

THE SIMPLE COBLER OF AGGAWAM IN AMERICA
Nathaniel Ward (1647)

EITHER I am in an appoplexy, or that man is in a lethargy who doth not now sensibly feel God shaking the heavens over his head and the earth under his feet... Satan is now in his passions, he feels his passion approaching, he loves to fish in royled waters. Though that dragon cannot sting the vitals of the elect mortally, yet that Beelzebub can fly-blow their intellectuals miserably. The finer religion grows, the finer he spins his cobwebs, he will hold pace with Christ so long as his wits will serve him.

We have been reputed a Colluvies of wild Opinionists, swarmed into a remote wilderness to find elbow-room for our fanatic doctrines and practices. I trust our diligence past, and constant sedulity against such persons and courses, will plead better things for us. I dare take upon me to be the herald of New England so far as to proclaim to the world in the name of our colony, that all Familists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, and other enthusiasts, shall have free liberty to keep away from us, and such as will come to be gone as fast as they can, the sooner the better.

Here is lately brought us an extract of a Magna Charta so called, compiled between the sub-planters of a West Indian Island; whereof the first article of consituplation, firmly provides free stable room and litter for all kind of consciences, be they never so dirty or jadish; making it actionable, yea, treasonable, to disturb any man in his religion, or to discommend it, whatever it be. If the devil might have his free option I believe he would ask nothing else but liberty to enfranchise all false religions and to embondage the truth; nor should he need.

My heart hath naturally detested four things; The Standing of the Apochrypha in the Bible; Foreigners dwelling in my country, to crowd our native subjects into the corners of the earth; Alchymized coins; Toleration of divers religions or of one religion in segregant shapes. He that willingly assents to the last, if he examines his heart by daylight, his conscience will tell him he is either an Atheist or an Heretic or an Hypocrite or at best a captive to some lust. Poly-piety is the greatest impiety in the world. I lived in a city, where a Papist preached in one church, a Lutheran in another, a Calvinist in a third; a Lutheran one part of the day, a Calvinist the other, in the same pulpit; the religion of that place was but motley and meager, their affections, leopard-like. To authorize an untruth, by a toleration of State is to build a sconce against the walls of heaven to batter God out of His chair

A Wise State Will Compose, Not Tolerate Differences in Religion.

THAT State is wise, that will improve all pains and patience rather to compose, then tolerate differences in religion. There is no divine truth, but hath much celestial fire in it from the Spirit of Truth: nor no irreligious untruth, without its proportion of antifire from the spirit of error to contradict it: the zeal of the one, the virulency of the other, must necessarily kindle combustions.

Fiery diseases seated in the spirit, imbroil the whole frame of the body: others more external and cool, are less dangerous. They which divide in religion, divide in God; they who divide in him, divide beyond Genus Generalissimum, where there is no reconciliation, without atonement; that is, without uniting in him, who is One, and in his Truth, which is also one.

Wise are those men who will be persuaded rather to live within the pale of truth where they may be quiet, than in the purlieus, where they are sure to be haunted ever and anon, do authority what it can. Every singular opinion, hath a singular opinion of itself; and he that holds it a singular opinion of himself, and a simple opinion of all contra-sentients: he that confutes them, must confute at three at once, or else he does nothing; which will not be done without more stir than the peace of the State or Church can endure.

And prudent are those Christians, that will rather give what may be given, then hazard all by yielding nothing. To sell all peace of country, to buy some peace of conscience unseasonably, is more avarice than thrift, imprudence than patience: they deal not equally, that set any truth of God at such a rate; but they deal wisely that will stay till the market is fallen.

My prognostics deceive me not a little, if once within three seven years, peace prove not such a penny-worth at most marts in Christendom, that he that would not lay down his money, his lust, his opinion, his will, I had almost said the best flower of his crown for it, while he might have had it, will tell his own heart, he played the very ill husband.

Concerning tolerations I may further assert.

That persecution of true religion and toleration of false, are the Jannes and Jambres to the Kingdom of Christ, whereof the last is far the worst. Augustine's tongue had not owed his mouth one pennyrent though he had never spake word more in it, but this, Nullum malum pejus libertate errandi. Frederick Duke of Saxon, spake not one foot beyond the mark when he said. He had rather the earth should swallow him up quick, than he should give a toleration to any opinion against any truth of God.

