

**THE JERICO PAPERS; A
QUAINT AND
AMUSING SIDE OF EARLY
NEW ENGLAND LIFE**

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The Jerico papers; a quaint and amusing side of early New England life by Joseph Vahle

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JOSEPH VAHLE

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P R E F A C E .

When Raphael planted his immortal tints, and bade them become the admiration of the world, he stood transfixed before his own creation. When Handel and Haydn brought forth the Messiah, and the Creation, the whole world stood spellbound before the harmony and melody of their genius. But, when Galileo exclaimed, "the earth is in motion," the Church cried out, "Seize, and bind the heretic," and Galileo was made to renounce on bended knee the sublime truths of his profession. When young Gersham, by his power of imitation, brought forth men and women from their graves and placed them among the living, he was arraigned before the community on a charge of mocking the saints, and was made a special subject of prayer. Had he lived 200 years ago he would have been brought before the Presbyterian Tribunal, and condemned to death.

“In New England the witchcraft mania at that period raged with peculiar intensity. As in Scotland and other countries, the clergy were the prime movers. Two clergymen have obtained a special and unenviable notoriety for the part they acted in the matter. The one was the Rev. Cotton Mather, a man who was considered a prodigy of learning and piety, but whose writings and proceedings in regard to the trial and execution of witches, show a degree of fanaticism, credulity and blind cruelty, that is almost incredible. The other, Samuel Parris, a minister of Salem, made use of the popular feeling to gratify his own spite at individuals. At last, in the Salem tragedy, as it is called, in 1692, the executions, torturings and imprisonments rose to such a height as to be no longer endurable, a complete revulsion of feeling took place, and the delusion was broken.”

Dr. Sprenger, in his *Life of Mohammed*, computes the entire number of persons who have been burned as witches during the Christian epoch at nine millions. See *Chambers Encyclopædia*, Vol. X, pp. 237. The Churches controlled by the press are in all cases a power for good; but give any one de-

nomination supreme control, and their power for evil would be incalculable. Could Elder Swamp have had the power, he would have crushed out every denomination in the United States, yea, throughout the entire world, save Close Communion Baptists, and had Sister Jones lived in Salem in 1692, she would have passed into history during that same period. These pious, blood-thirsty hypocrites were possessed with that low cunning that devour widows' substances, and then burn them for witches. Ignorance, bigotry, and superstition reigned supreme. Nor has it at the present time been completely obliterated. Hypocrisy cannot appreciate genius, nor can bigotry and superstition appreciate truth. Thousands of the brightest men and women throughout the world have for a single witty remark been burned at the stake.

When men stood and listened to the ready wit of Picket Barbour, and Jerry Dyre, and to imitation, as brought forth by young Gersham, they saw elements in them that they did not possess. Nor could those men escape their fate. As well might it be argued that Beethoven could have escaped the harmony and melody planted within him by the Great

Creator. Thus hath the millennium dawned, through the will of the Church, in subjection to the power of the press.

On a certain occasion a celebrated Connecticut Divine occupied the Plymouth platform. During the course of his sermon he took occasion to reprimand Mr. Beecher, saying, "that he used too much wit, and created too much laughter, to ever become a successful teacher." After he had finished, Mr. Beecher arose and said: "My honored friend and contemporary has seen fit to arraign me before my congregation this morning, charging me with using too much wit, and creating too much laughter." Then turning, and facing the Doctor, he said: "Dr. B——, supposing it had pleased God to have given you a little wit, what do you suppose you would have done with it?"

The author's aim has been to give a true picture of early New England life. To all people then, who will accept it, in the same spirit that it has been written, this book is respectfully dedicated.

JAMES GRAHAM.

Nov. 1, 1893.

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