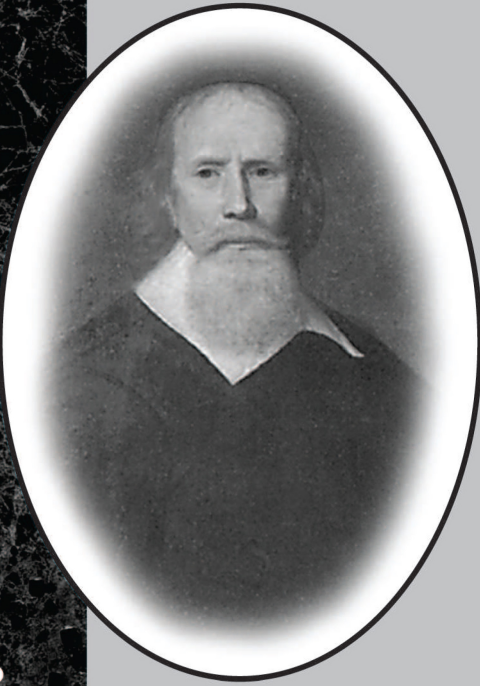


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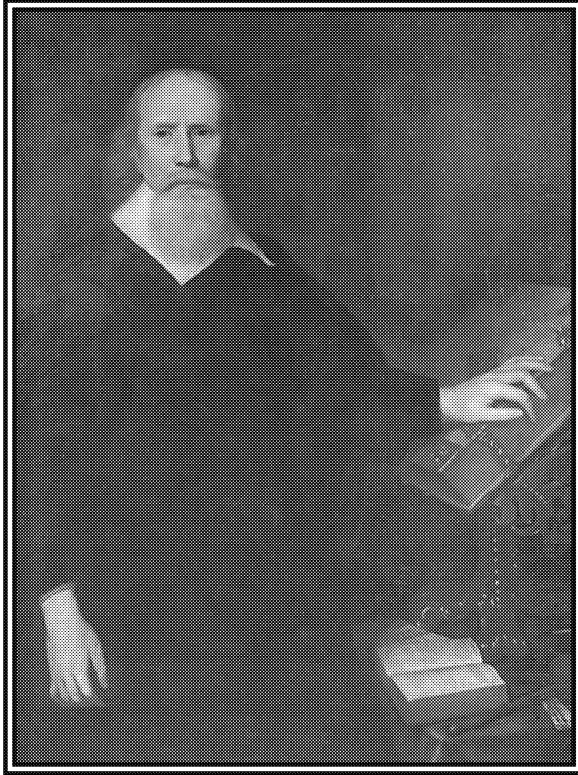
John Clarke (1609-1676)

Pioneer in American
Medicine, Democratic
Ideals, and Champion
of Religious Liberty

Louis Franklin Asher

John Clarke (1609-1676)

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Democratic Ideals, and
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JOHN CLARKE
1609-1676

This picture hangs in the Redwood Library in Newport, Rhode Island. It has been traditionally considered an authentic portrait of Dr. John Clarke.

John Clarke (1609-1676)

Pioneer in American Medicine,
Democratic Ideals, and
Champion of Religious Liberty

by

Louis Franklin Asher



The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.

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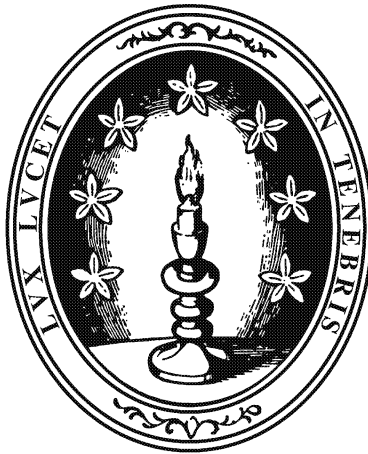
Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

-- Psalm 60:4

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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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*To my wife and family for their undying love
and encouragement which made the task
of writing this book much easier.*

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Portrait of Dr. John Clarke

Some have identified the portrait on the dust cover of this book as a likeness of Dr. John Clarke, early American pioneer in medicine, law, democracy and religious freedom. A photo of the original painting appeared on the cover of *The Hero of Aquidneck* by Wilbur Cheesman Nelson. Nelson believed the painting was that of Dr. Clarke. In the past, the portrait has been identified variously as that of Dr. Clarke, Roger Williams, or simply as “The Unknown Clergyman.”

