

ALBERT ADDISON

THE ROMANTIC STORY
OF THE MAYFLOWER
PILGRIMS, AND ITS
PLACE IN THE LIFE OF
TO-DAY

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Addison A.

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Содержание

I	7
II	11
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	13

Albert Christopher Addison

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PREFACE

By a strange yet happy coincidence, on the very day the writer of these lines sat silent in a Pilgrim cell at Boston – the Lincolnshire town where the Pilgrims were imprisoned in their first attempt to flee their native country – pondering on the past and inscribing his humble lines to the New World pioneers, the President of the American Republic was at Provincetown, Massachusetts, dedicating a giant monument to the planters of New Plymouth, the last of the many memorials erected to them. The date was the fifth of August, 1910. President Taft in his address at the commemoration ceremonies declared very truly that the purpose which prompted the Pilgrims' progress and the spirit which animated them furnish the United States to-day with the highest ideals of moral life and political citizenship. Three years before, another American President, Mr. Roosevelt, at the cornerstone laying of this monument, enlarged on the character of their achievement, and in ringing words proclaimed its immensity and world-wide significance.

Down through the years the leaders of men have borne burning witness to the wonderful work of the Pilgrim Fathers. Its influence is deep-rooted in the world's history to-day, and in the life and the past of our race it stands its own enduring monument.

The object of the present narrative is to give to the reader an account of the Mayflower Pilgrims that is concise and yet sufficiently comprehensive to embrace all essentials respecting the personality and pilgrimage of the Forefathers, whom the poet Whittier pictures to us in vivid verse as:

those brave men who brought
To the ice and iron of our winter time
A will as firm, a creed as stern, and wrought
With one mailed hand and with the other fought.

In the pages which follow, the Old World homes and haunts of the Pilgrim Fathers are depicted and described. The story has the advantage of having been written on the scene of their early trials, concerted plans of escape, and stormy emigration, by one who, from long association, is familiar with the history and traditions of Boston and the quaint old sister port of Gainsborough, and perhaps imparts to the work some feeling of the life and local atmosphere of those places in the days that are dealt with, and before. The Pilgrims are followed into Holland and on their momentous journey across seas to the West. The story aims at being trustworthy and up-to-date as regards the later known facts of Pilgrim history and the developments which reflect it in our own time. It does what no other book on the subject has attempted: it traces the individual lives and varying fortunes of the Pilgrims after their settlement in the New World; and it states the steps taken in recent years to perpetuate the memory of the heroic band. The tale that is told is one of abiding interest to the Anglo-Saxon race; and its attractiveness in these pages is enhanced by the series of illustrations which accompanies the printed record. Grateful acknowledgment is made of much kindly assistance rendered during the preparation of the work, especially by the Honourable William S. Kyle, Treasurer of the First (Pilgrim) Church at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Men they were who could not bend;

Blest Pilgrims, surely, as they took for guide A will by sovereign Conscience sanctified.

From Rite and Ordinance abused they fled To Wilds where both were utterly unknown.

– Wordsworth, "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," Part III. Aspects of Christianity in America, I. The Pilgrim Fathers.

In romance of circumstance and the charm of personal heroism the story of the Pilgrim Fathers is pre-eminent.

– J. A. Doyle's "English in America."

The coming hither of the Pilgrim three centuries ago ... shaped the destinies of this Continent, and therefore profoundly affected the destiny of the whole world.

– President Roosevelt, at the laying of the corner-stone of the Pilgrim Memorial Monument at Provincetown, Massachusetts, August 20th, 1907.

FROM A PILGRIM CELL

*The Pilgrims' Cells,
Guildhall, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

This is written in a Pilgrim cell, one of those dark and narrow dungeons which the Pilgrim Fathers tenanted three hundred and four years ago, in the autumn of 1607, and behind the heavy iron bars of which men have for generations delighted to be locked in memory of their lives and deeds. The present-day gaoler, less terrible than his predecessor of Puritan times, has ushered me in and closed the rusty gate upon me, and left me alone, a willing prisoner for a space. I look around, but do not start and shrink in mortal dread as must once the hapless captives here immured.

