

ANNE HUTCHINSON

A Woman of Independent Mind

by

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THE NAME ANNE HUTCHINSON is well known in Westchester. Banished for heresy from the Massachusetts Bay 'Colony, she sought refuge in the wilderness along the 'stream which now bears her name. When she had been here less than a year, she and all her household except one were killed by Indians. These facts alone would entitle her to a niche in colonial history. But through cold facts her free spirit and independent mind shine out against the somber Puritan 'background fro'm which she emerged.

Anne Hutchinson was a woman far ahead of her times. Today we could *be tempted to ask if she were a sister in spirit to the w-omen 'of the liberation movement.

Anne Marbury was born in Alford, Lincolnshire, England, in 1591, an elder daughter in the large family of an Anglican clergyman, Francis Mar-bury, and his second wife, Bridget Dryden. Twice Francis Marbury had been censured and imprisoned for persistent criticisms of the appalling lack of qualifications of the Anglican clergy. 'During the fifteen years in which he was silenced as a

preacher, the family received some help from the Drydens, the 'same family which later produced the poet, John Dryden.

When Anne was fourteen years old, her father was given a third chance. The Church of St. Mar'tins in the Vintry, London, needed a minister, and Francis Marbury move'd his family to London and steeled himself to preach within traditional patterns for the sake 'of his family.

Two influences seem to have been powerful stimulants in young Anne's 'life: her father with his deep interest 'in religions and questioning mind, and widening horizons of the dawning 1600's in London. The lively and intelligent girl must have listened eagerly to discussions of rebligion as clergymen visited with her father. She must have been 'aware of the ships coming and going to the New World. In London Anne met Mary Dyer. Their friendship was to have profound results in the New World.

After five and a half years in London, Francis Marbury died. There then appeared at the parson-

age a young man from Alford. He wanted to marry Anne, and he came at the right moment. So she married Will Hutchinson and went back to Alford to live. Will had inherited his father's dry goods business, which he ran successfully. For the next twenty years, Anne ran her household and bore children, one about every eighteen months.

Anne's life, though busy, must have seemed placid after London. Anne was a woman who had to use her mind. She poured over the Bible and came to believe that God spoke directly to her through His Holy Scriptures. Hearing of an eloquent young vicar at St. Botolph's in Boston, twenty-four miles to the south, Anne persuaded Will to take her whenever 'possible to hear the Rev. John Cotton preach. Will was always ready to do whatever pleased his wife. Anne found in Cotton's sermons the intellectual stimulation she had longed for. He brought current happenings into his sermons, and revealed the workings of God at the very moment in which they lived.

There were informal discussions of the sermons in the manse next to the church. Members of the congregation could express their opinions, though it was firmly understood that only the minister could interpret the true meaning of the Scriptures. Only the minister was under the Covenant of Grace. That is, only through him did the Holy Spirit interpret the Word of God. Members of the congregation were under the Covenant of Works, meaning their salvation came through following the rituals and moral precepts of the church. This awesome chasm between ministers and congregations was to become a factor of destiny in Anne's life. But at the

time she was undisturbed. She was satisfied to have contact with new ideas and the dynamic personality of the Rev. Cotton.

In 1630 there was a plague in London. Early that year Anne opened her Bible and read, "Suffer the 'little children to come unto me." An inner knowing flooded her. Her two small daughters would die that year. When they did, she felt that God had prepared her for the sorrow. At the cemetery she confided this revelation to her husband and Rev. Cotton. Her minister was comforting. He said although the minister should interpret Scripture, in times of great need God might speak directly to an ordinary person. Years later, at her trial in Massachusetts, Cotton was unable to remember he had ever made such a heretical remark.

At St. Botolph's, Cotton was cautiously turning to Puritanism. After warnings and a trial at the Star Chamber, he decided to follow John Winthrop to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Anne longed to take her family and go with her minister, but she was eight months pregnant. Her oldest son Edward went.

From America Cotton wrote the Hutchinsons, telling them of their safe voyage on the *Griffen* and urging them to come on the next trip. By this time the second Susannah had been born, named after the little Susannah who had died in 1630. Searching her Bible for guidance, Anne came to a verse from Isaiah, "Thy teachers shall not be removed in a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers." The decision was made. In 1634, when Anne was 42 or 43, she and Will, with their children, set sail in the *Griffen*. Mary

Dyer would follow as soon as her husband sold his millinery business.

