

MARY GRIFFIN AND HER CREED.

BY EGBERT C. SMYTH.

In looking over a pamphlet containing matter from the Records of the First Church of Christ in Bradford, Mass.,¹ my attention was specially attracted to the following entries :

From the "Records of Baptisms": "27 of 8, 1695. The wife of John Griffin of Bradford was baptized. She had waited near a one half of a year. I made a short speech to her. See ye conclusion. After my sermon on 1st Psalm 1:2, I read ye Apostle's [*sic?*] creed, She expressing her assent. I omitted prayer (before administration) after I proposed the church Covenant (the Brethren's vote having preceded) to which she assented, and declared her to be a member of this particular church — that ye door of it should stand open to her for further communion upon her desire.

"I publicly declared that I judged an Adult person should be baptized before admission into a particular church.

"Mary Griffin was accepted to full communion upon the terms before mentioned, she manifesting her desire, and I declaring ye same to ye church, waiting some time to see, no objection was brought against her." (P. 54.)

"27 of 8, 1695. John Griffin answering to ye substance ye 4 or 5 questions proposed to others, had his son baptized." (P. 55.)

From the "Roll of Membership": "'95 or '96. Mary

¹ *Articles of Faith and Covenant adopted by the First Church of Christ in Bradford, Mass., With its Standing Rules and Practical Principles, A Catalogue of its Officers and Members, From its First Organization, in 1682, up to 1885, And an Appendix Containing Facts in its History.* Haverhill, Mass.: C. C. Morse & Son, Book and Job Printers, 1886.

Griffing was accepted to full communion." (P. 12.) The name of her husband does not appear in the list as printed.

This appearance of the Apostles' Creed so near the beginnings of one of our older Massachusetts churches, and in precisely the relation to baptism and membership which belongs to its primitive use, is rather picturesque and suggestive. Perhaps it will seem to others as it did to me when I first saw it,—something of a surprise. It has led to some inquiries as to the appreciation or recognition of this Creed in our history; and since, so far as I am aware, this subject has not before been treated, it has seemed desirable to present for consideration here what I have gathered, although the investigation is still quite incomplete, and the information obtained may be susceptible of much supplementing or enlargement. The value of the paper, if it have any, will be mainly that of promoting further inquiry. If time permit I will include in it at least some reference to the results of recent researches into the origin and history of the Creed and to its wider use.

I desire to express my special obligations in the investigation to Mr. Wilberforce Eames, Mr. Edmund M. Barton, Mr. Fisher Howe, and the Rev. William H. Cobb, D.D.

I have referred to the use of the Apostles' Creed in the church of Bradford, so early as 1695, as something surprising. There is nothing apparently in the character or history of this church to explain it. Bradford was, until 1675, a part of Rowley, where Ezekiel Rogers had powerfully impressed himself on the entire community. When accosted by a stranger, passing through the town, with the inquiry, "Are you, Sir, the person who *serves* here?" he is said to have replied, "I am, Sir, the person who *rules* here."¹ His Catechism, to which I shall refer again, shows no trace of the Creed. It is rather, beyond others, the precursor of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism.² He has been called "the

¹ Gage's *History of Rowley*, p. 13.

² Mitchell: *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, p. xxxii.

clerical pioneer of Bradford," and "a Puritan of the Puritans." Across the Merrimac, in Haverhill, had been completed the long and influential ministry of the Rev. John Ward. Most of the original members of the Bradford church had been taught by him. Its minister, who writes the record before us, was a son of Rev. Zechariah Symmes of Charlestown, the friend of Mr. Rogers of Rowley, and it is supposed that to this intimacy Bradford owed its first Pastor.¹ He belonged to a family which for several generations had been warmly enlisted in the Puritan cause. He graduated at Harvard (1657) at the head of his class, and was a Fellow of the College when under the presidency of Charles Chauncy. His ordination at Bradford was attended by such men as John Higginson of Salem, Hubbard of Ipswich, Hale of Beverly, Brock of Reading, Edward Payson and Samuel Phillips of Rowley. But a short time before (1679, 1680) the Reforming Synod had approved, "for the main," the Westminster and Savoy Confessions of Faith, and had emphasized as "requisite" for admission to "Communion in the Lord's Supper . . . a personal and publick profession of . . . Faith and Repentance, either orally, or in some other way, as shall be to the just satisfaction of the Church." Catechising had been a marked feature of the religious history of the towns and parishes from the beginning. "Thanks be to God," wrote Francis Higginson of Salem as early as 1629, "we have here plenty of preaching and diligent catechizing, with strict and carefull exercise."² In 1681, the year before Mr. Symmes was ordained, and the church was organized for which he had for several years been preparing the way, the town "voted and consented to that ye Revt. Mr. Zech. Symmes have liberty at his discretion to call out any two men of ye inhabitants of ye town to be with him in catechizing ye youth, and to go with him

