

Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church

VOL. V

JUNE, 1936

No. 2

THE REVEREND SAMUEL PETERS, M.A.,

MISSIONARY AT HEBRON, CONNECTICUT, 1760-1774

By Charles Mampoteng, M.A.

THE first town in the Connecticut colony to be named from the Bible was the tiny rural community of Hebron, so named by the Connecticut General Court in 1707, three years after its settlement. It developed very slowly under the proprietorship of the Saybrook Legatees, though settlers were invited from Long Island and the lower Connecticut region. A petition to the General Court in 1708 mentioned that only nine families were living at Hebron, and it was not till 1716 that the same body authorized the settling of a Congregational minister in that section of Tolland County. A native of Norwich and graduate of Yale in 1710, the Rev. John Bliss was accordingly ordained on November 19, 1717, and settled in Hebron. It was not long before charges of intemperance were brought against him, but the South Consociation of Hartford on November 16, 1731, found him not guilty of excessive drinking at a funeral, taking into account his previous sobriety and "considering the weather."

Part of the congregation decided in 1734 that a new meeting house ought to be built in the center of the town, "the plain of Mamre." As opposition to the plan developed, Bliss asked a dismission, which was granted, while two factions prepared for a bitter conflict over the matter. The "North" party, intent upon building the meeting house on top of a hill half a mile toward the north, chose Bliss as their teacher. He was soon indicted, found guilty, and fined for holding schismatic meetings in his home. The powerful "South" group held to the original site, and when a fanatic, Moses Hutchinson, Jr., set fire to the building, they laid taxes for a new edifice and the salary

of the Rev. Benjamin Pomeroy, their new teacher. Matters soon came to a startling conclusion, for while those who refused to pay the added rates were jailed, about twenty families joined with Bliss in 1735 in declaring for the Church of England. Bliss himself deeded the land atop the hill for S. Peter's Church, an edifice not completed till 1766. An invitation was extended to the Anglican missionary at New London, the elder Rev. Samuel Seabury, to take charge of the new parish. His visits to Hebron gained Seabury a £10 bounty, for he spent much time instructing the people, and at a Eucharist on August 1, 1736, there were fourteen communicants.

The converted Mr. Bliss acted as lay reader until his death at the age of fifty-two, on February 1, 1742, the eve of his departure for London and Holy Orders. From that time on, the Church in Hebron experienced the most discouraging setbacks, as each successive candidate sent abroad for ordination did not return. In order to provide the Gospel and an orthodox clergy for the English colonies in America, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was founded in 1701. This society appointed recommended ordinands to mission posts, subsidized either wholly or in part by the organization. It was to this society that the distinguished convert, Dr. Samuel Johnson of Stratford, wrote:

"Indeed ministers are very much wanted in several places, particularly at Symsbury and Hebron, in which last place Mr. Dean is very acceptable as reader and I beg the Society will be pleased to have it on their thoughts to provide for him in due time."¹

The congregation sent Barzillai Dean² abroad and he was ordained on November 21, 1745. Leaving shortly thereafter for home, he was unfortunately lost at sea early in the following year. For the ensuing six years the parish was under the nominal care of the Rev. Ebenezer Punderson,³ an itinerant missionary who preached and administered the sacraments at intervals.

As the years went by, the parish grew stronger till in 1747 the General Assembly divided the town into four ecclesiastical societies, those of Gilead, Andover, Marlborough and Hebron. While each of these four groups settled a minister of its own, S. Peter's Church stood isolated in the center of the town, without a resident pastor. Seabury's successor at New London was the Rev. Matthew Graves, an

¹Johnson to S. P. G., October 5, 1742 (H. W. Schneider, "Samuel Johnson," III, 232).

²Rev. Barzillai Dean (1714-46), Yale 1737; made first communion in August, 1735, at Stratford Church; appointed itinerant missionary for Derby and Waterbury.

³Rev. Ebenezer Punderson (1710-80), Yale 1729; Holy Orders 1734; at Hebron 1746-1752; at New Haven 1753-62; at Rye, N. Y., 1762-80.

Englishman who was instructed to visit Hebron occasionally, but his authority was denied by the people. Graves was nevertheless determined that "as long as I solely am intrusted with Hebron, I will study to promote their good."⁴ There is, however, the sworn testimony of two Hebronites who claimed Graves was not sure of his authority, but

"turning to a man he said he would give him leave to tuck of his ear if he did not get authority over Hebron Church in six months."⁵

His severe views often bringing him into collision with the people, Graves soon found a popular adversary in the person of Jonathan Colton. A Yale graduate of 1745, Colton began his career as lay reader at Hebron in 1748, at the age of twenty-two.

Graves repeatedly complained to the Bishop of London, while Dr. Henry Caner of King's Chapel in Boston, heartily commended Colton when that young man set out for ordination.⁶ That there was a good bit of hard feeling can be understood from the sworn testimonies, such as that wherein Colton was said to have threatened to break Graves' head⁷ if he dared enter Hebron Church again. Graves felt it his duty to "prevent ye Encrease of False Prophets," and protested the ordination on the ground that Colton officiated contrary to Graves' wishes, preached his own sermons rather than the homilies, that he held private parish meetings and produced perjured testimony⁸ in a law suit. Colton, however, was accorded ordination in 1752 but never entered upon the duties of his mission, for he died of smallpox on the voyage home. Although Graves' charges had greatly offended the Bishop of London, he was convinced of his own integrity and having prayed for a new heart for Colton, he could easily believe "my prayers were heard and hope he dyed in ye Love of God."⁹

Convinced that the struggling mission was not receiving adequate care, Dr. Johnson wrote to the Society on March 25, 1754, that

"I also extremely pity poor Hebron, that good people are yet

⁴Graves to Johnson, June 18, 1748 (Schneider, "Johnson," I, 131). Rev. Matthew Graves (—1780) from England; at New London 1747-79; beaten in pulpit for using royal prayers during the Revolution; he spurned an offer made on November 14, 1778, to reopen the church if he would omit the prayers; was allowed to go to New York 1779; died of apoplexy on April 5, 1780, while officiating in S. George's Chapel.

