

William Hubbard and the Providential Interpretation of History

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WILLIAM HUBBARD (c. 1621-1704), a member of the first class to graduate from Harvard, has long been recognized for his work as a colonial historian.¹ His *Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England*, published in 1677, was probably the best history of King Philip's War to be written by a New Englander who lived through it, and, according to Moses Coit Tyler, this book, "for its almost universal diffusion among the people, deserves the name of an American classic."² Larger in scope, but less praised, is his *General History of New-England from the Discovery to MDCLXXX*, finished by 1682 but not published (and then imperfectly) until 1815.³ In

¹ See the *Dictionary of American Biography*, and J. L. Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University* (Cambridge, 1873-), vol. 1, pp. 54-62.

² M. C. Tyler, *A History of American Literature, 1607-1676* (New York, 1878), vol. 2, p. 135. Hubbard's *Narrative* was reprinted by Samuel G. Drake, as *The History of the Indian Wars in New England* (Roxbury, 1865). All my references are to this edition.

³ The work was printed in 2 *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, vols. 5, 6, 1815, and separately Cambridge, 1815. My references, except as otherwise noted, are to the Cambridge edition. Another and better edition, with revisions and notes, was printed in Boston, 1848. This, like the earlier editions, followed the Massachusetts Historical Society's manuscript, which was incomplete. It lacked the preface, and some pages at the beginning and end of the text were so mutilated that only a fragmentary reading could be printed. In 1878, however, (see *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 1878, pp. 12-3, 38-41) the Society was given a transcript from a manuscript in England, supplying the passages missing in the Society's copy. A set of sheets was printed by the Society, containing the preface and complete text of the beginning and end of the history, and it was proposed that these sheets be supplied to individuals and libraries in order that they might be inserted in the earlier printed edition. This plan was partly carried out, at least, and the Harvard College Library copy of the 1848 edition has the 1878 sheets bound in. Bibliographers, however, have either made no reference to the new sheets or have simply listed an "edition" of 1878, without explanation, and without noting that only in the extra

spite of its position as the first comprehensive history of the New England colonies, it has been too commonly dismissed as a mere transcript of Morton's *New-England's Memoriall* and Winthrop's *Journal*, and an obvious piece of hack-work. James Savage says that "more than seven eighths" of Hubbard's volume, "between 1630 and 1650, is borrowed, usually by specific extracts, occasionally with unimportant changes, from the text of" Winthrop. Savage's devotion to the author of that text, whom he called "the Father of Massachusetts," probably misled him into exaggeration, but any reader of Hubbard's book can see for himself that it often leans heavily on the earlier annalists.⁴

At the same time it usually fitted what it took from others into a more systematically organized text than theirs, and its alterations of what Morton and Winthrop had written were, Mr. Savage to the contrary, by no means always "unimportant" or "utterly trivial."⁵ Indeed, some of the alterations, together with other elements in Hubbard's two histories, suggest that his theory of history was somewhat unlike that of his predecessors and contemporaries in New England and was, from the modern point of view, more acceptable than theirs. The whole question of his merits and defects as a historian and stylist ought probably to be reconsidered if he is to have the credit he deserves, but such a reconsideration would require more detailed discussion than is possible here. His attitude toward the interpretation of events in formal history—specifically his attitude toward the doctrine of providences—can, however, be treated by

sheets printed in that year, combined with one of the earlier printed editions, can the whole history be read. I have seen no account of Hubbard which makes clear that his history was never put completely into print until 1878, and none that discusses his interesting preface, printed only in the extra sheets issued in that year. I have used the set of these sheets in the Harvard College Library copy, and refer to them by the page numbers printed in that set.

⁴ John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1640* (edited by James Savage, Boston, 1853), vol. 1, p. 357 n.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 358 n.

itself, and an examination of it supports the thesis that Hubbard was, for the time and place in which he wrote, relatively advanced in the methods he used in his attempt to understand and explain the past.

The doctrine of providences was a commonplace of theology, not only in colonial New England, but elsewhere in the seventeenth century and before. In the simplest terms it held that every event was manipulated by God. A man might make a fortune, a city might burn, someone might be saved from death, or a prince might fall—in each case God brought about the event. Thus He often rewarded the good by bringing good things to them and punished the bad by all sorts of calamities. Sometimes, to be sure, misfortunes came to one of His own, and sometimes sinners lived unmolested, but when this happened it was to be assumed that man's finite intelligence was simply unable to grasp the ends toward which the Almighty worked, and that the duty of the pious was to accept the fact, confident that divine providence was carrying out a divine purpose. Miraculous occurrences, strange happenings, curious upsets in human affairs, and such mysterious apparitions as eclipses and comets, were striking instances of God at work, rewarding, punishing, or warning mankind and reminding mortals that His all-powerful hand was ready to smite those who displeased Him. "An instance or act of divine intervention; an event or circumstance which indicates divine dispensation," was a providence; a "special providence" was "a particular act of direct divine intervention." A traveller as late as 1809 said: "The phrase a providence . . . in New England . . . appears to be more frequently used for that which is disastrous but which is at the same time to be regarded and submitted to as the act of God," and the *Connecticut Courant* in 1814 referred to the drowning of a skater who broke through the ice as a "Distressing Providence."⁶

⁶ *New English Dictionary*, definition 5, under "Providence."

The idea of "providences," then, has had an enduring vitality, and it would be easy to cite instances of belief in it in various forms today. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was generally held. As Sir Charles Firth put it, the doctrine "that Providence intervened in the government of the world" was accepted by "the Elizabethans in general."⁷ It was not peculiar to New Englanders or to Puritans, but was part of the traditional common stock of Christian belief. It was, of course, highly useful to preachers exhorting and warning their flocks; it also served well the historian looking for some principle by which to interpret the vagaries of historical happenings. It was accepted by writers and readers alike, and so it was agreed "that it was the business of the historian as a teacher of morality"—and he was commonly so regarded in the days when New England was colonized—"to point . . . out when he related . . . events" that history taught God's power and His control of mundane happenings and so far as possible to read in history the active purposes of God revealed in events.⁸ Philippe de Commines, at the end of the fifteenth century, includes in a long historical work a digression on Fortune, in which he explains that Fortune is nothing but a poetic fiction and that one of the personages of whom he wrote came to grief not by ill "fortune" but because God had abandoned him. Commines believes that it is not for man to judge why, in such cases, but none the less hazards his own guess as to the sin that led God in this instance to punish his servant. The only Fortune—or Fate—is, he maintains, God—a clear statement of the providential interpretation of history.⁹ In

⁷ Sir Charles Firth, "Sir Walter Raleigh's 'History of the World'" in *Essays Historical and Literary* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 44-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹ Philippe de Commines, *Mémoires* (edited by J. Calmette, Paris, 1924-25), vol. 2, pp. 86-7. For this reference and those in notes 10 and 12 on pages 19 and 20, I am indebted to Mr. Leonard Dean of the Tulane University of Louisiana.

1577 William Harrison, in his *Description of England*, included in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, went to some trouble to discuss alterations in kingdoms and to ascribe them to the powerful acts of God. Such changes in states, we are told, come usually every four hundred and thirty years, but "before the execution of Gods purpose dooth come to passe . . . sundrie tokens are sent, whereby warning is giuen, that without repentance he will come and visit our offenses." Alterations in kingdoms must be laid to "the diuine prouidence and appointment of God, which onelie may be called destinie as S. Augustine saith, for of other destinie it is impietie to dreame." "The iustice of the high God" is "the cheefe cause of all." He may use various means to put His just will into effect, but such things as treason or ambition or rebellion or contempt for law or religion are secondary causes of political changes—the first cause, "the originall and great cause of all," is the "providence" of Him who "humbleth and exalteth whom it pleaseth him."¹⁰ Edmund Bolton, a Catholic, wrote just before Plymouth was settled, that some ancient authors erred because "the Part of heavenly Providence in the Actions of Men is generally left out . . . in their Histories." Bolton thought that the historian "in Love with Glory for good and Heroick Deserts" had "a fourfold Duty." The first was, "as a Christian Comopolite, to discover God's Assistances, Disappointments, and Overruling in human affairs, as he is sensibly conversant in the Actions of men; to establish the just Fear of his celestial Majesty against Atheists and Voluptuaries, for the general good of Mankind and the World."¹¹ Sir Walter Raleigh, too,

¹⁰ William Harrison, "An Historical Description of the Iland of Britaine," in Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1807), vol. 1, pp. 49-50.

¹¹ Edmund Bolton, *Hypercritica; or A Rule of Judgement, for writing, or reading our History's*, written about 1618, and reprinted in J. E. Spingarn, ed., *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1908-09), vol. 1, pp. 82-115. My quotations are from this edition, vol. 1, pp. 84, 114.

wrote his *History* mindful "that all the events . . . in the world were divinely ordained." In history, he said, we see "how Kings and Kingdomes have florished and fallen; and for what vertue and piety God made prosperous; and for what vice and deformity he made wretched, both the one and the other." And in a brief summary of parts of modern history, Raleigh demonstrated "the bitter fruits of irreligious policy" and that "ill doing hath always been attended with ill success." According to him "God, who ordinarily works by concatenation of means, deprives the governors of understanding when he intends evil to the multitude," so that political catastrophes that might be explained by the badness of rulers should in fact be explained by God's act in making the rulers bad in order to accomplish His own purposes. "The . . . just God, who liveth and governeth all things for ever, doth in these our times," says Raleigh, "give victory, courage and discourge, raise and throw down kings, estates, cities, and nations, for the same offences which were committed of old, and are committed in the present." God "hath . . . punished . . . sins . . . in these our days, by . . . famine, plagues, war, loss, vexation, death, sickness and calamities."¹²

It was with such ideas, then, that the early seventeenth century historian, in England or the colonies, went to work. Whether he was Anglican, Catholic, or Puritan; Londoner, Virginian, or New Englander, he was likely to believe that the first cause of all historical events was God. Of course he might—and often did—emphasize in his writing the "second causes," the immediate material circumstances that seemed to dictate what happened, but the more pious and moralistic he was the more he was likely to look at history as the proof of God's providence, showing how He punished sin and

¹² Sir Charles Firth, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 44; Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (Edinburgh, 1820), vol. 3, p. 206; vol. 4, p. 119.

rewarded virtue. The more religiously minded the historian was, the more he would try to give consistency and pattern to his work by displaying the actions of men as controlled by God, working out His divine purpose for them.

Naturally, then, New England Puritans stressed the theory that history was primarily a record of God's providence. They were conscientious in putting down on paper, so far as possible, everything that took place, since God worked in everything, but they often seem most interested in what they thought illustrated best God's supreme power in human affairs, and most pleased when a narrative can be interpreted as an example of the operation of divine providence. In Bradford there is clearly put the theory that the facts he treats were significant not merely in themselves but as parts of an age-old struggle between God and the devil, and formed a special chapter in Protestantism's triumphant advance—an advance made possible because of God's constant providential care. Every reader of Winthrop's *Journal* recognizes the loving care with which it treats those happenings which seemed to its author instances of the Lord's direct intervention in the affairs of New Englanders. And Johnson's history of Massachusetts was, as its sub-title, *The Wonder-Working Providence*, shows, a work founded on the idea that the colony had prospered because God had favored its people as allies of Christ against Satan.

These were the major New England historians who preceded Hubbard, and two of them, at least, he must have read. He had probably seen Raleigh's history and Holinshed's, too, but, whether he had or not, he was surely thoroughly conversant with the historical theory which made the record of human events a tale of God's all-powerful and immediate control of the world, and interpreted the record usually as proof of God's love for righteousness and His hatred of sin. Moreover by the 70's, when Hubbard

began to write history, the learned and pious in Massachusetts were putting special emphasis on the doctrine of providences. No special emphasis had been needed when Bradford, Winthrop, and Johnson wrote. It had then been easy to find examples of "exceptions to the settled order" of nature, cases in which God brought about an event, not miraculous (for orthodox Puritans left no place for miracles) but unusual. It had been normal to regard such things as accomplished by God's use of natural means for His own purposes, "by arranging the causes or influencing the agents" employed "rather than by forcible interposition and direct compulsion." A providence for the Puritan was "not contrary to nature," but an instance of "Nature . . . turned off its course," and so long as many natural processes were still not understood, there were plenty of events that seemed to fit this definition. But by 1675, say, it was different. Puritans of that day were coming to feel that "greater stress should now be placed upon the uncommon and the peculiar than upon the regular"—that is, upon providential happenings.¹³

The new feeling came partly because the advance of science was bringing more and more phenomena into the category of normal operations under some natural law, and partly because the pious saw signs of sluggish complacency in New England and hoped that harping on the history of how God had specially favored the first settlers might incite their less godly offspring to greater efforts toward righteousness. "Preaching upon special providences"—or writing histories of them—"was a strategic device for arousing the emotions of a sluggish generation."¹⁴ Morton's *Memoriall*, published in 1669, and one of Hubbard's chief sources, illus-

¹³ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, The Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1939), p. 228.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

trates admirably the new zeal for recording "providences." It follows Bradford almost word for word, but it goes farther in stressing the providential. Any reader who compares the two texts will find places where Morton's adds to Bradford's by supplying explicit comments on this or that as an example of God's direct action.¹⁵

Morton represented an official attitude, endorsed in Massachusetts as well as in Plymouth.¹⁶ The General Court of the Bay voted in 1672 to encourage the collection of providences, events "beyond what could in reason have binn expected," as a means of bringing citizens to serve the Lord.¹⁷ In the next year Urian Oakes called for a history of the colonies because "God hath shewn" them "almost unexampled unparall[el]ed mercy." "It is our great duty," Oakes said, "to be the Lords *Remembrancers* or *Recorders* . . . that the mercies of the Lord. . . . that all the loving kindnesses of God, and his singular favours . . . might be Chronicled and communicated."¹⁸

