

*Cotton Mather on the Recent History
of New England*

I believe there never was a poor plantation more pursued by the wrath of the Devil than our poor New England; and that which makes our condition very much the more deplorable is that the wrath of the great God himself at the same time also presses hard upon us. It was a rousing alarm to the Devil when a great company of English Protestants and Puritans came to erect evangelical churches in a corner of the world where he had reigned without any control for many ages; and it is a vexing eye-sore to the Devil that our Lord Christ should be known and owned and preached in this howling wilderness. Wherefore he has left no stone unturned, that so he might undermine this plantation and force us out of our country.

First, the Indian Powwows¹ used all their sorceries to molest the first planters here; but God said unto them, "Touch them not!" Then, seducing spirits² came to root in this vineyard, but God so rated³ them off that they have not prevailed much farther than the edges of our land. After this, we have had a continual blast upon some of our principal grain, annually diminishing a vast part of our ordinary food. Herewithal, wasting sicknesses, especially burning and mortal agues,⁴ have shot the arrows of death in at our windows. Next, we have had many adversaries of our own language, who have been perpetually assaying to deprive us of those English liberties in the encouragement whereof these territories have been settled. As if this had not been enough, the Tawnies⁵ among whom we came have watered our soil with the blood of many hundreds of our inhabitants. Desolating fires also have many times laid the chief treasure of the whole province in ashes. As for losses by sea, they have been multiplied upon us; and particularly in the present

¹Indian shamans or religious practitioners, whom Puritans believed to be in communion with the Devil.

²Heretics.

³Drove.

⁴Fevers.

⁵Indians.

French War,⁶ the whole English nation have observed that no part of the nation has proportionately had so many vessels taken as our poor New England. Besides all which, now at last the devils are (if I may so speak) in person come down upon us, with such a wrath as is justly much and will quickly be more the astonishment of the world. Alas, I may sigh over this wilderness, as Moses did over his, in Psalm 90.7, 9: "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath we are troubled: All our days are passed away in thy wrath." And I may add this unto it: the wrath of the Devil too has been troubling and spending of us all our days. . . .

Let us now make a good and a right use of the prodigious descent which the Devil in great wrath is at this day making upon our land. Upon the death of a great man once, an orator called the town together, crying out, "Concurrere cives, dilapsa sunt vestra moenia!" That is, "Come together neighbors, your town walls are fallen down!" But such is the descent of the Devil at this day upon our selves that I may truly tell you, the walls of the whole world are broken down! The usual walls of defense about mankind have such a gap made in them that the very devils are broke in upon us to seduce the souls, torment the bodies, sully the credits, and consume the estates of our neighbors, with impressions both as real and as furious as if the invisible world were becoming incarnate on purpose for the vexing of us. . . .

In as much as the devil is come down in great wrath, we had need labor, with all the care and speed we can, to divert the great wrath of Heaven from coming at the same time upon us. The God of Heaven has with long and loud admonitions been calling us to a reformation of our provoking evils as the only way to avoid that wrath of his which does not only threaten but consume us. It is because we have been deaf to those calls that we are now by a provoked God laid open to the wrath of the Devil himself.

⁶When James II's daughter Mary and her Dutch Protestant husband, William, became king and queen in 1689, France (which was already at war with the Dutch) declared war on England and its colonies.