⁵Affidavit of John Peters and Nathan Rowles, January 31, 1751 (Roger Wolcott Papers in Connecticut Historical Society Collections, v, 16).

⁶Caner to London, October 15, 1751 (Fulham Palace Transcripts, in Library of Congress).

⁷Affidavit of Reuben Hutchinson, April 4, 1754 (Fulham Trans.).

⁸Graves to London, December 23, 1754 (Fulham Trans.).

⁹Graves to London, May 29, 1754 (Fulham Trans.).

destitute and no candidate appears to go for them. I wish some encouragement could be given them."

A third candidate finally did attempt the arduous trip abroad, being James Usher, the local catechist. The son of the missionary at Bristol, Rhode Island, young Usher graduated from Yale in 1753 at the age of twenty, only to die of smallpox four years later. Captured on the high seas by the French, he was imprisoned in a Bayonne castle, where he contracted the fatal malady. Great were the lamentations occasioned by this distressing situation, but soon the Hebron Church was heartened, for a young man who had been

"brought up to the law and was extremely popular in the country—on a sudden—forsook the bright example of his pious republican ancestors, repaired to England, and renouncing the independent faith, received holy ordination from the Lord Bishop of London."¹⁰

Samuel Peters, the tenth child of John and Mary Peters, was born on December 1, 1735, in Hebron. Descended from Andrew Peeters,¹¹ who had landed in Boston in 1659 and later established his family at Andover, Massachusetts, the future clergyman was to invent a more distinguished ancestry. His father, John, who had married in 1717, established a line of the Peters family in Connecticut soon after his marriage. John Peters built a house in Hebron in 1740 and was a Churchman, being on the 1745 Church of England tax list. The infant Anglican society in the town was cheered in 1746 by John Peters' deeding thirty acres¹² for a glebe to a committee headed by the Rev. Ebenezer Punderson, itinerant missionary in the colony. The early education of Samuel Peters was acquired in the Hebron Grammar School, while in 1757 he emerged from Yale College with his bachelor's degree. While Samuel was still in college his father died and upon the December 2, 1754, probate of his will, John Peters was found to have bequeathed £1000 to his son Samuel.

Finding the desire to help "the poor and unfortunate of Hebron" most compelling, the modest Peters declared his intention to seek Holy Orders, with the parish vestry hastily petitioning the Society on September 29, 1758. Rehearsing the good features of the mission, the vestry gave its bond that its contribution of £30 would be regu-

¹⁰Peters "History of Jonathan Trumbull" (*Political Magazine*, January, 1781.)

¹¹Andrew Peeters (1634-1713) m. 1659 Mercy Beamsley (1637-1726) had 7 children; William Peters (1678-96), son of Andrew and Mercy, m. 1694 Margaret Ruess, had 1 child; John Peters (1695-1754), son of William and Margaret, m. 1717 Mary Marks (1698-1784) had 10 children.

¹²Deed of John Peters, September 25, 1746 (*Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Transcripts in Library of Congress*).

larly paid to the resident missionary. At the Society's meeting of February 23, 1759, it was agreed that dependent upon ordination, Peters would be appointed to the post at Taunton, with a £20 subsidy. Late in 1758 Peters set out for London, armed with recommendations, including one from the Rev. Matthew Graves, dated September 28, 1758, urging his friend's appointment. The rather vague commendation given by Dr. Samuel Johnson on October 25th reflected the college president's impression of the candidate, rather than personal knowledge. In later Peters writings, the extravagant assertion was made that, besides numerous testimonials addressed to important English personages, Peters carried one from Johnson at King's College, "where Mr. Peters had been a tutor."¹³ Actually Peters did not tutor in New York, nor did he ever study theology with Johnson, as has been supposed.

Upon his arrival in London, the bewildered colonial rustic was deeply impressed with that metropolis and evinced great awe of ecclesiastical personages, giving occasion for Archbishop Secker's anecdote:

"When Mr. Peters from Hebron in Connecticut waited on his Grace with his letters on his first arrival in England, on seeing him enter the Room with 2 servants bearing his Train, etc., Peters was overwhelmed with such an Awe that he was unable to speak, so much as to answer any common Question. The Archbishop observing his Confusion, seated him in a chair by his side and spoke to him words to this Effect, 'Mr. P. you have come from New England and I suppose you look upon an Archbishop to be something more than human; but I am as much a mortal Creature as yourself and you have no reasons to be awed at my Presence'—putting his Hand on Peters' knee at the same time in the most familiar Manner, and even patting his cheek. This kindness and condescension had the intended effect; Mr. P. soon recovered the Use of his Tongue and Senses; and ever afterwards conversed with his Grace with great Ease and Freedom."¹⁴

On March 11, 1759, the Bishop of Chester, acting for the Bishop of London, ordained Peters a Deacon, whereupon the ordinand fell deathly ill with smallpox, an ordeal which left him noticeably pockmarked. During his confinement, Peters was attended by the Archbishop's personal physician, the prelate paying the seventy-five guineas fee. Having little cash at hand, Peters begged the Society's

¹³Peters "Early History of S. Peter's Church," edited by W. H. Bell (*Conn. State Lib.*).

¹⁴Chandler, T. B., *Manuscript Diary* (April 11, 1777) in *General Theological Seminary Library*.

aid, with the result that on May 18, 1759, it was voted to give him £20 for "expenses in the smallpox."

