The City Upon a Hill

New England as a Catalyst for the English Civil Wars

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The English Civil Wars are remembered today as some of the most catastrophic moments in English history. From 1642 to 1651, nearly 200,000 people lost their lives to violence, disease, and famine.¹ The Civil Wars occurred as a result of many factors, but one factor of paramount importance was religious conflict between the High Church backed by King Charles I and a group of radical Protestant subjects derogatorily labelled the “Puritans.”

In the years prior to the Civil Wars, over 14,000 of these Puritans fled England with the hope of creating “Bible Commonwealths” in North America.² These idyllic colonies were settled in a region they called “New England.” Conventional historical wisdom tells us that these colonists were forgotten during the Civil War era, that amid chaos at home, the people of the Mother Country were unable to pay any attention to their countrymen across the sea. But is this really true? Certainly, the distance was significant. The ships that ferried colonists to New England were hulking, slow-moving vessels, and the trip across the North Atlantic took an average of eight to twelve weeks each way.³ Yet the historical record seems to indicate that despite this geographic separation, the settlers of New England played an important role in agitating Puritans at home.

How is this possible? These individuals left England, but they also left behind family and friends, colleagues and associates. They wrote and received letters from loved ones across the Atlantic, and eagerly devoured news from home. The Puritans were Englishmen, after all. They left the Old World, but they did not abandon it. They saw themselves as models for their fellow countrymen and reported their good deeds home with an all-encompassing passion and fervor.

By disregarding these interactions between the colonists and their mother country, it becomes easy to claim, as the historian Alan Taylor has, that “New England ultimately failed as a ‘City Upon a Hill’ because the intended audience, the English, failed to pay attention.”⁴ I would counter that, at least for a brief time, the city upon a hill succeeded. The colonists of New England, as Puritans and Englishmen, played a pivotal role in the ideological and theological discussion in the years preceding the English Civil Wars. The existence of these “godly commonwealths” in the New World had a profound effect on many English Puritans—an effect which contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 1642.

THE NATURE OF PURITANISM

To understand the extent of the influence the New England colonies exerted upon the English Puritans, it is necessary to examine who exactly the Puritans were. To begin with, Puritans were not, strictly speaking, a denomination. They rather encompassed many different denominations. There were Presbyterian Puritans, Congregationalist Puritans, and many Puritan members of the Church of England. “Puritan” was a term of abuse and degradation, levied at particularly devout reformers by other Protestants, rather than a clearly defined movement with a self-evident ideology.⁵ As such it is exceedingly difficult to get an idea of the movement’s size. It is clear that most of England’s population of five million was not Puritan on the eve of the Civil Wars. It is probable that the actual number was on the order of a few hundred thousand, as for every one of the 14,000 Puritans willing to emigrate there were likely many more who remained in England. Though the members of this movement would not have identified themselves as Puritans, it is possible to get some understanding of what they believed by examining common attributes of their theology, philosophy, and history.

The Puritans followed the Reformed tradition and drew heavily upon the writings of the major Protestant thinker Jean Calvin and his disciples. The essence of

³ Taylor, 168.
⁴ Taylor, 185.
their theology was that individuals were ultimately justified not by works (i.e. through good deeds), but by Grace; the omnipotence of God was such that He knew, from the moment of Creation, whether an individual would go to Heaven or Hell. As a Reformed church, Puritans argued that the true religion must rid itself of idolatrous sacrament and ritual, and place its trust wholly in the word of God as conveyed in the Bible. They believed, in other words, in the “purification” of their religion, and in particular, the purification of the doctrines and practices of the Church of England, which many continued to believe was tainted by the scourge of “popery.”

