coherent social organism. Ironically, what was most uniquely "American" about the policies of earliest Dedham was the intensity of their utopianism. For here in the New World the settlers could heed almost without restriction whatever mysterious fears urged them to reconstruct in new perfection the ancient patterns of social organization.

2

The Heart of Perfection: The Church

DEDHAM WAS NOT to be a theocracy. By law, the Puritan clergy could not become officers of the civil society here or elsewhere in the colony. In some ways, the local church actually came to occupy a position of isolation. A good many of the lay elders of the congregation would play no role in the leadership of the town, while the town government, though it shared control of the business affairs of the church, had so little to do with religious beliefs that references to the Lord appeared in its records only twice in fifty years.

This superficial isolation did not mean that the church was irrelevant to the life of the new community. Quite the contrary, it was in several ways central to the settlers' experience. In the first place, these Englishmen had not left their homes merely to organize their own township. John Allin, their first minister, spoke for most of them when he wrote that only "the hope of enjoying Christ in his ordinances" could have persuaded the emigrants to "forsake dearest relations, parents, brethren, sisters, Christian friends and acquaintances, overlook the dangers and difficulties of the vast seas, the thought whereof was a terror to many, and . . . go into a wilderness where we could forecast nothing but care and temptation." [1] Even before a church was organized, this overriding concern for the implementation of true Christian faith had been written into the town Covenant, ensuring that the townsmen would be Christians in secular life

1. John Allin, *Defense of the Answer Made unto the Nine Questions or Positions Sent from New England . . .* (London, 1648).

as well as in church. Once the church was formed, the inhabitants of the town would assemble several times each week to hear sermons or lectures in practical piety, most of them would become members of the church, and church and town officers together would keep watch over the moral tone of the community. So, if anything, the church was to be the focus of that revived Christian spirit which had brought the settlers to America and was to illumine every aspect of their communal life.

At the same time, the church was intimately related to the community of Dedham in that both were organized around the principles of autonomy, exclusiveness, and unity. The local church emerged as an autonomous congregation whose membership excluded persons who could not prove they had received saving grace and in which the members were united by a covenant of love. Although these features were eventually expected of all churches by the religious authorities of the colony, the idea of a self-governing corporation of the saved was not just imposed from above. Founding their church in the years when the spiritual leaders of Massachusetts were still groping their way toward a definition of the true Church, the Dedham townsmen contributed to the growing insistence on what came to be called "congregationalism" and "the church of saints." Their church was organized according to their own vision of religious perfection, a vision which in this respect was very like their vision of social perfection. Both town and church partook of a common utopian form whose sources lay with yet beneath Puritan Christianity, in the Bible yet also in the ancient enduring motives of peasant communities.

* * *

Founding a church was more difficult than founding a town. For the town, it had been enough to write down the skeletal social ordinances of the Covenant, whereupon admissions and

allotments had gone forward, but months of painstaking discussion had to pass before a church covenant could be agreed upon. The basic principles were probably clear from the beginning, since they were largely the principles already written into the town Covenant. But in seeking to establish a true church the townsmen were trying to discover the exact means of salvation, a task whose implications were of the utmost importance. When it came down to the fine points of theology, their only authoritative guide was the Bible, a diffuse, obscure, sometimes contradictory book. It is no wonder that the process took time.

They began late in 1637, with a series of meetings open to "all the inhabitants who affected church communion . . . lovingly to discourse and consult together [on] such questions as might further tend to establish a peaceable and comfortable civil society and prepare for spiritual communion." [2] The townsmen, "being from several parts of England," sought to become "further acquainted with the tempers and gifts of one another." The meetings were held on the fifth day of every week at several houses in rotation. After the man of the house had opened proceedings with a prayer, each person asked questions or talked as he felt the need, all "humbly and with a teachable heart not with any mind of cavilling or contradicting." "Which order," wrote John Allin, "was so well observed as generally all such reasonings were very peaceable, loving and tender, much to edification." The weeks of mutual exploration probably spared them many later contentions.

"After which," Allin noted, "we proceeded to such as more properly concerned the scope of our meetings." Facing the task of gathering a church, those in attendance hammered out thir-

2. This and following quotations concerning the foundation of the church are from John Allin's "Brief History of the Church of Christ . . . at Dedham in New England," written shortly after the events it describes and reprinted in *Records*, II, 1–21. The genesis of the process of founding a church in Puritan New England is discussed in Morgan, *Visible Saints*.

teen questions and answering propositions containing the doctrinal base of the proposed congregation. They began with a clean slate. Did they, as a collection of Christian strangers in the wilderness, have any right to assemble with the intention of establishing a church? The answer was positive. As they understood the meaning of the Bible, "the right to pray, fast, consult, and institute a church" flowed from the relation of individual believers to Christ; they did not have to be either members of or under the supervision of an existing church in order to begin a new one. Assured of the legality of their endeavor, the participants went on to list the canons of the perfect church.

The second proposition set forth the universal "duties of Christian love," these being "to exhort, admonish, privately comfort, to communicate and improve any gift . . ., to relieve the wants of each other." Typically, the rule of love was placed before the complexities of doctrine. But the third question forced them to leave behind a simple fellowship of love; it asked "whether having these privileges of Christian communion [question one] and being bound by such duties [of love, question two], we may not rest in such a condition and look no further?" The reply was firm: "Negatively, we may not, but [must] seek for a further union even such as may . . . convey unto us all the ordinances of Christ's instituted worship, both because it is the command of God . . . and also because the spiritual condition of every Christian is such as stand in need of all instituted ordinances for the repair of the spirit." The Quakers would one day shrink back from this conclusion, resting content with a loving fellowship of believers, leaving to each man the details of his own worship. The Puritans were more skeptical about the ability of the individual to find a valid form of worship. Putting their faith instead in the church institutions which the Bible seemed to demand, they moved beyond.

The essential feature of "Christ's instituted worship" was spelled out in the answer to the fourth question. The church fellowship was to be restricted to "visible saints . . . agreeing to live together in spiritual communion . . . in the use of all the holy instituted ordinances . . . of the gospel." Only congregations of saints could exercise the ordinances of Christian worship, since by the word of Christ only they were pure enough.[3] How then were visible saints to be distinguished from other men? The fifth proposition replied, "a profession of faith and holiness [and] the fruit of it as makes it visible makes a man fit matter for a visible church." God alone knew the identity of the saints, knew who had received grace and who would one day be elected to join the company of the saved. But a person's public behavior and his profession of faith—his spiritual autobiography—could serve to identify him as a visible saint, almost surely one of the elect of God. By measuring candidates' lives and experiences against their own, the members of a church could select those who were "fit matter" to join. The rest, excluded, would attend dutifully the sermons delivered in the meetinghouse, awaiting the spiritual quickening that might come to carry them past the examination and into the inner communion. The sixth proposition provided that the saints thus selected were to sign a covenant which would knit them "firmly in the bond of love . . . and a sweet communion," serving also as a contract with God for the observance of the forms ordained in the Bible.

