

Deodat Lawson Describes Events at Salem, 1692

DEODAT LAWSON WAS AN ENGLISH PURITAN MINISTER. From 1684 to 1688, he served as the pastor in Salem Village, the rural area near Salem Town, Massachusetts. In 1692, rumors reached Boston, where he was living by then, that the niece of Salem Village's new minister, Samuel Parris (whom Lawson refers to as Mr. P), had been afflicted by a witch. Lawson was worried about his successor and his former parishioners, but the next piece of news hit closer to home. There were rumors that witches had played a role in the death of Lawson's own wife and daughter, who had died while he was the minister in Salem Village. Wanting to discover the truth, Lawson set out for Salem Village in March 1692.

On the nineteenth day of March last I went to Salem Village, and lodged at Nathaniel Ingersol's near to the Minister Mr. P[arris]'s house, and presently after I came into my lodging Capt. Walcut's daughter Mary came to Lieut. Ingersol's and spoke to me, but, suddenly after as she stood by the door, was bitten, so that she cried out of her wrist, and looking on it with a candle, we saw apparently the marks of teeth both upper and lower set, on each side of her wrist.

In the beginning of the evening, I went to give Mr. P a visit. When I was there, his kinswoman, Abigail Williams (about 12 years of age),¹ had a grievous fit; she was at first hurried with violence to and fro in the room (though Mrs. Ingersol endeavored to hold her), sometimes making as if she would fly, stretching up her arms as high as she could, and crying "Whish, Whish, Whish!" several times. Presently after, she said there was Goodwife N [Rebecca Nurse]² and said, "Do you not see her? Why there she stands!" And the said

Goodwife N offered her The Book,³ but she was resolved she would not take it, saying often, "I won't, I won't, I won't take it, I do not know what Book it is: I am sure it is none of God's Book, it is the Devil's Book, for ought I know." After that, she ran to the fire, and began to throw firebrands about the house; and ran against the back, as if she would run up chimney, and, as they said, she had attempted to go into the fire in other fits.

On Lord's Day, the twentieth of March, there were sundry of the afflicted persons at meeting, as Mrs. Pope, and Goodwife Bibber, Abigail Williams, Mary Walcut, Mercy Lewis, and Doctor Griggs' maid. There was also at meeting Goodwife C [Martha Corey] (who was afterward examined on suspicion of being a witch).⁴ They had several sore fits, in the time of public worship, which did something interrupt me in my first prayer, being so unusual. After Psalm was sung, Abigail Williams said to me, "Now stand up, and name your text." And after it was read, she said, "It is a long text." In the beginning of sermon, Mrs. Pope, a woman afflicted, said to me, "Now there is enough of that." And in the afternoon, Abigail Williams upon my referring to my doctrine said to me, "I know no doctrine you had. If you did name one, I have forgot it."

In sermon time when Goodwife C was present in the meetinghouse Abigail W called out, "Look where Goodwife C sits on the beam suckling her yellow bird betwixt her fingers!" Anne Putnam, another girl afflicted, said there was a yellow bird sat on my hat as it hung on the pin in the pulpit, but those that were [near]by restrained her from speaking loud about it.

On Monday the 21st of March, the magistrates of Salem appointed to come to examination of Goodwife C. And about twelve of the clock, they went into the meetinghouse, which was thronged with spectators. Mr. Noyes⁵ began with a very pertinent and pathetic prayer,⁶ and Goodwife C being called to answer to what was alleged against her, she desired to go to prayer, which was much wondered at, in the presence of so many hundred people. The magistrates told her they would not admit it; they came not there to hear her pray, but to examine her, in what was alleged against her. The worshipful Mr. Hathorne asked her, why she afflicted those children? She said, she did not afflict them. He asked her, who did then? She said, "I do not know. How should I know?"

The number of afflicted persons were about that time ten, *viz.* four married women, Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Putnam, Goodwife Bibber, and an ancient woman named Goodall; three maids, Mary Walcut, Mercy Lewis at Thomas Putnam's, and a maid at Dr. Griggs's; there were three girls from 9 to 12 years of age, each of them, or thereabouts, *viz.* Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam. These were most of them at Goodwife C's examination, and did vehemently accuse her in the assembly of afflicting them, by biting, pinching, strangling, etc. And that they did in their fit see her likeness coming to them,

