

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.

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.

Norwich if they possibly could, advising them to "be not discouraged, . . . be chearly . . . have patience . . . abide the will of God, who worketh all things for the best for you." A "loving brother in exile persecuted for Christ's verity," Michael Metcalf would go out alone and unwilling to the savage land of Massachusetts. He went with his eyes on England, not on America: "O Norwich! The beauty of my native country—what shall I say unto thee."

Lives of other early settlers offer other glancing insights into the society of early Dedham. William Bearstow (alias Barstow, Beerstowe, Barstawe), for example, was neither as upright nor as articulate as Metcalf. The Assistants of the colony ordered him "to be whipped for drunkenness" in 1636. By the next year he was admitted to Dedham, where he was assigned a small bachelor's lot. Never a member of the church or a freeman of the colony, his subsequent land grants were below the average while his public responsibilities were limited to duties about the hog-yard in 1637 and menial labor on a boundary commission of 1641. At one point the town accused Bearstow of illegally felling timber. He and another defendant pleaded that it was all a "misunderstanding," but the town found them guilty, concluding that, "being poor and confessing their fault," the men should lose only the wood and their labor. The term "poor" was reserved to describe persons truly destitute, so it is likely that Bearstow had fallen on hard times. By 1639 he had a wife and child to support, and by 1643 two more children. As if to compound his problems, the soil of his eight-acre home lot was found to be stony and he had to ask compensation from the town in the form of additional land elsewhere. Sometime after 1643 he removed to Scituate, Massachusetts, selling his land in Dedham shortly thereafter. At this point he disappears from the record. Perhaps he became a solid citizen of Scituate, for he did leave some sort of estate at his death in 1668. It can only be said that for the brief time he was in Dedham William Bearstow was not a model Puritan

and was not finding the New World a land of milk and honey.²

Robert Hinsdell left facts in a trail that will be familiar to Americans as that of the classic pioneer. A pillar of the Dedham church, he was also a member of the first panel of selectmen. He had no trouble in supporting a family which included a wife and six children. In 1651, when an outlying region of the original Dedham grant became the town of Medfield, he moved there and there continued as a respected, prosperous man. Then Hinsdell's life changed abruptly. His attempt to become a merchant went awry, ending in 1663 with the surrender of his ninety-acre farm to the attorney of one Jeremiah Tawke, a London clothier to whom he owed 153 pounds. By this time others of his lands in Medfield had been mortgaged, and in 1671 he sold them all to the wealthy Samuel Shrimpton of Boston. Leaving the scene of his failure, Hinsdell moved out to the frontier town of Hadley, thence to a still more exposed settlement which later became the town of Deerfield. Here he and his family settled; he became a deacon in the church and set about clearing his new lands for agriculture. Four years later, when the Indians rose against the colony, Boston raised an expedition to defend the frontier, but at a place since named Bloody Brook the Indians encircled and overwhelmed the small force. In the massacre Robert Hinsdell and all his sons fell. The long series of moves beginning in England ended there at Bloody Brook in a death that was to become a more usual end for later Americans likewise seeking to begin life anew in the West.³

2. *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1630-1692* (3 vols., Boston, Mass., 1904), II, 63; *Records*, III, 28, 31, 46, 60, 62, 79, 86, 96, 106, 110, 151; I, 1, 2, 126; James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England* (4 vols., Boston, Mass., 1860-62), I, 129.

3. *Records*, I, index; II, 13ff; III, 53, 166, 187; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, II, 427; Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, *Grantor and Grantee* under "Hinsdell," "Shrimpton"; Massachusetts Historical Society manuscripts under "Hinsdell"; see also Herbert Cornelius Andrews, *Descendants of Robert Hinsdale* (Lombard, Illinois, 1906).

Not everyone who moved from Dedham moved west; Henry Phillips got fed up and moved back to the city. He had done well enough since his arrival in 1637, for by 1656 he was a member of the church, an officer of the militia company, and was receiving better-than-average dividends of public land. But the village did not offer him scope for his talents. Angry over the battle for larger proprietary shares in which he had led a group of dissatisfied settlers, Phillips moved to Boston without waiting for the compromise which ultimately restored harmony. In Boston he showed himself to be a versatile man, becoming a deacon of the First Church, a deputy to the General Court, and an enterprising butcher who built a successful business by catering to the colony's leaders. He died in 1685, after thirty years of urban life, wealthy and sufficiently well known to merit mention in Samuel Sewall's famous diary.⁴

Death as well as disappearance from the records might remove a man from Dedham's history. Edward Alleyn—"Mr." Alleyn, a title usually reserved for university graduates—began what might have been a career of considerable distinction. A pillar of the local church and one of the first panel of selectmen, he was the town's regular deputy to the General Court following 1638. After numerous services to the community he acquired the honorary title of "gent." More tangible recognition took the form of a farm of 350 acres given him by the town. While active and widely employed in the government of the colony, Alleyn found time to dabble in schemes for establishing an iron industry. But in 1642 Edward Alleyn was killed while in Boston

4. Here and hereafter, "wealth" means either total estate at death (from an estate inventory) or taxable estate at a given point in life (from local tax lists). The two correspond fairly closely, since most of a man's total estate was taxable. The latter, however, often can only be expressed in relative terms, because of unknown variables in the tax-assessment base. *Records*, I, index; II, index; III, 95, 106, 111, 143, 152, 160, 211; IV, 229ff; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, IV, 410; Suffolk Deeds; *Dedham Historical Register* (14 vols., Dedham, 1890-1904), III (1892), 158; Suffolk County Court Files, no. 894.

on public business, so a career which might have revealed the heights to which a townsman could reach from a base in a rural community was terminated before it had properly begun. Not all the settlers lived to ripe old ages from which they could reflect upon the meaning of their emigration to the New World.⁵

Still, some of them did become virtual patriarchs, relics of the exodus surviving into the days of the third generation. John Gay died in 1688 after half a century in Dedham. His experience described a long descending curve from the respectability of wealth and service into old age and relative poverty. The richest man in town in 1661 and variously a selectman, constable, and member of a county Grand Jury, Gay eased out of public life while his estate slowly tapered down to a mere ninety pounds at his death. Much of the wealth must have gone to his sons, yet other men gave property to their sons while still alive without making themselves near-paupers. And Gay's son, Nathaniel, could not have received too much from his father, since he too died possessed of a small estate. Whatever the reason, it was possible to live so long in the New World and come to so little—not to real poverty, to be sure, but not much above bare subsistence either.⁶

The departures and sad deaths just chronicled may give the impression that Dedham was possessed by a malevolent spirit. Not so. Success was possible, provided vast riches were not the expectation. John Dwight was able to give his son a house and land and still have an estate worth more than 500 pounds on his death in 1660. The usual landmarks of local service and church membership distinguished his career, but more relevant were the large grants of land that went with the distinction of sixteen terms as selectman. Together with judi-

5. *Records*, II, index; III, 36, 42, 44, 52, 53, 55, 67, 73; IV, 289-91; *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay* . . . , I, index under "Alleyn."