The original oil painting of the clergyman measures several square feet in size and hangs in the Redwood Library and Athenaeum at Newport, Rhode Island. The date on the painting is 1639. In 1927, Providence artist Wilfred Duphinney suggested that possibly the painting is a likeness of Roger Williams; he conjectured that the date on the painting may be wrong and should be 1659 instead. When the author viewed the painting in 1965, the library catalogue listed the date as 1659, but no one at the library seemed acquainted with its history.

Dutch painter Guilliam DeVilje painted the portrait. It has been assumed, however, that no painter could have painted it in New England as early as 1639, although, as early as 1647, a portrait was made of Indian Chief Ninigret of Rhode Island, which in 1965 was housed in the Rhode Island Historical Society Library at Providence. Relative to the conjectured date of 1659, only Dr. Clarke was in England at that time; Williams had returned to Rhode Island earlier.

The following seem to be the known facts in identifying the portrait of the “Unknown Clergyman”:

- (1) It is the portrait of a clergyman.
- (2) His hair length borders on long because it touches his shoulders. While pictures of Roger Williams show the same hair length, other than this, there appears to be no similarity between this likeness and other pictures of Williams.

(3) Since both Dr. Clarke and Williams opposed “long” hair, evidently, such length to them was not considered long.

(4) The date of the painting on the portrait is 1639. Neither Dr. Clarke nor Williams was in England during 1639. While both were there from 1651 to 1654, only Clarke remained in England until 1664.

(5) No person other than Dr. Clarke or Williams has been suggested as a likeness of the portrait, insofar as the author is aware.

(6) Other pictures of Williams show no likeness to the painting.

(7) One of Dr. Clarke’s descendents identified the painting as bearing a resemblance to the Clarke features and lines.

In one of Roger Williams’ letters, Williams cited a man who visited Rhode Island, whom Williams described as strange because he wore long hair extending down his back. Since Williams considered long hair on a man as strange, it seems that such a man would stand out in New England. Evidently shoulder-length hair was not considered long at that time.

Off and on for years, attempts were made to identify the early portrait. Even though conclusive evidence is indeed lacking, which demonstrates beyond doubt the portrait is that of Dr. John Clarke of Rhode Island, by and large opinions seem to favor Clarke. Based on available evidence, the author believes the portrait is probably that of Dr. John Clarke who had it painted sometime between 1651 and 1664, during Clarke’s long stay in England. Since the author has found no conclusive disclaimer to the contrary, he chose to use a facsimile of the portrait to adorn this book.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the late professor Emeritus Dr. Louis A.R. Yates of Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, who first inspired him to do good research work and who wrote encouraging words toward this work. Also the author is grateful for the advisory assistance given him on his master's thesis titled "The Life and Letters of John Clarke (1609-1676)" in 1966 by Drs. Archie P. McDonald and James L. Nichols, both retired professors from Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas.

The author acknowledges his gratitude for the help he received from the following libraries and research centers: the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts; the Newport Historical Society; Redwood Library; the United Baptist John Clarke Memorial Church—all of above in Newport, Rhode Island; Rhode Island Historical Society; Providence Public Library; John Hay Library, Brown University; Rhode Island State House—all of above in Providence, Rhode Island; Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and University Microfilm, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Further the author wishes to express his indebtedness to the following British and Dutch sources and records offices: the British Museum, Corporation of London Records Office, Guildhall; Public Record Office, Chancery lane—all of above in London; King Edward VI School, Bury St. Edmonds, Suffolk County, England; Ipswich and East Suffolk Record Office, County Hall, Ipswich, Suffolk County; the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple; the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple; the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn; the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn—all of London; Miss Mary H. Flower, hired searcher of 2 Lammas Park Gardens, London, W5.; the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England; and the University of Leyden (Senaat Universiteit te Leiden), Leyden, Holland.

The following offices and persons were very cooperative in supplying

information or suggestions where materials bearing on Dr. Clarke may be located: the Office of Recorder of Deeds, Providence, Rhode Island; Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, London; County Records Offices, Shire Hall, Bedford, England; Greater London Record Office (Middlesex Records), London; Record Office, House of Lords, London; and Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Massachusetts. A special thanks is given to Dr. William D. Metz of the University of Rhode Island and a former editor of the Phi Alpha Theta *Journal* for reading the earlier manuscript and offering helpful advice; also to Wilbur Nelson, Jr., son of the late Rev. Wilbur Cheesman Nelson and Vice President of the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company for his encouragement and support offered toward this work and numerous others, including my oldest son, Michael—who supplied me with a computer and other aids—without whose encouragement this book probably would not have been possible.

