

Ebenezer Parkman's Confession of Faith, Rules of Behavior, and Solemn Covenant (1719)

Introduction and transcription by Prof. Ross W. Beales, Jr.

Francis Walett's edition of the diaries of Ebenezer Parkman includes several pages of autobiographical notes, dated August 24, 1719, that were not part of the diaries. These notes, which provide invaluable information about Parkman's early years, are contained in a small hand-sewn booklet that also includes a confession of faith, rules of the behavior, and a solemn covenant.¹

When sixteen-year-old Ebenezer Parkman wrote the "Confession of Faith," he was not creating anything new. Indeed, the "Confession" is an almost verbatim copy of the confession that the English minister, Matthew Henry (1662-1714), presented at the time of his ordination. At the end of the confession, Parkman included the notation, "Life Math: Henry. P. 66, Which Confession I also receive as mine" – a reference to William Tong's *Account of the Life and Death of Mr. Matthew Henry* (1716).² That the confession was not original to Parkman is less important than the insight it provides into Parkman's preparation for and dedication to the service of God. Then half way through his studies at Harvard and observing his sixteenth birthday, he recalled that at a time of illness in October 1714, he was "brought Very low and Near The Gates of death" and promised that "if God Should prolong my Life and Should give me a Space to repent in, I would dedicate My Self to his Service." Now, on his birthday five years later, "I have...Thought on my Wayes, and will endeavour after New Obedience. And in order Hereto, I do make a Solemn Covenant between God and My Soul." (For the specifics of that covenant, see below.)

How or when he acquired Tong's biography of Matthew Henry is not known, but if his later relationship with books is any indication, he was already a voracious reader.³ Tong's biography of Henry had been in print for only three years and was not yet in the library of Harvard College.⁴ Parkman may have purchased the volume, but, given his limited resources, it is more likely that he borrowed a copy that had been imported from England.

The "Rules of Behaviour" are also significant, although, like the confession, they are not original to Parkman, and he did not provide a date for what he wrote. The first rule – to "Keep an exact Diary" – may, of course, strike readers of Parkman's diary as especially significant. Although Parkman destroyed the first six volumes of his diary, the seventh volume includes the notation,

¹Parkman Family Papers (American Antiquarian Society), Box 2, Folder 4.

²W. T. [William Tong], *An Account of the Life and Death of Mr. Matthew Henry, Minister of the Gospel at Hackney, Who Dy'd June 22. 1714. in the 52d Year of His Age. Chiefly Collected Out of His Own Papers, and Faithfully Published* (London, 1716). Henry's confession of faith appears on pp. 66-70.

³On Parkman's relationship with printed material, see Ross W. Beales, Jr., "Ebenezer Parkman's World of Print: A Country Parson and the Print Culture of Eighteenth-Century Anglo-America," *Library and Information History* 31:4 (Nov. 2015): 229-57.

⁴W. H. Bond and Hugh Amory, eds., *The Printed Catalogues of the Harvard College Library, 1723-1790* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1996). Tong's biography was not in the 1723 catalog but was in the 1773 catalog. *Ibid.*, 146 (under Henry).

“Being a Continuation of a Design form'd in the Year 1719/20, February 19th” – that is, less than six months after copying Matthew Henry's confession of faith and perhaps also transcribing the rules of behavior.

Where does a sixteen-year-old find rules of behavior? Certainly from the behavior modeled by parents, older siblings, ministers, and teachers - but can appropriate behavior be reduced to written rules? For Parkman, the answer was found in Cotton Mather's sermon *Early Religion* (1694). In the appendix, Mather quoted from the writings of a young man who died in 1688, celebrated on his gravestone, as “*an Hard Student, a Good Scholar, and a Great Christian.*”⁵ The anonymous young man was undoubtedly Mather's younger brother, Nathanael, whose life he celebrated in his first English publication.⁶

Nathanael Mather left thirty-four rules of behavior, and it was these that Parkman copied. The rules, in turn, derived from several sources that attest to the young Mather's scholarship and, quite likely, to his father's extensive library. Most of the rules were copied or closely paraphrased from William de Britaine, *Humane Prudence, or, The Art by Which a Man May Raise Himself and Fortune to Grandeur* (London, 1680). *Humane Prudence* appeared in two more editions before Nathanael Mather's death (i.e., 1682, 1686) and many thereafter. Two rules were derived from *A Winter-Evening Conference Between Neighbours. In Two Parts* (Edinburgh, 1684); another came from a biography of Joseph Mede (1586-1639); and one was a Latin epigram by Thomas More.