¹ Cogswell: *History of Essex Co., Mass.*, p. 2089; Kingsbury: *Memorial History of Bradford*, p. 13. ² *N. Eng. Plantation (Mass. Hist. Coll., i, 124)*.

to see who of heads of families or others will join to ye church." ¹

As a religious movement the Great Reformation begun by Martin Luther was an awakening of conscience,—more specifically, an intensifying of the sense of personal guilt,—and a conviction that the Gospel of Christ offers and assures to the individual believer the peace of forgiven sin.

This experience involved and produced a greatly augmented conception of personality. Guilt is a personal thing. The craving for a divine attestation of forgiveness, not through forms and ordinances merely, not by sacramental rites simply, not by a priesthood, but by a "Thus saith the Lord,"—this craving is already a quickened consciousness of personal relations to a personal God. It implies personal duties and personal rights,—the great right, for instance, of private judgment, the right to the word of God.

The Gospel, moreover, it was held, is revealed in Sacred Scripture. The Bible became, as never before, the sufficient, the only rule of faith and practice.

Absorbed in a profound study of this divine Word,—one that commands still the admiration of scholars,—and guided by an instinct of organization and leadership paralleled only in instances of highest powers of statesmanship, John Calvin, with a singular clearness of vision and a concentration of purpose beyond that of the great father of Latin theology, seized upon the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, and with this gave to a militant Puritanism a strength and solidity of purpose, a heroism of endurance and courage, which nothing could subdue or even appall. It made Cromwell's Ironsides, nerved the Pilgrims for their yet more exacting contest with unseen and deadly foes, gave Massachusetts the sword of the spirit and the sword of steel with which it sought and won the peace of freedom under righteous law.

With these principles and inspirations, inherited from

¹ *Articles of Faith and Covenant, etc., etc.*, p. 64.

the first reformers, came in, partly in reaction from the rigor of Calvinism, a modified conception of the one Sovereign of all, and of His method of governing His responsible subjects.

The Genevan school, after its great leader had gone, scholasticized his teachings. Everything was subjected to the most exact analysis, combination and deduction possible through the processes of a formal and rigorous logic. Men turned from this abstract schematizing anew to the Scriptures. Retaining the principle of sovereignty, they saw it revealing itself through the method of *historical covenants*. This systemizing again became formal, and seemed more and more unreal. But at first it was a phase of progress, a working factor in the great struggle which was going on for human rights and larger freedom. So far as I am able definitely to trace it — there is suggestion of something earlier — it first formally appears in religious instruction in a catechism composed by Bullinger, — chief pastor at Zurich, and successor of Zwingli, — for the purpose of indoctrinating the more advanced pupils in the *Schola Tigurina*. Its title page bears the date 1563; the preface, 1559. Section third has the title: *De fœdere Dei quod pepigit Deus cum hominibus et de vero Dei cultu*. For the conception of man as a creature subject to a sovereign will, came in the estimate of him as a being with whom the Almighty Ruler makes covenants. The thought spread and was expanded. In the first half of the seventeenth century it made itself widely effective. It was caught up by the Puritans, and gained a triumph in the Westminster confession and catechisms. It ran parallel, as it were, in the Church to the same conception, in various forms, in the State. It came into vogue in theology at the same time that Solemn Leagues and Covenants obtained in civil affairs, and the theory began to find advocacy that human governments are founded in a social compact. The (so called) First Covenant, — a political

