William Bradford, from *History of Plymouth Plantation* (1630-1650)

William Bradford (1590–1657), second governor of Plymouth Colony, was a member of the original separatist congregation at Scrooby, England, that emigrated in 1609 with others to Holland. He came to New England on the Mayflower in 1620 and was chosen governor upon the death of Governor John Carver in 1621. He began writing his *History of Plymouth Plantation* in 1630. Here, Bradford explains why the Pilgrims left Holland (Chapter Four), how they made preparations for the voyage to the New World (Chapter Five), and their agreements with the Virginia Company for establishing their settlement at Plymouth (Chapter Six).

*Showing the reasons and causes of their remoovall.* After they had lived in this citie about some 11. or 12. years, (which is the more observable being the whole time of that famose truce between that state and the Spaniards,) and sundrie of them were taken away by death, and many others began to be well striken in years, the grave mistris Experience haveing taught them many things, those prudent governours with sundrie of the saggest members begane both deeply to apprehend their present dangers, and wisely to foresee the future, and thinke of timly remedy. In the agitation of their thoughts, and much discours of things hear aboute, at length they began to incline to this conclusion, of remoovall to some other place. Not out of any newfanglednes, or other such like giddie humor, by which men are oftentimes transported to their great hurt and danger, but for sundrie weightie and solid reasons; some of the cheefe of which I will hear breefly touch. And first, they saw and found by experience the hardnes of the place and countrie to be such, as few in comparison would come to them, and fewer that would bide it out, and continuuew with them. For many that came to them, and many more that desired to be with them, could not endure that great labor and hard fare, with other inconveniences which they underwent and were contented with. But though they loved their persons, approved their cause, and honoured their sufferings, yet they left them as it weer weeping, as Orpah did. her mother in law Naomie, or as those Romans did Cato in Utica, who desired to be excused and borne with, though they could not all be Catoes. For many, though they desired to injoye the ordinances of God in their puritie, and the libertie of the gospell with them, yet, alass, they admitted of bondage, with danger of conscience, rather than to indure these hardships; yea, some preferred and chose the prisons in England, rather then this libertie 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 discouragments. Yea, their pastor would often say, that many of those who both wrote and preached now against them, if they were in a place wher they might have libertie and live comfortably, they would then practise as they did.

They saw that though the people generally bore all these difficulties very cherfully, and with a resolute courage, being in the best and strength of their years, yet old age began to steale on manyof them, (and their great and continuall labours, with other crosses and sorrows, hastened it before the time,) so as it was not only probably thought, but apparently seen, that within a few years more they would be in danger to scatter, by necessities pressing them, or sinke under their burdens, or both. And therefore according to the devine proverb, that a wise man seeth the plague when it cometh, and hideth him
selfe, Pro. 22. 3., so they like skillfull and beaten souldiers were fearfull either to be
intrapped or surrounded by their enimies, so as they should neither be able to fight nor
flie; and therfor thought it better to dislodge betimes to some place of better advantage
and less danger, if any such could be found. Thirdly; as necessitie was a taskmaster over
them, so they were forced to be such, not only to their servantsy but in a sorte, to their
dearest children; the which as it did not a little wound the tender harts of many a loving
father and mother, so it produced likewise sundrie sad and sorrowful effects. For many of
their children, that were of best dispositions and gracious inclinations, haveing lernde to
bear the yoake in their youth, and willing to bear parte of their parents burden, were,
often times, so oppressed with their hevie labours, that though their minds were free and
willing, yet their bodies bowed under the weight of the same, and became decreped in
their early youth; the vigor of nature being consumed in the very budd as it were. But that
which was more lamentable, and of all sorowes most heavie to be borne, was that many
of their children, by these occasions, and the great licentiousness of youth in that
countrie, and the manifold temptations of the place, were drawne away by evill examples
into extravagante and dangerous courses, getting the raines off their neks, and departing
from their parents. Some became souldiers, others tooke upon them farr viages by sea,
and other some worse courses, tending to dissolutnes and the danger of their soules, to
the great greefe of their parents and dishonour of God. So that they saw their posteritie
would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted.

Lastly, (and which was not least), a great hope and inward zeall they had of laying some
good foundation, or at least to make some way therunto, for the propagating and
advancing the gospell of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea,
though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so
great a work.

These, and some other like reasons, moved them to undertake this resolution of their
removall; the which they afterward prosecuted with so great difficulties, as by the sequell
will appeare.

The place they had thoughts on was some of those vast and unpeopled countries of
America, which are frutfull and fitt for habitation, being devoyd of all civill inhabitants,
wher ther are only salvage and brutish men, which range
up and downe, little otherwise
then the wild beasts of the same. This proposition being made publike and coming to the
scanning of all, it raised many variable opinions amongst men, and. caused many fears and
doubts amongst them selves. Some, from' their rea
sons and hops conceived, laboured to
stirr up and incourage the rest to undertake and prosecute the same; others, againe, out of
their fears, objected against it, and sought to diverite from it, aledging many things, and
those neither unreasonable nor unprobable; as that it was a great designe, and subjecte to
many unconceivable perills and dangers; as, besids the casulties of the seas (which none
can be freed from) the length of the vioage was such, as the weake bodys of women and
other persons wore out with age and traville (as many of them were) could never be able
to endure. And yet if they should, the miseries of the land which they should be exposed
unto, would be to hard to be borne; and lickly, some or all of them togeither, to consume
and utterly to ruinate them. For ther they should be liable to famine, and nakednes, and
the wante, in a maner, of all things. The chang of aire, diate, and drinking of water, would
infecte their bodies with sore sicknesses, and greevous diseases. And also those which
should escape or overcome these difficulties, should yett be in continuall danger of the
salvage people, who are cruelly barbarous, and most trecherous, being most furious in
their rage, and merciles whey they overcome; not being contente only to kill., and. take
away life, but delight to tormente men in the most bloodie manner that may be; fleeing
some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting of the members and joynts of others by
peesmeale, and broiling on the coles, eate the collops of their flesh in their sight whilst
they live; with other cruelties horrible to be related. And surely it could not be thought
but the very hearing of these things could not but move the very bowels of men to grate
within them, and make the weake to quake and tremble. It was furder objected, that it
would require greater summes of money to furnish such a voyaige, and to fitt them with
necessaries, then their consumed estats would amounte too; and yett they must as well
looke to be seconded with supplies, as presently to be transported. Also many presidents
of ill success, and lamentable miseries befalne others in the like designes, were easie to
be found, and not forgotten to be aledged; besides their owne experience, in their former
troubles and hardships in their removall into Holland, and how hard a thing it was for
them to live in that strange place, though it was a neighbour countrie, and a civill and rich
comone wealth.

It was answered, that all great and honourable actions are accompanied with great
difficulties, and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was
granted the dangers were great, but not desperate; the difficulties were many, but not
invincible. For though their were many of them likly, yet they were not certaine; it might
be sundrie of the things feared might never befale; others by providente care and the use
of good means, might in a great measure be prevented; and all of them, through the help
of God, by fortitude and patience, might either be borne, or overcome. True it was, that
such atempts were not to be made and undertaken without good ground and reason; not
rashly or lightly as many have done for curiositie or hope of gaine, etc. But their
condition was not ordinarie; their ends were good and honourable; their calling lawfull,
and urgente; and therfore they might expecte the blessing of God in their proceding. Yea,
though they should loose their lives in this action, yet might they have comforte in the
same, and their endeavors would be honourable. They lived hear but as men in exile, and
in a poore condition; and as great miseries might possibly befale them in this place, for
the 12. years of truce were now out, and ther was nothing but beating of drumes, and
preparing for warr, the events wherof are allway uncertaine. The Spaniard might prove as
cruell as the salvages of America, and the famine and pestelence as sore hear as ther,
and their libertie less to looke out for remedie. After many other perticuler things
answered and aledged on both sids, it was fully concluded by the major parte, to put this
designe in execution, and to prosecute it by the best means they could.

The 5. Chap.

Shewing what means they used for preparation to this weightie vioag. AND first after
thir humble priaires unto God for his direction and assistance, and a generall conference
held hear aboute, they consulted what perticuler place to pitch upon, and prepare for.
Some (and none of the meanest) had thoughts and were ernest for Guiana, or some of
those fertill places in those hott climats; others were for some parts of Virginia, wher the
English had all ready made enterance, and begining. Those for Guiana aledged that the countrie was richy fruitful, and blessed with a perpetuall spring, and a florishing greenes; where vigorous nature brought forth all things in abundance and plente without any great labour or art of man. So as it must needs make the inhabitants rich, seing less provisions of clothing and other things would serve, then in more colduer and less fruitful countries must be had. As also that the Spaniards (having much more then they could possess) had not yet planted there, nor any where very near the same. But to this it was answered, that out of question the countrie was both fruitful and pleasante, and might yeeld riches and main been as well knowne as my selfe. Some what I have written to Mr. Cushman how the matter still continues. I have petitioned twise to Mr. Sherives, and once to my Lord Cooke, and have used such reasons to move them to pittie, that if they were not overruled by some others. I suppose I should soone gaine my libertie; as that I was a yonge man living by my credite, indebted to diverse in our citie, living at more then ordinarie charges in a close and tedious prison; besides great rents abroad, all my bussines lying still, my only servante lying lame in the countrie, my wife being also great with child. And yet no answer till the lords of his majesties Counsell gave consent. Howbeit, Mr. Blackwell, a man as deepe in this action as I, was delivered at a cheaper rate, with a great deale less ado; yea, with an addition of the Archp: blessing. I am sorie for Mr. Blackwels weakness, I wish it may prove no worse. But yet he and some others of them, before their going, were not sorie, but thought it was for the best that I was nominated, not because the Lord sanctifies evil to good, but that the action was good, yea for the best. One reason I well remember he used was, because this trouble would increase the Virginia plantation, in that now people began to be more generally inclined to goe; and if he had not nominated some such as I, he had not bene free, being it was knowne that diverse citizens besides them selves were ther. I expect an answer shortly what they intende concerning me; I purpose to write to some others of you, by whom you shall know the certaintie. Thus not having further at present to acquaint you withall, commending myselfe to your prayers, I cease, and committe you and us all to the Lord.