'Tis a gloomy place as a rule; but just now some outer basement doors, flung open, admit the autumn sunlight, which floods the hall floor and penetrates to the cell where I am seated. To get here I have stooped and sidled through an opening a foot and a half wide and five feet deep, set in a whitewashed wall fourteen inches thick. I stand with arms outstretched, and find that the opposite walls may be pressed with the finger-tips of each hand. The cell extends back seven feet, and the height is the same between the bare stone floor and the roughly boarded roof. All is dingy, cobwebbed, musty, and silent as the grave. Like the neighbouring tenement it is cold, mean, melancholy, fit only to be shunned. Yet its associations are dear indeed. For this is holy ground, a hallowed spot, a Mecca of modern pilgrims. It has a history held sacred in two hemispheres, that of religious persecution, of loyal resolution, of physical fetters and spiritual freedom.

Such is the story inscribed upon these walls, a record which may be read in all their time-worn stones, on every inch of their rusted bolts and bars. For they are the cells of the Pilgrim Fathers. Here was the first rude break in their weary worldly progress, a journey which was to continue with affliction into Holland, thence back to Plymouth, and, after a last adieu there to English soil, on in the little Mayflower to New Plymouth and a New England.

Alone in a Pilgrim cell! What thoughts the situation kindles; how eagerly the imagination shapes and clothes them; what scenes this mouldy atmosphere unfolds. The very solitude is eloquent with pious reminiscence; the void is filled again, peopled with those spectres of an imperishable past; their prayers and praise fall on the listening ear, a soft appeal for grace and strength, the lulling notes of a rough psalmody; then answering dreams and visions of the night.

THE AUTHOR.

1911.

I

OLD WORLD HOMES AND PILGRIM SHRINES

View each well-known scene:

Think what is now and what hath been.— Scott.

Lincolnshire stands pre-eminent among the English shires for inspiring records of trials borne and conflicts waged for conscience' sake. The whole country, from the lazy Trent to the booming eastern sea, teems moreover with religious interest. To read what happened between the births of two famous Lincolnshire men – Archbishop Langton in the twelfth century; and Methodist John Wesley in the seventeenth – is like reading the history of English nonconformity. The age of miracles was long since past; yet Stephen Langton, Primate of England and Cardinal of Rome, was a champion of the national liberties. He aided, nay instigated, the wresting of Magna Charta from King John. That was not the result of his education; 'twas the Lincolnshire blood in his veins. For the outrage on the Romish traditions the Archbishop was suspended by the Pope. Probably he would have been hanged if they could have got at him.

But we can go back farther even than Langton's time. Not many miles from Gainsborough is the Danish settlement of Torksey, rich in ecclesiastical lore. Here Paulinus baptised the Lindissians on the sandy shore of the Trent, in the presence of Edwin, King of Northumbria. Hereabout, they say, King Alfred the Great was married to the daughter of Etheldred, and the old wives of Gainsborough used to recite tales of Wickliffe hiding on the spot where once stood the dwelling-place of Sweyn and of Canute.

Lincolnshire has always had the courage to bear religious stress, and strange things are read of it. It was near Louth that the insurrection known as "The Pilgrimage of Grace" began. Eighty-five years before the sailing of the Mayflower, and thirty years before William Brewster was born, the ecclesiastical commissioners for the suppression of monasteries (which were plentiful in Lincolnshire) went down to hold a visitation at Louth. But the excursion was not to their pleasure. As one of them rode into the town he heard the alarm bell pealing from the tower, and then he saw people swarming into the streets carrying bills and staves, "the stir and noise arising hideous." He fled into the church for sanctuary, but they hauled him out, and with a sword at his breast bade him swear to be true to the Commonwealth. He swore. That was the Examiner. When the Registrar came on the scene he was with scant ceremony dragged to the market cross, where his commission was read in derision and then torn up, and he barely escaped with his life. For the same cause there were risings at Caistor and Horncastle – two of the demurest of modern towns. The Bishop's Chancellor was murdered in the streets of Horncastle and the body stripped and the garments torn to rags; and at Lincoln the episcopal palace was plundered and partially demolished.