pact—was adopted at Edinburgh in 1557; the Second at Perth in 1559; the National Covenant in 1638; the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643. This was between England and Scotland. The Scottish editions of the Westminster Confession contain the political covenants. In both spheres, the civil and the religious, a vital truth was framing itself, however imperfect the expression. The theological covenant was no more unreal than the alleged political consent,—whether, as taught by Hooker, a secret agreement in our predecessors, or, by Grotius, a virtual consent, or, by Hobbes, an instituted or actual contract, or, by Locke, a tacit consent, or, at last, by Burke, an implied consent, which really goes back to the natural order or divine constitution.¹ In both spheres,—the political and the theological,—so intimately related in the Puritan thought of them, a leading significance of it all is the attempt to find a personal basis for obligation, whether civil or religious.

This general type of religious and political doctrine, whose history and deeper meaning I have briefly indicated, dominated the mind of New England from the earlier settlements through the century at whose close Mary Griffin joined the Puritan church at Bradford on her confession of the Apostles' Creed and assent to the simple covenant which the Church had adopted. As a doctrinal formula this Federalism, developed into the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, had been endorsed by the hearty assent

¹ See Leo, *Universalgeschichte*, 2 Aufl., 1842, Bd. iv., s. 149 ff.; Fisher, *Yale Review*, Vol. II., 402 sq.; Hooker, *Works* (Keble's ed.), I., 239, 246 (*Eccles. Pol.*, I., ch. x., 1, 8); Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis libri tres*, *Prol.*, §§ 15, 16; II., vi., §§ 1-4; Hobbes, *English Works*, III., 153 sq. (*Leviathan*, ch. xvii.-xviii.); Locke, *Works*, II., 192; Burke, *Works*, III., 460. Cf. Professor A. L. Lowell's *Essays on Government*, and for anticipations of modern theories of political contract, Professor Dunning's *Hist. of Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval*. A sufficient history of Federalism in Theology is still a desideratum. How intimately the two conceptions of covenant, the political or social, and the religious, were associated appears in these words of John Cotton, "Neither is there any colour to conceive this way of entering into Church estate by Covenant, to be peculiar to the Pædagogoy of the old Testament; for it is evident by the light of nature, that all civill Relations are founded in Covenant." *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England, etc.*, (London, 1645), p 4.

and attestation, for substance, given to the Westminster Confession of Faith at the Cambridge Synod in 1648, and by the acceptance in 1680 at Boston, by the Elders and Messengers of the Massachusetts churches, of the Savoy Declaration. It had also shaped numerous catechisms framed in England and Scotland prior to the first great migration to these shores, and still others which the ministers here prepared with perhaps a yet more remarkable fertility. It was retained in the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism, two editions of which appear to have been published at Cambridge, and two certainly had been issued in Boston, as early as 1691.¹ Mr. Ford thinks that this Catechism probably was included in the earliest editions of the Primer, the first not later than 1690.²

The impression thus made as to what was aimed at in the cultivation of Christian Faith, and, in some at least of its special characteristics, was expected of those admitted to membership in the Churches, is deepened by an examination of the Puritan catechisms to which I have just alluded. I have looked for my purpose at a number of these, nearly all that seem to be of special importance, but I will adduce only three, selected for reasons which will appear as I proceed.

The first is the Rev. William Perkins's *Six Principles of Christian Religion*, of which our associate Mr. Wilberforce Eames gave so interesting an account.³ He characterized this catechism as apparently the "one most used by the Puritans in England, the Pilgrims at Leyden and Plymouth, and the first settlers on the Bay," and as "the book that has helped to form the early New England character and creed." John Eliot, it was stated, translated it "into the Indian language of Massachusetts, and it

¹ The exact dates are 1665, 1668, 1683, 1691. See *Proceedings of the Am. Antiq. Soc.*, xii., I. (Oct., 1898), pp. 141, 142.

² Ford: *The New England Primer*, ed. 1889, pp. 39, 86.

