

CHAPTER VIII.

FREEDOM'S VOYAGE TO AMERICA.

DISSENT AND PERSECUTION.

1. THROUGH the middle ages England, like the rest of the world, had been in full communion with the Church of Rome. When the Reformation had swept over Europe and left dissent to crystallize into various Protestant sects, England too had dissented, and her king had established the Anglican Church. This church, when it assumed final form, had for its supreme head, not the pope, but the king, and under him the clergy held their offices. The Roman Catholic ritual was not, as in some of the European sects, entirely given up, but was modified to suit the new order. And when the change was effected, the new ministers firm in their positions, the new service-books ready for use, then the Catholics were summarily ordered to embrace the reformed faith.

2. At that time it had not dawned upon the world that there might be more than one way to worship God in truth. Catholics honestly believed that Protestants were going straight to perdition, and Protestants as honestly believed that a like fate was in store for the pope and his followers. When this was the temper of conviction, the natural thing for each church to do was to perse-

cute every other; not from hate, but from the benevolent determination to oblige men to accept the true religion and save their souls, even though it might be necessary in the course of proceedings to burn their bodies. Mixed with this legitimate missionary spirit were all sorts of political motives. The church, whether Catholic or Protestant, was closely connected with the state, and through all the corruptions of party politics religion had to be dragged.

3. So, when the English state established Protestantism, its first duty and interest was to suppress Catholicism. After two Protestant kings, a Catholic queen came to the throne, and with her the Protestants fell and the Catholics rose. The former were forbidden their service, their ministers were turned out of their positions; fines, imprisonment, burning punished those who held out against the "true faith." Again the scene changed. The queen died, and by her Protestant successor freedom of worship was denied to Catholics, and the Anglican Church was re-established as the Church of England.

4. Meantime, in the Church of England a spirit of criticism had grown up. Stricter thinkers disliked the imposing ceremonies, which the English church still retained: some of the ministers ceased to wear gowns in preaching, performed the marriage ceremony without using a ring, and were in favor of simplifying all the church service. Unpretentious workers began to tire of the everlasting quarreling, and to long for a religion simple and quiet. These soon met trouble, for the rulers had decided that salvation was by the Church of England, as the sovereign, its head, should order. Dissent was the two-fold guilt of heresy and revolution—sin against God and crime against the king and English law. They were forbidden to preach at all if they would not

wear a gown during service, and the people who went to hear them were punished. This treatment caused serious thought among the "non-conformists," as they were called, and, once thinking, they soon concluded that the king had no such supreme right to order the church, and the church had over its ministers no such right of absolute dictation.

5. Various sects sprang up, called by various names, differing among themselves upon minor points, but agreeing more or less in dissent from the full, unquestioned rule and service of the Episcopal Church. Against all these dissenters the laws acted as against the Catholics. Not only must Englishmen be Protestants, they must be Protestants of the Church of England. Bodies were organized to keep strict watch of the non-conformists. They were forbidden their simpler church worship and fined if they did not attend that of the English Church. They were "scoffed and scorned by the profane multitude, and so vexed, as truly their affliction was not small."

JOHN ROBINSON'S CONGREGATION.

6. Among that division of the non-conformists called Puritans was a little congregation at Scrooby, a town in north England. The pastor was John Robinson, wise, kind, dignified, scholarly; and his helper in church work and government was Elder William Brewster, a college man who had served at the royal court. For the rest, the congregation were mainly Bible-reading farmers, who wished only to live in peace according to Bible teaching. Royal servants were watchful, and an open church was out of the question; but every Sunday they met for service wherever they could, sometimes in Elder Brewster's big house, sometimes out-doors, anywhere so that they

might listen to their beloved pastor. During the week they worked their farms, thinking and talking of the iniquities of the Catholics, the impurities of the Episcopalians, the hard ways that beset the Puritans, and the righteous God who looked down upon it all to record and avenge.

