Maine. The English named it after a British admiral, Sir Robert Mansell (1573–1656); the French explorer Samuel de Champlain (see the “First Encounters” cluster, above) named it Île des

Monts Déserts.

3. Air.

4. Several.

5. The Reverend John Wilson (1588–1667), then beginning a pastorate that lasted thirty-seven years.

6. Winthrop.

[Charges Made against Roger Williams]

[December 27, 1633] The governor and assistants met at Boston and took into consideration a treatise which Mr. Williams⁷ (then of Salem) had sent to them, and which he had formerly written to the governor⁸ and Council of Plymouth, wherein among other things he disputes their right to the lands they possessed here, and concluded that claiming by the King's grant they could have no title, nor otherwise except they compounded⁹ with the natives. For this, taking advice with some of the most judicious ministers (who much condemned Mr. Williams's error and presumption), they gave order that he should be convented¹ at the next Court to be censured, etc. There were 3 passages chiefly whereat they were much offended: 1. For that he chargeth King James to have told a solemn public lie, because in his patent he blessed God that he was the first Christian prince that had discovered this land; 2. For that he chargeth him and others with blasphemy for calling Europe Christendom or the Christian world; 3. For that he did personally apply to our present King Charles these 3 places in the Revelation, viz.²

Mr. Endecott³ being absent, the governor wrote to him to let him know what was done, and withal added divers arguments to confute the said errors, wishing him to deal with Mr. Williams to retract the same, etc. Whereunto he returned a very modest and discreet answer. Mr. Williams also wrote very submissively, professing his intent to have been only to have written for the private satisfaction of the governor, etc., of Plymouth without any purpose to have stirred any further in it if the governor here had not required a copy of him; withal offering his book or any part of it to be burnt, etc. So it was left and nothing done in it.

[A Smallpox Epidemic]

[January 20, 1634] Hall and the 2 others⁴ who went to Connecticut November 3 came now home, having lost themselves and endured much misery. They informed us that the smallpox was gone as far as any Indian plantation was known to the W[est], and much people dead of it, by reason whereof they could have no trade. At Narragansett by the Indians' report there died 700, but beyond Pascataquack none to the E[ast].

[A Warrant for Roger Williams]

[January 11, 1636] The governor⁵ and assistants met at Boston to consult about Mr. Williams, for that they were credibly informed that notwithstanding the injunction laid upon him (upon the liberty granted him to stay till the spring) not to go about to draw others to his opinions, he did use to entertain company in his house and to preach to them, even of such points as he

7. Roger Williams, a Puritan theologian who had emigrated to New England in 1630 and expressed radical views on Church reform and colonialism (his writing is excerpted later in this volume).

8. In 1633, Edward Winslow was governor in Plymouth (see the "First Encounters" cluster).

9. Arranged to make a financial settlement.

1. Summoned to appear.

2. Abbreviation for *videlicet*: namely (Latin).

3. John Endecott (c. 1588–1665): governor to the Massachusetts Bay Colony's advance settlement in Salem from 1628 until Winthrop arrived.

4. Not further identified.

5. John Hays (1594–1654). Winthrop was elected governor again in 1637.

had been censured for; and it was agreed to send him into England by a ship then ready to depart. The reason was because he had drawn above 20 persons to his opinion and they were intended to erect a plantation about the Narragansett Bay, from whence the infection⁶ would easily spread into these churches (the people being many of them much taken with the apprehension of his godliness). Whereupon a warrant was sent to him to come presently to Boston to be shipped,⁷ etc. He returned answer (and divers of Salem came with it) that he could not come without hazard of his life, etc., whereupon a pinnace was sent with commission to Captain Underhill,⁸ etc., to apprehend him and carry him aboard the ship (which then rode at Nantasket), but when they came at his house they found he had been gone 3 days before, but whither they could not learn.

