

## **Sarah (Warrin) Morse's Illness and the Name Submit**

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Sarah Morse's illness was first recorded at age 20 when, presumably at the request of her father, Jonah Warrin, Parkman visited her and found her "much disorder'd in the Mind" (Nov. 15, 1754). Four days later, he returned: Sarah "had attempted Several Times to destroy her Self." Dr. Samuel Brigham of Marlborough was there, and Parkman "pray'd with them" (Nov., 19, 1754). A month later Parkman visited Sarah Warrin again; she was, he wrote, "yet out of order" (Dec. 19, 1754). Several months later, on a Sunday, Sarah's father came to Parkman "in Distress about his Daughter Sarah again" and "desir'd public prayers." That evening Parkman visited and prayed with her (Mar. 30 1775). He visited her the next day, and two days later he returned for "Fast Exercises," with the Rev. Elisha Fish of Upton praying and Parkman preaching on Phil. 4.11. As he noted, "Sarah Warrin in So ill a frame that before we began the Exercise I could not get it out of her that she desir'd that what we were undertaking, or concurr'd in it - however she did tarry with us." That evening she wanted to talk with Fish, and when Parkman left "she ask'd me to remember her as being, if not under Conviction yet under Temptations" (Apr. 2, 1755). A month later the nature of her temptations was clear: she was "exceedingly Set to destroy herself." Parkman prayed with her, "though against her Inclination." She "ran away into the Woods, and all hands after her" (May 1, 1755). Two months later she remained "under Disorders" (June 24, 1755).

Sarah Warrin's marriage to Seth Morse two years later (July 12, 1757) suggests that her illness was in remission. Their marriage was marked by unrelenting tragedy. Their first child, a boy whose name was not recorded, died "of the Canker" at eight months (Feb. 28, 1759). Their

second child, also without a recorded name, died at a very early age: "Went to Neighbour Morse's, whose Child is dead" (Oct. 30, 1760).<sup>i</sup> Their third child, Elizabeth, born in 1761, was baptized the next year after Sarah Morse joined the church.<sup>ii</sup> Seth Morse joined the church in 1763,<sup>iii</sup> and several months later a foster child was entrusted to their care. They requested baptism for the child, with the church asking whether they did "Solemnly engage to take Special Care of this Child, which they now presented, to bring her up (by divine grace) in the good Knowledge and Fear of the Lord?" With "each of them manifesting their Consent," the child was baptized and given the name Sarah.<sup>iv</sup> Another child, Aaron, born in 1764, was sick seven months later when his sister Elizabeth died just shy of three years old (Nov. 9, 1764). Aaron, like the foster child Sarah, may have died young as there is no further record of their existence. Another son, Abner Warren, born in 1767, did survive to marry, but the last child of Sarah and Seth Morse, aptly named Submit, apparently did not survive.<sup>v</sup>

The choice of the name Submit was, for many parents, hardly random or fanciful but rather quite intentional. Submit was the name of at least fourteen girls whose parents lived in Westborough or were connected to the church. The church records and Parkman's diary reveal the heartbreaking circumstances under which parents – or a surviving spouse – chose the name. When Submit Forbush was baptized, she "was held up by its grandfather Deacon Forbush, the Immediate Father being (if alive) in Captivity."<sup>vi</sup> Submit Warrin's mother died six days after Submit's birth, and the next day, at the "Urgent Request" of her father and "upon Consideration of the illness of his Child and there being a great Congregation of people, at his House on Occasion of his wife's Funeral," Parkman "baptized the Child by the name of Submitt."<sup>vii</sup> Submit Warrin died three weeks later.<sup>viii</sup> Francis Whipple came to Parkman with

the news that Submit, "his poor little Child (which was always from its Birth unlike other Children, weak, pining, unable to Speak, etc.," had died (Apr. 30, 1777). Adonijah and Hannah Rice named the last of their ten children, twin daughters, Submit and Relief. One imagines that no explanation was needed for those who knew them. The records are silent with respect to Sarah and Seth Morse's last child, Submit. Were the pregnancy and birth difficult? Was Submit a premature or sickly child who was thought not likely to survive? Or had Sarah Morse's mental illness returned?

Five years after the birth of Submit Morse, Parkman and Dr. James Hawes of Westborough were called to the Morse home: forty-year-old Sarah Morse was "in a despairing condition and had taken some Coperas," a chemical used in dyeing, tanning, and making ink.<sup>ix</sup> She told Parkman that what he had "delivered in the sermon yesterday, was directly to her. She had now no Business to stay here any longer – no Desires of Good etc." (Mar. 14, 1774). Parkman's sermon had been on Acts 26:20: "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." After delivering the sermon, Parkman exclaimed, "And may it please God to grant a Blessing to accompany what has been delivered! Especially to Me that I may be excited by the Holy Spirit to a true sense of *Sin* -- what an Evil and what a Bitter Thing it is!" Sarah Morse's attempted suicide could hardly have been what he expected.