Once upon his feet again, Peters was ordained a Priest on August 25th by the Bishop of London. The Bishop generously ordered Peters to preach his first sermon in the Church of St. Sepulchre in London, where Hugh Peters, his reputed "great uncle," had preached. Refusing the offer of a London living, Peters accepted the £19.7.6 royal bounty given all American ordinands appointed missionaries of the Society, and set out for his native shores. Shortly after his arrival, Peters married Hannah Owen of Hebron, but after bearing him three children, alas,

"my once agreeable consort was taken sick soon after Christmas 1764 with a consumption & so continued until ye 25 of Octobr last & then changed this contending world for one far better, of which same disease died one of my children—kind Providence has left me one little child to help me bear my tryals."¹⁵

His second wife, Abigail Gilbert, died on July 14, 1769, only twenty days after the wedding, departing this life

"by an Illness termed by the Physicians an improper Chorea Sonata Viti, after 5 days illness to the inexpressible Grief of her Consort, Parents . . ."¹⁶

The young parson was quite acceptable to his clerical neighbor Graves, for on December 13, 1760, that missionary reported that Peters was painstaking and well behaved. In his own first report to the Society, Peters rehearsed the difficulties of consolidating his parish amid the open opposition, with

"the people belonging to the Church at Hebron seem religiously attentive to my instructions—the dissenters tho very spiteful at my coming home, doing all they could to destroy my Character, taking many groveling ways to prevent my service."¹⁷

Not content to work at home with his thirty-one families, Peters traveled about, stopping at Taunton, Sharon, Norwich, Simsbury, Middletown, Bolton and Glassenbury. These efforts were rewarded

¹⁵Peters to S. P. G., May 12, 1766 (*Francis L. Hawks Transcripts, in New York Historical Society*). Hannah Owen (1740-65) had three daughters: Hannah (December 19, 1760-March 2, 1761); the only survivor, Hannah Delena (January 2, 1762-September 20, 1845), married 1788 to Captain William Jarvis, later Secretary of Ontario; Elizabeth (January 19, 1764-August 27, 1765).

¹⁶Hartford Courant, July 24, 1769.

¹⁷Peters to S. P. G., April 15, 1761 (*Libr. Congress*).

when the Society at its meeting of October 1, 1761, voted Peters a £10 gratuity and recommended an increase in salary. Further notice was given Peters, when at the June 3, 1761, commencement of King's College in New York, Peters was admitted a Master of Arts.¹⁸ In September, 1764, he was called upon to preach the local election sermon, a tribute to conscientiously prepared pulpit utterances. The same missionary zeal flamed high in Peters during his Hebron incumbency, for in the first years he traveled some two thousand miles, ministering and preaching

"willingly for the prospect before me, and am willing to persevere and will, as long as my health and purse will permit, the former being very high, the latter very low."¹⁹

As compensation, the Society on April 15, 1763, raised his stipend to £30, adding a £20 gratuity.

Subscriptions toward completing the church at Hebron steadily rolled in, while occasionally Peters could boast of obtaining legacies. A bequest long due, owing to the machinations of grasping dissenters,²⁰ was settled in 1764, while in the following year a Dr. Samuel Shipman of Hebron left a property legacy²¹ of some size. The church, measuring 38 feet by 30 feet, was completed in 1766, when the parish numbered fifty-six families, despite the opposition teachings that

"the Church is the Sinagogue of Satan & if you have a mind to go to Hell—go to Church.—thus I live to fight Spiritual wickedness in high Places & by the Goodness & Veracity of God, the Gates of Hell have not prevailed against his Church."²²

Hostile civil authorities took pleasure in embarrassing Churchmen, and on Easter Day, 1765, a public fast was appointed, which the Hebron Churchmen ignored, in the absence of Peters. As a result eight members were cited for contempt, with Peters observing that "we are stigmatized if we observe not our own Days & punished if we do," going on to publicly inquire in the Courant for May 26, 1769:

"The Rubrick of the Church of England confirmed by act of Parliament enjoins me to rejoice and be exceeding glad upon Sundays, Christmas and Holy Days. I cannot serve two masters, of the twain whom shall I serve?"

¹⁸Matricula of King's College (*Schneider, "Johnson," IV, 248*).

¹⁹Peters to S. P. G., December 24, 1762 (*Libr. Congress*).

²⁰Peters: "A Death-Bed Discovery of Bostonian Virtue and Honesty" (*Political Magazine*, October, 1781).

²¹Peters to S. P. G., March 15, 1765 (*Libr. Congress*).

²²Peters to S. P. G., June 26, 1771 (*Libr. Congress*).

The familiar events relating to the so-called Stamp Act passed by Parliament in 1763 need not be dwelt upon, but the loyal submission of Anglicans in New England generally to a distasteful measure was notable. In Hebron, under the direction of Priest Peters, the Churchmen

"shunned any connections & openly condemned them, declaring they feared God & the King more than all the threats of his rebellious gang, whose furious fanatic motions gave us grounds to say we were in perils among false brethren. It, however, has this good consequence; the storm being over, those changelings have room to reflect & as boldly now applaud us for our bold stand as they condemned us heretofore."²²

It will be recalled that a prosperous New Haven lawyer, Jared Ingersoll, came home as provincial Stamp Master, only to be forcibly convinced that his resignation of the post on September 19, 1765, was imperative. While this successful intimidation was progressing at Wethersfield, a mob in Lebanon joyously set up effigies of the devil, Mr. Grenville and Mr. Ingersoll. As the figures were hung, fires were built and the sport went on till midnight, when it was suggested that "Ingersoll" be buried in Hebron with Parson Peters officiating. Peters spoiled the fun by refusing to be made sport of or to bury a dissenter.²⁴ Armed protection was necessary for Peters then, though he scornfully wrote:

"The peasantry I have often heard say that they had rather (notwithstanding their religious tenets are bent upon John Calvin's wheel) be under the government of the Pretender, the French, Dutch or Spanish Monarchies than to submit to acts of a British Parliament or an American Episcopate—the fanatic mob will judge my life too cheap a victim to pacify their belching stomachs."²⁵

On February 28, 1770, the New York Council decided to form a new county, Gloucester, north of Cumberland County in New Hampshire, to provide protection for pioneer settlers. This new county attracted the roving eye of Peters, who at the age of thirty-five, believed the end of his earthly days²⁶ was soon at hand. Dissatisfied with Hebron's neglect of its ecclesiastical obligations, Peters sought a

²²Peters to S. P. G., December 26, 1766 (Hawks).