Yet how could those present examine candidates or write a church covenant if there were among them no proven saints? To ask a neighboring congregation to select the first saints and founding members would be unthinkable, since each congregation was responsible directly to Christ for the purity of its standards. The problem was solved by asking a few likely men to "join by way of confession and profession of faith" to one another in order to assure themselves that they were suitable

3. Communion, the baptism of children, and the election of officers were reserved for the visible saints. Other ordinances of Christian worship (especially preaching) were available to persons who were not members of the church; but all ordinances were, in the strict sense, "exercised" (dispensed) by the congregation of saints.

founders of a church. After testing each other for sainthood, these pillars of the church could then sign a covenant and judge the spiritual qualifications of applicants. "But," it was added, "the number and what persons should first join is not much material, so they be such as are living stones . . . and also be of that innocency of life as may invite others more willingly to join to them."

The remaining six questions and propositions filled in the broad spaces of this framework, listing the ordinances of the church (baptism, communion, marriage, preaching), naming its offices. At the end the faith in "brotherly love" was reaffirmed. Doctrines had been spun out with infinite care and legalistic turns of speech, but before and after all doctrine came the rules of the spirit which were to lead the way to an enduring church.

The search for doctrine having ended, the search for the "living stones" on which to found the church began. In the early Spring of 1638, ten men chosen by all present began to meet separately "after solemn invocations and humiliation . . . before the Lord, . . . to open their conditions and declare the workings of God in their souls . . . [and to] approve or leave out as the Lord should give us to judge of every one's conditions or fitness for the work." The goal was a lengthy mutual testing of the men who had been chosen likely candidates for "soundness of grace." Each was to speak all he knew of himself or the others with neither ambition nor reticence. After "many meetings" six of the ten were found suitable, as was John Hunting, a new arrival in the town, while Edward Alleyn was considered a strong possibility. Of the remaining three, Joseph Kingsbury, still "stiff and unhumbled," and Thomas Morse, "not being able to hold forth anything that might persuade the company of a work of saving grace," agreed to suspend their candidacies for the moment.

The eight most likely submitted themselves to "a meeting or conference of the whole town," asking the inhabitants, "if they had any offences or grievances in their spirits from any of us and knew any just cause which might move us to leave out any, that

now they would faithfully and plainly deal with such a one." Though there were no bruised feelings in Dedham, several men from out of town arose to complain of offenses at the hands of Edward Alleyn. His replies satisfied everyone, so all eight men gained the unqualified approval of the meeting. John Allin, Ralph Wheelock, John Luson, John Frary, Eleazer Lusher, Robert Hinsdell, John Hunting, and Edward Alleyn were the products of six months of doctrinal debate followed by six months more of intense mutual examination. A wrong step, the misreading of the Word or of a man's character, could have threatened the purity of the church. Now, in November of 1638, nearly two years after the General Court had created the new township and a year after the first exploratory meetings of the settlers, the covenant could be signed and the church instituted.

Preparations for the ceremony went forward in an atmosphere of joyful expectation. Invitations were sent out to the churches and magistrates of the colony, asking them to send representatives to see "that nothing might be done therein against the rule of the gospel." The men of Dedham had every reason to ask the "advice and counsel of the churches" and "countenance and encouragement of the magistrates," for they had been careful in searching out the rule of the gospel. They did not expect objections. In case the authorities should decide to object, Dedham reminded them that strict congregational theory meant that each congregation was responsible only to Christ, implying that any objections which were not couched as advice would be looked upon as unwarranted interference. On the chosen day John Allin read aloud the founders' profession of faith. He asked that it be criticized "faithfully and plainly." No criticism was voiced. The covenant, which included a promise "to live together . . . according to the rule of love in . . . faithful mutual helpfulness in the ways of God for the spiritual and temporal good and comfort on one another," was likewise approved by all present. The eight pillars signing the document, the church was begun at that moment.

Not even this ended the process. Though candidates for

regular membership could now be heard and admitted, there were no officers. Without a minister, a teacher, or an elder there could be no preaching and no communion. Still another "tender" search began; after more months of humble discussions another ceremony followed, at which Allin was ordained as minister, John Hunting as elder, and the church was fully constituted.

So the utopian theory behind the foundation of the church proved much the same as that behind the foundation of the town; it is summarized in the words autonomy, exclusiveness, and unity. But the parallel had not been exact. In the case of the town, exclusiveness and unity were complementary virtues; strangers were kept off in order that the inhabitants might live undisturbed under the rule of love. The theory did not work that simply in the case of the church. While religious exclusiveness protected the pure church and fostered a close fellowship among the saints, it was potentially disruptive in the wider context of the town, since some of the inhabitants of the town might not meet the spiritual standard required for membership in the church. What if tension should arise between those inhabitants who were members and those who were not? The drive for perfection in the church could lead to conflict in the town! Recognizing this source of dissonance in their utopian scheme, the townsmen had taken great care to balance the exclusiveness of the church with a larger unity. They had created not only a pure church whose members were closely bound together, but also a church which the whole town had helped to create, could agree to support, would regularly attend, and perhaps could expect one day to enter. Should that day come, church and town, co-existent creations of the same impulse, would become virtually identical, no more than two aspects of one perfect Christian community.

* * *

Harmony continued to prevail as the congregation was formed and settled into the life of the town. The inherent ex-

clusiveness of the church was all but forgotten for the first twenty years. Admissions during this period were frequent enough to make the membership of the congregation and the town substantially the same. Seventy percent of the adult men in town in 1648 had become members, as had many of their wives; in other families wives alone were members. Eighty percent of the children born in Dedham between 1644 and 1653 were baptized, the membership of one or both parents qualifying them for the sacrament. Women joined in equal numbers with men. Servants joined their masters in the company of saints, and men of modest means mingled freely in the fellowship with men of substance.[4] When the wife of Robert Hinsdell became "fearful and not able to speak in public, . . . fainting away there," the church refused to let the customary public examination keep out a shy saint; she was admitted on the basis of a private conference. The congregation may have preferred "tender-hearted and hopefull" Christians such as Daniel Fisher or the "tender and brokenhearted" Henry Phillips, but the proud were gathered in as well: "Jonathan Fairbanke, notwithstanding he had long stood off from the church upon some scruples about public profession of faith and the covenant, yet after divers loving conferences . . ., he made such a declaration of his faith and conversion to God and profession of subjection to the ordinances of Christ in this church that he was readily and gladly received by the whole church." Even "stiff" Joseph Kingsbury was not left out; rejected as a founding member in 1638, he entered the fold in 1641. Though nonmembers were consequently rare, the town did not discriminate against them; John Haward and Samuel Morse were elected to public offices before they had joined the

4. If in the aggregate the church members were slightly more wealthy than the few nonmembers, this was primarily because the latter tended to be younger persons who had as yet had little time in which to acquire either grace or estate. If there was any discrimination, it was on the basis of age rather than of wealth, and this "discrimination" may have been the result of a voluntary reluctance on the part of young persons to seek membership. See a later discussion in this chapter.

