1926

The first American historian--William Bradford

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

T h e s i s

THE FIRST AMERICAN HISTORIAN -- WILLIAM BRADFORD

Submitted by

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A. B., Boston University, 1921

In partial fulfilment of requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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Outline

I. Introduction

A. American Colonial literature is a literature of sections

1. Due to physical characteristics of the land and differences in origin of the colonies

2. Bradford described early settlements in New England

3. Bradford's writings impress us.

II. Bradford's life

A. His birthplace

B. Date of his birth

1. No official record of his birth

C. His early home environment

D. Loss of parents at an early age and the resulting conditions

E. He joins the Separatists.

1. Relatives offended

2. At seventeen went to Holland

F. In Holland

1. Employment

2. A Student

3. His marriage

G. In America

1. Early reverses

2. Governor of the colony

a. Held the position for thirty years

b. A student in old age

H. His death

1. Lamented by all the colonies in New England

III. History of the Plymouth Plantation

A. Evidences of Bradford's early plan to write history

B. Superior opportunities for writing this history

C. Singular fate of his manuscript

1. Description of the original

2. Used by some writers and then disappeared

3. Found in London Library and finally returned to America

D. Bradford's fitness for historical writing.

E. The philosophical thoroughness of his plan

F. He recounts vividly and interestingly the wanderings of the Pilgrims and their settlement in America

G. He records in simple style and with sincerity the history of the colony year by year down to 1646

H. Some interesting facts about the Pilgrims

I. Summary of Bradford's characteristics, as the first American historian

IV. Bradford's place in American literature and history

A. His history reflects the life of our early settlers, so its permanency is assured

B. Unconscious contributor to literature

C. Characteristics of some modern historians

D. He possessed the characteristics of a real historian

1. He has singular regard for truth

2. His history is always readable

3. He is always just

E. Conclusion

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American literature had its beginning in no one center or community. During the early years of American history, the Colonies of the South, of the North, and of the Middle region were separated from each other by the barriers of forest and wilderness and by their underlying difference in spirit and origin. In each Colonial group, therefore, literature had an independent beginning, and, for a considerable period, a separate development. The crude literary efforts of the several colonies bear the stamp of their local individuality. Our Colonial literature is consequently a literature of sections, each of which must be studied separately to be rightly understood. We must go back to these Colonies and their literature as we would trace a river to its source; so only can we appreciate the origin of much that we find about us in the United States today.

New England may congratulate itself that its early settlements were described by Bradford and Winthrop in contemporary accounts as faithful and as truly original as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The purpose of this paper is to make a thoughtful study of William Bradford as the first American historian and no more worthy name is associated with the Plymouth Colony.

William Bradford deserves the pre-eminence of being called the father of American history. We pay to him also that homage which we render to those authors who even by their writings give to us the impression that, admirable as they may be in authorship, behind their authorship is something more admirable -- their own manliness.

"The world has nothing more worthy of our regard than its unconscious heroes" and we include William Bradford in our list of those who have been unconscious of their own greatness. He was a native of Austerfield, England, on the south border of Yorkshire. There is no official record of his birth. It was the rule then that children should be baptized one week after birth and the record of his baptism bears the date March 19, 1589. If this contemporary custom was followed, William was born March 12, 1589 by Old Style, or March 22, 1590, New Style. Not long before his nuptials on December 10 to 20, 1613, he averred that he was twenty-three; and, supposing an error of his quite improbable here, the conclusion seems to be justified that he was born in 1590 by the Gregorian Calendar.

The region in which he lived was rich in historic interest. It was the battleground of Britons, Romans and Anglo-Saxons. The Robin Hood marauders operated through this sparsely settled region. The people were comparatively rude and uneducated and there were few schools. Though the northern peasantry in young William's time was so untutored or morally lax, or both, that they were unacquainted with even their English Bible, it is not strange if the historical associations induced the more intelligent and refined yeomen to possess Latin books. It has been supposed that his own family owned them and some English works, too, all of which were rare and costly. Wills and records indicate that the Bradfords in general were of good repute and

moved in the best society of that period. The Austerfield branch consisted of yeomen, once so important in the English commons that they ranked next to the gentry.