²³Peters: "General History of Connecticut" (1877 ed.), p. 233 note.

²⁴Peters to S. P. G., June 25, 1768 (Hawks). Peters to S. P. G., March 25, 1767 (Hawks)—"I am at this time only able to say of my Native Land it is the Babel of Contention, where Faction is State Policy and every Religion—where little Conventicles are plodding and as capacious as a little Kirk—each guided by their different Gods and to complete my ancient news, Oliver is risen from the dead, or was a convict and so transported over here—unfortunate America."

²⁵Peters to S. P. G., June 26, 1770 (Libr. Congress).

transfer to another post, while it was reported to the Society that Peters had gone on to a better living²⁷ after preaching a farewell sermon in Hebron. Nothing came of this casting about, for in 1770 the small society at Hartford was added to his care. Peters had often preached to the poor farmer folk in the local courthouse and the first Eucharist was celebrated on March 2, 1766. The first funeral service took place on June 9, 1766, for the victim of an explosion at the school-house celebration of the Stamp Act Repeal.

The Anglican clergy in the colony met in regular conventions, and on June 5, 1765, Hebron was the convention town. Peters was a signatory of the petition drawn up at that time, urging the establishment of a colonial episcopate. At the Litchfield convention of June 13, 1770, the sermon was preached by Peters and later published as Peters made a strong bid for allegiance to the Crown. This convention authorized a missionary tour along the Connecticut River as previously proposed²⁸ by Peters, and he soon set out to preach to the scattered frontiersmen along both sides of the river. Proceeding west, Peters crossed the Green Mountains and finally reached Fort Miller on the Hudson River, then followed the Mohawk River, preaching at Schenectady, Albany, etc., before crossing Connecticut on the way home, having covered eight hundred miles.

Peters found time, however, to marry Mary Birdseye, the twenty-three-year-old daughter of a Stratford farmer, on April 23, 1773. But this marital bliss was terminated on June 16, 1774, when his third wife died, eleven days after the birth of a son, William Birdseye Peters. Having contracted an advantageous marriage, Peters again sought a transfer²⁹ to a more genteel parish, such as that of Portsmouth in New Hampshire, the incumbent having died on June 10, 1773. But great was Peters' disappointment when on June 17, 1774, the Society refused to transfer him, but calling for an account of the Hebronites' shortcomings concerning the glebe. The neglect shown by the parish did not enter into the financial considerations of Peters, for he was a gentleman of property, despite disparaging propaganda fostered by the Whig adherents. It was, however, admitted by friend and foe that Peters did live in some splendor,³⁰ while his charity and hospitality were widely appreciated. He personally managed an estate of a thousand well cultivated acres in Hebron, with seven dwellings upon them, nine barns, five cowhouses, three cider mills, a dairy house, smoke house, etc., the buildings being valued at £2960. £.

²⁷Graves to S. P. G., April 28, 1771 (S. P. G. Journal of November 15, 1771).

²⁸Peters to S. P. G., January 1, 1770 (Libr. Congress).

²⁹Peters to S. P. G., September 10, 1773 (Libr. Congress).

³⁰Wattles to Thorp, July 24, 1783 (Public Record Office, Audit Office 13/42, photostat in Libr. Congress).

In order to give a comprehensive view of Peters' establishment as of August, 1774, a few items, taken from his sworn schedule to the Loyalist Claims Commission¹¹ are here given, with their currency values as set forth:

<i>Household Furniture</i> total £1248.	24 Hay Rakes	1.16
1 Feather Bed & Suit £ 40.	4 Iron Rakes	1.
3 Feather Beds as above	1 Crosscut Saw, hand	2.10
10 " " @ £20.	saws	10.
4 " " @ £10.	30 Scythes, sickles	10.
4 Looking Glasses	Chisels, augurs,	10.
12 " "	wedgers	10.
24 Mahogany Chairs	4 Grindstones	4.
36 Walnut tree "	Wheat fans,	4.
24 Common "	winnowers	4.
4 Mahogany Chests	Hay Knives & forks	6.
2 " Scrutores	Tanned Leather	10.
4 " Bureaux	Horse Cart, Wheel-	6.
2 " Bookcases	barrows	6.
1 " Wardrobe		
6 " Square	<i>Provisions</i> total £1141.13.4	
6 " Tables	10 barrels Pork	30.
6 " Small	5 " Beef	11.5
Tables	4 tubs Soap	6.
9.	Hungbeef, hams &	
5 Sealskin Trunks &	bacons	30.
5 Common Chests	10 firkins Butter	10.10
3 pair Handirons,	10 hoghead Cider	20.
Tongs, etc.	Sugar, rum, wine,	
10.	brandy, etc.	100.
6 Carpets	2000 weight Cheese	25.
House Linen	2000 " Flour	15.
Culinaries	1000 " Rye Flour	6.
50.	200 bushels Wheat	45.
Laiteries	200 " Rye	33.15
Plate	300 " Indian Corn	33.15
China	10 " Malt	2.5
Crockery	400 " Oats	20.
Glass	100 " Buckwheat	10.
10 pair Window curtains	20 " Beans	4.10
Library (2000 vols.)	20 " Peas	4.10
Brass Clock	400 " Potatoes	30.
Gold watch (taken by	600 " Wheat not	
mob in Sept.,	threshed	135.
1774)	525 " Rye (same)	118.2.6
30.	1200 " Oats	45.
<i>Farming Utensils</i> total £ 378.16	60 " Barley (same)	17.12.6
6 Men Saddles	1000 " Indian Corn	
1 Lady Saddle	(same)	112.10
1 Coach Slay, steel	400 " Buckwheat	40.
sliders & harness	(same)	
30.	130 tons Hay (barn &	
3 Iron shod Carts	ricks)	195.
1 Waggon	100 Cider Barrels	7.10
1 Bug Cart	20 " Hogsheds	6.
4 Ox Sleds	1 Barrel Honey	5.
10 Ploughs & Irons	Beeswax, spermaceti,	
Ditching tools	etc.	17.15
12 Ox Yokes & Irons	1 Chaise with harness	75.
3 Iron Drags	1 Whisky with a cap	15.
16 Ox Chains	1 Common Slay iron	
5 pair Horse geers	shod	7.10
6 Iron Crows, 6 Levers		
12 Hoes		
12 Wood Axes		

¹¹Peters' Memorial, February 9, 1784 Schedule (P. R. O., A. O. 13/42, Libr. Congress).