King Philip's War impressed even more on the pious colonists the idea that to prove again the validity of God's overruling providence might rekindle piety. The colonists defeated the Indians only after suffering diastrous losses, and, according to the preachers, rather by God's mercy than by their own prowess. The war was a punishment for sins, said the pulpit orators; sins might be reformed by making clear in history—general history or specific accounts of the war—the dependence of errant man on the Almighty's providential control. Increase Mather pointed his narrative

¹⁵ Nathaniel Morton, *New Englands Memoriall* (Cambridge, 1669). My references to it are to the facsimile edition, ed. Howard J. Hall, New York, 1937.

¹⁶ For the official support given to Morton's work, see H. J. Hall's introduction in his edition of the *Memoriall*, pp. ii, iii.

¹⁷ N. B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1854), vol. 4, part 2, p. 515 (15 May 1672).

¹⁸ Urian Oakes, *New-England Pleaded with*, quoted in P. Miller and T. H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York, 1938), p. 81.

of the struggle with King Philip toward making a record "of the Providential Dispensations of God," and what he "mainly designed" in writing his *Brief History* "was the subsequent *Exhortation*" appended to it. The exhortation was, of course, a plea for reform, since the war had been God's punishment of sinners.¹⁹

But when we turn to William Hubbard's history of the Indian war, printed in 1677, and compare it with Increase Mather's; or to Hubbard's *General History*, the first draft of which was ready by 1680, and examine it with Winthrop's *Journal* and Morton's *Memoriall*, its chief sources; we find clear indications that Hubbard was less concerned with the providential interpretation of history than Oakes or the General Court might have wished. He is, for one thing, a little more cautious than his contemporaries about believing all he heard about marvellous occurrences, even when they, if true, would testify to God's might. In his *General History* he says, "Divers reports have passed up and down the country of several ominous accidents happening . . . as of earthquakes in some places, and of several vollies of shot heard in the air in the year 1667, but because many that lived not far off those places, when the said accidents were supposed to fall out, know nothing thereof, no more notice shall here be taken of the same than a bare hint of the report." Only when a story was vouched for by those in a position to know, could it be accepted—and Hubbard does tell of an explosion of earth caused "by a mineral vapour," since "the whole town of Wells are witnesses of the truth of this relation."²⁰ He refers to the alleged supernatural warnings of the coming of King Philip's War—mysterious gunfire "heard in the Ayer, in sundry Places"—with thinly

¹⁹ Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New-England* (Boston, 1676). See S. G. Drake's reprint of this, as *The History of King Philip's War* (Boston, 1862), pp. 36, 37.

²⁰ Hubbard, *History*, p. 646.

veiled scepticism. About all this, he says, "The judicious Reader may take what Notice he pleaseth." It is worth noting that Cotton Mather later confidently retailed the story of the mysterious gunshots without a hint of disbelief.²¹

Hubbard, of course, does believe that divine providences, well vouched for, should be recorded, but when he writes of them he sometimes seems to play up the immediate material cause, explainable in natural terms, rather than to harp on their possible significance as direct acts of God. There are passages in which he puts the natural explanation on an equal footing with the supernatural; this was not the method of the historian who was convinced that history was chiefly valuable as a record of God's providence. The Indians, Hubbard wrote, did not "offer any uncivil Carriage to any of the Females, nor ever attempted the Chastity of any of them, either being restrained of God . . . or by some accidental Cause, which held them from doing any Wrong in that Kind." Of a town that fared better than most, he says that its relative safety was owing to God's mercy, but follows this with: "Under God, the Courage of the Inhabitants was a great Means of their Preservation." This courage was described, and then attributed to God's upholding the spirit of the townsfolk.²²

In both these cases Hubbard is far from denying God's supreme control, but in each he goes on to make what happened intelligible in terms of the rational and natural. In other passages he seems puzzled by the event he describes, but prefers to invoke "chance" rather than to solve the difficulty by laying the occurrence directly to the immediate providence of God. Once, when Philip was not pursued far enough, the comment is: "What the Reason was . . . it is

²¹ Hubbard, *Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 262; C. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, 1853-55), vol. 2, p. 560.