William's father died in 1591 and his mother died soon after. His paternal grandfather in whose care he was left passed away in 1596. By legal imposition and not because of love for him, he was now taken care of by his uncles Thomas and Robert. Robert wished him to be a farmer, but when he proved to be not very rugged, he permitted him to study.

Before William was twelve, an illness of long continuance coming upon him, youthful intelligence and spiritual sensitiveness were developed in him. Denied the warmth of family affection, and for a season the wholesome sports of youth, the boy delighted in the contemplation of religious truth, particularly the Bible study; and this became a life long habit with him.

In his youth he joined a band at Scrooby who insisted on freedom of the individual conscience from either civil or ecclesiastical domination and who were also convinced that genuine Christianity called for a Christlike life. His joining with these Separatists from the Established State Church of England was an act which offended his relatives and they tried in vain to make him abandon his belief. He would walk six or seven miles to attend the chruch services. As his soul expanded, his intellect was also awakened. Though at first forbidden advanced schooling, he became a self-taught man, a thoughtful student of history, philosophy, and theology.

The Government officers soon discovered this company of dissenters at Scrooby, stopped their meetings and proceeded to make arrests. In the autumn of 1607, when seventeen years old, Bradford and his associates, under the leadership of the saintly John Robinson, endeavored to go over to Holland where religious liberty was allowed. Bradford was one of the chief advocates of this measure. Several unsuccessful attempts to escape were made and before the year 1608 passed, the victims of persecution, one after another, had crossed the water to Amsterdam.

On reaching Holland, an envious passenger accused Bradford of having fled from England as a culprit and he was taken before the magistrates. They willingly released him, however, when the truth was known. The Pilgrims settled at Leyden and Bradford became a student at the University there. He also went about there to earn a living. As an apprentice to a French Protestant, he learned the trade of dying silk and doubtless, besides his Dutch, he acquired there his thorough familiarity with the French language so widely used even in those days.

When he became twenty-one, he inherited his native estate in England. It was useless to him for he could not go back to the old faith in order to live there, so he sold it. At the age of twenty-two he was admitted, on proof and security, a citizen of Leyden, as William Bradford, Englishman. In the end of the next year his marriage bans were published, and he was registered as a worker in fustian, a coarse cloth of cotton

and flax. On December 20, 1913, he wedded Dorothy May, aged sixteen, formerly of Cambridge, England.

A few years after his marriage, some of the Pilgrims decided to leave Holland and at the age of thirty Bradford appeared as a prominent man among that portion of the Pilgrims who landed in New England in 1620. In the early days of the settlement, he was critically ill, but God spared him for his later work. Before the Pilgrims had found a satisfactory harbor for landing in America, he was saddened by the loss of his wife for, accidently, she fell overboard and all attempts to save her were futile. Two years later he married Alice Carpenter Southworth, a widow with two children. His family life seems to have been a happy one and four children were born to this union.

In the year 1621, Bradford was unanimously chosen governor of the Plymouth plantation. He held this position for thirty full years. Governor Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony wrote in his manuscript, "Mr. Bradford having been governor about ten years and now by importunity got off." The importunity was Bradford's, not the little colony's, for he urged rotation of office. Thomas Prince, a later settler, was voted to the position in 1634 and 1638, and Mr. Winslow was elected in 1633, 1636, and 1644. In every instance when Bradford requested a successor, the ballot made him chief of Assistants or Deputy Governor.

Certainly the position of Governor in the early colony

offered many difficulties and if he had not been a person of more than ordinary piety, wisdom and courage, he would have sunk under them. He had had many experiences which now he had occasion to use.

As chief magistrate he wrought a good work for the colony by a union of firmness and gentleness, of foresight and common sense. The Indian problem was, of course, the one most urgently demanding solution. When a chief took advantage of a famine in the colony to send a bundle of arrows tied in a serpent's skin, Bradford returned the skin crammed with powder and bullets. But if Bradford knew how to be bold, he was equally skilled in the arts of diplomacy. His management of the affairs of his colony was discreet as regards its internal affairs, its relation towards its neighbors and its obligations to the home government in England.

