

Chapter 1

William Bradford, the “Pilgrims,” and the Founding of Plymouth Plantation



In November 1620 a small group of English men and women reached the coast of New England. Another month passed before their ship, the *Mayflower*, anchored in Plymouth Bay, to the north of Cape Cod, and the emigrants went ashore to begin a permanent settlement at Plymouth. William Bradford (1589–1657) told the story of the “Pilgrims,” the name by which this group became known in the nineteenth century, in a manuscript headed “Of Plimmoth Plantation.” In his youth he had joined a group of Separatists, radical Puritans who pleaded the right of “conscience” to free themselves from “unlawful and anti-christian” aspects of the Church of England. In 1606 this group organized an independent (and therefore illegal) congregation in the village of Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, under the leadership of two former ministers in the Church of England, Richard Clyfton and John Robinson. The congregation made its way to Amsterdam in 1607/8 but removed in 1609 to Leiden in order to escape the disarray within another Separatist community, the “Ancient Church,” and the controversies surrounding John Smyth, a former minister and fellow Separatist who repudiated infant baptism and the doctrine of original sin.¹

By 1617 the Leiden congregation was initiating steps to secure a “patent” to territory in North America that belonged to the Virginia Company of London. Among the reasons that the congregation had for leaving the Netherlands was the exiles’ anxiety that living in a foreign land would cause their children to “lose our language and our name of English,” a process of assimilation that eventually occurred among the families who remained there.² Half of the passengers who had arrived on the *Mayflower* died during the first winter in New England, but the tiny colony was able to celebrate in November 1621 (the exact date is

¹ It should be noted, however, that John Robinson and his congregation eventually moderated their Separatism, arriving at a position some contemporaries dubbed “semi-Separatism.”

² Edward Winslow, quoted in Canup (1990), 58.

not specified in the records) a harvest feast that Americans look back to as the first “Thanksgiving.”

Much of Bradford’s history consists of letters and other texts that document the community’s efforts to obtain a patent, pay off their creditors in England, control the unruly “strangers” who intruded on them, and negotiate a durable peace with the Native Americans. Bradford was at the center of all these efforts; elected governor in April 1621, he was annually reelected from 1627 to 1656. When he began to write *Of Plymouth Plantation* in 1630, completing the first ten chapters before putting the manuscript down, he was sharply aware of the newly founded colony of Massachusetts Bay, to the north. Wanting to defend the path of Separatism against its Puritan critics, he began by recalling the struggles of the Christian church against the Antichrist. Bradford located the Pilgrims within the framework of this struggle, conflating their persecution and survival with the “deliverance” of Christian martyrs as narrated by the fourth-century Christian historian Eusebius and retold by the English martyrologist John Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs* (1559, 1565). The overriding theme of Bradford’s story was God’s protecting providence. Yet Bradford’s certainty about God’s providence often gave way to uncertainty, for he “recognize[d] the faithful search for God’s will as the major quest of the pilgrim’s life.”³ When Bradford described the “wilderness” that the emigrants had entered in 1620, he was writing as a moralist who understood the Christian life as constantly beset by adversity.

After a long interruption, he resumed writing in 1644 or 1645, now organizing his narrative around each year’s events, or “annals.” His audience had become the “young men” or “children” who had no first-hand experience of the early years and who were moving away from the communal center to live on “farms,” a process that eventually affected every seventeenth-century New England town. Bradford rejoiced in the triumph of the Puritans in England and the “downfall of the Bishops, with their courts, canons, and ceremonies . . . it is the Lord’s doing, and ought to be marvelous in our eyes!”⁴ But he also complained that the “sacred bond” uniting the Separatist community in the early years was “as it were insensibly by degrees [beginning] to dissolve, or in a great measure, to weaken.” He wrote, therefore, to create a lasting “memorial” of the “constant faithfulness” and self-sacrificing practices of the “ancient members” of the community as counterweight to the “decay and want thereof” among the next generation.

³ Levin (1972), 17.

⁴ Bradford (1912), 1:14, a marginal note he added.

Bibliography

Howard (1971); Levin (1972); Rosenmeier (1972); Anderson (2003), contesting Axtell (1985) and others on the Pilgrims' policy toward Native Americans; Gallagher and Werge (1976). The related primary sources are reprinted in Arber (1897) and Young (1841). See also Bradford's "Dialogue Between young Men Born in New England and Sundry Ancient Men that Came Out of Holland and Old England," in Young (1841).

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Of Plymouth Plantation

And first of the occasion and inducements thereunto; the which, that I may truly unfold, I must begin at the very root and rise of the same. The which I shall endeavor to manifest in a plain style, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things; at least as near as my slender judgment can attain the same.

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It is well known unto the godly and judicious, how ever since the first breaking out of the light of the gospel in our honorable nation of England (which was the first of nations whom the Lord adorned therewith after the gross darkness of popery which had covered and overspread the Christian world),⁵ what wars and oppositions ever since, Satan hath raised, maintained and continued against the saints, from time to time, in one sort or other. Sometimes by bloody death and cruel torments; other whiles imprisonments, banishments and other hard usages; as being loath his kingdom should go down, the truth prevail and the churches of God revert to their ancient purity and recover their primitive order, liberty and beauty.

But when he could not prevail by these means against the main truths of the gospel, but that they began to take rooting in many places, being watered with the blood of the martyrs and blessed from heaven with a gracious increase; he then began to take him to his ancient stratagems,

⁵ England's priority in bringing about the Reformation, an assertion made by the mid-sixteenth-century historians John Bale and John Foxe, was keyed to the career of John Wycliff, the fourteenth-century church reformer and translator of the Bible into English.

