

Pseudochristus: A Religious Romance, 1649-1650

by Robert Michel

Prophets and messiahs have appeared throughout European history, often at times of crisis. An unusually well-documented case occurred in 1649 in Hampshire, England, during the religious and social upheavals accompanying the Civil Wars. William Franklin, a craftsman suffering from mental distractions, claimed to be Christ. He was abetted by his companion Mary Gadbury; she assumed the various roles of Christ's bride, the Virgin Mary, and Franklin's Precursor. Legally married to others, the couple lived together, preached, and attracted followers. Outraged, the local magistrates charged Franklin and Gadbury with adultery, bigamy, and blasphemy and suppressed their disciples as a threat to public order. Humphrey Ellis, a minister, set down the events and trial in an admonitory tract: Pseudochristus (1650). He listened to Gadbury's confession in court, visited the couple in prison, and collected facts from witnesses, giving an account of their backgrounds, possible motives, and strange illicit attraction. Ellis suggested natural and supernatural explanations for their behaviour and delusions (or frauds). He described in detail Gadbury's symptoms of religious possession - visions of blazing lights, voices from God, and false birth pangs. Pseudochristus is the story of a man and woman who cast aside their unhappy marriages and their social anonymity for a joyful but doomed adventure of religion and romance.

L'apparition de prophètes et de messies a ponctué l'histoire européenne, et ce souvent en période de crise. Un cas particulièrement bien documenté survint en 1649 à Hampshire, en Angleterre, durant les bouleversements sociaux et religieux qui accompagnèrent les guerres civiles. William Franklin, un artisan qui souffrait de troubles mentaux, déclara être le Christ. Il fut solidement appuyé par sa compagne, Mary Gadbury, qui assuma les divers rôles de l'épouse du Christ, de la Vierge Marie et de l'annonciatrice de Franklin. Légalement marié à d'autres, le couple vécut ensemble, prêcha et s'attira des disciples. Outragés, les magistrats locaux accusèrent Franklin et Gadbury d'adultère, de bigamie et de blasphème et mirent fin aux activités de leurs disciples, jugeant qu'ils présentaient une menace pour l'ordre public. Un pasteur, Humphrey Ellis nota par écrit les événements et le déroulement du procès dans le cadre d'un tract de mise en garde intitulé Pseudochristus (1650). Il écouta la confession de Gadbury devant le tribunal, rendit visite au couple en prison et recueillit des renseignements auprès de témoins, rendant compte de leurs antécédents, de leurs motifs possibles et de leur étrange attirance illicite. Ellis proposa des explications naturelles et surnaturelles de leur comportement et de leurs fantasmes (ou fraudes). Il décrivit en détail les symptômes de possession religieuse exhibés par Gadbury : visions de lumières éblouissantes, voix de Dieu et douleurs d'enfantement imaginaires. Pseudochristus est l'histoire d'un homme et d'une femme qui rejetèrent leurs mariages ratés et leur anonymat social pour vivre une aventure romanesque et religieuse qui, bien que joyeuse, était vouée à l'échec.

In November 1649 William Franklin, a London rope-maker aged about forty, left his wife and children to travel into Hampshire. Posing as Christ, he lived with his partner in visions, his spiritual bride, Mary Gadbury. For two months they attracted followers as well as charges of bigamy, blasphemy and adultery. Their bravado and religious extremism seemed to embody the worst excesses of their troubled times. While traces of most ordinary people of their time have vanished, Franklin and Gadbury live on in a sixty-two page tract, *Pseudochristus*, published in London in late May 1650

by a Puritan minister, Humphrey Ellis. A copy is among the Redpath Tracts in McGill's Library. Ellis gave a full, eye witness account of this messianic delusion; surviving court testimony corroborates his facts.¹ False messiahs and prophets crop up in mediaeval and reformation Europe but most documentation is scanty and second hand. Franklin and Gadbury are mentioned briefly by several historians but have eluded detailed attention.² Their story of free love and free religion is timeless yet also reveals the strains and social crisis of their own society.

P S E U D O C H R I S T U S :
Or, A true and faithful
R E L A T I O N
OF THE
*Grand Impostures, & Abominable Practises
Horrid Blasphemies, & Gross Deceits;*
Lately spread abroad and acted in the County of
Southampton, by *William Frankelin* and *Mary Gadbury*,
and their Companions.
The one most blasphemously professing and asserting
himself to be *The Christ, The Messiah, The Son of God, who dyed
and was crucified at Jerusalem for the sins of the People of God.*
The other as wickedly professing and asserting her
self to be *The Spouse of Christ, called, The Lady Mary, the Queen,
and Bride, the Lambs Wife.*
Together with the Visions and Revelations, to
which they did pretend their ways of deceiving, with the Names
and Actions of sundry Persons deceived by them.
As also their Examinations and Confessions before the Justices of the Peace,
their Imprisonment, and their Tryal before the Judg of Assize, at the
last Assize holden at *Winchester, March 7. 1649.*
Published for a publique Benefit and Warning to every one to take heed
to himself, that he be not deceived by the Errors and Deceits of
these present times.
BY HUMPHRY ELLIS, Minister of the Word in the City of *Winton.*
*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe
it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false Prophets. Behold,
I have told you before: Mat. 24. 23, 24, 25.*
London, Printed by *John Macock*, for *Luke Fawc*, and are to be sold at his shop
at the sign of the Parrot in *Pauls Churchyard.* 1650.

Title page of Humphry Ellis's *Pseudochristus* (1650). Redpath Tracts, I, 1650.
(Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries)

THE SETTING

In 1649 England was recovering from the Civil War between Parliament and the Royalists (1642-1648), ending in the execution of King Charles I, and facing an Interregnum (1649-1660) under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. The Puritan reformers had abolished the established church and its courts which regulated marriage and immorality (punishing the latter mildly with penances in church). The breakdown of traditional restraints promoted religious freedom and unleashed millenarian sects proclaiming the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. Opponents traced these sects to Baptist congregations, which besides insisting on adult baptism seemed to have anarchical leanings. These sectaries - many of them craftsman or of the lower classes - joyfully expected a new Jerusalem on earth.

In addition to Christ's rule on earth, some reformers advocated communal ownership of land, women's right to preach, and extension of the franchise. The most radical ones allegedly used religious pretexts to invent new rules of marriage and practise free love and divorce.³ The most notorious, the Ranters, were active from 1649 to 1651. Lower class, footloose and sexually promiscuous, Ranters considered themselves reborn and no longer subject to earthly laws and mores. While several historians mention the couple when discussing Ranters, A.L. Morton points out that Franklin differed from the Ranters by claiming to be a messiah and leading his own distinct group.⁴ Ellis treated Franklin and Gadbury and their followers as a distinct group, ultimately rooted in the Baptists and the Familists.⁵ A continental sect, the Family of Love had defined the doctrine of free grace by which the elect were exempt from moral law and could sin without losing their sainthood; they supposedly divorced and married at will. The Ranters adopted similar doctrines.⁶ While Franklin thought and acted like a Ranter, his claim to be Christ and Gadbury's paraphernalia of fits and visions set them apart.

As a category, Messiahs cross boundaries and centuries. Christian societies offer many examples of unstable people who have thought they embodied Christ, Mary or the Prophets. Franklin's imposture is a well-documented case of a phenomenon which occurred most often during crisis and violent change of

the kind that England experienced in the 1640s and 1650s. There were similar cases: in 1644 a labourer Rowland Bateman claimed to be the son of God; Arise Evans proclaimed himself to be Christ in 1647; and in 1651 John Robins was acclaimed as a messiah, his wife as a Mary. As well several women claimed to be with child by the Holy Ghost, including Mary Adams, a Ranter. Active in the sects, women followers had heady effects on messiahs like Franklin and James Naylor; in 1656 Martha Simmonds and her women friends persuaded Naylor to act as if he were Christ and adopted the habit of kissing his feet. Parliament, infuriated, debated executing Naylor but finally ordered him whipped and branded.⁷ During the revolutionary decades 1640-1660, the authorities put down radicals quickly, using the established court system. While Oliver Cromwell and many of the Puritan leaders sympathized with millenarian views, they repressed threats to order, property, and the natural rule of gentleman over common man, master over servant, and man over woman.

Whatever their religion or politics, men in authority agreed sexual misconduct must be punished, especially among the lower orders, whose bastards might need community support. Drawing on scripture, Puritan ministers advocated companionate marriages and strict sexual morality. In May 1650 the Puritan Rump Parliament passed a law punishing adultery with death. (Almost never enforced, it died with the restoration in 1660 of Charles II and his permissive court.) By supposedly practising divorce or free love, the sectaries appeared to threaten public decency and the stability of marriages and households on which social order rested. None did so more dramatically than Mary Gadbury and William Franklin.