But Lincolnshire need rest no fame upon such merits as these. Greater honour belongs to the county, for it was Lincolnshire that made the most important of all contributions to the building of America when it sent forth the Pilgrim Fathers, and afterwards the Puritan leaders, who met for conference in the eventful days of the movement in Boston town, in Sempringham manor house, or in Tattershall Castle, to lay the foundations of the Massachusetts settlements. And, as Doyle in his "English in America," truly says, "In romance of circumstance and the charm of personal heroism the story of the Pilgrim Fathers is pre-eminent. They were the pioneers who made it easy for the rest of the host to follow." Their colony was the germ of the New England States.

Amid the quiet pastures threaded by the Ryton stream, where the counties of York and Lincoln and Nottingham meet, are two small villages, the homes of the only Pilgrim Fathers satisfactorily traced to English birthplaces. A simple, pathetic interest clings to these secluded spots. At Scrooby is the manor house wherein William Brewster, the great heart of the pilgrimage and foremost planter

of New Plymouth, was born. Archbishops of York had found a home here for centuries; Wolsey, at the close of his strangely checkered career, lodged there and planted a mulberry tree in the garden; Bishop Bonner dated a letter thence to Thomas Cromwell. And when William Brewster became Elder Brewster, pensive Puritans often gathered there to worship, "and with great love he entertained them when they came, making provision for them to his great charge." His condition was prosperous and he could well afford to do it. A Cambridge man, Brewster early took his degree at Peterhouse; he next saw service at Court, and accompanied Secretary Davison to the Netherlands; afterwards succeeding his father and grandfather as post on the great North Road at Scrooby, a responsible and well-paid office, which he filled for nearly twenty years.

The parish church, "not big, but very well builded," as Leland said; the quaint old vicarage; the parish pound, and all that remains of the parish stocks: these stand witness to the antiquity of Scrooby. A little railway station and rushing Northern expresses are almost the only signs of twentieth century activity.

The Scrooby community was an off-shoot from that at Gainsborough, the first Separatist church formed in the North of England, of which the pastor was John Smyth, a graduate of Cambridge, an "eminent man in his time" and "well beloved of most men." Smyth preached at Gainsborough from 1602 to 1606, when he was driven into exile. The members of his church gathered from miles around to its services, crossing into Gainsborough by the ferry-boat on the Trent. This continued for two or three years, until at length "these people became two distinct bodies or churches, and in regard of distance did congregate severally; for they were of sundry towns and villages."

Richard Clyfton, once rector of Babworth near Retford – "a grave and reverend preacher" – was the first pastor at Scrooby; and with him as teacher was "that famous and worthy man Mr. John Robinson," another seceder from the English Church, who afterwards was pastor for many years "till the Lord took him away by death."

Next to Brewster, William Bradford was the most prominent of the lay preachers among the Scrooby fraternity. He became Governor Bradford of the Plymouth Colony – "the first American citizen of the English race who bore rule by the free choice of his brethren" – and the historian of the Plymouth Plantation. Bradford, a yeoman's son with comfortable home surroundings, lived at Austerfield, an ancient agricultural village about three miles from Scrooby on the Yorkshire side. The pretty cottage of his birth is still shown by the roadside near the Norman church, and the parish register bears the record of his baptism, on March 19, 1589. A youth of seventeen years, he walked across the fields to join the Scrooby brethren in their meetings. He and Brewster, the two men who were to impress their individuality so powerfully upon the religious life of the American people, became firm friends, and, says their later historian,¹ that friendship, "formed amid the tranquil surroundings of the North Midlands of their native land, was to be deepened by common labours and aspirations, and by common hardships and sufferings endured side by side both in the Old World and the New."

