



# Early American Poetry: Mather Cotton. A poem and an elegy: the best poems

*Club of Odd Volumes*

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Excerpt:

works, numbering nearly four hundred, two are in verse. While all have become scarce or rare, these two may be considered unique, for no other copies are known. In the present series of the earliest and rarest American poems it seemed very desirable that they should be reproduced. They were owned by the late George Brinley, of Hartford, and when Part I. of his library was sold in 1879, they were bought by the late C. Fiske Harris for his probably unrivalled collection of American poetry, now belonging to Brown University in Providence. The writer, through the kindness of his friend, Reuben A. Guild, LL.D., librarian emeritus, and the courtesy of the librarian and authorities, was enabled to procure written copies. These were very carefully made by an expert, Miss Georgiana Guild, who has also read the printer's proofs from the originals, so that they are accurately shown here, page for page, and line for line, in their pristine incorrectness of type and peculiarity of composition.

Whatever may be thought of their literary or other value, or lack of it, they show the very early work of their author, and what at their date and birthplace was supposed to be fit offering to the Muses and tribute to the honored dead. No works could now be rarer, few more curious — or harder to read. Like some of the stones in our old burial-grounds, they should be preserved and made more widely known for just what they are, since they are among the few monuments dating from the spring-time and planting of a great nation.

When aged only twenty-two, Cotton Mather became a colleague with his father in the North Church, Boston, and he died its senior pastor. Through his pastorate of more than forty years his labor and influence were notable in all the phases of life and thought. Like other men of marked individuality and of prominence, he has been a subject of opinions diverse and even partisan. One fact, however, is notable: the works of scarcely an author in our language since Shakespeare are now sought with more zeal, or at higher prices. To the collector he has a special interest, for he was himself a collector, as well as scholar. He added much to a family library that was one of the three best in Provincial New England, and that was inherited and long kept by his son. Many hundreds of its volumes are still preserved by the American Antiquarian Society; more of them have had a fate mysterious or unknown.


The two works reproduced in this volume commemorate two ministers who were in their time prominent in New England.

The Reverend Urian Cakes, who was born in England in 1631, came to America in 1634, and graduated at Harvard in 1649. He returned to England, where he was a preacher, and was silenced in 1662. Again he came to America, and began pastoral labor in the church at Cambridge, November, 1671, where he was installed February 3, 1680. From April, 1675 to 1679, he superintended Harvard College, and then was its president until his death in Cambridge, July 25, 1681. Cotton Mather thought that he was a "faithful, learned, and indefatigable" president, and Quincy (I. 38), nearly two centuries later, had the same opinion. He was also a poet, and a better one than Mather. His Elegy on Shepard far surpasses the works in this volume, and, it is proposed, will be reproduced in the fourth of the present series.

The Reverend Nathaniel Collins was born in Cambridge, March 7, 1641-2, and graduated at Harvard, 1660. In 1668, at Middletown, Connecticut, he was ordained the first minister of a church with "ten male members including himself." The meeting-house was "twenty feet square, ten feet from sill to plate, and . . . enclosed with palisades for a safeguard against the Indians." (Sibley, II. 58.) He died December 28, 1684. One of his sons, John, married Mary, a daughter of the regicide Dixwell; another, Nathaniel, was the first minister of Enfield, Connecticut. (Allen, 250.)

JAS. F. HUNNEVELL.

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