At the core of Puritan theology in the years preceding the Civil Wars was the absolute supremacy of God over all things. This manifested itself in the notion of Providence, a doctrine which was given central importance in the Calvinist tradition. The rationale was that just as God knew the ultimate fate of all mankind, so too did He know (and in fact, dictate) everything else. “All things,” wrote the Puritan minister Arthur Dent in 1601, “turn about in God’s merciful Providence...” Further still, it is this Providence “which upholdeth all things, even the whole order of nature.” Because God’s sovereignty and power were unparalleled, everything that transpired must necessarily be a manifestation of His will. It mattered little whether humans on Earth understood the machinations of Heaven – indeed, it was virtually impossible for them to. Yet the fact remained, “His judgements are in all the Earth.” God’s Providence was in every aspect of human affairs, and it was the duty of Puritans to make sense of that Providence as best they could and interpret His will. The necessity of examining one’s own life and the natural world thereby gave every event cosmic significance. For the Puritan, every boon was a blessing, and every pitfall a just punishment.

These beliefs were not isolated to Puritan clergy and intellectuals. The London artisan Nehemiah Wallington (1598 – 1658) provides an indispensable example of how lay adherents perceived their relationship with God. Wallington was a staunch Puritan and a prolific writer in an era when most adult men were still illiterate. In fifty notebooks, Wallington covered issues of great consequence to the godly community; his writings provide insight into the psychology of everyday Puritans during the Civil War period.

In a notebook entitled “A Record of Gods Marcys, or a Thankfull Remembrance,” Wallington catalogues a list of his sins, with the principal aim of displaying how God is merciful even unto such a wretched a man as himself. He describes the necessity of such an act, saying “it is [mankind’s] dutie to seek Gods glory and the good of his church.” This gets at the core of what the Puritan felt his relationship with God to be in the mid-17th century. The Puritan was supposed to be a herald who lived and died for the sole purpose of glorifying a greater master. That the Lord could forgive such flawed individuals as Nehemiah, who admitted to “the corruption of my nature, and filthynesse and deceitfulnesse of my hart,” simply served to further indebt mankind to its creator and further demonstrate God’s benevolent mercy. Respecting God required careful adherence to the Divine Will, which could only be ascertained through close-readings of scripture and the workings of Providence (and not, as the orthodox adherents of the Church of England and Catholics argued, through ritual). The Puritan sought to “live a holy life” — a life entirely in line with the revelation as expressed in the Holy Book. Doing so would give glory to God in every aspect of their daily lives. Through their godliness, these men and women hoped to please their Lord.

This notion, that one’s purpose in life was to give glory to God by following His Will, had a natural corollary: the commission of sin was an offense to God. The Puritans, as God’s chosen, had the primary responsibility for conveying His Will to their fellow men, preaching, converting, and policing the sins of their fellows as necessary. Citing Leviticus 19:17, Wallington chastised a

9 Dent, 86.
10 Ps. 105:1.
13 Wallington, 30.
14 Wallington, 49.
neighbor for breaking the Sabbath: “thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, but thou shalt plainly rebuke thy neighbor and suffer him not to sin.”16 “Suffer” is the operative word; to the Puritanical mind, any sin in the community was liable to bring down the fury of the Lord and likely to cause untold suffering. God, in the enormity of His wrath and justice, would punish the whole of the people for the sins of a few. In serving as “a means whereby God might lead others to salvation,” the Puritans saw themselves as glorifying God whilst simultaneously saving and bettering their community.17

It was thus the ultimate Puritan intention to create a godly civilization wherein every member attempted to lead a virtuous life according to scripture, popish sacrament and ceremony did not taint the populace, and the people were not an affront to the eyes of God. Only such a society, where sin was minimized and repentance universal, could truly be a delight to the Lord.

**The Grievances of the Puritans**

Unfortunately for the Puritans, England was anything but ideal. The outbreak of war in 1642 was the result of numerous factors. Political and constitutional concerns, amplified by economic tensions, pushed many Englishmen to support the roundhead (or Parliamentarian) cause. Yet the Puritans collectively were less interested in these earthly matters. Their main frustrations were rooted in theological and spiritual anxieties. Their grievances were innumerable, but ultimately fell into two categories: frustration with England’s moral decay and suspicious of religious tyranny perpetrated by Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud. These factors formed a vicious circle of frustration for English Puritans, reinforcing and worsening one another and pushing England into chaos.

