

*American Philosophical Society 49/c*

THE  
MIGRATION OF THE PILGRIMS,  
AND OF  
THEIR POSTERITY,  
CONSIDERED,  
IN  
AN ADDRESS,

READ BEFORE THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA,  
ON THE 22D OF DECEMBER, 1817;

BY THE REV. EZRA STILES ELY, A. M.

One of their Chaplains.

---

Published at the request of the New England Society of  
Philadelphia.

---

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES' GAZETTE.

1818.

**AN ADDRESS, &c.**

*Gentlemen,*

**THE** unerring hand of Infinite Wisdom invariably educes good from evil; and so disposes of human events, that even ecclesiastical dissensions lay the foundation for the rise, progress, and glory of future states and nations. We have a striking exemplification of this remark, in the history of the first settlement of New England by civilized people. Religious dissention has, in the process of time, become the parent of our American privileges. We were born of disputation; and no wonder we are deemed sons of political, legal, ecclesiastical, and literary litigation: no wonder that every farmer in our native states is something of a civilian, a divine, and a scholar.

The history of our origin shall be briefly told; and I would hope, without giving any offence to any of our brethren of the Protes-

tant Episcopal Church; for none is intended; and no blame can be imputed to the present generation, by speaking the truth concerning one which has long since passed away. Henry the eighth, of England, quarrelled with his Holiness of Rome, because the Pontiff would not allow him to put away his old wife, and take a new one when he pleased. This commenced the reformation from Popery in Great Britain. The Pope excommunicated Henry and his kingdom; and Henry, in return for the compliment, excommunicated the Pope.

The church in those days had no sooner lost its ghostly head, than it found a regal one; for the parliament voted to Henry the authority over the Church of England, which had lately been exercised by his Holiness. But good came out of this contention; for the King really reformed many abuses. He confirmed, however, the worshipping of images, prayers for the dead, the seven sacraments, the mediation of the Virgin and other saints, and the ceremonies of the church.

His son, Edward the sixth, in a very short reign, advanced, from apparently pure motives, the reformation, which his father had commenced in his zeal for adultery.

His successour, Mary, by fire and faggots attempted to drive away the light of heaven, which had begun to beam on her kingdom; and raised such a smoke from the funeral pile of the Rev. John Rogers, and a multitude of other victims, that the orb of day veiled his face in tears.

Queen Elizabeth, of grateful memory, was of one mind with the pious young Edward. In her days, the thirty nine doctrinal articles of the Church of England were framed, and adopted by a convocation of the English clergy. These articles were agreeable to the wishes of the ministers of the gospel, with the exception of that concerning rites and ceremonies. "A majority of one vote was made up in the lower house, by the help of proxies, for keeping the ceremonies."\* This, however, would have

\* Holmes.

occasioned no schism, had those who pleased, prayed in a white robe, preached in a black one, and baptized with the sign of the cross, without requiring others, who thought these things unscriptural, to conform to their practice. The non-conformists to the ceremonies of the church were at first willing to continue in that communion, which they thought might be rendered more *pure*; and because they subsequently contended, that the church ought to be wholly purged from every thing not explicitly authorized by the Bible, their opposers styled them, by way of derision, *Puritans*; but the term, like that of *Yankee*, soon became honourable, through the exemplary conduct of those who wore it.

The first congregation of these Puritans was organized in 1602, in "the joining borders of Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire." From this little body of covenanted people, originated the numerous societies of dissenters from the established Church of England, and all the congregationalists of the northern states.