From my chamber in Wodstreeete Compter.

Your freind, and brother in bonds,

Septr: 4. An°: 1618. SABIN STARESMORE.

But thus much by the way, which may be of instruction and good use.

But at last, after all these things, and their long attendance, they had a patent granted them, and confirmed under the Companies seale; but these devissions and distractions had shaken of many of ther pretended freinds, and disappointed them of much of their hoped for and proffered means. By the advise of some freinds this pattente was not taken in the name of any of their owne, but in the name of Mr. John Wincob (a religious gentleman then belonging to the Countess of Lincoline), who intended to goe with them. But God so disposed as he never went, nor they ever made use of this patente, which had cost them so much labour and charge, as by the sequell will appeare. This patente being sente over for them to view and consider, as also the passages aboute the propositions between them and such marchants and freinds as should either goe or adventure with
them, and especially with those on whom they did chiefly depend for shipping and means, whose proffers had been large, they were requested to fitt and prepare them selves with all speed. A right emblime, it may be, of the uncertine things of this world; that when men have toyld them selves for them, they vanish into smoke.

The 6. Chap.

Concerning the agreements and articles between them, and such marchants and others as冒险ed moneys; with other things falling out aboute making their provisions. UPON the receite of these things by one of their messengers, they had a sollemne meeting and a day of humiliication to seeke the Lord for his direction; and their pastor tooke this texte, I Sam. 23. 3, 4. And David's men said unto him, see, we be afraid hear in Judah, how much more if we come to Keilah against the host of the Phillistines? Then David asked counsell of the Lord againe, etc. From which texte he taught many things very aptly, and bethitting ther present occasion and condition, strengthening them against their fears and perplexities, and encouraging them in the resolutions. After which they concluded both what number and what persons should prepare them selves to goe with the first; for all that were willing to have gone could not gett ready for their other affairs in so short a time; neither if all could have been ready, had ther been means to have transported them alltogether. Those that staid being the greater number required the pastor to stay with them; and indeede for other reasons he could not then well goe, and so it was the more easilie yeelded unto. The other then desired the elder, Mr. Brewster, to goe with them, which was also condescended unto. It was also agreed on by mutuall consente and covenant, that those that went should be an absolute church of them selves, as well as those that staid; seing in such a dangrous viage, and a removall to such a distance, it might come to pass they should (for the body of them) never meete againe in this world; yet with this proviso, that as any of the rest came over to them, or of the other returned upon occasion, they should be reputed as members without any further dismission or testimoniall. It was also promised to those that wente first, by the body of the rest, that if the Lord gave them life, and means, and opportunitie, they would come to them as soone as they could.