Taken together, the confession, rules, and covenant reveal sixteen-year-old Ebenezer Parkman's focus on faith, behavior, and the moral and religious compass by which he hoped to guide his life. In 1727 – 24 years old, ordained, married, and a father – Parkman left more explicit reflections on the life of Matthew Henry. “I was much affected with what I read in the Life of Mr. Mat. Henry, of his wonderfull Labours and Serviceableness. Example seems to have a far greater influence upon me than precept” (Jan. 24, 1727). Now very much settled in the world, Parkman distinguished between “precept” (or rules) and example, preferring the latter “since it so gratifies my under powers, my imagination, and curiosity; and thereby captivates my affections.” The rote of rules was nonetheless important for an adolescent. Indeed, it seems hardly a coincidence that Parkman's son Samuel, on the day after his own sixteenth birthday, was “transcribing Some Rules etc. from Dr. Doddridge's Life” (Aug. 21, 1767).⁷

⁵Cotton Mather, *Early Religion, Urged in a Sermon, the Duties Wherein, and the Reasons Wherefore, Young People, Should Become Religious...* (Boston, 1694), 73 (“Rules of Behaviour,” 82-85).

⁶[Cotton Mather], *Early Piety, Exemplified in the Life and Death of Mr. Nathanael Mather, Who Having Become at the Age of Nineteen, an Instance of More than Common Learning and Virtue, Changed Earth for Heaven, Oct. 17. 1688...* (London, 1689). Mather described his brother as “hard Student” (ibid., 3), a description that he repeated in *Early Religion*. According to Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 77, Mather wrote *Early Piety* within two weeks of his brother's death.

⁷Job Orton, *Memoirs of the Life, Character and Writings of the Late Reverend Philip Doddridge, D.D. of Northampton* (Boston: William M'Alpine for John Mein, 1766). Orton (1717-1783) had preached the funeral sermon for Doddridge (1702-1751). The *Memoirs*, first published in London in 1766, were quickly reprinted in Boston. The rules to which Parkman referred appear on pp. 18-21 of the London edition. Parkman began reading the *Memoirs* on Aug. 19, 1761 and finished two days later: “Finished reading Mr. Orton's Life of that eminent Man

A Confession of Faith

- 1 I believe that there is a God an Incomprehensible perfect being, a Spirit Infinite Eternall unchangeable in his Being, Wisdom, power, holyness, Justice goodness and truth, having his being of him Self and giving being to all things. I believe that the living and true God is but one. And that in the Unity of the God head there is a Trinity of Persons, Father, Son, and holy Ghost. And that these three are but one God the Same in Substance equall in power and Glory. This is a revealed mystery which I do believe but cannot comprehend.
- 2 I believe that this God who was from Eternity did in the beginning of time create or make out of Nothing The world the heaven and the Earth and all things visible and invisible and this he did by the word of his eternal power in the Space of Six dayes and all very good. And that the Same God doth by the Same power uphold and Maintain the creatures in that being which he at first gave them by the constant concurrence of providence for by him allthings Subsist from the highest Angel to the Meanest Worm. And that this God in the right of Creation and preservation, is the Supream Absolute Sovereign and rector of the world ruling and governing all his Creatures and all their Actions, according to the Wise holy and Eternal counsel of his own will to the praise and Glory of his own Name.
- 3 I believe that God as the Governour of the World hath given a law to his rational Creatures According to which they are to Walk, in order to their Glorifying and enjoying him And that to the present Sons of men the Scriptures of the O. and N. Testament are given as the only rule to direct them both in Faith and practice. That this book of Scripture was Given by Inspiration of God holy men Speaking and writing as they were Moved by the holy Spirit. And that this is the foundation of all revealed religion, and a perfect Sufficient rule of Direction to the Children of Men.
- 4 I believe that God made Man Upwright in his own Image, consisting in knowledge, Righteousness and holyness with Dominion Over the Inferiour Creatures. And that he made a covenant of Works with him promising life upon condition of a perfect and perpetuall Obedience Threatning Death upon Disobedience; and giving him a Command of Triall, Not to Eat of the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil upon pain of Death.
- 5 I believe that Man being left to the freedom of his own Will At the Instigation of the Devil Sinned against God in eating the forbidden fruit and So fell from his estate of happiness and

