

**LIFE OF ANNE HUTCHINSON:
WITH A SKETCH OF THE
ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY IN
MASSACHUSETTS; PP. 169-376**

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Life of Anne Hutchinson: with a sketch of the Antinomian controversy in Massachusetts; pp. 169-376 by George E. Ellis

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GEORGE E. ELLIS

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PREFACE.

Mrs. ANNE HUTCHINSON has never yet had a biographer, though history is so largely indebted to two of her lineal descendants, Thomas Hutchinson, Governor of Massachusetts, and James Savage, the laborious editor of the Journal of Governor Winthrop, the father of Massachusetts. Nor are there any known materials for a biography of Mrs. Hutchinson, in the strictest sense of that word. But for a detail of the circumstances and events, which alone have caused her name to live, the materials are ample. A curious inquirer might be glad of more information concerning her life in England, so far as it would explain her character and opinions, showing under what influences she had been educated, and what help she there found in attaining her peculiar views. Her history and experience in the new world are identified with the controversy, which originated in her instructions to an assemblage of women. It would be impossible to make her life a subject of record without finding the whole

interest of the work in that controversy. And so her biography must be written, as a part of local history, made prominent in our annals by the intensity and the extension of the feeling which once attached to it. I have gone no further into the metaphysics of the controversy than absolute necessity required, having written the fewest possible particulars of a strictly theological character. Incidental allusions to all the interests, and to the prominent men of the colony at that time, are required by the course of the events which are to be related.

The documents preserved among the manuscripts in the Massachusetts State-House, and the pamphlets and volumes referred to in the foot notes, are authority for the statements in the text to which they refer. The narrative in general is composed from these specified materials, by a fair, or at least an intentionally candid estimate of their fidelity to truth; when they tell the same story in different ways, the variance of representation being supposed to arise from natural feeling or prejudice.

ANNE HUTCHINSON.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory Observations upon the Experience and Situation of the Colonists of Massachusetts.— Their religious Policy.— The Vexations and Trials which they encountered.— Their Sufferings from their own Errors.— Examples of their scrupulous and timid Spirit in Religion.

THE Antinomian controversy in New England, like most other religious controversies, bears for its synonyme the name of an individual, the prime mover of the strife, and the prominent sufferer by the result. In this case, that individual was a woman. Mrs. Anne Hutchinson has thus become one of the historic persons of our annals. Her character, opinions, and experience may therefore fill some pages with matter as interesting as it is important. She was but one of a series of sufferers, one of a line of witnesses, by whose endurance and testimony religion has

gained of real power more than what it has lost of arbitrary force for the consciences of human beings.

If Providence had designed to offer to the colonists of Massachusetts a succession of opportunities for discovering the error, and impolicy, and utter futility of their recognized principle of constraint of conscience in religion, it would seem, humanly speaking, as if no train of events could have been more wisely adapted to such an end, than that which actually constituted their experience. It is a somewhat curious fact, that during the lives of the first generation of settlers upon the soil of Massachusetts, not a single year passed by, in which they did not bring the civil power to bear upon a strange succession of persons obnoxious for a religious tenet. Perhaps, however, so noble a principle as that of unlimited religious freedom is the offspring of too long a period, the growth of too enlarged a culture, to have reached its maturity in centuries of time, or even amid a company of persecuted exiles constituting a church of devout Christian believers. Religious bigotry, of all human infirmities, is the least willing to look upon its own likeness in the glass, and much more to study the reflection of its features, so that when it turns away it may not forget the lesson. Mrs. Hutchinson was not the first person to propose to the Bay colony a

lesson, which took its life from the principle of religious freedom. She and her companions found a place of refuge, in their banishment, through the friendly agency of Roger Williams, who had but just before proclaimed a doctrine in Massachusetts, which would have silenced the Antinomian controversy, or at least have left the name of Mrs. Hutchinson to natural oblivion.

He, however, who should decide that there was nothing to explain, and even in a degree to palliate, the measures taken by Massachusetts against the succession of persons who poured contempt upon her religious bigotry, must have read her history without candor. The explanation of her course is to be found in the spirit of the age, the same over Christendom; a degree of palliation for her measures is insured by a peculiar delusion, which was honestly and painfully entertained by the colonists, and by their position. An intimate acquaintance with the facts connected with their harsh proceedings against Roger Williams, Mrs. Hutchinson, the Baptists, and the early Friends, will at least give to the persecutors the benefit of this plea, that the same error and weakness, which led them into intolerance, kept them also in continual disquiet, called up before them a series of trying vexations, and visited them with plagues of their own creation. Mrs. Hutchinson and