The Puritan conception of England’s moral decay was discerned in terms of God’s absolute sovereignty over the universe. Providence worked itself in all phenomena, imbied with cosmic meaning that was the duty of His disciples to analyze and comprehend. As such, the various calamities afflicting England were interpreted as divine punishments, prompting reflection and reformation. Among the best examples of this belief system is Nehemiah Wallington’s journal describing “A memorial of God’s Judgements upon Sabbath breakers, Drunkards, and other vile lives.”18 In this notebook, Wallington described numerous examples of God’s wrath upon London, including fire, plague, explosion, and murder. This grisly volume minced no words about who is at fault: it is the “thieves, drunks, idlers, prostitutes, and blasphemers” who were to blame.19 London at this time was practically besieged by these sorts of folk, as opportunities for urban employment and hardship in the countryside pulled impoverished masses to the outskirts of the city.20 According to Wallington, God was not just punishing, He was “pleading with this citie by fire.”21 To an extent, the moral laxity perceived by the Puritans in this period was real — England was changing rapidly in the early 1600s. Yet in the Puritan mind there was a fundamental and profound link between this moral degradation and England’s woes. When Wallington talked about “grieving for the times wherein we live,” he is talking not about the destruction wrought by war, pestilence, and famine but the root cause of these things — namely, the baseness of Englishmen.22 Listing the reasons for the Puritan migration to New England, the future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony John Winthrop described how in England man was “more vile and base than the earth we treade upon.”23 Fellow migrant Edward Johnson elaborated, describing England as filled with a “multitude of irreligious lascivious and popish affected persons.”24 The wretched and sinful men of England were an affront even to the landscape itself. In the years preceding the Civil Wars, the English Puritans became convinced that moral laxity had become a rampant problem—that sinfulness had cost the English God’s favor and was bringing about “the endes of the world.”25

Moral failure was poisoning England, and nobody was doing more to usher in the end than Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud. The English Puritans (follow-

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16 Bremer, Puritan Experiment, 23.
17 Wallington, Notebooks, 97.
18 Taylor, American Colonies, 162.
20 Wallington, Notebooks, 114.
21 Wallington, 83.
24 Wallington, Notebooks, 97.
ing in the wake of the Calvinist tradition and the Thirty Years’ War) feared the encroachment of international Catholicism. In the mid-seventeenth century, no English figure was quite so linked with this threat as the Archbishop. Laud’s policy was one of religious uniformity—the combined kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland made forming cohesive ecclesiastical policy difficult, and Laud’s efforts as archbishop were oftentimes aimed at standardization. Yet what Laud considered necessary measures to secure religious harmony, many Puritans viewed as persecution in pursuit of a Catholic agenda. Of particular note were the limitations he imposed on Puritan preachers, in particular by censoring works he believed were controversial or heretical. The godly perceived this as a deliberate attempt to subvert public morality and faith. Samuel Rogers spoke for many when he described Laud as “a cursed traitor to Christ,” for his persecution of Puritans in England.  To the godly, the archbishop was “that great enemy of God and his people.”  His insistence on sacramental and hierarchical ecclesiastical reforms seemed to threaten Calvinist England. What Laud and others believed was necessary to maintain church orthodoxy and resist schisms became, for the Puritans, hallmarks of religious tyranny and despotism.

In the Puritan mind, these two factors amplified each other—the lack of “good” (i.e., Puritanical) religious instruction (because of the domination of a quasi-papist church) led to decaying morals, and this decay in turn made people more willing to accept a Laudian and borderline papist church. The godly thus saw England going down a spiral of popery and anarchy. The Puritans did not consider themselves blameless in this affair. In fact, some even blamed themselves the most. As God’s Chosen, it was their responsibility to give glory to the Lord and bring others into line with His Will. Their perceived failure was evident in their rhetoric—they often spoke of “the Lord against whom we have sinned.”  By allowing the promulgation of papist policies and the decline of virtue, the Puritans had defaulted on their heavenly compact. It was in the midst of this theological chaos that some began to argue that England’s salvation could not feasibly be accomplished by staying in England. Perhaps, they argued, to show England the error of her ways they needed to pro-

vide an external example. It was at this point, beleaguered by the sins of the Old World, that some Puritans began to look across the sea.