Dr. *Doddridge*. I pray it may be to my not only Instruction, but to my great Quickening. I bless God for Such bright Examples: but am utterly ashamed to think how far I am behind: how sorrowfully negligent I have been, and how little good I have done. The Lord forgive me! And O that I might have the Special Benefits of the Blood of Atonement, and of the Intercession of Jesus Christ! May I be greatly excited to copy Such excellent models! And especially be Strenuous to promote the Glory of God and the Eternal Salvation of the Souls of men!" Parkman did not state how his son Samuel came to transcribe "Some *Rules* etc. from Dr. *Doddridge's* Life," but we may imagine that it was done with his father's encouragement if not at his direction.

holyness and he being A common person all his posterity fell with him into an Estate of Sin and Misery.

That all the Sons of man are born Children of Disobedience, wanting originall righteousness and under a corruption of the whole Nature Slaves to the flesh the World and the Devil. And consequently Children of Wrath Obnoxious to the Justice of God and the Condemnation of the Law. And that No creature is able to deliver them out of this Condition.

6 That GOD having from all eternity of his Meer good pleasure Elected a remnant of Mankind to Everlasting life, did in Infinite Wisdom find out away [*sic*] So [*sic*] Save and Deliver them out of this Sinfull and Miserable Estate and to bring them into a State of Salvation And that Was by giving his only begotten Son to be their redeemer Who being God and One with the father according to the determinate council of God did in the fullness of time, take upon him our Nature a true Body and reasonable Soul And became Man being conceived by the holy Ghost born of the Virgin Mary Called JESUS.

I believe that This Jesus Was the true Messiah promised to and Expected by the Patriarchs under the old testament That he lived a holy Sinless life and fulfilled all righteousness, being Made under the Law; that he underwent the Miseries of this Life the Wrath of God for our Sins, and as a Sacrifice for Sin Dy'd a Cursed Death upon the Cross, Thereby Satisfying Divine Justice for the Sins of Man And So reconciling us to God, and bringing in an Everlasting righteousness. That he was buried and that having conquered Death he arose again the Third Day, and having commissioned his apostles and Ministers to preach the Gospel to all the World he Ascended into heaven Where he is and continues to be God and Man our prevailing intercessor with the father, and the Gloryfyed head Over all things to the Church: In all this Gloriously Executing the 3 Great Offices of Prophet Priest and King.

7 I BELIEVE That In Jesus Christ there is a New covenant of Grace made and publish'd in the Gospel the Tenor of which is, that all those who in the Sight and Sense of Their lost and undone condition by Nature come to Jesus X and truly repent of all their Sins and heartily renounce the Devil the World and the flesh and all their own righteousness in point of Justification And by a lively faith cordially resign them Selves to Jesus X as Their prince and Saviour covenanting to be his humble Servants and Serving him accordingly (sincerely tho' not perfectly) in all Manner of Gospell Obedience, Shall have all their Sins pardoned, their peace made, persons Justified Their Natures Sanctified, and Their Souls and Bodyes Eternally Saved.

8 I BELIEVE That the holy Spirit doth Effectually apply The redemption purchased by Christ to all the Elect by working in them that which is required of them convincing them of Sin, enlightening their minds in the knowledge of X, renewing their wills, not only persuading them, but powerfully enabling them to embrace Jesus X As he is freely offer'd in the Gospell. And that the Same Spirit continues to dwell in them And to work all their Works in them Weakening their Corruptions, Strengthening Their graces, Guiding their Way, comforting their Souls, Witnessing their Adoption enabling them More and More to dye unto Sin and to live unto Righteousness And keeping them faithfull and Stedfast unto the End.

9 I BELIEVE That all True Believers make up one invisible Sanctified Church which is the Mystical Body of Jesus X, receiving Vitall influence from him as from their head and having Communion in the Same Spirit of Faith and Love And that all those who by Baptism outwardly profess Faith in X as the true Messiah make up the Universall Visible Church of Christian Earth, of which J.X. is the only ruling Head, And as Such hath instituted Ordinances for Worship and discipline which are to be Observed and Kept pure in particular Churches and hath appointed the Standing Office of a Gospel Ministry for the due Administration of those Ordinances to the Edification of the Church and hath promised to be with them alwayes to the End of the World.