Aboute this time, whilst they were perplexed with the proseedings of the Virginia Company, and the ill news from thence aboute Mr. Blackwell and his company, and making inquery about the hiring and buying of shipping for their viage, some Dutchmen made them faire offers aboute going with them. Also one Mr. Thomas Weston, a merchant of London, came to Leyden aboute the same time, (who was well aquainted with some of them, and a furtherer of them in their former proseedings,) haveing much conferance with Mr. Robinson and other of the cheefe of them, perswaded them to goe on (as it seems) and not to medle with the Dutch, or too much to depend on the Virginia Company; for if that failed) if they came to resolution, he and such marchants as were his friends (together with their owne means) would sett them forth; and they should make ready, and neither feare wante of shipping nor money; for what they wanted should be provided. And, not so much for him selfe as for the satisfing of such frends as he should procure to adventure in this bussines, they were to draw such articls of agreemente, and make such propositions, as might the better induce his freinds to venture. Upon which (after the formere conclusion) articles were drawne and agreed unto, and were showne
unto him, and approved by him; and afterwards by their messenger (Mr. John Carver) sent into England, who, togeather with Robart Cushman, were to receive the moneys and make provissione both for shiping and other things for the vioage; with this charge, not to exseed thei commission, but to proseed according to the former articles. Also some were chosen to doe the like for such things as were to be prepared there; so those that weare to goe, prepared them selves with all speed, and soul of their estats and (such as were able) put in their moneys into the commone stock, which was disposed by those appointed, for the making of generall provissions. About this. time also they had heard, both by Mr. Weston and others, that sundrie Hon[bl]. Lords had obtained a large grante from the king, for the more northerly parts of that countrie, derived out of the Virginia patente, and wholly secluded from their Govermente, and to be called by another name, viz. New-England. Unto which Mr. Weston, and the cheefe of them, begane to incline it was best for them to goe, as for other reasons, so cheefly for the hope of present profite to be made by the fishing that was found in that countrie.

But as in all bussineses the acting parte is most difficulte, espetially wher the worke of many agents must concurr, so it was found in this; for some of those that should have gone in England, fell of and would not goe; other marchants and freinds that had offered to adventure their moneys withdrew, and pretended many excuses. Some disliking they wente not to Guiana; others againe would adventure nothing excepte they wente to Virginia. Some againe (and those that were most relied on) fell in utter dislike with Virginia, and would doe nothing if they wente thither. In the midds of these distractions, they of Leyden, who had put of their estats, and laid out their moneys, were brought into a greate streight, fearing what issue these things would come too; but at length the generalitie was swaid to this latter opinion.

But now another difficultie arose, for Mr. Weston and some other that were for this course, either for their better advantage or rather for the drawing on of others, as they pretended, would have some of those conditions altered that were first agreed on at Leyden. To which the 2. agents sent from Leyden (or at least one of them who is most charged with it) did consente; seeing els that all was like to be dashte, and the opportunitie lost, and that they which had put of their estats and paid in their moneys were in hazard to be undon. They presumed to conclude with the marchants on those termes, in some things contrary to their order and commission, and without giving them notice of the same; yea, it was conceled lest it should make any furder delay; which was the cause afterward of much trouble and contention.

It will be meeete I here inserete these conditions, which are as foloweth.


The adventurers and planters doe agree, that every person that goeth being aged 16. years and upward, be rated at 10li., and ten pounds to be accounted a single share.

That he that goeth in person, and furnisheth him selue out with 10li. either in money or other provissions, be accounted as haveing 20li. in stock, and in the devission shall receive a double share.
The persons transported and the adventurers shall continue their joynt stock and partnership togeather, the space of 7. years, (excepte some unexpected impedimente doe cause the whole company to agree otherwise,) during which time, all profits and benifits that are gott by trade, traffick, trucking, working, fishing, or any other means of any person or persons, remaine still in the commone stock untill the division.

That at their comming ther, they chose out such a number of fitt persons, as may furnish their ships and boats for fishing upon the sea; imploying the rest in their severall faculties upon the land; as building houses, tilling, and planting the ground, and makeing shuch commodities as shall be most usefull for the collonie.

That at the end of the 7. years, the capitall and profits, viz. the houses, lands, goods and chatles, be equally devided betwixte the adventurers, and planters; which done, every man shall be free from other of them of any debt or detrimente concerning this adventure.

Whosoever cometh to the colonie herafter, or putteth any into the stock, shall at the ende of the 7. years be alowed proportionably to the time of his so doing.

He that shall carie his wife and children, or servants, shall be alowed for everie person now aged 16. years and upward, a single share in the deivation, or if he provid them necessaries, a duble share, or if they be between 10. year old and 16., then 2. of them to be reconed for a person, both in transportation and deivation.

That such children as now goe, and are under the age of ten years, have noe other shar in the deivation, but 50. acers of unmanured land.

That such persons as die before the 7. years be expired, their executors to have their parte or sharr at the deivation, proportionably to the time of their life in the collonie.

That all such persons as are of this collonie, are to have their meate, drink, apparell, and all provissions out of the common stock and goods of the said collonie.

The cheefe and principall differences betwene these and the former conditions, stood in those 2. points; that the houses, and lands improved, espetialy gardens and home lotts should remaine undevided wholy to the planters at the 7. years end. 2\textsuperscript{nd}, that they should have had 2. days in a weeke for their owne private impoylement, for the more comforte of them selves and their families, espetialy such as bad families. But because letters are by some wise men counted the best parte of histories, I shall shew their greevances hereaboute by their owne letters, in which the passages of things will be more truly discerned.