7. Quiet as such a simple church in a corner of England must have been, it was not left undisturbed. Priests of the dominant church and officers of the civil service soon pounced down with the demand that the Puritan farmers stop all this "new-fangledness," and return to the ways of the loyal church. John Robinson's people, however, had no notion of giving up their new-fangledness. They possessed a full share of English obstinacy, and, backed in it by their consciences, were not likely to surrender at once. So their troubles began. They "were hunted and persecuted on every side. Some were clapped into prisons, 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."

8. What shall we do? thought the distressed farmers. We can not live in such persecution. We will have to go away. Give up? Indeed, no! We shall not belie our consciences for any man. Since God is behind us, we *will not* conform. And, under opposition and injustice, Puritan lips set themselves rigid, Puritan hearts closed against the persecutors, strong reaction from the beautiful ceremonies and graceful living that could hide such unbrotherliness became almost worship of unloveliness and hardship. In after years the lives of their descendants were shaped into a narrow severity, not drawn from the sweetness and light of the gospel which they read, but from the bitter fountains of their early sufferings and wrongs.

9. What shall we do? cried the harassed farmers. We will have to leave our home and go to Holland, where others like us have already gone, and where, we hear, is freedom of religion for all men. Yet how should they get there? "for, though they could not stay, yet were they not suffered to go." And, if they should get there, how could they, who "had only been used to a plain country life and the innocent trade of husbandry," manage to live in a country where people spoke an outlandish language instead of good English, and earned their money by trade.

10. Somehow God would help. Give up their religion they would not. They set about going. They bribed ship captains, feed the sailors, paid unreasonable rates for passage, and then, deserted by these same captains and sailors, tried it again with others, were betrayed into the hands of officers who rifled them of what money they had left and turned them over to prison. Hard luck! Set free from prison, they bargained with a Dutchman to take them in his ship to Holland, but as they were going aboard a company of armed men surprised them, and the Dutchman, afraid to be seen in such company, hastily sailed away with half the "Pilgrims," leaving the rest terrified on the shore.

11. "Take us back!" cried the men. "Don't you see our wives and children crying after us!" But the Dutchman was afraid of the soldiers. "What will they do without us!" cried the men, straining their eyes to see all that was happening on shore. "Our goods are not yet aboard—take us back!" No use. The Dutchman sailed away, and the soldiers carried off the frightened women and children to prison. When the authorities had them safely locked up, they did not know what to do with silly women and helpless children, who cried for their husbands and fathers, and when asked concern-

ing their homes cried the more and declared they hadn't any; and, after making themselves sufficient trouble, they solved the important problem by letting the ridiculous creatures go again. The Dutchman's ship, through a terrible storm, came to land. The distressed husbands sought the distressed wives, and troublous wanderings ended in reunion. So were they continually thwarted; but, by one means or another, determined wills bent circumstances to their end, and at last they reached Holland.

12. Strangers as they were, destitute, all unused to the new life and people, they had trouble enough at first, but they wasted little time staring at the new world. It was a world they were to become a part of as soon as possible, and, with characteristic earnestness, they fell to work at any thing they found to do. After a year in Amsterdam they settled in Leyden. They made them homes. They learned as best they could the uncouth language. They taught their farmer hands unaccustomed crafts, and applied their farmer heads to the mysteries of trade.

13. Elder Brewster, with the tastes and habits of a gentleman, a rapidly diminishing property, and a large family of children, looked about for work, and presently obtained pupils whom he taught English after an original method. Later he set up a printing-press, and in printing Puritan books, forbidden to be published in England, found plenty to do. Mr. Robinson visited his people and was busy for their welfare, preached, studied, wrote books; he was a kind friend and helper, and a scholar besides, and proud of him were his devoted flock.