10 I believe that God hath appointed a Day in the Which he will Judge the World in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained, who will raise the Bodys of all men from their graves, and Judge them all according to their Works, Sending the Wicked, impenitent and Unbelievers into Everlasting Punishment, and receiving the righteous into life Eternall to be together for Ever With the Lord. And that Then he Shall deliver up the Kingdom to God even the Father That God May be all in all to all ETERNITY. Life Math: Henry. P. 66.

Which Confession I also receive as mine. E. Parkman

Dated at Cambridge. Sept: 4. 1719

Eben Parkman
Sept^r 5. 1719

Rules of
BEHAVIOUR.

1. Keep an exact Diary of your actions and of memorable Passages.⁸
- II. If in the conduct of your affairs you have been deceived by others or committed any Error your Self 'twil be discretion to Note it.
3. Tu Teipsum Oblectes et vulgi Verba Loquacis Sperne; Benè hic de te, dicet et ille Malè.⁹
4. The Best Elixir is,
Never to do that by another hand which you can do by your own. Never to do that tomorrow that thou Canst do today. Neglect not the least things.
5. Gods Eye is allways upon you Therefore Let your's allways be upon him.
- A
6. Let your prayers be as frequent as your Wants and Your Thanksgiving as Your Blessings.
7. In the Morning Think what You have to do and ask Gods Blessing. In the Evening Think what you have done. Ask Gods pardon.
8. The whole Universe is your Library; Conversation Living Studies and Observations Your Best Tutors.
9. Let nothing discourage you Worth is ever at home and carries its own Welcome with it. A Gallant Spirit will make you Cousen Germane to Caesar.
10. He hath no Serious belief of God or the Nife to come Who dares be Wicked.
11. He that Dares Sometimes to be Wicked for his advantage will allways be So if his Interest call for it.
12. Make your peace with God at the End of Every day, So at last you will have but one day to repent of.
13. Hear no ill Will of a friend nor Speak any of an Enemy. Believe not all You hear and Speak not all you believe.

⁸William de Britaine, *Humane Prudence*, 260. The following rules appear on the pages within parentheses: #2 (260); #4 (146); #5-7 (18); #8 (4); #9 (10); #10 (18); #11 (19); #12 (20); #13 (29); #14-15 (30); #16-17 (32); #18 (34); #19 (37); #20 (60); #21 (61); #22-23 (47); #24 (77); #25 (91); #26 (103); #27 (105); #28-29 (108); #30 (122); #31 (138).

⁹"Just please yourself and scorn the comments of the chattering mob. One among them will praise, another defame you." *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Clarence H. Miller, Vol. 3, Part II, *Latin Poems* (Yale University Press, 1984), 161.

14. Give not Your Advice nor Opinion before You are Askt.
15. Find Not faults with other Men for You are Not bound to Weed their Gardens.
16. Commend not a person to his face but to others nor dispraise any man behind his back but to his face. And use not over-great Encomiums of a person.
17. Keep an humble and Serene Deportment.
18. Let your behavior be like your Garments, neither Streight nor loose.
19. Deride not any person for his Infirmities.
20. Never Impact That to your friend That may impower him to be your Enemy.
21. Carry an Eye of Wariness on your Self and an Eye of Observation on Others.
22. Parca Lingua, aperta frons et Clausum pectus¹⁰ are the best ingredients of Wisdom.
23. Be not too Affirmative in any Assertion.
24. Never Magnifye your Self, the weakest Wings are the highest flyers.
25. Speak not ill of any: Disoblige None.
26. Let not any passion be Above you.
27. Be like the Caspian Sea Never Ebb, Never flow.
28. If you have an Injury done you You do your Adversary too much honour to take Notice of it And think too meanly of your Self to revenge it.
29. Tis a Noble Way of revenge to forget it.
30. Be not like a Sun Diall in a Grave, of no Use.
31. A friend like a Glass will discover to you your own infirmities.

