

Chapter Four: *Something's rotten ...*

We now have a good understanding of the make up of Samuel Parris' character on the one hand, and the factionalism in Salem Village on the other. Now we shall examine the developing relationships between Parris and the Salem villagers. How these relationships developed from the negotiations for his contract until the afflictions began is crucial to understanding the motives Parris had to manipulate coming events to suit his own insidious purpose. This chapter will explore the series of events that occurred in the first two years of Parris' residence in Salem Village and will end just prior to the outbreak of 'afflictions'. Given the factionalism already in the Village, the introduction of a new player added a whole new dimension to the conflict. As Parris formed alliances with one of the powerful factions within the Village, we shall see a further breaking down of what little peace there existed until the tensions erupted with the outbreak of the afflictions within his household.

With the tedious negotiations for his contract behind him, Parris appeared to be a man about to settle down into his new respectability and start afresh. The sermon he delivered at his ordination implies that that was exactly what was in his mind. He spoke at great length about how, "this is the day wherein God is giving you hopes that he will roll away the Reproach of Egypt from off you". Parris lauded those who had pushed for the Village to attain an independent church, saying, "This doctrine serves to vindicate & justify the holy & Spirituall disquietness of such who were groaning in spirit under the want of the seals of the Covenant to be brought home to their own doors." He also admonished those who were "grieved" by this "restlessness of such in that condition", asserting that this was because of "the Reproach such were under" and to "let none be offended at the work of

this day”¹. In other words he was not so subtly admonishing those who were opposed to the independent church to not hold a grudge against the church or the people who instigated the call for the independent church. Here he arrogantly assumed that he would succeed where the previous three ministers had failed and that the turmoil that had plagued the Village since its initial settlement would disappear and peace would miraculously reign².

From all accounts Parris would have expected to live a comfortable life in Salem Village. His goal of security had been achieved, at least for the present, and although he would never get rich as the pastor of a small community, his income from the Village, together with the rents he presumably earned from his other properties in Barbados and Boston, while modest, was secure³. He had two slaves he probably brought with him from Barbados, John Indian and Tituba, to take care of the bulk of the menial work around his household. Thus he ensured that both himself and his family enjoyed a standard of life that could almost equate with that of a country squire, and which was almost luxurious compared to that of the majority of his parishioners. He even had enough liquid income to be able to speculate on land transactions and proceeded to buy several small tracts in and around the Village⁴. It appeared that Parris had settled in and was putting down roots, but was it enough to bring him to contentment?

Unfortunately the peace he had hoped for was not to last, so we will never know whether or not Parris would have been content to live out his life in the bucolic locale of the Village. The Porters and their allies who opposed

¹ *Sermons*, 19 September 1689, pp.48-9.

² P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, Cambridge Mass., 1974, pp.153-60.

³ L. Gragg, *A Quest For Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720*, New York, 1990, pp.91-2.

⁴ Gragg, *Quest For Security*, pp.91-2.

the Village becoming autonomous and having an independent church soon began to focus their attention on Parris. As we have seen, the villagers opposing each of the previous ministers had a way of ‘encouraging’ them to depart from the Village. This time, however, their *modus operandi* did not work on Parris. While Bayley, Burroughs and Lawson all departed from the Village when it was clear that they were not welcome, Parris, not being one to pack up and leave quietly, dug in his heels and prepared for the battle ahead. Having already experienced failure by not achieving the success he craved as a merchant, Parris would not quietly sit back and let his enemies strip from him all his new found security.

As has been discussed in the last chapter, the Village was fairly evenly divided into two factions, one for and the other against independence, led respectively by the Putnam and Porter families. The central issue of having an independent church, the symbolic representation of autonomy, with the minister serving as that institution’s representative, became very important to Parris. As the representative of the Village’s symbolic autonomy, he immediately gained a ready-made support base in the form of the Putnams and their allies. This in turn meant that he became automatically the focus for the opposing faction’s attentions. By opposing him and threatening his new-found security, the Porters, in turn, later became the target of Parris’ machinations during the witchcraft episode.

Initially Parris may have not considered his opponents to be any real threat as he had a ready-made support base. The following list of men joined the church on that first day of covenant and for the most part remained Parris’ staunchest supporters throughout the entire episode: Nathaniel Putnam, Edward Putnam, John Putnam, Jonathan Putnam, Bray Wilkins, Benjamin Putnam, Joshua Rea, Ezekiel Cheever, Nathaniel Ingersoll, Henry Wilkins,

Peter Cloyes, Benjamin Wilkins, Thomas Putnam, William Way, John Putnam Junior, Peter Prescott⁵. His most loyal supporters were made up of the Putnam family and their closest associates. Captain John Putnam was one of his earliest and staunchest supporters having been the one to have had the first contact with Parris and was possibly the one who suggested Parris as a ministerial candidate to the villagers. However, it was the patriarch of the Putnam family, Thomas Putnam, that was his most influential ally, both before and during the witch trials. It was his daughter, Ann Junior, that was to become one of the most prolific accusers in the trials alongside Abigail, Parris' niece.

At first glance the opposition that Parris encountered appeared to be nothing more than the villagers practising their usual form when dealing with their unwanted ministers. There are some differences, though, with the treatment that Parris received at their hands. While the ministers before him had enjoyed a period of relative peace before their opponents took action against them, things got off to an immediate and rocky start for Parris. Within only a month after his ordination, Parris was beginning to experience some difficulties in getting paid. In fact Parris did not receive his full pay for the first two years of his sojourn in the Village, whereas the other ministers for the most part received what was owed to them, at least in the beginning of their tenures⁶. Perhaps the immediate start to the hostilities was because the Porter faction felt it was losing ground in their battle against autonomy, having failed to block Parris' ordination as they had Lawson's, or perhaps they were also disaffected by Parris' arrogance. Whatever the reasons, Parris

⁵ *Church Records*, 19 November 1689, p.269.

⁶ Gragg, *Quest For Security*, p.87.

took their actions as a personal affront and from here the struggle escalated and took a direction the villagers could not have foreseen.

One of the earliest mentions of Parris in the Village Records is where the villagers recorded the details of Parris' contract. What is recorded appears to differ slightly from what Parris agreed to, unfortunately for Parris he did not discover this discrepancy until somewhat after the fact. What the villagers recorded went as follows:

that for Mr. Parice's encouragement and settlement in the work of the ministry amongst us we will give him sixty-six pounds for his yearly salary; one-third part in money, the other two-third parts in provision at the prices following: wheat at four shillings per bushel, rye and barley malt at three shillings per bushel, indian corn at two shillings per bushel; and beef at three half-pence per pound, pork at two pence per pound, and butter at three half-pence per pound; and Mr. Parice to find himself firewood, and Mr. Parice to keep the ministry house in good repair.

And that Mr. Parice shall also have the use of the ministry pasture and the inhabitants to keep the fence in repair, and that we will keep up our contribution; and our inhabitants to put their money in papers, and this to continue so long as Mr. Parice continues in the work of the ministry amongst us. And all provision to be good and merchantable, and if it please God to bless the inhabitants, we shall be willing to give more, and we expect that if God shall diminish the estate of the people, that then Mr. Parice do abate of his salary according to proportion."⁷

This agreement for Parris' salary was recorded in the Village Book of Record on the 18th of June, 1689. As we can see, the accounts of the agreement between Parris and the villagers differ slightly, but significantly, in

⁷ *Village Records*, 18 June 1689, p.348.

both content and tone. The major difference from what Parris agreed to is in the area of the supply of firewood. Point five of Parris' original counter offer stated that, "firewood to be given in yearly, freely"⁸, whereas the villagers recorded that Parris would find his firewood at his own expense having allotted him an extra six pounds to do so. This issue of firewood in particular became a point of some contention during Parris' residence in the Village as we shall see. The agreement also differs in the last part as Parris' version stated that if the Village were to suffer misfortune, he "will endeavour accordingly to bear such losses, by proportionable abatements of such as shall reasonably desire it"⁹. His meaning here is clearly that he will only consider taking a lesser amount in times of trouble but only for those individuals who personally request such an abatement. On the other side, the villager's version implies that Parris will abate his salary automatically. The difference is only slight, but there is a world of meaning away from what Parris clearly required in his original agreement. Parris alluded in his version that individuals must come as suppliants for a stay on their portion of his maintenance whereas the villagers' version rather implies that Parris was a public servant and that any abatements would be in the villagers' hands and not in Parris' at all.

The next record significant for Parris that the villagers noted appeared some four months later on the 10th of October, 1689. This record notes a significant victory for Parris and gained him some of the security he craved. The villagers voted that the previous entailment of the ministry house be rendered null and void and that the ministry house, barn and the two acres of land adjoining it should go to Parris and his heirs. The men who helped

⁸ C.W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft With an Account of Salem Village and a History of Opinion on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects*, 2 Vols., Boston, 1867, Vol. I, pp.289-90.

⁹ Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Vol. I, pp.289-90.

Parris achieve his unusual triumph were Nathaniel Putnam, John Putnam, Jonathon Walcott, Thomas Flint and Nathaniel Ingersoll¹⁰. This victory was a short-lived one, for Parris' opponents eventually gained control of the Village Committee and put into motion proceedings that questioned the legality of the transfer of those lands to Parris' possession. Two months later, on the 17th of December, 1689, we find that there was some difficulty in collecting Parris' rate with an order going to the constable, Edward Bishop, to collect what was owing "by distress" from the thirty-eight persons whose rates remained yet unpaid¹¹. This lack of enthusiasm in keeping up Parris' salary may be seen as a reaction to the earlier transaction and although there is no existing evidence that this was the case, the coincidence of these events is an interesting one.

Very little appears in the Village Records for almost twelve months concerning Parris. The next entry occurs on the 24th of October, 1690 and concerns the state of the Village meetinghouse which appears to have been somewhat neglected and allowed to fall into disrepair. It noted that the Committee was "empowered to repair our meetinghouse and keep it decent, and the inhabitants to bear the charge of it"¹². It is surprising that the villagers had let the meetinghouse fall into such a state considering the lengths they had gone to in order that they might have their independence from Salem Town. But on the other hand, when we consider the rapid changeover in ministers since it was built and the deep division within the Village which might have prevented its regular upkeep, perhaps it is not so surprising after all.