14. Leyden Dutchmen looked with curiosity upon the knot of plain foreigners, sober men, quiet women, children named after all the Bible saints and heavenly virtues. Bibles they brought and evidently read. It was rumored

that together every morning and before each meal each household held service of prayer, and long sermons and various devotions wholly filled the Sabbath. Queer people, meditated the Hollanders. But they soon found that it was safe to trust the Bible readers. Though they were peculiar about Sunday, they were surprisingly certain to keep their promises, and for all their propensity to pray without ceasing they made most faithful workmen. Superintendents sought them for laborers, merchants willingly gave them credit; and with the passing years they became settled and quietly prosperous. The Bibles were not neglected, the daily prayers and weekly sermons were methodically attended.

15. The unpretentious people were not unobserved. Many from England came to enjoy like freedom of worship, and far outside of Leyden John Robinson's learning was known. When Arminians and Calvinists fell into hot disputes, and Leyden ministers and university professors held public meetings twice a week to settle knotty points of doctrine, John Robinson was always there, listening eagerly to both sides. Many a famous talk he had with the ministers and professors. We must have Mr. Robinson confute the Arminians, cried his friends among themselves.

16. So on a day the Puritan pastor, somewhat demurring because he was a foreigner, yet withal not loath to ride a tilt with the enemy, confronted Episcopus, the Arminian professor; and it is reported by the Calvinists that his overwhelming arguments utterly nonplussed and put the great Episcopus to rout. Oh, those theological debates! About the paltry affairs of this world it was not right to quarrel. When personal considerations were at stake, Puritan worthies could bridle the tongue; but when was called in question some keenly felt phase of

the truth, some doctrine their precious Bible seemed to teach, then the repressed fire burst into legitimate flame, and righteous indignation with magnificent effect hurled back and forth the thunderbolts of prophecy and psalm.

THE DEPARTURE FROM LEYDEN.

17. After some eleven or twelve years of this life in Leyden the Puritans began to grow restless. Holland was not home to them, and they were lonely. Some of them were growing old, and the somber burden of poverty and exile began to weary the brave shoulders. The children were growing up, and hard work and cramped life pressed all too severely upon the young natures, so that they either threw off the yoke and turned to bad ways or, bearing it patiently, missed the chance of education and grew old before their time. They feared to stay longer in this foreign country lest the children should learn from the Dutch to break the Sabbath, should lose their native language, should cease to be Englishmen.

18. Perhaps it would be best to move again and settle in some land under the flag of dear England—harsh England, that would not grant them peace at home. Though they should have to go to most distant regions, they would cheerfully go, and consider themselves God's missionaries there, if only they might have the protection of England's king. They would go and break the way for others of their countrymen less strong, and in America, if need be, prepare an English home for Englishmen.

19. Gravely the elders talked together. The congenial life had been cheerfully borne; a new uprooting and uncertain change would be as steadfastly carried

through, once they were sure God willed it. And at last it seemed best to decide upon removal. "The dangers were great but not desperate, the difficulties were many but not invincible—and all of them, through the help of God, by fortitude and patience, might either be borne or overcome." Sturdy courage! O England, to exile such sons!

20. Where, then, should they go? "I will guide thee," reads the promise of the Puritan's Bible, and to God they turn in prayer for direction. A general meeting is held, and much discussion results in the decision to cross the Atlantic to Virginia, Great Britain's vast new realm. They would not settle near the colony already planted there, for that was of the Episcopal Church and might molest them; but away by themselves somewhere—anywhere, if only they might nestle in a remote corner of their king's dominions, and on English soil be free to follow their own conscience. God and the king was the loyal thought—yet, if there *must* be choice, the king shall not be first.

21. But, sending petition to the king, they found that he would give them no assurance of freedom of worship; it was intimated that, if they did go, the royal eye might be expected to wink at the proceeding; but, as for promises, royalty would not commit itself. Here was a discouragement. How should they dare break up their homes and cross the ocean to an unknown, uncolonized land, with no assurance of protection and liberty when they arrived there? But the leaders rallied again: "If on the king's part there is a purpose or desire to wrong us," they cried, "though we had a seal as broad as the house-floor it would not serve the turn, for there would be means enough found to recall or reverse it. . . . We must rest herein on God's providence, as we have done

before." Not lacking in comprehension of the world's ways and in canny shrewdness were those Puritans!