³ *Proceedings*, Oct., 1897, pp. 78-87. Mr. E. thinks the edition of 1590 was "probably the first." Mr. Ford so dates.

was borrowed from by Abraham Pierson in preparing his Quiripi catechism entitled *Some Helps for the Indians*, Cambridge, 1658." Numerous editions were published in England; Mr. Eames mentions twenty-four from 1590 to 1682.¹ The last of these years it was reprinted in Boston.² Even a cursory perusal of this remarkable book will suffice to show the prominence given to the doctrines which I have specified as primary in the thought of the first Reformers — sin, salvation through Jesus Christ, assurance of forgiveness. It is noticeable, however, that the conception of covenants is absent from this part of the "Exposition"; it comes in only in connection with the sacraments of Baptism and the Supper. These rites are seals. Federalism was a modification of Calvinism.

Fifty-two years later (1642), Ezekiel Rogers, who had become in 1639 the first minister of the Church in Rowley, published "The Chief Grounds of Christian Religion set down by way of Catechizing, Gathered long since for the use of an Honourable Family." This catechism, the highest authority respecting the history of the Westminster standards, has been characterized as containing "in miniature almost all that is in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly."³ It adds to the clear recognition

¹ *Proceedings*, Oct., 1897, pp. 79, 85 (note).

² Through the courtesy of Mr. Fisher Howe I have examined a copy of the London edition which bears the same date (1682) with that published in Boston. The former contains most of the new matter mentioned by Mr. Eames as found in the Boston edition, viz.: numbers 30, 31, 32, in the specification of errors, and the statement together with its signature, "Thine T. S.,"—that is all the additions except an editorial note on the fortieth page, which is left blank.

Mr. Eames offers the interesting suggestions that the signature may be that of Thomas Shepard, either father or son, and that there may have been an earlier New England edition. These deserve further investigation. I notice that the number of the verse quoted on the title page from Psalm 119 (Genevan version) is correctly given in the London edition, but wrongly in the Boston,—verse 133 for 130. Does this misprint occur in any earlier known edition? Does the signature "Thine T. S.," with the statement, appear in any London edition earlier than 1682?

In the title of the probably first edition, 1590, as given in the *Proceedings*, p. 79, the verse number is printed 30.

³ *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*. By Alexander F. Mitchell, D.D., 1886. p. xli. For the Catechism see pp. 53-64.

of the principles of the Great Reformation already noticed, the doctrine of the two covenants.

"Q. How did God govern man in this estate [that of innocency]?"

"A. By teaching him and making a covenant with him.

"Q. What was that covenant?"

"A. Do this and thou shalt live." (P. 57).

Then follows an account of man's sin and misery, after which are the following question and answer:

"Q. Is there no means to come out of this misery and to be reconciled to God?"

"A. Yes; God of his mercy hath found out a means by making a new covenant with us in Jesus Christ." (P. 58).

Adjoining Bradford, carved out of old Rowley, with the present town of Groveland as part of its domain, was Newbury, where Rev. James Noyes had served as teacher with Rev. Thomas Parker, his uncle, as pastor, the latter a student of Magdalen, Oxford, a pupil of Archbishop Usher of Dublin, and of Ames in Holland. The general court having "desired 'the elders would make a catechism for the instruction of youth in the grounds of religion,'" Mr. Noyes composed one for the use of the children in Newbury. Published at Cambridge in 1661, it passed through three editions before the close of the century. The features already noticed, including the two Covenants,—that of the Law, and that of the Gospel,—are here conspicuous. With the Rowley Catechism and others, it contains also the Calvinistic doctrine of Decrees.¹ The pastor, church and people of Bradford thus had in 1695 honored local catechisms, close at hand, of the same general character with those elsewhere in use. To these facts should be added others to which I can only advert.

One is, the absence of any use of the Apostles' Creed in

¹Mr. Noyes's Catechism is reprinted in Coffin's *Sketch of the History of Newbury, etc.*, 1845, pp. 287-291.

worship. Not until June 6, 1686, apparently, was the English Liturgy publicly read in Boston,¹ and its introduction by Randolph and support by Andros, who soon succeeded him, were not auspicious.

