

Of plimoth plantation

*And first of y^e occasion, and Indūsments ther unto, the which
that y^e may truly unfould, y^e must begine at y^e very roote, & rise
of y^e same. The which y^e shall endeuor to manefest in a plaine
stile; with singuler regard unto y^e simple trueth in all things;
at least as farr near as my slender Judgmente can attaine
the same.*

Bradford's Manuscript

As the precise layout and careful handwriting of this detail from the first page of Bradford's manuscript suggest, he evidently began to write his history with an eye to publication. But he continued to add to it for nearly twenty years, and the complete manuscript was not published until the mid-nineteenth century.

Boston and extensively reported in newspapers throughout the United States. The text of the following selections is taken from *Of Plimoth Plantation*, an exact transcription of the manuscript published in Boston by order of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1900. We have retained Bradford's original capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, except in a few instances where a now-archaic spelling obscures the meaning of a passage. But we have regularized his inconsistent chapter headings and expanded his abbreviations, including *y^e* (*the*) and *yⁱ* (*that*), which Bradford used throughout his manuscript.

WILLIAM BRADFORD (1590-1657)

FROM OF PLIMOTH PLANTATION

[From Book 1]

And first of the occasion and indūsments ther unto; the which that I may truly unfould, I must begine at the very roote & rise of the same. The which I shall endeuor to manefest in a plaine stile, with singuler regard unto the simple trueth in all things, at least as near as my slender judgmente can attaine the same.

From CHAPTER 1

It is well knowne unto the godly and judicious, how ever since the first breaking out of the lighte of the gospell in our Honourable Nation of England, (which was the first of nations whom the Lord adorned ther with, after that grosse darknes of popery which had covered & overspred the Christian worled,) what warrs & opposissions ever since, Satan hath raised, maintained, and continued against the Saincts, from time to time, in one sorte or other. Some times by bloody death and cruell torments; other whiles

imprisonments, banishments, & other hard usages; as being loath his kingdom should goe downe, the trueth prevaile, and the churches of God revert to their anciente puritie, and recover their primative order, libertie, & bewtie. [. .]

But that I may come more near my intendmente; when as by the travell & diligence of some godly & zealous preachers, & Gods blessing on their labours, as in other places of the land, so in the North parts,¹ many became inlightened by the word of God, and had their ignorance & sins discovered unto them, and begane by his grace to reforme their lives, and make conscience of their wayes, the worke of God was no sooner manifest in them, but presently they were both scoffed and scorned by the prophane multitude, and the ministers urged with the yoak of subscription,² or els must be silenced; and the poore people were so vexed with apparators, & pursuants, & the comissarie courts,³ as truly their affliction was not smale; which, notwithstanding, they bore sundrie years with much patience, till they were occasioned (by the continuance & encrease of these troubls, 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 beggerly ceremonies were unlawfull, but also that the lordly & tiranous power of the prelats ought not to be submitted unto; which thus, contrary to the freedome of the gospell, would load & burden mens consciences, and by their compulsive power make a prophane mixture of persons & things in the worship of God. [. .]

So many therfore of these proffessors as saw the evill of these things, in thes parts, and whose harts the Lord had touched with heavenly zeale for his trueth, they shooke of this yoake of antichristian bondage, and as the Lords free people, joynd them selves (by a covenant of the Lord⁴) into a church estate, in the felowship of the gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them. And that it cost them something this ensewing historie will declare. [. .]

But after these things they could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted & persecuted on every side, so as their former afflictions were but as flea-bitings in comparision of these which now came upon them. For some were taken & clapt up in prison, others had their houses besett & watcht night and day, & hardly escaped their hands; and the most were faine to flie & leave their howses & habitations, and the means of their livelehood. Yet these & many other sharper things which afterward befell them, were no other then they looked for, and therfore were the better prepared to bear them by the assistance of Gods grace & spirite. Yet seeing them selves thus molested, and that ther was no hope of their continuance ther, by a joynte consente they resolved to goe into the Low-Countries, wher they heard was freedome of Religion for all

1. North parts: Northern England and Scotland.

2. yoak of subscription: Compelled to subscribe to the laws of the Church of England.

3. apparators, & pursuants, & the comissarie courts: The various offices and officials of the Church of England.

4. a covenant of the Lord: An agreement entered into by all members of a congregation to act in accordance with the laws of the church.

men; as also how sundrie from London, & other parts of the land, had been exiled and persecuted for the same cause, & were gone thither, and lived at Amsterdam, & in other places of the land. So after they had continued together aboute a year, and kept their meetings every Saboth in one place or other, exercising the worship of God amongst them selves, notwithstanding all the dilligence & malice of their adverssaries, they seeing they could no longer continue in that condition, they resolved to get over into Hollād as they could; which was in the year 1607. & 1608. [. .]