On account of the persecution which some of these Puritans experienced;—and persecution was too common an error of all denominations in those days;—on account of tithes, the compulsion of ministers to subscribe to the ceremonies, imprisonment for worshipping God according to their own judgment of propriety, and fines for not attending the Episcopal church, our fathers removed to Holland. They were exiles, resident in Amsterdam for one year, and in Leyden from 1608 to 1620. It was in July of this last mentioned year, that these pilgrims, who sought a home, and a country for their sons, embarked for America. They came by the way of England, no doubt because they had a captain under Dutch influence; and after many delays and dangers, made Cape Cod, on the ninth of November. It was an unknown land to most Europeans, and an uninviting one, to persons whose contemplated destination was Virginia. The Pilgrims attempted to sail to the southward, after they had touched the eastern margin of the United States; but their naval commander “had been secretly promised a reward in Holland, if he would not carry the English” so far south as

---

Hudson's river: he found it, therefore, no difficult thing to sail all day, and make Cape Cod again at night. Thus we owe it, under Providence, to treachery and the cupidity of some Hollanders, that we are not high-minded Virginians;—for high-minded Yankees we undoubtedly are. We honour our fellow freemen of that 'ancient dominion,' and pity the inhabitants of it who are not free; but we have so much of the true spirit of Yankees, as to prefer for a native land, even while we have forsaken it, a land in which all enjoy the rights and privileges of men. We forget not, at the same time, that Virginia honourably protested against the first introduction of slaves into her territory, when she was a colony; and would now have been without them, had not the mother country forced their introduction.

Before our fathers disembarked, they draughted and subscribed a republican constitution of government for themselves, and proceeded to the election of a governour for one year. Thus, on the eleventh of November, 1620, the first model of our state governments, and indeed of all our representative institutions in

this western world, was formed, and went into operation. The Puritans were the fathers of all the modern republicks: let honour, therefore, be given to whom honour is due. One hundred and ninety seven years ago to day, our Puritan ancestors effected their landing at Plymouth, in the state of Massachussetts. When they left their crazy boat, they set their feet upon a rock: one part of which still retains its native position on the iron-bound shore; but our fathers, or some of their children (wishing still to enjoy stability in the most important things, wherever they reside) have removed, as an emblem, a part of that very rock to the centre of the town of Plymouth. Here on the rock, the very rock on which the feet of Carver, Standish, Winslow, Bradford, and the other weary pilgrims, planted their first steps in America, and said, 'we have found the land of liberty;' the children of future ages may sit, and in commemoration of the landing of their fathers, keep the frugal, but emblematical feast of shells. This day, indeed, we doubt not but many have done it; for the twenty second of December has been



observed as a joyous anniversary, by religious and festive rites, for nearly two centuries.

The repast provided in Plymouth, Boston, and other places, on this day, is styled the feast of shells; because our fathers, on their landing, found little else than a few shell fish for their refreshment. They found a country devoid of population, for not long before this providential, and on their part unintentional, arrival, a prevailing sickness had swept away all the aborigines of Plymouth and its vicinity, but one; and he was then in captivity. When he returned, our honest parents bought of him all the right and title which he could convey, to the fields in which he had hunted, and the rivers in which he had taken fish. Let it not be said that they cheated him, for they gave what was to him an equivalent, and so completely was he satisfied, that he lived with them, in the capacity of an agent, or secretary for Indian affairs, to the day of his death. He was a wily politician too; for he could raise disputes, that he might be an ambassadour to settle them.

Some of the distant tribes of Indians attempted to molest our ancestors; and this rendered a militia system necessary. Mr. Standish was elected Captain, and all the males performed duty. Our fathers would not live, without a place of worship, and a tower of defence: they erected, therefore, a log house, which was a church below, and a fort above, equally prepared for devotion and self-preservation. Their place of training was, of course, 'on the green,' or parade ground, before the church; and to this day, you all know, that every parish in New England contains at least one company of armed and disciplined men, who assemble at stated times, and go through the manual exercises, in front of the congregational 'meeting house.' This perhaps may account for the fact, that near every place of worship in New England, you will find a tavern; because on days of militia muster, our defenders of the country need a little refreshment; and for the promotion of friendship usually dine together.