The confining life on the ship bottled Anne's energies. When she thought of something to do, it 'seemed as if her energies exploded into joyous activity. She got 'together a group of women to discuss religion from a woman's point of view. They chanted Psalms (singing was thought to be pagan). Soon fifty or sixty women were meeting and enthusiastically expressing their views on religion. The men on board were astonished, shocked. One of the men, Mr. Bartholomew, heard Anne say that God had {forewarned her of the death of her two little girls. Another, Rev. Symmes, was no doubt inwardly upset 'because women were ignoring his meetings to attend those of Mistress Hutchinson. But one man approved, Will Hutchinson. He proudly declared that God had revealed to his wife that the *Griffen* would sight land on September 18th. It did.

Anne must have been in high spirits at the thought of seeing her son and the Rev. Cotton. Both were on hand when she disembarked. It was later in the day before she could talk with Cotton. There was then a cloud over her minister's welcoming. There were reports, he muttered, about her "conduct and opinions." Her husband would be #admitted to the Church at once, but there would have to be an inquiry into her qualifications for membership. "Here it be tactful to hold one's tongue," Cotton told her. Mr. Bartholomew and the Rev. Symmes had recommended that Mistress Hutchinson be denied membership in the Church. But Cotton would do what he could for her.

Denial of church membership would mean that Anne could not live

in the colony. Church and state were for practical 'purposes one and the same. Cotton went to the senior minister, the Rev. Wilson, pleading that it would be cruel to send away the family which had just made the long trip from England. Rev. Wilson finally agreed that Mistress Hutchinson could enter if she would confess to "wrong thinking."

Anne was not alarmed. Making confession of 'error was a common practice in the church. Cotton warned her to be discreet and told her of the coming trial of Roger Williams. Anne made 'confession of wrong thinking, in her own mind referring to errors of judgment in her home. Discreet 'enough this time not to be overly candid, Anne was admitted to church membership and thus to life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Will Hutchinson had brought his bolts of cloth with him to the New World and soon prospered in his dry goods business. He provided a spacious home for his family. Anne gained a reputation as a skillful nurse, always willing to help in sickness and at "birthings." Cheerful and energetic, she was welcomed especially by the younger women who 'often felt 'isolated and homesick. Indian women 'began to bring sick babies to her. Anne seemed to have time and love for everyone who needed her.

She had something more to give; her serene and comforting belief that God would speak to anyone who listened for Him, even in the privacy of one's home and without the need of a minister. After the men of the colony began having week-day 'meetings to discuss Sunday sermons, meetings from which women were excluded, Anne's friends began to gath-

er at her house for the same purpose. Anne suggested that each woman bring the quilt or rug she was working on.

So popular were these gatherings that eighty or more women sometimes attended. The first order of discussion was Sunday's sermon. But gradually women began to question and to express their own ideas, and were influenced by Anne's ideas. Anne considered herself a follower of the Rev. Cotton whose ideas were slightly less rigid than those of other ministers. But Anne's quick and eager mind often worked over Cotton's ideas and carried them much further than Cotton had. Some of Anne's friends went even beyond her, saying that if a person were under the Covenant of Grace (that is, had the Holy Spirit within him), he was no longer bound by moral conventions. Some converted their husbands to these ideas. A few men, such as Capt. John Underhill, Indian fighter and man of unpuritanical morals, were much relieved to be assured of salvation without concern for their deeds. From the point of view of the authorities, things were getting out of hand.

Governor Winthrop worried about his flock. God would desert the colony if they "sinned at so cheap a rate." Twice he sent delegations of ministers to exhort with Anne. Final truth had been revealed, they told her, in the King James Version of the Bible. Anne argued that if Wycliffe had removed errors from the Bible, and Martin Luther and John Calvin had further refined its meaning, then possibly the King James Version was not the final truth. The ministers answered that by their training and the Covenant of Grace

they were able to interpret the Bible according to its true meaning. Besides, if every one could be under the Covenant of Grace, of what use were ministers?