congregation. In view of the high rate of admissions, the townsmen may have assumed that Haward and Morse would be members soon enough.[5]

Much of the good order of the church was attributable to John Allin, who had steered the townsmen through the complications of their search and urged on them the humility which had eased the way. His account of the process and his public writings in defense of New England Puritanism reveal that Allin valued Christian love above theological perfection. It was no accident that the sermon which his parishoners later chose to reprint as a memorial was entitled, "The Lord Jesus, His Legacy of Peace." The sermon stated the theme of Allin's career: ". . . all troubles and all dangers shall not hurt this peace, but all shall work together to the furtherance of their everlasting peace, which . . . will guard your hearts against all evil whatsoever."[6]

While he lived, Dedham's first minister was given material proof of the respect of the town. His salary of sixty to eighty pounds yearly was a handsome sum in a society in which a total estate of 500 pounds meant wealth. On each division of public land his name was near the top of the list, his share one of the largest.[7] More important to Allin was the fact that this generosity was entirely voluntary. Not a word about the sordid details of collections or arrears in salary could be found in the records during his tenure. Both members and nonmembers gave silently, freely, as the spirit moved them.

Fifteen years after the founding of the church, Edward Johnson remarked that the religious community in Dedham had "continued in much love and unity from their first foundation."

5. *Records*, II, 21ff. lists admissions. The quotations are from 14, 21, 24, 29; *Records*, II, 21ff., III, 69, 77 for the points about Haward and Morse.

6. *Records*, II, 1–21; Allin, *Defense of the Answer;* Allin, "The Lord Jesus, His Legacy of Peace" (Cambridge, 1671), also in E. Burgess, *Dedham Pulpit* (Boston, Mass., 1840).

7. See *Records*, III, IV; Allin's estate inventory is on file at the Probate Office of the Suffolk County Courthouse.

The record bore him out. No open disputes had flared within the congregation, no one in the town had criticized the saints. Johnson's observation was included in his *Wonder Working Providence,* a breathless account of the achievements of the Puritans in New England. Considering the religious quarrels which had divided men in England, it is possible to understand why Johnson added Dedham's "love and unity" to his list of the many wonders wrought by God in the northern wilderness.[8]

* * *

Despite the success in establishing harmony, it was ultimately an attachment to exclusiveness which most marked the Dedham church. Throughout the colony the second half of the seventeenth century brought challenges to the doctrine of a church of saints. Most of the men and women of the emigration had been seekers after God with their whole hearts, as their actions testified. The experience of grace had come to them often, if not easily. But what about their children, brought young to America or born there never having known the heresies and persecutions of Anglican England? Would they be so ready to feel the work of divine grace on their sinful souls? If they did not, they could not become members of the church. What would become of their children in turn, for the children of nonmembers could not even be baptized? And what would become of the Puritan Church in the colonies as fewer became members and fewer still were introduced into its traditions by baptism? As the first generation died off, the covenants would lack adherents and the Church would dwindle to a handful of saints. Along with many other communities, Dedham came face to face with this dilemma. From 1653 to 1657 only eight inhabitants were admitted to membership; none joined from 1657 to 1662. The

8. Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*, edited by J. F. Jameson (New York, 1910), 180. For examples of disputes, see Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma, The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston, Mass., 1958).

young men and women of the second generation were coming of age but were not joining the church. They were not hostile; they simply failed to undergo the profound emotional conversion required for sainthood. By 1662 nearly half the adult men in town were not members and their numbers were growing steadily as ever more young men grew to maturity. Since their children were not eligible for baptism, the proportion of infants baptized into the church fell from eighty to forty percent.[9] Yet, while the ministers of the colony took steps to head off disaster, the Dedham congregation clung to the church of saints.

The ministers convened a Synod in 1662. Retreating from advocacy of the pure church of saints, they created an additional "half-way" membership bound by a "half-way" covenant of its own.[10] Under the new covenant the children of the saints could become members entitled to all ordinances except communion if they would show that they understood, believed, and would try to obey the word of God as revealed in the Bible. By avoiding the requirement of an inner experience of grace, the new membership opened the churches to the second generation and guaranteed that the third generation would be baptized. John Allin volunteered to defend the new doctrine against its conservative critics, having seen in his own town the pernicious effects of the old way.[11] But, alas for Allin, his own congregation would not compromise its desire for perfection. The members refused to allow "half-way" members to join the saints in the church so that the Dedham church narrowed still further. The disagreement never became a dispute; Allin stayed on to the day of his death, honored if not always heeded. But there could be no doubt that the congregation was determined to preserve the pure church that the members had so carefully constructed.

9. *Records*, I, *Births, Marriages and Deaths;* II, 21ff.; and tax lists in IV.

10. See Perry Miller, "The Half-Way Covenant," *New England Quarterly*, VI (1933) 676–715, and Morgan, *Visible Saints*.

11. John Allin, *Animadversions on the Antisynodalia Americana* (Cambridge, Mass., 1664).

Other reluctant congregations abandoned resistance in 1671, when an overwhelming majority of the towns' representatives to the General Court voted support of the doctrinal authority of the clergy, but Daniel and Joshua Fisher, representatives from Dedham, dissented.[12]

Though it never brought either the congregation or the town to open argument, the path of resistance was a hard one. A temporary reverse followed Allin's death late in 1671. Remorse and repeated refusals from ministers offered the vacant pulpit persuaded the congregation to back down. The change of heart was sincere: "We acknowledge the fault to be ours, not that of our pastor, who brought us up properly and showed the way and the word clearly and long . . . [especially the] church duty to the children of the covenant born of us and growing up with us as members of the church by divine instruction and so the proper subjects of . . . church privileges . . . . We are now under the conviction of our total neglect of the practice of this doctrine . . . . We do therefore hereby solemnly and in the fear of God . . . acknowledge all such children of the covenant . . . to be joint members of this particular visible church together with ourselves . . . . We apply and cry earnestly unto God for his spirit and grace whereby we may be all enabled to stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together not only in faith but the order of the gospel that both may abide with us from generation to generation forever."[13]

But the issue did not rest there. From 1685 to 1692 the church was once more without a minister. Once again likely young Harvard men were offered the pulpit and once gain they refused. Late in 1691 the congregation at last put an end to all resistance: "The church of Christ in full communion . . . do

12. Massachusetts Historical Society manuscript in *Photostats* file, June, 1671; *The Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay* . . . , IV, part 2, 492.

13. Massachusetts Historical Society Manuscripts, in the catalogue under "Dedham, 1672."

now by their vote declare . . . that the declaration of the synod [of 1662] and the doctrine of their late reverend pastor is according to the mind of Christ and do resolve through his help and grace to practice accordingly."[14] A minister was soon found and the issue never arose again.