But it was Robinson to whom they jointly owed much guidance. When, in Bradford's own words, "They could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted and persecuted on every side;" when "some were taken and clapt up in prison, and others had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands;" and when "the most were fain to fly and leave their homes and habitations and the means of their livelihood," it was John Robinson, the devout and learned pastor, who led them out of Nottinghamshire into Holland, and there inspired within them the vision of complete earthly freedom in the new country across the Atlantic.

Robinson was a Lincolnshire man. Gainsborough claims him, and on Gainsborough his first solid memorial has been raised. Many are familiar with Gainsborough who have never seen the town. Up the Trent sailed Sweyn, the sanguinary Dane, to conquest; and his son Canute – he that ordered

¹ Dr. John Brown in "The Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors."

back the rising tide, and got a wetting for his pains – was at Gainsborough when he succeeded him as King of England.

Gainsborough is the St. Ogg's of "The Mill on the Floss," and the Trent is the Floss, along which Tom and Maggie Tulliver "wandered with a sense of travel, to see the rushing spring-tide, the awful Ægir, come up like a hungry monster" – the inrush of the first wave of the tide, a phenomenon peculiar at that time to both the Trent and the Witham.

What George Eliot wrote of St. Ogg's describes old Gainsborough to-day – "A town which carries the trace of its long growth and history like a millennial tree, and has sprung up and developed in the same spot between the river and the low hill from the time when the Roman legion turned their backs on it from the camp on the hillside, and the long-haired sea-kings came up the river and looked with fierce eyes at the fatness of the land."

And in sketching the history of St. Ogg's the novelist remembered that time of ecclesiastical ferment now written about, when "Many honest citizens lost all their possessions for conscience' sake, and went forth beggared from their native town. Doubtless there are many houses standing now," she said, "on which those honest citizens turned their backs in sorrow, quaint gabled houses looking on the river, jammed between newer warehouses, and penetrated by surprising passages, which turn at sharp angles till they lead you out on a muddy strand over-flowed continually by the rushing tide." Did not Maggie Tulliver, in white muslin and simple, noble beauty, attend an "idiotic beggar" in the still existing Old Hall, where the Fathers worshipped and John Smyth taught – "a very quaint place, with broad, jaded stripes painted on the walls, and here and there a show of heraldic animals of a bristly, long-snouted character, the cherished emblems of a noble family once the seigniors of this now civic hall"?

In this Old Hall the Separatist church was founded in 1602, and here it had the friendly protection of the Hickman family, Protestants whose religious sympathies had brought them persecution and exile in the past.

But the "foreign-looking town" which George Eliot endowed with romance had, like the neighbouring estuary town of Boston, which her language might have served almost as well to paint, been the abode of hard, historic fact. We can imagine the Scrooby brethren crossing the ancient ferry to bid their friends at Gainsborough farewell. For in 1607 we read, this "groupe of earnest professors of religion and bold assertors of the principle of freedom and personal conviction in respect to the Christian faith and practice" had formed the resolution to seek in another country the liberty they found not at home.² But it was as unlawful to flee from their native land as to remain in it without conforming, for the statute of 13 Richard II, still in force, made emigrating without authority a penal crime.

Not Gainsborough alone in the North and East appeals to the never-ending stream of reverent New World pilgrims to Old World shrines. On an autumn day of the year above named came Elder Brewster to the famed new borough of Boston. There he cautiously looked about him, and made a bargain with the captain of a Dutch vessel to receive his party on board "as privately as might be." But they were betrayed, arrested, stripped of their belongings and driven into the town, a spectacle for the gaping crowd, then haled before the justices at the Guildhall and "put into ward," there to await the pleasure of the Privy Council concerning them.