That was the crux of the matter. But not quite. In a theocracy, heresy has to be also sedition against the state. Governor Winthrop had more to worry about than that God would abandon the colony. There was a movement afoot in England to change the charter of the colony. Winthrop could not afford to have divisions within. In addition commodities were scarce in the rapidly growing towns. It was difficult to keep prices within reach of the settlers. If eternal salvation were not dependent upon moral behavior, would not merchants and artisans be tempted to profiteer? Moreover, some of Anne's followers refused to bear arms or fight against the Indians. How would the colony be protected?

The Rev. Cotton took Anne aside and sternly warned her that she must "cease and desist" from holding gatherings and making public statements. Anne heeded the warning. Possibly there might have been smooth sailing for a time had not other events occurred. Anne's baby, Zuriel, born in the New World, had convulsions and died. Did that not show God's displeasure with Anne? Then Mary Dyer gave premature birth to a monstrously deformed child. Anne heled the midwife bury it, But the secretive burial was spied upon. Winthrop ordered the tiny body exhumed. The midwife was banished as a witch, and rumors flew that both Anne and Mary Dyer had consorted with the Devil.

Clearly Winthrop must act, though he was not foolish enough to accuse

any man in the colony of being the Devil. He was chiefly concerned with the stability of the colony. Mistress Hutchinson was at the root of all troubles. "She hath lost her wits by giving herself to reading and writing," Winthrop wrote in his diary. "She, contrary to Scripture, rules the Roost . . . She is an American Jezebel . . . She shall be tried as an Heretic."

Reports that have reached us of two trials, and references to them in later Puritan records, differ in many details. Some of the reports were written years afterward. Some were sympathetic, some hostile. Did the first trial last two or three days? Was it Sir Henry Vane or John Winthrop who presided? Whoever it was, Winthrop was the moving influence. Was it after two or more than five hours of standing before her accusers that Anne, pregnant again, 'fainted? Though details may conflict, certain outlines stand clear. Certain statements were recorded, and there is little doubt about the spirit of the trials.

They were more in the nature of an inquisition than a procedure for justice. Anne was allowed no counsel, no witnesses. At one point, when *Anne* insisted on knowing what rule of Scripture she had violated in teaching women, Winthrop could quote no Bible verse and fell back upon arbitrary authority. "We are your judges, and not you 'ours." At another time when Mr. Bartholomew remembered that Anne had claimed a revelation that the *Griffen* would make landfall on September 18th, Anne 'replied, "And did it not?" Winthrop told her that she had no right to ask questions.

Much of the hostility of Anne's

accusers stemmed from the fact that a woman, presumed to teach religion and that her teaching had stirred up other women. A woman should instruct children and servants and help her husband. The Rev. Hugh Peter made clear the kernel of bitterness when he said, "You have stepped out of your place. You have been rather a husband than a wife; and a preacher rather than a hearer."

Anne was tried before the Great and General Court of Massachusetts in November 1637. When she was sworn in, she noticed that the Bible lay open to the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Anne was accused of 82 errors in belief and conduct.

The officials sat at a long table, more than thirty of them. About 200 spectators sat on hard benches. Only Anne, in 'mourning for her dead child and again pregnant, stood in the unheated room. When accused of having instructed women, she quoted verses from Acts and Titus. When Mr. Bartholomew brought up the claim to a revelation from Cod that Anne had made in the churchyard cemetery in Alford, Anne admitted that a cemetery is a public place, "although there be mostly those that cannot hear."

When the Rev. Symmes testified that Anne had preached aboard the *Griffen* to women, she stated that the Rev. Symmes' own wife had thanked her for her counsel. When her accusers affirmed that God spoke only through ministers, Anne quoted two instances in which Governor Winthrop had described God's sending instant catastrophe upon sinners. She suggested that perhaps the Court

believed that the Covenant could be either of Grace or Dis-Grace. The bailiff was forced to call for order in the courtroom.

The officials were trying to prove that Anne had made claim, in a public place, of having received direct revelation from God. This distinction 'between heresy in public and in private sounds hypocritical to modern ears. But in a theocracy like the Massachusetts Bay Colony, private heresy could be dealt with by admonishment and instruction. Public heresy struck at the very foundations of the Church-State. After some quibbling, it was admitted that Anne's home, where she had taught women, was a private place. Repeatedly Anne answered accusations with a polite but firm, "Prove this then, Sir, that you say I did."