Their chronicler Humphrey Ellis had done well in the Civil War. After Winchester fell to Cromwell in 1645, the bishop and clergy of the established church were thrown out. Ellis, Rector of Millbrook, was appointed in their place as a preacher at Winchester Cathedral in January 1646. He may have been fairly young at the time as he lived until 1687. His county Parliamentary Committee stoutly supported him when members of the Assembly of Divines challenged his appointment (probably because he was Independent rather than Presbyterian). He received one of the highest grants, £150 in 1649, from the fund created by

the sale of the lands of the established church in 1648. A strong opponent of religious radicalism, Ellis published *Two sermons* in 1647, which attacked Baptists, extremists and, in a general way, antichrists. Two years later, Franklin and Gadbury provided him with an irresistible case study of what he had warned against. And in November 1649, at the very time Franklin and Gadbury travelled from London to disturb his county, Ellis took part in a public debate on behalf of infant baptism against the Baptists at Basing Stoke, Hampshire. There he first encountered Edward Spradbury, a cloth worker speaking for the Baptists, and heard that a Mrs. Woodward privately encouraged them. Both would shortly fall under Mary Gadbury's enchantment.⁸

Like most seventeenth century writers, Ellis justified his publishing: he wrote to warn against the "Errors and Deceits of the present times", to set the facts straight, and to prove the danger of allowing unlimited religious liberty. Ellis witnessed some of the events, interviewed people involved in the case, and corresponded with others. He based much of his report on Mary Gadbury's long confession, which he took down almost word for word. He tried to discover the couple's motives and the causes of their visions in order to make sense of puzzling realities. He adopted a historical, analytical method, arguing that in order to understand how this deception occurred, he must give an account of the people involved, their callings, way of life and pasts. Since so much of his evidence depended on Gadbury's confession, she comes across more vividly than Franklin.⁹

THE MEETING

William Franklin was a rope-maker, aged about forty: a craftsman like many sectaries. He had been born and bred in Overton, Hampshire - not far from Andover where he returned as Christ. He had been married for sixteen years and lived in Stepney, a London parish, with his wife and three children. As his religious zeal grew, he experienced doubts. In 1646 he suffered from distraction of the brain (a mental breakdown). He claimed to be God and Christ. His surgeon, Charles Stamford, bled him and used other (unspecified) means to cure him. Franklin returned to his trade and his gathered (Baptist) congregation. After

some time, Franklin reverted to private discussions with God. Using "Gospel-expressions" he heard in sermons, he began to prophesy and speak in incomprehensible tongues. He also became entangled with people who denied worldly and divine law (perhaps Ranters, though Ellis did not specify). His spiritual obsessions changed his character. He beat his wife, denied she was his wife, and kept company with other women. Some of his symptoms might now be called midlife crisis. His congregation excluded him for this behaviour.

Mary Gadbury was thirty and legally married to a husband, James, who had deserted her about seven years before and gone to Holland. Gadbury had visited him two years later but soon returned with her daughter (of whom no more is said) to live in London. Selling laces, pins, and trifles for her living, she lived alone and moved often. These habits made her suspect since it was considered morally and economically desirable that single people be attached to households, where as family members or servants they would be supervised. Passionately religious like Franklin, she apparently attended sermons by the Independent John Goodwin and the Baptist Henry Jessey, both famous preachers. She could not sign her name but had heard enough sermons to debate and twist scripture.

In late summer of 1649 Gadbury lived in London, sharing her room and bed with another woman - a common economical necessity. This woman told her about William Franklin. She had visited his house and thought she saw him embracing the Devil. Franklin had convinced her that God had singled him out. Intrigued, Gadbury asked to meet Franklin. He visited her. As they met, he spoke words which Gadbury could not understand but sounded so godly and sweet "that an Echo sounded in her to what he said". When he left, she said to him; "*My love is with me*" and he answered: "*My Peace be with you*". After he left, she went to bed. Waking, she felt so joyful that she and her woman friend burst into song - loudly enough to disturb a neighbour who burst in, calling them witches.¹⁰

THE REVELATION

Ellis attributed the couple's deep and immediate bond



Portrait of a young woman by Wenceslaus Holler, 1645. Pennington, 1918. (Print Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries)

to the voices, visions and fits which Gadbury now experienced. He described Gadbury's experience as she confessed it later (she used phrases from the prophet Isaiah):

she declared, that she hath had certain Fits, which she cannot call Convulsion Fits, nor knows how to express them, which could set her whole body in a trembling, and shake the bed wherein she lay, and continue upon her some times from two a clock at night, to seven in the morning. Her first taking with such a fit was upon a Sabbath day, about twelve a clock at night, which came so violently, as it set her whole body on trembling, working to her fingers ends, and that so strongly, as if she should have been strangled by it, at which time a voyce spake forth from her, and said, *It is the Lord, it is the Lord*; but she could not say it was her own voyce: At which time clapping her

hands together, she had brought to her remembrance a Scripture, which she never heard before, as she can remember; *The trees shall clap their hands for joy*: Then the voyce that spake within her before, spake again, *Babylon is fallen, is fallen*: and then it said further, *There shall be no King, but the King of Kings...*¹¹

The voice also declared that the saints would judge the earth. The fit had visual aspects; a light half the size of the full moon - so bright that it pierced the sheet and blanket she used to shield her eyes. In great pain, she cried out the words of Christ from the cross "*My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Then the pain left and the voice - God's she assumed - promised to deal with her more gently thereafter and to send his Son in the form of a man. She heard trumpets now as well. These supernatural sights and sounds convinced her that Christ would reign on earth in the person of her new acquaintance. Some physical cause may account for

her trembling and convulsions, if not the voices and revelations. If she was epileptic, as Christopher Hill suggested, she may have mistaken her fits for divine interventions or creatively used them to authenticate her revelations.¹²

Franklin visited Gadbury frequently. Soon he told her he was Christ. At first she laughed. Soon he convinced her of his extreme form of the doctrine of spiritual rebirth. He claimed he had a new body and nature and that his wife and children, belonging to his former sinful self, no longer meant anything to him. He declared he had not slept with his wife for three years. Gadbury accepted all this. Ellis found her as gullible as Eve. Eventually Franklin told her God had commanded him to forsake his wife. God also told him Gadbury was the woman set apart for him. At that Gadbury went to Franklin's house and tactlessly told his wife that he must now accompany the one for whom he been reborn - herself. Ellis heard this episode from Franklin's tearful wife.

If Gadbury had lived in a Catholic country, she might have fulfilled her ambition to be a bride of Christ by becoming a nun. It is difficult to tell if Gadbury's and Franklin's religious delusions served as deliberate or unconscious channels for sexual feelings. Ellis assumed some of their heresy stemmed from their attraction to each other. Whether they wanted to live together for religious or sexual reasons or both, Franklin and Gadbury ran up against law and custom. Their marriages trapped them. They could not solemnize new marriages; this was bigamy, a capital offence. Nor could they divorce their legal spouses. The dominant Puritans had long advocated divorce for adultery and desertion (and even for religious differences). Milton had recently urged divorce for incompatibility. Yet Parliament refused to pass a divorce law, fearing it would undermine marriage and the household economy on which order and prosperity depended. Couples like Franklin and Gadbury had only one advantage; the destruction of the Church courts had taken away the chief mechanism for punishing adultery. Secular courts, however, could also deal with immorality.

Franklin spent a night in Gadbury's house on the pretext that she was troubled. Ellis as well as some of Gadbury's observant neighbours assumed Franklin had

shared her bed as well as her roof. These neighbours charged her with keeping a naughty house. She spent a night in prison and got out on bail the next day. When she appeared at Guild Hall, the charge was dismissed. Court records show how important neighbours were as accusers and defenders in morals charges. While some neighbours accused Gadbury of immorality, others later petitioned her judges on her behalf.

By November 1649, Gadbury and Franklin had both gone through religious experiences. Each claimed to have been told to accompany the other. Gadbury's voice told her to sell all she had and follow Franklin as Christ. Deluded or not, she sold her goods and may have given some of the money to the poor. Ellis ridiculed her recklessness and suspected Gadbury had needed a pious excuse to leave London to avoid the uproar which Franklin's wife began to make. The couple may well have felt it was safer to leave.¹³

THE MISSION

Franklin and Gadbury chose the place where they were most likely to get into trouble - Hampshire, where Franklin grew up and was known to be married. Perhaps Franklin wished to triumph as Christ in his former home. Yet Gadbury seems to have been the one to choose Hampshire as their theatre. She dreamed that she saw a man fleeing to Hampshire closely followed by a lamb. She told this travel vision to Franklin. He had received the same revelations. Muddling scripture, they took Hampshire for the land of Ham, meaning Egypt - their trip would be a Flight into Egypt. Claiming God directed them, Gadbury and Franklin took the weekly coach to Hampshire in November 1649 as man and wife. Relating this, Ellis denounced couples who claimed their visions freed them from marital ties and justified living in adultery with new partners.