CHAPTER 4

SHOWING THE REASONS & CAUSES OF THEIR REMOOVALL

After they had lived in this citie⁵ about some 11. or 12. years, (which is the more observable being the whole time of that famose truce between that state & the Spaniards,) and sundrie of them were taken away by death, & many others begane to be well stricken in years, the grave mistris Experience haveing taught them many things, those prudent governours with sundrie of the sagest members begane both deeply to apprehend their present dangers, & wisely to foresee the future, & thinke of timly remedy. In the agitation of their thoughts, and much discours of things hear aboute, at length they began to incline to this conclusion, of remoovall to some other place. Not out of any newfanglednes, or other such like giddie humor, by which men are oftentimes transported to their great hurt & danger, but for sundrie weightie & solid reasons; some of the cheefe of which I will hear briefly touch. And first, they saw & found by experience the hardnes of the place & countrie to be such, as few in comparison would come to them, and fewer that would bide it out, and continew 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 & were contented with. But though they loved their persons, approved their cause, and honoured their sufferings, yet they left them as it weer weeping, as Orpah did her mother in law Naomie, or as those Romans did Cato in Utica, who desired to be excused & borne with, though they could not all be Catoes.⁶ For many, though they desird to injoye the ordinances of God in their puritie, and the libertie of the gospell with them, yet, alas, they admitted of bondage, with danger of conscience, rather then to indure these hardships; yea, some preferred & chose the prisons in England, rather then this libertie 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,

5. citie: After leaving England, the Separatists settled in the city of Leyden in the Netherlands. They lived there until 1620, near the end of a twelve-year truce (begun in March 1609) in the Netherlands's long war of independence from Spain.

6. Orpah . . . Catoes: In the Old Testament, Orpah and Ruth were the daughters-in-law of Naomi; after their husbands died, Naomi wanted the two women to return to their own people. Orpah wept and left, but Ruth remained with Naomi (Ruth 1: 1-20). Cato the Younger (95 BCE-46 BCE), a Roman statesman, was intensely devoted to the Republic and opposed to Julius Caesar, who was gaining unprecedented power in Rome. Cato committed suicide after forces led by Scipio, another defender of the Republic, were defeated by Caesar.

& take away these discouragements. Yea, their pastor would often say, that many of those who both wrate & preached now against them, if they were in a place wher they might have libertie and live comfortably, they would then practise as they did.

Secondly. They saw that though the people generally bore all these difficulties very cherfully, & with a resolute courage, being in the best & strength of their years, yet old age began to steale on many of them, (and their great & continuall labours, 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 sinke under their burdens, or both. And therefore according to the devine proverb, that a wise man seeth the plague when it cometh, & hideth him selfe, Pro. 22. 3., so they like skillfull & beaten souldiers were fearfull either to be intrapped or surrounded by their enimies, so as they should neither be able to fight nor flie; and therfor thought it better to dislodge betimes to some place of better advantage & less danger, if any such could be found. Thirdly; as necessitie was a taskmaster over them, so they were forced to be such, not only to their servants, but in a sorte, to their dearest children; the which as it did not a litle wound the tender harts of many a loving father & mother, so it produced likewise sundrie sad & sorrowful effects. For many of their children, that were of best dispositions and gracious inclinations, haveing lernde to bear the yoake in their youth,⁷ and willing to bear parte of their parents burden, were, often times, so oppressed with their hevie labours, that though their minds were free and willing, yet their bodies bowed under the weight of the same, and became decreped in their early youth; the vigor of nature being consumed in the very budd as it were. But that which was more lamentable, and of all sorowes most hevie to be borne, was that many of their children, by these occasions, and the great licentiousnes of youth in that countrie,⁸ and the manifold temptations of the place, were drawne away by evill examples into extravagante & dangerous courses, getting the raines off their neks, & departing from their parents. Some became souldiers, others tooke upon them farr viages by sea, and other some worse courses, tending to dissolutnes & the danger of their soules, to the great greefe of their parents and dishonour of God. So that they saw their posteritie would be in danger to degenerate & be corrupted.

Lastly, (and which was not least,) a great hope & inward zeall they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way therunto, for the propagating & advancing the gospell 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 performning of so great a work.

These, & some other like reasons, moved them to undertake this resolution of their removall; the which they afterward prosecuted with so great difficulties, as by the sequell will appeare.

7. to bear . . . youth: See Lamentations 3:27: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke of his youth."

8. great licentiousness of youth in that countrie: To the horror of the Separatists, who devoted the Sabbath entirely to religion and worship, after attending church Dutch children spent the rest of the day feasting and playing games.