He must have been a man of prudence and patience and a person of well-tempered spirit to have kept the affairs of Plymouth in so good a temper for the thirty years which he served as governor. The leader of a people in a wilderness needed to be a Moses; and if a Moses had not led the people of Plymouth Colony, when Bradford was their leader, the people would never have, with such unanimity, called him so many times to lead them.

He was a person for study as well as action. In spite of the difficulties through which he passed in his youth, he attained a notable skill in languages. As mentioned before the Dutch tongue became almost as vernacular to him as the English; the French tongue he could also manage. He mastered Latin and

Greek and in his old age he was a diligent student of Hebrew. In his Dialogues, we discover this statement: "Though I am grown aged, yet I have had a longing to see with mine own eyes something of that most ancient language and holy tongue, in which the law and oracles of God were writ, and in which God and angels spake to the holy Patriarchs of old time." All his training tended to make him more efficient as governor and his knowledge of history, philosophy, and theology was invaluable in solving many of the questions which arose in the colony.

He last presided at court February 13, 1657. He was absent from the annual meeting in March. His health declined steadily and in May his condition became critical. One night he was so moved with anticipations of the hereafter that he told in the morning those about him that, "The good spirit of God had given him pledge of his happiness in another world and the first fruits of his eternal glory." About nine o'-clock on the next day, May 19, after he had dictated his will, his breathing ceased. Thus passed into his eternal glory a man who was lamented by all the colonies of New England, as a common blessing and father to them all, and the crown of all was his holy, prayerful, watchful, and fruitful walk with God wherein he was very exemplary.

His form was laid to rest on the brow of a hill which overlooked the site of his home for over thirty years.

"Men are but Flocks: Bradford beheld their need,
And long did them at once both rule and feed."

Governor Bradford early formed the plan of writing a history of the colony and this, doubtless, led to the careful preservation by him of the valuable materials which officially came into his possession previous to the time when the work was commenced. One evidence of this is seen in his "Letter-Book" which contained an invaluable collection of letters and other public papers, chronologically arranged, afterwards freely used by him in preparing his history. In a note appended to one of these papers, alluding to the necessitous condition of the colony in 1625 and 1626, he says, "It was God's marvelous providence that we were ever able to wade through things, as will better appear if God give me life and opportunity to handle them more particularly in another treatise more at large, as I desire and purpose, (if God permit) with many other things in a better order."

The opportunities which Governor Bradford enjoyed for writing the history of his colony were superior, in many respects, to those of any other person. Just five years' release from the office of chief magistrate from 1621 to 1657 would seem to afford him little leisure for writing; yet he acquired during that time an entire familiarity with every subject of a public nature in any way connected with the colony. This taken in connection with his high character has caused the work to be regarded as of the first authority in matters relating to the history of the Pilgrims.

It was after he had been in America ten years and he had seen absolute proof of the permanent success of the heroic movement in which he was a leader that he began his chronicle of events in Plymouth Colony, and thenceforward for twenty years he gave his leisure to the composition of a work in which the story of the settlement of New England should be told in a calm, just, and authentic manner. The result was his "History of Plymouth Plantation," a book which has had an extraordinary fate.

He made no effort to publish his history so he left it in manuscript form. The original is a folio of twelve inches by seven and a half. There has been some scribbling on the cover, now scarcely legible. It was done apparently by some member of Bradford's family before they had allowed the volume to pass out of their hands. In this scribbling, the name of Mercy Bradford is to be traced. She was Governor Bradford's daughter. Written on one of the blank leaves at the beginning we find this: "This book was rit by Goefner William Bradford, and gifen to his son Mager William Bradford, and by him to his son Mager John Bradford, rit by me Samuel Bradford, March 20, 1705."

Occasionally throughout the manuscript an alteration in the spelling of a word has been made. For instance, the word "such" is usually written "shuch", but very frequently a pen has been drawn down through the second letter, reducing it to modern orthography. This is the case with a few other words.