[*The Case of Anne Hutchinson*]

[October 21, 1636] * * * One Mrs. Hutchinson, a member of the church of Boston, a woman of a ready wit and bold spirit, brought over with her two dangerous errors: 1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person.⁹ 2. That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification.¹—From these two grew many branches; as, 1, Our union with the Holy Ghost, so as a Christian remains dead to every spiritual action, and hath no gifts nor graces, other than such as are in hypocrites, nor any other sanctification but the Holy Ghost Himself.²

There joined with her in these opinions a brother of hers, one Mr. Wheelwright, a silenced minister sometimes in England.³

[*Rev. John Cotton Explains His Position*]

[October 25, 1636] The other ministers in the bay, hearing of these things, came to Boston at the time of a general court, and entered conference in private with them, to the end they might know the certainty of these things; that if need were, they might write to the church of Boston about them, to prevent (if it were possible) the dangers which seemed hereby to hang over that and the rest of the churches. At this conference, Mr. Cotton was present, and gave satisfaction⁴ to them, so as he agreed with them all in the point of sanctification, and so did Mr. Wheelwright; so as they all did hold that sanctification did help to evidence justification. The same he had delivered plainly in public, divers times; but, for the indwelling of the person of the

6. Misguided teachings. Providence Plantation, the colony Williams started in Rhode Island, received its patent in 1644.

7. I.e., returned to Boston by ship.

8. John Underhill (c. 1597–1672), soldier who organized the Massachusetts Bay Colony militia. "Pinnace": a small, light vessel, usually with two masts.

9. Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) held the radical view that the "justified"—those elected or chosen for salvation by God—were joined in personal union with God and superior to those lacking such inspiration.

1. I.e., that proper moral conduct is no sign of justification.

2. I.e., that good works are not a sign of God's favor; justification is by faith alone and has nothing to do with either piety or worldly success.

3. John Wheelwright (c. 1592–1679) had been a vicar near Alford, England, where Anne Hutchinson and her husband, William, lived before emigrating to America. Wheelwright was removed from his ministry, probably because he refused to sign an oath of loyalty to the Church of England, and went to Boston in 1636.

4. Satisfied their doubts about him. The sermons of the Reverend John Cotton (1584–1652), a prominent Boston theologian, were admired by the Hutchinsons, which worried his fellow ministers.

Holy Ghost, he held that still, but not union with the person of the Holy Ghost, so as to amount to a personal union.

[Charges Brought against Mrs. Hutchinson and Others]

[November 1, 1637] * * * There was great hope that the late general assembly would have had some good effect in pacifying the troubles and dissensions about matters of religion; but it fell out otherwise. For though Mr. Wheelwright and those of his party had been clearly confuted and confounded in the assembly, yet they persisted in their opinions, and were as busy in nourishing contentions (the principal of them) as before. * * *

The court also sent for Mrs. Hutchinson, and charged her with divers matters, as her keeping two public lectures every week in her house, whereto sixty or eighty persons did usually resort, and for reproaching most of the ministers (viz., all except Mr. Cotton) for not preaching a covenant of free grace, and that they had not the seal of the spirit, nor were able ministers of the New Testament; which were clearly proved against her, though she sought to shift it off.⁵ And after many speeches to and fro, at last she was so full as she could not contain, but vented her revelations; amongst which this was one, that she had it revealed to her that she should come into New England, and she should here be persecuted, and that God would ruin us and our posterity and the whole state for the same. So the court proceeded and banished her; but because it was winter, they committed her to a private house where she was well provided, and her own friends and the elders permitted to go to her, but none else.

The court called also Capt. Underhill and some five or six more of the principal, whose hands were to the said petition; and because they stood to justify it they were disfranchised, and such as had public places were put from them.

The court also ordered, that the rest, who had subscribed the petition, (and would not acknowledge their fault, and which near twenty of them did,) and some others, who had been chief stirrers in these contentions, etc., should be disarmed.⁶ This troubled some of them very much, especially because they were to bring them in themselves; but at last, when they saw no remedy, they obeyed.