The pair lodged quietly at an inn, the Star, in Andover. All the time, said Ellis, they shared the same bed as husband and wife. As she confessed later, Gadbury soon had a new experience; she went into a seizure similar to labour, but more painful. The voice sustained her. The next day was the Sabbath and many came to speak to her and Franklin. Then Franklin had

to return to London to find money to support them. He may have left and returned several times. Gadbury stayed at the inn about a month. There she played the role of John the Baptist. Ellis declared they plotted to deceive the credulous: while Franklin was gone, Gadbury would tell everyone she had seen Christ. This she did persuasively. Since Andover was a market town, many people heard her story or visited her at the inn. Most people asked what Christ had said or what he looked like. She described a Christ who looked like Franklin. Those who called her a liar she called Satan.

Gadbury experienced false birth pains several times while at the inn. Once she thought she was giving birth to Christ. Ellis could not tell if these travails were feigned or involuntary. He repeated a rumour that she had given birth to a dragon or serpent. A constable testified later that one of Gadbury's converts, Edward Spradbury, had told him that Gadbury had borne a dragon which Christ then had slain on the bed. Gadbury apparently went into some of these labours deliberately to convert people. She would give birth to the spirit of Christ which entered the convert who became spiritually reborn. Her use of the physical symptoms of childbirth to symbolize or impel spiritual rebirth seems to have been effective.

Gadbury attracted some converts, including the ones who would prove the most devoted, William Woodward, a minister, and his wife as well as Edward Spradbury, the cloth worker who had argued against infant baptism at Basingstoke. Gadbury told the Woodwards and Spradbury of her spiritual birth pains. Mrs. Woodward doubted her at first but then had a vision of her own, inspired by Gadbury's birth effects, in which Gadbury appeared as the woman in Revelation (12:1,2) often interpreted as the Virgin Mary: clothed with the Sun, the Moon at her feet, "travailing in pain". While Franklin was still away, the Woodwards and Spradbury supped with Gadbury in her chamber at the inn. After eating, she felt something painful rising inside her. She begged her companions to cut the laces of her jacket, at which the pain left and she laughed in a transport of joy. The episode helped make Mrs Woodward and Spradbury "proselites of this seducing deceitfull strumpet." On 8 December 1649, Franklin returned to the Inn. A voice had told him that people were treating Gadbury badly because they had heard that both of them were married to others. This

scandalous information seeped in from nearby Overton where Franklin had grown up. It was also reported by Goodman Hunt, the waggoner between London and Andover; Franklin's wife told him how she had been deserted and left without support. Though Gadbury defended their relations on the grounds of their rebirth, the Star's keeper Michael Rutlie and his wife told them to leave.¹⁴

The Woodwards invited Gadbury and Franklin to live with them at the minister's home in Crookes Easton (Crux Easton), Hampshire. The couple stayed at the Woodwards from 11 December 1649 until their arrest six weeks later. Apropos of lodging, Christopher Hill observes that peripatetic religious enthusiasts like Franklin and Gadbury often boarded with friends and that an increase in mobility during the 1640s and 1650s furthered sexual freedom.¹⁵ Mrs. Woodward easily accepted that the couple's new life dispensed them from their former marital obligations. Ellis objected that sinners like Gadbury and Franklin thought nothing of desertion and adultery if they could be justified by visions and revelations. While at the Woodwards Gadbury's voice, never silent for long, told her to try to convert some of her opponents, such as the Rutlies. The voice also told her to dress in the white of innocence. She cajoled some valuable linen out of the Woodwards to make a gown. From this, Ellis concluded, she learned she could get whatever she wanted out of her followers as long as she pretended her voices or vision commanded it.

Ellis recorded some of the strange phenomena which Gadbury claimed to have experienced. One night at the Woodwards while Franklin was absent, Gadbury saw a vision of a white foot. The voice commanded the foot to rest on her shoulder. Next a bright light appeared inside the bed curtains. The voice spoke aloud in her: "*Arise all ye that sleep*". Usually only Gadbury heard the voice. This time William Woodward heard it, looked in her room, and later declared he had seen a bright light at her feet and heard the voice declaim that the whole power of heaven gathered for the moment in that room. Presumably Gadbury had spoken but with her voice altered. This vision with its voice and light resembled the one Gadbury had just after meeting Franklin. Her contemporaries (and subsequent historians) found it hard to tell if these visions and the false births pains were faked or involuntary. Besides

being a lightning rod for divine fits, Gadbury was credited with witch-like powers. When Goody (Goodwife) Waterman told the Woodwards that Franklin had been born in Overton and was a seducer, she soon found herself forced against her will to visit the Woodwards' house. She arrived sweating and could not leave. Gadbury won her over. Ellis asked if this did not look like witchcraft. (Later charges against Gadbury did not include witchcraft, however.)

Returning from London, Franklin preached at least two or three times in Woodward's house to increasing multitudes. Witnesses, whose affidavits Ellis copied, revealed a few glimpses of Franklin's behaviour. Fortunatus Wats declared that Franklin had affirmed that he was Christ, slain at Jerusalem, "*and had the wound yet on his body unhealed*". He claimed he could forgive sins and forgave Wats his. Mrs Woodward would testify later that Franklin kept up his religious discourse most of the time, even when not preaching. The little heresy approached the stage of organisation and Franklin's close followers received titles. John Noyes became John the Baptist; Henry Dixon and John Holmes became destroying angels. Mr. Burre, a minister in Houghton Parish, wrote Ellis an account of how Holmes with a gun in hand had talked blasphemously to two men working for him. By January 1650, Gadbury and Franklin had become notorious - for their religious claims, their followers' behaviour, and for living together so openly.¹⁶

THE DEFIANCE

Many complaints against the pair were alleged at the County Quarter Sessions held in early January 1650 in Winchester.¹⁷ The Justices issued warrants to the constables to arrest Franklin and his more dangerous disciples, William Woodward, Spradbury and Dixon. At this point, only men were arrested. The Justices perhaps took the women, including Gadbury, less seriously or felt the women were less responsible since supposedly their husbands controlled them. The Bailiff of Andover brought the prisoners to Winchester on 27 January 1650 to appear before the local Justices of the Peace. This was a hearing; if the Justices found sufficient grounds, the accused would be held for trial.

Others not in the warrant came of their own accord: Mary Gadbury, Mrs. Woodward and Goody Waterman. The Justices were Thomas Bettesworth and Richard Cobbe. The examinations took place on 28 January 1650 (near the cathedral where Ellis preached) in Bettesworth's house. Many people crowded inside to see the events. At first Franklin's crew asserted themselves confidently. Goody Waterman, whom Ellis termed a very talkative woman, addressed those around her cryptically, declaring that if the witnesses did not speak the stones would speak. To a man who told her to stand further away as her breath stank, she retorted that her breath was of the Lord. Waterman referred to another woman as a babe a week old; Ellis explained that Franklin's followers recalculated their ages from the date of their rebirth. Indeed the idea of rebirth, so evident in chiliastic religion, is especially pronounced in this case, since Gadbury used birth simulations to effect conversions.

Gadbury became enraged when someone called Franklin "fellow", demanding how he dared address his saviour thus. The little group was still heady and bold as the proceedings began. When Mrs. Woodward came in to be examined by the Justices, Mary Gadbury called out "*Come in my Elect Lady*". Goody Waterman referred to herself as the King's daughter, all glorious within. The Justices had various signed testimonies that Franklin had claimed to be Christ and that Spradbury and Woodward had declared him to be Christ. According to other witnesses, Dixon had claimed to be God himself; yet at other times he had denied God's existence.¹⁸

Blasphemy, the most obvious charge, was difficult to define or prove. In 1648 Parliament had passed an ordinance punishing with death those who maintained such heresies as atheism, obstinately without recantation. The law did not specifically prohibit posing as Christ but in defining Christ's nature in orthodox terms left Franklin and Gadbury open to prosecution.¹⁹ As testimony accumulated, other charges fell into place. William Woodward admitted that Gadbury and Franklin called themselves husband and wife and slept together in one bed in his house. This opened the way for a charge of bigamy. Mrs. Woodward declared that Gadbury had given birth to the spirit of Franklin, which she received as her saviour. The Justices pounced on this, thinking they might



Southampton (Hampshire) from John Speed's *England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland Described* (1627 but 1646?). Redpath Tracts, II, LXXCIII, 1649.
(Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries)

discover an infanticide, a capital crime. Nothing could be proved from this, however, except that Gadbury went through birth pains as a device to express spiritual rebirth and to convert people.