¹⁰ *Village Records*, 10 October 1689, p.349.

¹¹ *Village Records*, 17 December 1689, p.350.

¹² *Village Records*, 24 October 1690, p.351.

This record also showed that the villagers will “keep up the contribution” for Parris and set the rate for his salary, noting that the inhabitants would put their contributions into papers “or else it shall be accounted as strangers’ money”¹³. This part of the record is important as it hints that the contract for Parris’ salary was misrecorded by the villagers as it gives an inkling that they had knowledge of the original counter-offer made by Parris in which he quite particularly requested that he should get ‘outsiders’, or people from without the Village boundaries, contributions as a bonus on top of his set rate as he outlined in point seven of his counter-offer where he stated that “contributions each sabbath in papers; and only as such are in papers, and dwelling within our bounds, [are] to be accounted a part of the sixty pounds”¹⁴. It was in the villagers’ best interests to have their contributions in papers counted, otherwise they would still have an outstanding balance recorded against them.

Up until now we have heard almost nothing from Parris himself. The Church Records that he meticulously kept have been remarkably silent on the matter of his salary payments or about any other source of difficulty with his flock. Knowing what we do of Parris’ nature, it is hard to believe that if he had encountered some problem he would have remained quiet about it. We are forced to assume from his reticence that everything until this point had been reasonably smooth sailing for him. Up until the 7 December 1690, Parris only made brief records of those people undergoing baptism and becoming members of the Village church. Parris noted in the Church Records that after the evening service on the seventh, he had to admonish “those of the brethren that were absent at the time”¹⁵. This matter of

¹³ *Village Records*, 24 October 1690, p.351.

¹⁴ Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Vol. I, pp.289-90.

¹⁵ *Church Records*, 7 December 1690, p.273.

absenteeism may indicate that disaffection with Parris' ministry was growing and that it had begun to erode his support base. To try and repair some of the damage, Parris issued a stern admonishment. In order to reinforce his point, Parris used several verses from the New Testament. It is interesting to note that the chapter he used deals with admonishing those of a "disorderly" and "busybodying" nature. The passage he chose begins with the verse, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly"¹⁶. The selection of these particular verses gives us an indication that already his opponents were beginning to show their hand and he was asking that the "brethren", church members, withdraw from those that were creating disorder.

The next matter we hear from the villagers in regards to Parris, appears in their record book on the 3 April 1691. This record indicates that, although the Village Committee was still firmly controlled by Parris' supporters from the Putnam faction, they were still having difficulty in collecting the rate that they had set for Parris. On this date a warrant was issued to the constable, Joseph Hericke, to collect the outstanding amount of eighteen pounds, sixteen shillings and one pence, or just over 30 per cent. This was ten per cent more than the last time when his parishioners were delinquent with his salary payment for the period beginning 1 July 1690¹⁷. It seems that his opponents were further escalating their efforts to remove Parris and had gained more support for their movement. The records of this meeting also show that the committee was having some problems in ensuring all those who attended the meetinghouse for services contributed to both the upkeep of the meetinghouse

¹⁶ 2 *Thessalonians*, 3:6-16.

¹⁷ *Village Records*, 3 April 1691, p.356.

and towards Parris' salary. To this end they voted to address the General Court in Boston seeking an order to force those "families adjacent to us and are constant comers to our meetinghouse" to contribute their share of the burden¹⁸.

Although warrants were issued for two consecutive years for the constable to collect outstanding monies owed to Parris, it seems that the constable lacked any real power as the villagers did not accept his authority to demand payment. A note in the margin in the Village records, dated the 31 October 1694, signed by Parris shows that he did not received the entire balance of his salary payment until that date. The outstanding amount of one hundred and fifteen pounds, five shillings and eight pence, was received by Parris at "sundry times and in divers species" to make up the balance owing to him for the two year period to 1 July 1691¹⁹. The fact that it took two years for Parris to collect the full amount owing to him attests to a certain lack of enthusiasm and support for Parris. It also could imply that by 1694, the villagers were getting outstanding accounts out of the way in order to facilitate Parris' leaving the Village, since the dust surrounding the witchcraft outbreak was, at last, beginning to settle.

For the next ten months, the Church Records were remarkably silent on the subject of the on-going dispute Parris had with his opponents. Instead they show only the ordinary business of the Church. Unfortunately, we cannot definitely know whether this silence is because the records have not survived or been discovered, or because there was a lull in the hostilities. An indication of the last explanation being the more appropriate for a lack of

¹⁸ *Village Records*, 3 April 1691, p.355.

¹⁹ *Village Records*, 31 October 1694, p.355.

comment from Parris is confirmed by the fact that the Village Records are also quiescent. Since the period of silence occurs during spring and summer, the busiest seasons for farmers, this quiet can be attributed to the simple explanation that the villagers were too occupied to get up to mischief and were more concerned with the urgent matters of planting and harvest. Of course, once the pressure of earning their livelihoods was off, the villagers returned to the fray with growing enthusiasm and by October 1691 their hostilities had resumed with further harassment that was designed to both irritate and inconvenience Parris.

Along with difficulty in collecting his rate, there were a myriad of other little problems which Parris was experiencing with the villagers opposed to him. One complaint that Parris strenuously voiced in the Church Records was the lack of a proper supply of firewood. The supply of firewood was of major concern to Parris and a source of contention between himself and the villagers. During the negotiations for his contract, Parris quite adamantly required that firewood be supplied - delivered to him without any need on his part to organise it. According to the record that the villagers made, they agreed to give Parris a further six pounds in order for him to purchase it. Since there does not appear any further comment about it, it could be assumed that Parris accepted this compromise. Having a slave, John Indian, to carry out any heavy work there would not be any need for Parris to actually go out and chop the trees and cart the wood himself. Also, being a relatively newly settled area there would be plenty of woodland from which firewood could be easily obtained. With this knowledge, it is hard to understand exactly why Parris made such a fuss about the deficiency in the villagers providing him firewood. As we have suggested in Chapter Two, Parris appears to have made the stipulation requiring that he be supplied with

firewood “freely”, for the sole reason of being able to emphasise his status as being above that of the villagers.

On several occasions Parris remarked that his needs for firewood were not being adequately supplied by the villagers, although he does not seem to have had any problems with obtaining his firewood prior to the 8 October 1691. On that occasion Parris entered in the Church Records a rather piteous complaint that “I was so bare of firewood that I was forced publicly to desire the inhabitants to take care that I might be provided for”. Further in the entry he stated that if not for the timely visit of Mr. Corwin he would “hardly have any to burn”²⁰. On two other occasions, Parris was forced to express his concern about his lack of firewood, but it seems that little was being done in order to satisfy his needs²¹. By this time though, Parris had more serious matters pressing than the issue of firewood. He was now concerned whether he was going to get paid at all.

The next turn of events recorded in the Village Records is of vital importance to Parris, and signals yet a further deterioration in his support base, and consequently a turning point in the history of the Village. On 16 October 1691, less than three months before the outbreak of afflictions, the faction opposing Parris managed to gain the upper hand through control of the Village committee. This new committee was made up of Francis Nurse, Joseph Porter, Joseph Hutchinson, Daniel Andrew and Joseph Putnam, all belonging to the Porter faction and all having close ties to Israel Porter, the chief advocate of maintaining the villager’s association with the town²². Nurse was a close friend to Porter, Joseph, his brother; Andrew, his

²⁰ *Village Church*, 8 October, 1691, p.276.

²¹ *Village Church*, 2 November 1691; 18 November 1691, pp.276-7.

²² *Village Records*, 16 October 1691, p.356.

brother-in-law and Putnam, his son-in-law²³. With these men now in control of the apparatus that oversaw the details of the Village's few institutions, they could now threaten Parris' living within their community, which they promptly began to do. No sooner had they gained power, than their first act was a provocative vote to not make a rate for Parris' salary.

Parris' reaction was not long in coming. On 2 November 1691, after presenting his need for firewood, the church voted to send a delegation consisting of Captain Putnam and the two deacons to the Village committee in order to persuade them to set a rate²⁴. On 10 November 1691, the delegation returned to Parris and the message was not at all to his liking. It seems that the committee would not respond to Parris' messengers unless they had his request in writing, "under both the church's and pastor's hand"²⁵. It appears that this new committee was doing its best to make Parris' living unendurable, forcing him into a position where he had to appeal to his parishioners, not as their respected spiritual leader but as a suppliant. The motive for gaining signatures on a letter could also be a way for his opponents to more accurately assess his support base. On the 10th of November Parris also noted the lack of attendance by some brethren saying this, "slight and neglect ... did not a little trouble me"²⁶.

By 18 November the difficulties that Parris had been experiencing appeared to be on the increase. At the church meeting it seems attendance was still on the decline and "the appearance of the brethren is but small to what it might be expected". This is a significant date in the ongoing dispute

²³ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.112.

²⁴ *Church Records*, 2 November 1691, pp.276-7.

²⁵ *Church Records*, 10 November 1691, p.277.

²⁶ *Church Records*, 10 November 1691, p.277.

as Parris was able to drum up enough support in order to try and force some action from the Village committee. Hoping in the face of direct confrontation that he could get the committee to reverse its inactivity with making his rate, Parris was able to get a vote passed by the church to make a formal complaint to the County Court at its next sitting in Salem “against the neglects of the present committee”²⁷. Unfortunately if he was trying to call their bluff, he failed and at the next meeting of the Village committee, the hostilities escalated. There was now no turning back for either side.

The Village committee voted to hold a meeting of the inhabitants on 1 December 1691. The proposed agenda for this meeting was to examine

what means the inhabitants were convened together on the 18th of June, 1689 (then there was a committee chosen and a yearly salary stated to Mr. Parris that day, but no warrant appearing in the book for it), and to consider of a vote in the book on the 10th of October 1689, wherein our right in the ministry house and land seems to be impaired and made void; also to consider our ministry house and 2 acres of land given to Mr. Parris, and a committee chosen to make conveyances to Mr. Parris in the name of the inhabitants; and to consider about Mr. Parris’ maintenance for this year - whether by voluntary contributions or by subscription.²⁸

The anti-Parris committee was beginning its first real attack in the battle to oust their un-wanted minister. With the first part of the agenda, the committee sought to look into the means by which the inhabitants were called together, how Parris was hired or “called”, and how a rate committee was chosen to set Parris’ salary. It appears that they were implying that not all the villagers were in agreement in calling Parris to their community. In

²⁷ *Church Records*, 18 November 1691, p.277.

