

FRANK SHUFFELTON

Thomas Hooker, 1586-1647



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THOMAS HOOKER

1586-1647

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For Jane, For David

*vos, o clarissima mundi
lumina, labentem caelo quae ducitis annum*

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P R E F A C E

THE most recent biography of Thomas Hooker was published in 1891, and Cotton Mather's short biography included in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* was the only previous original account of Hooker's career—other accounts being abridgments or padded versions of Mather's narrative. Mather's presentation of Hooker as a model of ministerial piety contains many useful insights into Hooker's religion, character and deeds, and George Leon Walker's *Thomas Hooker: Preacher, Founder, Democrat* (New York, 1891) shows a scrupulously researched mastery of the relevant facts concerning Hooker's life. Unfortunately, the strength of one biographer is the weakness of the other, and both writers have failed to give an adequate treatment of Hooker's published works—Mather, perhaps, because they were so familiar to his audience, and Walker because they were so foreign.

The absence of a modern treatment of Hooker's life is in itself a good reason to retell the story of this great preacher and leader of our first Puritan settlers. A deeper and more satisfying understanding of the Puritan enterprise has been created in the last eighty years; Hooker's career deserves to be reconsidered with the scholarly accessions of the twentieth century in mind, and a biographical study will further deepen our knowledge of the New England experiment. Walker perpetuated the misleading version of Hooker's significance so dear to nineteenth-century American historians. From George Bancroft to Vernon Parrington writers have attempted to portray Hooker's removal to Connecticut as a type of the American Revolution; Perry Miller has since shown us that this interpretation will not do. Hooker was a preacher first and foremost, a founder only in a secondary sense, and hardly a

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democrat at all. My study has led me to believe that Hooker's significance for New England and America was as a preacher and pastor, as a theologian, and as an architect of the religious community. I have attempted to explain Hooker's career within these guidelines and to integrate a consideration of his writings with a discussion of his activities in the hope that thought and action might illuminate each other. While Miller disproved the idea of Hooker as a democratic refugee, he did not give an explanation of Hooker's reasons for removing to Connecticut. I began this study in an attempt to discover in Hooker's sermons reasons for his emigration, and what I discovered there has importance for Puritan and American life on a much wider scale. His concern for men's troubled minds, for civil harmony, and for the practice of a meditative, intensive piety has reappeared throughout our history, although I have confined myself to a consideration of his significance for the Puritan experience.

Hooker's activities seem to me to fall into several phases which correspond to his cultural and geographic milieu at any given time. I have devoted successive chapters to Hooker's education, first pastoral experience, English preaching career, activities in the Netherlands, settlement in Massachusetts, re-settlement in Connecticut, and his work in defense of the New England Way then being formulated in the four plantations known as the United Colonies. My final chapter attempts to suggest the lines of Hooker's influence through Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards; I must emphasize the term "suggest," for any attempt to cover a hundred years of New England church history in a short chapter can scarcely hope to do more.

A minor warning or two is due the reader at this point. First, I use the term *Puritan* within a historical, and hence shifting, context. In the first part of the study, involving Hooker's activities in England and the Netherlands, I intend *Puritan* to include all those men who wished to reform the Church of

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England in a protestant direction, whether they were inclined to presbyterian, congregational, or separatist forms of church government. After Hooker's arrival in the New World, the opponents to the established church of England began to distinguish themselves in accordance with their preferences for various forms of church order, and hence in the latter part of the study, involving Hooker's activities in New England, *Puritan* refers to the particular variety of Puritanism and to the particular theories of church government practiced there. This is clearly a matter of convenience rather than of definition, and when obliged to distinguish between varieties of Puritan in Old and New England, I have referred to them as presbyterians or nonseparating congregational independents as the case might be. As I have used the term *Puritan*, I have had in mind Alan Simpson's useful study, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press).

Second, I have for the most part attempted to explicate Hooker's ideas within the narrative context of his life, but in two important, lengthy passages analysis has displaced narrative. In the second chapter I have made a detailed study of Hooker's *Poore Doubting Christian Drawne to Christ* in order to reveal the complex machinery of his cure of souls; as I indicate there, concern for the spiritually troubled was central to Hooker's entire career. In the third chapter I have analyzed Hooker's concept of preparation for salvation as he preached it in England; the overwhelming bulk of his published work deals with this preparationist theology, and it was through these writings that he gained his reputation and influence in New England. Chapter Three, in particular, covers ground already familiar to scholars steeped in the Puritan mind, but I hope they will discover some new insights there, and newcomers to the field should be able to find their way through the thickets of Puritan theology without extensive prior reading. Except for expanded abbreviations, all quotations preserve the original spelling and, unless otherwise noted, the

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original punctuation. All dates are based upon a January 1st New Year's Day; thus, February 12, 1633/34 is given as February 12, 1634.

I have been indebted to various scholars more than mere footnotes can possibly reveal. George and Williston Walker helped begin the spadework necessary for a reevaluation of the Puritan past. Perry Miller has revolutionized our knowledge of the American seventeenth century and has made possible most of the significant scholarship which followed his pioneering work. I have profited widely from the work of Raymond P. Stearns, Edmund S. Morgan, Norman Pettit, Larzer Ziff, Darrett B. Rutman, Sidney Ahlstrom, and Jesper Rosenmeier. David Hall's collection of documents on the Antinomian Controversy was indispensable. Winthrop S. Hudson has been extremely kind and patient as he listened to half-formed versions of my ideas and offered valuable suggestions. William A. Clebsch read an earlier stage of this work with an ear sharpened to theological overtones and distinctions. Above all, I owe an enormous debt to David Levin, whose suggestions and corrections have made this a much better study than it might have been and whose patience and encouragement have supported my carnal heart. Needless to say, any errors herein are my own. Helen Craven has spent long hours of typing, and the librarians of the Congregational Library and of Houghton Library made me comfortable during extended bouts of sermon reading. And finally, Jane Shuffelton has offered motivation, a sympathetic ear, and a keen sense of stylistic grace as she relived with me the intricacies of seventeenth-century thought.

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