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used of old against the first Christians. That when by the bloody and barbarous persecutions of the heathen emperors he could not stop and subvert the course of the gospel, but that it speedily overspread, with a wonderful celerity, the then best known parts of the world; he then began to sow errors, heresies and wonderful dissensions amongst the professors⁶ themselves, working upon their pride and ambition, with other corrupt passions incident to all mortal men, yea to the saints themselves in some measure, by which woeful effects followed. As not only bitter contentions and heartburnings, schisms, with other horrible confusions; but Satan took occasion and advantage thereby to foist in a number of vile ceremonies, with many unprofitable canons and decrees, which have since been as snares to many poor and peaceable souls even to this day.

So as in the ancient times, the persecutions by the heathen and their emperors was not greater than of the Christians one against other: — the Arians and other their complices against the orthodox and true Christians. As witnesseth Socrates in his second book.⁷ His words are these: “The violence truly (saith he) was no less than that of old practiced towards the Christians when they were compelled and drawn to sacrifice to idols; for many endured sundry kinds of torment, often rackings and dismembering of their joints, confiscating of their goods; some bereaved of their native soil, others departed this life under the hands of the tormentor, and some died in banishment and never saw their country again, etc.”

The like method Satan hath seemed to hold in these later times, since the truth began to spring and spread after the great defection made by Antichrist, that man of sin.⁸

For to let pass the infinite examples in sundry nations and several places of the world, and instance in our own, when as that old serpent could not prevail by those fiery flames and other his cruel tragedies, which he by his instruments put in use everywhere in the days of Queen Mary and before, he then began another kind of war and went more closely to work; not only to oppugn but even to ruinate and destroy the kingdom of Christ by more secret and subtle means, by kindling the flames of contention and sowing the seeds of discord and bitter enmity

⁶ Professing Christians.

⁷ Lib. 2, chap. 22 (correctly, 27) Bradford (1912). Socrates Scholasticus, fourth-century C.E. Greek historian, author of *History of the Church from 306 to 409 A.D.* Bradford was quoting the London 1577 edition. Arians (named after Arius, 250–336 C.E.) were a powerful fourth-century sect that denied the full divinity of Christ. The theological/political conflict between Arians and the (Trinitarian) followers of Athanasius escalated to the point of violence.

⁸ 2 Thess. 2:3.

amongst the professors (and seeming reformed) themselves. For when he could not prevail by the former means against the principal doctrines of faith, he bent his force against the holy discipline and outward regiment of the kingdom of Christ, by which those holy doctrines should be conserved, and true piety maintained amongst the saints and people of God.

Mr. Fox recordeth how that besides those worthy martyrs and confessors which were burned in Queen Mary's days and otherwise tormented, "Many (both students and others) fled out of the land to the number of 800, and became several congregations, at Wesel, Frankfort, Basel, Emden, Markpurge, Strasbourg and Geneva, etc."⁹ Amongst whom (but especially those at Frankfort) began that bitter war of contention and persecution about the ceremonies and service book, and other popish and anti-Christian stuff, the plague of England to this day, which are like the high places in Israel which the prophets cried out against, and were their ruin. Which the better part sought, according to the purity of the gospel, to root out and utterly to abandon. And the other part (under veiled pretences) for their own ends and advancements, sought as stiffly to continue, maintain and defend. As appeareth by the discourse thereof published in print, anno 1575; a book that deserves better to be known and considered.¹⁰

The one side labored to have the right worship of God and discipline of Christ established in the church, according to the simplicity of the gospel, without the mixture of men's inventions; and to have and to be ruled by the laws of God's Word, dispensed in those offices, and by those officers of pastors, teachers and elders, etc. according to the Scriptures.¹¹ The other party, though under many colors and pretences, endeavored to have the episcopal dignity (after the popish manner) with their large power and jurisdiction still retained; with all those courts, canons and ceremonies, together with all such livings,¹² revenues and subordinate officers, with other such means as formerly upheld their anti-Christian greatness and enabled them with lordly and tyrannous power to persecute the poor servants of God. This contention was so

⁹ Foxe (1837), 6:430. In this paragraph and its sequel, Bradford summarizes the history of the "Marian exiles," Protestants who left England rather than accept the Catholicism reimposed by Mary Tudor (1553–1558), but returning after her half-sister, Elizabeth, a Protestant, succeeded to the throne.

¹⁰ *A brief discourse of the troubles begonne at Franckford* (1575), narrating disputes among the Marian exiles, some of whom wanted to adopt the Reformed model of church government while others preferred an episcopal system, which Bradford himself opposed. Collinson (1967), 153.

¹¹ That is, no bishops as there are in an episcopal system.

¹² Livings: funded positions in the Church; Bradford is accusing the Church leaders of avarice.

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great, as neither the honor of God, the common persecution, nor the mediation of Mr. Calvin and other worthies of the Lord in those places, could prevail with those thus episcopally minded; but they proceeded by all means to disturb the peace of this poor persecuted church, even so far as to charge (very unjustly and ungodly yet prelatelike) some of their chief opposers with rebellion and high treason against the emperor, and other such crimes.

