

**MEMOIRS OF THE
PILGRIMS
AT LEYDEN**

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Memoirs of the Pilgrims at Leyden by George Sumner

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GEORGE SUMNER

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OF

THE PILGRIMS AT LEYDEN.

BY

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MEMOIRS.

THE position and privileges enjoyed by the founders of Plymouth Colony, during their ten years' residence in the Netherlands, would seem to be not very clearly defined. Every one, who has examined this part of the history of our Pilgrim forefathers, must, I think, have been struck by the discrepancies in regard to it, which occur in the different statements that we have before us.

Robertson, Burke (in his *European Settlements in America*), and many other English writers of less name, represent their condition in any but favorable colors; and the disparaging statements of these authors have, in some cases, been adopted by Americans at home. The principal among these is the learned Chief-Justice Marshall, who speaks of the Pilgrims * as "an obscure sect which had acquired the appellation of Brownists," and which was forced to remove to Leyden. He then continues:—"There they resided several years in safe obscurity. This situation at length became irksome to them. Without persecution to give importance to the particular points which separated them from their other Christian brethren, they made no converts"; and then, as a cause for their removal to America, he asserts, that, "in the extinction of their church, they dreaded, too, the loss of those high attainments in spiritual knowledge which they deemed so favorable to truth."

The sneer contained in this passage was not necessary for the announcement of a historical fact, and it is evident that the Chief Justice has adopted the tone as well as

* Marshall's *Life of Washington*, Vol. I., p. 93.

the statement of Robertson. For this passage the author has given no authority, although Robertson, Hutchinson, and Chalmers are referred to as general authorities at the close of the chapter.*

Other writers, again, have represented in somewhat glowing colors the hospitality which was extended to the Pilgrims in Leyden, the unity which reigned among them while there, the attentions shown them by the magistrates, and the honors rendered to the remains of their pastor by the professors and learned men of the University.†

The time has gone by, when the just fame which has been won by those men who planted a nation can be either lessened or magnified by the recital of honors that they may have received in by-gone years; and one may search freely for the truth in regard to them, conscious, that, in developing that, small injury can be done to their memory.

I know not whether I deceive myself, but I am disposed to believe that much of what has been written in regard to the position in Holland of the founders of Plymouth Colony is erroneous; and that, although they were far from exciting, on the part of the Dutch people and magistrates, those feelings of contempt and ill-will towards themselves, the existence of which has been so often charged by their enemies, yet they were equally far from

* See *Life of Washington*, Vol. I., p. 93; also *Young's Pilgrims*, p. 48, note. Chief-Justice Marshall altered these expressions in a subsequent work, but did not pass, however, without experiencing severe reproaches from others, and particularly from the author of the *American Annals*, for the opinion he had uttered. "The historian," says Holmes, "who tells us that the Puritans removed from Leyden into the American wilderness because they were obscure and unpersecuted, must not expect to be believed." *American Annals*, Vol. I., Note XXI.; see also Vol. I., p. 159. In *Bozman's History of Maryland*, p. 376, is a reply to the author of the *Annals*, and a defence of the obnoxious expressions of Chief-Justice Marshall.

† In a work published during the present year at Leipzig, *Die Geschichte der Congregationalisten in New-England bis 1740*, von H. F. Uhden (*History of the Congregationalists in New England until 1740*), the idea of the author, drawn from the American authorities that he had consulted (among which is Cotton Mather), would appear to be, that the Pilgrims were enjoying, while in Holland, a good degree of worldly prosperity. The author of this book is a clergyman at Berlin, and was one of the deputation sent in 1841-2, by the king of Prussia, to inspect the state of the English church. The book itself was written at the suggestion of Dr. Neander, and, although in a foreign language, will prove, I believe, a valuable addition to our historical literature. The author has drawn largely from Buckus, a writer whose candor and moderation seem not to be appreciated in America as they merit.

experiencing any excess of kind attention and magisterial favor.

This opinion is the result of some special observations that I have been enabled to make in Holland, and it is the same which, as it strikes me, must be formed by all who examine the writings preserved to us of those who were constantly with the little band, from the time of their quitting England, in 1608, until their arrival in America. The authority of these writings (which have been recently brought before the public in a most excellent form by Mr. Young, accompanied by his valuable notes) is superior to that of any of the different historians who wrote at a later day. While the small, struggling colony was exposed to obloquy in England, and was fighting its way painfully along, against opposition, religious, political, and commercial, it was hardly to be expected that a historian devoted to its interest would neglect to avail himself of any thing which might appear, *at that time*, to reflect credit upon it. It was not the historian, but the advocate, who wrote. Remembering this, one may perhaps see a reason why "the careful Morton" has at times slightly colored some passages from Governor Bradford's *Journal*, and why Cotton Mather has drawn in many cases from authorities which Morton must have known, but which he does not appear to have regarded, and has, in other cases, made statements for which it would seem to require more than an ordinary degree of research to find any authority whatever.

I propose to examine some points in relation to the position of the Pilgrims while in Holland, and particularly the attentions that may have been extended to them by the Dutch people and magistrates.

But first let us see what was their position as shown by the best authority we possess, the writings of Governor Bradford.

Having seen six of their fellow-men—"men of piety and learning"—executed in England for their religious belief, their own friends put into prison, and themselves watched night and day that charges might be brought against them, they at length resolved, when all hopes of toleration

at home had fled, to remove to the Low Countries, "where they heard was freedom of religion for all men."^{*}

After making one unsuccessful attempt to leave England, suffering arrest and imprisonment from the Lincolnshire magistrates, encountering in a second attempt the perils of a violent storm, and being in imminent danger of shipwreck in the German Ocean, one part of these Pilgrims, among which Bradford is supposed to have been, arrived in the spring of 1608 at Amsterdam. Here they found countrymen who, like themselves, had suffered persecution for religion's sake; but, remaining only a few months, they removed, at the end of 1608 or beginning of 1609, to Leyden.†

"Being now here pitched," says Bradford, "they fell to such trades and employments as they best could, valuing peace and their spiritual comfort above any other riches whatsoever; and at length they came to raise a competent and comfortable living, and with hard and continual labor." When, however, in another place, he is naming the motives of the removal to America, a somewhat different tone is used. "And first, they found and saw 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 the great labor and hard fare, with other inconveniences, which they underwent and were contented with. . . . 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 prisons in England, rather

^{*} See Bradford's *Journal*, Young, p. 23.

† Bradford says of Leyden, that, "wanting that traffic by sea which Amsterdam enjoyed, it was not so beneficial for their outward means of living and estates." Young's *Pilgrims*, p. 35. This may be so; yet Leyden was at that time the principal manufacturing town of the Netherlands, and one of the most important in Europe. As many of the early colonists were weavers (see Young, note, p. 35), is it not reasonable to suppose that their removal to Leyden was caused by the fact that they would there more readily meet with employment than at Amsterdam? The cloth manufacture of Amsterdam, during the first half of the seventeenth century, was very trifling, when compared with that of Leyden.

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 that both writ and preached now against them, if they were in a place where they might have liberty and live comfortably, they would then practise as they did.*

Again, "They saw, that, although the people generally bore all their difficulties very cheerfully and with a resolute courage, being in the best of their strength, yet old age began to come on some of them, and their *great and continual labors*, with other crosses and sorrows, hastened it before the time." Again, their children "were oftentimes so oppressed with their heavy labors, that, although their minds were free and willing, yet their bodies bowed under the weight of the same and became decrepit in their early youth."† And again, "They lived here but as men in exile and in a poor condition."‡

This certainly does not show that they were living in a state of holiday comfort; neither is there here, nor throughout the writings of Governor Bradford, any evidence of kind attentions on the part of the Dutch people and magistrates. § On the contrary, we have, in different passages of his journal, strong evidence that no such favors were extended to them.

When he replies to the charge made by Baylie in his tract, || that the Pilgrims were driven out from Holland, and that the Dutch were weary of them, Bradford would naturally cite the strongest facts that could be found to prove the contrary; but the most he says is, that the Dutch, finding them painful and diligent in their callings, and careful in keeping their word, gave them employ-

* Young, p. 46.

† Ibid. p. 46.

‡ Ibid. p. 51.

§ It is curious to see how some passages from Bradford's journal have been colored by those who have made use of it. Bradford says of the Pilgrims (Young, p. 35), "Enjoying [in Holland] much sweet and delightful society and spiritual comfort together, in the ways of God," &c., &c. Morton omits the word "together," and adds in its place, "*being courteously entertained and lovingly respected* by the Dutch, amongst whom they were strangers." p. 18, Davis's edition. Prince, also, in giving this same passage from Bradford, says, they "live in great love and harmony both among themselves and their neighbour citizens for above eleven years."

|| *Dissuasive from the Errors of the Times*, by Robert Baylie, of Glasgow, 1645.