

October 20, 1692 Letter from Cotton Mather to his uncle John Cotton in Plymouth

Uncle.

Your thoughts for me I have always prized; but I know not whether I ever wanted them so much as now. I now send you a book,† written with as much exercise of mind, as perhaps anything that ever any pen of mine has meddled with. Pray read it critically, and let me know whether you think I have served, as you know I have designed therein to serve, God and my government.

There are fourteen worthy ministers that have newly set their hands unto a book now in the press, containing Cases of Conscience about Witchcraft. I did, in my Conscience think, that as the humors of this people now run, such a discourse going alone would not only enable the witch-advocates, very learnedly to cavil and nibble at the late proceedings against the witches, considered in parcels, while things as they lay in bulk, with their whole dependencies, were not exposed; but also everlastingly stifle any further proceedings of justice & more than so, produce a public & open contest with the judges who would (tho beyond the intention of the worthy author & subscribers) find themselves brought unto the Bar before the rashest mobile. [mob]

For such cause & for one more, I did with all the modesty I could use, decline, setting my hand unto the book: assigning the reason, that I had already a book in the press†, which would sufficiently declare my opinion: and such a book too, as had already passed the censure of the hand which wrote what was then before us.

*With what sinful & raging asperity I have been since treated, I had rather forget than relate. Altho I challenged the fiercest of my accusers, to find the thousandths part of one wrong step taken by me, in all these matters, except it were my use of all humble & sober endeavors, to prevent such a bloody quarrel between Moses and Aaron, as would be bitterness in the latter end; no other fault has been laid before me. At last I have been driven to say I will yet be more vile and quoting Mark 5:9. * I have concluded, so I shall not want a father!*

Since the trial of these unworthy Treats, the persons that have used them have endeavored such expressions of sweetness towards me, as may make me satisfaction. But for the great slander with which they have now filled the country against me, That I run against my own father, & all the ministers in the country; merely because I run between them when they are like mad men running against one another; they can make me no reparation; However my God will!

God has marvelously blessed my poor endeavors, for the preventing of some outrages, which my warm friends have been running into; and I know that God will bless my little book†, for further benefit that way: tho' by the means of somebody or other, it comes abroad under unhappy disadvantage of prejudice among the people. I don't yet repent of one word that I have written, nor won't, it may be, til you tell me that I should.

My friends have now happily gained a point such has been long wished for: even for me to become unconsidered. I confess, things become every day more & more so circumstanced, as if my opportunity of serving my neighbors were after a sort expiring; alas, that I have made no better an use of them while I had 'em!

I seem now to have little to do, but to die: and blessed be the free-Grace of God, by whose help, I hope, I can do that! I begin to have a fine easy time of it. & now I can, you see, write larger letters than I use to do.

I grow tedious; and I shall count you so too, if you don't write me some good and comfortable words, as soon as you can.

God preserve you, and all yours, from a crafty, busy prevailing devil. Farewell. And think on,

Your honest cousin,

C. Mather

†Wonders of the Invisible World

*Mark 5:9 "And he [Jesus] asked him [a man possessed], "What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many." -- Geneva Bible

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(Also in upper lefthand corner of first page, in blue ink: "J.L. Whitney, Dec 3, 1938"-- presumably the date of acquisition)