And this contention died not with Queen Mary, nor was left beyond the seas. But at her death these people returning into England under gracious Queen Elizabeth, many of them being preferred to bishoprics and other promotions according to their aims and desires, that inveterate hatred against the holy discipline of Christ in his church hath continued to this day. Insomuch that for fear it should prevail, all plots and devices have been used to keep it out, incensing the queen and state against it as dangerous for the commonwealth; and that it was most needful that the fundamental points of religion should be preached in those ignorant and superstitious times. And to win the weak and ignorant they might retain divers harmless ceremonies; and though it were to be wished that divers things were reformed, yet this was not a season for it.¹³ And many the like, to stop the mouths of the more godly, to bring them on to yield to one ceremony after another, and one corruption after another; by these wiles beguiling some and corrupting others till at length they began to persecute all the zealous professors in the land (though they knew little what this discipline meant) both by word and deed, if they would not submit to their ceremonies and become slaves to them and their popish trash, which have no ground in the Word of God, but are relics of that man of sin.¹⁴ And the more the light of the gospel grew, the more they urged their subscriptions to these corruptions. So as (notwithstanding all their former pretences and fair colors) they whose eyes God had not justly blinded might easily see whereto these things tended.

And to cast contempt the more upon the sincere servants of God; they opprobriously and most injuriously gave unto and imposed upon them that name of Puritans, which is said the Novatians out of pride did assume and take unto themselves.¹⁵ And lamentable it is to see the effects which have followed. Religion hath been disgraced, the godly grieved, afflicted, persecuted, and many exiled; sundry have lost their

¹³ Rationales of the conservative leaders of the Church for not undertaking full reform.

¹⁴ The "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3), synonym for the Antichrist.

¹⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, bk. 6, chap. 43, Bradford (1912). A mid-third-century sect marked by a refusal to reconcile with those who apostatized during persecution, the Novatians (after their founder, the bishop Novatus) called themselves the Katharoi, the "pure": hence "Puritans."

lives in prisons and other ways. On the other hand, sin hath been countenanced; ignorance, profaneness and atheism increased, and the papists encouraged to hope again for a day.

This made that holy man Mr. Perkins¹⁶ cry out in his exhortation to repentance, upon Zephaniah 2: “Religion (saith he) hath been amongst us this thirty-five years; but the more it is published, the more it is contemned and reproached of many, etc. Thus not profaneness nor wickedness but religion itself is a byword, a mockingstock, and a matter of reproach; so that in England at this day the man or woman that begins to profess religion and to serve God, must resolve with himself to sustain mocks and injuries even as though he lived amongst the enemies of religion.” And this, common experience hath confirmed and made too apparent.¹⁷

But that I may come more near my intendment.

When as by the travail and diligence of some godly and zealous preachers, and God’s blessing on their labors, as in other places of the land, so in the north parts, many became enlightened by the Word of God and had their ignorance and sins discovered unto them, and began by his grace to reform their lives and make conscience of their ways; the work of God was no sooner manifest in them but presently they were both scoffed and scorned by the profane multitude; and the ministers urged with the yoke of subscription, or else must be silenced. And the poor people were so vexed with apparitors and pursuivants and the commissary courts, as truly their affliction was not small. Which, notwithstanding, they bore sundry years with much patience, till they were occasioned by the continuance and increase of these troubles, and other means which the Lord raised up in those days, to see further into things by the light of the Word of God. How not only these base and beggarly ceremonies were unlawful, but also that the lordly and tyrannous power of the prelates ought not to be submitted unto; which thus, contrary to the freedom of the gospel, would load and burden men’s consciences and by their compulsive power make a profane mixture of persons and things in the worship of God. And that their offices and callings, courts and canons, etc. were unlawful and anti-Christian; being such as have no warrant in the Word of God, but the same that were used in popery and still retained. Of which a famous author¹⁸ thus writeth in his Dutch

¹⁶ William Perkins (1558–1602), noted teacher at Cambridge and moderate Puritan; the reference is to *A Godly and Learned Exposition of Christ’s Sermon On the Mount* (1618), 421.

¹⁷ Opposite this passage Bradford wrote, “A late observation, as it were by the way, worthy to be noted,” dated 1646, remarking on the “downfall of the bishops” and giving 1630 as “about the year” he began to write his narrative. Bradford (1912), 1:14–16.

¹⁸ Emmanuel van Meteren, *General History of the Netherlands* (1608), trans. Edward Grimstone (London, 1609), bk. 25, fol. 119, Bradford (1912).

commentaries, at the coming of King James into England: “The new king (saith he) found there established the reformed religion according to the reformed religion of King Edward VI, retaining or keeping still the spiritual state of the bishops, etc. after the old manner, much varying and differing from the Reformed churches in Scotland, France and the Netherlands, Emden, Geneva, etc., whose reformation is cut, or shapen much nearer the first Christian churches, as it was used in the apostles’ times.”

So many, therefore, of these professors as saw the evil of these things in these parts, and whose hearts the Lord had touched with heavenly zeal for his truth, they shook off this yoke of anti-Christian bondage, and as the Lord’s free people joined themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.¹⁹ And that it cost them something this ensuing history will declare.

These people became two distinct bodies or churches, and in regard of distance of place did congregate severally; for they were of sundry towns and villages, some in Nottinghamshire, some of Lincolnshire, and some of Yorkshire where they border nearest together. In one of these churches (besides others of note) was Mr. John Smith, a man of able gifts and a good preacher, who afterwards was chosen their pastor. But these afterwards falling into some errors in the Low Countries, there (for the most part) buried themselves and their names.²⁰

But in this other church (which must be the subject of our discourse) besides other worthy men, was Mr. Richard Clyfton, a grave and reverend preacher, who by his pains and diligence had done much good, and under God had been a means of the conversion of many. And also that famous and worthy man Mr. John Robinson, who afterwards was their pastor for many years, till the Lord took him away by death. Also Mr. William Brewster a reverend man, who afterwards was chosen an elder of the church and lived with them till old age.²¹

But after these things they could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted and persecuted on every side, so as their

¹⁹ Almost certainly Bradford was quoting the covenant used by the Scrooby Separatists.