There was no pause for food or drink, nor any seat offered to Anne. A moment came when she fainted. (Winthrop wrote in his diary, "an attempt to gain Pity and Postpone the (Course of Justice.")

The following day the Court was shocked to hear Anne request that the ministers be sworn in, an insult to their character and veracity! No doubt Anne hoped that under oath their memories would be less vague. Finally one minister consented and others followed suit. Rev. Cotton testified last. He swore that he could not remember ever hearing Anne make the statements of which she was accused.

The ordeal was over, and it ended as Anne had known it must. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness." In an upsurge of joy and gratitude, she proclaimed that God had given her this sign. The silence that followed must have hit

her like a physical blow. The hours of strain, the endurance she had summoned from the very depths of her being, everything was undone in one unguarded moment of joyous release. The courtroom was a public place!

There was nothing to do but to square her shoulders and accept the sentence. It came within an hour. She was suspended from the Church, to be confined in the home of Joseph Weld, wealthy deputy of Roxbury Town; "til the season of the year be fit and fair for her banishment." One wonders who was responsible for that one small show of mercy toward a pregnant woman and her children. She would not be banished until spring!

The winter in Weld's house must have been a trying one for Anne. Used to managing a large household, she was now confined to another's home and in Coventry. No one could speak to her except her family and ministers. Will Hutchinson, practical man that he was, went south to Roger Williams' colony to look for a place to live. The ministers continually importuned her to recant. Anne acknowledged faults of speech, temper, and conduct, and retracted some of her more extreme statements. But she would not deny that the voice of God had spoken to her.

Far from recanting completely as the ministers wanted, Anne brooded and developed more unorthodox views. It is wrong to say that Indians are not human because they are not in Christ. A child should not be 'baptized, because he does not know what is being done to him. Each new error of Anne's 'strengthened Winthrop- belief that he must root the Devil out of New England.

In the middle of March in 1638 when several of the congregation including Will Hutchinson were away, Winthrop called a second trial without giving Anne even one hour's notice. The conditions of the trial were like those of the first one, but Anne was different. She made no attempt to trim her words to the magistrates and ministers or to outwit them. Instead, she added fuel to the fire by proclaiming new "Errors." "Sunday should not be set aside as the Lord's Day, we should be good Christians every day." "You should not preach that we will have these same bodies in heaven. What of men who have been burned?"

The change in Anne has sometimes been attributed to her menopausal pregnancy. Regardless of that, she would have been less than human if she had not been tired and depressed. Under the restrictions of Corentry, her mind would not be still. Somewhere in her thinking Anne had reached a point of no return. She would say all that her mind told her was right.

To persist in Error was Pride. To be unsubmitive in matters of doctrine (especially for a woman!) was to Lie. The tortuous Puritan logic is incredible to the modern mind. Anne did not believe in resurrection of the body. Did she then believe in the doctrine of the community of **women** (promiscuity)? Anne emphatically did not. At this, the Puritan reasoning went to work. If bodies are not resurrected, then there is no marriage or giving in marriage; if there is no marriage, there must be promiscuity. Therefore, if you do not believe in resurrection of the body, you lie when you say you do not believe in promiscuity. The Rev. Cot-

ton for long years Anne's minister and friend, unable either to change Anne or to silence her, now turned completely against her. He had never heard, he said, that Anne had been unfaithful to her husband, yet that would surely follow. One wonders if he would have said that had Will Hutchinson been in the courtroom.

When the vote came, it was thirty to one, not just for banishment but for excommunication also. Anne threw herself on the mercy of the Court. She was no Puritan, she now realized. She would leave the Church but let her stay in the Colony. That could not be, Winthrop told her. Anne raised her voice to a shout. "If you do me harm, God will ruin you, and your posterity, and this whole state and this religion." A curse! There was commotion in the courtroom. Two young men, John Throgmorton and Thomas Cornell, rushed to her side and were promptly banished along with Anne.

