

Am Lit texts - 2

John Smith, from *A Description of New England* (1616)

Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but only his merit to advance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he have but the taste of virtue, and magnanimitie, what to such a mind can be more pleasant, then planting and building a foundation for his Posteritie, gotte from the rude earth, by Gods blessing and his owne industrie, without prejudice to any? If he have any grain of faith or zeal in Religion, what can he doe lesse hurtfull to any; or more agreeable to God, then to seeke to convert those poore Salvages to know Christ, and humanitie, whose labors with discretion will triple requite thy charge and paines? What so truely sutes with honour and honestie, as the discovering things unknowne? erecting Townes, peopling Countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things unjust, teaching virtue; and gaine to our Native mother-countrie a kingdom to attend her; finde employment for those that are idle, because they know not what to doe: so farre from wronging any, as to cause Posteritie to remember thee; and remembring thee, ever honour that remembrance with praise? ...

Here nature and liberty afford us that freely which in England we want, or it costs us dearly. What pleasure can be more than (being tired with any occasion ashore, in planting vines, fruits, or herbs, in contriving their own grounds, to the pleasure of their own minds, their fields, gardens, orchards, buildings, ships, and other works, &c) to recreate themselves before their own doors, in their own boats upon the sea, where man, woman, and child, with a small hook and line, by angling may take divers sorts of excellent fish at their pleasures? And is it not pretty sport to pull up two pence, six pence, and twelve pence as fast as you can haul and veer a line? He is a very bad fisher [that] cannot kill in one day, with his hook and line, one, two, or three hundred cods, which dressed and dried, if they be sold there for ten shilling the hundred [pounds], though in England they will give more than twenty, may not both the servant, the master, and merchant be well content with this gain? If a man work but three days in seven he may get more than he can spend, unless he will be excessive. Now that carpenter, mason, gardener, tailor, smith, sailor, forgers or what other, may they not make this a pretty recreation, though they fish but an hour in the day, to take more than they eat in a week? Or if they will not eat it, because there is so much better choice, yet [they may] sell it or change it with the fishermen or merchants for anything they want. And what sport does yield a more pleasing content and less hurt or charge than angling with a hook and crossing the sweet air from isle to isle, over the silent streams of a calm sea? Wherein the most curious may find pleasure, profit, and content.

For hunting also, the woods, lakes and rivers afford not only chase sufficient for any that delight in that kind of toil or pleasure but such beast to hunt that besides the delicacy of their bodies for food, their skins are so rich as may well recompense thy daily labor with a Captain's pay. For laborers, if those [in England] that sow hemp, rape, turnips, parsnips, carrots, cabbage, and such like, give twenty, thirty, forty, fifty shilling yearly for an acre of ground, and meat, drink, and wages to use it and yet grow rich, when better or at least as good ground may be had [in New England] and cost nothing but labor, it seems strange to me any such should there grow poor.

My purpose is not to persuade children from their parents, men from their wives, nor servants from their masters; only such as with free consent may be spared. But that each parish or village, in city or country, that will but apparel their fatherless children of thirteen or fourteen years of age, or young married people that have small wealth to live on, here by their labor may live exceedingly well. Provided always that first there be a sufficient power to command them, houses to receive them,

means to defend them, and meet provisions for them; for any place may be overlain, and it is most necessary to have a fortress (ere this grow to practice) and sufficient masters (as carpenters, masons, fishers, fowlers, gardeners, husbandmen, sawyers, smiths, spinners, tailors, weavers, and such like) to take ten, twelve, or twenty, or as there is occasion, for apprentices. The masters by this may quickly grow rich; these apprentices their trades themselves to do the like, to a general and an incredible benefit for king and country, master and servant.

William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*: Book I, Chapter IX

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 a 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.
...

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 well considers the same. Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation ... 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 succor. It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle [Paul, Acts 28.1-2] and his shipwrecked¹ company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them,² 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 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. ... For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets,³ 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 main⁴ bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world. ...

What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity"*

* Here Bradford's text echoes the language of the *Bible*: "And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor and our oppression: And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (*The Bible*, The Old Testament, Deuteronomy 26.6-8). [Deuteronomy: *deutero* = late Latin for second + *nomos*, Greek for law – Deuteronomy is the name of the fifth book of canonical Jewish and Christian Scripture containing a second statement of the Mosaic law]

¹ Shipwreck: the destruction or loss of a ship, as if by sinking.

² [Paul Ashore on Malta] Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.

³ Thicket: a thick or dense growth of shrubs [woody plants smaller than trees], bushes, or small trees.

⁴ Main: strong.