²⁰ John Smith or Smyth (d. 1612), former minister in the Church of England who participated in organizing a Separatist congregation in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire; this group emigrated to Amsterdam in 1608.

²¹ John Robinson (c. 1576–1625), an ordained minister who became a Separatist; he remained in Leiden with the majority of the congregation rather than emigrate. William Brewster (d. 1644), postmaster in Scrooby, where the Separatist congregation met in his house.

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former afflictions were but as fleabittings in comparison of these which now came upon them. For some were taken and clapped up in prison, others had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands; and the most were fain to flee and leave their houses and habitations, and the means of their livelihood.

Yet these and many other sharper things which afterward befell them, were no other than they looked for, and therefore were the better prepared to bear them by the assistance of God's grace and Spirit.

Yet seeing themselves thus molested, and that there was no hope of their continuance there, by a joint consent they resolved to go into the Low Countries, where they heard was freedom of religion for all men; as also how sundry from London and other parts of the land had been exiled and persecuted for the same cause, and were gone thither, and lived at Amsterdam and in other places of the land.²² So after they had continued together about a year, and kept their meetings every Sabbath in one place or other, exercising the worship of God amongst themselves, notwithstanding all the diligence and malice of their adversaries, they seeing they could no longer continue in that condition, they resolved to get over into Holland as they could. Which was in the year 1607 and 1608; of which more at large in the next chapter.

[Chapters 2 and 3 cover the exodus from England to the Netherlands and the transfer of the congregation from Amsterdam to Leiden, where it began to prosper under the leadership of John Robinson.]

Chapter 4

Showing the Reasons, and Causes of Their Removal

After they had lived in this city [Leiden] about some eleven or twelve years (which is the more observable being the whole time of that famous truce between that state and the Spaniards)²³ and sundry of them were taken away by death and many others began to be well stricken in years (the grave mistress of experience having taught them many things), those prudent governors with sundry of the sagest members began both deeply to apprehend their present dangers and wisely to foresee the future and think of timely remedy. In the agitation of their thoughts, and much discourse of things hereabout, at length they began to incline to this conclusion: of removal to some other place. Not out of

²² A handful of Separatists formed a congregation in Amsterdam as early as 1595; this became known as the "Ancient Church." Its troubles are narrated in Morgan (1963).

²³ War between the Netherlands and Spain had been interrupted by a truce in 1609 that ended in 1618, when the Thirty Years War began.

any newfangledness or other such like giddy humor by which men are oftentimes transported to their great hurt and danger, but for sundry weighty and solid reasons, some of the chief of which I will here briefly touch.

And first, they saw and found by experience the hardness of the place and country to be such as few in comparison would come to them, and fewer that would bide it out and continue with them. For many that came to them, and many more that desired to be with them, could not endure that great labor and hard fare, with other inconveniences which they underwent and were contented with. But though they loved their persons, approved their cause and honored their sufferings, yet they left them as it were weeping, as Orpah did her mother-in-law Naomi, or as those Romans did Cato in Utica who desired to be excused and borne with, though they could not all be Catos.²⁴ For many, though they desired to enjoy the ordinances of God in their purity and the liberty of the gospel with them, yet (alas) they admitted of bondage with danger of conscience, rather than to endure these hardships. Yea, some preferred and chose the prisons in England rather than this liberty in Holland with these afflictions. But it was thought that if a better and easier place of living could be had, it would draw many and take away these discouragements. Yea, their pastor would often say that many of those who both wrote and preached now against them, if they were in a place where they might have liberty and live comfortably, they would then practice as they did.²⁵

Secondly. They saw that though the people generally bore all these difficulties very cheerfully and with a resolute courage, being in the best and strength of their years; yet old age began to steal on many of them; and their great and continual labors, with other crosses and sorrows, hastened it before the time. So as it was not only probably thought, but apparently seen, that within a few years more they would be in danger to scatter, by necessities pressing them, or sink under their burdens, or both. And therefore according to the divine proverb, that *a wise man seeth the plague when it cometh, and hideth himself*, Proverbs 22:3, so they like skillful and beaten soldiers were fearful either to be entrapped or surrounded by their enemies so as they should neither be able to fight nor fly. And therefore thought it better to dislodge betimes to some place of better advantage and less danger, if any such could be found.

Thirdly. As necessity was a taskmaster over them so they were forced to be such, not only to their servants but in a sort to their dearest

²⁴ Ruth 1:14; Marcus Porcius Cato (95 B.C.E. to 46 B.C.E.), also called Cato the Younger, held the gates of Utica long enough to evacuate his men by sea and then committed suicide.

²⁵ A commonsense response by Robinson to Puritan critics of Separatism.

children, the which as it did not a little wound the tender hearts of many a loving father and mother, so it produced likewise sundry sad and sorrowful effects. For many of their children that were of best dispositions and gracious inclinations, having learned to bear the yoke in their youth and willing to bear part of their parents' burden, were oftentimes so oppressed with their heavy labors that though their minds were free and willing, yet their bodies bowed under the weight of the same, and became decrepit in their early youth, the vigor of nature being consumed in the very bud as it were. But that which was more lamentable, and of all sorrows most heavy to be borne, was that many of their children, by these occasions and the great licentiousness of youth in that country, and the manifold temptations of the place, were drawn away by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous courses, getting the reins off their necks and departing from their parents. Some became soldiers, others took upon them far voyages by sea, and others some worse courses tending to dissoluteness and the danger of their souls, to the great grief of their parents and dishonor of God. So that they saw their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted.