<i>Negroes & Live Stock</i> total £1316.	1 Stallion	40.
40 Cows	3 Draught Mares	30.
10 yoke Oxen, 40 meat	5 Breeding Mares	100.
Cattle	4 Colts	30.
20 weaned Calves	36 Beehives	81.
100 Sheep	3 Negro Men & 3 Negro	
40 sucking Lambs	Women	300.
70 Swine	3 Negro Children born	
2 Geldings	in the house
1 Black Mare		

Not only was Samuel Peters a gracious gentleman of large land holdings, but he was also the local banker,¹² and with the added prestige of his clerical position, he became an admirable object for pre-war patriot solicitude. The succession of events in Boston challenging Parliamentary authority need not be recalled at this point, except to note that as a result of the so-called tea party in Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773, a number of punitive "Intolerable Acts" were passed in March, 1774, by Parliament. Among other measures, the port of Boston was closed to trade till the tea damage was paid, but enforcement of the edict resulted in wide colonial sympathy, particularly in neighboring Connecticut. In that colony, Governor Jonathan Trumbull promptly circularized town meetings, asking contributions to a general fund to support the "poor and distressed" people of blockaded Boston. The meeting in Hebron resolved into a session of bickering, as Peters and a gentleman convert led the opposition to the proposed fund, the fiery parson proclaiming:

"As the good people of Boston had destroyed the tea, the private property of the East India Company, they ought to pay for it; and then if their port was not opened he would give them 1000 sheep and 10 fat oxen, but until they had paid for the tea, he should not willingly bestow any thing upon them."¹³

Peters proceeded to accuse Governor Trumbull of being too premature in his requests, especially since Boston townspeople were free to move in and out of town. When put to a vote, the proposal was overwhelmingly defeated in Hebron, as was the case in Hartford, due to Peters' efforts. So upset was the governor that, according to Peters, he issued a proclamation to be read in every meeting house on Sunday, August 14, 1774, denouncing Peters as an enemy to the colony, a spy and correspondent of bishops. The ministerial harangues fired the people of Windham County with the ambition to storm the Hebron parsonage, while further information was volunteered that

¹²Testimony of John Peters, July 29, 1786 (P. R. O., A. O. 13/42—Libr. Congress). The schedule of notes and bonds owed Peters in September, 1774, showed a total of £1716 currency, £1287 sterling.

¹³Peters: "History of Jonathan Trumbull" (Political Magazine, January, 1781).

Peters regularly wrote reports to the bishops "big with reflections upon the colony." Accordingly the town committee of Bolton and three hundred neighbors set out, to arrive in Hebron at sunrise on August 15th and rouse Peters. Having announced their mission, a committee was invited inside to look at copies of letters, but nothing incriminating was found beyond a set of resolves. The men quietly left with Peters' thanks for the consideration³⁴ they had shown. But when Peters described the events in his memorial to the Loyalist Claims Commission, he told of an unruly mob, four thousand strong sent by the governor to force his signature to the covenant. The charge was also made that personal papers were carried off, while a deposition made by two visitors in Peters' home at the time affirmed that Peters was illegally terrorized and abused by hoodlums. Before the Bolton committee departed, however, they obtained Peters' written declaration³⁵ that he had not and would not write to any English personages about the political controversy.

The set of thirteen resolutions which were printed in the *New London Gazette* for September 2, 1774, and entitled the "Hebron Resolves," was allegedly drawn up by the community. Actually Peters had run them off in characteristically offensive style, yet expressing a good deal of balanced reasoning anent the tea question. But what inflamed the patriot readers was the way Peters lashed out at the Windhamites who had maligned Governor Thomas Hutchinson, and, secondly, the withering attack upon the Farmington mob, "convened for that glorious purpose of committing treason against the King." On Sunday, September 4th, the post arrived with news that Boston was on fire and General Gage's redcoats were killing old men and babies. Ardent volunteers filled the ranks as the call to arms was sounded and a detachment prepared to march on Boston. Sensing the uneasiness of his congregation as the volunteers marched by, Peters masterfully counselled his flock not to start a treasonous war³⁶ on good General Gage, with the result that Churchmen ignored the clamor.

Such action endeared Peters to the zealots in Windham County, who took it upon themselves to rush to Hebron on September 6th and challenge the parson to justify his statements. In a later version, Peters claimed that the governor sent his son along with a mob of three thousand Windhamites to force his acceptance of the Solemn League and Covenant, a denial of royal and parliamentary supremacy.

³⁴Report of Committee, November 29, 1774 (Jonathan Trumbull MSS., V. 4, Part 1, in Conn. State Lib.); also *American Archives*, 4 ser. I, 716.

³⁵*Amer. Archives*, 4 ser. I, 714.

³⁶Peters: "Narrative of Mobbing" (Archives of the General Convention of Protestant Episcopal Church—Manuscripts of the Rev. Samuel Peters; in New York Historical Society).