²² Hubbard, *Narrative*, vol. 1, pp. 167, 192.

better to suspēd, than too critically enquire. . . . Time and Chance hapneth to all Men, so that the most likely Means are often frustrated of their desired End." To be sure, a moral is tacked on: "All humane endeavours shall arrive at no other Success, than the Counsel of God hath preordained, that no Flesh might glory in their own Wisdom, but give unto God the Praise of all their Successes, and quietly bear whatever miscarriages he hath ordered to befall them," but "Time and Chance" after all seem to be what first came to Hubbard's mind when he tried to understand what happened.²³ Again, he is perplexed by colonial reverses. The leaders were not always wise, he thinks; the weather sometimes worked against them. Officers and men were brave and diligent, "but Time and Chance hath strangely interposed to the prolonging of our Miseries."²⁴ Particularly striking is a sentence praising the ability of the colonists to defend themselves when outnumbered, which leads to the clause "unless at such Times when Providence seemed as it were to Trouble the Wheels of our Motions, and fight against us."²⁵ Is not the implication, intended or not, that the "Wheels of our Motions," the smooth-running natural machine, went on by itself, with God important only as the engineer who started it, except when He chose to interfere in the process for some inscrutable end? Read thus, the passage makes historical event normally a matter of the orderly working of a machine, and shifts God's Providence out of the central position.

Hubbard's attitude is still clearer in his general history of New England. In it he often seems more interested than were Bradford, Winthrop, Johnson, Morton, or the Mathers, in the working out of earthly affairs in earthly terms, more

²³ Hubbard, *Narrative*, vol. 1, pp. 90-1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 259.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

interested than they in tracing the rationally explainable causes and effects, and less inclined than they to fly to "divine providences" as the best solvent of any historical problem. Of course he does not renounce the doctrine of providence. He refers to it often, expounds it, shows its relevance to this or that event. He takes over bodily many tales of "providences" told by Winthrop or Morton. At intervals the *History* turns from its narrative of political and ecclesiastical events to chapters on "Various occurrents" or "Memorable accidents" or "Memorable occurrents and sad accidents," each covering a period of years and each containing some records of "providences." But none the less the emphasis on God's intervention in mundane affairs seems subdued in comparison to Morton's or Johnson's. The special chapters in which "providences" are described are headed with the words "occurrents" or "accidents," not "providences," and the total impression of Hubbard's pages is that, whatever the reason, he was less concerned than his predecessors with the doctrine of providence as a central principle for the historian.

Take, for example, some excerpts from his preface, which is apparently very little known to students of his work. His whole design, he says, "is only to render a just account of the proceedings of" the colonists, "together with the merciful providences of the Almighty towards them." Providences come in, to be sure, but rather as an adjunct to "the proceedings" than as their determining cause.²⁶ "Notice is also taken," Hubbard continues, "of the severe dispensations they have all along been acquainted with . . . wherein they have been many ways humbled and proved, yet not without comfortable expectation of receiving good in their latter end. For ever since they forsook their fathers' houses and the pleasant heritage of their ancestors they have by solemn

²⁶ Preface, p. x. Cf. note 3 *ante*.

providence been ordered . . . into the barren wilderness and remote deserts, to the care of the concerns of the great Shepherd."²⁷ This is a relatively restrained statement, surely, as to God's overruling and continuing Providence. The "dispensations," as Hubbard puts it, may simply be taken to be the materially conditioned trials of colonization, which toughened and chastened the pioneers, and he does not explicitly insist that they revealed the hand of God. Perhaps he took this for granted and knew his readers would; perhaps he was actually thinking more of the immediate and concrete conditions than of the divine source. His next sentence, to be sure, does accent providence, but only to the extent that God decreed the settlement of the wilderness. It leaves open the question whether after the decree was carried out the settlers were day by day punished, rewarded, warned, and guided by continuous divine interventions, or whether their history can be read simply as the orderly working out of natural laws and immediate causes under a special set of circumstances, established and set in motion by a Deity presiding from a distance but not often directly interfering in earthly events. Nor is it necessary to read God's immediate intervention into such a passage as that in which Hubbard declares his wish "to search more narrowly into the beginning of things relating to that plantation, tracing them to their first original; the series and order of which is here presented that it may appear . . . from what beginning and by what steps and degrees they have been carried on to the state wherein they now stand."²⁸ And early in the text of the *History* itself is a passage which certainly suggests that Hubbard thought of history in terms of concrete and material causation quite as naturally—perhaps more naturally—than he thought of it in terms of special

²⁷ Preface, pp. x, xi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

“providence.” He writes of the “incredible success of those planations of New England, that from so small and mean beginnings, did in so few years overspread so large a tract of land,” and lays this success to “the industry and diligent pains of a poor people, to which alone, next under the blessing of Almighty God, must the success of the whole business be ascribed.”²⁹ The bad logic of the sentence—success was due to the people’s industry alone—and yet not alone to that, since it was due also to God’s blessing—gives the reader the sense that what Hubbard most cared about and instinctively wrote was that the triumph was achieved by poor men’s diligent pains. His clause about the “blessing of God” seems to have been afterthought or perfunctory concession to convention, awkwardly fitted into a sentence that reads more intelligibly without it.