Lastly (and which was not least), a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work.

These and some other like reasons moved them to undertake this resolution of their removal; the which they afterward prosecuted with so great difficulties, as by the sequel will appear.

The place they had thoughts on was some of those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same. This proposition being made public and coming to the scanning of all, it raised many variable opinions amongst men and caused many fears and doubts amongst themselves. Some, from their reasons and hopes conceived, labored to stir up and encourage the rest to undertake and prosecute the same; others again, out of their fears, objected against it and sought to divert from it; alleging many things, and those neither unreasonable nor improbable; as that it was a great design and subject to many unconceivable perils and dangers; as, besides the casualties of the sea (which none can be freed from), the length of the voyage was such as the weak bodies of women and other persons worn out with age and travail (as many of them were) could never be

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able to endure. And yet if they should, the miseries of the land which they should be exposed unto, would be too hard to be borne and likely, some or all of them together, to consume and utterly to ruinate them. For there they should be liable to famine and nakedness and the want, in a manner, of all things. The change of air, diet and drinking of water would infect their bodies with sore sicknesses and grievous diseases. And also those which should escape or overcome these difficulties should yet be in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous and most treacherous, being most furious in their rage and merciless where they overcome; not being content only to kill and take away life, but delight to torment men in the most bloody manner that may be; flaying some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting off the members and joints of others by piecemeal and broiling on the coals, eat the collops of their flesh in their sight whilst they live, with other cruelties horrible to be related.²⁶

And surely it could not be thought but the very hearing of these things could not but move the very bowels of men to grate within them and make the weak to quake and tremble. It was further objected that it would require greater sums of money to furnish such a voyage and to fit them with necessaries, than their consumed estates would amount to; and yet they must as well look to be seconded with supplies as presently to be transported. Also many precedents of ill success and lamentable miseries befallen others in the like designs were easy to be found, and not forgotten to be alleged; besides their own experience, in their former troubles and hardships in their removal into Holland, and how hard a thing it was for them to live in that strange place, though it was a neighbor country and a civil and rich commonwealth.

It was answered, that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate. The difficulties were many, but not invincible. For though there were many of them likely, yet they were not certain. It might be sundry of the things feared might never befall; others by provident care and the use of good means might in a great measure be prevented; and all of them, through the help of God, by fortitude and patience, might either be borne or overcome. True it was that such attempts were not to be made and undertaken without good ground and reason, not rashly or lightly as many have done for curiosity or hope of gain, etc. But their condition was not ordinary, their ends were good and honorable, their calling lawful and urgent; and therefore they might

²⁶ The editors of the 1912 edition searched in vain for the source of this clearly derivative, secondhand account.

expect the blessing of God in their proceeding. Yea, though they should lose their lives in this action, yet might they have comfort in the same and their endeavors would be honorable. They lived here but as men in exile and in a poor condition, and as great miseries might possibly befall them in this place; for the twelve years of truce were now out and there was nothing but beating of drums and preparing for war, the events whereof are always uncertain. The Spaniard might prove as cruel as the savages of America, and the famine and pestilence as sore here as there, and their liberty less to look out for remedy.

After many other particular things answered and alleged on both sides, it was fully concluded by the major part to put this design in execution and to prosecute it by the best means they could.

[Chapter 5 summarizes the congregation's debate about the "particular place to pitch upon" and the conclusion, to "live as a distinct body . . . under the general government of Virginia." Negotiations with the Virginia Company and various London merchants are traced in the rest of chapters 5 and 6; chapters 7 and 8 describe the departure from Leiden in July 1620, the arrival at Southampton, and the first attempt to set out in two ships, one of which proved unseaworthy, leaving only the Mayflower to make the voyage.]

Chapter 9

Of Their Voyage, and How They Passed the Sea; and of Their Safe Arrival at Cape Cod

September 6 [1620]. These troubles being blown over, and now all being compact together in one ship, they put to sea again with a prosperous wind, which continued divers days together, which was some encouragement unto them; yet, according to the usual manner, many were afflicted with seasickness. And I may not omit here a special work of God's providence. There was a proud and very profane young man, one of the seamen, of a lusty, able body, which made him the more haughty; he would alway[s] be contemning the poor people in their sickness and cursing them daily with grievous execrations; and did not let to tell them, that he hoped to help to cast half of them overboard before they came to their journey's end, and to make merry with what they had; and if he were by any gently reproved, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard. Thus his curses light on his own head, and it was an astonish-

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ment to all his fellows for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him. . . .

But to omit other things (that I may be brief) after long beating at sea they fell with that land which is called Cape Cod; the which being made and certainly known to be it, they were not a little joyful. After some deliberation had amongst themselves and with the master of the ship, they tacked about and resolved to stand for the southward (the wind and weather being fair) to find some place about Hudson's River for their habitation. But after they had sailed that course about half the day, they fell amongst dangerous shoals and roaring breakers, and they were so far entangled therewith as they conceived themselves in great danger; and the wind shrinking [shrieking] upon them withal, they resolved to bear up again for the Cape and thought themselves happy to get out of those dangers before night overtook them, as by God's good providence they did. And the next day they got into the Cape harbor where they rid in safety.