Such enduring exclusiveness is a formidable mark of the intensity with which the men of Dedham sought perfection in their religion. The attachment to a pure church was not easily loosened by time and circumstance; fathers passed on to their sons the adherence to the old principle of membership, and the sons who did not become saints did not object to the narrowness of the church. Originally justified by Puritan ideology, the commitment to exclusiveness gained its persistence from what has been called "tribalism," the eternal desire to protect the ways of the community against the encroachment of change.[15] Like the town, the church sprang from a thirst for perfection whose origins were deep and whose complex effects permeated every part of the common existence.

14. Manuscripts in the vault of the Dedham Historical Society.

15. "Tribalism" was first applied to the Puritans by Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (1944; Rev. Ed., New York, 1966), ch. 7. For an example of the use of religious organization (and ceremony) to re-enforce peasant communal corporatism in a Catholic country, see "Religious Aspects of the Social Organization of a Castilian Village," Susan Tax Freeman, 1969, *American Anthropologist.*

3

The Pattern of Communal Politics

"AT A GENERAL TOWN MEETING it was voted as followeth," "It is by general consent ordered," "Ordered by general consent"—the expressions of what today is called town meeting democracy were current in this seventeenth-century village. Yet it is not correct to say that the myth of the democratic New England town has a firm basis in fact reaching back to the beginnings of this town. Even to raise the question is to do an injustice to the past. Between the seventeenth century and the twentieth a conceptual revolution took place, a revolution in which the banners of popular democracy raised high by the nineteenth century were victorious. Land of the free, Andy Jackson, the people's President, I'm as good as the next man, Tippecanoe and Tyler too, torchlight parades and barbecues—the men of early Dedham knew none of these; the present age cannot escape them. From the time of the democratic revolution all politics has been the politics of universal manhood suffrage and correspondingly of "deals" for the common man whether New or Fair or Square. Questions about the political style of the distant past tend to be colored by this subsequent layer of experience. Inquiries are prejudiced by the knowledge that a tradition of popular democracy has become America's gift to the world. Actually the very term "democracy" was rarely used in the seventeenth century and was then devoid of the favorable overtones now attached to it. It is anachronistic, therefore pointless, to look for anything resembling modern democracy in early Dedham.

What was the style of political life in this long-ago utopia? It was a thing unto itself, full of contradictions which the modern mind is hard put to resolve but which were no contradictions at all to the mind of the seventeenth century.[1]

* * *

The town meeting was the original and protean vessel of local authority. The founders of Dedham had met to discuss the policies of their new community even before the General Court had defined the nature of town government. Acting in March, 1635, the Court gave a broad mandate to all such assemblies of townsmen; they were authorized to make bylaws not repugnant to the laws of the colony and to "choose their own particular officers."[2] Shortly after receiving this official sanction the Dedham meeting called into being its companion in local government, the board of selectmen. On May 3, 1639, the town resolved, "whereas it has been found by long experience that the general meeting of so many men in one [assembly to consider] of the common affairs thereof has wasted much time to no small damage, and business is nothing furthered thereby, it is therefore now agreed by general consent that these seven men hereunder named we do make choice of and give them full power to contrive, execute, and perform all the business and affairs of this our whole town—unto the first of the tenth month next." Yearly thereafter the meeting chose seven men to act as a town executive with "full power" over most affairs.[3] Because

1. The discussions of politics in this and in the seventh chapter are expanded in "The Evolution of Massachusetts Town Government, 1640 to 1740," by Kenneth A. Lockridge and Alan Kreider, *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXIII, (1966), 549–74.

2. *Records*, III, 1–2; *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay* . . . , I, 172.

3. *Records*, III, 53. The General Court recognized the innovation, which was soon employed by nearly all towns, in the Body of Liberties of 1641; William H. Whitmore, ed., *A Bibliographical Sketch of the Laws of the Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1686* (Boston, Mass.,

political power in the town (as in most towns) soon polarized around the meeting and around these "select-men," the story of communal politics must be woven around these institutions.

John Gay wanted to build a barn nearer his fields. The trouble was, the best site for a barn was on public land. At the end of February 1667 he went to a meeting of the board of selectmen and asked for "an enlargement of land near his land beyond Andrew Duane's for the setting of a barn." The board sent Daniel Fisher, a selectman since 1650 who eventually occupied the office thirty-two times together with the novice Thomas Fuller, to "view the place desired and make return of what they judge meet in the case." Since he had already taken up his share of the recent divisions of town land, Gay did not have any land coming to him. Instead, Fisher and Fuller worked out a swap; Gay would give the town the right to run a road across his house lot in the village in return for the two acres of town land he had selected as the site for the barn. Four acres of swamp leading from Gay's fields down to the Charles River would be thrown in to overcome his reluctance at the prospect of cart traffic rumbling beneath his windows. It was not a bad bargain. Anyway the only recourse would be an appeal to the next meeting of the whole town and the approach of planting season made that delay unwise. Gay accepted. The selectmen approved, sealing the bargain two weeks after the request.[4]

Much of the power of the Dedham selectmen derived from a thousand variations on the theme of John Gay's barn. Thomas Aldridge's widowed mother wanted to take up her proprietary share of the "Natick Dividend" near her house rather than out by Natick as was expected of everyone else. Michael Metcalf said that his grandfather had forgotten to claim a rightful share

1890), 49. See also *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay in New England*, II, 4, 6–9, 163, 180. Unlike the selectmen, the town's lesser officers did not have broad discretionary powers, being confined to one or two highly specific functions.

4. *Records*, IV, 147–48, 154.

in a former division; the records should be checked, the right recognized, and the land granted. Joseph Kingsbury had been assigned some "very bad land" and sought to trade it for better land elsewhere. Francis Chickering needed a little triangle of common land so that he could straighten the fence around his field.[5] They came to the selectmen, Gay, Aldridge, Metcalf, Kingsbury, Chickering, all the members of this agricultural town who wanted something from the public domain.

Indeed, the selectmen enjoyed almost complete control over every aspect of local administration. They determined the guilt or innocence of men accused of breaking the bylaws. Who was responsible, the farmer whose ill-kept cattle had escaped to trample someone else's grain or the fellow whose tumbledown fences had let the straying beasts into the fields? The selectmen would decide. Questions of the location of highways and of men's ways of access to their fields came up frequently. These entailed touchy issues of property rights—the rights of the public versus the individual or of one landowner versus another—customarily resolved by the selectmen. Townsmen who took firewood or hay from the common lands would risk a fine unless they had the prior approval of the selectmen. The seven men acted as the guardians of the social order by investigating rumors of disorderly conduct and dictating stern remedies. It was a rare townsman who did not find himself either wanting or having to attend the selectmen at several of their meetings each year,[6] and it was a rare selectman who did not find himself judging most of his fellow townsmen in the course of a year. The full board met in formal session about ten times yearly, more often in less formal groups of four or five. The business brought before them might take a few minutes and a few lines in the town book, but it could as easily take much of the day and several pages in the record. The typical panel

5. *Records*, III, 201; IV, 71, 148, 153–54.
6. *Records*, III, IV, V, abound in examples. Henceforth, pages will be cited only where examples are singular or scarce.

of selectmen had accumulated a vast store of experience in the intricacies of town life, had dispensed favors, punished wrongdoers, heard and settled problems by the score. As in the politics of any age, power led to experience and experience enhanced power.