²⁸ *Village Records*, 1 December 1691, p.356.

examining the record of 10 October 1689, where the entailment of the ministry house was declared null and void and duly voted to Parris and his heirs in perpetuity, it seems that they are about to take steps to reclaim the ministry house and its adjacent lands for the Village, thereby threatening some of the security that Parris had achieved. The final part of the agenda concerning Parris' maintenance is a slightly different matter. With the parts of the agenda regarding the ministry house, the Village committee do seem to have had just legal grounds for their investigation. By stating that they would consider whether Parris' maintenance should be by voluntary contribution or by subscription, they are hinting that it was acceptable for individuals to refuse to keep up their contributions to Parris' salary. By calling into question the legality of the meeting that called Parris to the Village, the anti-Parris committee were essentially refusing to accept that Parris was legally the Village's minister. The committee appears to have had a firm grasp of the subtleties of their legal position, however they neglected the fact that, even if Parris' appointment was not strictly by-the-book, they still had a moral if not legal obligation for his maintenance while the matter was being investigated.

The record for this particular meeting would have been interesting for its impact on Parris, but unfortunately, we do not know if this meeting was actually held as no record of it survives. What is recorded, though, in the proposed agenda would have been enough to put Parris on notice regarding his future in the Village. His bluff of presenting a complaint to the County Court was called, and from here on it was a case of 'let the games begin'. By announcing to Parris and his supporters that they were about to directly attack both his income and his security, his opponents gave Parris the opening he needed to defend what he considered was his by right. Parris' response to

this attack was not long in coming and would cost his opposition more than simply some inconvenience, it would cost some of them their lives.

For the most part of his early life in the Village Parris did not come across too many obstacles. Those that did arise seemed to be nothing more than the usual way that the villagers had, in the past, treated their other three ministers. The four major problems that Parris encountered, the collection of his rate, his often bitter dispute about his supply of firewood, the lack of attendance at church, and general a lack of deference and respect, were initially irritants and did not prevent Parris from securing his future in the Village even to the point of investing in further property. While Parris' supporters had control over the Village meeting and therefore the rate committee, Parris was assured of continued security. Unfortunately for both Parris and the villagers, Parris' supporters could not always maintain their dominance and his enemies rose to ascendancy. Once this occurred and they sought to join battle in earnest, Parris' security came under fire and his very existence in the community was threatened. When this came to pass Parris could not fail to respond in kind. And it was this response that gave rise to one of the more savage outbreaks of witchcraft prosecution in the history of humankind.

Chapter 5: *And the Lord shall be my shepherd...*

We have seen how the ongoing dispute between Parris and his opponents was building in momentum. All the while this dispute was gaining in ferocity, it also began to find expression in Parris' sermons as he used the pulpit to advance his cause. He used the public forum of the meetinghouse to both castigate his enemies and reassure his friends. As we have seen in chapter four, Parris' opponents had finally manoeuvred themselves into a position where they could directly challenge Parris' security in the Village. As his opponents gained in power and influence Parris' sermons began taking on an increasingly ominous theme that would foreshadow later events. Instead of focusing upon the temporal argument between himself and his antagonists, he chose to interpret this battle in a spiritual context. Through his sermons, Parris chose to translate his enemies' actions as being not against a man and his ambition, but against God's messenger and God himself.

To this aim, the sermons delivered by Parris until the commencement of the trials will be examined here. Although there are only twenty-nine sermons, these offer enough information for a picture of Parris' intentions to emerge. As we will see, Parris had a 'fixation' with the presence of hidden evil within the Church and he frequently referred to the struggle between good and evil, which given his beleaguered circumstances within the Village, can be seen to mirror the situation between Parris' supporters and his 'evil' opponents. It is to these particular sermons we will turn to see that Parris was leading his people in the 'good' fight against the Devil and against those who were foolish enough to oppose him in his ministry. Parris used his sermons as a vehicle to carefully prepare the villagers so that they would readily accept

the existence of witches in their community when their presence was revealed by him, and to prophesy the coming events of the witchcraft crisis.

A key piece of Parris' writings give us some insight into, not only why he was reluctant to directly confront his opponents, but why he chose to take his battle for his security from the worldly to the spiritual arena. As we have discovered through his sermons, Parris equated himself with Christ. He also referred to his enemies as being akin to Satan's minions trying to depose him and undermine the church. In the sermon of 21 December 1690, he stated that "vengeance belongeth to God and God forbids it to us"¹. His belief that vengeance was denied to him personally might have prodded him into transferring his desire for action against his enemies from the temporal to the spiritual realm. This may have been all the justification he needed to relinquish the responsibility of answering his critics directly and bring the more sinister elements of devils into the matter.

As we have already highlighted in chapter one, after Parris could no longer tolerate the mediocrity he had suffered as a merchant, he chose the ministerial life to achieve a sense of financial security and more importantly social security. As a minister, Parris' standing in the community would be assured and he would no longer be looked down upon by his "betters" as a parasitical merchant, gaining from the labour of others. In chapter two we saw how the convoluted negotiations that Parris had with the villagers confirmed that indeed Parris chose the ministry as a path to elevate his status as being above that of the common man. In this chapter we shall see that the evidence continues to indicate that Parris was indeed a man who craved recognition as a man of importance. To this end we shall be examining

¹*Sermons*, 21 December 1690, p.21.

Parris' actions as evidenced through his sermons and church records in order to achieve an understanding of why a man like Parris could incite or manipulate the witchcraft outbreak for his own ends.

In chapter four, we saw that there was a gradual escalation in the opposition to Parris, beginning with the withholding of part of his rate and causing him frustration over the matter of his supply of firewood. There was also an erosion in his support base which caused a withdrawal of attendance at church meetings. Eventually, his enemies managed to erode enough of this support base to gain control of the Village committee and to began to attack him in a more direct manner. When Parris failed in his attempts to rally his flagging support, he was left with no choice but to embark on a course of action that would ensure, not only his security in the Village, but his indispensability to all the villagers. It seems that Parris had an inkling well in advance that events would eventually force a confrontation with his opponents, so it appears Parris may have developed a plan to combat them in their attempts to oust him. The effect was to force the villagers to unite with him against an even greater enemy, that enemy being Satan and his accomplices. Some time before the first outbreak of afflictions amongst the community's youth, Parris began to carefully implant and foster the idea that some amongst them were in league with Satan through the vehicle of his sermons.

For the period beginning from his ordination sermon right up until the outbreak of the afflictions, Parris used the overarching theme of Christ's life, most particularly his betrayal, his sufferings and his death. As Cooper and Minkema have noted, Parris' sermons during this period reveal that Parris was preoccupied with the spiritual war between Christ and Satan as well as,

importantly for us, an imminent demonic onslaught². Boyer and Nissenbaum also observe that during this period of sermons Parris doggedly pursued the topic of Christ's betrayal³. By looking at this topic of Christ's betrayal and his sufferings it can be seen, especially when considering Parris' beleaguered situation, that he was identifying himself with Christ, who like Parris was scorned and reviled by those around him. Within this context of speaking of Christ's life and death we shall see that Parris was able to use his sermons to address both his critics and his supporters.

A number of authors have argued that Parris was a man concerned with his standing in the community. They have noted that he was a man who wished to be respected for his station and noted that he "dwelled tirelessly on questions of dignity and status"⁴. These authors, too, recognised that Parris, in his sermons, likened himself to Christ, and used Christ's life in order to parallel his own. Boyer and Nissenbaum have noted that Parris' early life and subsequent unsuccessful foray into the mercantile arena was to have great influence over his new calling to the ministry and was to develop into a set of "obsessions...which came to dominate his thinking"⁵. These concerns, as Parris' sermons show, centred upon a desire to achieve respect for his new status and security.

Parris, as we have seen in previous chapters was a man who appeared to crave recognition and his choice of the ministry had finally gained him a position where he was able to garner for himself what he desired; security and respectability. Right from the beginning of his tenure in Salem Village,

²*Sermons*, p.13, editor's introduction..

³P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum (eds), *Salem Possessed*, Cambridge Mass., 1974, p169-70.

⁴Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.164.

⁵Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.161.

through the vehicle of his sermons, Parris repeatedly emphasised that the villagers had a need to pay him his due reverence as their minister and to this end delivered a lengthy list of instructions to the villagers on exactly how they should go about this.

You are to pay me that Reverence which is due to an Ambassador of Jesus Christ. You are to bear me a great deal of love. You are indeed highly to love every Minister of Christ Jesus: but (if you can notwithstanding the vast disproportion between myself & others) you are to love me best. You are to obey me (at lest) so far as I watch for your souls. You are to communicate to me of your carnall [worldly] good things both that which is stable, sufficient, & (according to your capacity) honourable: & that not as a piece of alms, or charity, but of justice & duty. You are to pray for me, & to pray much & fervently alwayes for me, but especially when you expect to hear from God by me. You are to endeavour by all lawfull means to make my heavy work as much as in you lyes light & cheerfull. And not by unchristian like behaviour to my selfe, or one another, or other Churches of God, or any whither within or without, or to God, or man to add to my burthen, & to make my life among you grievous, & my labour among you unprofitable.⁶

As we can see, from this passage, Parris had very definite ideas about his role in the Village and what the villagers' responsibilities were towards him. By stating he was to be revered and loved above all others it is clear that Parris expected to be held up as being above the villagers in station. He made it clear that his future financial security is assured, and it would not be by "alms or charity" but by right, and that it was the villagers' "duty" to ensure that he was maintained. More importantly, in addition to the reverence he expected as his due, Parris required their obedience and for them to do all in their power to make his work easier and not "unprofitable".

⁶*Sermons*, 24 November 1689, p.51.