Other tests seem to bear out the theory that Hubbard, however unconsciously, was less interested in the unusual event revealing God’s direct activity in the world than in the orderly working out of history in terms of mundane causes. Morton describes how “it pleased God to go on in a manifestation of his displeasure against New-England, in a very remarkable manner” by causing lightning to kill three persons in Marshfield in 1666. This, Morton said, was a “sad Dispensation of Gods hand,” and leads into a disquisition on thunder and lightning as means by which man is divinely punished or warned. The record of the three deaths occurs in Hubbard, but there is no reflection on “providence” and no moralizing on the divine source of lightning.³⁰ John Cotton dies in 1652, and Morton pays a brief tribute to him but gives almost as much space to an account of how a comet was seen at the time of Mr. Cotton’s sickness, and went out soon after his death. This was, for

²⁹ Extra sheets of 1878 (cf. note 3 *ante*), p. 14.

³⁰ Morton, *Memoriall*, pp. 178–9; Hubbard, *History*, p. 642.

Morton, "a very signal testimony, that God had . . . removed a bright star" from the church. Hubbard devotes a long passage to Cotton's demise and his character, but does not mention the comet in connection with him.³¹ Morton tells of William Bradford's death, and Thomas Prince's election as governor at Plymouth, explaining how God influenced the voting to secure a happy result—"a good demonstration that he was chosen of God for us, and by his blessing made an Instrument of much peace and settlement." "The Lord also directing the Freemen of this Jurisdiction at the same time in their Election to the choice of a discreet and able Council," Morton continues, "through the goodness of God," Plymouth prospered. The passage ends in a plea that God be praised. Hubbard follows his mention of Bradford's passing with this: "But he who made it at the first utterance a divine proverb, (in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,) hath in all following ages made it good to the experience of his people; in that those, in whom the choice of the people in that jurisdiction hath since centered, have been furnished with that measure of assistance as hath carried them through the difficulties, as they have met withal in their government." The difference in emphasis is obvious.³²

No doubt a close comparison of Hubbard and his sources would reveal more of the same sort. Certainly there are some passages in the *General History*, which, taken by themselves, suggest a subtle difference between its author's point of view and that of earlier New England historians. Hubbard tells the story of "an old man that used to go to sea in a small boat, without any other help save a dog," who was one day warned of a coming storm but said "he would go to sea, though the devil were there." "Whether the devil

³¹ Morton, p. 135; Hubbard, pp. 553-4.

³² Morton, pp. 151-2; Hubbard, p. 556.

were there at sea or no," Hubbard remarks, "it is no matter." The old man's "vessel was never seen more." Here an obvious chance to moralize on God's providential punishment of arrogance and defiance is neglected in favor of a comment that smacks of a half-humorous scepticism toward supernatural influences on the mariner's life.³³ More striking, perhaps, is Hubbard's conclusion to his chapter on the New England climate, in which he tells of the frosts that shorten Massachusetts summers: "The unsearchable providence of Almighty God is the more to be admired, that doth so richely clothe the earth of the countrey in so short a space . . . for although some times it be the middle of May before the fruit trees be blossomed out, or the fallowed ground of the fields be willing to receive its portion of the seed . . . yet within three monthes after, the harvest of English graine will be fit for the hand of the reaper." Here, clearly, is God's hand bringing good harvests in spite of short growing seasons—but Hubbard is not content to leave it at that, and ends the passage on a quite different note. "Whence we may conclude, that the salubriousness of the aire in this countrey depends much upon the winter's frost; and the earth, as to its fruitfullnesse, is as much beholding to the summer's heat, and influence of celestially planets."³⁴ To be sure the air, the frost, the earth, and the planets might be regarded as providentially disposed, but Hubbard's emphasis is on the purely natural causes of a natural phenomenon, and not on its divine origin.

Finally, in writing of 1640, Hubbard presents a comment on events, puzzling at best, but most intelligible if read as the work of a man whose attitude toward the providential interpretation of history was tinged by a more rational point of view.

³³ Hubbard, p. 198.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

“Hitherunto divine providence did, with arms of abundant goodness, as a nursing father, uphold this infant province of New England, as was said of Ephraim, when God learned him to go, taking him by the hand. But for the future they were left more to stand upon their own legs, and shift for themselves; for now there was a great change in the state of the country, the inhabitants being put to great straits by reason of the fall of the price of cattle, the breeding and increase of which had been the principal means of upholding the country next under divine favour, shining out upon them, by many unexpected advantages.”