A word or two by the way of this cape. It was thus first named by Captain Gosnold and his company, anno 1602, and after by Captain Smith was called Cape James; but it retains the former name amongst seamen.²⁷ Also, that point which first showed those dangerous shoals unto them they called Point Care, and Tucker's Terror; but the French and Dutch to this day call it Malabar by reason of those perilous shoals and the losses they have suffered there.

Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element. And no marvel if they were thus joyful, seeing wise Seneca was so affected with sailing a few miles on the coast of his own Italy, as he affirmed,²⁸ that he had rather remain twenty years on his way by land than pass by sea to any place in a short time, so tedious and dreadful was the same unto him.

But here I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor people's present condition; and so I think will the reader, too, when he well considers the same. Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies; no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succor. It is recorded in

²⁷ Bartholomew Gosnold had explored the coast in 1602 and John Smith in 1614; it was Smith who named the region and provided an elementary map in *A Description of New England* (London, 1616).

²⁸ Epist. 53, Bradford (1912), a reference to the Epistles of Seneca.

Scripture²⁹ as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not. Neither could they, as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue. If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world. If it be said they had a ship to succor them, it is true; but what heard they daily from the master and company? But that with speed they should look out a place (with their shallop) where they would be, at some near distance; for the season was such as he would not stir from thence till a safe harbor was discovered by them, where they would be, and he might go without danger; and that victuals consumed apace but he must and would keep sufficient for themselves and their return. Yea, it was muttered by some that if they got not a place in time, they would turn them and their goods ashore and leave them. Let it also be considered what weak hopes of supply and succor they left behind them, that might bear up their minds in this sad condition and trials they were under; and they could not but be very small. It is true, indeed, the affections and love of their brethren at Leiden was cordial and entire towards them, but they had little power to help them or themselves; and how the case stood between them and the merchants at their coming away hath already been declared.³⁰

What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and his grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: *Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were*

²⁹ Acts 28, Bradford (1912).

³⁰ In chapters 6 and 7, Bradford described the negotiations between the “merchants and adventurers” (chief among them the merchant Thomas Weston and two agents of the congregation), the “great discontents” the emigrants felt about the conditions agreed to by those agents, and the final breakdown of negotiations just as the group was leaving for the New World.

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*ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their voice and looked on their adversity, etc.*³¹ *Let them therefore praise the Lord, because he is good: and his mercies endure forever.*³² *Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how he hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed*³³ *in them. Let them confess before the Lord his lovingkindness and his wonderful works before the sons of men.*³⁴

[Chapter 10 describes the search for a “place of habitation,” the earliest encounters with Native Americans, and the decision to “pitch their dwelling” in Plymouth.]

The Second Book

The rest of this history (if God give me life, and opportunity) I shall, for brevity’s sake, handle by way of annals, noting only the heads of principal things, and passages as they fell in order of time, and may seem to be profitable to know, or to make use of. And this may be as the Second Book.

THE REMAINDER OF ANNO 1620

I shall a little return back, and begin with a combination made by them before they came ashore; being the first foundation of their government in this place. Occasioned partly by the discontented and mutinous speeches that some of the strangers³⁵ amongst them had let fall from them in the ship: That when they came ashore they would use their own liberty, for none had power to command them, the patent they had being for Virginia and not for New England, which belonged to another government, with which the Virginia Company had nothing to do. And partly that such an act by them done, this their condition considered, might be as firm as any patent, and in some respects more sure.

³¹ Deut. 26:5, 7, Bradford (1912).

³² Ps. 107:1, 2, 4–5, 8, Bradford (1912).

³³ The editors of the 1912 edition note that the word “fainted” is used in both the King James and Geneva versions of this verse.

³⁴ Dan. 2:19.

³⁵ “Strangers”: passengers who had not been members of the Leiden congregation. Approximately half of the 102 passengers on board the *Mayflower* joined the group from London, some of them hired as servants and others, such as the soldier Miles Standish and the cooper John Alden, hired because of their special skills. Forty-one men signed the compact; another 24, most of them sons, did not.

The form was as followeth:

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the grace of God of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc. Having undertaken, for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our King and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia,³⁶ do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France and Ireland the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Anno Domini 1620.³⁷

After this they chose, or rather confirmed, Mr. John Carver (a man godly and well approved amongst them) their governor for that year. And after they had provided a place for their goods, or common store (which were long in unlading for want of boats, foulness of the winter weather and sickness of divers) and begun some small cottages for their habitation; as time would admit, they met and consulted of laws and orders, both for their civil and military government as the necessity of their condition did require, still adding thereunto as urgent occasion in several times, and as cases did require.

In these hard and difficult beginnings they found some discontents and murmurings arise amongst some, and mutinous speeches and cariages in other; but they were soon quelled and overcome by the wisdom, patience, and just and equal carriage of things, by the governor and better part, which clave faithfully together in the main.

But that which was most sad and lamentable was, that in two or three months' time half of their company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases which this long

³⁶ The grant of land by the English Crown to the Virginia Company, chartered in 1606, extended to the Hudson River. The accident of settling north of Cape Cod meant that the congregation's "patent" was invalid, as the restless "strangers" realized. The colony acquired a substitute patent in 1621.