Peters refused to comply and went out on the stoop of his house to harangue the crowd of three hundred, but oratory was not sufficient. Furthermore, the committee had been assured that only two rusty guns were in the house,³⁷ but when a gun was discharged in the excitement a search yielded guns, pistols, clubs and swords hidden away. Immediately Peters was rushed off his feet, his robes were torn and in the tussle his brothers and mother were wounded. Cheered by talk of tar and feathers and hanging, Peters was put on a horse and rushed to the meeting house three-quarters of a mile away, "naked as he was all but the breeches." Incidentally, some years later, Sylvester Gilbert of Hebron found Peters' torn surplice and sent it to the exile as a monument to mob madness.³⁸

The crowd having assembled around the horse-block in the rear of the edifice, Peters was forced to read a prepared statement³⁹ renouncing his previous inflammatory writings and asking

"the forgiveness of all whom I have offended, promising for the future as far as in me lies, to circumspect my conduct, that it shall be agreeable to the rules of Christianity."

Satisfaction having been gained, the crowd released the bedraggled Peters, who went to David Barbour's house to put on clean clothes. The excited victim gave two versions of the events in later years, crediting his release to the intervention of an armed group of forty friends who threatened to shoot⁴⁰ unless Peters was released. The second version of the mobbing given in a memorial of November 25, 1782, credited Peters' release to the suggestion that the parson was insane and so allowed to be carried home by his negroes. On the day following his public humiliation, Peters called on Governor Trumbull at Lebanon for satisfaction,⁴¹ but was advised to sign the proffered covenant if he sought tranquility. Substantially the same answer was given by the Superior Court at Hartford on September 8th, and by the twelve magistrates in New Haven. Trumbull did, however, write to the civil authorities in Hebron as well as to John Phelps, the justice of the peace in Hartford County, urging that peace and order be maintained, particularly as

"Mr. Peters shews himself greatly affected and says he is

³⁷Report of Committee, December 6, 1774 (*Amer. Archives*, 4 ser. I, 717).

³⁸Gilbert to Peters, October 26, 1796 (*Peters Ms.*).

³⁹*Connecticut Gazette*, September 16, 1774.

⁴⁰Peters Memorial, December 6, 1783 (P. R. O., A. O. 13/42, Libr. Congress).

⁴¹Peters to Auchmuty, February 25, 1775 (*Peters Ms.*).—"Trumbull set on the mob upon me. Before I applied for protection of him, Dr. Payne told me of it 3 times with a loud voice, after they had taken me out of my house & stripped me, in these words, Governor Trumbull will not protect you, for he told us this morning to come & give it to you; September 8th the Governor owned it to me & added that he told Payne not to hurt my person or interest."

well affected to our Liberties and will do nothing to detriment the Cause thereof."⁴¹

Having traveled the forty-five miles to New Haven, Peters looked up Dr. James Hillhouse, who sent him along to the Rev. Bela Hubbard, their mutual friend and the missionary of the S. P. G. in that place. Hubbard welcomed his colleague but sent his own family to neighbors as a precaution, for the local druggist, smuggler and soldier of fortune, Colonel Benedict Arnold, had brutally attacked local Sandemanian loyalists. A straggly crowd led by Arnold did put in an appearance at the parsonage about ten o'clock that particular evening, only to find the gate locked and Peters on guard with a musket. The embattled cleric had assembled some twenty loaded muskets to be used by his friends while awaiting help promised by Dr. Hillhouse, but this grandstand play and threat of violence sent the patriot heroes home. Half an hour later another group, led by Colonel Thomas Wooster, appeared, only to be dispersed in a like manner. Obviously it was best to make a quiet exit from New Haven, and this Peters did, going disguised with a servant to Branford, where friends had placed horses at his disposal. He procured a boat, crossed an arm of the sea, traveling near shore two days and two nights, making a round-about circuit of some eighty miles via Saybrook.

At midnight, Saturday, September 18th, he slipped into his ravaged house, but was seen by twelve men posted about as sentinels. He rested and then boldly appeared in his pulpit on Sunday morning to preach, despite warnings of mob violence. Peters also preached in the afternoon from the text:

"Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the transgressions of my people."

Towards evening he said a hurried good-bye to his mother, whom he was never again to see, entrusted his children to her care, hid his sealed will in the sleeve of his last wife's wedding gown,⁴² and with only a few shirts and five guineas departed from his home. In addition to his young daughter, Peters abandoned his infant son, William Birdseye Peters,⁴³ who was carefully nurtured by his grandmother until as a young boy his education was entrusted to the joint efforts of the Rev. Bela Hubbard, the Rev. Richard Mansfield and his maternal grandfather. As a lad of fourteen, William Birdseye Peters journeyed down

⁴¹*Boston Evening Post*, November 7, 1774.

⁴²*Peters to Mann, February 14, 1785* (Conn. State Library).

⁴³*William Birdseye Peters (1774-1822) to England 1788*, enrolled in Trinity College, Oxford, 1792; as a child received an ensigncy in Queen's American Rangers; studied at Inner Temple; went to Ontario 1796 as barrister and deputy secretary; to Alabama 1812, where he died.

to New York to be cared for by William Samuel Johnson, then president of Columbia College, prior to his embarkation in 1788 for England.

Upon his leaving the parsonage, Peters walked four miles to where a horse had been placed for him, jumped into the saddle and rode one hundred and ten miles to Boston, arriving late the next day. En route he was stopped at Woodstock, Oxford and Sutton by patriot patrols, who let him by when Peters represented himself as a messenger from Trumbull to John Hancock. He managed to pick up information on plans to capture General Thomas Gage's army at Boston and relayed them to the general on his arrival. According to Peters' memorial, Gage set up batteries on Boston Neck as a result of this information, saving "his own life, the lives of his army and of the Loyalists then in Boston." Once in Boston, Peters found himself lionized by councillors, commissioners and clergy, who gravely accepted his embellished stories of mistreatment⁴⁴ in Connecticut, where it was feared Anglicanism would be wiped out. Evidence that he had not been forgotten in Hebron came with a letter to Peters asserting that

"Your house is watched every night, I hear to notify a Mob from Farmington who are ready to visit you on your expected return . . ."

