

# Of Plymouth Plantation

William Bradford

**BACKGROUND** By the time the Pilgrims landed at Cape Cod, the local Native American tribes had had 100 years of contact and conflict with European explorers. Squanto, who became the Pilgrims' interpreter, had learned English when he was kidnapped by an English expedition in 1605. The Nauset Indians, who attacked the Pilgrims shortly after their arrival, had survived years of skirmishes with English explorers, including a 1609 battle with John Smith of Jamestown fame. Keep these events in mind as you read Bradford's account.

## Their Safe Arrival at Cape Cod

But to omit other things (that I may be brief) after long beating at sea they<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .

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. . . . **A**

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  
10 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

**ANALYZE VISUALS**  
Describe the landscape that awaits the travellers. What emotional response might they have had to this sight?

**A CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**  
Reread lines 4–7. What does this paragraph reveal about the way Puritans viewed God?

1. **they:** Bradford refers to the Pilgrims in the third person, even though he is one of them.

*The Landing of the Pilgrims*  
(1803–1806), Michael Felice Corne.  
Tempera on canvas. Pilgrim Hall  
Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts.

succor.<sup>2</sup> It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them,<sup>3</sup> 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  
20 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<sup>4</sup> 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  
30 parts of the world. . . . **B**

**solace** (sŏl'ĭs) *n.* comfort in sorrow or distress

**B SUMMARIZE**  
Reread lines 16–30. What challenges confronted the colonists when they arrived at Cape Cod?

2. **to seek for succor:** to look for help or relief.
3. **It is . . . refreshing them:** a reference to the Biblical account of the courteous reception given to Paul ("the Apostle") and his companions by the inhabitants of Malta (Acts 27:41–28:2).
4. **Pisgah:** the mountain from whose peak Moses saw the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:1–4).



*The First Winter of the Pilgrims in Massachusetts, 1620 (1800s). Colored engraving. The Granger Collection, New York.*

### The First Encounter

Being thus arrived at Cape Cod the 11th of November, and necessity calling them to look out a place for habitation (as well as the master's and mariners' importunity); they having brought a large shallop<sup>5</sup> with them out of England, stowed in quarters in the ship, they now got her out and set their carpenters to work to trim her up; but being much bruised and shattered in the ship with foul weather, they saw she would be long in mending. Whereupon a few of them **tendered** themselves to go by land and discover those nearest places, whilst the shallop was in mending; . . .

**tender** (tĕn'dər) *v.* to offer formally

After this, the shallop being got ready, they set out again for the better discovery of this place, and the master of the ship desired to go himself. So there went some thirty men but found it to be no harbor for ships but only for boats. There was also found two of their [the Indians'] houses covered with mats, and sundry of their implements in them, but the people were run away and could not be seen. Also there was found more of their corn and of their beans of various colors; the corn and beans they [the English] brought away, purposing to give them [the Indians] full satisfaction when they should meet with any of them as, about some six months afterward they did, to their good content.<sup>6</sup>

And here is to be noted a special **providence** of God, and a great mercy to this poor people, that here they got seed to plant them corn the next year, or else they might have starved, for they had none nor any likelihood to get any till the season had been past, as the sequel did manifest.<sup>7</sup> Neither is it likely they had had this, if the first voyage had not been made, for the ground was now all covered with snow and hard frozen; but the Lord is never wanting unto His in their greatest needs; let His holy name have all the praise. ☉

**providence** (prŏv'ĭ-dĕns) *n.* an instance of divine care

The month of November being spent in these affairs, and much foul weather falling in, the 6th of December they sent out their shallop again with ten of their principal men and some seamen, upon further discovery, intending to circulate that deep bay of Cape Cod. The weather was very cold and it froze so hard as the spray of the sea lighting on their coats, they were as if they had been glazed. . . . [The next night they landed and] made them a barricado<sup>8</sup> as usually they did every night, with logs, stakes, and thick pine boughs, the height of a man, leaving it open to leeward,<sup>9</sup> partly to shelter them from the cold and wind (making their fire in the middle and lying round about it) and partly to defend them from any sudden assaults of the savages, if they should surround them; so being very weary, they betook them to rest. But about midnight they heard a hideous and great cry, and their sentinel called "Arm! arm!" So they bestirred them and stood to their arms and shot off a couple of muskets, and then the noise

☉ **CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**  
Reread lines 48–54. What belief helps Bradford justify taking the corn?