The place they had thoughts on was some of those vast & unpeopled countries of America, which are frutfull & fitt for habitation, being devoyd of all civill inhabitants, wher ther are only salvage & brutish men, which range up and downe, litle otherwise then the wild beasts of the same. This proposition being made publike and coming to the scanning of all, it raised many variable opinions amongst men, and caused many fears & doubts amongst them selves. Some, from their reasons & hops conceived, laboured to stirr up & encourage the rest to undertake & prosecute the same; others, againe, out of their fears, objected against it, & sought to diverte from it, aledging many things, and those neither unreasonable nor unprobable; as that it was a great designe, and subjecte to many unconceivable perills & dangers; as, besids the casulties of the seas (which none can be freed from) the length of the vioage was such, as the weake bodys of women and other persons worne out with age & traville (as many of them were) could never be able to endure. And yet if they should, the miseries of the land which they should be exposed unto, would be to hard to be borne; and lickly, some or all of them together, to consume & utterly to ruinate them. For ther they should be liable, to famine, and nakednes, & the wante, in a maner, of all things. The chang of aire, diate, & drinking of water, would infecte their bodies with sore sicknesses, and greevous diseases. And also those which should escape or overcome these difficulties, should yett be in continuall danger of the salvage people, who are cruell, barbarous, & most trecherous, being most furious in their rage, and merciles wher they overcome; not being contente only to kill, & take away life, but delight to tormente men in the most bloodie mañer that may be; fleaing some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting of the members & joynts of others by peesmeale, and broiling on the coles, eate the collops⁹ of their flesh in their sight whilst they live; with other cruelties horrible to be related. 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 weake to quake & tremble. It was funder objected, that it would require greater sumes of money to furnish such a vooage, and to fitt them with necessaries, then their consumed estats would amounte too; and yett they must as well looke to be seconded with supplies, as presently to be trāsported. Also many presidents of ill success, & lamentable miseries befalne others in the like designs, were easie to be found, and not forgotten to be aledged; besids their owne experience, in their former troubles & hardships in their removall into Holand, and how hard a thing it was for them to live in that strange place, though it was a neighbour countrie, & a civill and rich comone wealth.

It was answered, that all great & honourable 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 likly, yet they were not cartaine; it might be sundrie of the things feared might never befale; others by providente care & 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

9. collops: Cooking term for slices of meat.

such attempts were not to be made and undertaken without good ground & reason; not rashly or lightly as many have done for curiositie or hope of gaina, &c. But their condition was not ordinarie; their ends were good & honourable; their calling lawfull, & urgente; and therefore they might expecte the blessing of God in their proceeding. Yea, though they should loose their lives in this action, yet might they have comforte in the same, and their endeavors would be honourable. They lived hear but as men in exile, & in a poore condition; and as great miseries might possibly befall them in this place, for the 12. years of truce were now out, & ther was nothing but beating of drumes, and preparing for warr, the events wherof are allway uncertaine. The Spaniard might prove as cruell as the salvages of America, and the famine and pestelence as sore hear as ther, & their libertie less to looke out for remedie. After many other perticuler things answered & aledged on both sids, it was fully concluded by the major parte, to put this designe in execution, and to prosecute it by the best means they could.

CHAPTER 9

OF THEIR VIOAGE, & HOW THEY PASSED THE SEA, AND
OF THEIR SAFE ARRIVALL AT CAPE CODD

September 6. These troubles being blowne over, and now all being compacte together in one shipe,¹⁰ they put to sea againe with a prosperus winde, which continued diverce days together, which was some incouragemente unto them; yet according to the usuall maner many were afflicted with sea-sicknes. And I may not omite hear a spetiall worke of Gods providence. Ther was a proud & very profane yonge man, one of the sea-men, of a lustie,¹¹ able body, which made him the more hauty; he would allway be contemning the poore people in their sicknes, & cursing them dayly with greēous execrations, and did not let¹² to tell them, that he hoped to help to cast halfe of them over board before they came to their jurneys end, and to make mery with what they had; and if he were by any gently reprov'd, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it plased God before they came halfe seas over, to smite this yong man with a greeveous disease, of which he dyed in a desperate maner, and so was him selfe the first that was throwne overbord. Thus his curses light on his owne head; and it was an astonishment to all his fellows, for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him.

After they had injoyed faire winds and weather for a season, they were incountred many times with crosse winds, and mette with many feirce stormes, with which the shipe was shroudly¹³ shaken, and her upper works made very leakie; and one of the maine beames in the midd ships was bowed & craked, which put them in some fear that

10. together in one shipe: The original plan called for two ships to sail from England, the *Speedwell* and the *Mayflower*. The *Speedwell*, a smaller boat that brought Bradford and the other members of the Separatist community from Holland to England, proved to be unseaworthy. During the delay, some members of the Holland group decided not to go to the New World; 102 people eventually sailed on the *Mayflower*.

11. lustie: Healthy and strong.

12. let: Hesitate.

13. shroudly: Early form of *shrewdly*, meaning wickedly.