To enhance his newly acquired elevated status, Parris continuously made it plain through his sermons that as a minister he bore a ‘special’ grace from God. He stated to his parishioners that they would only “hear from God by me”. Parris was now God’s voice and the villagers had to respect him as such. He quoted at length from Ephesians about how ministers such as himself had been given a special grace to preach the word of God so to help other men find that grace as well. He was saying that without a minister, namely himself, to bring them the word of God and to intercede for them, they would not be able to achieve a state of grace. As it was through “the Ministry of the word...that Christ brings us into his blessed kingdom”⁷, Parris was now informing the villagers that in order to attain heaven it would have to be through him. In a Puritan community attaining grace was something to be aspired to.

Parris constantly stressed that “Ministeriall employment is the Lords work”⁸, emphasising that his was a noble, higher, calling, a “great and dreadful work”⁹. He told the brethren that his expectations were that they “should be more mindful of me than other people”¹⁰. He even went so far as to say that he considered those that did not pay “due respect” to those that did God’s work, was doing His work “deceitfully”¹¹. Parris felt, most keenly, even a small slight to his dignity. On 10 November 1691, he recorded in the Church Records a somewhat petulant complaint about the “slight and neglect” of the brethren when only six of his supporters put in an appearance at the church meeting. He counselled them that they should “be more mindful of me than other people, and their way was plain before them”. In

⁷*Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.190; Ephesians 4:11.

⁸*Sermons*, 24 November 1689, p.55.

⁹*Sermons*, 24 November 1689, p.54.

¹⁰*Church Records*, 10 November 1691, p.277.

¹¹*Sermons*, 24 November 1689, p.54.

other words, they were to remind the other church members on his behalf to ensure that they did not fall behind in their duty to him¹². He was not reluctant to issue reprimands. “Some sit before the Preacher as senseless as the seats they sit on” he remonstrated to his congregation as his complaint and “the complaint of thousands since Paul”¹³. It seems that this lack of reverence towards him was a sore point for Parris. Coming from a wealthy background on Barbados where he would have been treated, at least by slaves, in a manner fitting a ‘lord’, then going on to become a member of the ‘middle class’, and of only moderate means appears to have made Parris sensitive to such matters. Any perceived slight to his new-found respectability probably incensed Parris no end.

Parris was to use his position as a minister in a variety of ways to highlight his importance. Upham was of the opinion that Parris used the church and made it “the theatre for the exercise of his authority”.¹⁴ The way that Parris was using his position can be seen in some of his actions. The instance of the choice of the church’s deacons was a prime example. After his ordination Parris had the job of appointing to the church deacons to aid him in his work. The two men who were eventually chosen, Nathaniel Ingersoll and Edward Putnam, had previously been a deacon and associate deacon respectively. Parris refused to appoint them as full deacons until he had completed an elaborate process of selection. In fact in 1689, just after his ordination, Parris would only select Ingersoll as a temporary deacon and kept the matter of his confirmation for well over a year. Edward Putnam’s confirmation was also held in abeyance for just over a year. In the final tally

¹² *Church Records*, 10 November 1691, p.277.

¹³ *Sermons*, 24 November 1689, p.58.

¹⁴ C. W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft-With an Account of Salem Village and a Hisotry of Opinion on Witchcraft and kindred Subjects*, 2 Vols, Boston, 1867, Vol I, p.300.

of events it appears that Parris put the nominations of Putnam and Ingersoll to the congregation to vote them into the office of deacon on at least two occasions. It was finally in June 1691, with much solemn ceremony, that Ingersoll was finally confirmed as deacon¹⁵. The ordination ceremony was suitably dignified and contained enough pomp to satisfy even Parris.

Another example of his zeal in emphasising both his and the church's importance was in the case of the baptism of Hannah Wilkins. Hannah, daughter of Bray Wilkins, sought to be entered into covenant with the church. According to Upham, a later minister of the Village, this matter of baptism would normally have been handled in a more discreet manner than Parris did, without involving the whole congregation. In fact in most other cases Parris was more discreet and only noted their membership in the Church Record rather than making a full-blown occasion of it¹⁶. Parris though, with his need to highlight the gravity of the moment and his own significance, chose to draw out the matter publicly through three sabbaths before Hannah's baptism could take place. In fact a vote was taken on no less than three occasions for Hannah to be admitted into the church¹⁷. Even after Hannah had been baptised Parris chose to keep public attention firmly on the matter and even went so far as to repeat to the congregation a private conversation between Hannah and her preacher¹⁸.

Despite Puritan ideology that God's house did not need elaborate ornamentation, Parris believed that his church was in need of more than the

¹⁵*Church Records*, 24 November 1689, p.270; 28 June 1691, p.274; Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, p.301-2.

¹⁶Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, p.311.

¹⁷*Church Records*, 9 August 1691, p. 275; 23 August 23 August 1691, p.275; 30 August 1691, p.276; Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, pp.309-11.

¹⁸*Church Records*, 28 August 1691, pp.275-6.

simple implements of pewter that the Lord's table was currently provided with¹⁹. Parris noted in his book of records that "The Lord's Table not being provided for with aught else but two pewter tankards, the pastor propounded and desired that the next sacrament-day...there be a more open and liberal contribution...to furnish the said table decently; which was consented to"²⁰. Through this statement he was requiring the funds from this pastoral community to upgrade the altar furnishings from the simple to the more elaborate. This again highlighted that Parris was not content with his place as a simple village pastor and sought to emphasise his position and his church.

Parris also sought to use his position as a minister to assert himself as a village leader in disciplinary matters. Ezekial Cheever, a very upstanding member of the community, borrowed a horse from his neighbour, Joseph Putnam, "without leave or asking for it" when his wife became ill. In this kind of matter it would seem to be more normal for the two parties involved to settle quietly or come to an agreement privately, or if the offended party were truly aggrieved, for the matter to be taken to court. Unfortunately for the parties involved, more especially for Cheever, Parris decided to take this matter in hand and see to it that the simple matter of a man borrowing a horse without the permission of the owner because of extreme need became a showcase for him to display his power as more than the Village's minister but as their leader.

Some "five or six weeks" after the event Parris chose to bring this matter to the public forum of the meetinghouse and presented it before the entire congregation on two occasions.

¹⁹*Church Records*, 7 December 1690, p.273; Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, p.304.

²⁰*Church Records*, 7 December 1690, p.273.

Brother Cheever...was called forth to give satisfaction to the offended Church, as also the last Sabbath he was called forth for the same purpose, but then he failed in giving satisfaction, by reason in his somewhat mincing in the latter part of his confession, which in the former he had more ingenuously acknowledged. But this day the Church received satisfaction, as was testified by their holding up of hands.²¹

Although Parris did not record the first confession made by Cheever, this record appears to indicate that it was not conciliatory enough for Parris and he made the poor man go through the whole process again, in the end putting it before a vote in order to attain the forgiveness of both the church and Parris himself. Parris saw fit to round off the matter and “a word of caution by the Pastor was dropped upon the offender”²².

Another occasion where Parris chose to assert his role as a disciplinarian was noted in the church record where he “admonished those of the brethren that were absent” and “a mark in a disciplinary way” was put against them²³. It is clear that Parris saw this matter as a chance to exert his position and we can see in this that he wanted to be the one everyone brought their problems to and wanted to be seen as both leader, mediator and disciplinarian. Parris, it seems, was serious when he said, “By the work of the Lord, is intended the execution of the judgements of God according to his divine commandment.”²⁴

Another way that Parris was to highlight his position as being above that of the villagers was to use his education to emphasise his distinction.

²¹*Church Records*, 30 March 1690, p.272.

²²*Church Records*, 30 March 1690, p.272.

²³*Church Records*, 7 December 1690, p.273.

²⁴*Sermons*, 24 November 1689, p.53.

Throughout his sermons Parris used both Greek and Latin phrases which would have not been understood by his congregation. The only reason that can be seen for the usage of such language would have been to ‘show off’. He also did this by introducing to the villagers topics of discussion that would have been either beyond their grasp or of little relevance to them. Not long after his ordination, on 20 February 1690, Parris threw out the question, “Who are the proper subjects of baptism?”²⁵. It is uncertain whether Parris was truly seeking answers from his congregation. From a reading of the record Parris’ question appears to have been rhetorical. He appeared to have already had the answers thought out. He told the congregation, “there were two ways by which persons come to baptism: viz., by their own profession and by their parents’.”²⁶ By opening up such a topic as baptism, Parris was not-so-subtly letting the congregation know that he had all the answers to their spiritual problems and a grasp on complex theological issues. This incident could also be seen as a display of Parris’ insecurity. In not having actually achieved his qualifications as a minister, Parris might have been bringing up issues such as these in order to reassure his congregation that he was capable of fulfilling the position they had entrusted to him.

Parris may have felt compelled to magnify his status and to exercise the authority which accompanied the “extraordinary and ordinary [grace]” with which God had imbued him. Much of this conviction may be traced to the belief that he had been entrusted with a great task, to form a “true separation between the precious and the vile” of the congregation.²⁷ As early as his ordination sermon, Parris cautioned the villagers to expect “laborious &

²⁵*Church Records*, 20 February 1690, p.271.

²⁶*Church Records*, 20 February 1690, p.271.

²⁷*Sermons*, 3 January, 1692, p.182; 14 February, 1692, p.190.

hazardous combats both publick & private”²⁸. He stated that his work in the Village was to “make the difference between the clean, & unclean: so as to labour to cleanse & purge the one, & confirm & strengthen the other ... to give Cordials to some ... to administer corrosives to others”²⁹. This can be taken as a warning that Parris would consider those who opposed his ministry and made difficulties for him as “unclean”, and that his intention was to “purge” them. In explicit warning to those who dissented against having the Church and Parris in the Village, he said that “when wicked men think themselves most secure many times thy are most in danger”³⁰. He comforted his followers and held out an olive branch to his enemies by saying that “Obedience to God is the best defence against the greatest hazards”³¹. He went on to exhort the villagers to also obey him, saying that they should not add to his burden and “make my life among you greivous”³².

About the time Parris was first beginning to have some problems collecting his rate, he spoke at length on the topic of those who do the Lord’s work deceitfully, perhaps speaking to those who attended church while harbouring ill will towards him personally. He then went on to say that those who do the Lord’s work deceitfully will “fall under curses: & the curse of God” like Saul and that “dreadful mischief” will be visited upon them³³. In his sermon on 12 January 1690 he went further and stated that there was a “lamentable harmony between wicked men & Divels in their opposition of Gods Kingdome & Interest”³⁴. Here, perhaps, Parris was referring to those

²⁸*Sermons*, 19 November 1689, p.40.