Not merely in the trivia of administration but in every major sphere of political activity the selectmen developed a strong initiative. Appointive powers were shared with the meeting, the selectmen naming fenceviewers, sealers of weights and measures, and others of the lesser functionaries. When presented with a difficult problem, the board would appoint a special committee of townsmen instructed to investigate and report back. The power of the purse fell largely to the selectmen, who estimated the needs of the town and periodically levied taxes. This was an especially sensitive task, for it involved determining how much each townsman was obliged to pay. The town's chief legislators, the selectmen promulgated important bylaws without prior consultation with or subsequent approval by the general meeting. These ranged from the usual laws concerning livestock and fences to a broad statute imposing controls on whatever mines might be discovered, enacted in 1647.[7]

The initiative of the board reached a peak in its control over the functioning of the town meeting itself. Colony law required one or two annual gatherings for electoral purposes, but beyond this the selectmen called whatever general meetings seemed necessary. They called very few. When they did, they prepared a detailed agenda to guide the meeting. The agenda included proposals for action, and it was not unusual for the procedure to run as follows: "an order being presented already drawn by the selectmen—being put to vote it was voted in the affirmative, confirming the same for a town order." [8]

7. *Records*, III, 84, 119; V, 50–51, 143, 168, 173, will give examples of points not immediately obvious from a look at any part of the records.
8. See *Records*, IV, 35, 74–75, 123, 222; the quotation is from

The line between such strong leadership and complete domination might have been crossed with a little effort. In some English parishes (the English original of the town) the select vestrymen had begun with legal powers comparable to those of the Dedham selectmen and had evolved past the stage of strong leadership into uncontrollable, self-perpetuating oligarchies.[9] Not the least of the circumstances which kept this from happening in Dedham was the care with which the board of selectmen exercised its manifold powers. Every request was duly heard, duly investigated. The plea of a selectman received the same treatment as the plea of any townsman. Votes of the town were executed without hesitation, and not one incumbent questioned the town's right to elect another man in his place.

Who were the selectmen? As selectmen they were the most powerful men in town. As men, they were few in number, old, relatively rich, and saints of the church.

Forty-three men served as selectmen between 1639 and 1687, averaging eight terms each. This persistent returning of men to the office reflects the town's inclination to leave a man in office if he passed the test of his first few terms. The inclination went so far in some cases that the town was in fact led by a very few men: ten men, perhaps five percent of the adult males living in Dedham before 1687, were returned to office so often that they filled sixty percent of the selectmen's posts, thereby supplying sixty percent of the local leadership. The ten averaged twenty terms apiece in careers ranging from fourteen to thirty-two terms, careers which they like most selectmen began in middle life, usually about age forty. In the seventeenth century a man of forty could hardly expect to live past seventy, so, once

IV, 125. As will be seen in chapter 7, the power of the selectmen was to undergo a radical change in the post-1686 period, as indeed was the whole political style of the town. The style depicted here was unique to the seventeenth-century town.

9. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government . . . , I, The Parish and the County* (New York, 1906), 39, 41n., 42–43, 173ff.

embarked on their careers, these ten men served for most of their remaining lives. The duty was not continuous—every experienced selectman taking an occasional year off—but it was almost continuous. And even when out of office each of the ten was asked to lend advice or lead emergency committees. Another fifteen men occupied the office for four to twelve terms, averaging ten. They supplied another thirty percent of the leadership. The careers of the men in this group tended to be cut short by premature death or by departure from the town. A last group of eighteen men served one to three terms, less than two on the average, and accounted for only ten percent of the leadership.[10] By and large these were the rejects of a system which sought strong leaders and having found one returned him to power as often and as long as he was available.

The selectmen were comparatively wealthy men, both because they had lived long enough to wring prosperity from the stubborn soil and because the voters liked to elect the more substantial of the mature townsmen. The typical selectman's estate placed him somewhere in the richest quarter of the townsmen. The less well off were not called as often as their more prosperous fellow townsmen, nor were they called back as often. Twelve of the twenty-seven most wealthy men on the 1666 tax list acted as selectman for a total of 100 terms, while of the sixty-three less wealthy taxpayers only seven served for a mere forty-one terms. Wealth was not everything—some men from the lower ranks were called to office—but it helped. How much it helped can be seen from the cases of the ten leading

10. Averages are rounded off. There were minor exceptions to the rule of seven men a year. The information is from *Records* I, III, IV, V (records of births and deaths, and of yearly elections, etc.). Judgments of the data are, again, based on an implicit comparison with the post-1686 period, discussed in chapter 7. Demographic information is treated more fully in chapter 4. The ten were Eleazer Lusher (first elected 1639), John Dwight (1639), Francis Chickering (1641), Peter Woodward (1643), Timothy Dwight (1644), Joshua Fisher (1649), Daniel Fisher (1650), John Hunting (1658), Daniel Pond (1661), and Thomas Fuller (1661).

selectmen. By the time they reached their third terms (the point at which the long-term leaders tended to be kept on and the others set aside) all ten were in the upper third, seven were in the upper sixth, and five were in the top tenth of the taxpayers.[11]

The predominance of men of substance is all the more remarkable in a society whose spectrum of wealth was not in actual fact very wide. From its beginnings and for some time thereafter, the town contained neither a distinct class of English-style gentry nor seventeenth-century versions of the millionaire. The voters had to create their own "aristocrats" by picking relatively wealthy farmers and keeping them in positions of leadership, which they did. In this practice they echoed the decision of the founders to reward with extra land such relative "rank and quality" as a few of the first settlers had managed to acquire in England. Both actions stemmed from the same desire to balance with a measure of hierarchy and respect, the collectivism of the covenantial ideology and the tendency toward middle-class homogeneity resulting from the nature of the exodus and from the primitive economy.[12]

11. Tax lists in *Records*, III, IV, V. All lists and all selectmen at all stages during and preceding their careers have been considered. The 1666 list is in *Records*, IV, 119ff., and is not an extreme example. Regarding the top ten selectmen, see *Records*, III, 152–53, 213–14; IV, 37–38, 90–91, 104–05. In three cases the evidence is of necessity drawn from a time later than the third term, but still early in the man's career. See chapter 4 for a description of the social structure.

12. See chapter 4 for a discussion of the relatively limited spread of the hierarchy of wealth, which in fact emerged among the middle class immigrants who settled Dedham.