To early example and education, it must be attributed, that in the eastern states the militia

---

system has always been co-extensive with the population. I presume no one of you, gentlemen, ever saw in New England a company of soldiers without arms; or with canes, broomsticks, and even corn stalks, as in some other states we have seen, in place of bright, substantial muskets. It is rare, too, that any one beholds, either in the large towns, or villages, any company of military men without a uniformity of dress and accoutrements.

When the town of Plymouth became considerably populous by birth, and emigration from the dissenting communities of England, a company of our fathers located themselves on the peninsula that bears the name of Boston. From Boston the Pilgrims spread to Charlestown, and other places in Massachusetts; then to Hartford and New Haven, in Connecticut; then to Rhode Island; and their sons, in later days, to Vermont, New Hampshire, and the District of Maine. A great portion of the present inhabitants of the three last mentioned sections of New England, were born either in Connecticut or the ancient Massachusetts.

Our fathers never removed to a settlement, unless it was in sufficient numbers to constitute a congregational church, like the one which they left; and hence it is, that all other denominations of Christians among them are comparatively small; for the first societies in every town and parish of New England were composed of dissenters, or of their children.

The love of ecclesiastical liberty predominated in the minds of all who remembered grievances, occasioned by an establishment in the old world. This spirit, infused into all their civil institutions, has been transmitted to posterity; and hence the ancient jealousy against rotten boroughs, corporate bodies, and privileged communities, has hitherto prevented the town of Boston from becoming a city. An attempt, we understand, was made to convert the town of Boston into a city, last spring; but the object was not accomplished. A great majority of the inhabitants would not consent to be incorporated. That populous place has neither mayor nor aldermen; but is governed like the smallest towns, by all the freemen assembled in town meeting, or by

---

power specifically delegated for particular purposes, to 'select men,' chosen annually. Massachussetts does not contain a city; but Connecticut, becoming less jealous, or else being more fond of many courts of justice, long ago created by charter five little cities.

Many important advantages have resulted from the migration of our New England fathers, not as disconnected individuals, but as ecclesiastical bodies. They held it to be inconsistent with man's duty, as a creature formed for society, and with the dictates of Christianity, for any family to run away into the woods, and live like wild beasts, without the means of religious knowledge, and the ordinances of publick worship. Had they scattered themselves thinly through the land, instead of erecting a village at once, the consequence would have been, that publick schools, and religious teachers could not have been maintained.

Do you ask then, to what it is owing, that every man, woman and child in New England, above twelve years of age, can read and write?

**Do you ask, why the plain farmers of a few acres have their law books and systems of divinity; are able to keep their own pecuniary accounts, to write their own wills, and maintain a correspondence? Do you ask, why every man in town meeting writes his own ticket; and why many, during the delivery of a discourse, take notes of what they hear in the church? Do you ask, why the English language, geography, arithmetick, navigation and surveying are taught, systematically, in every township; why the academies, elevated above common grammar schools, flourish; and why New England has the most respectable colleges in the United States?**

**It is for this reason;—our fathers were so attached to their ecclesiastical privileges and order, that a little congregation always migrated together, and commonly carried with them their schoolmaster and their pastor. They moved as social beings, like the Israelites with the tabernacle of Jehovah, and were determined never to move further or faster than the church and the school could move in their centre. This has enabled them not only to**

rear teachers for themselves; but to furnish half of the schools and colleges in the United States with principals. We have been credibly informed, that Philadelphia has more than one hundred teachers from New England; and we know, that Doctors Edwards and Nott, of Union College; Doctors Burr, Edwards, and Green, of Princeton; Doctors Johnson and Harris, of Columbia College; and not a few of the Presidents of Universities in the southern states, were born in the land of steady habits.