The woeful speech of "casting out" was given by the senior minister, the Rev. Wilson. In the name of Christ he delivered the heretic to Satan and ordered her to withdraw from the congregation as a leper. Then it was the turn of Anne's own minister, the Rev. John Cotton, to speak. "The great questions of this present time are how far liberty of conscience can be given to those that truly fear God?" he began. Was he troubled at the excommunication? He went on to read the mournful versed from Isaiah 16. Anne cried aloud. Mary Dyer walked from the courtroom with her.

The Hutchinson family was not alone in moving to Roger Williams' colony. Mary Dyer, her family, and eighteen others joined the Hutchin-

sons. Misfortunes came upon Anne, one upon another, in the Providence area. In June there was an earthquake which came while Anne was preaching. A few weeks later Anne's pregnancy was terminated in what modern doctors have said was probably a hydralidiform mole. "Judgments of God on Anne and their own vindication," said Bay officials.

In September 1641 a hurricane blew the roof off the Hutchinson home. Then in the spring of 1642 Will Hutchinson died, the husband who had stood by Anne through every kind of trouble and 'called her "a dear saint and a servant of God."

Roger Williams' colony where freedom of conscience was permitted, attracted settlers so rapidly that Massachusetts Bay felt threatened, and attempted to extend its control over the Providence area. Winthrop sent a delegation of ministers, headed by the Rev. John Wilson, to urge Anne and others who had fled to recant before it was too late, for they would soon be again under the jurisdiction of the Bay Colony. The answer of many of the families was to move farther into the wilderness.

We do not know by what means of travel Anne reached Westchester in June or July of 1643. There were sixteen persons in her party including a 22-year-old son, two grown daughters, a son-in-law, and four younger children. They settled probably in what is now Eastchester, along the banks of the stream now named for them, the Hutchinson River. There is some evidence that Anne had arranged with a Capt. James Sands to have a house built.

Westchester may have been chosen for their refuge because the Cornell and Throgmorton families were al-

ready here. Capt. Underhill, banished from Massachusetts Bay for having supported Anne Hutchinson, had helped to settle Greenwich, Connecticut. These four families lived each a few miles from the other.

Anne had been warned that the Indians in the area were disgruntled because white settlers were appropriating their land. Anne was unconcerned. Had not Indian mothers brought their sick babies to her?

At first the Indians seemed friendly. But one summer evening, probably in August, when Capt. Underhill was away fighting Indians at Sing Sing, a party of braves attacked the other three families in the area. Some of the Cornells and Throgmortons escaped. Of the Hutchinson household all were murdered except the youngest child, Susannah, who was taken captive by the Indians.

Throughout New England there were reverberations after Anne's murder. To Governor Winthrop a proud Jezebel had been cast down. But from many places came bitter accusations about the harshness of Massachusetts Bay officials. Anne's tragic ending stirred feelings against puritan rigidity and desires for more freedom of conscience.

Was Anne a fore-runner of the woman who fights for liberation today? She was at least in part, a woman of her own times. Her consuming interest, religion, was the consuming interest of her peers. She seems never to have expressed resentment at fourteen pregnancies nor to have imagined it could have been any other way. Though her life furthered the cause of religious freedom, she asked only for the right to share her beliefs. Though Anne ministered to the loneliness of the young women

in the colony, she had no particular concept of women's rights. She did not engage in civil disobedience, as did her friend Mary Dyer who deliberately and repeatedly returned from Providence to Boston to preach, until she was hanged. Though Anne believed Indians should not be enslaved, her understanding of what white settlements were doing to the Indian way of life was limited to the outlook at her times. Intelligent, quick of wit, compassionate, and filled with energy, Anne was unique in the stern Puritan community, but she was a woman of the early seventeenth century.

In one way Anne was spiritual kin to the women of today's liberation movement. She *permitted herself to be herself*. While she welcomed the role of wife and mother, she did not accept the silence and submission part of that role in her time. Her nature was compassionate and she did good works, but not because she believed them necessary for salvation.

Above all, she constantly used her keen mind on the material her age provided. Her refusal to mold her thinking to the approval of the authorities was called Pride. They would not have recognized the term self-respect. Anne had the fearlessness of a nature uncomplicated by too many considerations. Loyalty to truth as she understood it, and self-respect as we understand the term, were her guiding stars.

Anne Huttdhinson was an uncommon woman for her day, or for any day. A free spirit and an independent mind have timeless appeal.

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