²⁹*Sermons*, 19 November 1689, p.50.

³⁰*Sermons*, 19 November 1689, p.42.

³¹*Sermons*, 19 November 1689, p.43.

³²*Sermons*, 19 November 1689, p.51.

³³ *Sermons*, 1 December 1689, pp.70-1.

³⁴ *Sermons*, 12 January, 1690, p.76.

“wicked” men in the community who were opposing him by withholding their support of him as God’s representative and thereby opposing God’s kingdom. Again, somewhat coincidentally, this sermon corresponded with the Village committee setting his rate, and perhaps he was hoping that with the diatribe that only those who refused him were “wicked” he would ensure his year’s income. Whatever his intended purpose, in the end, he failed to achieve a lasting result and eventually he was forced to remind his flock more firmly that as God’s representative he could not be opposed without “dreadful mischief” coming amongst them.

Parris continued with the theme of Christ’s humiliations and sufferings before his crucifixion and looked closely at the theme of betrayal. He stated that there was a “lamentable harmony between wicked men and Devils in their opposition to God’s Kingdome and Interest. As here Devils, and wicked men” and that “here is great guiltings upon this account in this poor little village”³⁵ for the sin of lying and betrayal. And that there were, he trusted “in this place” many who pray and watch that they do not enter into such temptation and that there are many who do and they find this temptation “too hard for them already”³⁶. Here he alluded to that fact that the Devil had already entered the community by some having given in to the temptation of lying.

By May 1690, it appears that Parris was already coming under criticism from his opponents and using the medium of his sermon, Parris let his critics know that he was aware of their actions. Continuing the theme of Christ’s hardships he likened Christ’s situation with his own, “but when he

³⁵*Sermons*, 12 January 1690, p.76; 23 February 1690, p.84.

³⁶*Sermons*, 23 February 1690, p.85.

once comes to the sacred employ of his publick Ministry Satans instruments surround him, with great fury and malice”³⁷. Parris cautioned against the, “Reviling & Reproaching of any: for this is to savour the worst of Spirits especially when our Reproaches are against such poor Ministers, whose desire is your best welfare”³⁸. It appears obvious here that Parris was already coming under attack and was cautioning those who opposed him.

By late 1691, Parris turned to a more ominous theme. In the sermon he gave on 22 November he spoke on how Christ’s enemies shall be laid low and said no less than five times on that occasion that God shall, “make thine Enemies thy footstool”³⁹. By 3 January 1692 this ominous theme developed more warlike overtones. With this sermon Parris spoke about the church being militant and how Christ, while defending the church “against all ruining attempts”, will punish the “Enemies of his Church”⁴⁰. In this sermon Parris again equated the wicked with devils, or Satan’s assistants and noted how Christ would “punisheth them...so that they will run themselves voluntarily and merrily into the Sea of destruction” or even “fall into desperation as bloody Saul”⁴¹. We must not forget here that Saul was guilty of rebellion against god and such “rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft”⁴².

On 18 November 1691 Parris was beginning to see that the battle with his opponents was becoming more than a minor skirmish, but more an all-out war. He then called his supporters in the church to petition the County Court about the “neglects” of the Village Committee, which at that time consisted

³⁷*Sermons*, 25 May 1690, p.96.

³⁸*Sermons*, 25 May 1690, p.98.

³⁹*Sermons*, 22 November 1691, pp.170-172, 176.

⁴⁰*Sermons*, 3 January 1692, pp.183-4.

⁴¹*Sermons*, 3 January 1692, p.185.

⁴²*Samuel I.* 15:23.

of members of his opposition. With this in mind, it is not surprising that Parris' sermons started to reflect more ominous themes. He again talked about how God would "make thine enemies thy Footstool" on at least five occasions after the petition to the Courts was organised⁴³. Parris appeared by these comments to have felt confident that the Courts would vindicate his case.

Just prior to the actual beginning of the afflictions, Parris, again on the subject of enemies, spoke extensively about exactly how Christ "defends his Church against all ruining attempts and purposes" against the three great enemies which were, "inward enemies in their own souls: their own remaining lusts, ... Against furious and firey persecutions [and] Against the power of Death". Parris went on to say that these enemies were the "Wicked & Reprobate men (the assistants of Satan to afflict the Church)", and Christ would punish his Church's enemies "By hampering & fettering" them⁴⁴. It is not at all surprising given the opposition that he increasingly faced that Parris was focusing his sermons on the subject of the enemies of the church. The new Village Committee had threatened his interests by voting to hold an inquiry into the legality of the ministry house and lands being conveyed to him, and by giving consideration to changing the collection of Parris' salary to voluntary basis. It is easy to see that Parris was identifying his enemies as being the enemies of the Church. By saying that such "Wicked & Reprobate men" were the assistants of Satan he was again alluding to these enemies as being in the same class as witches, for such as they are Satan's handmaidens, or assistants, who opposed the work of the church.

⁴³ *Sermons*, 22 November 1691, pp.170-2, 176; 3 January 1692, p.178; 14 February 1692, pp.185, 189.

⁴⁴ *Sermons*, 3 January 1692, pp.184-5, .

It is the sermon that Parris gave on 14 February 1692 that is most important in giving insight to what the situation was in Parris' mind just prior to the outbreak of afflictions. This sermon had a particular foreboding to it and he continued with the references of how God would make his enemies his "footstool". Parris told his people that they should "War a good warfare, to subdue all our spiritual Enemies"⁴⁵. At the same time he warned that "stronger is he that is with us and for us, then he is against us"⁴⁶ and his opponents should "have a care not to persist" in their rebellion⁴⁷. Further he continued these threats with the prophetic statement that they should "not be offended at the present low condition of the Church in the midst of its enemies. Oh shortly the case will be far otherwise"⁴⁸. He went on to say that "God is sending forth destroyers"⁴⁹. These passages were particularly blatant in their threatening tone and it is obvious that the situation in the Village was about to come to a head. This sermon reveals that Parris must have been angry and frustrated with the fact that all his efforts were not helping to stave off his enemies attacks on his position.

As we have mentioned, while using his sermons to castigate his opponents, Parris also used this vehicle to reassure those that supported him. Throughout this period when he was most under siege Parris continually reassured his supporters that it was normal for the Godly to be reviled by those who were not, "afflictions are common to all but especially they belong to saints" and that it was the "dearest of Gods children [who] may be called upon to drink deepest of the most embittered cups of affliction". He told his people that they should but "remember if we suffer, we shall also reign with

⁴⁵*Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.190.

⁴⁶*Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.187.

⁴⁷*Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.192.

⁴⁸*Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.191.

⁴⁹*Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.188.

him...therefore fear none of those things that you can suffer - only be faithful”⁵⁰. He further confirmed this assurance by saying that “Christ furnisheth the believer with skill strength, courage, weapons and all military accomplishments for victory”⁵¹. Here Parris was attempting to assure the congregation that, though at the present they were in the midst of enemies, that should they but be faithful to the church and thereby to him, they would be victorious.

Not only did Parris use his sermons to issue subtle and some not-so-subtle threats against his persecutors, he also used his sermons to introduce the concept of the community harbouring witches to the congregation. In the sermon he delivered on 1 December 1689 he spoke about how Saul was cursed with the haunting of an “evil & wicked spirit” for doing the Lord’s work deceitfully and that he killed himself as a result of this curse because he turned from God to the Devil and a witch⁵². Even though this passage was used by Parris as a warning against those ‘deceivers’ in the Village it is also the first reference Parris made to actual witches. He again made a reference to evil magicians or ‘witches’ when he spoke of Elymas the sorcerer, a man who Parris charged with perverting the nation from the true faith⁵³.

Boyer and Nissenbaum have highlighted in their work how Parris set the scene unconsciously for the outbreak to take place⁵⁴. However, it seems that Parris, being a thoughtful and intelligent man, had chosen his topics and biblical passages for his sermons with great care. When his difficulties with

⁵⁰*Sermons*, 21 December 21 1690, pp.117-119.

⁵¹*Sermons*, 19 July 1691, p.147.

⁵²*Sermons*, 1 December 1689, p.69.

⁵³*Sermons*, 17 August 1690, p.104.

⁵⁴ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.168.

his opponents are taken into account, it is more than a striking coincidence that Parris was using his sermons to reprimand his enemies and to coalesce his support. While preparing his supporters for the coming events, Parris warned his opponents of the consequences of their actions against him. This approach can be seen in the sermon he delivered just prior to the first witches being accused. This sermon gives us a key piece of information about the state of Parris' mind, and how the situation between Parris and his opponents was beginning to come to a head. On 14 February 1692, he was again speaking about enemies of God, and specifically of the church. What differentiates this sermon is the air of menace. Parris speaks about war and the subjugation of enemies and he states to his parishioners that they should, "not be offended at the present low condition of the church in the midst of its enemies. Oh shortly the case will be far otherwise"⁵⁵.

This final prediction before the outbreak was both a threat directed to those who opposed him, and a reassuring forewarning to those who supported him. Here Parris was demonstrating that he was either prescient or that he was then planning the coming events. Given that this threatening sermon was delivered less than two weeks before the outbreak of the afflictions, it can be assumed that Parris' predictions were less prophetic and more of foreknowledge. It is not inconceivable that Parris had a hand in the events which were shortly to unfold. This rather ominous prophecy would very shortly be fulfilled when the first three witches were accused, and his house slave Tituba confessed to a vast conspiracy of witches within the Village community.

⁵⁵ *Sermons*, 14 February 1692, p.191 .