Other states have been settled in a different manner, by insulated families, who made the privilege of schools and churches one of the last considerations that should influence their location. In them, generally speaking, *taverns* are first built, to be soon converted into post offices; and hence places are designated in the middle and southern portions of our country, by the sign of "the Buck," "the Spread Eagle," "the Fox Chace," or some other device on a sign-post; whereas, in the states whence we came, every township, parish, and place of residence, marked by a neat white

“meeting house” and steeple, is designated by the name of the religious community assembling in it. Hence we read of the town and churches of Boston; of the parish and church of Lebanon, and the like: but in other states, if they had places of worship and ecclesiastical communities in every village, we should probably hear of “the church at the New Rising Sun,” of “the church at the Black Horse tavern,” or of “the church at the sign of Toby Fillpot, Esq.” It may be said by some, that our fathers were bigoted; but, if they were, it has proved a happy bigotry for us: it has given our brethren universally a respectable education: and it has qualified the numerous sons of the Pilgrims, whom their native soil is not sufficient to maintain, to become teachers of youth, clergymen, distinguished lawyers, judges, representatives in congress, or merchants, in every commonwealth in which they fix the bounds of their habitation. This education, gentlemen, with a good character for industry, ingenuity, and morality.—is our capital on which we live,—wherever we go.



For our ancestors, who have transmitted to us an inheritance more durable, and more universally available than riches, we ought to feel sentiments of profound respect and gratitude.

It may be objected to the intimated superiority of New England in matters of education, that individuals are more wealthy in other states; and are therefore able to give their children a superiour education. We must answer, that the pecuniary ability to educate offspring rarely ensures a disposition to do it, in those who have not been well educated themselves; and that it is the peculiar advantage of the system pursued among our parents, that the poor and the rich are on an equality, so far as the acquisition of a good common education is concerned; for every township and parish levies an education tax on all rateable property, whether it be owned by a bachelor, an old maid, a childless couple, or the father of a dozen little ones, on the principle that the general improvement of the rising generation is a publick good: this assessed sum, when collected, is divided to the different school

districts, according to the proportion of taxable property in each; and a publick school committee employs a teacher for the benefit of all, whether old or young, who choose to attend. Hence, when a boy, the person who has the honour of addressing you was taught in the town school, by a gentleman of liberal education, who had under the same roof children of every family, from that of his Excellency, the late, and universally admired, Jonathan Trumbull, Esquire, Governour of the Commonwealth, down to the servant of the black Governour Saul;—a man who was annually elected commander in chief, by the people of his own colour, over all the negroes within the eastern part of the state. This coloured gentleman had as free access to the literary privileges of the community as any white man; and very well united the offices of a military commander, a civil governour, and a chief justice, without any law or constitution but the steady habits of his brethren according to the flesh, and the example of the white people, among whom they live, as a little republick within the commonwealth.

I have seen this chief magistrate of colour, a venerable man of gray hairs, wearing his large, triangular, cocked hat, and golden epaulettes, with the sword of state by his side, seated in judgment on a black man and the wife of another negro, who were arraigned for an infraction of the seventh commandment. I have seen his black sheriff too, at his order, tie each of the culprits to the publick whipping post, and inflict on the exposed skin, "forty stripes, save one." Such, then, is the state of education in New England, that even the people of colour can read, write, and frequently act well their part in complicated civil and military concerns; and such the prevalent sentiment in favour of morality, that even the negroes punish with severity the violation of the marriage contract, which lies at the foundation of human society; while in many other states the refined libertine and adulterer may pay a small fine, wipe his mouth, and say, "Aha! what evil have I done? What disgrace have I incurred?"

Let others ridicule us for our puritanick notions, if they please, but at our anniversary

thanksgiving dinner, and on "the feast of shells," we will give with animation, but not obstreperous mirth, **THREE CHEERS, FOR THE MORALITY, EDUCATION, AND STEADY HABITS OF THE SONS OF THE PILGRIMS.**

You know it to be a fact, gentlemen, that gouging was never practised in New England, and that fisticuffs are rarely resorted to for the settlement of any personal dispute. You know also, that duelling has occurred but in a few instances, since the landing of our fathers. The fashion of murdering by consent of parties, was attempted to be introduced, indeed, by two servants, that came in the first ship to Plymouth, who fought with a sword and dagger; but the Pilgrims immediately brought them to publick trial, both being wounded, but neither mortally, and decreed that they should be tied together by their heads and heels, and be deprived of food for the space of twenty four hours. This *menial* practice has been followed in no more than three or four instances, of which I have ever heard.