Hitherto, Hubbard explains, cattle brought £25 a head because new immigrants caused a steady demand. Now immigrants became few, and cattle prices dropped to as low as £5 a head. Clothes had been bought with the proceeds of cattle sales, so that under the new conditions “the general court made several orders for the manufacture of woollen and linen cloth; which with God’s blessing upon man’s endeavour, in a little time stopped this gap in part, and soon after another door was opened by special providence. For when one hand was shut by way of supply from England, another was opened by way of traffick, first to the West Indies and Wine Islands.” Thence came cotton, which the colonists worked into cloth. They also bred sheep and planted hemp and flax. So, “thanks be to the Almighty, the country was not driven to those straits to lay hold of the skirts of the next comer, for want of meat and clothing; for being so well furnished with the one, they soon found out a way by the abundance thereof, to supply themselves with the other, which hath been the general way of the subsistence of the country ever since; and is like, by the blessing of heaven, to continue, so long as the original grant of divine bounty continues, (which is the grand tenour [tenure?]) whereby mankind do hold in capite of the supreme Head and

Governour of the world) of multiplying the fish of the sea, and beasts on the earth, or fowl in the air, and the growing of the grass and fruits of the earth, for the food of man and beast, that their granaries may be full, their oxen strong to labour, and other creatures bring forth thousands in their streets."⁸⁵

Just what does Hubbard mean by saying that until 1640 divine providence upheld New England but thereafter left it more to stand on its own feet? The most plausible reading seems to be that he thought of "divine providence" here as a matter of the unusual or exceptional happening, serving as a special blessing for God's people, and saw colonial history after 1640 as conditioned less by such extraordinary boons than by the working out of natural causes, always, to be sure, in accordance with the plan and order of the world established by God, but proceeding in terms of the predictable and the rationally explainable rather than in terms of miracle or direct divine intervention for the nonce interrupting the course of earthly affairs. The country had prospered because of an economic situation involving supply and demand for cattle. This was, of course, "next under God's blessing"—made possible by Him who created the situation—but the historian's task, as Hubbard saw it, was to discuss cattle prices in relation to immigration and the opening of new markets rather than to focus solely or principally on God's manipulation of event. Trade with the Indies was opened by "special providence"—that was admitted—but after all the good results rested on man's endeavor under a definable set of economic circumstances, and the net effect of the whole passage is a pushing back of God's agency to a point where He is little more than a prime mover, the ordainer of a beneficial and orderly system, within which human prosperity was best understood in terms of

⁸⁵ Hubbard, pp. 238-9.

men's own effort, their prudence, and the natural working out of material causes. The interpretation is not sustained, but the very inconsistencies which result from Hubbard's conflicting allegiances to it and to the older more exclusively "providential" point of view, throw into relief the relatively modern aspect of some of his pages, with their concentration on good air as a cause of soil fertility or immigration as the cause of high prices for cattle rather than on the "unsearchable ways" of Providence to be accepted so completely that no further explanation of events is felt necessary.

If this view of Hubbard's work is correct, it is perhaps worth noting that he spent his early boyhood in England, came to this country with his father, a farmer, when he was fourteen, and that it was not until fourteen years after his graduation from Harvard in 1642, that he seems to have entered regularly into service as a divine. For a time, it appears, he studied medicine. Possibly his detachment from the purely theological for the earlier part of his life helped to develop in him a view of life occasionally more "rational" than that of Bradford, Winthrop, or Johnson, who, although they were laymen too, wrote when theological motives were invincibly dominant in the colonies, or than that of Morton, whose rôle was that of a champion of the old order in a time when godlessness seemed to be gaining ground. It is probably significant, too, that Hubbard was an ardent believer in the theory of "order" in society, established by God, and wrote eloquently on it.³⁶ There is after all a possible kinship between the notion that government and society rest on a firm systematic basis, decreed by God, that each of his creatures has a place in a regular scheme, and the idea that the operations of history are to be seen less as a record of

³⁶ See the excerpt from his *The Happiness of a People in the Wisdome of Their Rulers*, etc. (Boston, 1676), in P. Miller and T. H. Johnson, *The Puritans*, pp. 247 ff., and Miller's comments, *ibid.*, pp. 181-94.

events each directly produced by God's act than as a picture of the working of a carefully designed mechanism, set up by God and controlled by him, but running ordinarily in terms of immediate material cause and effect not necessarily involving constant supernatural manipulation.³⁷