Refuting the Myth of Isolation
It is easy to forget that the early colonists of New England did not consider themselves “Americans.” For the most part, these settlers were mindful of their ancestry and still thought of themselves as Englishmen. In a sermon delivered by William Hooke in 1640 (who upon returning to London in 1656 would become domestic chaplain to Oliver Cromwell), he reminded the colonists to remember their civil, natural, and spiritual relations with England.

“There is no Land that claims our name but England,” he wrote, and “no nation that calls us Country-Men but the English.”26 The colonists would not allow themselves to simply sit in their private Eden and ignore the tribulations of the godly community abroad. These settlers, as has been noted, were not just escaping England—they were saving it.

The Puritans who settled in New England did so for a wide variety of reasons. For some, financial pressures under Charles I, such as the infamous ship money tax, acted as push factors. For others, the opportunities provided by cheap and readily available land caused them to seek their fortunes in the New World (especially as the rise of enclosures reduced the amount of land available in England). Yet for most of the earliest immigrants, this colonial excursion was about more than material betterment. It was an opportunity to show the world the type of prosperity that could be found in a society entirely in line with the Divine Will. New England was to be a grand exhibition, a test and experiment to show the people of England what could be if they would only embrace God. Perhaps the most noteworthy explanation of this intention comes from John Winthrop’s sermon, “A Model of Christian Charity.” Given aboard the Arabella on its way to Massachusetts Bay in 1630, Winthrop spoke for many immigrants when he identified the higher cause the settlers migrated in support of:

... wee shall finde that the God of Israel is among us, ... when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of

succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us. Many of the Puritans who founded the Commonwealth of Massachusetts thus set out, from the beginning, with the intention of creating a model of Christian charity in America; Massachusetts Bay, that "city upon a hill," was intended by its founding members to serve as inspiration for the creation of future godly societies in Europe.

This rhetoric is not unique to Winthrop, though he is perhaps most famous for it. Many of the colonists believed that they were doing the Lord's work and expressed as much both in private and public. Among them was Captain Edward Johnson, one of the founders of Woburn, Massachusetts, who wrote that he felt the purpose of the colony was "to be set as lights upon a Hill more obvious than the highest Mountaine in the World," a literal beacon of spirituality that would frighten away the darkness of episcopal despotism. Yet another claimed New England was a "pregnant demonstration" of the synergetic effect of Congregational Puritanism on Civil Government. Even those who did not travel exclusively for these altruistic reasons were aware that this was intended by many of the leading colonial officials, and all would have been conscious of their role. The colonists had braved the treacherous voyage to the New World. Their cause was just and their goal was set: they would be a city upon a hill, a beacon around which all Protestant nations would rally. With this purpose in mind, they began sending messages home to England. The success of the Puritan experiment in the New World now rested on the willingness of their countrymen to listen.

THE IMPACT OF NEW ENGLAND I: SOLUTIONS IN THE WILDERNESS

Many Puritans in England hoped that by instituting religious reforms similar to those of New England it would be possible to root out papism and immorality in England and usher in a godly age. Their chief rival was Archbishop Laud, who argued along with other defenders of episcopacy that a clearly defined church hierarchy and standardized beliefs helped to preserve order. Even the most minor infraction that went "against both the canons of the Church and the Laws of the realm" became a "great scandal," in Laud's eyes, for its potentially destabilizing impact. Religious order was predicated on "the authority of the church," the only body capable of interpreting God's word. Without the authority of the Church of England, Laud and others argued, religious (and therefore social and political) order would collapse. Religious orthodoxy in the form of bishops supposedly helped to prevent "religious schism" and allowed for harmony within the realm. One of the primary aims of the Puritans during the English Civil War was the overthrow of this church hierarchy. Tearing down the episcopal church structure first required that Puritans demonstrate that Laud and others were wrong, that it was possible for social and religious order to prevail without such a strict hierarchical organization.

For some Puritans, New England was the ultimate refutation. New England "lacked church courts and tithes, bishops and archbishops, church weddings and ales, Sunday sports and maypoles, saint's days and Christmas." In other words, New England had purged itself of the trappings of ritual and sacrament, of paganism and papism alike. It had become a model Calvinist society, where scripture, not ritual or superstition, reigned supreme. Most important of all, by rejecting bishops New Englanders developed the "New England" or "Congregational" Way. Congregationalism, with its insistence on the right of each individual congregation to choose its own leaders and organization (and also of each congregant to choose a congregation), marked the ultimate liberation from religious authoritarianism.

