

PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide - An Ongoing Project

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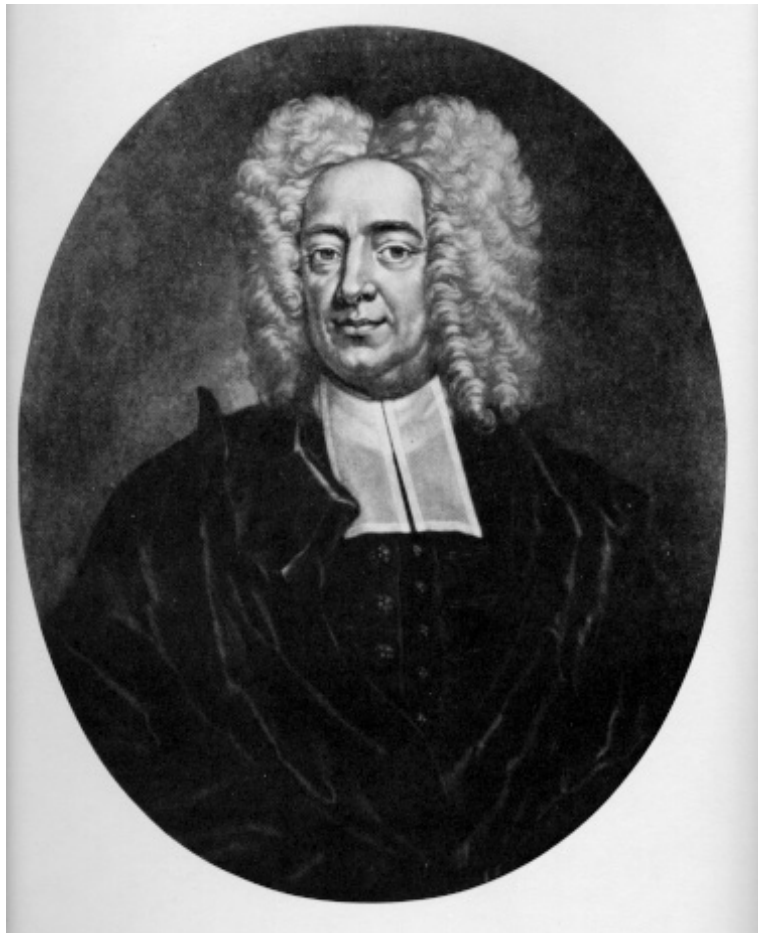
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Chapter 1: Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

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(Engraving by Peter Pelham; American Antiquarian Society; downloaded, 10/24/96, from the Society of Early Americanist home page.)

A member of the powerful Mather family, Cotton Mather produced 444 volumes of written work. Although his writing is didactic, moralistic, and filled with references to the Bible, it reveals important information on the history and society of his time. His best known work is the *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) which gives an insight into Mather's views on Puritan society. A good edition of his works is *Selections from Cotton Mather* edited by Kenneth B. Murdock, 1926.

Primary Works

Military Duties, Recommended to an Artillery Company; at their Election of Officers, in Charles-Town... (1687); *Memorable Providence, Relating to Witchcrafts And possessions...*(1689); *Work upon the Ark.*

(1689); *The Wonderful Work of God Commemorated*. (1690); *The Triumphs of the Reformed Religion*. (1692); *Preparatory Meditations upon the Day of Judgement*. (1692); *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. (1692); *Early Religion, Urge in a Sermon*. (1694); *Brontologia Sacra*.(1695); *Piscator Evangelicus. Or the life of Mr. Thomas Hooker...*(1695); *The Boston Ebenezer*. (1698); *Eleutheria*. (1698); *Decennium Luctuosum*. (1699); *A Pillar of Gratitude...*(1700); *The Religious Marriner*. (1700); *Magnalia Christi Americana*. (1702); *The Negro Christianized*. (1706); *Corderius Americanus*. (1708); *Bonifacius*. (1710); *Theopolis Americana*. (1710); *Duodecennium Luctuosum*. (1714); *The Christian Philosopher: A Collection of the Best Discoveries in Nature, with Religious Improvement*. (1720); *India Christiana*. (1721); *Coelestinus*. (1723); *Parentator*. (1724); *The Palm- Bearers*. (1725); *Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Nov Anglorum*. (1726); *The Vial poured out upon the Sea*. (1726); *Agricola*. (1727); *Boanerges*. (1727); *The Terror of the Lord*. (1727)

