

One is forced to the conclusion that the treatment of the Quakers was stupid and unwise, but it is not correct to say that the magistrates and officers of the law were blood-thirsty men. They executed the law as it was handed to them, and the fact that they did not write much of anything about their side of the case suggests that they did not regard it as the important event of the day. It is likely that the price of dried codfish in Virginia or Barbados meant much more to them than the actions of some of their lesser fellow citizens in the woods of West Peabody. The execution of the laws against Quakers or other transgressors was merely part of the general routine of government.

All the glowing details of the controversy have to be garnered from the books and tracts of the Quakers which were manifestly put out to inflame public opinion in America and England, so as to bring pressure to bear on New England to permit the Quakers to continue their crusade. There can be no denying that the Quaker accounts were written forcefully and dramatically, but there is good reason to doubt both the truth and accuracy of many of their statements which have been accepted as actual history by many subsequent writers. They are really dramatic partisan accounts, playing up the most obnoxious side of an unpleasant episode which the Quakers could easily have avoided by staying in England and minding their own business.

Laws against witchcraft had been enacted in Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth in 1641 and 1636 and even one in Rhode Island in 1647 which called attention to the death penalty, but the first execution for witchcraft was that of Margaret Jones in Charlestown in 1648. A year or two later, Mary Johnson was executed at Hartford

¹ Drake: *Annals of Witchcraft*, 1, 56 et seq.

These cases had no connection with Salem, but it is interesting to note that they occurred over forty years before the outbreak in Salem which has received so much undeserved publicity. In 1651 Mary Parsons of Springfield, evidently an insane person, was tried for 'having familiarity with the devil' and murdering her child. She was acquitted of the first charge, but hanged for the latter.¹ Five years later, in 1656, matters did not turn out so simply for Ann Hibbins, the widow of a worthy Boston gentleman at one time the agent of the colony in England, who was charged with witchcraft. She seems to have been a sharp-tongued, crabbed old woman, and she was finally executed as a witch.² Other cases followed every year or two in some one of the colonies.

Fortunately these unpleasant instances bore no more relation to the life of the people than does the modern murder trial. The ordinary folk were going industriously on with what was on the whole a genial, kindly life. The busy life of the fishermen at Winter Island was bringing in more fish than the town could use. It was dried and cured on the island and later shipped off to the southward. The merchants with their wharves along Front Street and at the foot of Norman Street supervised the trade and stored and sold the goods brought home in the little ships.

Around the town better and more elaborate many-gabled houses were built, and out through Danvers, Beverly, and Peabody the old square houses, with their big square chimneys and lean-to roofs, were succeeding the temporary huts and hovels of an earlier day. The Balch house in Beverly seems to be the only house still standing that can be proved to have been built before 1650, but many others came along about that time. These were substantial houses and many of them are standing to this day through Danvers, Pea-

¹ Col. Rec., III, 229.

² Felt, 1st, 192.