The exaggerated tales, though recommended by the Boston clergy as just and modest,⁴⁵ were, however, reported to Governor Trumbull by one Thaddeus Burr, then in Boston. As a result of Burr's letter,⁴⁶ an open letter was sent to the *Boston Evening Post* and printed on November 7, 1774, stating that religious affiliations had played no part in the Peters events. Deeply concerned lest Peters present his tale of woe in England, a "true" narrative of the events was prepared⁴⁷ by Trumbull, denying that he had been motivated by religious viewpoints. Not only was Peters assiduous in cultivating the good graces of Gage and Admiral Graves, but he renewed his acquaintance with the Rev. Mather Byles, Jr., of Christ Church; met the Rev. Henry Caner of King's Chapel, and struck up a warm friendship with the curate, the Rev. John Troutbeck. In passing it may be noted that Troutbeck advanced Peters some thirty guineas and dur-

⁴⁴*Gage to Dartmouth, October 30, 1774* (Carter: "Correspondence of General Gage," I:—) "A clergyman by the name of Peters was driven here from Connecticut and gave horrible Accs. of his Treatment."

⁴⁵*Tyler to Peters, October 5, 1774* (Peters Ms.).

⁴⁶*Letter of October 7, 1774*, in *S. P. G. Journal* January 19, 1775 (Libr. Congress).

⁴⁷*Burr to Trumbull, October 13, 1774* (Trumbull Ms., IV, Conn. State Libr.; also *Amer. Archives*, 4 S., I, 714).

⁴⁸*Narrative of December 26, 1774* (I. W. Stuart: "Life of Jonathan Trumbull," 158).

ing the early hostilities sheltered Peters' daughter Hannah in his residence.

During his stay in Boston the impatient Peters wrote much and managed to involve his brother clerics in popular denunciations as two letters were intercepted and published in the papers. Peters' brother Jonathan and one Newcomb had visited the parson in Boston and were to deliver letters, but shrewd patriot farmers procured the missives, which Jonathan had hidden when halted at a tavern. One letter, addressed to his mother and dated September 28th, was couched in typical disdainful language, but what made Whig hearts apprehensive was the "military" information given—

"Six regiments are now coming from England, and sundry men of war; so soon as they come, hanging work will go on, and destruction will first attend the seaport towns; the lintel sprinkled on the side posts will preserve the Faithful."¹⁰

As his name had been mentioned in the letter, the Rev. Abraham Jarvis quickly dispatched an open letter to the *Connecticut Journal*¹¹ disclaiming any connection with or previous knowledge of Peters' going to Boston. The second letter, dated October 1, 1774, and addressed to the Rev. Samuel Auchmuty, was more exasperating, which occasioned editorial comment¹² when printed in the *Boston Evening Post*.

This letter to Dr. Auchmuty, written in Peters' usual intemperate style, could but foment furious sentiments against the Anglican Church generally, for the author asserted, in part:

"The Riots and Mobs that have attended me and my House, set on by the Go— of Connecticut, have compelled me to take my Abode here; and the Clergy of Connecticut must fall a sacrifice with the several Churches very soon, to the Rage of the Puritan Mobility, if the old Serpent, that Dragon is not bound. . . . Judge Auchmuty will do all that is reasonable for their neighboring charter. Necessity calls for such Friendship, as the Head is sick and the Heart faint, and Spiritual Iniquity rides in high places, the Halberds, Pistols and Swords. See the Proclamation I sent you by my nephew, on their pious Sabbath day the 4th of last Month when the Preachers and Magistrates left the Pulpits, etc.,

¹⁰Peters to Mary Peters, September 28, 1774 (*Amer. Archives*, 4 S., I, 715).

¹¹*Connecticut Journal*, October 21, 1774.

¹²*Boston Evening Post*, October 24, 1774: "No Proposition in Euclid admits of a more facile Solution than that Samuel Peters of Hebron, who is daubed with the Title of Reverend, is the most unnatural Monster, diabolical Incendiary & detestable Parricide to his Country that ever appeared in America or disgraced Humanity; his Name, like the Lake of Sodom, will emit a disagreeable Effluvia to all succeeding generations. It is happy for his Contemporaries that his invincible Stupidity is a sufficient Antidote to his more than infernal Malignity. To evidence these Assertions, nothing more is necessary than the following Letter . . ."

for the gun and drum and set off for Boston, cursing the King and Lord North, General Gage, the Bishops and their cursed Curates and the Church of England; and for my telling the Church-people not to take up arms, etc., it being high treason, etc. The Sons of Liberty have almost killed one of my Church, tarred and feathered two, Abused others and on the 6th Day Destroyed my Windows and rent my Cloaths, even my Gown, etc. Crying out down with the Church, the Rags of Popery, etc. Their Rebellion is obvious, Treason is common and Robbery the daily Devotion. The Lord deliver us from Anarchy . . ."

When informed that the letter had been intercepted and made public, Auchmuty wrote a blistering note to Peters, objecting to having his name "bandied about by a parcel of rascals"¹³ and voicing his brother's angry sentiments. From the safe distance of London, the over-apologetic Peters wrote a conciliatory message, couched in extravagant style and averring that

"I blame myself more for my foolishness than the world can blame me.—my repentance is like Esau's a bitter repentance and too late. I am killed with the thots of my foolishness. I have not slept 2 hours in 24 since I have heard of the robbery; I mourn all my time with fervent prayer to God to protect my injured friends from violence of evil men and from the danger I unwillingly exposed them to . . ."

While his enemies roundly abused him,¹⁴ the militant priest proposed to General Gage that he be commissioned to return to Connecticut to enlist Loyalists and perhaps lead an attack on his rebellious neighbors. Gage hastily vetoed the plan, pleading lack of authority to grant such commissions but suggesting the alternative of Peters embarking for London as a dignified "sufferer" for his loyalty. The prospect of enduring popularity in the official circles of London attracted Peters to the extent that he agreed to Gage's proposal. Advised to sail from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a disguised Parson Peters left Boston on October 12th, walked some distance, and then caught the coach to Portsmouth. Upon his arrival he took shelter with Robert Traill, the customs collector, and was persuaded to preach on Sunday in the historic Queen's Chapel, where Peters had once hoped to preach as rector. But it soon became known that Peters had slipped out of Boston, with the result that John Hancock publicly offered £200 for the cleric's capture.