John Clarke (1609-1676)

Pioneer in American Medicine,
Democratic Ideals, and
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Introduction

Every student of American history knows the importance of Roger Williams. The battle for religious freedom, which he courageously initiated in New England, has been unceasingly proclaimed. But somehow it has escaped the attention of students that Williams' singular contribution has eclipsed other equally outstanding figures. One of the most neglected of these personages was Dr. John Clarke, physician, minister, colonial patriot, and benefactor of seventeenth-century Rhode Island. A close friend and political associate of Williams, Dr. Clarke hurled the same bold challenge against the church-state principle of government for which Williams became famous. In contrast to Williams, however, Clarke came to America fully persuaded in this conviction. Yet in recognition, Clarke has been given less than token attention. Thus very little about him and his contributions have been duly noted. Even Clarke's contemporaries have provided too little information.

Basically this book is an expansion of a thesis: "The Life and Letters of John Clarke, Physician of Rhode Island, 1609–1676," which was originally submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of arts at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, in 1966.

My thesis in this work is that John Clarke of Rhode Island was the initiator of democratic ideals in New England, he was an explorer in New England medicine, and he played a seminal role in establishing religious freedom in the Rhode Island colony by initiating it and legally upholding its practice.

The objective of this work aims at installing Dr. Clarke to his rightful place in history by rescuing him from historical oblivion. The methodology is by analyzing and evaluating his role in colonial America through an examination of his correspondences, his book, various university and Rhode Island State Records, contemporary letters and works—especially those which oppose his views, and all other materials that relate to him.

Several things can account for Clarke's obvious obscurity in history. Because of his common name, historical confusion is understandable. Yet his public life in Rhode Island appears to be well documented. In view of this, why has such a distinguished person been so callously ignored by historians, especially those in political science? The intellectual community, in fact, seems to be inadequately informed on the significant role of Clarke in formative America. As it happens, certain important ideals have been attributed to Roger Williams—such as the innovation of the “lively experiment” of democracy—which belong to Clarke.

Such obscurity aroused my curiosity and fired my enthusiasm to investigate further into the life and contributions of Clarke. In turn this led to a second research tour in New England, a lengthy correspondence of inquiries, and a tour to England in 1975. After serious reflection and examination of the materials relating to Clarke's era, I found several apparent reasons for Clarke's relative insignificance.

As a modest person, Clarke wrote very little about himself. A practical man, his prolific talents kept him occupied, affording him little time to write of personal matters. According to state records, matters of early colonial expediency kept Clarke very busy, and documents of historical importance were too often scribbled on loose pages; consequently they were not guarded very carefully. As a result, many valuable materials were either misplaced or destroyed. Along with these, many valuable papers and records were confiscated by British troops when they occupied the town of Newport during the War of Independence. To make matters worse, the ship which carried the confiscated records to England was lost; only a small box of papers was salvaged.

Unfortunately Clarke's relatively common name has caused considerable confusion in both England and New England. Now, however, Dr. Clarke of Rhode Island can be identified quite accurately. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, Clarke left no descendants to carry on his interests. Of his five brothers and sisters who migrated to America, only his brother Joseph continued the family name. Therefore no relative survived to make us aware and keep us informed on personal matters relating to Clarke.

Except for a few articles about Clarke, to author, little if anything of a secondary nature concerning Dr. Clarke has appeared in print for some three decades. Of course as late as 1975, two more of Clarke's personal letters were discovered in England. The letters are of a religious nature, and they merely confirm what this work states: Clarke as a minister served his religious brethren some while he was in England from 1651 to 1664.

Except for a few articles about Clarke, the few available secondary materials which relate to him span a number of years. To the author's knowledge, only two books, a dissertation and a master's thesis, have been composed on Clarke: *The Story of Dr. John Clarke* in 1915, by Thomas Williams Bickness; *The Hero of Aquidneck* in 1938, by Wilbur Cheesman Nelson; “John Clarke, Baptist Statesman,” a Th.D. dissertation in 1950, by James Hallett Christian; and “The Life and Letters of John Clarke, Physician of Rhode

Island, 1609-1676," an M.A. thesis in 1966, by the author.