Boston is a unique old shrine – a place "familiar with forgotten years," as George Eliot says; a town, as already hinted, resembling Gainsborough in many outward features, but even wealthier in

² "Seeing themselves thus molested, and that there was no hope of their continuance there, they resolved to go into ye Low Countries, wher they heard was freedome of religion for all men; as also how Sundrie from London, and other parts of ye land had been exiled and persecuted for ye same cause, and were gone thither and lived at Amsterdam and in other places of ye land, so affter they had continued together about a year, and kept their meetings every Saboth, in one place or other, exercising the worship of God amongst themselves, notwithstanding all ye dilligence and malice of their adversaries, they seeing they could no longer continue in yt condition, they resolved to get over into Hollād as they could which was in yy year 1607-1608." – Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation."

associations dear to the hearts of New World pilgrims. Boston and Gainsborough are regarded as the two most foreign-looking towns in England. Many of Boston's inhabitants still hold the brave spirit which enabled their ancestors to endure the religious stress of the seventeenth century. It has been a cradle of liberty since that idea first held men's thoughts and roused them to action.

The quaint buildings, the ancient towers of Hussey and of Kyme, the Guildhall, the Grammar School, the great church with its giant tower all crusted o'er with the dust of antiquity: these stood when Bradford and Brewster and their companions in search of freedom were arraigned before the magistrates for the high crime and misdemeanor of trying to leave their native land.

They must have had secret friends in the place; for some time after their Boston adventure the Government sent down Commissioners to make serious inquiry as to who had cut off the crosses from the tops of the maces carried before the Mayor to church "on Sundays and Thursdays and solemn times." John Cotton, the Puritan vicar, openly condemned the act. Suspicion fell upon churchwarden Atherton Hough. But he denied it, though "he confessed he did before that year break off the hand and arm of a picture of a Pope (as it seemed) standing over a pillar of the outside of the steeple very high, which hand had the form of a church in it." The confession seems to have been safely made, and doubtless churchwarden Hough was proud of it. He might have been better employed at that moment; but if any be tempted to censure his Puritan zeal, let them remember the temper of the times in which he lived. There was something more than wanton mischief behind it all. It was not in fact a "picture" of a Pope, but an image much more innocent. But the resemblance was sufficient for Atherton Hough.

The venerable Guildhall, where Brewster and the rest faced the justices, stands in a street containing the queerest of riverside warehouses. One of them, old Gysors' Hall, was once the home of a family belonging to the merchant guilds of Boston, which gave to London two Mayors and a Constable of the Tower in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Guildhall itself dates from the thirteenth century; the image of St. Mary which once adorned its front shared the fate of the "picture" on the church tower, with the difference that the Virgin vanished more completely than the "Pope." The hall is regularly used by the public; and local authorities with long and honourable history still deliberate in the ancient court-room, with its wagon roof, its arch beams, its wainscoted walls, and the Boston coat-of-arms and the table of Boston Mayors since 1545 proudly displayed to view. Except for its fittings and furniture the chamber presents much the appearance now that it did when the Pilgrim Fathers, brought up from the cells which exist to-day just as when they tenanted them, stood pathetic figures on its floor and were interrogated by a body of justices, courteous and well-disposed, but powerless to give them back their liberty.

II

THE ARREST AT BOSTON AND FLIGHT TO HOLLAND

*Well worthy to be magnified are they
Who, with sad hearts, of friends and country took
A last farewell, their loved abodes forsook,
And hallowed ground in which their fathers lay.*

Wordsworth.

Great things were destined to result from that none too joyous jaunt of Elder Brewster's when, late in 1607, charged by the Scrooby community to find them a way out of England, he went down to Boston and chartered a ship. William Bradford was of the Boston party. Everything was quietly done. In all likelihood the intending emigrants never entered the town, but gathered at some convenient spot on the Witham tidal estuary where the rushing Ægir hissed.

Whether the Dutch skipper was dissatisfied with the fare promised him, or he feared detection and punishment, cannot be told. Yet, when the fugitives were all on board his vessel, and appeared about to sail, they were arrested by minions of the law. Bitter must have been their disappointment; stern, we may be sure, their remonstrance. But they could do nothing more than upbraid the treacherous Dutchman. They were not kept long in doubt as to their fate. Put back into open boats, their captors "rifled and ransacked them, searching them to their shirts for money, yea, even the women further than became modesty, and then carried them back into the town, and made them a spectacle and wonder to the multitude who came flocking on all sides to behold them." A goodly sight for this curious Boston mob. "Being thus first by the catchpole officers rifled and stripped of their money, books, and much other goods," proceeds the account, with an honest contempt for the writings of the law, "they were presented to the magistrates, and messengers were sent to inform the Lords of the Council of them; and so they were committed to ward."