In some instances the correction of the spelling of a word is indicated by placing a letter over the word as originally written; this may have been done by the author or some of the men who used the document later. There is a great want of uniformity in the author's punctuation and also in his use of capitals. The original manuscript was written on one side of the leaf only and on the reverse side Bradford sometimes wrote long passages, some of which evidently were forgotten at the time of his first writing and hence were omitted then, but he afterwards supplied them by this means. In the same volume with the history, thought forming no part of it, "is a rather long piece, being Hebrew Roots, with English explanations," which seems to indicate his intense interest in that language. He put at the end a very interesting list of passengers of the Mayflower and an account of their families.

The manuscript was freely used by Bradford's nephew, Nathaniel Morton, in the composition of his famous "New England's Memorial", published in 1669. It remained in the hands of the family of the author for a hundred years, but none of his immediate successors made any attempt to publish it; they seem to have considered it a document to be kept for future historians. Afterward, it came into the hands of Thomas Prince who drew from it what he desired when writing his "Chronological History of New England", published in 1736. By Prince the old book was left at his death in his library in the tower of the Old South Church, Boston. There it was

used by Thomas Hutchinson when he was engaged in writing his "History of Massachusetts Bay".

During the occupation of Boston by the British troops in 1775 and 1776, Prince's library was plundered and many precious historical documents were destroyed. Bradford's manuscript was known to have been in that library not long before and as afterward it did not appear among the remains of the library, it was given up for lost and was mourned over by American scholars for nearly a hundred years. In 1855, however, the long lost treasure was discovered in England, in the Fulham library, the ancient and rich collection belonging to the Bishop of London.

In 1844, Wilberforce published a book on the Protestant Church in America in which he referred to the manuscript. Four years later appeared Anderson's "History of the Colonial Church," an English work, and in it also was a reference to the manuscript. Seven years later, two gentlemen of Boston came across the reference in Anderson's book. An investigation was made and the identity of the Fulham manuscript with Bradford's was completely established. The Bishop of London held that only an act of Parliament could restore it to the place whence it had been taken. He made, however, no objection to a request that the Massachusetts Historical Society be allowed to publish the manuscript. In 1856 that society gave the world the first complete publication of Bradford's book. It took the copyists three months to secure a transcript and when published it was enriched with annotations by the learned Charles Deane.

In 1867 another request was made that the bishop should surrender the manuscript, but the reply was the same as in the first instance. In 1896 the then Bishop of London relented and Bradford's manuscript was given up without an act of Parliament.

It was given to the American Ambassador to be delivered to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It was received in Boston with high honor and much joy on the part of learned men and was placed in the State Library, a chief ornament of the Archives of the Commonwealth. There is no other document upon New England history that can take precedence of this, either in time or in authority. In 1912 it was published in a final and authoritative form by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Governor Bradford wrote of events that had passed under his own eye, and that had been shaped by his own hand; and he had every qualification of a trustworthy narrator. His mind was placid, grave, well-poised; he was, as I have mentioned, a student of many books and of many languages; and being thus developed both by letters and experience he was able to tell well the truth of history as it had unfolded itself during his own strenuous career. His history is an orderly, lucid and most instructive work; it contains many tokens of its author's appreciation of nature and requirements of historical writing. I believe its true place is at the head of American historical literature.

The philosophical thoroughness of his plan is indicated in the opening chapters of his book. In relating the history of Plymouth, he undertakes to go back to "the very root and rise

of the same," and to show its "occasion and inducements" and he declares his intention to write "in a plain style, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things". This plan, of course, leads him into an account of the origin of religious dissent in England and of the great blunders made by the English churchmen in trying to beat back that dissent into submission. To the average reader, the first chapter is not very interesting, but church historians find much valuable information in it.

There is a charm in the simple English and in the quiet pathos of his words as he depicts the sufferings of the ones who were persecuted, especially of the little congregation at Scrooby, with which the author himself was identified: "But after these things they could not longer continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted and persecuted on every side, so as their former afflictions were but as flea bitings in comparison of these which now came upon them. For some were taken and clapped up in prison; others had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands; and the most were fain to fly and leave their houses and habitations and the means of their livelihood. Yet these and many other sharper things which afterward befel them, were no other than they looked for, and therefore were the better prepared to bear them by the assistance of God's grace and spirit. Yet seeing themselves thus molested, and that there was no hope of their continuance there, by a joint consent they resolved to go into

the 'Low-Countries', where they heard was freedom of religion for all men."