All the proceedings of this court against these persons were set down at large, with the reasons and other observations, and were sent into England to be published there, to the end that our godly friends might not be discouraged from coming to us, etc. * * *

[Mrs. Hutchinson Admonished Further]

[March 1638] While Mrs. Hutchinson continued at Roxbury,⁷ divers of the elders and others resorted to her, and finding her to persist in maintaining those gross errors beforementioned and many others to the number of thirty or thereabout, some of them wrote to the church at Boston, offering to make proof of the same before the church, etc., [March] 15; whereupon she was

5. To qualify her statements.

6. Seventy-five people were disarmed, a severe

punishment for this time and place.

7. Near Boston.

called, (the magistrates being desired to give her license to come,) and the lecture was appointed to begin at ten. (The general court being then at Newtown, the governor⁸ and the treasurer, being members of Boston, were permitted to come down, but the rest of the court continued at Newtown.) When she appeared, the errors were read to her. The first was that the souls of men are mortal by generation,⁹ but after made immortal by Christ's purchase. This she maintained a long time; but at length she was so clearly convinced by reason and scripture, and the whole church agreeing that sufficient had been delivered for her conviction, that she yielded she had been in an error. Then they proceeded to three other errors: That there was no resurrection of these bodies, and that these bodies were not united to Christ, but every person united hath a new body, etc. These were also clearly confuted, but yet she held her own; so as the church (all but two of her sons)¹ agreed she should be admonished, and because her sons would not agree to it, they were admonished also.

Mr. Cotton pronounced the sentence of admonition with great solemnity, and with much zeal and detestation of her errors and pride of spirit. The assembly continued till eight at night, and all did acknowledge the special presence of God's spirit therein; and she was appointed to appear again the next lecture day. * * *

[*Mrs. Hutchinson Banished*]

[March 22, 1638] Mrs. Hutchinson appeared again; (she had been licensed by the court, in regard she had given hope of her repentance, to be at Mr. Cotton's house that both he and Mr. Davenport² might have the more opportunity to deal with her;) and the articles being again read to her, and her answer required, she delivered it in writing, wherein she made a retraction of near all, but with such explanations and circumstances as gave no satisfaction to the church; so as she was required to speak further to them. Then she declared that it was just with God to leave her to herself, as He had done, for her slighting His ordinances, both magistracy and ministry;³ and confessed that what she had spoken against the magistrates at the court (by way of revelation) was rash and ungrounded; and desired the church to pray for her. This gave the church good hope of her repentance; but when she was examined about some particulars, as that she had denied inherent righteousness, etc., she affirmed that it was never her judgment; and though it was proved by many testimonies that she had been of that judgment, and so had persisted and maintained it by argument against divers, yet she impudently persisted in her affirmation, to the astonishment of all the assembly. So that after much time and many arguments had been spent to bring her to see her sin, but all in vain, the church with one consent cast her out. Some moved to have her admonished⁴ once more; but, it being for manifest evil in matter of conversation, it was agreed otherwise; and for that reason also the

8. Winthrop. Newtown was soon thereafter renamed Cambridge.

9. I.e., from the beginning. Orthodox believers hold that the soul is always immortal.

1. Her son Edward Hutchinson and her son-in-law Thomas Savage, both of whom moved to

Rhode Island.

2. John Davenport (1597-1670), a minister.

3. Because Anne Hutchinson's beliefs threatened both civil and ecclesiastical law.

4. Warned.

sentence was denounced by the pastor,⁵ matter of manners belonging properly to his place.

After she was excommunicated,⁶ her spirits which seemed before to be somewhat dejected revived again, and she gloried in her sufferings, saying that it was the greatest happiness next to Christ that ever befell her. Indeed it was a happy day to the churches of Christ here, and to many poor souls who had been seduced by her, who by what they heard and saw that day were (through the grace of God) brought off quite from her errors, and settled again in the truth.