and bringing a Book to them. She said, she had no Book. They affirmed, she had a yellow bird that used to suck betwixt her fingers, and being asked about it, if she had any familiar spirit that attended her, she said she had no familiarity with any such thing. She was a Gospel Woman, which title she called herself by; and the afflicted persons told her, ah! she was a Gospel Witch. Ann Putnam did there affirm that one day when Lieutenant Fuller was at prayer at her father's house, she saw the shape of Goodwife C and she thought Goodwife N praying at the same time to the Devil. She was not sure it was Goodwife N; she thought it was, but very sure she saw the shape of Goodwife C. The said C said, they were poor, distracted children, and no heed [should] be given to what they said. Mr. Hathorne and Mr. Noyes replied, it was the judgment of all that were present, they were bewitched, and only she, the accused person, said they were distracted. It was observed several times that if she did but bite her under-lip in time of examination the persons afflicted were bitten on their arms and wrists and produced the marks before the magistrates, ministers and others. And being watched for that, if she did but pinch her fingers, or grasp one hand hard in another, they were pinched and produced the marks before the magistrates and spectators. After that, it was observed, that if she did but lean her breast against the seat in the meetinghouse (being the bar at which she stood), they were afflicted. Particularly Mrs. Pope complained of grievous torment in her bowels as if they were torn out. She vehemently accused said C as the instrument, and first threw her muff at her; but that flying not home, she got off her shoe, and hit Goodwife C on the head with it. After these postures were watched, if said C did but stir her feet, they were afflicted in the feet, and stamped fearfully. The afflicted persons asked her why she did not go to the company of witches which were before the meetinghouse mustering? Did she not hear the drum beat? They accused her of having familiarity with the devil, in the time of examination, in the shape of a black man whispering in her ear. . . .

They told her she had covenanted with the Devil for ten years, six of them were gone, and four more to come. She was required by the magistrates to answer that question in the Catechism, "How many persons be there in the God-Head?"⁷ She answered it but oddly, yet was there no great thing to be gathered from it. She denied all that was charged upon her, and said, they could not prove [her] a witch. She was that afternoon committed to Salem Prison, and after she was in custody, she did not so appear to them and afflict them as before.

On Wednesday the 23 of March, I went to Thomas Putnam's, on purpose to see his wife. I found her lying on the bed, having had a sore fit a little before. She spoke to me, and said she was glad to see me. Her husband and she both desired me to pray with her while she was sensible, which I did, though the apparition

[according to Mrs. Putnam] said I should not go to prayer. At the first beginning she attended, but after a little time was taken with a fit, yet continued silent, and seemed to be asleep. When prayer was done, her husband going to her, found her in a fit. He took her off the bed, to set her on his knees, but at first she was so stiff, she could not be bended; but she afterwards set down, but quickly began to strive violently with her arms and legs. She then began to complain of, and as it were to converse personally with, Goodwife N, saying, "Goodwife N. Be gone! Be gone! Be gone! Are you not ashamed, a woman of your profession, to afflict a poor creature so? What hurt did I ever do you in my life! You have but two years to live, and then the Devil will torment your soul, for this your name is blotted out of God's Book, and it shall never be put in God's Book again. Be gone for shame. Are you not afraid of that which is coming upon you? I know, I know, what will make you afraid; the wrath of an angry God, I am sure that will make you afraid; be gone, do not torment me, I know what you would have (we judged she meant her soul) but it is out of your reach; it is clothed with the white robes of Christ's righteousness." After this, she seemed to dispute with the apparition about a particular text of Scripture. The apparition seemed to deny it (the woman's eyes being fast closed all this time). She said, she was sure there was such a text, and she would tell it, and then the shape would be gone, for said she, "I am sure you cannot stand before that text!" Then she was sorely afflicted. Her mouth drawn on one side, and her body strained for about a minute, and then said, "I will tell, I will tell; it is, it is, it is!" three or four times, and then was afflicted to hinder her from telling. At last she broke forth and said, "It is the third Chapter of the Revelations." I did something scruple the reading it, and did let my scruple appear, lest Satan should make any superstitious lie to improve the Word of the Eternal God. However, though not versed in these things, I judged I might do it this once for an experiment. I began to read, and before I had near read through the first verse, she opened her eyes, and was well. This fit continued near half an hour. Her husband and the spectators told me, she had often been so relieved by reading texts that she named, something pertinent to her case, as Isaiah 40:1, Isaiah 49:1, Isaiah 50:1, and several others.