Another fact is, the omission of the Creed in the early New England reprints of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, so far as these are known. The Assembly, Nov. 8, 1647, added to its Catechism the Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed.² These are printed, Mr. Eames informs me, in a copy of the London edition of 1658 which belongs to the Lenox Collection. They are found also in a reprint, by Dr. Mitchell, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of St. Andrews, of one of the earliest English editions.³ The Prayer and Creed appear in full, the Commandments by title and reference to Exodus xx. They are present also in early Scottish catechisms.⁴ But in the New England reprints of the Shorter Catechism to which I have referred, one by Samuel Sewall, 1683, and another by B. Harris and J. Allen, 1691, both at Boston,—of two prior editions no copy seems to be known,—the Creed does not appear. The Prayer and Commandments are also omitted, but these, of course, were at hand in the Bibles, and they were the subjects of Questions and Answers in the Catechism. The Creed, therefore, so far as the catechisms in circulation here were concerned, including the Westminster, was not in sight.

To complete this view of the singularity of the transaction

¹ Foote: *Annals of King's Chapel*, I., p. 44.

² Mitchell: *Catechism of the Second Reformation*, p. xxv. ³ *Ib.*, pp. xxxi, 38.

⁴ *The A, B, C, or a Catechisme for Yong Children Appointed by Act of the Church and Councell of Scotland. To be learned in all families and Lector Schools in the said Kingdome.* 1644.

The New Catechisme according to the Forme of the Kirk of Scotland. Very profitable and usefull for instructing of Children and Youth in the Principles of Religion. Set forth for the generall good of both Kingdomes. 1644. As given by Dr. Mitchell the Creed is not printed in full in this Catechism. Under a heading "The 12 Articles of the Belief," and it proceeds: "Q. Rehearse the 12 Articles of the Beliefe? A. I believe in God the Father Almighty, etc." Questions and Answers follow on this and the other Articles. See Mitchell, *Catechisms*, etc., pp. 267-296.

at Bradford I should add, that I have discovered no similar occurrence in the proceedings of any other of the early churches of Massachusetts or of those affiliated with them elsewhere in New England; nor, which is quite as noteworthy, in the history of the Church in Bradford.

Yet the record is plain. When some one wrote to Saint Augustine asking how he should meet an objection to a certain miracle that it was a singular event, the reply was sent, "Ask your friend if he cannot find in the literature of the world anything which has occurred only once, and yet is credible." Augustine specifies no instance. The church record at Bradford seems to contain one. Though not miraculous, nor perhaps even marvellous, there is really something suggestive and admirable in it all. In the midst of the ecclesiastical and theological situation I have described, with catechisms and confessions, and declarations and creeds all about her, and revered pastors and religious leaders all committed to a scheme and system of religious teaching and profession,—in the midst, I repeat, of this strongly flowing stream of tendency, Mary Griffin, after waiting half a year, stood up, in that log church in Bradford, before the minister and deacons and the rest of that Puritan congregation, and professed the Apostles' Creed; and the Pastor approved, and all the Brethren, and no doubt all the sisters as well, for the minister wrote in the Record: "and I declaring the same to ye church, waiting sometime to see, no objection was brought against her." Jenny Geddes' stool would have been there if it had been wanted.

One would like to know more of this mother in Israel. Her son was baptized the same day, the father bringing him, though not himself a member of the church, but one of those Christians, as Mr. James Freeman Clarke perhaps would have said, who are always found on the Parish Committee. When the log church was built, the first in Bradford, he served on the Building Committee. He served the town

also as Selectman. One wonders whether in that home, in that father's and mother's heart, memories were not stirring of lessons learned from some old English Primer, which always had the Creed, and whether, though for conscience' sake all *imposed* worship must be forsaken, there lingered not with them the thought of a confession of belief as a religious service, an offering of faith, an act of homage and worship, and if something of the beauty and sacredness of the Creed which for centuries had been recited at every baptism, and been associated with every admission to the full privileges of the Christian fellowship, did not come with new and fresh power to these believers, wakening, in the freedom and Sabbath stillness of this new world, chords that, under oppression, had well nigh wholly ceased to vibrate.

But I must not leave this matter in mere mystery. There is another line of investigation to follow.

Personal "relations," as they were called, were still in the churches the mode of confession of faith, though not exclusively so.

This explanation, however, does not go far. How came, we ask, this particular Creed to be used?