He that is willing to tolerate any religion, or discrepant way of religion, besides his own, unless it be in matters merely indifferent, either doubts of his own, or is not sincere in it. He that is willing to tolerate any unsound opinion, that his own may also be tolerated, though never so sound, will for a need hang God's Bible at the Devil's girdle.

Every toleration of false religions, or opinions hath as many errors and sins in it, as all the false religions and opinions it tolerates, and one sound one more. That state that will give liberty of conscience in matters of religion, must give liberty of conscience and conversation in their moral laws, or else the fiddle will be out of tune, and some of the strings crack.

He that will rather make an irreligious quarrel with other religions than try the Truth of his own by valuable arguments, and peaceable sufferings; either his religion, or himself is irreligious.

Experience will teach Churches and Christians, that it is far better to live in a state united, though a little corrupt, then in a state, whereof some part is incorrupt, and all the rest divided.

I am not altogether ignorant of the eight rules given by orthodox divines about giving tolerations, yet with their favour I dare affirm, that there is no Rule given by God for any state to give an affirmative toleration to any false religion, or opinion whatsoever; they must connive in some cases, but may not concede in any. That the state of England (so far as my intelligence serves) might in time have prevented with ease and may yet without any great difficulty deny both toleration, and irregular *connivences salva Republica*.

That if the state of England shall either willingly tolerate, or weakly connive at such courses, the church of that kingdom will sooner become the devil's dancing-school, than God's temple: The Civil State a bear-garden, than an exchange: The whole Realm a Pais base than an England. And what pity it is, that that country which hath been the staple of truth to all Christendom, should now become the aviary of errors to the whole world, let every fearing heart judge.

I take liberty of conscience to be nothing but a freedom from sin and error. *Conscientia in tantum libera in quantum ab errore liberata*. And liberty of error nothing but a prison for conscience. Then small will be the kindness of a state to build such prisons for their subjects.

The Scripture saith, there is nothing makes free but truth, and truth saith, there is no truth but one: If the States of the World would make it their sumoporous care to preserve this one truth in its purity and authority it would ease you of all other political cares. I am sure Satan makes it his grand, if not only task, to adulterate truth; Falsehood is his sole sceptre, whereby he first ruffled, and ever since ruined the World. If truth be but one, methinks all the opinionists in England should not be all in that one truth, some of them I doubt are out. He that can extract an unity out of such a disparity, or contract such a disparity into an unity; had need be a better artist, than ever was Drebell.

If two centres (as we may suppose) be in one circle, and lines drawn from both to all the points of the compass, they will certainly cross one another, and probably cut through the centres themselves. There is talk of an universal toleration, I would talk as loud as I could against it, did I know what more apt and reasonable sacrifice England could offer to God for his late performing all his heavenly truths than an universal toleration of all hellish errors, or how they shall make an universal reformation, but by making Christ's academy the Divil's university, where any man may commence heretic per saltum; where he that is filius Diabolicus, or simpliciter pessimus, may have his grace to go to Hell cum Publico Privilegio; and carry as many after him, as he can. It is said, though a man have light enough himself to see the truth, yet if he hath not enough to enlighten others, he is bound to tolerate them, I will engage my self, that all the devils in Britanie shall sell themselves to their shirts, to purchase a lease of this position for three of their lives, under the seale of the Parliament.

It is said, that men ought to have liberty of their conscience, and that it is persecution to debar them of it: I can rather stand amazed than reply to this: it is an astonishment to think that the brains

of men should be parboiled in such impious ignorance. Let all the wits under the heavens lay their heads together and find an assertion worse than this (one excepted) I will petition to be chosen the universal idiot of the world.

It is said, That civill magistrates ought not to meddle with ecclesiastical matters. I would answer to this so well as I could, did I not know that some papers lately brought out of New-England, are going to the Press, wherein the opinions of the Elders there in a late Synod, concerning this point are manifested, which I suppose will give clearer satisfaction than I can.

The true English of all this their false Latin, is nothing but a general toleration of all opinions: which motion if it be like to take, it were very requisite, that the City would repair Paul's with all the speed they can, for an English Pantheon, and bestow it upon the sectaries, freely to assemble in, then there may be some hope that London will be quiet in time. If all be true we hear, never was any people under the sun so sick of new opinions as Englishmen nor of new fashions as Englishwomen. If God help not the one and the devil leave not helping the other, a blind man may easily foresee what will become of both.

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