On Thursday the twenty-fourth of March (being in course the Lecture Day at the Village), Goodwife N was brought before the magistrates Mr. Hathorne and Mr. Corwin, about ten of the clock, in the forenoon, to be examined in the meetinghouse. The Reverend Mr. Hale began with prayer, and the warrant being read, she was required to give answer, Why she afflicted those persons? She pleaded her own innocence with earnestness. Thomas Putnam's wife, Abigail Williams and Thomas Putnam's daughter accused her that she appeared to them and afflicted them in their fits, but some of the others said, that they had seen her, but knew not that ever she had hurt them; amongst which was Mary Walcut, who was presently after she had so declared bitten, and cried out . . .

producing the marks of teeth on her wrist. It was so disposed, that I had not leisure to attend the whole time of examination, but both magistrates and ministers told me that the things alleged by the afflicted, and defenses made by her, were much after the same manner, as the former was. . . . There was once such a hideous screech and noise (which I heard as I walked, at a little distance from the meetinghouse), as did amaze me, and some that were within told me the whole assembly was struck with consternation, and they were afraid that those that sat next to them, were under the influence of witchcraft. This woman also was that day committed to Salem Prison. The magistrates and ministers also did inform me that they apprehended a child of Sara G⁸ and examined it, being between 4 and 5 years of age, and as to matter of fact, they did unanimously affirm that when this child did but cast its eye upon the afflicted persons, they were tormented, and they held her head, and yet so many as her eye could fix upon were afflicted, which they did several times make careful observation of. The afflicted complained they had often been bitten by this child, and produced the marks of a small set of teeth. Accordingly, this [girl] was also committed to Salem Prison; the child looked hail, and well as other children. I saw it at Lieut. Ingersol's. After the commitment of Goodwife N, Thomas Putnam's wife was much better, and had no violent fits at all from that 24th of March to the 5th of April. Some others also said they had not seen her so frequently appear to them to hurt them.

On the 25th of March (as Capt. Stephen Sewall, of Salem, did afterwards inform me) Elizabeth Parris had sore fits, at his house, which much troubled himself, and his wife, so as he told me they were almost discouraged. She related, that the great black man came to her, and told her, if she would be ruled by him, she should have whatsoever she desired, and go to a Golden City. She relating this to Mrs. Sewall, she told the child, it was the Devil, and he was a liar from the beginning, and bid her tell him so, if he came again, which she did accordingly, at the next coming to her, in her fits.

On the 26th of March, Mr. Hathorne, Mr. Corwin, and Mr. Higginson were at the prison-keeper's house, to examine the child [Dorcas Good], and it told them there, it had a little snake that used to suck on the lowest joint of its forefinger; and when they inquired where, pointing to other places, it told them, not there, but there, pointing on the lowest point of forefinger; where they observed a deep red spot, about the bigness of a flea-bite, they asked who gave it that snake whether the great black man. It said no, its mother gave it.

The 31 of March there was a public fast kept at Salem on account of these afflicted persons. And Abigail Williams said, that the witches had a sacrament that day at a house in the Village, and that they had red bread and red drink. The first of April, Mercy Lewis, Thomas Putnam's maid, in her fit, said they did eat red bread like man's flesh, and would have had her eat some, but she

would not, but turned away her head, and spit at them, and said, "I will not eat, I will not drink, it is blood," etc. She said, "That is not the Bread of Life, that is not the Water of Life; Christ gives the Bread of Life, I will have none of it!" This first of April also Mercy Lewis aforesaid saw in her fit a white man and was with him in a glorious place, which had no candles nor sun, yet was full of light and brightness, where was a great multitude in white glittering robes, and they sung the song in the fifth of Revelation the ninth verse, and the 110 Psalm, and the 149 Psalm, and said with herself, "How long shall I stay here? Let me be along with you." She was loath to leave this place, and grieved that she could tarry no longer. This white man hath appeared several times to some of them, and given them notice how long it should be before they had another fit, which was sometimes a day, or day and half, or more or less. It hath fallen out accordingly.

The third of April, the Lord's Day, being Sacrament Day, at the Village, Goodwife C [Sarah Cloyse] upon Mr. Parris's naming his text, John 6:70, "One of them is a Devil,"⁹ the said Goodwife C[loyse] went immediately out of the meetinghouse, and flung the door after her violently, to the amazement of the congregation. She was afterward seen by some in their fits, who said, "O Goodwife C[loyse], I did not think to see you here!" (and being at their red bread and drink) said to her, "Is this a time to receive the Sacrament, you ran away on the Lord's Day, and scorned to receive it in the meetinghouse, and, Is this a time to receive it? I wonder at you!" This is the sum of what I either saw myself, or did receive information from persons of undoubted reputation and credit.

From Deodat Lawson, "A Brief and True Narrative of Witchcraft at Salem Village, 1692," in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York, 1914), 152-62.