

On Sunday we accompanied the family of a lawyer, to whom we had brought letters, to a Unitarian church. There was nothing doctrinal in the sermon, and, among other indications of the altered and softened feelings of the sects which have sprung from the old Puritan stock, I remarked a gilt cross placed over the altar. The officiating minister told me that this step had been taken with the consent of the congregation, though not without the opposition of some of his elders. The early Puritans regarded this symbol as they did pictures and images, as the badges of superstition, the relics of the idolatrous religion so lately renounced by them; and it is curious to read, in the annals of the first colonists at Salem, how, in 1634, the followers of Roger Williams, the Brownist, went so far as to cut that "popish emblem," the red cross, out of the royal standard, as one which the train bands ought no longer to follow.*

During my first visit to the New England States, I was greatly at a loss to comprehend by what means so large a population had been brought to unite great earnestness of religious feeling with so much real toleration. In seeking for the cause, we must go farther back than the common schools, or at least the present improved state of popular education; for we are still met with the question, How could such schools be maintained by the state, or by compulsory assessments, on so liberal a footing, in spite of the fanaticism and sectarian prejudices of the vulgar? When we call to mind the religious enthusiasm of the early Puritans, and how at first they merely exchanged a servile obedience to tradition, and the authority of the Church, for an equally blind scripturalism, or implicit faith in the letter of every part of the Bible, acting as if they believed that God, by some miraculous process, had dictated all the Hebrew words of the Old, and all the Greek of the New Testament; nay, the illiterate among them cherishing the same superstitious veneration for every syllable of the English translation—how these religionists, who did not hesitate to condemn several citizens to be publicly whipped for denying that the Jewish code was obligatory on Christians as a rule of life, and who were fully persuaded that they alone were the

* Graham's History of United States, vol. i. p. 227.