¹⁰"A cautious tongue, open countenance, and close breast." This translation appears in Herman Mann, ed., [William de Britaine,] *Human Prudence: or the Art by Which a Man and a Woman May Be Advanced to Fortune, to Permanent Honor, and to Read Grandeur. Adapted to the Genius of the Citizens, and Designed for the Use of Schools in the United States. First American, from the Eighth London Edition. With Many Corrections, Translations, and Additions* (Dedham, MA, 1806), 36. Note, in the title, the change from "Humane" to "Human" and the inclusion of "a Woman."

32. To doubt nothing and to understand Nothing are alike verifiable.¹¹
33. Dont Quote Authors, nor talk in Scholastick Phrases, Nor Vent Metaphysical Notions among Gentlemen.¹²
34. It is a Sign of a good Judgement to be Able to ask a Discreet and pertinent Question.¹³

¹¹"In the Evening they all came to his Chamber to satisfie him that they had perform'd the Task he had set them. The first question which he us'd then to propound to every one in his order was, *Quid dubitas? What Doubts have you met in your studies to day?* (For he supposed that *To doubt nothing*, and *To understand nothing*, were verifiable alike.)" See "The Life of the Reverend and Most Learned Joseph Mede, B.D." in *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D., Sometime Fellow of Christ's Colledge in Cambridge* (4th ed.; London, 1677 [first published in 1664]), IV.

¹²"And methinks as it is usually accounted a Piece of Pedantry, and an Argument of defect of generous Education, for a Student to quote his Authors, to talk in Scholastic Phrase, and to vent his Metaphysical Notions in the Company of Gentlemen; so neither is it very decorous and civil on the other side to be talking altogether in the peculiar Phrase of Faulconry and Hunting in the Company of a Student: and it savours either of great defect (of other Matter of Discourse) in our selves, or of great contempt and insolence towards those others so treated." *A Winter-Evening Conference Between Neighbours. In Two Parts* (Edinburgh, 1684), Part I, 79-80.

¹³"As any man may pull down faster than another can build up. It is one sign of a good judgment to be able to ask a discreet and pertinent Question, and another to discern what satisfaction is fit to be expected; and then in the third place there is such a Virtue as modestly to sit down and rest satisfied with such an Answer as the nature of thing will admit of, all which those captious Hypercriticks are destitute of." *Ibid.*, 83.

Cambridge, Sept. 5. 1719. Saturday.

Whereas it hath pleased the Almighty Lord of Heaven and Earth the High and the Lofty one that Inhabits Eternity, that Dwells in the high and Holy place, out of his abundant Mercy and grace, to Cause Me to be born of religious parents; and did put it into Their hearts, to have me Baptized and brought into the pale of the Visible Church; and into covenant with God; And Whereas in a time of Sickness [*marginal notation*: Octob: 1714.] when brought Very low and Near The Gates of death I promised if God Should prolong my Life and Should give me a Space to repent in, I would dedicate My Self to his Service and to his fear, that I would Seek him Early, would prevent the dawning of the morning, making no delay to keep his Commandments That I would forsake my wicked way and My unrighteous Thoughts and Turn unto the Lord; Who has promised that If I do *<word crossed out>* so, he would have Mercy on Me and abundantly pardon me. I have now Thought on my Wayes, and will endeavour after New Obedience. And in order Hereto, I do make a Solemn Covenant between God and My Soul in These terms.

I do give my Self up to God, Soul and body, to be his; to Serve him, and none other; to Laud, to praise, and adore the Most high God, that rules in the Kingdom of heaven above, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth beneath; Who is the Father, the Son, and the holy Ghost, Three persons and but one onely Wise, infinitely high and holy God, from everlasting to everlasting, a Self Sufficient, independant, omnipotent, omniscient, Omnipresent Just and mercifull Being *<several lines crossed out>* Whose name alone is Jehovah the Creator Redeemer and Sanctifyer. And I do Covenant with God the Lord in a Solemn Manner taking God the Father to be my Father, Highest good and (his great End) God the Son to be my only Saviour, *<several words crossed out>*, Lord and Master: God the holy Ghost to be my comforter Leader and director in all my Actions. And do protest against every Thing contrary to the revealed will of God and only rule of man, the holy Scriptures contained in the books of the Old and new Testament Intirely depending upon God my Creator Saviour and preserver for all things Necessary for the life that now is, and that which is to come Desiring to be ruled as Well as eternally Saved by him.

I have Sworn and I will perform it (as far as in me Lyes) That I will Keep Gods Statutes.