6. *Records*, III, 37, 41, 63, 105, 139, 151, 193; IV, 292; V, 41, 70, 99, 156; *New England Historic-Genealogical Register*, IV, 379-80; XI, 112; XXXIII, 45-57.

cious purchases, these grants made Dwight one of the richest townsmen in the years between 1649 and 1660. He passed both his comfortable estate and his prestige on to his son, Timothy, thereby initiating a family line marked by both distinctions.⁷

Eleazer Lusher was the one settler who could have made a fortune had he wished. Within the town his political influence was unmatched, while within the colony he was one of a handful of men who made the vital decisions. His position as deputy and as Assistant brought him into contact with enterprising men from all over New England. Yet Lusher never became overwhelmingly wealthy. His estate of some 500 pounds was less than the estates of several of his village neighbors and only grants of land from town and colony in recognition of his services brought his estate up to this moderate level. He died less wealthy than almost any of his fellow Assistants, never having become a land speculator or merchant as did so many who moved in the higher spheres of power. Whether because of his ignorance or, more likely, because of his restraint, at the end he bequeathed to the distant relatives who survived him only the possessions of a solid local farmer.⁸

These are the outlines of eight lives, the lives of eight Englishmen who came to Dedham early in the seventeenth century. They are varied lives and the possibilities they raise are fascinating. Yet they have limitations. Because the record is meager, their outlines lack many of the meanings which might have been garnered. Only an exceptional life left testimony enough for a full biography and the most exceptional of men often left no clue to their inner thoughts. Moreover, even

7. *Records*, III, 143, 160, index; IV and V, indexes. Also, Benjamin W. Dwight, *The Descendants of John Dwight* (New York, 1874).

8. *Records*, all volumes, indexes; Massachusetts Historical Society card catalog under "Lusher," especially photostat documents dated May 7, 1662, and October 19, 1664; Massachusetts Archives, card catalog index under "Lusher"; Probate Office, Suffolk County, lists wills of most Assistants; *Dedham Historical Register*, II (1891), 130ff.; Suffolk County Deeds.

the sparse details that survive concerning these plain men reveal how difficult it is to base generalizations on the peculiarities of individual lives. For every model Puritan there was a ne'er-do-well; for every pioneer, a butcher; for every patriarch, a man who died prematurely. The very variety which lends fascination also frustrates any attempt to characterize the whole society through individual histories. Ultimately the underlying patterns of society in Dedham can emerge only from a consideration of the dull samenesses which have ever dominated human existence. And what the common features of all lives portray is an isolated, small, stable, homogeneous agricultural community which resembled the rural society of seventeenth-century Europe as much as it resembled the "land of opportunity" dear to the hearts of generations of American students and scholars.⁹

* * *

The overwhelming majority of the settlers came to Dedham to stay. They neither ranged restlessly west nor sought wealth in the developing metropolis of Boston. Most put up temporarily in a nearby town while they looked things over, then moved to Dedham and there initiated a sequence of generations which would intertwine their names with the history of the town for several centuries to come.¹⁰ Because of the stability of the

9. Much of the information that follows is based on collective "biographies" of all of the first fifty men to arrive in town and of slightly over half of the eighty-odd men of a "second generation," which matured between 1665 and 1685. The information is drawn from the *Records*, from the Suffolk County Probate Office Registry of Deeds, and Court Files, from the Massachusetts Archives and the collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, from manuscript records in the Dedham Historical Society, and from printed sources. Common features have been the focus of the inquiry, and the dominant features are presented here.

10. Though a significant minority, perhaps a third, of the early settlers eventually lived in at least three different New England towns. It is probable that geographic mobility was greater in the first two decades after 1630 than in the entire century thereafter. A detailed

settlers and their posterity, the town became a self-contained social unit, almost hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world. Less than one percent of the adult males in town in a given year would be newcomers, while less than one percent of the adult males would emigrate in a given year. Some of the rare immigrants settled permanently in the town, but others were drifters who did not stay more than a few years and whose departure merely served to raise a little the low level of emigration. Most of the remaining emigrants moved no farther than an adjoining town or "moved" only in the eyes of the law when the distant part of Dedham in which they had always lived was incorporated as a new town. A scattering of officials and servants came and went; young women from nearby towns married into local families while young ladies of Dedham married in turn into the families of those towns; and some young men left town before reaching the age at which they appeared in the records.¹¹ Otherwise, hardly anyone stirred in or out. By way of comparison, the only contemporary English villages whose level of mobility is known were consistently more mobile than this American village.¹²

analysis of mobility and demographic characteristics in Dedham may be found in K. Lockridge, "The Population of Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736," *Economic History Review*, XIX (1966), 318-44. This article includes data from neighboring Watertown, which confirm the analysis of Dedham.

11. Because of flaws in the early records, the emigration of young men is difficult to trace. An educated guess, based on birth and tax records and genealogical works, would place the level of emigration of males below age twenty-four at between ten and fifteen percent—most probably close to the former. As will be seen, the reluctance of young men to seek opportunity elsewhere was a typical, persistent and highly important feature of Dedham's history; it was a feature found in other towns of New England.

12. See Peter Laslett and John Harrison, "Clayworth and Cogenhoe," *Historical Essays, 1660-1750, Presented to David Ogg* (London, 1963), edited by H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard. Dedham's decennial rate of continuity was between fifty-six and seventy-six percent, as against forty to fifty percent in Clayworth and Cogenhoe.