At this time the good providence of God so disposed, divers of the congregation (being the chief men of the party, her husband being one) were gone to Narragansett to seek out a new place for plantation, and taking liking of one in Plymouth patent, they went thither to have it granted them; but the magistrates there, knowing their spirit, gave them a denial, but consented they might buy of the Indians an island in the Narragansett Bay.⁷

After two or three days the governor sent a warrant to Mrs. Hutchinson to depart this jurisdiction before the last of this month, according to the order of court, and for that end set her at liberty from her former constraint, so as she was not to go forth of her own house till her departure; and upon the 28th she went by water to her farm at the Mount, where she was to take water with Mr. Wheelwright's wife and family to go to Pascataquack; but she changed her mind, and went by land to Providence, and so to the island in the Narragansett Bay which her husband and the rest of that sect had purchased of the Indians, and prepared with all speed to remove unto. For the court had ordered, that except they were gone with their families by such a time they should be summoned to the general court, etc.

[Mrs. Hutchinson Delivers a Child]

[September 1638] * * * Mrs. Hutchinson, being removed to the Isle of Aquiday⁸ in the Narragansett Bay, after her time was fulfilled that she expected deliverance of a child, was delivered of a monstrous birth. Hereupon the governor wrote to Mr. Clarke,⁹ a physician and a preacher to those of the island, to know the certainty thereof, who returned him this answer: Mrs. Hutchinson, six weeks before her delivery, perceived her body to be greatly distempered and her spirits failing and in that regard doubtful of life, she sent to me etc., and not long after (in *immoderato fluore uterino*)¹ it was brought to light, and I was called to see it, where I beheld innumerable distinct bodies in the form of a globe, not much unlike the swims² of some fish, so confusedly knit together by so many several strings (which I conceive were the beginning of veins and nerves) so that it was impossible either to number the small round pieces in every lump, much less to discern from whence every string did fetch its original, they were so snarled one within another. The small globes I likewise opened, and perceived the matter of them (setting

5. I.e., read in public by John Wilson.

6. Cast out of the congregation.

7. William Hutchinson and several others laid out plans for the town of Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

8. Aquidneck Island, Rhode Island.

9. Dr. John Clarke came to Boston in 1637 and was disarmed, having been declared an antinomian (believer that faith alone, not morality, is necessary for salvation).

1. In a heavy discharge from the womb (Latin).

2. Swim bladders.

aside the membrane in which it was involved) to be partly wind and partly water. The governor, not satisfied with this relation, spake after with the said Mr. Clarke, who thus cleared all the doubts: The lumps were twenty-six or twenty-seven, distinct and not joined together; there came no secundine³ after them; six of them were as great as his fist, and the smallest about the bigness of the top of his thumb. The globes were round things, included in the lumps, about the bigness of a small Indian bean, and like the pearl in a man's eye. The two lumps which differed from the rest were like liver or congealed blood, and had no small globes in them, as the rest had.

[*An Earthquake at Aquiday*]

[March 16, 1639] * * * At Aquiday also Mrs. Hutchinson exercised⁴ publicly, and she and her party (some three or four families) would have no magistracy. She sent also an admonition to the church of Boston; but the elders would not read it publicly because she was excommunicated. By these examples we may see how dangerous it is to slight the censures of the church; for it was apparent that God had given them up to strange delusions. . . . Mrs. Hutchinson and some of her adherents happened to be at prayer when the earthquake was at Aquiday, etc., and the house being shaken thereby, they were persuaded (and boasted of it) that the Holy Ghost did shake it in coming down upon them, as He did upon the apostles.

[*The Death of Mrs. Hutchinson and Others*]

[September 1643] The Indians near the Dutch, having killed 15 men, began to set upon the English who dwelt under the Dutch. They came to Mrs. Hutchinson's⁵ in way of friendly neighborhood, as they had been accustomed, and taking their opportunity, killed her and Mr. Collins, her son-in-law (who had been kept prisoner in Boston, as is before related), and all her family, and such [other] families as were at home; in all sixteen, and put their cattle into their houses and there burnt them. These people had cast off ordinances and churches, and now at last their own people, and for larger accommodation had subjected themselves to the Dutch and dwelt scattering near a mile asunder. * * *

[*Winthrop's Speech to the General Court*]

[July 3, 1645] * * * Then was the deputy governor⁶ desired by the Court to go up and take his place again upon the bench, which he did accordingly. And the Court being about to rise, he desired leave for a little speech which was to this effect.

