

God's Controversy with New England

by Michael Wigglesworth

Written in the Time of the Great Drought, Anno 1662

*Wigglesworth was a Puritan clergyman, who wrote this "jeremiad" in verse. A **jeremiad** is a long literary work, usually in prose, but sometimes in poetry, in which the author bitterly laments the state of society and its morals in a serious tone, and always contains a prophecy of society's imminent downfall.*

Beyond the great Atlantic flood
There is a region vast,
A country where no English foot
In former ages past;
A waste and howling wilderness,
Where none inhabited
But hellish fiends, and brutish men
That Devils worshiped.

This region was in darkness placed
Far off from heavens light,
Amidst the shadows of grim death
And of eternal night.
For there the Sun of righteousness
Had never made to shine
The light of his sweet countenance,
And grace which is divine:

Until the time drew nigh wherein
The glorious Lord of hosts
Was pleased to lead his armies forth
Into those foreign coasts.
At whose approach the darkness sad
Soon vanished away,
And all the shadows of the night
Were turned to lightsome day.

Some were desirous to be taught
The knowledge of thy ways,
And being taught, did soon accord
Therein to spend their days.
Thus were the fierce and barbarous
Brought to civility,
And those that lived like beasts (or worse)
To live religiously.

O happiest of days wherein
The blind received sight,
And those that had no eyes before
Were made to see the light!
The wilderness hereat rejoiced,
The woods for joy did sing,
The valleys and the little hills
Thy praises echoing.

Our temporal blessings did abound;
But spiritual good things
Much more abounded, to the praise
Of that great King of Kings.
God's throne was here set up; here was
His tabernacle pight:
This was the place, and these the folk
In whom he took delight.

Our morning stars shone all day long:
Their beams gave forth such light,
As did the noon-day sun abash,
And's glory dazzle quite.
Our day continued many years,
And had no night at all;
Yea many thought the light would last,
And be perpetual.

Such, O New-England, was thy first,
Such was thy best estate:
But, Lo! a strange and sudden change
My courage did amate.
The brightest of our morning stars
Did wholly disappear;
And those that tarried behind
With sack-cloth covered were.

*Are these the men that prized liberty
To walk with God according to their light,
To be as good as he would have them be,
To serve and worship him with all their might,
Before the pleasures which a fruitful field,
And country fl owing-full of all good things, could yield?*

*Are these the folk whom from the British Isles,
Through the stern billows of the watery main,
I safely led so many thousand miles,
As if their journey had been through a plain?
Whom having from all enemies protected,
And through so many deaths and dangers well directed,*

*Is this the people blest with bounteous store,
By land and sea full richly clad and fed,
Whom plenty's self stands waiting still before,
And poureth out their cups well tempered?
For whose dear sake an howling wilderness
I lately turned into a fruitful paradise?*

*If these be they, how is it that I find
Instead of holiness Carnality,
Instead of heavenly frames an Earthly mind,
For burning zeal lukewarm Indifference,
For flaming Love, key-cold Dead-heartedness,
For temperance (in meat, and drink, and clothes) excess?*

*Whence cometh it, that Pride, and Luxury
Debate, Deceit, Contention and Strife,
False-dealing, Covetousness, Hypocrisy
(With such like Crimes) amongst them are so rife,
That one of them doth over-reach another?
And that an honest man can hardly trust his Brother?*

*How is it, that Security, and Sloth,
Amongst the best are Common to be found?
That grosser sins, instead of Graces growth,
Amongst the many more and more abound?
I hate dissembling shows of Holiness.
Or practice as you talk, or never more profess.*

*What should I do with such a stiff-necked race?
How shall I ease me of such Foes as they?
What shall befall despisers of my Grace?
I'll surely bear their Candle-stick away,
And Lamps put out. Their glorious noon-day light
I'll quickly turn into a dark Egyptian night.*

*If here and there some two, or three, shall steer
A wiser Course, than their Companions do,
You make a mock of such; and scoff, and jeer
Because they will not be so bad as you.
Such is the Generation that succeeds
The men, whose eyes have seen my great and awful deeds.*

*Now therefore hearken and incline your ear,
In judgment I will henceforth with you plead;
And if by that you will not learn to fear,
But still go on a sensual life to lead:
I'll strike at once an All-consuming stroke;
Nor cries nor tears shall then my fierce intent revoke.*

*Our healthful days are at an end,
And sicknesses come on
From year to year, because our hearts
Away from God are gone.
New-England, where for many years
You scarcely heard a cough,
And where Physicians had no work,
Now finds them work enough.*

*Our fruitful seasons have been turned
Of late to barrenness,
Sometimes through great and parching drought,
Sometimes through rain's excess.
Yea now the pastures and corn fields
For want of rain do languish;
The cattle mourn, and hearts of men
Are filled with fear and anguish.*

*The clouds are often gathered,
As if we should have rain;
But for our great unworthiness
Are scattered again.
We pray and fast, and make fair shows,
As if we meant to turn;
But whilst we turn not, God goes on
Our fields and fruits to burn.*

*Beware, O sinful Land, beware;
And do not think it strange
That sorer judgments are at hand,
Unless thou quickly change.
Or God, or thou, must quickly change;
Or else thou art undone;
Wrath cannot cease, if sin remain,
Where judgment is begun.*

*Ah dear New-England! dearest land to me;
Which unto God hast hitherto been dear,
And mayst be still more dear than formerly,
If to his voice thou wilt incline thine ear.*

*Consider well and wisely what the rod,
Wherewith thou art from year to year chastised,
Instructeth thee. Repent, and turn to God,
Who will not have his nurture be despised.*

*Thou still hast in thee many praying saints,
Of great account, and precious with the Lord,
Who daily pour out unto him their complaints,
And strive to please him both in deed and word.*

*Cheer on, sweet souls, my heart is with you all,
And shall be with you, maugre Satan's might:
And whereso'ere this body be a Thrall,
Still in New-England shall be my delight.*