Chapter Six: *Double, double, toil and trouble!*

Samuel Parris did not react like his predecessors, leaving when the situation became untenable. His opponents among the villagers failed to take into account the character of the man they had invited into their community. Parris was now under siege in his new home town and the life of comfort, security and above all respectability that he had longed for was in jeopardy. In fact he was only retaining his position by the most narrow margin. Instead of having “rolled away the reproach” from the Village, his presence disturbed what little peace there was, adding yet further dimensions of bitterness to the conflict. With the anti-Parris faction about to realise their goal of ousting Parris from their midst, we shall now consider the measures that Parris took to not only retain his position, but to ensure his indispensability to all the villagers. In order to counter his opponents’ growing determination to remove him, he had to deflect their attention from their on-going conflict with him and his supporters and as well from their old debate about the Village’s autonomy or lack thereof. In order to achieve his goal, he highlighted an old adversary for the villagers to focus upon. This old enemy was Satan, the eternal foe attacking their Godly community with a new ferociousness.

This chapter examines the actual outbreak of the afflictions amongst the girls up until the beginning of the trials. The focus will be on how Parris handled the initial outbreak of afflictions, and in particular his handling of this situation will be compared with other ministers in similar situations. This examination of other cases will allow us to establish a ‘norm’ or a customary way in which ministers handled cases of afflicted children making accusations of witchcraft. We shall also be examining how spectral evidence from afflicted victims was treated by Salem’s magistrates in order to confirm that these other ministers were in no way acting outside of the established

‘norm’. With these comparisons we will see how Parris’ contributions at the early stage of the outbreak of afflictions led directly to the trials themselves, in turn resulting in a great loss of life and further strife within the Village.

When his Porter faction opponents failed to be admonished by his preaching and various other attempts to bring them into line, Parris began to introduce the idea of Satan’s minions amongst the community. Parris was very clever about the way he brought the villagers’ attention to this new dimension in the conflict. In fact it was almost from the beginning of his ministry in the Village that he began to introduce the concept of witches being already amongst them. He built up the concept in the villagers’ minds so none would be unduly surprised when Satan’s minions did reach out and attack the Village. He may have initially introduced this concept of an outside enemy in order to deflect the villagers away from their current political divisions and to help unite them in a common cause against a universal enemy. Once the idea was introduced it may well have been an easy leap for Parris to take the idea further when no abatement in the Village’s division and contentiousness resulted. With the afflictions beginning first in his own household and then spreading to those of his closest supporters and allies it will be clearly seen that Parris, if not the instigator of the so-called afflictions, manipulated the coming events in order to cement his indispensability to the villagers and secure his tenure in perpetuity but also to aid his allies in eroding the support base of his opposition.

On examining New England cases of the ‘afflicted’, especially those outside of the Salem episode, it can be seen that the ministers of New England treated such people with suspicion. First, though, in order to help establish the credibility of afflicted people we shall look at how such accusers

were generally received and in order to do this we shall turn to the courts of New England. In order to establish a basis for comparison with the Salem incident we shall be looking closely at two New England ministers who were contemporaries of Parris, Cotton Mather and Samuel Willard. We shall also be examining the contemporary opinion about the testimony of afflicted people, or spectral evidence, in general, in order to give a base line by which we can compare and contrast it to Parris' opinion and usage of such evidence.

Of the many cases of witchcraft that came before the courts of New England prior to 1692, only a few came about as a result of an accusation made by an afflicted person. In these rare cases it seems that magistrates were not wont to weigh this type of spectral evidence very heavily and most cases resulted in the acquittal of the accused. One magistrate, Mr Serjeant Keeling stated that he was "much unsatisfied" with such evidence and that if it was allowed as proof of guilt of witchcraft then, "no person whatsoever can be in safety". Even in cases where afflictions resulted in the death of the accuser, magistrates were reluctant to convict without strong supporting evidence. One such case, documented by Cotton Mather, was that of Philip Smith of Hadley, Massachusetts. In this case Philip Smith became concerned about "receiving mischief" at the hands of Mary Webster after she became "dissatisfied at some of his just cares of her". When Smith became ill, during his delirium he cried out against Webster and others. Yet no records exist that she was ever brought up on charges for such a serious crime. Cotton Mather was convinced that it was "unquestionable that witchcraft" was the cause of Smith's death, yet apart from making a record of these events, did not testify in a formal court to this effect¹.

¹C. Mather, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, Boston,

Two years before Philip Smith's death, Webster was indicted on charges of witchcraft and upon having her case referred to the Boston Court of Assistants, was acquitted². It seems that even the death-bed accusation of witchcraft was not considered strong enough evidence to indict even a suspected witch. It appears that while a firm believer that acts of witchcraft were able to inflict such hideous deaths, Cotton Mather was yet quite sceptical about its efficacy as actual proof of guilt. In a letter to John Foster, Cotton Mather clearly stated that spectral evidence, while useful in arousing suspicions against a suspect, was not completely adequate for a conviction and requires supporting evidence for confirmation of guilt³. This opinion was based upon a passage from Deuteronomy which states "at the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; *but* at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death."⁴ Cotton went on to say that for those accused on the basis of spectral evidence, bail should be granted them, confirming his reluctance to rely upon the testimony of the afflicted as the sole source of evidence⁵.

The more 'normal' way that magistrates treated spectral evidence appears in the case of Caleb Powell in Newbury in 1679. Here Powell, who was identified as a ship's mate temporarily resident in Newbury, came across William and Elizabeth Morse and their grandson John Stiles who was then residing with them. In this case we have in the Morse household, what we

pp.54-59.

² D.D. Hall (ed.), *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth Century New England*, Boston, 1991, pp260-262.

³ B. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, Cambridge, 1993, p.144.

⁴ *Deuteronomy* 17:6.

⁵ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p.144.

would today call a classic case of a poltergeist in residence causing all manner of disturbances and damage to the household and property.⁶

Caleb Powell, having entered the scene at the height of the Morses' afflictions, boasted that he was somewhat experienced in these kinds of things and would endeavour to resolve the Morses' problem for them. To this end, Powell volunteered to take into his custody the young John Stiles having said to William Morse that, "this boy is the occasion of your grief, for he hath done these things, and hath caused his good old grandmother to be counted a witch" and further that "... this boy is a young rogue, a vile rogue. I have watched him and seen him do things, as to come up and down".⁷ Whatever methods Powell used, the results were immediate and gratifying to the Morses, for their 'poltergeist' ceased to plague them. If Powell had expected praise or appreciation for his cure of the Morse's troubles, he was sadly mistaken and soon was to face trial on an accusation of witchcraft.

The time period of these events has a significance in that the lead up to and the trial itself took place in a very short period of time. The lead up to witchcraft accusations and trials was normally over a much longer period starting with the suspicion that a member of the community was a witch often starting years before a formal accusation occurred. The chronology of the Powell case began on 27 November and the subsequent weekend with the particularly violent activity of the poltergeist. Powell took custody of the young Stiles on 1 December and the Morse's troubles immediately ceased. Two days later on 3 December, William Morse showed his gratitude to Caleb Powell by approaching the local magistrate to file a formal complaint against

⁶ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.230.

⁷ J. Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, Oxford, 1982, p.134.

Powell “for working with the Devil to the molesting of ... his family”.⁸ With the depositions taken, the magistrate found there was enough evidence to order Powell appear before the next full session of the county court. With Powell taken into custody, John Stiles returned to the home of his grandparents, the poltergeist activity immediately resuming.

The reasons why William Morse brought witchcraft accusations against Powell is unknown, but it was during Powell’s trial that the spectral evidence was brought up in this case. While Powell was awaiting trial, there were further developments in the Morse household. It was during the intermission in the proceedings against Powell that Stiles began to have fits and afflictions. Stiles would swoon, be violently thrown to and fro and even experience sensations of pricking and pinching with sharp objects, such as forks and knives, being found stuck in his body. This was not the full extent of his afflictions though, Stiles would sometimes not be able to partake of food or drink, or if he did would vomit them up, or he would be given to periods of shouting and raving or making the noises associated with animals and then sometimes not being able to speak at all.

During Stiles’ afflictions there seems to have been no perceptible pattern to them, while he would go through periods where he was free from his torments. At some time during his afflictions, the young Stiles began to identify the person who was responsible for his torment and would say such things as “There's Powell, I am pinched”⁹. Powell was eventually brought before the county court at the end of March and although there were some seventeen depositions given in evidence against him, there was not strong

⁸ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.238.

⁹ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, p.135.

enough evidence against Powell and he was acquitted on the charge of witchcraft. The court while not able to find any “evident ground of proceeding further against the said Powell”, could not fully acquit him of the charges as they considered that there existed “ground of suspicion”. As a result of this suspicion Powell was ordered to pay all the court’s costs and “bear his own shame”, but was allowed to go free¹⁰. From the acquittal of Powell, it can be assumed that the spectral evidence that John Stiles had levelled against him, was not considered weighty enough by the presiding magistrates for more than suspicion to held against Powell of practicing witchcraft, and definitely not enough for a conviction.

Spectral evidence also made an appearance in the case of Elizabeth Garlick in Easthampton in 1658. In this instance, the accuser, Elizabeth Howell, died as a result of her afflictions. After the recent birth of her first child, Howell became mysteriously afflicted with strange and violent fits which intensified as time wore on. During Howell’s afflictions she cried out the name of her tormentor, Goody Garlick¹¹. Howell was urged by her mother to deny that she was bewitched and not to repeat that she thought Garlick responsible for her ills. She was urged by her mother, in a stern manner to, “Hush, child. This is a terrible thing you say. You must never say it again, not to your husband, not to any living soul. For your husband, if he heard you speak so, would surely tell ...”¹². As Howell’s afflictions grew more severe she eventually repeated her accusation against Garlick and on the Sabbath¹³, Elizabeth Howell, died.

¹⁰Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.239.

¹¹ Goodwife Garlick.

¹² Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, p.215.

¹³ The puritan's day of worship, not the Witches' Sabbath.

Within a week of Howell's death, the townsfolk had gathered sworn depositions against Garlick, accusing her of witchcraft. When the collection of the depositions was completed, a vote was cast and the majority agreed to present Garlick to the colony's highest court for trial. Two months later Goodwife Garlick was formally indicted upon the charge that:

not having the fear of God before thine eyes thou hast entertained familiarity with Satan, the Great enemy of God and mankind, and by his help since the year 1650 hath done works above the course of nature to the loss of lives of several persons (with several other sorceries), and in particular the wife of Arthur Howell ... for which, according to the laws of God and the established law of this Commonwealth, thou deservest to die.¹⁴

The depositions presented against Garlick gave testimony of all manner of witchcrafts allegedly performed by her, not the least of which was that she spectrally tormented Elizabeth Howell to death. The result of the trial of Garlick was that she was found not guilty and a letter of explanation of the verdict from the magistrates of the high court was sent to the residents of Easthampton. This letter also admonished the townsfolk to treat the Garlicks in a neighbourly and peaceable manner¹⁵. Spectral evidence in this case, as well as in that of Powell, was not taken very seriously by the magistrates and was not considered weighty enough for conviction as is evident by the verdicts that were handed down.