The basement cells in which the prisoners were placed had been in use at that time for about sixty years, for "in 1552 it was ordered that the kitchens under the Town Hall and the chambers over them should be prepared for a prison and a dwelling-house for one of the sergeants." There must have been more cells formerly. Two of them now remain. They are entered by a step some eighteen inches high; are about six feet broad by seven feet long; and in lieu of doors they are made secure by a barred iron gate.

Into these dens the captives were thrust. Short of a dungeon underground, no place of confinement could have been more depressing. Only the heavy whitewashed gate, scarce wide enough to allow a man to enter, admits the light and air; and the interior of each cell is dark as night. We can imagine the misery of men fated to inhabit for long such abodes of gloom; it must have been extreme. They look as if they might have served as coal cellars for feeding the great open fireplaces which, with their spits and jacks and winding-chains, still stand there in the long open kitchen much as they did when they cooked the last mayoral banquet or May Day dinner for the old Bostonians.

A curious winding stair (partly left with its post), terminating at a trapdoor in the court-room floor, was the way by which prisoners ascended and descended on their passage to and from the Court above.

Now these justices who had the dealing with the Pilgrim Fathers were humane men, and were not without a feeling of sympathy for the unhappy captives. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that during some portion of this time, when their presence was not required by the Court, they may have found them better quarters than the Guildhall cells. There was a roomy ramshackle pile near

the church in the market-place, half shop, half jail, of irregular shape, with long low roof, which in 1584 was "made strong" as regards the prison part, though in 1603 – four years before the date under notice – it was so insecure that an individual detained there was "ordered to have irons placed upon him for his more safe keeping," with a watchman to look after him! And thirty years later the jail, "and the prison therein called Little-Ease," were repaired.

We know what "Little-Ease" means well enough; and so did many a wretched occupant of these barbarous places. The Bishop of Lincoln, in the old persecuting days, had at his palace at Woburn "a cell in his prison called Little-Ease," so named because it was so small that those confined in it could neither stand upright nor lie at length. Other bishops possessed similar means of bodily correction and spiritual persuasion.

This was worse than the Guildhall cells, with all their gloomy horror; and if the magistrates entertained their unwilling guests at the town jail, we may rest satisfied they did not eat the bread of adversity and drink the water of affliction in Little-Ease, but in some more spacious apartment. We have no evidence that they did so entertain them, and the traditional lodging-place of these intercepted Pilgrims is the Guildhall and nowhere else. It is probable, all the same, that a good part of their captivity was spent in the town prison.

Although the magistrates, from Mayor John Mayson downward, felt for the sufferers and doubtless ameliorated their condition as far as they could, it was not until after a month's imprisonment that the greater part were dismissed and sent back, baffled, plundered, and heart-broken, to the places they had so lately left, there to endure the scoffs of their neighbours and the rigours of ecclesiastical discipline.

Seven of the principal men, treated as ring-leaders, were kept in prison and bound over to the assizes. Apparently nothing further was done with them. Brewster is said to have been the chief sufferer both in person and pocket. He had eluded a warrant by leaving for Boston, and we know this was in September, because on the fifteenth of that month the messenger charged to apprehend Brewster and another man, one Richard Jackson of Scrooby, certified to the Ecclesiastical Court at York "that he cannot find them, nor understand where they are." On the thirtieth of September also the first payment is recorded to Brewster's successor as postmaster at Scrooby.

How the imprisoned Separatists fared, there is nothing to show. No assize record exists. The Privy Council Register, which could have thrown light on the matter, was destroyed in the Whitehall fire of 1618; and the Boston Corporation records, which doubtless contained some entry on the subject that would have been of the greatest interest now, are also disappointing, as the leaves for the period, the first of a volume, have disappeared.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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