None of the above works has brought due recognition to Clarke. The books are not adequately documented, and the dissertation—although expertly documented—focuses mostly on the charter acquisition and its implications; little attention is paid to Clarke's other contributions. Although the thesis brings together more of Clarke's letters and other valid evidences, which bear on his diversified life, the thesis is basically more of a collection of source materials than a balanced interpretive work. However the thesis does make a serious attempt to identify the five or more John Clarkes that appeared in new England up to 1650.

None of the above four works explores in depth Clarke's religious views. Only a few of his letters relating to matters of state are examined, and insufficient attention is given to Clarke's education background. In general no documented narrative has been produced that presents a satisfactory, balanced assessment of Clarke's life, activities, and overall contributions to American society in New England. Therefore this book attempts to shed more light on Clarke's social, political, and religious role in helping to develop the infant American republic.

In the pioneer social context, John Clarke of Rhode Island contributed significantly to the medical, political, and religious developments of New England at large and the Rhode Island colony in particular. As a physician, Dr. Clarke made medical history by his extraction of a hydatidiform mole, the first in New England history. In this contribution, he is deserving of signal honor for his unselfish medical services to the Antinomian social outcasts of Massachusetts. Socially Clarke led out and helped found a distinctively unique colony in the New World when he helped transform a group of immigrant dissidents into an experimental democracy.

As the most forward and stable-minded man in the Antinomian camp, Clarke initiated the Rhode Island migration. Serving on the purchasing committee, he was in the initial founding group. As new towns sprang up and a growing concern for unity emerged, Clarke was chosen to lead the way. Helping to unite the towns, Clarke worked faithfully by assisting in framing, codifying, and executing the early laws of the unpopular colony. But more importantly, he was the principal author and acquirer of Rhode Island's famous civil and religious charter of freedom—the first of its kind in the world. As the chief instrument in drawing up the novel document, Clarke was then chosen to help lead the struggling colony toward an effective popular government.

Freedom of religion to many is the fountainhead from which all other freedoms flow. It has proved central to the democratic system, and ideal which has manifested to the world unique civil and religious liberties. While Roger Williams has been hailed as the earliest American harbinger of religious freedom, it was Dr. Clarke who activated the principle by making it the wellspring of democracy in early Rhode Island government. By implementing his pioneer democratic philosophy and religious liberty, Clarke made clear that the state is not to be used as an instrument of rule, a disciplinary

agent—or even a guide to regulate religious matters.

In contrast to Williams, Clarke structured and helped to stabilize an infant republic, which became a role model for modern American democracy. Clarke steered the colony toward a government of unprecedented civil and religious liberty, convinced that otherwise a populace inevitably ends up subservient to the very wishes and whims of self-centered and overly ambitious rulers. At the first settlement of Portsmouth, for instance, such a direction was threatened by the Antinomians, and later at Newport by the usurping authority of Governor William Coddington and his immediate followers. Of course not all of Clarke's associates—such as the Puritans of New England at large—agreed with Clarke's democratic philosophy. To them free-spirited idealism too often fractures or veers off into anarchic tendencies, which at the outset became apparent. Such a threat was real to the Puritans; in fact it caused serious difficulties for some time between Rhode Island and the rest of New England.

“Oh, my brethren, what manner of people ought we to be, who as Christian men have succeeded to the heritage of martyrs? who have taken up a cause pleaded by apostolic lips? who have followed upon men of whom the world was not worthy? Our ancestors were made what they were by the grace of God, and the church of God may well glorify God in them. Their sufferings and heroic fortitude, their labors and their dauntless courage have left us under solemn obligations. Shall we be craven sons of heroic sires? Shall we be sluggards and slovenly in a work which they carried out so well? They built with gold, silver, and precious stones, shall we degrade their work by heaping thereon wood, hay, and stubble? I charge you, brethren, take good heed unto your ways by the remembrance of whence you came ... I address myself specially to those who are known as Baptists ... our ancestry as a body of Christian men is not to be despised. Albeit that the name of Anabaptist has been made the football of reproach, because it was wrongfully associated with fanatical opinions, we may rest assured that the more history is understood the more apparent will it be that those who were the most traduced were thus treated because they were before their times; they bore the brunt of battle because they led the van. God forbid that I should induce you to glory in them, and so to wear borrowed laurels. Of all pride I think that to be the most idle which hides its own nakedness beneath the tattered banners of ancestry. I do but dwell for a moment upon our past history to excite you to yet more earnest deeds. Prove ye yourselves to be these men’s sons by doing their deeds, else are ye bastards, and not sons.”

C. H. Spurgeon

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

(London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1875)

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