In fact, the society of the village was quite narrow and self-centered. The number of family names actually declined from sixty-three in 1648 to fifty-seven in 1688, and an increasing majority of the population belonged to a group of thirty-odd enduring clans who could trace their roots back beyond 1648. Collectively and individually the members of the commune had little to do with outside authorities. They obeyed the law of the colony, but not always. They paid their colony taxes, but the taxes paid for local purposes were usually twice as great. As the town sought to avoid involvement in the courts of the colony, so did each man. The average inhabitant was a plaintiff or defendant in civil proceedings no more than once in his life-time and involvements in criminal proceedings were virtually nonexistent. Nearly all land transactions were small exchanges between Dedham men. Two or three speculators excepted, the seventeenth-century farmer dealt with his neighbors, or with farmers of adjoining towns on those few occasions on which the land he sought was just over the town line.¹³

Seventeenth-century Dedham was a small place, including on the average about 500 souls. It was a little larger than the usual English village and a little smaller than most French villages, but was of a size common to many rural communities in the Atlantic civilization of the time. Yet the town grew steadily throughout the century. The population in 1648 was approximately 400; by 1700, it had risen to nearly 750. Natural increase accounted for the growth, since net immigration was

13. Family data from tax and birth records in *Records*, I, III, IV, V: the law most frequently ignored in the first decades was that requiring registration of land transactions, as a comparison of the town land records in the Dedham Town Hall with the Suffolk County Deeds will show; local expenses included the school costs and the minister's salary, as well as the usual expenses of representation, the meetinghouse, roads, and so forth; see *Records*, III, IV, V; the Index to the Calendar Index of the Suffolk County Court *Files* and the records in the offices of the Clerks of the County and Superior Courts of Suffolk cover in depth certain sample periods on which conclusions have been based; land transactions are found in the sources listed above.

negligible. The significance of the healthy rate of natural increase can only be appreciated in the light of the stagnation which characterized the level of population in the villages of seventeenth-century England and France.¹⁴ If Dedham was growing steadily while its counterparts in Europe were growing little if at all, then the fundamental conditions of life in Dedham must have been better than in Europe.¹⁵

Better in what way? The obvious explanation that springs to mind is that the birth rate must have been higher in Dedham than in seventeenth-century European villages. Surely these young settlers in a new land were prolific in a way impossible in the crowded, marginal villages of the Old World? But it was not so, for the birth rate was about forty births per 1000 population per year—a rate significantly but not remarkably higher than the birth rates of the villages of Clayworth and Cogenhoe in England and Crulai in France. Other figures support this judgment. The average intervals between births, the average number of births per marriage and the average number of marriages per 1000 population were substantially the same in Dedham as in these Old World villages. The devastating statistic which confirms this conclusion is the average age at marriage, which in Europe ranged around twenty-five years for women and twenty-seven years for men and in Dedham was twenty-three for women and twenty-five for men.¹⁶ The differ-

14. Again, see Lockridge, "The Population of Dedham." European figures are drawn from J. D. Chambers, *The Vale of Trent, 1670-1800* (London, 1957), E. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," *Past and Present*, nos. 5 and 6 (1954), Laslett and Harrison, "Clayworth and Cogenhoe," and Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et les Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (2 vols., Paris, 1958).

15. Dedham's rate and pace of growth closely parallel those of Massachusetts as a whole, thus making it likely that the town's demographic structure was typical of this part of the New World and that the advantages it enjoyed were typically "American" advantages. See Lockridge, "The Population of Dedham."

16. European sources as above, plus A. Drake, "An Elementary Exercise in Parish Register Demography," *Economic History Review*,

ence in female marriage ages argues for a slightly higher birth rate in Dedham—since the younger women marry, the longer they are "eligible" to have children and the shorter the part of their fertile span that is wasted—but similarity is the main point. And, whether twenty-five or twenty-seven, the middle twenties are a late time for a man to begin married life. In a patronizing assumption of New World superiority, American demographers have commented sadly on the unfortunate conditions that kept European men from acquiring the wherewithal to support a family until they were nearly thirty. Their assumption was wrong, because in Dedham just as in Crulai or Clayworth a man did not find opportunity so plentiful that he could marry as young as he chose.

A great part of Dedham's steady growth and corresponding natural advantages over European villages must be explained through a lower death rate. At most, there were twenty-seven deaths per 1000 per year as against rates of thirty to forty and higher in Europe. Much of the difference can probably be ascribed to such long-range causes as better diet or better housing, conditions which acted year in and year out to prolong the lives of older persons and to ensure that more infants survived the critical days following birth. A more readily identifiable difference lay in the relative absence of short-range demographic "crises" in Dedham. In Europe, particularly in France, famines and plagues struck repeatedly. Often coming in clusters within a ten or twenty-year period, these disasters could wipe out a tenth, a quarter, a half or more of the population of a village. Crises were so severe in some French villages that they created "echoes," periods of low births a generation apart reflecting the initial crisis period of deaths and delayed marriages: fewer children were born or survived birth during a crisis; on reaching maturity their generation had fewer persons

XIV (1962), 427, and Louis Henry and Etienne Gautier, *La Population de Crulai, Paroisse Normande* (Paris, 1958).

available for marriage; a generation with fewer marriages had fewer children; and so it went until circumstances smoothed out the echoing flaw over a period of three or four generations. Dedham went through well over a half century without experiencing a single crisis which removed as much as ten percent of its population within a two-year span. For some reason this New World village was spared at least the worst ravages of disease, famine, and climate, effects all too familiar to rural Europeans of the time.¹⁷ It would be foolish to launch out in Jeffersonian praises of the benefits of benevolent nature in a new land free from the depravities of Europe, yet it is clear that the new land had some material gifts to offer and freedoms to bestow other than the freedom from Anglican persecution.

The town's insulation from the forces of nature had other results. Dedham paralleled Crulai in its seasons of birth, conceptions reaching a peak in the spring and descending to a low in the autumn. But in the New World town the difference between the month of highest conceptions and the month of lowest conceptions was lower than in Crulai. Children were being conceived throughout the year with distinctly less regard for the natural forces—climate, food, labor, whatever—which tended to impose a cyclic yearly pattern of conception on all the rural societies of the world.¹⁸

Yet in other ways nature did impose itself on human life in Dedham in just the same way and often as severely as in Europe. The similarities in birth rates and marriage ages bear witness to this truth, as does the parallel timing of the yearly cycle of conception. Then too, this town had its severe years; 1675-76 saw twenty-five deaths occur in Dedham. Several of the twenty-five were killed fighting in the same Indian war (King Philip's War) that had resulted in Robert Hinsdell's death, but most died of age and disease in the long season of alarms and

17. Lockridge, "Population of Dedham," and Goubert, *Beauvais*.

18. Lockridge, "Population of Dedham," and Henry and Gautier, *Crulai*.

excursions that accompanied the war. And year in and year out the seasons of death in Dedham were the same as in the European villages. In all, deaths occurred most frequently in the winter months, when cold, poor diet, and confinement combined to weaken the strong and kill the weak. No insulation from nature blessed Dedham with a reduction in the toll of deaths that mounted to a peak every December, January, February.¹⁹

The economy was agricultural. Men called themselves "yeoman" or "husbandman" as any farmer called himself in England. There was always a miller or two, a blacksmith, a cordwainer or other artisan in the town to supply the specialized needs of the economy, but easily eighty-five percent of the male inhabitants characterized themselves as farmers and most of the rest derived the greater part of their support from the land.²⁰ It was an unspecialized agriculture which they practiced, devoted largely to mere subsistence, and was very like the agriculture practiced in many sections of rural England. The same oaken tubs full of the same crops (peas, barley, wheat, rye, oats, hay, fruit)²¹ from fields of similar sizes rested in identical rooms in matching houses of farmers who achieved equal if modest prosperity and participated in like rural offices (poundkeeper, fence-viewer, hogreeve) in Dedham as in England.²²

What exactly might a farmer possess? His land aside, he would own essentially the possessions of an English yeoman farmer: within his house of two to eight rooms were a few beds, chests and chairs, a little pewter or silver, perhaps two changes

19. See Footnote 18.

20. Based on wills and inventories in the Suffolk County Probate Office and on occupational labels in documents in the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds.