Negatively, we may say,— the Puritans *never rejected this Creed*. How the matter stood is plainly shown in the letter "To all Ignorant People That desire to be Instructed," which precedes William Perkins's statement of the "Six Principles," and their catechetical "Exposition." In this epistle he states a large number of "common opinions" which keep men from a true knowledge of religion. One of these is, that "God is served by the rehearsing of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed." It was the confounding Religion with repeating the Creed, the saying it without understanding it, and applying it to conduct, that he censures and would banish. His "Six Principles" were pressed in order that by their "being well conceived and in some measure felt in the heart," his readers should "be able to profit by Sermons . . . ; and the ordinary

parts of the Catechism, namely, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the institution of the two Sacraments, shall more easily be understood."¹

It should also be noticed that the Puritan teachers much as they and their followers prized the kind of Creed and Catechism I have, perhaps with unnecessary fulness, illustrated, rigorously insisted that the smallest measure of Christian faith was sufficient for discipleship and church membership, if only it was genuine, and its professor was ready to assume the obligations of the church covenant.

Somewhere about the year 1690, not later, perhaps a little earlier, a new agency came into the field — Benjamin Harris's *New England Primer*. Mr. Ford says: "In every 'New England Primer' the Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed was [?] included, and while their position was varied, they commonly followed 'The Alphabet of Lessons.'"²

The insertion of the Creed in *The New England Primer* was of much importance for its history in New England. Possibly it occasioned Cotton Mather's paying so marked attention to it in his "Maschil, or the Faithful Instructor," published in 1701. Mary Griffin, one would think, must have looked on with a pleased surprise. This versatile preacher, quick to seize an opportunity for testimony, begins and almost ends this new and comprehensive catechetical Educator, with the Creed. In the opening Essay he says: "This Creed is well worth an Early Inscription upon the Memories of our Children," and then he appends Questions designed to promote its introduction into their "Affections and Practices." In the Tenth Essay he eulogizes the Assembly's Catechism and gives Questions under each

¹ *The Foundation of Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles*. London, 1682, pp. 2-4, 6.

² The Creed had been published here still earlier in English as well as Indian in John Eliot's *Indian Primer* (Cambridge, 1669). Rev. E. E. Hale, D.D., has kindly called my attention to a reprint of this Primer (Edinburgh, Andrew Elliot, 1880). According to Mr. Ford, Harris inserted the Creed in *The Protestant Tutor* (London, 1679), but it is omitted in the edition of this book published at Boston, 1685. Mr. Ford refers to this edition as "probably in an abridged form." (*The New England Primer*, 2d ed., pp. 52 sq., 34, 35, 37.)

of its Questions and Answers to facilitate their use. Then, in an Appendix, we have with the Commandments a Hymn called "The Lord's Prayer," of eight four-line stanzas, and then a Paraphrase of The Creed, with "a Profession of Faith directed by some Eminent Ministers associated for Church Reformation." He prints each Article of the Creed.

As I have intimated, it looks as though he saw in the success of the *Primer* a sign of the times.

This little book, more than anything else, must have kept alive or extended in the eighteenth century New England's knowledge of the Creed.

I pass on at once to the following century and to a time near the middle of it. It is marked by the beginning in the churches represented later by the National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States, of occasional appearances in particular churches of more or less recurrence to the Creed. This tendency received a noteworthy recognition in the recommendation of a Commission of twenty-five "ministers and teachers designed" (I use the words of one of our Associates) "to be widely representative of Congregationalism, geographically and theologically." Coming into existence through action of a National Council which met at St. Louis in 1880, this Commission published in 1883, with a "Statement of Doctrine," a form for admission to Church membership, of which Mary Griffin's Creed is a marked feature. I have looked over recently several hundred manuals of churches of this order, and find that already considerably more than a hundred show the use or influence of this Creed. The collection consisted of a large proportion of older Creeds, and was very far from complete in its representation of the existing usage. I was surprised at finding so large a number as that just stated.

The Creed is the universal Baptismal Symbol of the Roman Catholic Church. In its form as derived from that of the ancient church of Jerusalem and modified by the influence of the Nicene Confession, it is that of the Greek Church. It

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