

from  
**P Of P**  
**lymouth lantation**  
*William Bradford*

**Background** In 1620, the Pilgrims made the difficult voyage to America aboard the tiny *Mayflower*. After fierce storms and the loss of lives, the Pilgrims landed near Cape Cod, Massachusetts, not in Virginia as intended. It was mid-December before they could build shelters and move ashore. Once ashore, the Pilgrims found the hardships of settling in a strange land worsened by a harsh winter. They struggled to make a new life in America.

**from Chapter 9**

**Of Their Voyage and How They Passed the Sea;  
and of Their Safe Arrival at Cape Cod**

[1620] SEPTEMBER 6 . . . After they<sup>1</sup> had enjoyed fair winds and weather for a season, they were encountered many times with crosswinds, and met with many fierce storms, with which the ship was shrewdly<sup>2</sup> shaken, and her upper works made very leaky; and one of the main beams in the mid ships was bowed and cracked, which put them in some fear that the ship could not be able to perform the voyage. So some of the chief of the company, perceiving the mariners to fear the sufficiency of the ship, as appeared by their mutterings, they entered into serious consultation with the master and other officers of the ship, to consider in time of the danger; and rather to return then to cast themselves into a desperate and inevitable peril. And truly there was great distraction and difference of opinion amongst the mariners themselves; fain<sup>3</sup> would they do what could be done for their wages' sake (being now half the seas over), and on the other hand they were loath to hazard their lives too desperately. But in examining of all opinions, the master and others affirmed they knew the ship to be strong and firm under water; and for the buckling of the main beam, there was a great

**Reading Strategy**

**Breaking Down Sentences**

To better comprehend its meaning, break down the first sentence of this account.

**Vocabulary Builder**

peril (per' el) *n.* danger

loath (lōth) *adj.*

reluctant; unwilling

1. **they** Even though Bradford is one of the Pilgrims, he refers to them in the third person.

2. **shrewdly** (shrōōd' lē) *adv.* severely.

3. **fain** (fān) *adv.* gladly.

up by the same rope to the brim of the water, and then with a boat hook and other means got into the ship again, and his life saved; and though he was something ill with it, yet he lived many years after, and became a profitable member both in church and commonwealth. In all this voyage there died but one of the passengers, which was William Butten, a youth, servant to Samuel Fuller, when they drew near the coast.

But to omit other things (that I may be brief), after long beating at sea they fell with that land which is called Cape Cod; the which being made and certainly known to be it, they were not a little joyful. After some deliberation had amongst themselves and with the master of the ship, they tacked about<sup>9</sup> and resolved to stand for the southward (the wind and weather being fair) to find some place about Hudson's River for their habitation. But after they had sailed that course about half the day, they fell amongst dangerous shoals<sup>10</sup> and roaring breakers, and they were so far entangled therewith as they conceived themselves in great danger; and the wind shrinking upon them withal,<sup>11</sup> they resolved to bear up again for the Cape, and thought themselves happy to get out of those dangers before night overtook them, as by God's providence they did. And the next day they got into the Cape harbor,<sup>12</sup> where they rid in safety. . . .

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. . . .

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 (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them, nor inns to entertain or refresh their weather-beaten bodies, no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succor.<sup>13</sup> It is recorded in Scripture<sup>14</sup> as a mercy to the apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness

9. **tacked about** sailed back and forth so that the wind would hit the sails at the best angles.

10. **shoals** (shōlz) *n.* sandbars or shallow areas that are dangerous to navigate.

11. **withal** (with ôl') *adv.* also.

12. **Cape harbor** now called Provincetown Harbor.

13. **succor** (suk' er) *n.* help; relief.

14. **Scripture** In Acts 27–28, when the Apostle Paul and a group of other Christians are shipwrecked on the island of Malta, they are treated kindly by the "barbarians" who live there.

## Literature in Context

### History Connection

#### The Mayflower

The *Mayflower* was the British ship on which 102 Pilgrims sailed from Southampton, England, to North America during September, October, and November of 1620. In November, the Pilgrims disembarked at the tip of Cape Cod. Shortly before Christmas, they moved to the more protected site of Plymouth, Massachusetts. According to historians' estimates, the square-rigged *Mayflower* probably measured about 90 feet long and weighed 180 tons.

### Connect to the Literature

What details in *Of Plymouth Plantation* suggest the kinds of challenges the travelers faced on the journey? What other challenges do you think travelers might face on a ship this size?



The Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor  
Plymouth State University Collection

iron screw the passengers brought out of Holland, which would raise the beam into his place; the which being done, the carpenter and master affirmed that with a post under it, set firm in the lower deck, and other ways bound, he would make it sufficient. And as for the decks and upper works, they would caulk them as well as they could, and though with the working of the ship they would not long keep staunch,<sup>4</sup> yet there would otherwise be no great danger, if they did not over-press her with sails. So they committed themselves to the will of God, and resolved to proceed.