The removal of the bishops appeared to be the best defense against religious imperialism, and the best safeguard of the godly community's autonomy. John Cotton described the effect of the New England Way upon the godly of the old world in 1648, saying that "the Christian world ... upon our departure grew ... more sensible of the burden and danger of episcopal tyranny," resulting in the

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31 John Norton, quoted in Bremer, Puritan Experiment, 44.
35 Taylor, American Colonies, 179.
eventual “shaking off” of the episcopal yoke.” The example of New England’s prosperity and stability following the elimination of bishops was vitally important to English Puritans. Samuel Rogers, a restrained defender of Congregationalism, was suddenly “stirred up” by a bishop who had criticized New England for opening the door to nonconformity and disorder. Similarly, Scottish thinker Robert Baillie argued that it was conceivable that “there are half so many schism[s] in New England where bishops are not, as we see in Old England where bishops are in full force.” In the years preceding the Civil Wars, British Puritans began to use New England to challenge the idea that disorder was the natural consequence of eradicating episcopacy. The Congregational Way gained such a notable following that during the Civil War era, the Independents became the dominant faction in the Rump Parliament. Their model of independent congregations was in many ways inspired by the New England Way. New England thus managed to serve in this respect as a model commonwealth, insofar as it provided English Puritans an example of an effective society overseen by a non-episcopal church.

By appearing to have reversed the decline of public virtue, the Puritans gained more support for their new mode of social and religious governance. The fact that Puritan governance in New England was viewed as “effective” is demonstrated by the settlers’ apparent resolution of another issue: the decline of public virtue. Indeed, many English Puritans believed that New England was a paradise on Earth, a land free of immorality and sin, where the godly ruled and all was harmonious. The cause of this harmony was clear: New Englanders had organized their entire society “according to the scriptures,” and so gained the approval of God. This message was relayed to the Old World Puritans incessantly. In a letter to his former congregation in Terling, Essex, the minister Thomas Weld described how in New England,

... all things are done in the form and pattern shewed in the mount: members provided, church officers elected and ordained, Sacraments administered, scandals prevented, censured, Fast days and all such things by Authority commanded and performed according to the precise rule. The Puritans here were allowed to live in accordance with the Divine Will, interpreted by the godly through the Bible and direct communication with spiritual forces, otherwise known as revelation. In New England, where “the greater part [are] the better part,” the Puritans had managed to create a society without immorality or sin. Here was a land where “our ears are not beaten, nor the air filled with oaths, swearers and ranters, nor our eyes and eares vexed with the unclean conversations of the wicked.” Some English began to believe that if they could emulate their American cousins and seize God, “lay hold on Him, yea hang on Him, and say thou shalt not goe,” then they could spare England its grisly fate.

It seems that the underlying theme of much transatlantic correspondence was the virtues of a government perfectly aligned with the teachings of Christ. The preeminent Massachusetts Bay theologian John Cotton described the character of New England’s government in a pamphlet published in London in 1641. In addition to listing various organizational laws about the operation and structure of the government, Cotton identified the crimes in the colony and the punishments for them. Of the twenty-four crimes that merited either the death penalty or banishment, all but six are directly inspired by commandment (and of those six, two relate to witchcraft, and four to subversion of the government). In the New England colonies, the reigning king was the Lord in Heaven, and His word was the sole basis for law. This was the society that Puritans in England dreamed of. Mistress Warden, in a series of speeches with her husband and chambermaid, declared boldly that it was the “Zion of New England.”