21. Indian corn excepted.

22. See Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts* (New Haven, Conn., 1942); W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant, The Economic and Social Structure of a Leicestershire Village* (London, 1957); and A. N. Garvan, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven, Conn., 1951).

of clothing and a good suit and cloak, a Bible, sometimes with commentaries thereon; outside was a barn or lean-to containing agricultural tools, a cart, bins, bowls, pots and pans, a few bushels of each of the staple crops, and finally a horse or two, several cattle and five or six each of sheep and swine. His whole estate would come to between 200 and 400 pounds Massachusetts currency.

No crop became a cash crop grown in quantity at the expense of others. The agricultural surpluses listed in the inventories varied with the season but were always small and distributed among three or four crops. This held for livestock as well. John Allin died in possession of twenty-eight sheep in 1671, John Bacon of twenty-four cattle in 1683, but these relatively modest herds were the height of acquisition in an economy in which specialized entrepreneurial farming was unknown. The farmers doubtless traded small quantities of grain, wood, beef and hides in nearby Boston in order to obtain the few manufactured necessities that were beyond their means to produce. Still, the message of the inventories of their estates is unmistakable: no single crop or animal dominated the village economy, and the farmers died without leaving the multiplicity of debts or credits with Boston merchants which would have resulted from a more developed commercial relationship.²³

Yet this simple subsistence economy was also an economy of abundance, for there was an incomparable abundance of land. To be sure, soil was often poor; even free public land grants had to be surveyed at some expense; a man's grant might be distant from his home; and if land was cheap to buy that was in part because it was wilderness land that would take years of backbreaking labor to clear. Yet there was land.

23. As might be supposed, wealth came from within the town. No Dedham men drew a majority of their wealth from outside sources. Within Dedham, prices remained fairly stable throughout the second half of the seventeenth century. Again, the relevant documents are in the Suffolk County Probate Office in Boston.

Privately owned land cost shillings an acre instead of pounds an acre as in England, and most townships were giving it away free. In Dedham, the conservatism of the town's early land policy did not last forever. No more than 3000 acres had been allotted in the first twenty years, but in the next twelve years over 15,000 acres were divided among the proprietors. A man who lived in the town for any twenty-five year span between 1636 and 1686 received between fifty and 500 acres from the town, 150 acres on the average.²⁴ This was by no means a farmstead beyond the wildest dreams of a successful English yeoman, but it meant security for the whole society of the village since it made every man a potential yeoman, a status enjoyed by only a fortunate minority of the English rural populace. It was a promise to every man's posterity, guaranteeing that the next generation would inherit the raw material of self-support. Even a younger son of a less than distinguished settler could expect a patrimony which would keep him from having to rent land or work for another man or beg in the streets.

The leaders of the colony reflected a general awareness of the unique abundance of the New World in the novel inheritance law they created. In England, the lands of a man who left no will would go to his eldest son under the law of primogeniture, whose aim was to prevent the fragmentation of holdings which would follow from a division among all the sons. This law arose from a mentality of scarcity. It left the landless younger sons to fend for themselves. In New England the law provided for the division of the whole estate among all the children of the deceased. Why turn younger sons out on the society without land or perhaps daughters without a decent

24. Land grants are in *Records*, III, IV, V and in manuscripts in the Dedham Town Hall. For English comparisons see Campbell, *English Yeoman*, Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, H. J. Habakkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740," *Economic History Review*, X(1940), 14, and Martha Jane Ellis, "Halifax Parish, 1558-1640" (Ph.D. dissertation, Radcliffe-Harvard, 1958).

dowry, why invite social disorder, when there was enough to provide for all?²⁵ The plentitude of land, the novel intestacy law, and the benevolent practices of those yeomen who did leave wills combined in New England to offer the entire second generation the promise of prosperity within the familiar social framework of the village in which their fathers had settled. It was a deeply satisfying prospect to men whose homeland had contained a fair share of wandering laborers, struggling apprentices, and paupers.

As might be expected, the society of the town was rather homogeneous. The circumstances of the emigration had fostered a certain homogeneity from the very beginning, for no noblemen or true English gentlemen settled in Dedham, while the few servants among the founders soon became independent yeomen. Though the social policy of the founders had embraced a degree of social differentiation by recognizing "rank and quality" earned in England as the basis for larger allotments of land in the New World, in fact the settlers of appreciable "rank and quality" were few, they did not receive extremely large bonuses of land as a result of their distinction, and they had to compete for allotments with men who met the more practical standards for extra land—such as skill in farming or large families. Above all, the abundance of land and the simplicity of the economy mitigated against the rapid evolution of radical social differences among the middle-class Englishmen who settled the town. Impoverished "laborers" hardly existed in this society of abundant land. Servants amounted to less than five percent of the population and were nearly all either captive Indians, Negro slaves (of whom there were very few), or young children serving in another family as part of their upbringing.²⁶ The

25. Charles M. Andrews, *The Connecticut Intestacy Law* (Connecticut Tercentenary Pamphlet, New Haven, Conn., 1933); George L. Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts*; Richard B. Morris, *Studies in the History of American Law* (New York, 1930).

26. *Records*, V, 121–22 contains a census of servants. The Probate

occasional "poor" individual was usually a sick widow or an orphan, or an improvident half-wit. On the other hand men who came to be known as "gentleman" were even more rare and had earned their titles through long and distinguished public service. The more wealthy farmers—even those of families with original pretensions to a little "rank and quality" and who were called on to serve as selectmen not infrequently—continued to refer to themselves as yeomen, which they were. They might have had a little more wealth and distinction than the average farmer, but their estates were identical in structure to those of men with half as much wealth and their style of life was correspondingly similar—a style in which every man toiled on his own lands. While they no doubt expected and certainly were given respect, they retained a good measure of Puritan honesty about their social position and refused to take titles of gentility.