In sundry of these storms the winds were so fierce, and the seas so high, as they could not bear a knot of sail, but were forced to hull,<sup>5</sup> for diverse day together. And in one of them, as they thus lay at hull, in a mighty storm, a lusty<sup>6</sup> young man (called John Howland) coming upon some occasion above the gratings, was, with a seele<sup>7</sup> of the ship thrown into [the sea]; but it pleased God that he caught hold of the topsail halyards,<sup>8</sup> which hung overboard, and ran out at length; yet he held his hold (though he was sundry fathoms under water) till he was held

4. **staunch** (stôunch) *adj.* watertight.

5. **hull** *v.* drift with the wind.

6. **lusty** *adj.* strong; hearty.

7. **seele** *n.* rolling; pitching to one side.

8. **halyards** (hal' yerdz) *n.* ropes for raising or lowering sails.

### Vocabulary Builder

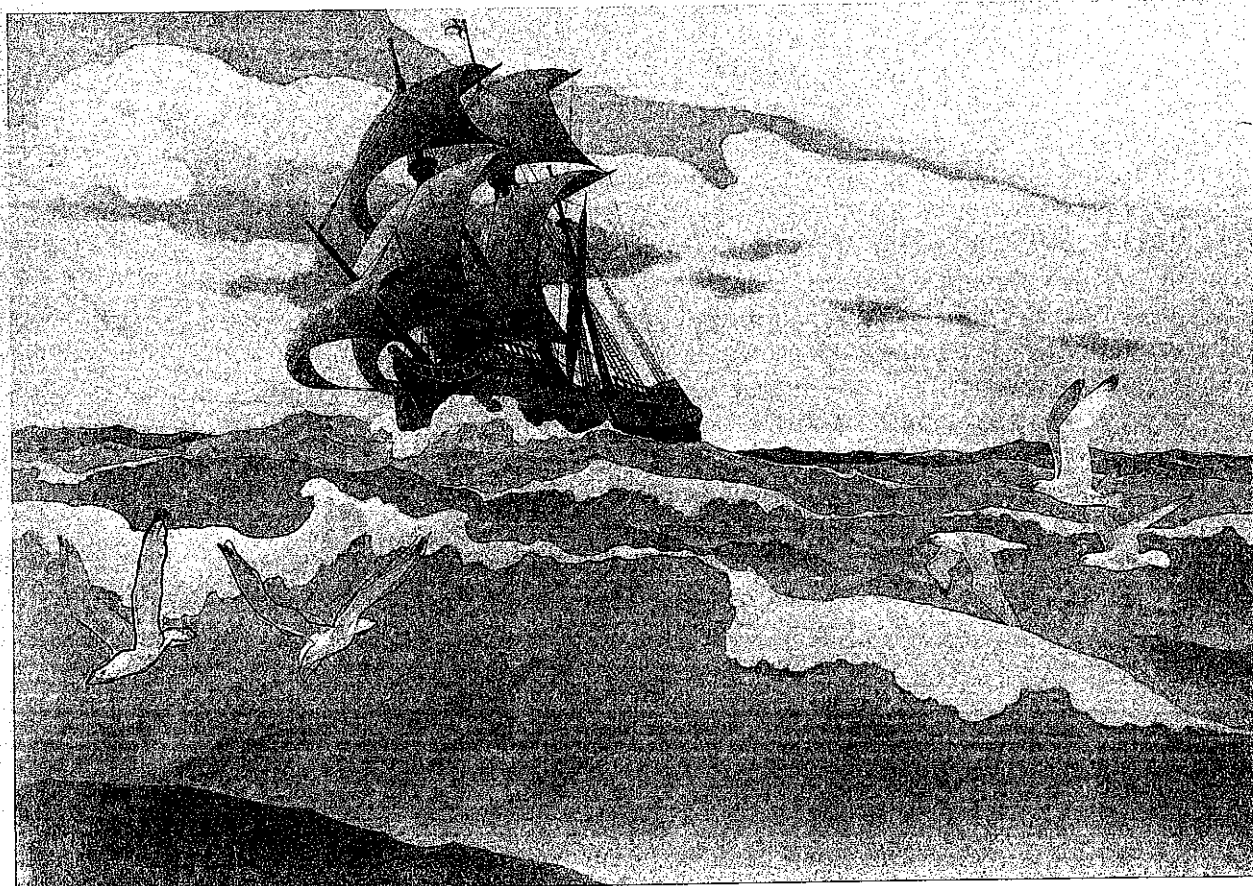
**sundry** (sun' drā) *adj.*  
various; different

### Reading Check

What happens to the ship in the storm?