At first none of those arrested would give their names, callings or habitations, since these belonged to their fleshly past. The Justices threatened that if they refused to identify themselves they could be sent to the House of Correction as rogues. Scared, Franklin testified but stuck to his story. He admitted he had a wife and three children according to the flesh; he had gone to Woodward's house with a woman he called his spouse; a vision had told him Gadbury was appointed for him and that he must leave his former wife; Gadbury had believed in his integrity and followed him; he had preached to groups of twenty or more affirming he was the son of God, crucified at Jerusalem; and he had assumed this fleshly body three years earlier (when his experiences began). When told that Scripture placed Christ not on earth but in Heaven at right hand of God, Franklin replied that scripture was nothing but "*types and shadows*" - a catch phrase among the reborn.²⁰

Less cautious, Mary Gadbury refused to give her name, claiming that she no longer had a husband according to the flesh; that her Maker was her husband - the Lord of Hosts his name; and that he was within her. She had been in Jerusalem a week ago and seen Franklin crucified; Jerusalem was every where. She admitted sleeping with Franklin but, perhaps out of caution, affirmed "that it was without pollution or defilement, and denied that there had been any carnal copulation between them." She claimed that she and Franklin shared the innocence of Adam and Eve before the Fall; in this she unconsciously echoed mediaeval heretics.²¹ Gadbury implied that they would have been justified in having sexual relations but had not done so. The Woodwards also testified that Franklin and Gadbury had shared a single bed in their house. Persons of the same sex shared beds; however, contemporaries assumed the worst if men and women shared the same bed or spent the night under the same roof when they belonged to different households. Ellis thought their reckless cohabitation must be condemned whether or not they had actually committed adultery.

The Justices assumed they were guilty of adultery

and perhaps had married bigamously. Bigamy was punished by death. Most authorities treated adultery among the lower orders as a kind of breach of the peace which might result in illegitimate children and the destruction of households, leaving all members dependent on public charity. Proof of such misconduct would discredit Franklin's and Gadbury's religious pretensions and increase the grounds for punishing them. The court found it easier to enquire into Gadbury's sexual misconduct than to pursue her muddled heresies. Her defiance galled them. Ellis recounted an incident which, he claimed, proved Mary Gadbury's impudence (it also proved her quick wit). Many of the women present thought that her complexion was so fresh and beautiful that she must be painted. Holding up a candle (by now it was dark), one of the Justices told her:

that she looked so fair, that he did scarce believe it to be natural; whereupon she stept forth presently, and very boldly put her face very near to the candle and said, That she was glad, that the glory of God did shine so bright in her face, that they were forced to admire it.²²

Her beauty proved natural. Use of cosmetics would have damaged Gadbury's reputation further as a sign of lewdness. Typically, the Justices focused on immorality when dealing with a troublesome, bold woman.

THE RECANTATIONS

The preliminary examinations ended, and so far Franklin's followers had braved the onslaught of authority. However, the hearing was not over. The Justices decided that the best way to shock Franklin's followers and stop his religious movement was to make him recant. Probably citing the capital terms of the 1648 law on blasphemy, they warned him that he stood in great danger and that the only way to save himself was to admit his wickedness. Ellis noted that they held out the hope of gentle treatment if he would recant immediately. At this point the little heresy collapsed. Its Christ decided to save his skin, unlike the true fanatic who forces his opponent to martyr him. Franklin agreed to sign whatever recantation the

Justices prepared. So Justice Bettesworth drew one up quickly, in which Franklin disavowed being Christ and declared repentance. Franklin signed it. Ellis did not offer an opinion as to Franklin's sincerity.

As the Justices had intended, Franklin's recantation threw his followers into confusion. Horrified, Mary Gadbury watched her idol fall and took it hard. When the Justices showed Mary Gadbury the recantation, she looked at Franklin with "a very angry countenance" and demanded, "*Hast thou done this? is this thy hand?*" Downcast, Franklin remained silent for a time. At last he answered, "*you see what the times are*" or "*you see what condition we are fallen into*" or words to that effect. Betrayed as both accomplice and follower, Gadbury was shocked by his collapse. Obviously the two had not rehearsed how to deal with arrest and prosecution. At this point (or perhaps later), Gadbury declared she would never have believed Franklin's confession if she had not seen it herself; she would have laid down her life for the truth of what Franklin had told her; she had lived with him because she had believed he was Christ not Franklin; now she realized he had abused her. Spradbury made as if to strike Franklin, denouncing him for deceiving them. Thus, said Ellis, was their Christ soon reckoned a deceiving villain: "So uncertain, so changeable, are these giddy people, and upon such sandy foundations is their whole salvation layd by them."

Now that the Justices had deflated the heresy, they disposed of the people before them. William Woodward, Spradbury and Dixon had to give security to appear before the next Assizes, a circuit court. Its judges dealt with serious or capital crimes and examined the cases of suspected felons held in gaols. Franklin and Gadbury, the instigators, were a more serious matter. Since the blasphemy charges seemed difficult to define, the Justices imprisoned Gadbury and Franklin on suspicion of the capital crime of bigamy. Ellis declared that the Justices had good and just grounds to assume that they had married each other bigamously. After all, they had been sleeping in the same bed and calling each other husband and wife. Furthermore, Franklin had confessed to having a wife, while it was reported that Gadbury had a husband.

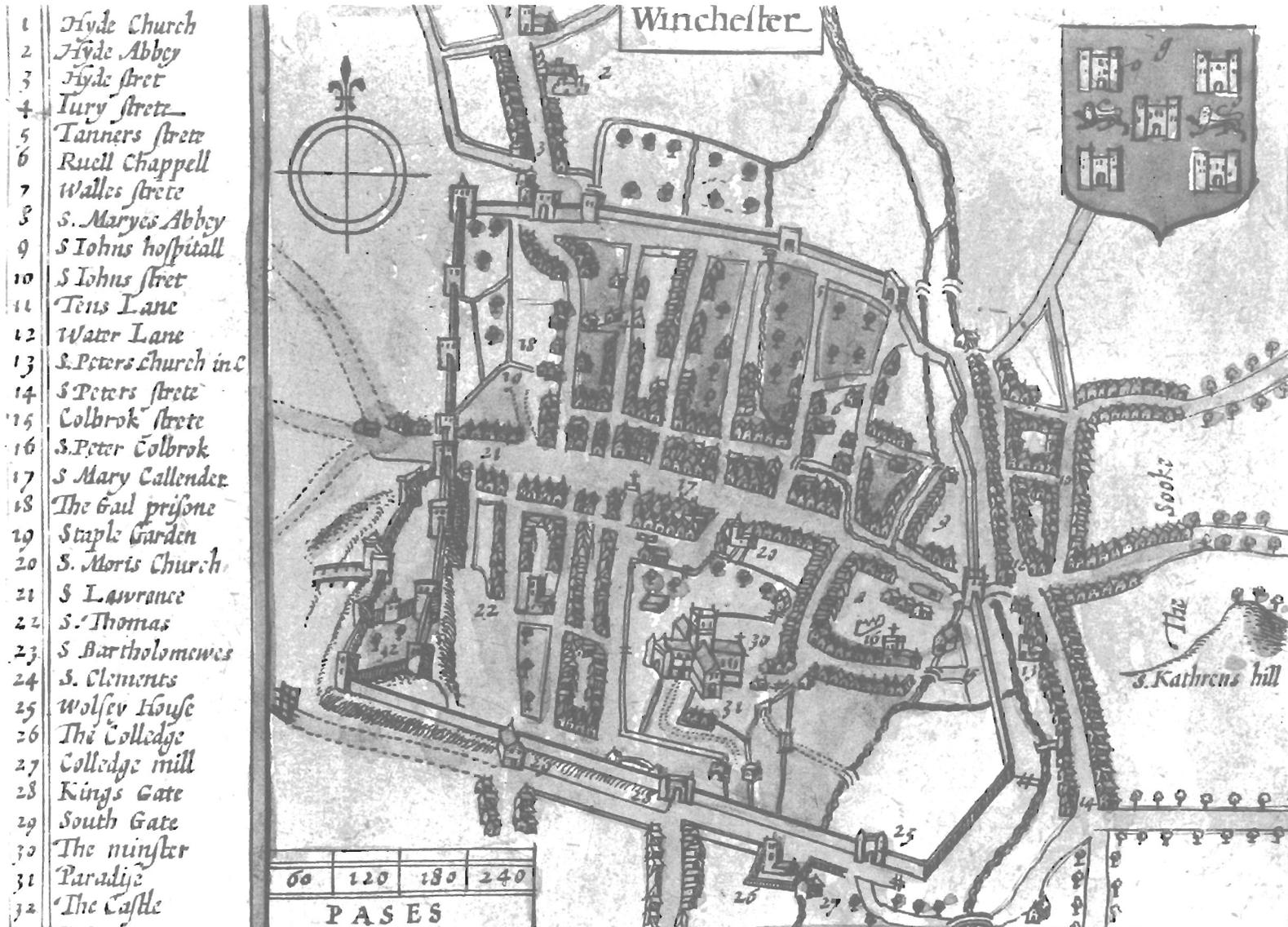
Franklin was sent to the gaol where as a felony suspect he was chained by the legs until the Assizes.