The distribution of taxable wealth reflected the *de facto* homogeneity of the economy and the society. The five percent of men who paid the highest taxes controlled but fifteen percent of the taxable wealth in Dedham. This degree of concentration implied a certain hierarchy of wealth within the town, but was far more equitable than the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few which came to prevail in seventeenth-century Boston. In this developing commercial center the richest five percent of men controlled twenty-five percent of the wealth. At the bottom of the social spectrum, the lowest twenty percent of men owned eight percent of the taxable wealth in Dedham as against three percent of the wealth in Boston.

So the cheapness of land and the low level of the subsistence economy had done much to keep the distribution of wealth relatively even and the spectrum of social rank narrow, thereby making it easier for the town's leaders to maintain a social

Records and Deeds for Suffolk County include occupational and honorary titles and yield information on estates, landholdings, etc. Millers, who did consistently well, seem to have had the only "gimmick" that led to wealth.

harmony predicated on a judicious blending of collective interest with a moderate degree of hierarchy. If anything, it had been necessary to emphasize the latter just a little here and there, to prevent its being swallowed in the former. The founders of Boston faced an opposite problem, as its distribution of wealth indicates, and the brief history of the utopian impulse in that city showed the deadly effects of excessive concentration of wealth resulting from rapid economic development.²⁷

In sum, what kind of life did such a society offer? It certainly offered a man the opportunity to live a long life on his own land among a group of equals and near-equals. But this appealing prospect was tempered by the inherent conservatism of the social environment. To follow the fortunes of a young man from year to year is to perceive the bonds which knit him to his society and his society to the special world of all peasant villages. He could expect to be a farmer, like his father. He would stay in the village, for his father's death held out the promise of land. It would take time, for almost any farmer who passed forty would live to be sixty before dying. A son might be given lands while the patriarch was still alive, but woe unto him who angered his father! (There was the story of one father who cut his second son out of his will because he dared to disobey his father's order to grow barley on the five acres given him to test his sense of the land.) Of course a youth could strike out on his own within the town . . . if he could find a way to earn money, that is, and if his father would let him, since a man was not really free of paternal discipline

27. The top ten percent of Dedham taxpayers controlled twenty-five percent of the taxable wealth. Figures are drawn from *Records*, III, IV, V, all tax lists. For comparative figures for Boston, see James A. Henretta, "Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXII (1965), 75-92. For a typology based on the distribution of wealth in the towns of late eighteenth-century America, see Jackson T. Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, N.J., 1965). Also, see chapter 8. The fate of Boston's utopian impulse is chronicled in Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1965).

until he reached the voting age of twenty-four. But at last the day would come when his inheritance finally cleared the courts. Even if his father had been well off, it might not be much, by the time the older brothers got their shares and part of the estate was set aside for the use of the widow. Still, it would do for a start, and now, at the age of twenty-five or twenty-six, he could marry and begin a family. The land would take some clearing and it was sometimes thin soil such as could drive a man to other employment if other were to be had, but it was his land and better than nothing. Twenty or thirty years of hard work aided by the labor of his own sons might enable the farmer to save enough to buy a little extra land, and dividends of public land would further swell his holdings. By now in his late forties himself, he might have earned enough respect to be elected selectman. But by now he was nearly an old man, left to husband his estate for the sons who were in their turn anticipating their father's will. At least he had had the satisfaction of progressing as well as most: no one had passed him by on the way to fabulous riches, nor would any catastrophe be likely to wipe out his holdings.²⁸ He depended on no city man or foreigner for his income, and, although his home could be easily destroyed by fire, it could as easily be rebuilt out of local materials with the help of his neighbors. It would have been a good enough life, though rather hard and lonely since his wife and youngest child had died.

* * *

So on the one hand it was unmistakably an "American" society. The seemingly unending potentialities of the virgin lands which surrounded Dedham had their due effects on the

28. This is based on sources previously cited, particularly on an analysis of the rate of upward and downward economic mobility of forty members of the second generation whose names occur on the tax lists in *Records*, IV, V, VI (1706-1736), and on a study of inheritance customs as evinced in the wills of seventeenth-century townsmen in the Suffolk County Probate Office.

life of every man, helping to prolong that life and opening to it possibilities unthinkable for the Everyman of England. The absence of a privileged aristocracy and of the masses of the poor left the community free of the drastic human inequalities which plagued European society. Life was indeed better than in England and far removed from the sometimes appalling conditions of France under the old regime.²⁹

But the America of social diversity and ideological pluralism was never more distant. If the society was one of opportunity, it was the continually present opportunity to take up land and become another subsistence farmer. No social or industrial revolution was taking place, increasing social opportunity by altering its distribution in the society or by opening new avenues of upward mobility. And the equality of the society was nothing less than the equality of economic interests which lies at the heart, not of modern pluralistic democracy, but of Marxist-Leninist democracy. One class, one interest, one mind—how can there help but be voluntary unanimity within such a society? As it was to have been yet never was and never could be with Marx's hopelessly idealized industrial proletariat, so to a remarkable degree, it really was with the farmers of the Dedham commune.

Furthermore, an awareness of the diverse possibilities of rural society in seventeenth-century Europe can serve as a needed corrective for the evidence of uniquely American opportunity in Dedham. Europe included many nations, each with many regions. Here and there in the interstices of Old World society can be found villages whose way of life resembled that of "American" Dedham. The English village of Wilston Magna

29. Indirect support for the idea of a "spectrum" of social conditions ranging from France to America may be found in the works previously cited and in Pierre Goubert, "The French Peasantry of the Seventeenth Century: A Regional Example," *Past and Present*, no. 10 (1956), 55-77.

is one example. By the seventeenth century there were no lords of the manor in this village, all having sold out to peasant proprietors. Many families owned land, farming areas of twenty to forty acres for the most part, areas comparable to those actually under cultivation in early Dedham. It was "a solid community of middling size farmers, . . . with no overshadowing family at the top, . . ." Not an isolated case, the English village was "representative of a considerable number of midland villages where a substantial body of peasant proprietors still kept their hold on the land."³⁰

If some Old World villages offered many of the beneficial conditions found in New World Dedham, it is even more true that New World Dedham embodied many of the traditional conditions found in most Old World villages. Dedham, Clayworth, and Crulai were three small agricultural villages which existed in an age long before modern medicine, scientific farming, and industrial productivity. Winter was to be feared in each of them, harvests were a gamble that kept men aware of Providence, diseases arose and subsided outside of all human control and infants died in numbers that would shock us today. A man ready to marry did not just go out and get a job; he prepared a farm of his own or else made sure he could expect to inherit the family home and acres. A person who lived to seventy, a normal lifespan in our century, found that he was one of the few survivors of his generation. Collectively, a town was likely to retain its customs and peculiarities for a long time. The few newcomers admitted each year soon adopted the ways found comfortable by the clansmen of the town for generations past. Few left town, for the ways of the community were reassuringly familiar. Most men showed the typical peasant's satisfaction with the *status quo*: It worked for his father and for his father before him, why tinker with success? Why, especially when it

30. W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, 143-44.

could be dangerous? Some of Dedham's customs may have been unique, but chances are they soon became as unthinkingly rigid as any in Europe. It could hardly have been otherwise in a society that in so many ways still followed the ancient, universal patterns of rural life.