5. **shallop** (shāl'əp): an open boat usually used in shallow waters.

6. **purposing . . . content**: intending to repay the Nauset Indians for the corn and beans they took, as they in fact did, to the Indians' satisfaction, six months later.

7. **as the sequel did manifest**: as the events that followed proved to be the case.

8. **barricado** (bār'ĭ-kā'dō): a barrier for defense.

9. **to leeward**: on the side sheltered from the wind.

ceased. They concluded it was a company of wolves or such like wild beasts, for one of the seamen told them he had often heard such a noise in Newfoundland.  
70 So they rested till about five of the clock in the morning; for the tide, and their purpose to go from thence, made them be stirring betimes. So after prayer they prepared for breakfast, and it being day dawning it was thought best to be carrying things down to the boat. But some said it was not best to carry the arms down, others said they would be the readier, for they had lapped them up in their coats from the dew; but some three or four would not carry theirs till they went themselves. Yet as it fell out, the water being not high enough, they laid them down on the bank side and came up to breakfast.

But presently, all on the sudden, they heard a great and strange cry, which they knew to be the same voices they heard in the night, though they varied  
80 their notes; and one of their company being abroad came running in and cried, "Men, Indians! Indians!" And withal, their arrows came flying amongst them. Their men ran with all speed to recover their arms, as by the good providence of God they did. In the meantime, of those that were there ready, two muskets were discharged at them, and two more stood ready in the entrance of their rendezvous but were commanded not to shoot till they could take full aim at them. And the other two charged again with all speed, for there were only four had arms there, and defended the barricado, which was first assaulted. The cry of the Indians was dreadful, especially when they [the Indians] saw their men [the English] run out  
90 about upon them. But some running out with coats of mail on, and cutlasses in their hands, they [the English] soon got their arms and let fly amongst them [the Indians] and quickly stopped their violence. . . .

**rendezvous** (rān'dā-vōō) *n.*  
a gathering place

Thus it pleased God to vanquish their enemies and give them deliverance; and by His special providence so to dispose that not any one of them were either hurt or hit, though their arrows came close by them and on every side [of] them; and sundry of their coats, which hung up in the barricado, were shot through and through. Afterwards they gave God solemn thanks and praise for their deliverance, and gathered up a bundle of their arrows and sent them into England afterward by the master of the ship, and called that place the First Encounter. . . .

### The Starving Time

100 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<sup>10</sup> and other diseases which this long 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. 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,

10. **scurvy** (skŭr'vē): a disease caused by lack of vitamin C.



*The First Thanksgiving (1914)*, Jennie Augusta Brownscombe. © Burstein Collection/Corbis.

3) n.  
 110 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. . . . D

### Indian Relations

All this while the Indians came skulking about them, and would sometimes show themselves aloof off, but when any approached near them, they would run away; and once they [the Indians] stole away their [the colonists'] 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. He 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.

**ANALYZE VISUALS**  
 Contrast the scenery in this image with the landscape on page 102. How has the view of nature changed?

**D CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**  
 Reread lines 106–114. What values are demonstrated by the seven colonists' responses to their ailing companions?

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,<sup>11</sup> called Massasoit. 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  
140 entertainment and some gifts given him, they made a peace with him (which hath now continued this 24 years) in these terms: **E**

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.
- 150 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.<sup>12</sup>
6. That when their men came to them, they should leave their bows and arrows behind them.

After these things he returned to his place called Sowams,<sup>13</sup> some 40 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  
160 profit, and never left them till he died.

### First Thanksgiving

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 great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides they had about a peck a meal a week  
170 to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not **feigned** but true reports. **E**

### **E** SUMMARIZE

Reread lines 122–141.  
What events led to the treaty with Massasoit?

**procure** (prō-kyōōr') v. to get by special effort; to obtain

**feigned** (fānd) *adj.* not real; pretended **feign** v.

11. **Sachem** (sā'chem): chief.

12. **He should send . . . peace:** Massasoit was to send representatives to other tribes to let them know about the treaty with the Pilgrims.

13. **Sowams** (sō'əmz): near the site of present-day Barrington, Rhode Island.