³⁷ The "compact" was printed for the first time in *A Relation, or Journal [Mourt's Relation]* (1622); subsequent printings, and variations among them, are noted in Walker (1893), chap. 5.

voyage and their inaccommodate condition had brought upon them. So as there died some times two or three of a day in the foresaid time, that of 100 and odd persons, scarce fifty remained.³⁸ And of these, in the time of most distress, there was but six or seven sound persons who to their great commendations, be it spoken, spared no pains night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them. In a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named; and all this willingly and cheerfully, without any grudging in the least, showing herein their true love unto their friends and brethren; a rare example and worthy to be remembered. Two of these seven were Mr. William Brewster, their reverend elder, and Myles Standish, their captain and military commander, unto whom myself and many others were much beholden in our low and sick condition. And yet the Lord so upheld these persons as in this general calamity they were not at all infected either with sickness or lameness. And what I have said of these I may say of many others who died in this general visitation, and others yet living; that whilst they had health, yea, or any strength continuing, they were not wanting to any that had need of them. And I doubt not but their recompense is with the Lord.

. . . All this while the Indians came skulking about them, and would sometimes show themselves aloof off[f], but when any approached near them, they would run away; and once they stole away their tools where they had been at work and were gone to dinner. But about the 16th of March, a certain Indian came boldly amongst them and spoke to them in broken English, which they could well understand but marveled at it. At length they understood by discourse with him, that he was not of these parts, but belonged to the eastern parts where some English ships came to fish, with whom he was acquainted and could name sundry of them by their names, amongst whom he had got his language. He became profitable to them in acquainting them with many things concerning the state of the country in the east parts where he lived, which was afterwards profitable unto them; as also of the people here, of their names, number and strength, of their situation and distance from this place, and who was chief amongst them. His name was Samoset.³⁹ He

³⁸ The exact figure of deaths was fifty-three, including eight of twelve wives.

³⁹ "For he [Samoset] had learned some broken English amongst the Englishmen that came to fish at Monchiggon [Monhegan Island]. . . . We questioned him of many things. He was the first savage we could meet withal. He said, he was not of these parts; but of Morattigon [actually, of Pemaquid, now Bristol, Maine], and one of the sagamores or lords thereof; and had been eight months in these parts." *A Relation*, repr. in Arber

told them also of another Indian whose name was Squanto, a native of this place, who had been in England and could speak better English than himself.

Being, after some time of entertainment and gifts dismissed, a while after he came again, and five more with him, and they brought again all the tools that were stolen away before, and made way for the coming of their great sachem, called Massasoit.⁴⁰ Who, about four or five days after, came with the chief of his friends and other attendance, with the aforesaid Squanto. With whom, after friendly entertainment and some gifts given him, they made a peace with him (which hath now continued this twenty four years) in these terms:

1. That neither he nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of their people.
2. That if any of his did hurt to any of theirs, he should send the offender, that they might punish him.
3. That if anything were taken away from any of theirs, he should cause it to be restored; and they should do the like to his.
4. If any did unjustly war against him, they would aid him; if any did war against them, he should aid them.
5. He should send to his neighbors confederates to certify them of this, that they might not wrong them, but might be likewise comprised in the conditions of peace.
6. That when their men came to them, they should leave their bows and arrows behind them.⁴¹

After these things he returned to his place called Sowams, some forty miles from this place, but Squanto continued with them and was their interpreter and was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation. He directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit, and never left them till he died. He was a native of this place, and scarce any left alive besides

(1897), 450–51. Earlier in the year, an English ship had carried him from Monhegan Island to Cape Cod.

⁴⁰ Died in 1662; see Bradford (1912), 1:200, n. 1

⁴¹ “This treaty was renewed by Ousamequin [Massasoit] and his son, Mooanam [Wamutta, or Alexander], in 1639, with certain additions to the terms, one of them being that ‘he or they shall not give, sell, or convey away any of his or their lands, territories, or possessions whatsoever, to any person or persons whomsoever, without the priutie and consent of this government, other than to such as this government shall send and appoint.’” Bradford (1912), 1:202, n. 1. Recent historical work criticizes the colonists for their aggression toward the Native Americans; for a critique of this approach and an alternative reading, see Anderson (2003), chap. 2.

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himself.⁴² He was carried away with divers others by one Hunt,⁴³ a master of a ship, who thought to sell them for slaves in Spain. But he got away for England and was entertained by a merchant in London, and employed to Newfoundland and other parts, and lastly brought hither into these parts by one Mr. Dermer,⁴⁴ a gentleman employed by Sir Ferdinando Gorges and others for discovery and other designs in these parts. . . .

The spring now approaching, it pleased God the mortality began to cease among them, and the sick and lame recovered apace, which put as [it] were new life into them; though they had borne their sad affliction with much patience and contentedness, as I think any people could do. But it was the Lord which upheld them, and had beforehand prepared them; many having long borne the yoke, yea from their youth [Lam. 3:27]. Many other smaller matters I omit, sundry of them having been already published in a journal made by one of the company; and some other passages of journeys and relations already published, to which I refer those that are willing to know them more particularly.⁴⁵ And being now come to the 25 of March I shall begin the year 1621.

ANNO 1621

. . . Afterwards they (as many as were able) began to plant their corn, in which service Squanto stood them in great stead, showing them both the manner how to set it, and after how to dress and tend it. Also he told them, except they got fish and set with it (in these old grounds) it would come to nothing, and he showed them that in the middle of April they should have store enough come up the brook, by which they began to build, and taught them how to take it, and where to get other provisions necessary for them; all which they found true by trial and experience. . . . In this month of April whilst they were busy about their seed, their governor (Mr. John Carver) came out of the field very sick, it being a hot day, he complained greatly of his head, and lay down, and within a few hours his senses failed, so as he never spake more till he died. . . . Shortly after William Bradford was chosen governor in his stead. . . .