¹³Auchmuty to Peters, October 31, 1774 (*Peters Ms.*).

¹⁴Peters to Auchmuty, February 25, 1775 (*New Jersey Documents on Colonial History*, I Series, Vol. 10).

¹⁵Stiles: "Literary Diary," October 27, 1774: "the infamous Parricide fled to Boston to embark for England & tell the King his story, get a Pension & perhaps a Bishoprick for his suffering in the Cause of Government as it is called."

The Boston clergy dispatched a messenger to Peters to warn him of his danger, while ambitious patriots spread out to find the parson. The Wednesday following his appearance in church, Peters met a man in a Portsmouth tavern who was seeking that "bitter enemy to the rights and liberties of America." Having posted the landlord, it was arranged that Peters be chased across Casco Bay, for a ferryman was induced to tell the stranger that he had previously ferried a mysterious person over to Piscataqua. Obviously the hunt was in vain and when four more heroes rode into town in the evening a popular search was instituted of the Governor's house, the fort and the ship "Fox." In the meantime, Peters hid in a large cave by the seashore, subsisting through the aid of friends until October 19th, when he removed to Castle William at Newcastle, eight miles from Portsmouth. For eight days he remained at the castle under Governor John Wentworth's protection, as

"Information came to Mrs. W. that insult was intended at poor Parson Peters. She very wisely sent him off, conducted by Thomas Coach to the Castle, where he has since remained quiet and this day sails London.—He is highly pleased with N. Hampshire and probably will report kindly thereof. The story of his calamities is most astonishing and in a Xtian country equally deplorable. I have advised him to be moderate on his arrival in England even toward those who have most cruelly treated him."¹⁴

News of this state of affairs was brought to Admiral Graves in Boston, who dispatched a sixteen-gun ship to pick up Peters, which was done at night. When the time came for Peters to be transferred to the "Fox," the captain of the warship boarded the "Fox" and ordered the local Committee of Safety then aboard to quit the ship in five minutes, as "your company is not wanted here." Upon their hurried departure, Peters came aboard and Captain Zachariah Norman hoisted anchor and sailed down the river towards the sea. The discomfited patriots on shore sent some scattering musket fire after the ship, while the warship obligingly replied by firing its cannons. It was with such a send-off that "Munchausen" Peters, as he was popularly named, departed from his native New England on October 27, 1774. After a long, tiresome journey, the "Fox" landed Peters in England on December 21st and on the following day he arrived in London. Peters soon had the honor of kissing King George III's hand¹⁵ as the first Loyalist clerical sufferer from New England.

¹⁴Wentworth to Waldron, October 25, 1774 (Belknap Papers in Mass. Hist. Soc. Collections, 6 Series, Vol. 4).

¹⁵Connecticut Gazette, May 4, 1776: "His Majesty's right arm is lame, occasioned by a sprain from flourishing his sword over the heads of his new made knights. The

For thirty years Samuel Peters remained abroad, proudly serving as liaison between his colonial brother clergy and the English hierarchy, for he was constantly in demand for information relevant to matters concerning the American churches. He took part in discussions regarding the Nova Scotia episcopate, which he unsuccessfully sought, and proffered his services when Dr. Seabury came to London seeking consecration. In 1791 Peters almost drew the appointment as Bishop of Upper Canada, while in 1794 the churches in Vermont elected him their bishop, but unfortunately Peters was unable to obtain consecration either in England or America. Finally in 1804 he returned to America, fired by the ambition to become a real estate magnate, as the so-called Carver Grant in Wisconsin had been procured by him. Congress refused to honor the dubious Indian deed of 1766 to Jonathan Carver and so Peters found his weary journey from New York out to Prairie du Chien, made in 1817, a waste of time. His last days spent in abject poverty, he died in New York on April 29, 1826.

Closely following Peter's departure in 1774, the Connecticut General Assembly notified the Anglican clergy of the open suspicion in which they were popularly held and some of the clergy published a statement¹⁶ denying any connection with Peters' designs or activities. The small Anglican group left at Hebron courageously met for services, led by Thomas Brown as lay reader, while the Rev. John Tyler of Norwich took the parish under his care,

"though I must confess that I durst not go there for some time after you went away; so bitter was the Spirit of some People; but since, I have been three or four Sundays there every year."¹⁷

Toward the close of hostilities, a wandering dissenting minister, Clement Sumner, managed to get into the good graces of the Hebronites and he patronizingly demanded of Peters when he intended to return.¹⁸ It seems that Sumner expected to obtain ordination whenever an American Bishop should be available and then proceed to consolidate the scattered parish. Nothing came of these plans, however, and it was not until 1794, when the Rev. Tillotson Bronson spent some time at Hebron, that the parish had any regular supply.

Rev. Mr. Peters from Lebanon in Connecticut has obtained his Majesty's leave to pick hops at 9d. per day, a penny more than the usual price, as a reward for his past faithful services; and by this lucrative business it is supposed he will soon acquire a fortune equal to that he left behind him."

¹⁶Connecticut Journal, October 28, 1774.

¹⁷Tyler to Peters, January 9, 1784 (Peters Ms.).

¹⁸Sumner to Peters, October 18, 1783 (Peters Ms.). Rev. Clement Sumner (1731-95) Yale 1758; licensed pastor 1759; at Keene, N. H., in 1761, a "Half-Way Covenant" group, built up group from 14 to 73; dismissed by town vote 1772; Congregational pastor 1775-5 at Thetford, Vt.; fed as Tory, lived as a farmer at Swanton, N. H., but fined in 1777 as a Tory; supplied Universalist Church in Swanton.