He then proceeds to tell "of their departure into Holland and their troubles thereabout, with some of the many difficulties they found and met withal"; "of their manner of living and entertainment there," of "the reasons and causes of their removal" across "the vast and furious ocean". He impressively relates the hardships they endured in Leyden and the reasons for leaving there such as the oncoming of old age, the effects on the children of living among foreignors and, lastly, the great hope they cherished of advancing the church of Christ in some remote part of the world. They planned to go to "some of those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same."

There is something very impressive in the quiet words in which he pictures the conflicts of opinion among the Pilgrims over the question of their removal to America, their clear, straight view of the perils and pains which it would involve and, finally, the considerations that moved them, in spite of all the difficulties they foresaw, to make their immortal attempt. No modern description of these modest and unconquerable heroes can equal the impression made upon us by Bradford's words, "It was answered that all great and honorable actions

are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised andovercome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great but not desperate; the difficulties were many but not invincible. For though there were many of them likely, yet they were not certain; it might be sundry of the things feared might never befall; others by provident 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 attempts were not to be made and undertaken without good ground and reason; not rashly or lightly as many have done for curiosity or hope of gain, and so forth. But their condition was not ordinary; their ends were good and honorable; their calling lawful and urgent; and therefore they might expect the blessing of God in their proceeding. Yea, though they should lose their lives in this action, yet might they have comfort in the same, and their endeavors would be honorable." A minute account is then given of their negotiations in England and in Holland for permission to settle in America. No more wonderful bits of expression exist than those used by Bradford in relating their departure. "And the time being come that they must departe, they were accompanied with most of their brethren out of the city unto a town sundry miles off called Delfes Haven, where the ship lay ready to receive them. So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but

they knew that they were pilgrims and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country and quieted their spirits---The next day, the wind being fair, they went aboard and their friends with them, where truly doleful was the sight of that sad and mournful parting.--- But the tide, which stays for no man, calling them away that were loathe to depart, their reverent pastor falling down on his knees and they all with him, with watery cheeks commended them with most fervent prayers to the Lord and his blessing. And then, with mutual embraces and many tears, they took their leave one of another; which proved to be the last leave to many of them. " And in this interesting way he gives us accounts of their difficulties about money, ships, and food, before their departure. Their delays, toils, and risks in getting free of the English coast, their long voyage over the sea and their approach to Plymouth harbor are all clearly portrayed in this history.

The language in which the historian describes their condition and their emotion on reaching shore is a noble specimen of simple, picturesque and pathetic eloquence: "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 the 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. And no marvel if they were thus joyful, seeing wise Seneca was so affected with

sailing a few miles on the coast of his own Italy, as he affirmed, that he had rather remain twenty years on his way by land, than pass by sea to any place in a short time; so tedious and dreadful was the same unto him---they had 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 succor. It is recorded in the scripture as a mercy to the apostle and his shipwrecked company that the barbarians shewed them no small kindness in refreshing them; but these savage barbarians when they met them 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?---If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main 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.'"

It does not seem necessary to quote further to show the elegance of the style of our first historian. As the history proceeds year by year, few things are omitted that a noble curiosity could desire to look into, the bright and sombre side of the life of the early settlers--its inadequate shelter, its sickness, its weariness, its long pressure upon the verge of famine and assassination, its roughness, its toils, its outbreaks of crime, its prosperity through hard work, its indomitable faith, its military exploits, philanthropy and acute diplomacy. As it is an annual record of experiences, it can stop where it will without breaking its own unity. The historian's hand kept moving upon this task for twenty years; and when at last old age and public cares rested too heavily upon it, the work, brought down to 1646, was finished so far as it went. Break off when it would,that work, an embodiment of great expression, absolute sincerity and a rhythm of beauty which comes with sincerity, could not be a fragment.