He may have confessed immediately in order to avoid worse. Mary Gadbury received harsher treatment because in addition to the suspicion of bigamy and adultery, she had refused to divulge her name, place of origin, or marital status - hoping perhaps to make it harder to charge her. Her refusal meant the Justices declared her to be a "lewd woman and rogue at law". They committed her to the Winchester House of Correction where she was whipped several times "according to the custom of it".²³ The gaols, often located in castles in the county towns, were intended chiefly to hold prisoners awaiting trial. Houses of Correction or bridewells had been set up in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to reform and punish rogues by giving them a steady routine of work as well as whipping or wearing of fetters.²⁴

On 4 February 1650 after a week of imprisonment, Gadbury was brought back before the Justices alone and downcast. Like most of his contemporaries, Ellis found it natural that contrition must sometimes be extracted with the savage force that had been brought to bear on Mary Gadbury:

And having now suffered a little hardship, and tasted somewhat of the smart of the whip, the height of her spirit becomes to be somewhat abated; now she with abundance of tears laments her condition wherein she is, and desires all favour that may be from the Justices.²⁵

Gadbury now revealed her name, admitted she had a husband and children, and made a rambling confession lasting two hours, hoping to win her release from the House of Correction. Ellis used this testimony as the basis of his narrative. He noticed that Gadbury told much more than the Justices wanted. She talked about her voices, revelations and visions, to which the Justices did not listen attentively. But Ellis paid close attention: "what she spake, I writ from her own mouth, being willing to learn somewhat of the wiles of *Satan*, whereby she and others by her had been deceived". This eye and ear witness testimony made Ellis's account more dependable and detailed than most other writers inveighing against the reported crimes of Ranters, Seekers, and the like. The Justices had hinted at milder treatment if she recanted. Like Franklin, she signed a recantation regretting her heresy. In it she



Map of Winchester from John Speed's Map of Hampshire, ca. 1720?
 (Map Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries)

admitted that she had been deceived by the devil to sinfully accompany William Franklin, attributing to him what should only be attributed to Christ. Though a skilful speaker, she had to sign her recantation with a mark as she could not write.

THE IMPRISONMENT

Now that Gadbury had cooperated, confessed, and recanted, the Justices sent her to the easier conditions of Winchester gaol. There she and Franklin awaited the Assizes, which would hear the charge of bigamy. Ellis complained that after a week or so apart these companions in wickedness now spent the next five weeks waiting for the Assizes in the same place. Conditions in gaols were fairly lax, although prisoners depended on outside friends for subsistence and comforts. At the gaol, crowds of curious people visited Gadbury and Franklin. Many visited the imprisoned couple to savour the scandal or to confute their errors. Some visitors believed them saints. Others sympathized with them and believed they had been wronged or persecuted. Some brought them daily provisions. Ellis noted that Gadbury was as well supplied as she would have been at liberty. Her attractiveness and dramatic talk probably helped. The numbers who supported the couple then or previously cannot be known, although Ellis feared they had several hundred adherents - a Royalist soldier turned sectary put the number at five or six hundred. His evidence was suspect as he also reported that Franklin continued to appear freely among his followers while his body was in prison.

Ellis visited both Franklin and Gadbury. He found Franklin difficult to deal with since he was wary, avoided speaking in front of third parties, and spoke slowly and carefully, apparently fearing entrapment. Ellis found that Franklin feared the trouble he had got into but did not seem to understand the enormity or consequences of impersonating Christ. Franklin blamed his followers, claiming they had been the ones to affirm he was Christ. He repented but only in generalities: "*If I have deceived any one, I shall be sorry for it*". He avoided admitting to specific blasphemies or heresies; a good tactic as he might face charges under the blasphemy law. Ellis found that Franklin though uneducated had the gift of many lower class preachers of the times. Ignorant of the fine points of religious

theory, he spoke plausibly and could easily convince simple people. Ellis called his speech typical of the Familists, from whom Ellis assumed Franklin had "sucked in all these wicked Principles" (presumably, the belief that free grace put him above moral law). His talk perverted scripture with "Allegorical fancies". At a time when sermons provided many people with their chief intellectual stimulation, enthusiasts like Franklin and Gadbury easily absorbed the concepts, phraseology, and cadences of their preachers.

Ellis found Gadbury talked freely but inconsistently. Occasionally she defended her actions. She claimed dispensation from scripture for lying with Franklin in apparent adultery. A minister asked if she felt ashamed. She replied that sin had brought shame into the world but when people "*come to be in Christ*" the shame was taken away. She sometimes complained that Franklin had undone her and was to blame for everything. Other times she seemed to excuse him. Ellis thought that Gadbury had left her fears and contrition behind her at the House of Correction; now that she was in gaol, she became too familiar with Franklin, whom she saw regularly. Like Franklin, she back-tracked somewhat from her recantation. Freer conditions, the influence of visitors, and proximity to Franklin may have encouraged Gadbury to reaffirm her revelations. She admitted that she had been deceived - that Franklin was not Christ - but vowed the voice came from Jehovah not the devil: "she would stand it out even to the death those visions to be of God". Though triggered by meeting Franklin, the voice may have meant more to her than he did. Ellis and others argued that her recantation could not be taken seriously, since if she clung to her voices she might return to her evil ways.²⁶

THE ASSIZES

In March 1650 after two months in gaol, Franklin and Gadbury appeared together before the Winchester Assizes on bigamy charges. The two judges of the Western Circuit were Robert Nicholas (1595-1667) and Henry Rolle (1589?-1656). Rolle judged the couple by himself. Chief Justice of the Upper Bench, Rolle helped settle the Western Circuit during disorderly times. He was a conservative who opposed changing the fundamental laws. His influential law reports and

abridgements were published in the 1660s and 1670s.²⁷ Franklin was presented at the bar first. He renounced any claim to being Christ; declared he hoped to be saved by Christ; declared himself sorry for his errors (but in general terms, evasively, Ellis noted); and subscribed to his earlier recantation. He presented certificates testifying to his distempers in 1646, perhaps to claim that what he had done was in distracted fits (rather like an insanity defence today). Ellis found no proof of illness since 1646 and thought Franklin rational. Franklin's testimony ended before Ellis arrived but he gave a full account of the proceedings as Gadbury joined Franklin standing before the judge.

The information given to the Justices in January was read; witnesses gave their testimony *viva voce*. The constable who had arrested the couple testified that he found them in bed. They had upbraided him for his boldness, demanded how dared he come into the presence of the Lord, and told him to take off his shoes as he stood on holy ground. Gadbury, often more reckless than Franklin, had claimed she was the mother of Christ and had borne Franklin. The constable added that William Woodward tried to win him over to them.

Gadbury admitted that she had taken Franklin for something she now realized he was not. Rolle repeatedly demanded if she had had sexual relations with Franklin and why she had shared his bed. Gadbury defended herself against the charge of bigamy by testifying that Franklin had denied having a wife and children. Denying bigamy and adultery, she declared that she accompanied him as a spiritual not carnal man and that she had had no carnal relations with him. Instead, she lived with him "as a fellow-feeler of her misery". At this, the whole court room laughed uproariously. Some said, "*Yea, We think you companied with him as a fellow-feeler indeed.*" The language of religious enthusiasm often invited such vulgarities. Judge Rolle angrily denounced their actions. Their opinions were so ridiculous he could not believe anyone of sound mind could take them seriously. He was shocked that Woodward, a minister, could have been seduced by their opinions. As for Gadbury's claim that she shared Franklin's bed spiritually, not carnally, he retorted that any whore might use this excuse to cover up her adulteries.²⁸

The Assizes' business with Franklin and Gadbury had been bigamy. However, Rolle had to drop the charge. They had not gone through a marriage ceremony nor even admitted to adulterous sexual relations. Still they were a public nuisance and could be detained. He sentenced Franklin to remain in Winchester gaol until he could find bonds for good behaviour. No guiltier than Franklin, Gadbury was once again treated more punitively - probably because she seemed to mix promiscuity with her other crimes. Rolle sent her to the House of Correction rather than the gaol to await the next County Quarter Sessions Court to be judged for unspecified misbehaviour rather than bigamy (unproven) or blasphemy (recanted). Gadbury pleaded not to be sent to the House of Correction. She argued that she had been there already (for refusing to identify herself) and should not be punished twice for the same offence. Rolle told her the punishment was too light for so lewd a woman; her offence, presumably adultery, was all the greater because it was done under religious pretences, and the House of Correction was too good for her. To most men of the time, such an offence was also all the greater because she was a woman. Transferring her from gaol to the House of Correction appears to have been vindictive on the judge's part, since she had not yet been found guilty of any charge. In effect, she was treated as a rogue needing reform rather than as a prisoner awaiting trial.