The political practice of "creating aristocrats" did not arise simply because the more wealthy men alone could devote the necessary time to public duties and therefore *had* to be preferred over men struggling to make a living. In neighboring Watertown—which had a comparable social and political structure in all other respects—the voters ranged widely and evenly through the levels of taxpayers in selecting leaders (see Lockridge and Kreider, "The Evolution of Massachusetts Town Government"). Dedham's voters could have done the same, but chose instead to elevate the more wealthy of their fellows. No doubt the voters saw the advan-

A large majority of the selectmen were members of the church, a circumstance which added to their prestige and which strengthened the bonds between the town corporation and the church corporation but did not necessarily reflect a local preference for saints. It happened that the selectmen with the longest careers—nine of the leading ten for example—had established themselves at a time when most men were church members. They continued to serve in the following decades, occupying places that might otherwise have been given to younger men maturing in the years when church membership was no longer so characteristic.

The influence of the most prominent selectmen went considerably beyond the limits of excutive functions within the town. It was these men whom the town sent as its representatives to the one superior it recognized, the General Court of the colony. All but five of the years to 1685 saw one of the ten sitting as Dedham's man in Boston and three of them—Eleazer Lusher, Daniel Fisher, and Joshua Fisher—virtually monopolized the post after 1650. Lusher achieved distinction in colonial circles by his election as Assistant, a rank surpassed only by the Governor and Deputy Governor. During the ten years he held the honor (1663-1673) Lusher was a one-man ministry of all talents, acting now as diplomat, now as judge, now as mediator in the convolutions of high Puritan politics. Daniel Fisher rose to become Speaker of the House of Deputies in 1680 and after three years in that powerful role he moved up to the rank of Assistant, dying not long after. These were men of many distinctions, rich in knowledge of a world otherwise little known in Dedham. They bridged the gap between the ethnocentric utopia in the woods and the larger spheres of English history,

tages in time and dedication that would accrue from the selection of more wealthy men, but the case of Watertown shows that there were no economic or political forces that *required* men to elect the wealthy for these reasons alone. Obviously, the Dedham voters' political ideology also involved innate respect for, rather than suspicion of, the wealthy.

whose operations were even then moving toward a day in which such backwoods utopias could no longer exist. For the time being, they were able to protect their community while doing its tasks in the outside world.[13]

The men who occupied the town's most powerful office were men of immense prestige, but there was another side to their character. As mentioned, their restraint in office was consistent, and in or out of office there is no indication that they treated one another to special favors. They worked hard, giving their time without salary or so much as an honorary title to ease the burden. During some busy months a third of their time would not be their own. Their relative wealth was the town's profit, since their incomes were enought to free the leaders from the worst distractions of a struggle for subsistence. All had been apprentices in the art of government, each having spent several years in the grubby lower echelons of local service. Beginning perhaps as fenceviewer or (alas) hogreeve, each submitted himself to the town's watchful eye. Each had avoided giving offense yet earned the necessary respect as he moved up toward the highest office. Most important, each selectman had been *chosen* by his neighbors. The town wanted these men, called them back repeatedly, elected them to other high posts and to the leadership of its militia company. If the town was an oligarchy, it was a peculiar oligarchy.

* * *

The repeated fact that the selectmen were, after all, elected, naturally brings attention back to the town meeting. Surely here was the touchstone of local politics. But it was an elusive touchstone, if indeed there was such a thing in the complex patterns of Dedham's political life.

13. *Records,* IV, Appendix, lists the terms and illustrates the activities of the representatives. See also the card catalog, Massachusetts archives, Basement, State House, Boston, under "Lusher" and "Fisher."

In theory, the power of the town meeting knew no limit. The town had called the board of selectmen into existence and could as easily abolish the institution altogether. On occasion the town would reaffirm the broad mandate of power given to the board and in the very fact of affirmation confirm the ultimate power of the meeting. In a memorable upset in 1660 the town actually went so far as to negative the proposal, "whether they [the selectmen] should have the same power their predecessors have had" and underlined their dissatisfaction by voting out of office every single incumbent—though the pique soon passed. Theoretical power might be translated in very specific ways into real power any time the townsmen assembled. They might pass bylaws, appoint special committees of their own, or grant small favors to petitioners; they customarily admitted new townsmen and appointed many lower officers. Anything the selectmen could do, they could do. Just to make sure the selectmen did their job well, the meeting would sometimes bring up for approval all the acts and accounts of their executive.[14] The yearly elections gave the town a fine tool for use against its leaders, for not only could an entire board be removed but also any one selectman could be singled out for vengeance and left in limbo for one year, two, three, or forever.

The voting membership of the meeting was generally wide enough to include a fair majority of the townsmen, so most men had a voice in local affairs and most could vote to remove an errant selectman. Though the colony law concerning local suffrage shifted with the changing attitudes of the colonial authorities toward the franchise, and though the consistency of the law's application in the town is questionable, some generalizations are safe. Up to seventy percent of the male taxpayers were eligible under a law in effect to 1647, whose chief requirement was church membership. Whatever the law's requirements, the town meetings of the first few years were informal gatherings in

14. *Records,* III, 62, 126, 147; IV, 29. Other meetings are described every few pages in *Records,* III, IV, V.

which all men probably voted. As Dedham interpreted a new law of 1647, only men under twenty-four were ineligible to participate, so the legal suffrage rose to over ninety percent of adult males. An additional requirement of twenty pounds taxable estate imposed in 1658 did little to reduce this; a town voting list for 1666 includes the names of eighty-three of the ninety-one male taxpayers. A law of 1670 raised the amount needed to qualify to a stiff eighty pounds, but took effect slowly since it allowed all town voters who had previously qualified under the old law to continue in the privilege regardless of their estates.[15]

Yet broad as its powers and membership were, the town meeting was essentially passive. It lacked initiative, its veto was quiescent, and its theoretical powers were for the most part symbolic. Meeting on the average only twice a year, the town never had a chance to acquire or apply the consistent expertise of the selectmen. Most meetings stayed close to the agenda prepared by the selectmen and were brief in comparison with those of the board. Formal review of the acts and accounts of the executive was sporadic and at best perfunctory. The townsmen seemed glad to leave most decisions to their leaders, often "referring to the selectmen" to "prepare and ripen the answer." Whatever the answer, it would not be challenged; the town never presumed to replace a substantive decision of the selectmen with its own will. The upset of 1660 was the single occasion on which the town used its theoretical right to withdraw the power of the selectmen and the only time the annual election was used to remove an entire panel of seven men.[16] Year after year for half

15. The most readily accessible summary of the suffrage laws is in B. Katherine Brown "Freemanship in Puritan Massachusetts," *American Historical Review*, LIX (1954), 865–83. Some of Mrs. Brown's interpretations should not be considered final. See *Records*, II, 13–39; III, 20–62, 152, regarding the suffrage to 1647. The list of voters in *Records*, III, 190, confirms the breadth of the 1647–1658 suffrage. For 1666, see *Records*, IV, 119–20, 124. The tax lists in *Records*, IV, V, yield post-1670 figures.