As we can see from the above cases where evidence was given by a victim 'spectrally' afflicted by witchcraft, this type of testimony did not seem

¹⁴ Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1639-1663, p.188, quoted in Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, pp.219-20.

¹⁵ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, p.220.

to be considered to be incontrovertible proof and was not taken as such, only as a useful tool of suspicion. Now that we have determined how the courts and magistrates considered such spectral evidence, we shall examine how it was treated by ministers who found themselves in the same situation as Parris did. There is the case of Elizabeth Knapp of Groton, who appears in a treatise written by the Reverend Samuel Willard¹⁶. Beginning in October of 1671 and continuing for some three months, the sixteen year old Elizabeth was 'afflicted' with violent and extreme fits. Elizabeth was observed to carry herself in a strange manner, sometimes giving shrieks or falling to the ground in fits of uncontrollable laughter. On 1 November she cried out against one of her neighbours. The person was sent for and when they came into Elizabeth's presence, she knew the person's touch from any others even though her eyes were tightly closed. After this neighbour and Elizabeth were questioned closely, Willard reported that God was pleased to vindicate this person to the satisfaction of all. Afterwards the accused prayed with Elizabeth, and Elizabeth confessed that Satan had deluded her. Willard went on to say that Elizabeth never again "complained of any such apparition or disturbance from the person"¹⁷.

Elizabeth's afflictions progressed to yet another level after her unsuccessful bid to accuse her neighbour of being the cause of her torments. Her next move was confess that the devil came to her, tempting her with money and fine things to get her to sign a covenant with him. She reported that she was shown a book in which others had signed in blood their covenants with him. Her afflictions at this time continued intermittently and on November 5th a physician was consulted as to her state. At first, after an

¹⁶ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, p.99.

¹⁷ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.199.

initial examination by the physician, her fits were thought to be of a natural origin, a result of “the foulness of her stomach and corruption of her blood, occasioning fumes in her brain, and strange fantasies”¹⁸. Later as her fits progressed the physician concluded that her afflictions were of a diabolical origin and therefore came under the province of the local minister, Samuel Willard¹⁹.

Early in December 1671, Elizabeth’s torments took a turn for the worse and she declared that if the person responsible was apprehended she would be cured from these afflictions and she again named the person who she thought was her tormentor. Her father brought to Elizabeth’s presence the accused woman on the night of 7 December. Samuel Willard who was present at this occasion reported that as soon as the woman came into the room Elizabeth became “violently handled, and lamentably tormented” making “unusual shrieks, at the instant of the person's coming in, though her eyes were fast closed. But having experience of such former actings, we made nothing of but waited the issue”²⁰. Willard went on to say that after prayer and the questioning of Elizabeth and the accused, he observed clear mistakes and the person so accused of spectrally afflicting Elizabeth was cleared of all suspicion. From the consideration that Willard gave to such evidence it can be clearly seen that the weighting granted to the accusations of the ‘afflicted’ was not great, nor enough to proceed to trial. Rather than take Elizabeth at her word, Willard, a firm believer in witchcraft and the Devil being capable of such transgressions, appears to have found it hard to fully accept that previously devout and upstanding members of the

¹⁸ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.201.

¹⁹ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.197.

²⁰ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, pp.105-107.

community would be discovered as witches and was willing to investigate the matters fully before proceeding further.

After her accusations of witchcraft against her neighbours did not bear fruit, Elizabeth tried a different tack and proceeded to confess to signing a pact with Satan. Her afflictions continued for some time after her second attempt at impeaching her neighbours, Willard's last entry on the matter of her afflictions being the 15th of January. At the end of this episode Willard appears to have been undecided about the exact cause of Elizabeth's afflictions saying, "whether her distemper be real or counterfeit: I shall say no more...". Willard concluded by stating that "she is an object of pity ... a monument of divine severity"²¹.

The next case we come to is that of Cotton Mather and the Goodwin children. Mather was a firm believer in witchcraft and diabolical occurrences and went to great pains to document each stage and aspect of the episode. In this instance the person accused actually confessed to afflicting the children and was hanged for her crime. Someone freely confessing to this crime was a great rarity in New England witchcraft cases. In the history of New England witches there had been only three other occasions of a witch confessing as such before the Salem episode²².

The episode had its beginnings with the eldest of the Goodwin children, Martha, accusing the laundress of stealing linen. This accusation of theft led to harsh words from the laundress' mother, Mary Glover, who reacted with hostility to the accusation of her daughter for such a crime. The

²¹ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, pp.211-212.

²² Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, p.352.

result of these 'harsh words' was that all four of the Goodwin children, Martha (13), John (11), Mercy (7) and Benjamin (5), became subject to 'afflictions'. The fits of the four children continued for some weeks and the physicians consulted pronounced their affliction the result of "nothing but a hellish witchcraft". In order to combat these vile afflictions the Goodwins' requested that the four ministers of Boston, in addition to the minister of Charlestown as well as other devout people, to hold a prayer day at their residence. This day of prayer and fasting resulted in the successful cure of Benjamin, the youngest of those afflicted. There is no record of any of the children complaining of Glover being the cause of their afflictions, but rather it was the father who brought the complaint against Glover.

The results of this complaint led to Glover being examined for the crime of witchcraft. Although the primary evidence against Glover was the living evidence of the children's afflictions, this was only held to be the basis of suspicion against her and not actual proof. To prove Glover's guilt she was subjected to the traditional tests for witchcraft, such as the reading of the Lord's Prayer. A search of Glover's house also turned up some 'poppets' or small effigies that were thought to have been used by her for 'spells'. Further evidence against her was gathered and it appeared that some six years earlier Glover had been suspected of bewitching another person to death, while her late husband had also complained against her as a witch. All of this evidence would have been very compelling to the Boston magistrates that presided over the trial, but would not have necessarily have led to her conviction on the charges. What did seal Glover's fate in the end was her confession to being a witch and to having afflicted the Goodwin children. Even with a confession though the magistrates were still sceptical and before accepting it they sought "five or six physicians ... to examine her very strictly, whether she were not crazed in her intellectuals, and had not procured to herself by folly and

madness the reputation of a witch”²³. In the end the physicians found that she was *compos mentis*, of sound mind, and the death sentence was passed. As Glover went to the gallows she launched a parting barb and stated that even with her death the children’s afflictions would not be at an end, but would continue unabated, “for others had a hand in it as well as she”²⁴.

True to her threat, the afflictions of the three remaining children went on gaining in severity. The children still cried out that others were afflicting them but at this stage no indication was given by the children as to who their tormentors were, only crying out that “They” and “Them” were the ones that caused their torments. At one stage in the children’s afflictions, a blow was aimed at the place where the boy had reported that the spectre of a witch was standing, and even though the boy ‘felt’ the blow as if it had hit him, his torments would temporarily be relieved. At that time it was reported to Mather that a “wound was given in this way to an Obnoxious woman in the town”. It seems here that Mather counselled caution at such a proof of witchcraft, refusing to disclose the identity of the woman saying that “we should be tender in such Relations, lest we wrong the Reputation of the Innocent by stories not enough enquired into”²⁵. Even though Mather was a staunch believer in the ability of witches to perform such harmful acts as to torment children, he was reluctant to accuse anyone on only this type of spectral evidence, at least not without further proofs as corroborating evidence.

²³ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.271.

²⁴ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, p.272.

²⁵ C. Mather, *Memorable Providence*, in G.L. Burr, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706*, New York, 1914, p.107.

The afflictions of the three remaining children continued in ferocity. To show his kindness he took the eldest child, Martha, into his home, although this was not without an ulterior motive. Mather sought to try and effect a cure of the girl's torments as well as act as an observer and chronicler of the events so that he might be "furnished with Evidence and Argument as a Critical Eye-Witness"²⁶. For the first few days, Martha's torments seemed to have a respite and she acted as normal, but after this time her fits returned and she cried out that they had found her. It seems her relocation had somewhat confused the spectres who tormented her. At two places in Mather's narrative of Martha's torments he alluded to Martha furnishing the names of those who were responsible for causing her afflictions²⁷. At no stage, though, did Mather mention any of those named or relate any information that those named by Martha were investigated for witchcraft. It seems that Mather was still of the opinion that without further proof or suspicion, to publicly reveal those named, would only lead to damaged reputations, and such would be mean an awful blight if the suspicions were unfounded. In New England the hint of witchcraft, even if proved wrong, would besmirch their names for life. Still not naming names, at the end of his discourse, Mather said, "I think it will not be improper to tell the World, that the one thing in the Childrens Deliverance was the strange Death of an horrible old Woman, who was presum'd to have a great hand in their Affliction"²⁸.

As we have seen from the above examples, the magistrates and the ministers both treated the evidence presented by those suffering afflictions with caution. They refused to accept such spectral evidence as proof of guilt

²⁶ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, p.110.

²⁷ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, pp.116-117.

²⁸ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, p.126.

of the crime of witchcraft, but rather used such evidence as a indication of suspicion for such a crime which should be backed up with other more concrete proofs. Now that we have seen how this type of evidence and afflicted victims were usually treated in New England, we shall now examine the afflictions of those accusers of Salem Village and how Samuel Parris managed the outbreak that occurred there in 1692. We shall see from the evidence presented that it was Parris' unusual handling of the initial outbreak of afflictions which led directly to the largest persecution of witches in New England.

The situation in Salem Village was coming to a head with the friction between Parris and his opponents, as the security he craved became increasingly tenuous. It was at this critical stage in Parris' career in the Village that the first afflictions began. Common assertion has conveyed to us that the girls became afflicted because of their fears after dabbling in simple spells and sorceries to predict their future²⁹. Whatever the actual cause of the afflictions, it will be clear that first Parris and then his supporters used these spectral charges to their own ends and to further their separate causes.