5

Decline

DEDHAM'S AGE of utopian communalism contained within itself the seeds of change, just as later the age in which change would become the dominant theme of the town's history would contain in turn the continuing impulse of the past.

As any Puritan would have been the first to admit, the impulse toward perfection is doomed to failure. Crippled by original sin, man's reason cannot discern the nature of God's plan for the universe. Still less can human reason put into practice and maintain whatever chimera of social perfection it happens to light upon. This theory was never better illustrated than in the case of earliest Dedham. Though no violent changes disturbed the even tenor of village life, the overriding utopian concern gradually evaporated. All the covenants, catechisms, and bylaws in the world could not have stopped the process, for at its heart lay the everlasting inability of human nature to satisfy its own recurring hunger for the absolute. By the end of the first half-century, the policies of perfection no longer held sway.

* * *

The process of decline began with the beginning of the community. Even as town and church wrote their covenants and set about putting their principles into practice, imperfections arose. What Plato called "the recalcitrance of the medium" made itself felt in seemingly trivial ways: "Contentment" was

renamed "Dedham" by an unimaginative General Court; Thomas Cakebread, a skilled miller, decided not to add his skills to the new community; the respected and learned John Phillips was unable to join the church as its first minister. But as the years passed, trivial disappointments were replaced by imperfections of ever larger consequence until at last the failings had so eroded the successes that the integral utopian spirit could no longer be said to exist.

A little of the intended unity was sacrificed as early as 1639, when the meeting of all townsmen delegated its powers to the selectmen. Perhaps "the general meeting of so many men" had "wasted much time," but it had also enabled every townsman to participate directly in every decision. Now the pure consensual unity of the founders would disappear and most decisions would pass into the hands of a few leaders—all in the name of efficiency.

It had been the town's practice to set aside six days out of each year for work on the highways and to require each man to work any four of the six days. On the appointed day, the townsmen would work shoulder-to-shoulder until the roads were once again in good repair. But here, too, the communal ideal fell short when an early bylaw allowed a man to hire a substitute. Instead of displaying in their soiled hands the evidence of a common obligation, thenceforth the more successful townsmen could use their wealth to lift themselves above the herd. Eventually, a similar procedure would allow the well-off to buy themselves out of their turn at the burdensome office of constable. By the terms of the Covenant all townsmen were equally privileged and equally bound, but money soon made some more equal than others.¹

By the 1650's circumstances had begun to create a series of privileged subcorporations within the community, further

1. *Records*, III, 8, and index under "Highways". For the constable issue, see the notebook of Jeremiah Fisher, Justice of the Peace, among the manuscripts in the Dedham Historical Society.

undermining the total unity envisioned in the Covenant. The tapering off of new memberships in the church which began in these years had led by 1670 to a congregation which excluded a majority of the townsmen. The formal proprietorship of the town lands was shared by nearly all townsmen at the inception of that institution in 1656, but thereafter new arrivals unable to purchase shares from an existing proprietor were shut out of this privilege. The town corporation itself ceased to be identical with the community since, after about 1660, new arrivals were not always invited to sign the Covenant. Thus, a group of six or eight Scotsmen settled in Dedham in the 1660's without subscribing to the pact. They were not warned out; they paid taxes, worked and even married in the community just as did any townsman; but they were by implication second-class citizens.² The irony in all of this is that the founders' drive for perfection carried the seeds of its own failure. Their perfect church had the imperfection of excluding some townsmen from its sacraments, while their perfect town excluded some of its inhabitants from the proprietorship and from its Covenant. It could not be helped.

2. The development of these subcorporations, particularly that of the proprietorship, could be seen as a first step in the transition from what anthropologists would label a "semiegalitarian, semirank" society into a full "rank" society and further into a "stratified" society. The economic and social developments to be discussed in chapter eight completed this development and left the community almost fully "stratified" in the technical sense. See Morton H. Fried, "On the Evolution of Social Stratification and the State," in *Culture in History*, S. Diamond, ed. (New York, 1960). This process toward stratification was a factor in the decline of the closed corporate community, for such a community is based above all on shared risks, shared obligations, and shared rewards, all of which rank and above all stratification tend to erode. See Eric Wolf, "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, XIII (Spring, 1957), 1-18. Indeed, as will be seen in the second section of this book, every one of the structural and ideological dilemmas Dedham faced was typical of those which face any closed corporate peasant community, and Dedham's disintegration followed more or less the pattern to be expected in such cases.

If the corporate unity of the village was slowly eroding, so was its physical coherence. The common field system began disintegrating almost from the day of its inception. Already in the 1640's the town permitted men to "fence their lots in particular" and presumably to grow in these lots whatever crops they wished. By the 1670's it had become usual for men to take up both special "convenience grants" and their usual shares of each new dividend in locations as close as possible to their existing lots, practices which aided the consolidation of individual holdings. The process encouraged by public policy was completed by private transactions, for an active market in small parcels of land soon emerged, a market in which most farmers sought to sell distant lands and buy lands closer to their main holdings. The net result was the coalescence of private farms. From here, it would be but two short steps for farmers whose holdings were centered in outlying areas to move their barns and then their houses from the village out to their lands. As of 1686 few seem to have taken these steps, but the way had been prepared and the days of a society totally enclosed by the village were numbered. In any event the common-field system was gone, taking with it the common decisions and the frequent encounters of every farmer with his fellows which it entailed.³

The evidences of increasing imperfection were not always so subtle. After twenty years several overt breaches appeared in the rule of love. Though each was a transient episode and was resolved within the town as the Covenant had prescribed, in fact and in implication each was rather more serious than the sorts of disagreements foreseen in the Covenant. The 1656 demand of some disgruntled settlers, led by Henry Phillips, for larger shares in the proprietorship, and the sudden rejection in 1660 of the powers and members of the board of selectmen

3. *Records*, III, 77, 101; IV, 22, 85; also manuscript land records in the Dedham Town Hall and wills and inventories in the Suffolk County Probate Office.

by a discontented majority of townsmen, had each in its own way threatened to stretch the policy of consensus beyond its limits. As far as Phillips himself was concerned, those limits had been passed, for he had gone off to Boston in a fit of anger. Moreover, at one point Phillips and his friends had gone so far as to bring their cause to the attention of the General Court, thereby setting an unhealthy precedent of appeal to higher authorities. Had that precedent become a general practice, the whole mechanism of the Covenant might have collapsed forthwith. The political contretemps of 1660 was no less disturbing in its implications. Had the total rejection of authority which it embodied become characteristic, the orderly society of the Covenant might have dissolved into chaos. Amidst their self-congratulations on having eased these episodes into quick and peaceful resolutions, the leaders of the town might have pondered the potential dangers that time was uncovering.