22. Wearisome negotiations then began with men who should furnish means for the removal. Back and forth, from Leyden to London, from London to Leyden, the agents went; letters passed from Robinson and Brewster to the London merchants, and from the London merchants back. Poor Robert Cushman, agent for the Puritans, experienced numerous tribulations; pushed by the merchants to make an agreement, blamed by his friends for going beyond his instructions, his letters defending himself give a spirited glimpse into the harrowed soul of a quick-tempered Christian.

23. After months of all this, the arrangements were concluded. A body of London merchants agreed to furnish ships and provisions for the passage, on certain conditions: for seven years after landing the Puritans were to hold all property in common; they were to fish, plant, build, and at the end of seven years were to share with the merchants, according to certain specified conditions, the accumulated property, capital, and profits. Hard terms! But they could not choose, and go they must.

24. Who should go? This question agitated the Leyden congregation. Not all could take the voyage. Perhaps not all cared to: it was so far, so far! Yet the most were willing, and it remained to select from the large congregation those most fit for the hard task. There was dividing of friend from friend, of husband from wife, of father from child. Elder Brewster would go as their spiritual leader, since the beloved pastor must for the present stay with those who remained, hoping later to cross the sea and come to them.

25. A ship, the *Speedwell*, was fitted up in Holland;

another, the *Mayflower*, awaited them in England. When all was ready they appointed a day of solemn fasting and prayer. Pastor Robinson preached to them "a good part of the day" on the text, "And there at the river, by Ahava, I proclaimed a fast, that we might humble ourselves before our God and seek of him a right way for us and for our children and for all our substance," and "the rest of the time was spent in pouring out prayers to the Lord with great fervency mixed with abundance of tears." Again they met together in a "feast" at the pastor's house. Sorry feasting!

26. The hospitality was large, but hearts were too full for much but tears: a tender, painful farewell gathering, their white-haired pastor going about among them with words of comfort and counsel, gentle last suggestions, scripture texts believed, though the voice that repeats them trembles and breaks—believed and clung to through the tug of parting. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness!" "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Yes, they believed. And believing, they sang through tears—quivering pain notes at first, then, faith dominating, the tones grew firmer and sustained, until the final words rang out clear and strong; and with the end of the hymn they were ready for last earnest hand-clasps and quiet good-night.

27. To take ship, they went to Delft Haven, fourteen miles from Leyden, and to the port Pastor Robinson, with most of their friends, accompanied them. One

more night on land, then the long voyage and the uncertain future. There was little sleep that night; and again, with Bible words and Christian counsel, hearts were strengthened.

28. In the morning, the wind being fair, "they went aboard and their friends with them, where truly doleful was the sight of that sad and mournful parting, to see what sighs and sobs and prayers did sound among them." We know, we know—God *is* our refuge—but sore is the parting. We *are* willing—but our hearts are wrung. There is no thought of regret or turning—but oh, the pain of it! The Dutchmen, loitering in the sunshine on the shore, watching with heavy curiosity this strange departure, suddenly find their own eyes filled with sympathetic tears. We must be off! cries the captain, half impatient over so much fervency and tears. They kneel around the pastor, and, with unsteady voice, though his trust is firm, he calls upon the God in whom they believe to guide and bless these his children. Once more the arms cling close. "Mother, mother, how can I let you go!" "My child, my child!" "Beloved, you will come over to me soon." "Oh, my husband!" "God wills it; I must go." "My son, I shall not live to see your face again." Loosen the clasping arms; unfold the clinging fingers. You stay and we go, and the ocean lies between. The wind comes breathing, the sails fill; good-by! good-by! across the widening space—and they are gone.

THE VOYAGE.

29. They sailed first to meet the *Mayflower* and others of the Puritan company at Southampton, England. There they called Robert Cushman to account, fell out with one of their London patrons, read together an affec-