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A Student Project by Margarita Arzola

Cotton Mather, Puritan minister, author, and scholar was born on February 12, 1663, the eldest child of Increase Mather, a Puritan minister, and Maria Cotton. The marriage of Increase Mather and Maria Cotton was an interesting one because Increase and Maria were stepbrother and sister. It was also "the union of two great New England families." (Carnes, pg. 682). Cotton parents named him properly, almost as if planning his future. Cotton Mather is named after his ver famous grandfathers John Cotton, and Richard Mather; "two of the strongest leaders of the founding generations." (Levin, pg. 1) Six of his uncles had become ministers, four Mathers and two Cottons. One is being the famous reverend John Cotton, who Cotton Mather wrote to.

Cotton Mather as a young child showed that he was very intelligent child. As soon as he learned to speak he was taught to pray. He learned to read long before he started school. At around the age of seven or eight he was reading 15 chapters of the bible five in the morning, five in the afternoon, and five in the evening (Levin, pg.11). Cotton always wanted and tried to please both parents, because of the support and love he received from them. He knew that his father had high expectations, and he wanted to live up to them.

Cotton was a very serious child. This is because of his fathers' problems. When Mathers grandfather, Richard Mather past away, it hit Increase Mather very hard. Then a few months later Increases brother Eleazar past away at the early age of 32. Increase Mather couldn't handle both deaths so he ended up falling into a deep depression, which affected his son Cotton a great deal.

Cotton was nearly 12 years old when he entered Harvard in 1674. "He was the youngest to enroll in the 40 year history of the college." (Levin, pg. 23). The other students ranged from the ages of 15-21. He had a hard time fitting in because of the age difference. He graduated from Harvard in 1678; "he began to preach in nearby churches. He received his M.A from Harvard at 18 and five years later was ordained in his father's church, Boston's Old North." (Carnes, pg. 682).

Cotton Mather married three times. He first married Abigail Phillips in 1686. They had nine children together, she died in 1702. In 1703 Cotton Mather married Elizabeth Hubbard and they

had six children together, but in 1713 she past away. In 1715 Mather married his third wife Lydia Lee George. She would cause Cotton many problems. "She left him for a short period of time, and word of their unhappiness soon spread throughout Boston." (Carnes, pg. 682). Because of his marriage to Lydia he had assumed many financial debts, which creditors " threaten to reduce him to poverty." (Carnes, pg. 682). His wealthy members of the church helped him get back on his feet.

In April 1689, Boston revolt against Andros, Cotton Mather wrote the *Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitans of Boston and the County Adjacent*. "Which justified the rebellion." Some time in 1692 the Salem had an uproar of witchcraft. Cotton Mather played a big part in this uproar, but he did not provoke the situation. The Salem affair grew and Mather did not like the way the courts were handling the situation. "Publicly he justified the proceeding." (Carnes, pg. 683) He did it in one of his best works; *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692), were he favored the prosecutions (Carnes, pg. 683). When the whole ordeal was finally over his reputation suffered extremly. His political influence stayed strong for a few years, but then things changed and landowners had more say in the world of politics.

Cotton Mather had 450 separate written works. "His books ranged in subject matter from natural history, as in his *Curiosa Americana*, 1712-1724, to church music, in *The Accomplished Singer*, 1721, and from polity in *Ratio Disciplinae*, 1726, to moral essays such as those in *Bonifacius*, 1710." (Van Doren, pg. 698). His most famous work is, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1702, it remained the most complete history of New England for many years (Van Doren, pg.698).

Cotton Mather past away on February 13, 1728 one day after his 65th birthday. He was a very intelligent man, who believed in the ways things were done in his fathers' time. He lived his life trying to impress his father who he admired beyond belief. You could say, "he was the last great member of the Puritan dynasty."(Carnes, pg. 684). And remains one of the most famous puritans in our history.

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