William Woodward, Spradbury and Dixon also had to appear. At first Woodward denied that he had owned Franklin to be Christ. Then a witness, Thomas Muspratt, testified that Woodward had accepted Franklin as Christ. Reluctantly, Woodward confessed that he had been taken in by the couple's voices and revelations. Finally he alleged he had been duped. Turning against the couple, he said he supposed they were witches. The judges did not pursue the possibility of witchcraft. Rolle sentenced him like Franklin to gaol until he found security for good behaviour. (Later, Woodward would also lose his ecclesiastical living.) And since it had been proven that the Woodwards knew Franklin and Gadbury were adulterers and entertained them nonetheless, the judge ordered that Mrs. Woodward be indicted as a bawd, and be brought to answer at the next Assizes. Like Gadbury, Mrs. Woodward was treated worse because she was a woman suspected of sexual misconduct. William Woodward,



Henry Rolle. Frontispiece from his *Abridgment des Plusieurs Cases et Resolutions del Common Ley*. London: 1668.

(Courtesy Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.)

Dixon and Spradbury acknowledged their errors but were imprisoned until they found security for good behaviour; having friends, they found securities the same day and were released.²⁹

THE OUTCOME

Gadbury petitioned the Assize judges to remit her sentence to the House of Correction. Her petition blamed Franklin: he had falsely pretended to be Christ; his "*vehement perswasions*" and showing her scripture for his false purposes had won her over; he had forcibly persuaded her to believe in him, sell her goods and follow him. Having lost all, she now suffered in the House of Correction, contrite for her errors. She declared she had always lived honestly; several London neighbours signed her petition.

Chief Justice Rolle had shifted the case down to the Quarter Sessions, since it involved lewdness rather than bigamy. He also made sure that Gadbury would be punished until her appearance in court. The authorities had separated Gadbury's case from Franklin's. Gadbury went to the House of Correction where she was whipped regularly until the Easter Quarter Sessions. There her distress resembled that of her previous appearance after a term in the House of Correction. Tearfully petitioning for mercy and admitting her errors and evil behaviour, Gadbury won her discharge. The Justices held great arbitrary power over prisoners of Gadbury's low social status. Consequently, if she had not made a convincing show of penitence, she might have been imprisoned longer. Gadbury's friends may have been some help in getting her released. On 22 April 1650 Gadbury left Winchester by the weekly coach to London, six months after setting forth with Franklin as the bride of Christ. Franklin, who had escaped more lightly until now, suffered longer. His notoriety was so great that no one would come forward to sponsor his release with monetary security. Ellis thought his supporters were too ashamed to help him. Franklin was still in gaol in May when Ellis's tract came out.³⁰

Ellis placed the Franklin and Gadbury episode in context by citing the excesses and blasphemies of such earlier sects as the Anabaptists of Munster in Germany. He declared that to avoid chiliastic errors one must stick closely to scripture and avoid intuition and strange

influences. He traced Franklin's and Gadbury's errors to their involvement with the Baptists - the nursery of all the errors recently disturbing England. He noted that many of the couple's followers were Baptists. While some Baptists might be godly, they should take warning from the fact that their congregations never survived long; God always scattered them. Ellis found that the Baptist belief that Christ would reign on earth provided fertile ground for false messiahs. Thus Mary Gadbury had believed Christ would come in the flesh to reign in England; she asked Franklin whether this had been revealed to him; he seized the opportunity to declare he was Christ - and the Baptist belief came to blasphemous life.

Ellis tackled a difficult question: had Franklin and Gadbury really seen visions and heard voices to the effect that Franklin was Christ? If so, had they been deceived by the devil? Or had they made the voice and visions up to deceive others? Ellis balanced his evidence rationally. He found Gadbury and Franklin more fraudulent than deluded but he also accepted that Gadbury's fits, voices, and visions may have been involuntary. He attempted no blanket explanation for Franklin's strange spiritual frenzy.³¹ As a minister, Ellis must have realized that many instances of religious enthusiasm could not be set aside as mere frauds. Yet he feared that Franklin and Gadbury posed a real threat to religion and public order. Ellis argued that, even if they had seen and heard what they claimed, they should have realized that God did not deal in this way. They remained guilty, since the purport of the phenomena was so obviously wicked that they should have known the devil caused it. Ellis had no doubt that the devil might intervene in daily life in this way. Concluding, he warned that the story of Franklin and Gadbury showed that his readers must shun strange innovations, and thus, "We may be preserved from the deceits of the many Antichrists which are now abroad in the world. Amen."³²

Given the seriousness of the initial charges against Franklin and Gadbury - blasphemy and bigamy - the authorities reacted in a fairly reasonable and restrained way. They let them recant the blasphemy (as the law of 1648 provided) and found insufficient evidence of bigamy. The authorities squelched the Christ imposture, imposed brief punishments, secured sureties for good behaviour, and sent the miscreants home. The

magistrates assumed the couple was guilty of adultery but they lacked a statutory remedy beyond the brief imprisonments they had imposed. The church courts had prescribed public penances for adultery but the courts had been abolished by 1645. Since then Parliament had been drafting laws to punish sexual immorality and other vices; on 10 May 1650 it finally passed a law punishing adultery with death. Things might have gone harder for Franklin and Gadbury if this law had been in effect a few months earlier - although as it turned out, juries nearly always refused to find those charged guilty.

The case - and the publication in late May 1650 of *Pseudochristus* - probably influenced the terms of a new act against blasphemy. The Presbyterian-influenced blasphemy act of 1648 had failed to foresee messianic deceptions. Now controlled by the Independents, Parliament brought in a new act against blasphemy and atheism on 21 June 1650, which passed less than three weeks later. Aimed at Ranters and their like who had been active during the past year, the terms of the act may have been written with Franklin and Gadbury in mind, since the first heresy condemned was that of declaring oneself or another to be God. Six months in prison was the punishment for this heresy or for maintaining that sins of the flesh were righteous instead of sinful. Lunatics were exempted.³³

Convinced that gross indecencies were being practised under the cloak of religion, Parliament particularly wanted to crack down on the Ranters, detested as anarchists and libertines.³⁴ The act's preamble declared that many men and women lately had been rejecting not only the doctrines of the gospel but also civil and moral laws to such an extent that they threatened the dissolution of society. Unlike the act of 1648, which had been restricted to purely theological questions, the act of 1650 reveals great concern over the social disruption caused when people put heretical doctrines into practice. Parliament lumped impersonating God with earthy Ranter-like sins: swearing, drunkenness, cheating, theft, sodomy, fornication, adultery, filthy speaking, and the like. The act demonstrated the contemporary belief that attacks on morals, property, and scripture were all related and that social and religious heresies tended to amalgamate. Although originally planned to carry the death penalty like the act of 1648, the law of 1650 carried the far milder penalty of six months imprisonment.³⁵

Religious enthusiasm gave Franklin and Gadbury the excuse and idiom to reinvent their drab unhappy lives, find exciting new partners, and take over the chief roles in the Christian religious drama that dominated their imaginations. Yet Franklin and Gadbury and the sectaries left no lasting legacy of increased sexual freedom. The research of Hill and of Thomas indicates, however, that the sectarian insistence on the importance of the individual's direct relationship with God encouraged greater democracy in church, state, and family.³⁶ The sects' most direct contribution in this regard was their claim that wives might worship apart from their husbands - that in the matter of worship if in nothing else, wives had a higher duty than obedience to husbands.