The inhabitants of this land were viewed by some English

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37 Rogers, The Diary of Samuel Rogers, 29.
38 Baillie, The Unlawfulness and Danger of Limited Episcopacy, 28.
42 Wallington, 162.
as “the Saints,” taken by God to this Land because they were his elect. To these Puritans, who believed in the paradise of America, New England looked like Jerusalem restored. The passion with which some English Puritans described the Bible Commonwealths makes evident the paradisical awe it held over them: “New England[,] New England[,] it is in my thoughts[,] my heart rejoices to think of it.”47

By supposedly solving the issue of public sinfulness and morality, New England became an idealistic vision of what a society ruled by the godly could look like. Puritans in England had no way of knowing that their view was driven in large part by propaganda. In reality, New England was not a perfect Zion. It had its fair share of spousal abuse, violence, murder, and adultery. On one particularly extravagant occasion in 1641, a servant was made to stand on the Boston gallows, noosed, for his “foul and devilish attempt to bugger a cow.”48 Yet these blemishes were kept largely hidden in the letters sent home. In their quest to use New England as a model for England’s further reformation, the colonists focused instead on the virtues of New England’s laws and social structure. The fact that the New World was not as heavenly as it appeared was not as important to the English Puritans as their belief that it was heavenly. Many of the Puritans who could not participate in the New England experiment were enraptured by the myth of its utopian success and sought to emulate that success in the motherland. In New England, English Puritans saw a vision of what England could become. All they had to do was seize it.

The Impact of New England II: International Protestantism

New England’s paradisiacal nature and lack of episcopacy compounded with one another to increase Old World Puritans’ frustrations with their own turbulent society. Yet arguably even more important than the example of the colonists was the support and unity they provided through international Protestantism—more precisely, international Calvinism. In the wake of the Thirty Years’ War, the ideological descendants of Jean Calvin felt a strong urge to band together to protect against the encroachments of popery. The union was not necessarily born of kinship, so much as of necessity. In a sermon by the prolific John Preston published in 1630, he asked “doe wee not see the whole bodie of those who profess the truth are besieged round about through Christendome? ... Are not our allies wasted?”49 The need for the different reformed Churches to unite, not on matters of doctrine but for matters of mutual defense, pressed heavily on the Puritans. The “union ... betwenee us [English Calvinists] and those of our religion beyond the sea” was regarded as the greatest defense against popery and its supporters, “the capital enemy of all Reformed churches in Europe.”50 In this environment, New English successes became Protestant successes. As the Bible Commonwealths in America grew, their ability to provide spiritual and military reinforcements to the English godly grew as well.

This hints at the first benefit that the English godly derived: New English successes (and indeed prosperity) during the 1630s appeared to indicate God’s favor for the reformed cause. If every minor happenstance was for the Puritan imbibed with cosmic significance, then particularly unlikely events or what the New Englanders called “miracles” were even more so. Throughout the 1630s (the era of the “Great Migration”), 198 voyages carried passengers to New England, of which only a single vessel sunk. Upon arriving in the New World, colonists had to contend with frigid winters and deadly conflicts with Native Americans, yet despite these hardships the colonial population continued to increase thanks to low rates of disease and starvation and a relatively high female population.51 The Puritans of New England managed to triumph against incredible odds to form a Christian commonwealth in the harsh and unforgiving wilderness of North America. This was, according to Edward Winslow’s report home, “the good providence of God working ... in our preservation.”52 Many English Puritans did not rebuke Winslow’s claim—indeed, many were thrilled to see the godly prospering abroad. In 1632, Nehemiah Wallington prayed for

46 Rogers, Diary, 47.
47 Rogers, 97.
49 John Preston, Sermons Preached Before His Majestie, (London: Leonard Greene of Cambridge, 1630), 84.
51 Taylor, American Colonies, 168-170.
“[God’s] whole church and each member of the same,” by which he meant reformed churches. The successes of the New World Puritans against tremendous odds were taken as signs of God’s undeniable favor for their cause. They were, after all, God’s chosen, and “all things tend to the good of God’s chosen people.” The growth of the reformed movement was a cause for celebration among the English godly. While English Puritans may have had some degree of theological disputes with their coreligionists in America, they ultimately believed that they benefited from New England’s successes. These benefits came in the form of spiritual and occasional military aid, which fostered a sense of solidarity from which the English Puritans derived considerable benefit.