Should any ask the reason of these things, we cannot impute them to the universal influence of religious principle;—for I am ashamed to confess, that when our young men remove to states in which boxing and duelling are reputable, many of them, adapting themselves with too great facility to every climate, “will do as the Romans do.” From early and continued education, these vices which I have named, are generally unpopular in New England; and from the acquaintance which every one has with common and statute law, it is customary to seek redress, and even the gratification of revengeful feelings, in a legal way. Hence, instead of knocking an insolent or slanderous person down; instead of gouging the man who puts up his finger by way of threatening; and instead of biting off one’s nose, who gives the first blow, the common people, who cannot forgive, individually exclaim: “I’ll take the law of you!” This answers a better purpose than profane imprecations; and legal litigation, with a little depletion, by way of feeing an advocate, is a less evil than a broken head, or a dislocated eye.

The very contentions of the people, being settled by learned pleadings, tend to promote their literature.

So far as "the glorious uncertainty of the law," as it has been called, will admit of any assurance, concerning any future result, it is considered as certain, that crimes will be punished in New England; and that he who kills a man aiming at him a blow that endangers life, will be judged by a jury to have committed justifiable homicide. This prevents passionate men from giving the reins to their evil emotions, and from frequently doing violence to the person of a neighbour.

Let it be known, in other states, that he who intentionally kills a man, except in self-defence, shall indisputably be hung; that criminals legally convicted, have no reason to hope for pardon from the civil magistrate: and let education and social worship equally diffuse in them the publick influences of which they are productive, and we shall hear no more of duelling, maiming, and murder, in the south than in the north. For our habits of social

feeling, and for our good laws, we are indebted to our fathers: let us, therefore, be thankful for their morality and piety, while we endeavour to copy them into our own lives.

It will naturally be demanded of us: “Why did you leave the abode of your ancestors, since you commend it so highly? Why have the Yankees spread over the state of New York, peopled half of Ohio; and found for themselves a name and place in almost every city on the face of the earth? Why are the Bostonians flocking to the cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia?”

It is a fact, that nearly half of the most respectable merchants in the city of New York belong to the New England Society of that place; that a constant stream of population is flowing from the north to the south and west; and that no traveller in modern times can visit a commercial spot on the globe, without finding there some Yankee, and in most instances, a Connecticut-man. We even find a Connecticut sailor\* in the interior of

\* Captain Riley.

Africa, writing a better history of his travels, and the country, than has been produced by all the scientifick expeditions from England. It is not because we cease to love the land of steady habits and pumpkin pies, that we leave it, any more than the Scotchman can forget "the land of cakes," or the Irishman, his sweet little Emerald Isle of the ocean. We leave the northeastern states, because the land is too narrow to contain all that are reared to manhood there, by the temperance and frugality of their parents;—because the soil is too thin to sustain all that would otherwise be born there; and because we have sufficient ingenuity and perseverance, to provide for ourselves and our posterity, in a more temperate climate; while we leave our native mansions for the youngest sons in their respective families.

It has been a subject of frequent wonder, that comparatively few Yankees should have found a home for themselves in Philadelphia, the most healthy, wealthy, and beautiful city on the continent. A sufficient reason can be given: the Philadelphians in general, and the



Quakers, the original settlers, in particular, are such an industrious, thriving, and acute people;—are, in short, so much like ourselves, that until lately, none of us could find room for activity here. We that have obtained an entrance, therefore, and have all the blessings which any city on earth can afford, while we remember as dutiful sons the home of the Pilgrims, will not cease, on our anniversary thanksgiving, and on “the feast of shells,” to give also **THREE CHEERS FOR THE MORALITY, EDUCATION, AND STEADY HABITS OF THE PHILADELPHIANS.**

**THE END.**