16. See Lockridge and Kreider, "The Evolution of Massachusetts

a century the town elected a wealthy and experienced group of respected friends, took their suggestions, obeyed their bylaws, and left them to run the town without interference.

Furthermore, the law of the colony imposed an increasing degree of narrowness on the right to political participation. Even the comparatively generous local suffrage law of 1647 had excluded young men under twenty-four. The law of 1670 was designed to shut out almost all young men coming of age thereafter. A man might easily be forty before he acquired the necessary eighty pounds of taxable estate or he might never acquire that much. By 1686 only a quarter of the male taxpayers could meet the eighty pound minimum, and though some of the rest could vote because they had been voters before the law of 1670 took effect, nearly half of the taxpayers were not eligible to cast a vote in the town meeting. On the level of the provincial suffrage, the colony law continued to insist that full church members alone were eligible to vote for representatives and Assistants, and church membership in Dedham had fallen to half of the male taxpayers by 1662 and continued to fall thereafter.[17] All in all, if the town was a democracy, it was a most peculiar democracy.

* * *

The system's prime virtue was that it worked. The very ambivalences of the allotment and use of power produced a marvelously stable politics. No man, group of men, or single institution could run away with the town and generally none wanted to try. Supported at every turn by the policy of mediation introduced by the Covenant, this political system gave Dedham fifty years of tranquil government. But to call the

Town Government." As with the selectmen's behavior, that of the meeting was to change. For 1660 see *Records*, IV, 29–30.

17. *Records*, II, 13–39; V, tax lists for 1680's. A law of 1664 admitted a few very wealthy non-saints to the colony suffrage; B. K. Brown, "Freemanship in Puritan Massachusetts" discusses but somewhat misunderstands this law.

system successful is still not to describe it: "A successful thing unto itself" is hardly satisfactory. What label fits an oligarchy which was not an oligarchy and a democracy which was no democracy? An excursion into the theory of politics in seventeenth-century Massachusetts offers a tentative answer.

Though a new age of revolutionary political theories was even then beginning, order was still the highest political value in the seventeenth century, as it had been for some centuries before. Thomas Hobbes was no innovator when he observed that human society is naturally inclined to chaos. Hobbes' argument in favor of strong rulers merely secularized the old Christian justification of government. God had given man the capacity to sin, Adam and Eve had sinned, thenceforth men were forever imperfect, forever condemned to fall into immorality and discord. As sin was divinely ordained, so was government. The state existed to restrain the sinful impulse and punish the sinner, not simply because sin was wrong, but because the visible church needed an orderly world in which to fulfill its part of God's plan. A society in which violence interrupted the work of the clergy and unbridled license smothered all examples of virtue was not a proper arena for man's struggle for salvation. The much-maligned James I was only invoking the commonplace when he spoke of the divine right of kings, for traditional theory gave divine sanction to the rulers of the state. Likewise Shakespeare's frequent sallies in praise of order were no more than resounding summations of the deep-rooted spirit of his age. And similarly, much of the "reform" thought of the radical English Protestants of the seventeenth century envisioned not a new and mobile society stressing individual opportunity but rather a social commonwealth whose prime features were security and Christian love.

The Puritans of New England had ample reason to hold to and indeed to extend the seventeenth century's faith in order. Their conception of a whole society bound to God by a covenant

made the existence of sin an immediate danger, for to allow sin was to breach the contract with God, thereby inviting his wrath down upon them all. Further, their desire to build a perfect visible church accented the need for a state which would give the church an orderly social setting for its work. Circumstance lent practical force to these arguments; England might use any sign of discord in Massachusetts as an excuse to revoke their charter and take over the government in the name of good order. Such a move would shatter the emigrants' covenant and with it their "city on a hill."

But it does not require Hobbesean skepticism, original sin, or Puritan perfectionism to explain the love of order. All were present, but beneath all, as ever, lay the peasant's inbred fear of chaos. Robbery, extortion, war with its legalized murder—few peasant villages had not lived precariously close to these disasters. Only late in the fifteenth century had the Tudor state ended the bloody baronial feuds which had kept England in turmoil for generations, and it would be at least another century before the age of inchoate popular uprisings would come to an end. The confidence generated by uniform legal order imposed by a central monarchy was new to Englishmen's experience. A little below the surface were folk memories of violence and a longing for peace and certainty.

Such was the background of Dedham's peculiar political behavior. A product of its time, the town Covenant had obliged men to pledge obedience and had gone to some lengths to provide mechanisms for the preservation of order. Men of their time, and also men aware of the dangers involved in founding a perfect society in the wilderness, the townsmen of Dedham took the Covenant to heart. They settled their disputes peacefully and used their electoral powers to elevate a handful of substantial men, leaving in their hands the direction of the community. Sanctified by their election, the leaders of Dedham were further sanctified by their success in keeping order, and thereby they

gained re-election repeatedly. Today's praise for democracy as the key to opportunity and for dissent as the harbinger of change would have been grotesquely out of place in such a society, where order outranked opportunity and the changes brought by dissent were not expected to be fruitful.

But a narrow-minded passion for order was not the only source of the town's political behavior. Had it been, there would have been no need for a town meeting. The founders or the colony's Governor could have imposed a set of lifetime rulers who would name their own successors, a complete oligarchy in short. The Puritans' desire for order was more sophisticated than this. Their intense Christianity led them to see in unity rather than in repression the essence of true order. They "demanded that in society all men, at least all regenerate men, be marshalled in one united array . . . . The theorists of New England thought of society as a unity, bound together by inviolable ties; they thought of it not as an aggregation of individuals, but as an organism, functioning for a definite purpose, with . . . all members contributing a definite share . . . ."[18] Therefore, a degree of popular participation was valued, for it would both symbolize and strengthen the unity of all men in the common Christian society. Consent would strengthen unity and that unity would lead to a higher form of order.

So there was in the Puritan political philosophy a door through which the generality could enter to participate in the workings of government. But, at least on the level of the colony's theoreticians and leaders, it was seen as a very narrow door. It was only the saints who could hope to achieve genuine Christian unity, and therefore it was their participation that was the center of concern. Even in their case, "the commanders were not to trim their policies by the desires of the people . . . the officers were above the common men . . . ." The emphasis was on obedience: "When the Lord sets himself over a people, he frames them unto a willing and voluntary submission unto him . . . they follow Him not forcedly, but as far as they are sanctified by his grace, they submit willingly to his regiment." The chief participatory acts envisioned were the consent to covenants and the election of a few leaders, acts which would enhance the unity of the participating saints and at the same time give extra cachet to the leaders and to the political frame-work which they had established. Beyond this, participation was likely to be viewed as interference, conducive to disorder.

18. Miller and Johnson, eds., *The Puritans*, I, 182–83; see also Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933).