As we read this history we find the Pilgrim Fathers were not all saints and we can admire them all the more because they were human beings. When they first touched the Plymouth Rock, "discontent and murmurings" arose among some, and "mutinous speeches and carriages" among others. Whenever they started out on any momentous enterprise they would stop and argue the case. This was the feeling of some among them before they started across the boisterous sea: "We, that should be partners of humility and peace, shall be examples of jangling and insult-

ing"; "there is fallen already amongst us flat schism; and we are readier to go to dispute, than to set forward a voyage." Nevertheless, upon almost every page of this history there is some quiet trace of the lofty motives which gave them courage to start on their great enterprise. They did it for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith. Being baffled in one of their projects for getting to America, they were greatly disappointed and Bradford calls it " a right emblem, it may be, of the uncertain things of this world; that when men have toiled themselves for them, they vanish into smoke". The prevailing trait of the history's pages is, of course, serious, but it is relieved times by an incident which is somewhat humorous. In the early days of the settlement, some of the true men were bothered by the complaints which were sent back to England and retarded emigration. Bradford comments on the complaints about mosquitoes with a sort of humor which may be called "grim": "They are too delicate, and unfit to begin new plantations and colonies, that cannot endure the biting of a mosquito. We would wish such to keep home till at least they be mosquito proof."

This history so reveals to us the life of the Pilgrim Fathers that we see our estimate of them cannot be too high. Their sufferings thrill us, their kindness to their enemies demands our admiration. As we read the pages, we find they were battling with many of our modern problems, such as, the doctrine

of free trade and socialism. For three years they put the fruits of their labors into a common warehouse, but the plan did not work successfully, so "every man should set corn for his-own particular and in that regard trust to themselves". Bradford was impartial in his judgment of men, for scattered through the history there are many little biographies of men and women, good or bad, who played a part in the early settlement. He makes them all appear on his pages as human actors on the stage of life. In fact, some of the most luminous pages of Bradford are his biographical sketches, wherein his keen but kindly judgment of men is brightened by the play of a grim humor. Here, for instance, is the salt maker from England, who "knew only how to boil water in pans," but who made a great mystery and hocus-pocus out of his art, making his helpers do many unnecessary things "until they discovered his sutetie". Here are Morton and his revelers placing all the settlements in danger, not simply by their evil living, but by breaking the law against selling guns and powder to the Indians. In a few terse pages, Bradford makes us as well acquainted with Morton as if we had met him and his Indian squaws as they revelled about the Maypole at Merry-mount. Finally, Myles Standish "brake up the uncleane nest" and the only person injured "was so drunk that he ran his owne nose upon the point of a sword and lost a little of his hott blood."

A good passage to illustrate with what simplicity and restrained emotion he wrote is his eulogy of Brewster: "He was

wise and discreete and well-spoken, having a grave and deliberate utterance; of a very cheerful spirit, very sociable and pleasant amongst his friends; of an humble and modest mind, undervallewing himself and his own abilities and sometime overvallewing others; inoffensive and innocent in his life and con--versation, which gained him the love of those without as well as those within---He was tender-hearted and compassionate of such as (like himself) had been of good estate and ranke and were fallen into wante and poverty, either for goodness and religious sake, or by injury and oppression of others. He would say,of all men these deserved most to be pitied. And none did more offend and displease him than such as would hautily carry themselves, being risen from nothing, and having little else to commend them but a few fine clothes or a little riches more than others."

Many pages might be consumed if we were to analyze thoroughly this great work of history, but I think sufficient material has been given to make plain to us some of the outstanding qualities of the mind and style of our first American historian -- justice, breadth, vigor, directness, and an untroubled command of strong and manly speech. He wrote without artistic consciousness, but with a plain, direct style, without effort, like a free man, a sage and a Christian.

So in our study of American literature, Bradford is included as one of the founders. He wrote a history of his past experiences as they remained in his memory but it is written in such an interesting way, and it so reflects the life of our early people that its permanency in literature is assured. From the point of view of literature, perhaps we would not consider Bradford a literary man, but he made a record of the vital happenings under God's guidance in the old Plymouth colony and when a man selects vital material and puts it down with no thought of its permanent value as literature, he, as is the case with Bradford, is destined to become a contributor to literature. He gave us a priceless book which we are proud to count among our literary treasures.