3. Afterbirth.

4. Lectured.

5. After the death of her husband in 1642, Anne Hutchinson moved to Dutch territory: Pelham Bay, now a part of the Bronx in New York City.

6. Winthrop. The governor in 1645 was Thomas Dudley (1576–1653). The "little speech" that fol-

lows is one of Winthrop's most important meditations on Christian liberty. Several residents of the town of Hingham argued that "words spoken against the General Court" had been unfairly used and hoped that Winthrop would be impeached for misusing his power as deputy. Winthrop was fully acquitted.

I suppose something may be expected from me upon this charge that is befallen me, which moves me to speak now to you. Yet I intend not to intermeddle in the proceedings of the Court, or with any of the persons concerned therein. Only I bless God that I see an issue⁷ of this troublesome business. I also acknowledge the justice of the Court, and for mine own part I am well satisfied. I was publicly charged, and I am publicly and legally acquitted, which is all I did expect or desire. And though this be sufficient for my justification before men, yet not so before the Lord, who hath seen so much amiss in any dispensations (and even in this affair) as calls me to be humbled. For to be publicly and criminally charged in this Court is matter of humiliation (and I desire to make a right use of it), notwithstanding I be thus acquitted. If her father had spit in her face (saith the Lord concerning Miriam), should she not have been ashamed 7 days?⁸ Shame had lain upon her whatever the occasion had been. I am unwilling to stay you from your urgent affairs, yet give me leave (upon this special occasion) to speak a little more to this assembly. It may be of some good use to inform and rectify the judgments of some of the people, and may prevent such distempers as have arisen amongst us. The great questions that have troubled the country are about the authority of the magistrates and the liberty of the people. It is yourselves who have called us to this office, and being called by you we have our authority from God in way of an ordinance, such as hath the image of God eminently stamped upon it, the contempt and violation whereof hath been vindicated with examples of divine vengeance. I entreat you to consider that when you choose magistrates you take them from among yourselves, men subject to like passions as you are. Therefore, when you see infirmities in us, you should reflect upon your own, and that would make you bear the more with us, and not be severe censurers of the failings of your magistrates when you have continual experience of the like infirmities in yourselves and others. We account him a good servant who breaks not his covenant.⁹ The covenant between you and us is the oath you have taken of us, which is to this purpose, that we shall govern you and judge your causes by the rules of God's laws and our own, according to our best skill. When you agree with a workman to build you a ship or house, etc., he undertakes as well for his skill as for his faithfulness, for it is his profession, and you pay him for both. But when you call one to be a magistrate, he doth not profess nor undertake to have sufficient skill for that office, nor can you furnish him with gifts, etc. Therefore you must run the hazard of his skill and ability. But if he fail in faithfulness, which by his oath he is bound unto, that he must answer for. If it fall out that the case be clear to common apprehension and the rule clear also, if he transgress here the error is not in the skill but in the evil of the will; it must be required of him. But if the case be doubtful, or the rule doubtful, to men of such understanding and parts as your magistrates are, if your magistrates should err here yourselves must bear it.

For the other point concerning liberty, I observe a great mistake in the country about that. There is a twofold liberty: natural (I mean as our nature

7. Termination.

8. Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron. "And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed

seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again" (Numbers 12.14).

9. Format agreement.

is now corrupt),¹ and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. By this, man as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he list. It is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts, *omnes sumus licentia deteriores*.² This is that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it.