Parkman visited Morse several times over the next two weeks, on one occasion bringing her a sermon by Increase Mather on Genesis 4:13 ("And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear"), but she would not take it: "It would do no good," she said (Mar. 22, 1774). On another visit, he noted that "Her Doctor from *Andover*, Mr. *Daniel How*, was there" (Mar. 29, 1774). Five days later, he and two doctors were called: she had cut

her throat with a razor, inflicting a two-inch wound to her windpipe. Dr. Hawes and Dr. Stephen Ball of Northborough managed to stitch up the wound. When Seth Morse asked Parkman to pray, Sarah responded that "she was not against it 'with respect to Mr. *Morse* and the Children, but it could do her no good'" (Apr. 3, 1774).

Parkman visited her on an almost daily basis, offering prayers for her and her family. Seth Morse asked that a fast be kept on her account, fearing that she would "live but a little longer" (Apr. 11, 1774). Four ministers gathered the next day at the Morse home, with Parkman praying and Joseph Sumner of Shrewsbury preaching in the morning, and Elijah Fitch of Hopkinton praying and Elisha Fish of Upton preaching in the afternoon. As Parkman exclaimed, "May the Lord bless the word and accept the prayers, especially for this Miserable Object!" (Apr. 12, 1774). Sarah Morse's health did not improve, and ten days later Parkman was asked to her home, "She *her self* having wanted to see me." He "found no great alteration as to the State of her mind, except that she is thought Somewhat more insane. Her Body is more emaciated and she grows weaker." Her wound had pretty much healed, "the Hole not bigger apparently, than a Hazelnut might be put into." Swallowing was difficult and she spoke "but in Whisper and to be understood but difficultly." Parkman prayed with her – "not so much against her Will, as heretofore: but she was not rational enough to discourse much. Tis feared she can't continue long" (Apr. 22, 1774).

Seth Morse sent an urgent message to Parkman the next morning: "It was feared she was dying." Parkman visited and prayed. As a minister, he was naturally concerned about her spiritual condition, but "Her real Frame could not be known." She died later that morning. The next day, a Sunday, Parkman read Romans 11:33, and although he had prepared his afternoon

sermon on another subject, he continued on the theme from Romans “as the solemn Occasion (Mrs. Morse’s awfull Departure) engaged all our minds” (Apr. 24, 1774). The scripture reads, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” The next day “a Great Assembly” gathered for Sarah Morse’s funeral.

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<sup>i</sup>Neither Sarah nor Seth had yet joined the church as full members or had even owned the covenant (i.e., the so-called half-way covenant which would have allowed them to offer their children for baptism but not receive communion, the only two sacraments in the Puritan churches). Seth recorded only the births of four of their children in the official town records (Elizabeth, Nov. 19, 1761; Aaron, May 6, 1764; Abner Warren, July 29, 1767; and Submit, Nov. 20, 1769); *Vital Records of Westborough, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester: Franklin P. Rice, 1903), 76-77. None of the children’s deaths was recorded.

<sup>ii</sup>Westborough Church Records, Aug. 22, 1762.

<sup>iii</sup>Westborough Church Records, Mar.13, 1763.

<sup>iv</sup>Westborough Church Records, June 12, 1763.

<sup>v</sup>Submit was born on Nov. 20, 1769, and baptized on Nov. 26. There is no record of her marriage or death. When Seth Morse wrote his will in 1823, he left a token amount to his “only Son,” Ebenezer Belknap Morse, the only child of his second marriage. Abner Warren Morse, who was born in 1767, married Lydia White of Watertown, Feb. 7, 1790, in Watertown (*Vital Records of Westborough*, 186), but I have been unable to locate information about any children or Abner’s death which presumably occurred before his father wrote his will in 1823.

<sup>vi</sup>Westborough Church Records, Oct. 12, 1746.

<sup>vii</sup>Westborough Church Records, Jan. 20, 1739.

<sup>viii</sup>*Vital Records of Westborough*, 256.

<sup>ix</sup>*OED*: A name given from early times to the protosulphates of copper, iron, and zinc (distinguished as *blue*, *green*, and *white* copperas respectively); etymologically it belonged properly to the copper salt; but in English use, when undistinguished by attribute or context, it has always been most commonly, and is now exclusively, applied to *green* copperas, the proto-sulphate of iron or ferrous sulphate (Fe SO<sub>4</sub>), also called *green vitriol*, used in dyeing, tanning, and making ink.