In the colonial days we had in this country other men besides Bradford who wrote history. But when we compare his work with that of others, we feel, without a doubt, that he is the first real historian. His contemporary, Captain John Smith in Virginia, also wrote history. His main object was to entertain and in doing this he failed to distinguish between historical fact and fiction; so he mixed both together freely. Bradford told his story in a more methodical and pleasing manner than is visible in any of Smith's books and he was also master of a better English style than Smith. Smith's proneness to exaggerate makes his works very unreliable.

But Bradford's "History" is after all only a document and he would rank high with the useful company of annalists, diarists, and autobiographers, so are we justified in calling him the first American historian? Let us consider briefly some of the

historians of more modern times. Edward Gibbon, for instance, wrote with such ease and grandeur, with such skill in arrangement and such a mastery of narrative, that he is as much a man of letters as a historian. He apparently kept before him the historian's most difficult duty -- the telling of the truth. He lacked enthusiasm, but he told his story in a calm, just and authentic manner.

John R. Green wrote his history of the English people in a lively and picturesque manner. As he records the growth of a people, his narrative is vivid and straightforward. He was a sentimentalist and often let his imagination run away with him. His enthusiasm is evident and his work vibrates with his own spirit.

Francis Parkman ranks high in the group of American historians. We respect Parkman for his absolute fidelity to facts. His scenes are always minutely true to life and his characters are living men. His style is clear, forceful, unconscious and abounding in life and color, and so vividly realistic at times that one would think Parkman had been an eye witness of the event which he describes. Parkman has created a work of literature as well as of history.

These three men, who are considered great historians, will give us a basis for our judgment of Bradford as a historian. We realize that the standards of the age in which Bradford lived were somewhat different from those in the ages in which these historians lived and he was not a college trained man, yet he

compares favorably with these great historians.

Bradford impresses us as a real historian in comparison with these great men. In the beginning of his "History" he declares his purpose to write "in a plain style, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things" and he does not swerve from it in any of his writing. In some respects, Bradford's style is surpassed by the later historians, but if we except the documents he quotes we find his history always readable. It is permeated with a note of sincerity and he writes in a plain, simple style. He has the fundamental quality of every great historian, a deep reverence for truth. To prove the accuracy of his statements, Bradford, whenever it is possible, quotes the authorities for his story in the forms of letters, documents or earlier records. In some of our histories when the author describes a conflict we can easily discern which side he favors, or if it is a political struggle to which party he belongs, or he may show his prejudice toward the leaders of some of the great movements. Although Bradford wrote from the standpoint of the Pilgrim Separatist and with the interests of Plymouth constantly in view, he may fairly be called just, even to the enemies of the colonies, and "when judgment must be uttered on men or on methods, charity is always uppermost." These facts show that Bradford possessed the qualities which we found in our great historians and we may justly call him our first American historian. He wrote what we may call contemporaneous history for he was an eye-witness and his spirit vibrates through his writing as he relates the history of human beings in the colonial days.

Conclusion

The subject matter lends the history interest and the author's narrative style is only slightly quaint and cumbersome. Dignity, sobriety and piety give us both the rhyme and the reason of the hold Governor Bradford had upon his fellow-colonists and still keeps upon posterity. Occasionally we find instances of the spiritual emotion overmastering him, but it does not distract us.

He was a great man of the balanced type and might be compared to Washington in that respect. He was an excellent statesman, although his sphere was limited and he was something of a scholar, as well as an historiographer of authority and of fair literary power. Much duller books than Bradford's have been written by American historiographers. We might easily find reasons for accusing Bradford of bitterness and bigotry, but we cannot lay down his writings without feeling that we have been in the presence of a strong, sincere and useful man. His book of annals, unlike most works in this useful but dreary department of book-making, can be read through without much weariness.

If we ask, in the modern German way of criticism, What did Bradford write that was not as well or betterwritten before him? the answer is simply this: He was the first to write the dream and the deed, the faith and the work of a company of men and women who founded a state and laid the deep foundation of a mighty nation. The result is a priceless book which any nation might well be proud to count among its literary treasures.

THE FIRST AMERICAN HISTORIAN -- WILLIAM BRADFORD

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