

**A SUMMER VISIT OF THREE RHODE ISLANDERS
TO THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY IN 1651: AN
ACCOUNT OF THE VISIT OF DR. JOHN CLARKE,
OBADIAH HOLMES AND JOHN CRANDALL,
MEMBERS OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN
NEWPORT, R. I., TO WILLIAM WITTER OF
SWAMPSCOTT, MASS. IN JULY 1651**

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A Summer Visit of Three Rhode Islanders to the Massachusetts Bay in 1651: An Account of the Visit of Dr. John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall, Members of the Baptist Church in Newport, R. I., to William Witter of Swampscott, Mass. In July 1651 by Henry Melville King

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HENRY MELVILLE KING

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1651: ITS INNOCENT PURPOSE AND ITS PAINFUL
CONSEQUENCES

BY
HENRY MELVILLE KING
PASTOR OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, PROVIDENCE, R. I.

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PREFACE

THE substance of this paper was presented at the midwinter meeting of the Backus Historical Society, held in Boston, Dec. 8, 1879. It was published (Boston, 1880), by vote of the Society, under the general title—"Early Baptists Defended, a Review of Dr. Henry M. Dexter's Account of the Visit to William Witter in 'As to Roger Williams.'" It has been quoted frequently as an authority in reference to the historical incident which it discusses. Dr. Dexter found a copy of it in the Library of the British Museum. For several years it has been out of print, and the demand for it, on the part of the increasing number of students of colonial history, could not be met.

The history of the visit has been carefully re-examined, and the paper has been considerably lengthened by the addition of new

matter, and made to include a consideration of the incident as symptomatic of the Puritan spirit, and as shedding light upon the cause of the banishment of Roger Williams—a question which a few writers and speakers are not willing to allow to remain settled. The recent discovery of incontrovertible documentary evidence will confirm the belief that has been generally held as to the religious nature of Williams' offence, and ought to be able to remove all doubts from all minds.

This paper was read, in its enlarged form, before the Rhode Island Historical Society at its meeting, March 5, 1895, and before the Veteran Citizens Historical Association of Providence, April 11, 1895.

A SUMMER VISIT

OF THREE RHODE ISLANDERS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY IN 1651.

THE memorable visit of Dr. John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall, members of the Baptist church in Newport, to William Witter, one of the early settlers in the Massachusetts Bay, took place in July, 1651. It is proposed in this paper to review the history of that visit, that we may ascertain, if possible, the object of it, the alleged criminal conduct of which these troublesome visitors were guilty, and the severity of the punishment which they received at the hands of the Puritan magistrates.

This service has been undertaken solely in the interests of historic truth, and not in the spirit of a partizan or a controversialist. A difference of opinion having been manifested of late in high quarters, and views put forward in opposition to those which had been universally held, it seems desirable that there should be a thorough and candid re-examination of the facts in the case which are accessible. When such historians as Dr. J. G. Palfrey ("History of New England") and Dr. H. M. Dexter ("As to Roger Williams") who follows Dr. Palfrey closely and even outstrips him in the positiveness of his convictions, call in question accepted opinions in matters of colonial history, it is due that those opinions be reviewed in the light of all the evidence, old and new, that can be presented.

A high regard for the many sterling

qualities of our Puritan ancestors, and admiration and gratitude for the noble service which they rendered, and the inestimable benefits of which we are enjoying, make us desirous to judge them fairly in all things, and even charitably where they were undoubtedly in error. We certainly would not misjudge their spirit or their acts, and if any false judgments have come down to us, transmitted through ignorance or prejudice, it is high time they were abandoned. On the other hand, a sacred regard for the truth of history should keep us from any disposition to conceal the errors of the Puritans or to extenuate their sins. Great and good as they were, they were not perfect; and he who undertakes to justify all the acts of his fathers, natural or denominational, will find himself burdened with a grave responsibility.

It should be remembered that we are dealing with events nearly two centuries and a half old, when truths now well developed, full grown and generally accepted, were in their infancy and acknowledged by few. We should be careful lest we unconsciously carry back to that early period of our history the standard of to-day, and measure events which occurred then by the fuller wisdom which we now possess. We should be no less careful lest, forgetting the growth and advancement that have been made, we seek to bring past events into closer harmony with present views and wishes than the facts will warrant. The duty of the historian is simply to write history, not to modify it or make it appear different from what it is. The truth may be judged charitably; but the truth is history, and nothing else is.