The most notable failure of the policy of peace was external rather than internal. From 1651 to 1665 and sporadically thereafter, Dedham carried on a stubborn legal battle against the Christian Indians of neighboring Natick.⁴ At issue was a section of land along the Charles River. The Indians, who were cultivating the land even though it fell within the bounds of the Dedham grant, made the dubious claim that an "agreement" with the Dedham townsmen gave them the right to farm there. But the Indians' leader, the Reverend John Eliot, rested his case most heavily on the moral issue of his followers' need of land. Virtually alone among all the Europeans who pledged themselves to convert the heathen, Eliot had kept his pledge, winning many of the local Indians over to Christianity and to a stable, agricultural life. It now seemed that Eliot had been too successful, for the very increase in the numbers of his converts had created a demand for farmland which in turn had brought on the encroachment on Dedham's territory. Should

4. Many of the relevant documents can be found reprinted in *Records*, IV, Appendix.

the mere letter of the law now choke off his holy enterprise? Eliot's answer was "No." But Dedham's answer was "Yes." Legal right was in fact with the townsmen and they would have their rights. Yet no amount of legal right could have justified the deceptions, retaliations, and lasting bitterness which characterized Dedham's role in the case. The town did not even have the good grace to drop the issue once the General Court had imposed a compromise by which the "praying Indians" got some of the land and Dedham received compensation elsewhere. The townsmen continued to harass their neighbors with petty accusations. When good land was at stake and the other party was "savage," the spirit of the Covenant could be set aside. But once set aside, could it be taken up again without having lost some of its power?

Still, the town held the line against disappointment, dispersion, and occasional imperfection as long as its original leadership remained intact. Not until the 1670's and 1680's, when the great men of local politics had died or left office, did the decline become obvious. Peter Woodward left office in 1670; Eleazer Lusher and Joshua Fisher died in 1672; Timothy Dwight served only rarely after ending a string of nine consecutive terms as selectman in 1681; and Daniel Fisher died in 1683.⁵ Young men in the days when the Covenant was written, several of these men had been among those who had first agreed upon the principles which it embodied, and all had entered office at a time when the policies of perfection were in full force. Several were also founders of the church. Their long service and the respect in which they came to be held had virtually guaranteed the community against a loss of purpose. As they and their compatriots began to disappear the policies they had wielded fell into disuse.

The bylaws restricting the presence of strangers in the town were not often applied after 1675. Mediators and arbi-

5. See Lockridge and Kreider, "The Evolution of Massachusetts Town Government" for a more detailed analysis of this transition and of a remarkably similar transition in neighboring Watertown.

trators were asked less and less often to settle disputes, while evidence of concern for the "convenience" of men with problems was ever less apparent and the many small manifestations of a "loving spirit" came to be conspicuous by their absence. Evidence of dissent began to appear in the records, first in the form of challenges to the selectmen's arranging of the seating in the meetinghouse, then as requests that dissenting votes in town meetings be counted and recorded. By 1686 such small sins of omission and commission had destroyed much of the overt utopianism of the founders. The end of the age of peace was epitomized in the list of duties assigned to the newly created office of town treasurer in 1687: "to make demand, sue . . . according to law . . . and to receive moneys from the inhabitants to carry on such suits at law, or matters of trouble."⁶

Men were not entirely unaware of what was happening to their communal ideal. In at least one instance the loss of voluntary unity was accompanied by an agonizing consciousness of failure. The minister's salary had been raised by private contribution until shortly before the death of John Allin in 1671. But once Allin became old and infirm and it became necessary to hire visiting ministers to help fill his post, contributions began to lag. In 1670, "divers of the inhabitants coming this day to the selectmen and moved that some care might be taken that our reverend Pastor might have his salary yearly paid." From this day forward the collection of the minister's salary was a running problem of the town, one which exemplified the weakness of the flesh in the face of the pecuniary demands of the spirit.

They tried to preserve the old way at first:

In reference to the present way of contribution in each Lord's day, these two questions were put. One: whether a proportion shall be made wherein each shall be assessed what he is to pay and

6. For examples, see *Records*, V, 19, 121, 183. The quotation is from V, 200.

a committee chosen to make that proportion accordingly. Voted in the negative. Two: whether, in consideration of what have been spoken from scripture and argument referring to the duty and rule of [voluntary] contribution as to conscience . . . in the sight and fear of God, the case may not at present be left in the same way of contribution that at present and for some time past we have practiced, hoping that every man will endeavour to keep a good conscience therein, at least for trial. The vote passed in the affirmative to this second question by general consent.⁷

But by 1672 the town was forced to adopt the "proportion" scheme which they had at first rejected, since some men continued to ignore the dictates of God and good conscience. Henceforth each man would be responsible for a definite proportion of the minister's salary, though it was up to him to contribute this from Sunday to Sunday and he could add to it as he pleased. Not quite a compulsory tax yet no longer the old free personal offering, this arrangement represented a major breach in the voluntaristic ideology of the community. It was only the beginning.

The town struggled against the inevitable for the next thirty years. Though Allin's successor, William Adams, complained frequently of arrears, the town refused to guarantee his salary by turning its "collection by proportion" into an actual tax. They would assign each man his due share and hope that either shame or conscience would lead him to pay it, but they would not send the constable around with a warrant if he did not pay. When Joseph Belcher succeeded to the Dedham pulpit, he even made an attempt to restore the collection of most of his salary to a purely private basis. Even though the burden of the minister's salary on the individual was decreasing as the number of townsmen rose faster than the value of the salary, Belcher's attempt failed. And the "proportion" system to which the town then reverted proved itself as inadequate under Belcher as it had been under Adams. By 1704 all fiction of voluntarism was discarded. After this date it became the practice of the town

7. *Records*, IV, 204, 214.

to assign arrears on the proportions to the constables for collection. The euphemistic "proportion" came to be called what it in fact had become, a "rate," an ordinary tax.⁸ If a man did not pay, he would become subject to the penalties of the law. The town abandoned its idealistic free contributions reluctantly, but abandon them it did, and in abandoning them it left behind another part of the old communal synthesis.

More strictly religious problems also arose to plague the community. Though it never caused an explosion of resentment, the runaway exclusiveness of the congregation had a fanatical tinge that did not compare well with the humility of the founders. It was possible to be too true to their doctrines, to cling to the technical point of a church of saints at the expense of the original impulse toward love and consensus. Twice after 1671 the town had paid the price of the congregation's stubbornness by having to do without a settled minister for long periods. Was it a reasonable price? Had the covenants of either church or town foreseen that this would happen?