The Puritans and many other contemporary Christians believed fervently in the power of prayer to bring about practical change in the world. Prayer was more than wishes – in the hands of the godly, prayer was a direct channel to God, and was therefore the most powerful force a human being could muster. The prayers of the godly, in the words of preacher Thomas Cobbett, were “terrible as so many armies with banners, so many thundering legions.” In New England, days of fasting and prayer were organized throughout the Civil War era as Puritans prayed for the success of the godly in the Mother Country. English Puritans moreover solicited and took comfort in these prayers. Nehemiah Wallington, writing to a friend in Massachusetts Bay, wrote that

I think the lord never had more powerfull and earnest prayers and tears [in England] than now … we here in Old England have found the benifet and profit of your prayers in New England, which should incourace us still to go on in praying…

English Puritans thus derived spiritual strength from their coreligionists in America. The knowledge of godly prayers on their behalf gave them the comfort and courage to continue fighting against popery, both before and during the Wars. The existence of Bible Commonwealths, such as New England and the Netherlands, allowed for a feeling of strength-through-solidarity, which allowed the English Puritans to feel that they were not alone in their struggle against episcopacy. This larger spiritual aid was further buttressed (albeit slightly) by military reinforcement during the Civil Wars, the most famous example being at the Siege of Crowland, where Colonel Thomas Rainbowe’s militia of New English volunteers seized the strategically important town. The feeling of unity thus took on two forms – not simply the unity of spiritual brethren, but that of brothers in arms, as “New England Men” became famous throughout England for their daring pursuits in the name of English Puritans.

The English Puritans thus benefitted, spiritually and militarily, from their connections with Puritan America. Days of prayer and Thanksgiving in New England, described in letters and pamphlets in Old England, helped give comfort to the English godly and reminded them that they were not alone. This feeling was almost certainly compounded by the commitment of Massachusetts men to fight on behalf of England’s “Puritan Revolution.” International Calvinism was thus a source of strength and encouragement for the Puritans in the years leading up to and during the English Civil Wars. It not only strengthened English resolve, but also gave them the feeling of being connected to something greater – this idea that even the loss of the Civil Wars would not mean the end of the True Church and that the reach of the godly was constantly expanding. While not the cause of the Civil Wars per se, the mere existence of New England helped give English Puritans the courage to rebel in 1642.

Conclusion

I respectfully disagree with Oliver Cromwell’s assessment of New England as “poore, cold, and useless.” New England proved extremely “useful” in the years preceding the very Wars that put Cromwell into power. It would be overreaching to say that New England and Puritanism caused the English Civil Wars. However, it remains that the English Civil Wars were fought mainly along religious lines. Understanding the unique factors which ap-

53 Wallington, “A Record of God’s Mercies” in Seaver, Wallington’s World, 144.
54 Dent, Plain Man’s Pathway, 90.
56 Wallington, Notebooks, 239.
59 Oliver Cromwell, quoted in Taylor, American Colonies, 175.
pealed to the Puritan element within England is important. The Puritans of England did not live in a theological vacuum. They exchanged ideas and prayers with coreligionists throughout the reformed world and had friends and colleagues throughout the Netherlands and New England. They saw New England as a potential model Christian society, one to be used as inspiration for reform in England. More important, they viewed New England as an ally against papism, and from this partnership derived considerable resolve.

It is unsurprising that the impact of New England on the English Civil Wars tends to be forgotten today. Certainly, many English Puritans of the era considered the region a backwater. Many (like Cromwell) were probably unaware of the subtle influence the region had in pushing the mother country to Civil War. Further, the Restoration of 1660 put an end to England’s experiment with Puritan government, and therefore erased any hope for the lasting success of this “city upon a hill.” To ignore completely the catalyzing and galvanizing effects of the Bible Commonwealth is to erase the colonists as actors from the historical narrative. Taylor’s claim that New England failed to have an impact because the English failed to pay attention ignores the vital part the colonists had in shaping England’s history. In presenting a solution to the woes of their coreligionists and giving them the confidence to pursue that solution in England, the colonists played an important role in agitating the Puritan element at home. To deny the role of the colonies in intensifying this desire for reform is to forget that the colonists of New England were themselves Englishmen. These were their Civil Wars too.