John Winthrop expressed it in this way: "It is yourselves who have called us to . . . office, and being called by you, we have authority from God." As for liberty, "[the] liberty you are to stand for is a liberty to [do] that only which is good, just, and honest . . . . This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority." A good subject was to resemble a good wife, for, "the woman's own choice makes such a man her husband; yet being so chosen, he is her lord, and she is to be subject to him, yet in a way of liberty, not of bondage; and a true wife accounts her subjection her honor and freedom . . . ."[19] Though Winthrop's statement exaggerated its authoritarian aspects, the fundamentals of the theory prevailed as the usual ideological justification for popular participation. The colony law continued to insist that church members alone were qualified to vote for colony officers because they alone could be trusted to perceive "that which is good, just, and honest" and to submit themselves to leaders with a like perception.

Perhaps because it was grafted onto a tradition of local consensus and cooperation which had long characterized English peasant communities, the theory had more positive overtones on the local level. The vote was not confined to church members (after 1647) and voters had the right to join in

19. Miller and Johnson, eds., *The Puritans*, I, 183, 190 (from sermons by John Davenport and Peter Bulkely), 206–07 (a speech by Winthrop to the General Court in 1645).

substantive decisions as well as to elect leaders. Still, the town's behavior reveals that the popular voice in Dedham acted in a manner consonant with the Puritan theory of popular participation. Men had signed the Covenant voluntarily and they voluntarily lived according to its commands. Their votes were customarily "by general agreement"—a voluntary consensus. In electing a man, they were asking him to lead a society united in love under the rule of the gospel; in obeying his decisions they were marching together freely in the practice of the "one truth" desired by all. The matching restraint of the selectmen derived more from their own stake in the common unity than from any fear of retaliation. And out of the unity thereby voluntarily achieved, the townsmen also enjoyed an enduring order such as no amount of force could have imposed.

Sixty-nine men of Dedham explicitly approved the prevailing theory in a petition of support sent to the General Court in 1665 to aid the government in its battle against English interference in the affairs of the colony. None of them was qualified to vote in colony elections and some could not participate in the town meeting, yet every last one expressed appreciation of "the great blessing we enjoy . . . in a Godly, righteous, and peaceable government."[20] These men said quite frankly that they valued a government "Godly, righteous, and peaceable" over the limited blessing of the suffrage. In an age in which the suffrage was viewed as one more way of maintaining unity and preserving order, the democrat's worship of the vote was far in the future.

To put it another way, conditions were not ripe for a philosophy of individualism. "The basic sociological findings . . . show that modern individualism depends appreciably upon extensive division of labor, institutional differentiation and cultural diversity."[21] The democracy of differing religions, immigration, urbanization, and contending economic interests was out of the question in the simple society of seventeenth-century

20. *Records*, IV, 276–78.

21. T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers, Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago, Ill., 1964), 233.

Dedham. Diversity had not yet been forced upon men. Until it was, a man's concern would be more with harmonizing himself with the one true way than with protecting his right to vote in a pluralistic world where individual rights had become the only refuge.

The political phenomenon at hand, which might be labeled "Conservative Corporate Voluntarism," actually lies not one but two layers deep in American history. A long distance from the popular democracy of the nineteenth century, it was only beginning to merge into the mechanistic political philosophy which was to characterize eighteenth-century Americans—particularly those eighteenth-century Americans familiar with Enlightenment thought and with contemporary English political theorists.[22] Dedham's political system was intricate, yet ultimately what had made political harmony in Dedham was not a clockwork balance of one power against another but voluntary restraint on the part of all concerned. Eighteenth-century thinkers would de-emphasize the notion of an organic society held together by voluntary restraint. In its place would come an emphasis on the balance of political elements, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, each with its own virtues and vices. Ideally, each would contribute its virtues while holding in check the vices of the others. Democracy would contribute the representation of a certain class of interests and the innate good sense of the commonry. The instability of democracy would be cancelled partially by restricting the suffrage to propertied men, partially by the stability of the monarchical and aristocratic elements. The theory of the eighteenth century allowed popular participation at once a greater and a lesser role than its predecessor. By justifying the participation of the commonry in a legislative role and by freeing the suffrage of religious restrictions, it opened a door to the later deification of democracy. Yet by destroying the Puritan notion of popular participation as a holy recognition of the organic unity of men (or at least

22. See Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

of all believers) in their society, the eighteenth-century outlook stripped the popular voice of a mystical level of human significance which it has since regained, alas, largely in the perverted world of plebescitary totalitarianism.

"Conservative Corporate Voluntarism" in politics, like the closed corporate community in which it operated, was "American" chiefly in that it was a uniquely intense expression of Old World ideals.[23] Only in the most tenuous sense can the roots of modern American democracy be traced back to the political experience of seventeenth-century Dedham. Its limitations and conservative theoretical context notwithstanding, the suffrage *was* significantly wider in Dedham than in England. Both in Dedham and in Massachusetts at large the many officers subject to election by this wider electorate exercised powers which were in the aggregate greater than the powers exercised by elected officers in England. In such innovations lay the deepest foundation of an American participatory mentality, a mentality born of a widened public role in government, which eventually would lead increasing numbers of men to demand a still wider role in their own governance. In this context perhaps the brief political upset in the town of Dedham in 1660 might be seen as the first faint movement of an awakening giant. And perhaps it is possible to see in the divine sanction with which all New England Puritans endowed a limited popular voice the beginnings of the later secular sanctification of Everyman's right to participate which paved the way for the triumph of democracy as a supreme virtue. But it must not be forgotten that modern democracy whether in practice or in theory was a long way in the future. It took far more than moderately wide participation, occasional popular protests, or veiled scriptural justifications to create that democracy.

23. For examples of the relationship of Protestant political theory to government in the Old World, see E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York, 1965); and also Gerald Strauss, "Protestant Dogma and City Government: The Case of Nuremberg," *Past and Present*, No. 36, 38–58.

4

The Pattern of Communal Society

IT HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE to view the settlers of Massachusetts Bay as men more pulled to America by the opportunity to found a new society than pushed there by the persecutions of Anglican England. Michael Metcalf, one of the founders of Dedham and for a time its schoolmaster, would have disagreed violently. On abandoning his homeland and his career as a master weaver in provincial Norwich, Metcalf had written a long letter "to all true professors of Christ's gospel" within that city.[1] Trying to justify his sudden departure from the Puritan community, he spoke of "the great trouble I sustained in the Arch-Deacon's and Bishop's court at the hands of my enemies concerning the matter of bowing as well as for other matters of like consequence." When hauled before the ecclesiastical court he had expertly quoted against the judges their own theologians and the Bible itself, but to his disgust "their learned and invincible arguments to refute my assertions were these: 'Blockhead, old heretic, the devil made you, I will send you to the devil.' " Frustration gave way to fear when "enemies conspired against me to take away my life, and sometimes, to avoid their hands, my wife did hide me in the roof of the house, covering me with straw." Having become a marked man, he had no choice but to flee to America. He counseled his less notorious fellow Puritans to remain in

1. *New England Historic-Genealogical Register* (Boston, Mass., 1880–), XVI, 279ff. See also *Records*, IV, 2.