Not even the exaggerated exclusiveness which was the last remnant of the utopian impulse survived much beyond 1686. Within five years thereafter the congregation was forced to abandon its desperate insistence on a church of saints and to accept the inevitable compromise of the Half-Way Covenant. In the same years the town was required to come to terms with changes which it, in turn, regarded as infringements on its purity. Like most of their fellow colonists, the men of Dedham had become increasingly fearful under the constant threat of interference from England. By the 1680's this fear had reached the proportions of a mania. Blind resistance to any assertion of Crown power was the order of the day. Most colonists were convinced that the original Charter of 1629 and the covenant with God which it represented must be kept intact at all costs and that negotiations with the English authorities could only mean compromise, a compromise with corruption which would

8. *Records*, V, VI, indexes under "constable," "minister's salary," "arrears," "Adams," and "Belcher."

surely invite the wrath of God. The Crown's reaction was to withdraw the old charter and impose a Royal government headed by Sir Edmund Andros. But he was overthrown by the people of Massachusetts as soon as it became known that the Glorious Revolution of 1689 had removed his master, James II, from the throne. The hatred of the "foreign" regime was so great in Dedham that the townsmen followed up Andros' fall by repudiating every selectman who had served during the years of his rule. Eight men with a total of over fifty years' experience served from 1687 to 1689, and though all lived for some time thereafter, only one ever again served as selectman and he only for a single term. In their places the town put five young men with a collective total of but two years' experience, all of whom promptly pledged support to the local revolution and the old charter. Such excesses of Puritan patriotism could not alter the course of history, however, and William III, James' successor, imposed a compromise in the form of the Charter of 1691. Under its terms the Charter of 1629 became a dead letter, a Royal governor replaced the locally chosen governor of former times, and writs ran in the name of the King of England. By the 1690's Dedham, with the rest of Massachusetts, had been required to accept the reality of some degree of English control. There was no longer any point in local purges in the name of political purity.⁹

* * *

The waning of the explicit social synthesis of the Dedham Covenant was a subtle thing, as subtle yet as pervasive as the synthesis itself. There had been no dramatic social upheaval

9. *Records*, I, V, especially 203; see also *Massachusetts Archives*, CVII; and Viola Barnes, *The Dominion of New England* (New Haven, Conn., 1923). There is a distant possibility that the Dedham electoral purge of 1689 also involved a revolt of youth against the limited suffrage and the rule of their elders. If this is so, it may be no accident that the end of exclusiveness in the church came only two years thereafter.

brought on by irresistible material forces, nor had a cathartic moral crisis replaced the old synthesis with a new. The village remained a small, slowly growing community with traditional views and unchanging institutions. It was just that the utopian aura was gone. Something almost intangible had happened, then, and for almost inscrutable reasons. The townsmen might as well have attributed the change to a dozen small shifts of circumstance as to the gradually waning spiritual energies which, at times, they seemed to think were at fault.¹⁰ Although, most likely, they simply subsumed all causes under the wrath of a truly inscrutable God who could punish men both by altering their circumstances and by sapping their faith. That was cause enough. But, whether the forces of nature, the fallibility of the human spirit, or the wrath of God was most responsible, the fact is that something most certainly had happened. By 1686, the Covenant was no longer enforced and would never again be the guide for every policy and every

10. Anthropologists would place the weight of causation solely on shifting material circumstances—such as growth, immigration, and the evolution of a status hierarchy—rather than deal with anything so intangible as a "waning of spiritual energy." In their view, the latter is the result of the former, an effect rather than a cause. To the extent that this is true, the "decline" of the utopian impulse in Dedham in the later seventeenth century was merely the first phase of a typical process of material change which, in more obvious ways, was shortly to cause more overt changes in the life of the town (see note 3, above, and chapters 6, 7, 8). But, if so, it was a somewhat diffuse phase, both in its causes and in its effects. And, for those who wish to leave room for the dark night of the soul, the fact is that, at least in the case of the decline of voluntary support of the ministry, the townsmen themselves seem to have believed that the problem was purely one of weakening spiritual energy. Surely such a thing does happen, and is one part of the process by which the more extreme examples of utopian corporate communities lose their coherence. Indeed, it may be that in Dedham it was the decline of spiritual resolve which permitted such material changes as the evolution of certain of the subcorporations and the lapse of the common field system to occur. If this was the case, then the loss of resolve is a distinct preliminary phase in the dissolution of at least this closed corporate community, and perhaps of others.

action. The harmonious society so painstakingly built under its influence no longer existed in all its original integrity.

The only satisfaction the townsmen could have salvaged was that it all appeared to have happened according to strict Puritan theory. In "A Modell of Christian Charity," John Winthrop had predicated the successful application of Christian love upon the existence of a large majority of saints, who were able to sustain that love because they had received God's restoring grace. In Dedham, when the saints dwindled and died away, the rule of love dwindled and died with them. In this sense, too, the New England preachers of the 1670's and 80's could take some satisfaction in being right. Their famous laments over the decline of the spirit of the founders were justified by events in Dedham. Small wonder the wrath of God was now descending.

Perhaps, in retrospect, there is another satisfaction to be gained. Though all too short from the point of view of a Puritan divine, the life of the utopian commune had been longer than anyone had a right to expect. Created in the midst of a howling wilderness, it had remained essentially intact well into the lifetime of the second generation. It has been said that America is the place where utopias are put into practice . . . and found impracticable. This is true, but among all the social blueprints brought to reality on these shores, among the Pennsylvanias and Georgias and Brook Farms, the Dedham experiment stands out by virtue of its relative endurance. In the long history of American utopias, any which lasted the better part of fifty years must be accounted a success.

II

A Provincial Town, 1686-1736

At the end of its first fifty years Dedham was still a static rural village. A hundred and fifty years later it was to be a county seat, a thriving commercial and manufacturing center just beginning to merge into the industrial belt forming around Boston, and a town which had long been a focus for the vigorous political activity popularly associated with the Jacksonian era. How did Dedham pass from the one scene to the other? The beginnings of the transition can be seen in the story of the next fifty years of the town's existence. It is a peculiar, frustrating story, for the continuities of the period nearly balanced the changes, while the changes themselves were often elusively evolutionary. Yet it is a story well worth following, for out of the intricate flux of events emerges the certainty that the village community had physically disintegrated, the probability that a society more accustomed to social diversity and political dissent had begun to evolve, and the possibility that the way had been prepared for the gospel of individual rights which would be preached during the American Revolution and widely practiced in the nineteenth-century nation.