The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal. It may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions amongst men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority and cannot subsist without it, and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard not only of your goods but of your lives, if need be. Whatsoever crosseth this is not authority, but a distemper thereof. This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority. It is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.³ The woman's own choice makes such a man her husband, yet being so chosen he is her lord and she is to be subject to him, yet in a way of liberty, not of bondage, and a true wife accounts her subjection her honor and freedom, and would not think her condition safe and free but in her subjection to her husband's authority. Such is the liberty of the church under the authority of Christ her King and husband. His yoke is so easy and sweet to her as a bride's ornaments,⁴ and if through frowardness or wantonness, etc., she shake it off at any time, she is at no rest in her spirit until she take it up again. And whether her Lord smiles upon her and embraceth her in His arms, or whether He frowns, or rebukes, or smites her, she apprehends the sweetness of His love in all and is refreshed, supported, and instructed by every such dispensation of His authority over her. On the other side, you know who they are that complain of this yoke and say: let us break their bands, etc.; we will not have this man to rule over us. Even so, brethren, it will be between you and your magistrates. If you stand for your natural corrupt liberties, and will do what is good in your own eyes, you will not endure the least weight of authority, but will murmur and oppose and be always striving to shake off that yoke. But if you will be satisfied to enjoy such civil and lawful liberties, such as Christ allows you, then will you quietly and cheerfully submit unto that authority which is set over you in all the administrations of it for your good; wherein if we fail at any time, we hope we shall be willing (by God's assistance) to hearken to good advice from any of you, or in any other way of God. So shall your liberties be preserved in upholding the honor and power of authority amongst you.

The deputy governor having ended his speech, the Court arose, and the magistrates and deputies retired to attend their other affairs. * * *

1. Because we are fallen and subject to death.

2. We are all the worse for license (Latin). From the ancient Roman dramatist Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos* (*The Self-Tormentor*) 3.1.74.

3. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled

again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5.1).

4. "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11.30). "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21.2).

[A Daughter Returned]

[July 1646] * * * A daughter of Mrs. Hutchinson was carried away by the Indians near the Dutch, when her mother and others were killed by them; and upon the peace concluded between the Dutch and the same Indians, she was returned to the Dutch governor, who restored her to her friends here. She was about 8 years old when she was taken, and continued with them about 4 years, and she had forgot her own language, and all her friends, and was loath to have come from the Indians.

1630–49

1825–26

THE BAY PSALM BOOK

The Protestant Reformation sparked a revival of psalm- and hymn-singing that held important consequences for English-language poetry. Church music had previously been reserved for choirs and other selective ensembles, rather than practiced by the full congregation. The shift in the language of worship from Latin to the vernacular allowed for a more democratic participation in the singing of sacred songs. Protestant denominations differed as to who should be allowed to sing—everyone all the time, or smaller groups in specific contexts—and what kinds of works should be performed in religious settings. This second question hinged on issues of source and of translation. Many of the leading New England ministers believed that only psalms, which were drawn directly from the Bible, and not hymns on religious themes with no specific scriptural source, should be permitted in worship services. They also wanted the psalms to reflect the original Hebrew as closely as possible.

When the first printing press arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1638, the ministers in the area took the opportunity to produce their own psalm book. Two years later they issued what has been famous ever since as the first book printed in the English colonies: *The Whole Book of Psalms Faithfully Translated into English Meter* (1640), familiarly known today as the *Bay Psalm Book*. The translators, whose individual efforts have never been fully identified, struggled with some knotty issues. The Reverend John Cotton, a leading theologian, stressed in his preface to the 1640 volume that the translators had not “taken liberty or poetical license to depart from the true and proper sense of David’s word.” (David, the second king of ancient Israel, was traditionally considered the author of the biblical Book of Psalms.) At the same time, Cotton reassured the public that “as it can be no just offence to any good conscience to sing David’s Hebrew songs in English words,” it ought to be equally unobjectionable to employ English metrical forms in translations of the psalms. Purity was desirable, but so were comprehensibility and tune-fulness. The psalms were performed a capella, often using a system called “lining out,” where a leader sang a phrase and the congregation repeated it. This method enabled church members who could not read, or who could not afford a psalter, to participate in the song. The tunes sometimes used to accompany the words were mostly of common origin and simple form, enhancing the earnest, self-restrained beauty of the performance.