Today we are prone to explain a historian's theory or attitude in part, at least, by reference to his political sympathies and affiliations, and it is possible that the emphasis put on "providences" by orthodox Puritans in 1680, and Hubbard's occasional variation from them on this point, may be related to their stand on a political issue. The charter of Massachusetts was being threatened by the royal authorities, and the ardently patriotic were zealous to defend it. What better way to show the iniquity of attacks on the charter than to prove historically that the colonists were God's own people, a virtuous nation entitled to all their rights and liberties, and what better way to prove this in history than to play up wherever possible instances of God's providential interposition on behalf of New Englanders, His aid to the godly and His vengeance on their enemies? But Hubbard was, on the

³⁷ Toward the end of the *Narrative* (vol. 2, p. 248-58), Hubbard discusses the whole matter of providences, fully but not always convincingly. His point seems to be that history is the record of God's providence, but the operation of that providence is sometimes beyond the historian's grasp. It worked by natural means, and thus events could ordinarily be ascribed to immediate material causes. Therefore perhaps all that could be said positively was that it is well to be wary of sin and meek in suffering, since all men are in God's hand. All this was good Puritan doctrine, but from the point of view of historiography it is worth noting that within the limits of such doctrine a historian may take any one of several attitudes toward his material. He may concern himself especially with the exceptional or strange event that seems to show God's control of material forces for His own ends, and ascribe it directly to providence rather than attempt any rational material explanation of it. This is often the way of Bradford and Winthrop. Or the historian may, the while he writes all he can of temporal events, present them first of all as evidences of God's benevolence toward His own and His avenging hatred of the profane—thus turning the record into a kind of allegory about a divinely waged war. This was Edward Johnson's method. Or, as in Morton the story may be told with deliberate accenting of those data most readily interpreted as God's rewarding of saints and punishment of sinners, even though the immediate earthly causes of the happenings are natural. But Hubbard's interest often seems to be chiefly in the immediate working of material cause and effect, and he is less inclined than the other New England historians to give providence any essential role.

charter question, one of the so-called "moderates" who, in Palfrey's words, were "most obsequious to the usurpations of the King."³⁸ Accordingly he did not have the political motive that others may have had in his day for recording New England history so far as possible in terms of the operations of God's power in the interests of His chosen people, and so may have felt more free to look at historical events largely in terms of "rational" and scientific cause and effect.

Support for this hypothesis comes from the behavior of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay. In 1680 it appointed a committee to read Hubbard's history of New England and to report to the next session of the Court, in order "that the Court may then, as they shall then judge meete, take order for the impression thereof." But it was nearly two years before anything was done. Then the Court expressed its gratitude for Hubbard's labors, and voted him £50, but did nothing about printing the history, deciding instead that a transcript should be made, "that it may be the more easily perused, in order to the satisfaction of this Court." Five months later the £50 was still unpaid.³⁹ Obviously the Court's enthusiasm for Hubbard's history was very moderate. One reason for this may well have been the fact that Hubbard's emphasis on the providential interpretation of colonial history was less primary and explicit than the more orthodox legislators desired.

All this is conjecture. What is certain is that Hubbard now and then shows a more "modern" attitude toward history than his New England contemporaries, or his successor in historiography, Cotton Mather. Mr. Savage, editing Winthrop, was surprised that Hubbard left out all reference

³⁸ J. G. Palfrey, *History of New England during the Stuart Dynasty* (Boston, 1858-65), vol. 3, p. 360.

³⁹ N. B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay*, vol. 5, pp. 279 (11 June 1680), 378 (11 October 1682), 394 (30 March 1683).

to the blowing up of the ship *Mary Rose*, a casualty "the most striking recorded by Winthrop." It showed to Winthrop "the judgment of God upon . . . scornors of his ordinances" and gave occasion for reflections on the Lord's good care of his own people "beyond ordinary ways of providence." But Hubbard omits the whole story, and in what he takes from the next paragraph of Winthrop, leaves out another reference to God's activity in colonial affairs.⁴⁰ Here, as elsewhere, one gets the impression that Hubbard was groping for a way of reading history which should not rely too heavily on extraordinary providence. By so doing he may have annoyed his more orthodox contemporaries, but to us he seems to have been moving toward the conceptions of history that were to govern most later writing. He was not consistent and at times he writes of "providences" just as any conventional Puritan of his day might have. He had clearly not thought out a single logical scheme for historical interpretation, but it is none the less plain that in some passages he outstripped other New England historians of his generation in the relative modernity of his method of interpreting the past.

⁴⁰ Winthrop, vol. 2, pp. 13-4; Hubbard, *History*, 224-6.

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