⁴² The only surviving member of the Patuxet, an Algonquin group that was destroyed in a sickness about 1617, and “one of twenty captives” captured in 1614 by an English explorer and taken to England. *A Relation*, in Arber (1897), 456.

⁴³ Thomas Hunt, a shipmaster who participated in John Smith’s 1614 voyage to the coast of New England. A fuller account of his aggression toward the Native Americans may be found in Bradford (1912), 1:204, n. 2.

⁴⁴ Thomas Dermer sailed for Newfoundland in 1615 with Captain John Smith (completing the voyage without him) and made several subsequent exploratory trips, the reports of which were widely read.

⁴⁵ These texts are reprinted in Arber (1897).

Having in some sort ordered their business at home, it was thought meet to send some abroad to see their new friend Massasoit, and to bestow upon him some gratuity to bind him the faster unto them; as also that hereby they might view the country and see in what manner he lived, what strength he had about him, and how the ways were to his place, if at any time they should have occasion. . . . They found his place to be forty miles from hence, the soil good and the people not many, being dead and abundantly wasted in the late great mortality, which fell in all these parts about three years before the coming of the English, wherein thousands of them died, they not being able to bury one another, their skulls and bones were found in many places lying still above ground where their houses and dwellings had been, a very sad spectacle to behold. . . .⁴⁶

[November 1621] They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and had all things in good plenty. For as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was a great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides they had about a peck a meal a week to a person, or now since the harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to friends in England, which were not feigned but true reports.⁴⁷

. . . [1632] Though the partners⁴⁸ were thus plunged into great en-

⁴⁶ Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins made this trip, which Winslow described in *A Relation*. The editors of the 1912 edition provide extensive information on the epidemics that devastated the Native American population: Bradford (1912), 1:221, n. 1.

⁴⁷ Edward Winslow described the festivities in a letter dated 11 December 1621, printed in *A Relation*: “Our corn did prove well, and, GOD be praised! we had a good increase of Indian corn; and our barley indifferent good: but our pease not worth the gathering; for we feared they were too late sown. . . . Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling; that so we might, after a more special manner, rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four, in one day, killed as much fowl as, with a little help besides, served the Company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms; many of the Indians coming amongst us. And, amongst the rest, their greatest King, Massasoit, with some ninety men; whom, for three days, we entertained and feasted.” *A Relation*, in Arber (1897), 488–89.

⁴⁸ The founding of Plymouth had been financed by a group of London merchants, the “adventurers.” The efforts to repay these merchants included, in 1626, an agreement on the part of a small group of colonists (the “partners”) to remit £200 a year for nine years.

gagements, and oppressed with unjust debts, yet the Lord prospered their trading, that they made yearly large returns, and had soon wound themselves out of all if yet they had otherwise been well dealt withall; as will more appear hereafter. Also the people of the Plantation began to grow in their outward estates, by reason of the flowing of many people into the country, especially into the Bay of the Massachusetts. By which means corn and cattle rose to a great price, by which many were much enriched and commodities grew plentiful. And yet in other regards this benefit turned to their hurt, and this accession of strength to their weakness. For now as their stocks increased and the increase vendible, there was no longer any holding them together, but now they must of necessity go to their great lots. They could not otherwise keep their cattle, and having oxen grown they must have land for plowing and tillage. And no man now thought he could live except he had cattle and a great deal of ground to keep them, all striving to increase their stocks. By which means they were scattered all over the Bay quickly and the town in which they lived compactly till now was left very thin and in a short time almost desolate. And if this had been all, it had been less, though too much; but the church must also be divided, and those that had lived so long together in Christian and comfortable fellowship must now part and suffer many divisions. First, those that lived on their lots on the other side of the Bay, called Duxbury,⁴⁹ they could not long bring their wives and children to the public worship and church meetings here, but with such burthen as, growing to some competent number, they sued to be dismissed and become a body of themselves. And so they were dismissed about this time though very unwillingly. But to touch this sad matter, and handle things together that fell out afterward; to prevent any further scattering from this place and weakening of the same, it was thought best to give out some good farms to special persons that would promise to live at Plymouth, and likely to be helpful to the church or commonwealth, and so tie the lands to Plymouth as farms for the same; and there they might keep their cattle and tillage by some servants and retain their dwellings here. And so some special lands were granted at a place general called Green's Harbor,⁵⁰ where no allotments had been in the former division, a place very well meadowed and fit to keep and rear cattle good store. But alas, this remedy proved worse than the disease; for within a few years those that had thus got footing there rent

As Bradford repeatedly noted, the debt seemed only to increase, because of unfair practices by the creditors.

⁴⁹ Duxbury became a separate town in 1637, although settlement occurred before this year.

⁵⁰ "It is not known when these lands were granted at Green's Harbor, which in 1640 became known as Rexhame, and before 1641 as Marshfield." Bradford (1912), 2:53, n. 1.

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themselves away, partly by force and partly wearing the rest with importunity and pleas of necessity, so as they must either suffer them to go or live in continual opposition and contention. And others still, as they conceived themselves straitened or to want accommodation, broke away under one pretence or other, thinking their own conceived necessity and the example of others a warrant sufficient for them. And this I fear will be the ruin of New England, at least of the churches of God there, and will provoke the Lord's displeasure against them.

Source: Bradford (1912), corrected against Morison (1952).