



Editorial

THE major essays in this, the December 2010 issue of *The New England Quarterly*, open with Adam naming the animals and conclude with an injunction from the Dalai Lama. In the intervening pages and into the Document beyond, we meet Catholics, Calvinists, Evangelicals, and Unitarians, and we travel from the imagined land of Bensalem, to the New England frontier, to Michigan's Indian country. In the individually penetrating and collectively wide-ranging investigations before us, we learn to appreciate the various ways in which New England has been steeped in and informed by religion from its founding to the present day.

In the seventeenth century, Zachary Hutchins tells us, schemes abounded for recovering Adam's lost prelapsarian wisdom. Certain individuals among New England's early Puritan immigrants were attracted to Francis Bacon's notion of a select society of scholars (Salomon's House) who, by means of diligent observation and experimentation, would work toward a comprehensive understanding of the natural world. The Puritans' dedication to that project, which they considered to be biblically ordained, helped justify their act of planting the Massachusetts Bay Colony as well as of founding Harvard College within the settlement's first decade.

Shelby Balik takes us from the heart of settlement to its fringes. On the frontiers of New England, she shows, townspeople who lacked fully functioning churches used the acts of reading and writing to fashion virtual communities of believers that offered words of encouragement and promoted a sense of shared endeavor. Quoting from an impressive number of sources, Balik allows her subjects to speak for themselves, thus

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lending an air of immediacy to their urgent need for spiritual sustenance.

With Michael Lee's essay, we return to the halls of Harvard. In 1750, an annual lecture series was established to provide prominent ministers a platform for sharing their views with students, pastors-in-training. In tracing ideas that were expounded over three generations, Lee demonstrates how a fear of deism and emphasis on biblical revelation gradually gave way to a "practical religion" that would in time leave "dogmatic divinity" and the "over-valuation of theological schemes" aside.

"Practical religion," a supremely flexible term, may have been embraced by Unitarians, but it was also adopted by liberal evangelical Congregationalists. Rose Terry Cooke, Carol Holly shows, gave form and texture to this shift from strict Calvinism to a progressive, beneficent theology in her local color tales of Christian character and conduct, tales that supported a broader postbellum agenda for ensuring the nation's morality and civic welfare. Finally, in the Memoranda and Documents section, we read letters Michigan missionary Amanda White Ferry and her young Indian students sent to her former classmates Mary Lyon and Zilpah Grant, who at the time were running the Ipswich Female Seminary. The letters, poignant indices of frontier deprivations and cultural interventions, are important documents that will merit further study. Taken all together, then, the essays in *NEQ*'s current issue describe aspects of New England's religion as both intellectual concept and lived experience.



I am delighted to announce that Robert D. Richardson has joined *NEQ*'s board of editors. Professor Richardson, author of the well-received intellectual biographies *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (1986), *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (1995), and *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (2006), conveys his passion for ideas, teaching, writing, and transcendentalism in his recent *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (2009). His wise counsel, I am happy to report, has already left its mark on *NEQ*.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS