

ROWLAND' S RELATION

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Unlike the first and second papers, which are entirely factual, this paper, although in accord with the presently known facts, is largely fictional. It is an effort to create a credible biography (in autobiographical form) for the author's ancestor Pilgrim John Howland of the Mayflower, from the sparse and often conflicting evidence. F. G. D.

I am an old man now, and though, as the Psalmist says, by reason of strength I have come to fourscore years, they are become a labor and sorrow to me. Psalm 90. My good Bess having lately persuaded me to set my Last Will in order, whereby I have made such disposition of my earthly goods as seems just to me; and being still of perfect remembrance praise be to God, I have bethought me to make also some like disposition of the chattels as it were of my mind and memory. Which by God's mercy being laid up over a long life may indeed be of more worth and true instruction to my heirs than the bequest of 3 porringers, 2 pair of pillowbeers, a red waistcote, etc.

So though I be but rude in speech as the apostle says (2 Corinthians) I shall assay to set down here some relation of those events which have brought me to my present state and condition, which may serve as instruction to those who come after. For though we be depraved and corrupted beyond all man's remedy, yet as good Tindall tells, whosoever flieth to Christ Jesus can neither hear nor receive of God anything save mercy. To which end I shall commence my relation at the beginning, as it were, and so move forward to this day, hoping not to be shifted off more than need be with false wit and wisdom along the road.

Imprimis: I was born, as I have been told, (for no man knows his beginning more than he shall know his end) in the 34th year of the reign of our good Queen Bess, which is to say the year of Our Lord 1592, at Fen Stanton in the shire of Huntingdon. My father was a yeoman of the place, with lands in freehold hard by the Great North Road; which circumstance put us more into the great world than out of it, though to the northeast by but a few miles the Fens stretched out unbroke to Ely and beyond. In which damp places men lived who had never been to market at St. Ives or walked an upland furrow. Yet by a strange turn the Fens and the Road combined to bring my father some small fortune, for in my child- hood, driven by the vile wet and filthy fog of those years, he turned ever more to the breeding and sale of horses, which pastured

well along the Fenland. For with the cornlands all out of heart through the constant dearth of sun and the soaking wet, the grass grew marvellous well in the meadows, and with such hay as could be got from the uplands served well to keep the mares in health and spirit. Pasturage in the Fens ran late in the year, and so my father brought strong stock to the autumn fairs at Huntington and even Peterborough for trafficking on the Great North Road from London to York and beyond. By my seventh year or thereabouts though it pleased God to return the weather to more near its natural state, my father continued in his way of raising horses together with his farm crops, and I have heard him say that even Mr. Pickford, the goods carrier of Lancashire and York came down to buy our horses.

So through my boyhood I remember with rare longing the late summer weeks when with my brothers Arthur and Humphrey and a horseherd or two we kept the horses at pasture in the Fens, where I learned to draw the bow and hunt the bustard and mallard and the world was half wind and half water, and reeds and cloudy reflection.

My father was a big man, whence my own great size and strength was given, and my mother, a proud woman of some learning, made much of it that he was cousin to Richard Howland, Bishop of Peterborough. But I think my father took more pride in his friendship with Squire Hinchbrooke, who leaned heavy on him and some few others for management of our parish of Fenny Stanton when he was at the Parliament in London. Indeed, for father's labours as Surveyor of Highways, the Squire presented him a great silver plate, which stood on our sideboard for all his life, making the pewter sad gray beside it. This Squire Hinchbrooke was uncle and namesake to Oliver Cromwell our late Lord Protector, and our window into the great world, for the noble and powerful passing north on the Great Road from London would stop at Hinchbrooke House for cheer, and one April when I was eleven or twelve King James himself was entertained there with a great feast, and we lined the road up to the great house to see the new King jog by, smiling a little and nodding to us all.

But already I have run on before myself. Some few years before King James came to Hinchbrooke's my mother put me to petty school with our poor old vicar, for she had herself some learning, and often said to us "better unborn than untaught". So for what seemed to us an endless time (for so time draws out in our salad days when we are young and green) my brothers Arthur and Humphrey and I went with our hornbooks to the vicarage where we learned the secretary hand, the art of reading, and some ciphering I suppose, though my father early showed us the ciphering, who being greatly taken with it himself said it was the white magic which brought wealth and power. And so in a way I suppose it was.

In due time I was sent on to Dr. Beard's school at Huntingdon where to my spelling and reading was added yet more of the arithmetic and some Latin (which I never could digest) and a great deal of scripture and the psalms. Thomas Beard was a harsh man but righteous, whence we learned a true fear of God, and that right living and God's grace brought rewards in this life and the next. It was at the Huntingdon Free School that I came by my first book, where mother gave me Foxe's Martyrs, which I have by me to this day with John Tindall's works, etc. But alas I was no great scholar, being minded to read more from Foxe than from Ovid, and finding the rides into the fens more to my liking than the rides into Huntingdon to Dr. Beard's.

And so, my brothers George and Simon coming of an age to help father and Arthur with the horses and the fields, I was sent off after my brother Humphrey to London for an apprentice. Humphrey had been put to a draper whose name I have forgot, but I went to Mister John Carver, a man known to both my father and Dr. Beard as righteous and prosperous though with Brownist leanings.

Father arranged with a carrier of Huntingdon that I should go with a company of his carters to London, for a green youth by himself was like to be cozened or beaten or worse by rogues or priggers or some other of the rabblement on the roads. We were three days on Ermine Street going up to London, the roads being very noisome and tedious but the inns pleasant and cheerful enough for a country lad. Arrived at last in London I made my way to Carver's, where I was kindly received by my new master and mistress, and given a room to share with the kitchen boy.

For some two years I worked in Mr. Carver's counting-house, starting as helper to a senior prentice: filling the string-ball, cutting quills, and so to the petty cash books, copying the letters into the books of copies, etc. It was here I changed my old Secretary hand for the fine Italian, which is a fair style enough, and yet the Secretary having come first to me has stayed with me to this day in some measure. My master and mistress being as I have related inclined toward the Brownists, kept a strict household, with prayers said for all and much reading of the bible; yet John Carver was a gentler man and more loving than Dr. Beard, and for love of the Carvers rather than for fear of God or master I suppressed the high spirits of youth and bore myself straitly during all my stay with them. Thus as good Tindall says, the heart being overcome with kindness begins to submit to the laws of God, to learn them and to walk in them.

Yet the temptations of London town were great, and as Tindall says also, we are bound to do evil as the serpent is bound to bite, and from time to time I would out with the other prentices on one or another execrable enterprise as to the bear baiting at Paris Garden in Sutherk or some tavern in Cheapside, so that I was in no rude ignorance of the devilish evils at large in London, although for the most part

remaining discreet and studious as I have said. Mr. Carver maintained a house in Leyden in the Netherlands, where he often absented himself about his affairs, and indeed when I had been with him for about three years he proposed to remove himself there altogether; one Mr. Robinson, a noted Brownist and gossip of my master's being also in the Low Countries, who havin removed there with some of his fellows thought to practice their faith without let by the archbishop or council. The Carvers urged me to accompany them in this removal, as they proposed to close up their London house and leave their affairs there in the hands of Thomas Weston and others. But having been once to Leyden with Mr. Carver to compare the books and having taken a strong dislike to the miserable place I would have none of it, so by the agreement of all I was bound over to Mr. Weston to continue my apprenticeship at London. This Weston was of the Ironmongers Company, but had his hand in many a pot, and I was to learn much in his counting house of large affairs.

Mrs. Carver at leaving presented me with a Great Bible which I still have by me, but in the merry household of Tom Weston I was soon shifted off by Mr. Hakluyt's books of Voyages and Discoveries which Mr. Weston kept in the house and that I conned with delight. I was turned eighteen when I came to Mr. Weston, who urged me on to read as much of the wide world as I could see, to which end he took me often to the booksellers in Paul's Walk to cheapen for books. Mr. Weston being of sanquine complexion and a lover of this world's goods was less arduous in his persuit of the true religion than my former master, and less strict also in his accounts, so that as a young man will I drifted from the path, and as good Tindall says in his great answer to More: in temptation, tribulation and adversities I perished daily, and as soon as I was delivered out of one temptation another was set before me. For while in Mr. Carver's house the motto was "Love, and Condemn not", Weston's rule was that "an ounce of mirth is better than a pound of sorrow", and all was at odds and hurly-burly. So with all the comings-in and goings-out in Mr. Weston's business I was left much to my own devices, and as None of us Liveth to Himself (Romans XIV), I fell in with the other prentices and out of all doubt soon reached the vilest estate of my whole life. Now the most devilish and mischievous face of sin, which the devines and preachers all shift off from, is the joy which the sinner finds in his viciousness, and the pleasures of the theater, the bear pit, and the tavern grew upon me like a miserable pestilence till I became as Foxe says depraved and corrupted beyond all man's remedy. We would go out to shoot ducks at Islington ponds or Moorfields, a sport which I had learned in the Fens, and return in the red dusk to the Mitre in Cheapside and carouse into the night. Or we would off to the Globe for the Merchant of Venice or some such bawdy play, shouldering among the groundlings and hieing off presently to the George for another carouse, running like mad dogs in the streets, all insolence and unpeacable fury.

When I had done my apprenticeship to Tom Weston, I stayed on with him as a journeyman clerk, and seeing at close hand the ways of the merchants, and that if ever I was to rise in the world I must plant my wages where they would likely grow tallest, I set about to take shares in such joint stocks or adventures as Mister Weston showed me. Who indeed having ever an eager eye for profit came near onto disaster more than once for trading with the Dutch in contempt of the Merchant Adventurers of London. And so I went on for some few years in this vile estate, debauching in the taverns and worse by night, seeking ever a ready and unearned fortune by day, until in the year 1618 word came to our counting house of Mr. Francis Blackwell and his company, who being Brownists (or Puritans at most) of Amsterdam had got them a patent from the Virginia Company for a particular plantation in Virginia. Now, says Mr. Weston, a plantation must needs have ready and willing planters, as Captain Smith and others saw to their sorrow in the early days of Jamestown. And where better to find honest labor and modest perserverance than in a company determined to make a new place for their life and worship? For though I afterwards heard it said that Blackwell had declined from the truth in Amsterdam, and indeed later betrayed and accused certain godly men in London; yet was his company ready enough to brave the perils of the seas and the dread afflictions of an unknown land. Mr. Weston and Mr. Sherley and sundry other adventurers whose pursuit of the treasures of this earth something exceeded their pursuit of the true and lively doctrine of Christ Jesus, took shares in this false Blackwell's voyage; and I, wicked and depraved as I was, took such shares as I could then buy up. Further, bemused by the glittering tales of Sir Walter Raleigh and Mr. Hakluyt of the riches of the fair New World, I fell so far out of my wits as to borrow upon my slender credit to the same end.

Then in the bright May of 1619 was my bubble broke, and the fruits of wickedness harvested in full measure; Captain Argall returns from Virginia with the wretched news: Mr. Blackwell's ship is carried out of its course, and of 180 persons in the ship 130 are lost of the flux and want of fresh water, and Blackwell himself turned up his heels and died. There were repinings amongst the adventurers, saying too many were packed into the ship, etc., but the bitter end was that the venture had come to naught, and many of us ruined altogether. So here I was, scarce ventured upon the sea as it were and my bark already on the rocks, and my name like to be read out on the Exchange for a defaulter.

Here at the ebb of my slight fortunes came my old master, John Carver, back from Leyden with a Mr. Cushman as agents for yet more Brownist adventurers bound for Virginia. Tom Weston indeed had broached some plan or other to them, and helped in the matter of a patent through Sir Edwin Sandys of the Virginia Company. Which Company then being in a great schism and like to fall in bits and pieces and could offer but 300 pounds for the voyage, Mister Weston made stir among the

merchants for a joint stock, seeing his chance with these sober Saints to win back his losses in the Blackwell disaster. For myself, being still determined that fortune lay in those newly-discovered parts which Hakluyt and Raleigh had shone forth in so clear, nay so golden a light, I made shift to indenture myself once again to good Mister Carver. If for want of fortune I could not be a merchant adventurer in London, thought I, I should be a planter in Virginia, for no man having put his hand to the plough and then looking back is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke VIII).

Mister Carver took me with him into Hampshire and Southampton to make provision for the voyage, leaving Mr. Weston charged with the raising of the moneys, and for near a year I was in the south country, cheapening for com and butter, seeing to the hauling and grinding and brewing and churning and all the wearisome tasks of provisioning, for we must needs feed the whole company not only on the crossing, but in Virginia itself until we could make our own provision there. In all this time we heard naught but a flowing stream of complaint and abuse from the Leyden company: Tom Weston and Cushman had changed the agreement, Carver should make provision in London instead of Southampton where we would cast off, Christopher Martin, one of the London agents, was of insolent carriage and ignorant boldness and would ruin all, some would go to Guiana and not Virginia, etc.

At last, despite all, we were all met at Southampton in the summer of 1620, where I saw for the first time the Leyden leaders; Mr. Brewster, Edward Winslow, Mr. Bradford and Isaac Allerton, a merchant I had seen before at Weston's. Brewster, then in hiding from a charge of issuing seditious books from his printing press in Leyden, was the elder of the Leyden flock, a discreet and studious man of great wisdom and gentleness, who would thereafter teach me the true way of Jesus Christ, give me the freedom of his library and council me like a very father. His assistant, Edward Winslow, was a man of biting wit and lively mind, a few years my junior but out of all doubt the brightest light of the company. Bradford, a man of melancholy complexion and bilious humour, was the iron clamp that held all together and in truth made the plantation survive by his powerful faith and force, but it is strange how God worked his will through such a wrangling and exposulating spirit, as will be seen more hereafter.

The Leyden saints had come over in the Speedwell, a ship much condemned by Weston and others as overmasted and unanswerable, as indeed she proved, and was at last abandoned at Plymouth in a near sinking condition, and many of company, with poor Robert Cushman, left behind.

So when at last we stood out to sea scarce forty of our company of one hundred were of Leyden, the others being from London and other places. We were

crowded in enough, and in rough weather all below decks and out of harm's way were indeed like herring in a cask.

On one such wretched morning, feeling the foul airs of the Cabin insufferable, and although forbidden to it by Captain Jones, I slipped up onto the open deck, and was there struck by a great gale of wind, howling through the ship from side to side. The sun was struggling with a thin gray murk, so that I scarce cast a shadow as I staggered down the deck to the starboard rail. Clinging there with my inward parts all in turmoil, I could look straight down into the spume rushing alongside, and being on a sudden taken up with a gust of the tempest or a sudden retching, I know not which, I was lifted as it were by a great hand and flung headlong over the side. I seemed to fall out and down for all eternity, my breath snatched out of me by the wind, and then I was fathoms deep in the sea, looking down into a great pale darkness where I thought there must sure be no bottom. Then the horror of Hell closed over me, and I felt myself damned to fall through that freezing murk forever, and I cried inwardly in great terror for God's help and mercy, while the bitter chill sucked all the earth's heat out of my body. But suddenly I heard above and behind me, and yet it seemed within my own head too, a clear, hard voice, like a distant horn, saying "Look you up then, John Howland." And look up I did, kicking and twisting back from the murderous deep. Above was green dimly glowing, splattered with sparks and bubbles, and there, trailing down out of some invisible place above, a dark line sweeping toward me in a slow twisting curve. I laid hands on it with a will, and found it a good halyard or line, pulling upon which with all my failing strength and somewhat assisted by its speed through the water, I dragged my head and upper parts back into God's own air, and drew in such a breath as I think no man ever took before. Still looking up as I was enjoined to do, I saw above and beyond me the poop deck of the Mayflower, and the line I held trailing down from the yard arm, and looking down over the rail a face contorted into one great mouth, shouting some passionate words to me; but they were blown away by the gale, and the face worked violently and the mouth twisted soundlessly, and as it seemed to me to no purpose. Nevertheless was I drawn up into the ship like a great fish, though I remember nothing after that shouting face, and taken below and wrapped in rugs and possetted somewhat and so came back to health in a few days.

My first words were with Elder Brewster, whom I acquainted with my salvation at the hands of God, and I spoke of the great rejoicing in my heart at the said salvation, and protested my determination to follow His word thereafter with a high heart. "In truth" said he "we well know your high heart and lusty spirits, and we thank God that He has elected you to serve Him with joy and gladness." For they that go down to the sea in ships saw the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep. They

cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He brought them out of their distress. Psalm 107.

I will pass over our landfall at Cape Cod and our early times thereabout with scant notice, seeing that others have told the tale better than I might do: how it fell out that Captain Jones being wary of coasting down to Virginia so late in the year, the first men among us thought to plant in New England, and after some hot words we so agreed and drew up our articles accordingly; how we chose John Carver governor of our company, how we set out our shallop and cast about, setting finally on New Plymouth, as Captain John Smith had called the place; how the great sickness fell upon us in our misery, so that some cried that the place was accurst, seeing that the savages who had lived thereabouts had all been struck dead some few years before; and how God strengthened us and lift up our hearts and brought us who survived safe through that bitter time.

Some few things I still see in my mind's eye as clear as yesterday: rowing the shallop in the bitter sleet along Cape Cod till our boat cloaks were cased as it were in ice; the howling of the savages when they broke onto our barricado at dawn as if the earth was broke open and all the devils of Hell loose; the endless chopping and sawing in the wet murk of Plymouth. I remember how on that cold morning when the savages attacked I whipped up my snaphance musket, which kept the priming dry and fit for use even in the rain, and lodged a ball into a tree hard by the head of their sagamore, so that he ran off yelling into the woods. I was sinfully proud of that piece, it being given me by Tom Weston when we parted, only Captain Standish of the whole company having one its equal. I used it much that first winter to bring down fowl and deer, and once on a later time, God forgive me, for a try bigger game.

I must likewise pass lightly by, the matters being too near my heart for idle words, how good John Carver came in out of the field the next spring, spoke of a great pain in his head and died straightaway, leaving me and Mrs. Carver to manage his household; and she, poor soul, wasted away and died in the summer, charging me with all, and the guard of her ward Bess Tilley, whose father and uncle had been taken off in the great sickness. Whereby I came into all the fortune of the Carvers, and a good wife besides. For with the needs of the household, and of the fields, and some work by way of counting in the storehouse I was sore beset to keep all in order. So I concluded to marry, for as the saying is "if the pilot would both hold the stern, and hoist up the sail, and be upon the hatches, and labor at the pump, and do all himself, it must needs go ill with the ship." And strange to say, for all dear Bess was starved down like a wet kitten, with her grey eyes sunk in her head and her gown and kirtle all patches, still she kept her dark hair all smooth and ordered and she seemed to me more beautiful than any wench I had known in London.

It was about the time we married, for though we had no pastor yet good Elder Brewster entered us in the records as husband and wife, that I became embroiled in the wretched affairs of the plantation and the London adventurers. Will Bradford, our new governor after Mr. Carver, was ever in contention with Isaac Allerton and the London company; knowing little of the exchange or merchant's affairs, he looked with suspicion on the Londoners, thinking prayer and upright thought a fit substitute for a knowledge of trade. Soon seeing how that wind blew, I slunk off from the counting house, for I knew that no accounts kept a two months' journey from the London treasurer and at the whim of an innocent could bring the account-keeper ought but grief. And so it proved for Edward Winslow's young brother, who being later brought over to set all in order fell presently afoul of the governor, and fared little better than Isaac Allerton himself.

The root of the trouble was the Plantation would not stand by the undertakings of their agents sent back to London, and especially Allerton, whom they ever charged with trading for his own particular. So, when Allerton buys the ship White Angel, and James Sherley the treasurer at London charges it upon the general account of the Plantation, they at Plymouth make great outcry that they are much put upon, and run about wringing hands. In truth the error was at London, for Weston, like Sir Ferdinando Gorges and others of the Council for New England, thought only of the fishing, and pressed hard to make New Plymouth another Damaris-cove, all fishing stages and salt pans. Which the governor and others saw would be well nigh fatal to the plantation, and sought to shift off to trade with the savages.

To which end, after the harvest of 1625, I went with Mr. Winslow and others in a shallop with a cargo of corn some 40 leagues northeastward to a river called the Kennebec, and thence brought home some 700 pounds of beaver. Which river the sagamore Somoset had made known to us, he being a savage of the Abnaki tribe and ever a good friend to us.

About this time also some few of us undertook to discharge the debt of the plantation to the London adventurers, getting in return the particular right to trade with the savages, the Dutch and others, and having the whole stock of trading truck then in store. We then through Mr. Allerton procured a patent from the Council for New England for a trucking house on the above said Kennebec, which we built and stocked with coats, shirts, rugs, biscuit, pease, corn, hoes, axes, etc. to trade with the savages for beaver.

This place came into my charge in due time, and here keeping my own accounts free from the meddling of others, and exchanging and comparing the same with Mr. Sherley in London when occasion offered, I wrought well for the Undertakers with God's help for some years, until the fatal meeting with the Piscataqua men.

One day in the year 1634 up the Kennebec comes a bark from Piscataqua, a plantation a little east of the Merrimac river which the Lord Saye and Sele, Sir Ferdinando Gorges and some other great persons had a hand in. This bark would go up the river above us and so intercept the trade, contrary to our patent. I warned them off, but Hocking, their captain, and a man of insolent carriage, sets himself in a rage, rates me as though I had been a dog, bids us do our worst and anchors above our house. I in turn send out Moses Talbot and another in a canoe who cut their cable, but Hocking takes up his musket and shoots poor Talbot through the head, so he fell dead. Whereupon I, and as I think some others of our company, let fly with our muskets and there is Hocking dead likewise.

There was a devilish to-do when this affair was bruited about, and the meddling fools from the Massachusetts Bay took John Alden who had been there with me upon his bark returning from Kennebec and clapped him in prison, thinking thereby to ease the ire of Lord Saye and Lord Brooke. But Tom Prence, who was then our governor, sent Miles Standish to the Bay and procured John's release, and the whole matter was laid to rest when the true story was shown to their Lordships.

It was thought best that I leave the Kennebec house; and so I came back at last to my first way of life, the farm and the breeding of horses. In 1635 I served my seventh and last year as governor's assistant, and though I have been a Deputy to the General Court almost ever since, my greatest pride was serving a year as surveyor of highways. I received no silver plate such as my father had of Squire Hinchingbrooke for his labors, but I had the joy of the task well done, which is God's greatest gift, after all. I have found joy, too in Mrs. Carver's Great Bible and the Works of Mr. Tindall, given me by Elder Brewster, who led me far on the path of salvation. It is near thirty years since he died, but I feel him near me still.

I have become a gentleman, and been blessed with much land, rich crops and many cattle, and have bred the finest horses in this Colony by common consent, yet my true blessing has been the high heart God gave me, and the will to look up which he taught me in the dark waters, and in the love of my good Bess and our children, for without these an abundance of goods is but an abomination. Thus is seen God's glory and the true mercy of Christ Jesus, who out of his love has given me such undeserved blessing.

Two things remain which I may speak of more fully at another time, which cast a shadow on my heart. I have read Mr. Wilson's work on the conversion and salvation of the savages inhabiting this country, yet I have seen things of late which make me keep my musket still ready by the fire. Massasoit was a great sachem and a powerful leader, and his son called Alexander a godly man, but his son Philip has the eye of a traitor. The savages unsaved are devils still, and I doubt Mr. Wilson or a

dozen Mr. Wilsons can bring them all to Christ before they break forth like the Pequots into some fiendish mischief.

The other shadow touches me more nearly: my brother Arthur, who came here after me, is become a base and profane Quaker, professing an inner light within him which alone will bring him salvation, whereas the true faith shows that we are saved by faith alone and not of our own impotency. That arrogant inner light is but vile self pride, and I pray God Arthur will see the true light presently. My younger brother Henry died in this perverse and malicious faith but a year past; can ever God's mercy save him now?

But even these shadows are become pale in the light of Christ's mercy, for though my fourscore years be labor and sorrow, it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Psalm 90.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy IV, 7.

AFTERWORD

"The 23d of February 1672, Mr. John Howland, Senior, of the town of Plymouth, deceased. He was a godly man and an ancient professor in the ways of Christ: he lived until he attained above eighty years in the world. He was one of the first Comers into this land and proved a useful Instrument of Good in his place and was the last man that was left of those that came 'over in the ship called the May Flower that lived in Plymouth. He was with honor interred at the town of Plymouth on the 25 of February 1672."

-- Plymouth Colony Records.

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