It is striking how voices and visions obsessed and justified the Franklin group. Franklin, Gadbury, both Woodwards, and perhaps others claimed to have seen visions or heard voices. They assumed God and the Devil actively intervened in their lives. Did they really have revelations? Did they make them up? Did they do both? When we ask this, we must remember that their truth and experience is not ours. We may see a manic depressive and his possibly epileptic mistress; their converts saw Christ and his queen. Ellis had few doubts. He knew their heresy was false; he granted that they may have believed their revelations, though Devil-inspired; and he charged that they used visions and religion to cloak their desire to run away together.

THE AFTERMATH

Franklin and Gadbury served as a brush to tar other religious enthusiasts, particularly the Quakers. In 1678 Thomas Comber, an Anglican minister cited *Pseudochristus* in a tract directed against the Quakers and their claims to experience revelations. In a chapter on the "Partners and Competitours in Revelation" of the Quakers, Comber described Ranters, Seekers, ancient heresies, and Franklin and Gadbury, naming the Woodwards and Spradbury as their followers. Not knowing whether the little sect had had a name, he retroactively baptised them "Revealers" in his index. Admitting the Quakers probably would not have accepted Franklin and Gadbury, Comber used the pair to prove that those who claimed revelations were

usually deluded. Following Ellis's terminology closely, he described Franklin's prophecies and Gadbury's fits and visions, calling her Franklin's whore.³⁷ Comber hoped their excesses would persuade moderate Quakers to abandon personal revelation and visions in favour of traditional scripture study and Anglican doctrine. Aside from Comber, by 1678 most English tract writers detested Catholics more than Quakers.

Something is known about the later lives of the people whose paths crossed Franklin's and Gadbury's. Humphrey Ellis, like many other Puritan ministers, lost his living in the ejections of 1662. Proving true, perhaps, to the rationalism demonstrated in his search for the truth behind the Franklin and Gadbury case, he soon conformed to the established church. In December 1664 he became Rector of Mottistone on the Isle of Wight, dying there in April 1687.³⁸ On 12 March 1655, at Salisbury on their Western Circuit, Judges Rolle and Nicholas narrowly escaped dying like the felons they condemned. They were caught by rebellious Royalists who wanted to hang them, but the leader John Penruddock let them go. When Penruddock and others were tried (and condemned) for treason soon afterwards, Rolle angered Cromwell by refusing to serve as one of the judges - perhaps because he (Rolle) was a party concerned in the events or because Penruddock had been promised his life in return for surrendering. Rolle had scruples about another case, resigned as Chief Justice, and died in 1656.³⁹

The *Pseudochristus* episode had a startling sequel. William Woodward renewed his faith in Franklin in 1660, as the monarchy came back and the Church of England and its bishops regained authority. Although Woodward had recanted his belief in Franklin at the Assizes (under threat of punishment), by 1660 he seems to have revived or reiterated his belief in the man he and his wife had sheltered ten years earlier. By then Woodward had left Hampshire and become Rector of Trottescliffe in Kent. There, on several occasions, Woodward repeated his blasphemous belief in Franklin. His foolhardy words and deeds once more caught up with him. Shocked members of his flock brought charges against him or cooperated with church authorities to oust him. His past adherence to Woodward and Gadbury played a major part in discrediting him. Woodward probably lost his living

some time before August 1662, the date when 1000 or so Nonconformist ministers were ejected under the terms of the Act of Uniformity. His case appears to have gone to the ecclesiastical Court of Delegates on appeal from the court of the Archbishop of Canterbury during the latter's visitation of the diocese of Rochester. The depositions about Woodward's indiscretions were taken down between 9 July and 16 November 1663. The records of the earlier ecclesiastical case against him as well as the final sentence of the Court of Delegates in 1666 have not survived.⁴⁰ However, the sentence of 1666 probably confirmed the deprivation of Woodward's Trottescliffe living.

The witnesses' depositions give a fairly good idea of the charges against Woodward. They also confirm Ellis's earlier depiction of Woodward as an unstable enthusiast. Woodward was charged in the church courts with publicly denouncing the Lord's Prayer, the teachings of the Church of England and the Bible. Moreover, his wife and children were reputed to be Quakers. Particularly damaging was his involvement with Franklin and Gadbury, made notorious by gossip and his own admission - or boasting - to many acquaintances. The church authorities dug up Woodward's old foe Thomas Muspratt of Winchester, who had testified against Woodward in 1650. In his tract, Ellis had reported that Muspratt testified before both the Justices and the Assizes that Woodward had declared that Franklin was Christ. Muspratt's words had helped force Woodward to confess and then retract his belief in Franklin.⁴¹ Now Muspratt gave evidence against Woodward again. His testimony of November 1663 firmly identified the William Woodward of Trottescliffe, Kent as the same William Woodward who had been the heretical minister of Crux Easton, Hampshire and who had harboured Franklin and Gadbury when they had been arrested. Muspratt repeated his testimony of 1650: that Woodward had told him Franklin was Christ.

Witnesses told the Court of Delegates of Woodward's more recent offences: that in the spring of 1660 he had ranted against orthodox doctrine and repeated his belief that Franklin was Christ or at least possessed of the spirit of Christ. Whether he had seen Franklin since the events of 1650 is unknown. Woodward may have been provoked by the impending restoration in May 1660 of Charles II and the

established church. In 1659 he had remarked to one witness, John Bewley, that if Charles II attempted to regain his throne, 40,000 armed men would oppose him. Bewley's was the fullest testimony given against Woodward; much of what he said was repeated by others. Bewley declared (in March 1663) that Woodward had often spoken of lodging Franklin and Gadbury at his house in 1649, while they claimed to be Christ and his spouse. The church officials made Woodward's earlier support of Franklin and Gadbury one of the chief points in their case against him.

Bewley and other witnesses portrayed Woodward as unruly and outspoken as well as heretical. Bewley declared that around spring 1660 Woodward had denied doctrines of the Church of England; asserted the Church of England "might bee as well called the Church of Rome"; and said that "a man might profit as much by reading a play-booke as by reading the holy scripture".⁴² In 1660 or 1661 Bewley had given Woodward "a booke of service", probably the Book of Common Prayer (not used by most Presbyterians and Independents), which had been ordered to be read in church on 29 May to celebrate the restoration of Charles II. Woodward refused to read the service. He later told Bewley to "keepe his booke and stopp his breech with it".⁴³ Further discrediting Woodward, other witnesses - perhaps once his friends - William Scudder and William Coward reported that in October 1661 they had drunk five pints of canary wine with Woodward at the Globe Tavern in London. Woodward had drunk "excessively till he was much overtaken in wine and much distemper'd thereby".⁴⁴ At some point, Scudder and a minister threatened to turn Woodward out of his living. Woodward replied that a vision had assured him he would keep his living. Other witnesses repeated their recollections of Woodward's belief in Franklin and his declaration that Franklin was a better saviour than any of them would ever have.

An obvious affront to the orthodox authorities, Woodward had been deprived of his living of Trottescliffe before the testimony of 1663 cited here. He had resisted the loss of his place and income. He had laid "violent hands" on John Stacey, minister of Ridley, who had been ordered to announce the sequestration of Woodward's tithes for the use of the next incumbent. He prevented Stacey from going into the pulpit to make this announcement. In front of

Bewley and others in February 1663, Woodward broke the windows of his former church.⁴⁵ It may be presumed he did not regain a church living. Like many other deprived clerics, he may have continued to minister to Nonconformists, taught school or sunk to some craft or labour.

The court records of 1663 prove that Franklin had cast a spell over Woodward as well as Gadbury, and a longer lasting one at that. It is unclear whether Woodward was still in touch with Franklin when he revived his praises in 1660. Surviving evidence indicates that Woodward was Franklin's most enduring and last disciple, keeping his vision of Christ on earth alive while the Restoration church blighted the religious freedom so briefly won.

Nothing more is heard of Mary Gadbury, returning in 1650 to London and her daughter after her heady, magnetic reign as the bride of Christ. While discarding Franklin, she had clung to her voice as Joan of Arc had. Whether it spoke to her again or if she rejoined her husband may only be guessed. Was she an unfortunate madwoman led astray by the man she loved and worshipped? Or was she the main instigator? Her visions, voices, and false births converted acolytes to the quieter, often absent Franklin. As his Precursor, she created him as much as he imposed his story on her. Far more than Franklin, Gadbury is preserved in Ellis's compelling portrait. Across 350 years, she speaks from Justice Bettesworth's parlour court, facing her accusers in candle light, full of her adventure, her visions and her love for the man who seemed to be Christ. Then he recanted, she raged, and the romance died.