The first of those afflicted and the first of those accused can be found in Parris' own household. The afflictions began with his daughter, Elizabeth 'Betty' Parris and his niece Abigail Williams on 20 January 1692. These fits, although no record remains to tell us otherwise, may not have been unduly harsh or hurtful to the children as it took Parris some time to bring them to the attention of a physician, William Griggs. He may have been waiting for a suitable time period to do so, one that would suit his purposes, as when a physician did finally examine the children he declared that they were under

²⁹ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.1.

an “evil hand” or afflicted by the malice of witches. Once this was declared by Griggs, it firmly put the ball in Parris’ court giving him control and making him the ultimate authority in this situation, for who else but a man of God could drive out God’s enemies.

Parris was in the unique position of having his own household contain not only the first two afflicted girls but also one of the first accused witches. At the beginning of the girls’ afflictions, Parris’ handling of the situation was somewhat different to that of other ministers who had been present at other such occurrences where afflicted victims became accusers. As already outlined, both Willard and Mather retained their objectivity and required more substantial proofs of witchcraft than just the accusation of someone who was afflicted and who may or may not have been possessed or suffering from some other source of torment or illness. Parris would have been acquainted with both of these instances, though probably more so with the Goodwin case as this case occurred only some four years before the outbreak in Salem Village and Cotton Mather had published an extraordinary account of the episode. This episode with the Goodwin children would also have occurred while Parris was still residing in Boston and he would, at the very least, have heard about the case, if not actually read the publication that Mather had written on it³⁰. He may have observed the extra attention and prestige that Mather acquired through this episode as he helped to effect cures of the children’s afflictions. He may have used Mather’s account of the Goodwin episode as a blueprint or a guide for the management of the situation that broke out within amongst his own parishioners.

³⁰ C.W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft-with an Account of Salem Village and a History of Opinion on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects*, 2 Vols., Boston, 1867, Vol II, p.1.

After Betty and Abigail had been diagnosed as being under an ‘evil hand’, it was not long before other children and adults became touched by the same evil. The afflictions seemed to spread like wild fire especially amongst the families of those that were the strongest Parris supporters. Parris as the Village minister and resident ‘expert’ on theological matters was free to deal with the situation as he saw fit. Right from the first diagnosis of probable witchcraft, Parris’ handling of the afflicted deviated from the ‘norm’. Rather than follow the encouragement of Mather to isolate the afflicted in order to effect a cure³¹, Parris allowed the girls close contact with each other and with spectators. Parris did heed Mather in seeking help from “some Worthy Gentlemen of Salem and some Neighbour Ministers to consult together at his House”³². This crisis enabled Parris to gather to himself the prestige of being a minister at the forefront of the battle against their ancient foe, Satan.

Where this case diverged from what has been established as the ‘norm’ and from more specifically Willard’s and Mather’s approach to this type of situation is that Parris allowed the girls to be exposed to, not only each other, but to the general public as well. By allowing the afflicted to remain in contact with each other they could reinforce each others ‘hysteria’ and corroborate each other’s stories. Public access to the afflicted girls allowed the afflictions to continue to spread and gave the girls an unwonted amount of attention. This access allowed the fear to spread further by enabling people to hear the names of those who the girls accused as well as allowing people to ask leading questions of the victims³³. In fact one of the charges that was to be levelled at Parris by his opponents subsequent to the trials was that he used

³¹C. Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 2 Vols, New York, 1957, Vol I, p.151-2.

³² J. Hale, *A Modest Inquiry Into The Nature of Witchcraft*, 1702, New York, 1973, p.414.

³³ Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Vol II, pp.7, 10; L. Gragg, *A Quest For Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720*, New York, 1990, p.117.

the afflicted to discover “who were the Devil’s instruments to afflict the sick and pained”³⁴. Since, in some remarkable instances, the girls did not recognise their tormentors when they were physically brought before them, we can only speculate on whether or not this opportunity was used by some in order to discomfort their enemies³⁵. Parris clearly did not heed Mather’s example of not revealing names in case any was unjustly accused. After being prompted by intense questioning from observers and Parris himself, the girls finally relented and named their tormentors. On 29 February 1692 an arrest warrant was issued for Parris’ female slave, Tituba³⁶, for causing the girls afflictions. Two others, Sarah Good and Sarah Osbourne, were also named in this arrest warrant.

It is at this particular point, after the accusations and subsequent arrests of Tituba, Good and Osbourne, that this witchcraft outbreak began to diverge further from the normal course of proceedings. During Tituba’s examination and confession she spoke of four others and a man involved in the tormenting of the girls. She also stated that there were nine people from the Village and from Boston that had made pacts with Satan³⁷. With this confession, there would remain doubt amongst the villagers and it gave the opportunity to the girls to expand upon their list of tormentors, thereby giving rise to the spread of the witch panic. Had Parris followed more closely the examples of Willard and in particular Mather, and more closely examined the evidence offered by the girls, in all probability the case would not have gone further than the three already accused. Had Parris followed the example of Mather and isolated the

³⁴ P. Boyer & S. Nissenbaum (ed.), *Salem Village-Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England*, Belmont, 1972, p.296-7

³⁵ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p.188.

³⁶ Parris had probably brought with him from Barbados Tituba and John Indian.

³⁷ P. Boyer & S. Nissenbaum, *The Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 3 Vols., New York, 1977, Vol III, pp.746-55.

afflicted, the spread of the panic may have been prevented. Because Parris sent his daughter away to the house of Stephen Sewall, one of his friends in Salem, her 'cure' was soon affected³⁸. By removing his daughter from the scene Parris demonstrated that he knew that this approach to 'curing' the afflictions was a valid one. By allowing the others to remain open to public scrutiny he was in fact facilitating the further spread of this hysteria in a way which ultimately benefited his cause. The unique strategy regarding his own daughter could be interpreted as supporting the thesis of this chapter. He was an embattled man of god but he was also a father.

Tituba's confession raises a number of questions, to most of which unfortunately definitive answers cannot be given. As a slave of Negro or Carib Indian racial stock who grew up in Barbados, it is unlikely that she would have had an extensive knowledge of English or more importantly European witchcraft traditions where accomplices were often named during confessions. Although she might have been somewhat or even intimately acquainted with voodoo lore³⁹, she may have remained ignorant of traditional Puritan approaches to witchcraft. On the other hand she would probably have been aware of the New England tradition of where a person who confessed to witchcraft was signing their own death warrant. It is hard to accept that she had such a death wish or was mentally unstable, as there is no evidence upon which to make such assumptions.

Although she asserted in her confession that she was coerced into tormenting the girls, there is no reason at that time to suggest that this would have saved her life. Both Good and Osbourne were conforming to the more

³⁸ Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Vol II, p.3.

³⁹ P. Boyer & S. Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, Cambridge Mass., 1974, p.181.

normal approach of the accused by maintaining their innocence as this was the more likely path to gaining an acquittal. Why would Tituba have so readily confessed? This will not likely be ever known, but it does raise the issue that her confession might have come about after assurances had been given to her about the outcome. Even life as a slave would still have been worth living. Her knowledge of what to include in her statement suggests that her confession might indeed have come at some other's prompting. Calef stated as much when he recounted Tituba's claim that "her master did beat her and otherways abuse her, to make her confess and accuse...her Sister-Witches, and that whatsoever she said by way of confessing or accusing others, was the effect of such usage"⁴⁰.

It is interesting to note that within Parris' household, it was only his niece and one of his children that suffered from afflictions. Unlike the Goodwin case where the hysteria spread to all of the children, with the exceptions of the older and more mature son and a young infant still nursing, Parris' outbreak did not spread to any of his other two children. In the household there was his son, Thomas, and his youngest daughter, Susannah, who would have been eleven years and five years of age respectively during the outbreak. Since the afflictions appeared to spread quite readily to those exposed to other afflicted, it was interesting that Parris' other children remained unaffected especially since they were of an age to have been influenced by the happenings around them. Parris sent his daughter away so that she might find her relief but his niece he kept home. Some questions about these facts remain. Was Parris protecting his children and willing to use his niece to prolong the affair and further his designs, and why were his

⁴⁰ Robert Calef, 11 March 1692, in Burr, *Narratives*, p.343; Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Vol II, p.32.

other children immune to this plague of torments? It does seem telling that once the episode had its beginnings established he wanted to shield his own children.

With the outbreak of witchcraft in Salem Village the myriad of problems that Parris was having with regards to his salary, poor church attendance and the disrespect, all appeared to vanish overnight. Both the Village Records and the Church Records are silent on these issues, and Parris was not one to abide quietly if he had a problem that he felt needed attention, most especially those concerning his struggles with his opposition. Now that Satan had shown his hand and witches were amongst them, the villagers turned to their minister to lead them through this struggle and aid their understanding about how this came to be. Now instead of having to castigate his parishioners to attend Church, people were flocking to hear his words. There is no longer any plaintive requests from Parris about his lack of firewood or having to admonish his flock on their lack of respect for him. With the beginning of this witchcraft outbreak, all of Parris' previous problems no longer seem to exist. He too was consumed in the greater battle.

The outbreak of afflictions also aided Parris in the matter of his status. Instead of being the beleaguered minister of a tiny village whose only claim to fame previously was for contentiousness and bickering amongst its inhabitants, another kind of renown was now acquired. If Parris could successfully battle Satan and his army of witches, his own prestige would be enhanced and might even outstrip that of Cotton Mather's. Mather, after all, had only cured four children and routed one witch, but Parris had the opportunity to rid the Village of many more and cure a dozen of their victims. Not only were the girls the focus of attention, but so too was Parris. He was able to issue a call to some of the most famous and pious men around and

they heeded his call to consult and to pray with him at this, his hour of need. Parris was in his element, no longer was he one of the many moderately prosperous merchants in Boston, but he was a minister, one of the elite, the spiritual leader of his community and now with the respect of his peers. Parris had achieved his purpose and if he had succeeded he would have never needed to be concerned about his security again. Given this possible outcome, and Parris' earlier actions, it is not implausible to suggest that the entire Salem outbreak may have been a premeditated and manipulated set of occurrences, rather than a spontaneous upwelling of Puritan hysteria.