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Notes

The original spelling is retained in quotations. In preparing this article, I have been assisted by comments from Dr. Richard Virr (McGill University), Prof. Stuart Juzda (Vanier College, Montreal), Dr. William Feindel (Montreal Neurological Hospital), and Carol Wiens (Montreal Neurological Institute/Hospital Library). For information on surviving court records, I am indebted to A.H. Lawes (Public Record Office). For reporting a lack of records on the Franklin/Gadbury case, I owe thanks to P.M. White (Hampshire Record Office), Melanie Barber (Lambeth Palace Library), Anne M. Oakley (Cathedral Archives, Canterbury), and the Senior Research Archivist of the Centre for Kentish Studies.

1. The narrative is among the Redpath Tracts in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries: Humphrey Ellis, *Pseudochristus: or, a true and faithful relation of the grand impostures, horrid blasphemies, abominable practices, gross deceits lately spread abroad and acted in the County of Southampton, by William Frankelin and Mary Gadbury, and their companions* (London 1650). RT, I, 1650, 2, 13. Hereafter *Pseudochristus*. The Wing Catalogue reference is E 579. The Thomason Tracts (British Library) reference is E.602 (12). Ellis's preface to the reader was dated 14 May 1650; the imprimatur by Joseph Caryl was dated 18 May 1650; and George Thomason, who collected most publications of the day, acquired his copy on 27 May 1650. Wing (E 578) locates another edition at the Universities of Cambridge and Harvard. Depositions in the records of the Court of Delegates at the Public Record Office (DEL 3/7) confirm the main outline of Ellis's account: see below.

2. The tract is summarized briefly in Norman Cohn, *The pursuit of the millennium* (2nd ed. New York 1961), 336-339 and referred to by C.E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688* (London 1931), 320; A.L. Morton, *The world of the Ranters* (London 1970), 92; Christopher Hill, *The world turned upside down* (London 1972), 40, 137, 200, 255; Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy men* (London 1972), 42-3; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic* (Penguin

1973), 161, 203; and J.F. McGregor and B. Reay, eds., *Radical religion in the English revolution* (Oxford 1984), 133, 185, 204-205.

3. See Hill, *World turned upside down* and K. Thomas, "Women and the Civil War sects", *Past and Present*, no. 13 (April 1958), 42-62.

4. Morton, *Ranters*, 92-3. On Robins, see *Dictionary of National biography*, xvi.1323-24; McGregor and Reay, *Radical religion*, 133.

5. *Pseudochristus*, 48.

6. See McGregor and Reay, *Radical religion*, 58-60, 121-39.

7. Ronald Matthews, *English messiahs* (London 1936), 3-42; Hill, *World turned upside down*, chapter 10; Capp, *Fifth Monarchy men*, 42; Thomas, "Women and the Civil War sects"; Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, 162.

8. *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, 6 vols. (London: 1903-14), ii. 90; William A. Shaw, *A history of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth, 1640-1660*, 2 vols. (London: 1900), ii, 543; Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformist's memorial*, ed. Samuel Palmer. 2 vols. (London 1775-78), ii, 29; A.G. Matthews, *Calamy revised* (Oxford 1934), 182; Ellis, *Two sermons* (1647), "Address"; *Pseudochristus*, 60. He is not found in the published registers of Oxford or Cambridge graduates. He was not the Catholic Humphrey Ellis (d.1676) in the *D.N.B.*, vi, 700-701.

9. Ellis, *Pseudochristus*, 4.

10. *Ibid.*, 5-9. On Goodwin and Jessey, see *D.N.B.*, viii, 145-148; x.807-809.

11. Isaiah 21:9 "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" and Isaiah 55:12 "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

12. Ellis, *Pseudochristus*, 9-10. Hill, *World turned*

- upside down, 255 n.56.
13. Ellis, *Pseudochristus*, 8-16.
14. *Ibid.*, 17-26.
15. Hill, *World turned upside down*, 40, 255.
16. *Pseudochristus*, 26-31, 36.
17. Quarter Sessions records at the Hampshire Record Office lack Calendars of Prisoners for this date. The indictment book for 1646-1660 does not contain entries for Franklin and Gadbury. Ellis's account appears to be the unique record of the proceeding and gives far more detail than most court records.
18. *Pseudochristus*, 31-40.
19. C.H. Firth and R.S. Rait, *Acts and ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*. 3 vols., (London: 1911) i. 1133-6: "An Ordinance for the punishing of Blasphemies and Heresies, with the several penalties therein expressed" (2 May 1648).
20. *Pseudochristus*, 38-41.
21. Cohn, *Millennium*, 337.
22. *Pseudochristus*, 42.
23. *Ibid.*, 41-44.
24. 7 *Jac.* I *cap.* 4; Donald Veall, *The popular movement for law reform* (Oxford 1970), 12-17.
25. *Pseudochristus*, 44.
26. *Ibid.*, 44-49.
27. *D.N.B.*, xiv, 431-2, xvii, 162-3; J.S. Cockburn, *A history of English Assizes 1558-1714* (Cambridge 1972), 272-4.
28. *Pseudochristus*, 49-50.
29. *Ibid.*, 51-52.
30. *Ibid.*, 51-53.
31. *Ibid.*, 7-18.
32. *Ibid.*, 62.
33. Ellis's tract was out by late May 1650; the Imprimatur's date is 18 May 1650 and the Thomason copy is annotated 27 May (1650). The act was ordered on 21 June 1650: *Commons' Journal*, vi, 427. Committed, vi, 430. Clauses added, vi, 437. Amendment rejected, vi, 440. Clause added, vi, 444. Passed, vi, 454, 9 August 1650; Firth & Rait, *Acts and ordinances*, ii, 409-12: "An Act against several Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions." The probable influence of the Franklin case is suggested in McGregor and Reay, *Radical religion*, 133.
34. The Ranters were named in the original title of the act (*Commons' Journal*, vi, 427) but were afterwards dropped, probably to broaden the act's effect.
35. As originally envisaged, the 1650 act would have imposed the death penalty rather than imprisonment; see *Commons' Journal*, vi, 427 and the general index to the *Commons' Journals*. As passed, the punishment for a second offence was banishment, while returning from banishment without licence was made a felony.
36. See especially, Thomas, "Women and the Civil War sects", 44.
37. Thomas Comber, *Christianity no enthusiasm: or, the several kinds of inspirations and revelations pretended to by the Quakers* (London 1678), 94, O2v (index). *D.N.B.*, iv, 891-3: "Thomas Comber". Comber's summary is cited by Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism*, 320.
38. Matthews, *Calamy revised*, 182.
39. *D.N.B.*, xiv, 431-432; xvii, 162-163; xv, 790-791; Edward Foss, *The judges of England* 9 vols. (London 1848-64), vi, 474; Edward Hyde Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (7 vols. Oxford 1849), v.414-417 (Book XIV, Paragraphs 132-134). The Royalist Clarendon, not a friendly witness, observed that Rolle "who had so luckily scaped at Salisbury, had not recovered the fright, and would no more look those men in the face who had dealt so kindly with him, but expressly refused

to be employed in the service, raising some scruples in point of law whether the men could be legally condemned:" *Ibid.*, v, 417 (XIV, 134).

40. Public Record Office, London. Records of the High Court of Delegates, Examinations. DEL 3/7: 9 July 1663 - 16 Nov. 1663. My discussion is based on photocopies of the depositions by various witnesses in this set of Examinations. I am indebted to A.H. Lawes of the PRO for a summary of these records and for checking the relevant Act Books (DEL 4), the Cause Papers (DEL 2), and the Repertory Book (DEL 8/71), which yield no further details. Woodward was sentenced on 19 June 1666 but the sentence itself is missing from the records of sentences (DEL 5/18) In noting Woodward's recidivism, Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, 161, cites a published reference to the records in the Woodward case: "Return of all Appeals in Causes of Doctrine or Discipline made to the High Court of Delegates, 1533-1832", *British Sessional Papers. House of Commons. 1867-68*, vol. 57, xxi-xxii.

41. Ellis, *Pseudochristus*, 38, 51-52.

42. P.R.O. Court of Delegates. DEL 3/7: 9 July 1663.

43. *Ibid.* Bewley said the incident took place in 1660 or 1661. Returning from exile, Charles II celebrated his thirtieth birthday and entered London on 29 May 1660. Authorities of the restored Church of England pushed to restore the Book of Common Prayer from May 1660 onwards; the Act of Uniformity (April 1662) finally imposed the revised Prayer Book among other conditions.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.* Estimates of the numbers of ejected ministers differ greatly; a conservative estimate of 1000 represents roughly 10% of total livings: Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration* (Oxford 1985), 175-177. Clergy ejected under the Act of Uniformity in August 1662 missed the September tithe and often had difficulty in getting their share of the earlier part of the year from their successors: Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism*, 19-20. This may account for some of Woodward's violence.