### Critical Viewing

Is this an idealized or a realistic depiction of the *Mayflower's* Atlantic crossing? Explain your decision. [Judge; Support]



The *Coming of the Mayflower*, N. C. Wyeth, from the Collection of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York City, photograph by Malcolm Varon

in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows then 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. . . . 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;*<sup>15</sup> *but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice, and looked on their adversity, etc.*<sup>16</sup> *Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good, and His mercies endure forever. . . .*

### from Book 2<sup>17</sup>

[1620] In these hard and difficult beginnings, they found some discontents and murmurings arise amongst some, and mutinous speeches and carriages in others; but they were soon quelled and overcome by the wisdom, patience, and just and equal carriage of things by the Governor<sup>18</sup> and better part, which cleaved faithfully together in the main. But that which was most sad and lamentable was that in two or three months' time, half of their company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy<sup>19</sup> and other diseases, which this long voyage and their inaccommodate<sup>20</sup> condition had brought upon them; so as there died sometimes two or three of a day, in the foresaid time; that of one hundred and odd persons, scarce fifty remained.

And of these in the time of most distress, there was but six or seven sound persons, who, to their great commendations be it spoken, spared no pains, night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them; in a word, did all the homely<sup>21</sup> and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named; and all this willingly and cheerfully, without any grudging in the least, showing herein their true love unto their friends and brethren. A rare example and worthy to be remembered. Two of these

15. **wilderness** Bradford is comparing the Pilgrims to the ancient Hebrews, who wandered in the desert after fleeing Egypt and before reaching the Promised Land.

16. **they cried . . . etc.** Bradford is paraphrasing a passage from the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 26:7).

17. **Book 2** Here Bradford switches from chapter divisions to book divisions.

18. **Governor** John Carver (c. 1576–1621) was the first governor of Plymouth Colony but died during his first year of office. Bradford succeeded him as governor.

19. **scurvy** (sker' vē) *n.* disease cause by a vitamin C deficiency.

20. **inaccommodate** (in' ə kām' ə dāt') *adj.* unfit.

21. **homely** *adj.* domestic.

### Reading Check

What do some of the pilgrims do to help those who become sick?

seven were Mr. William Brewster,<sup>22</sup> their reverend Elder, and Myles Standish,<sup>23</sup> their Captain and military commander, unto whom myself, and many others were much beholden in our low and sick condition. And yet the Lord so upheld these persons, as in this general calamity they were not at all infected either with sickness, or lameness. And what I have said of these, I may say of many others who died in this general visitation,<sup>24</sup> and others yet living, that whilst they had health, yea, or any strength continuing, they were not wanting to any that had need of them. And I doubt not but their recompense is with the Lord.

But I may not here pass by another remarkable passage not to be forgotten. As this calamity fell among the passengers that were to be left here to plant, and were hasted ashore and made to drink water, that the seamen might have the more beer, and one<sup>25</sup> in his sickness desiring but a small can of beer, it was answered that if he were their own father he should have none; the disease began to fall amongst them also, so as almost half of their company died before they went away, and many of their officers and lustiest men, as the boatswain, gunner, three quartermasters, the cook, and others. At which the master was something stricken and sent to the sick ashore and told the Governor he should send for beer for them that had need of it, though he drunk water homeward bound.

But now amongst his company there was far another kind of carriage<sup>26</sup> in this misery then amongst the passengers; for they that had been boon<sup>27</sup> companions in drinking and jollity in the time of their health and welfare began now to desert one another in this calamity, saying they would not hazard their lives for them, they should be infected by coming to help them in their cabins, and so, after they came to die by it, would do little or nothing for them, but if they died let them die. But such of the passengers as were yet aboard showed them what mercy they could, which made some of their hearts relent, as the boatswain (and some others), who was a proud young man, and would often curse and scoff at the passengers; but when he grew weak, they had compassion on him and helped him; then he confessed he did not deserve it at their hands, he had abused them in word and deed. O! saith he, you, I now see, show your love like Christians indeed one to another, but we let one another lie and die like dogs. . . .

All this while the Indians came skulking about them, and would sometimes show themselves aloof of, but when any approached near them, they would run away. And once they stole away their tools where they had been at work, and were gone to dinner. But about the 16<sup>th</sup> of

22. William Brewster (1567–1644) one of the Pilgrim leaders.

23. Myles Standish (c. 1584–1656) professional soldier hired by the Pilgrims to be their military advisor. He was not originally a Puritan but later became a member of the congregation.

24. visitation *n.* affliction.

25. one Bradford is referring to himself.

26. carriage *n.* behavior.

27. boon *adj.* close.

### Vocabulary Builder

**recompense** (rek' am pens')

*n.* reward; repayment

### Literary Analysis

#### Narrative Accounts

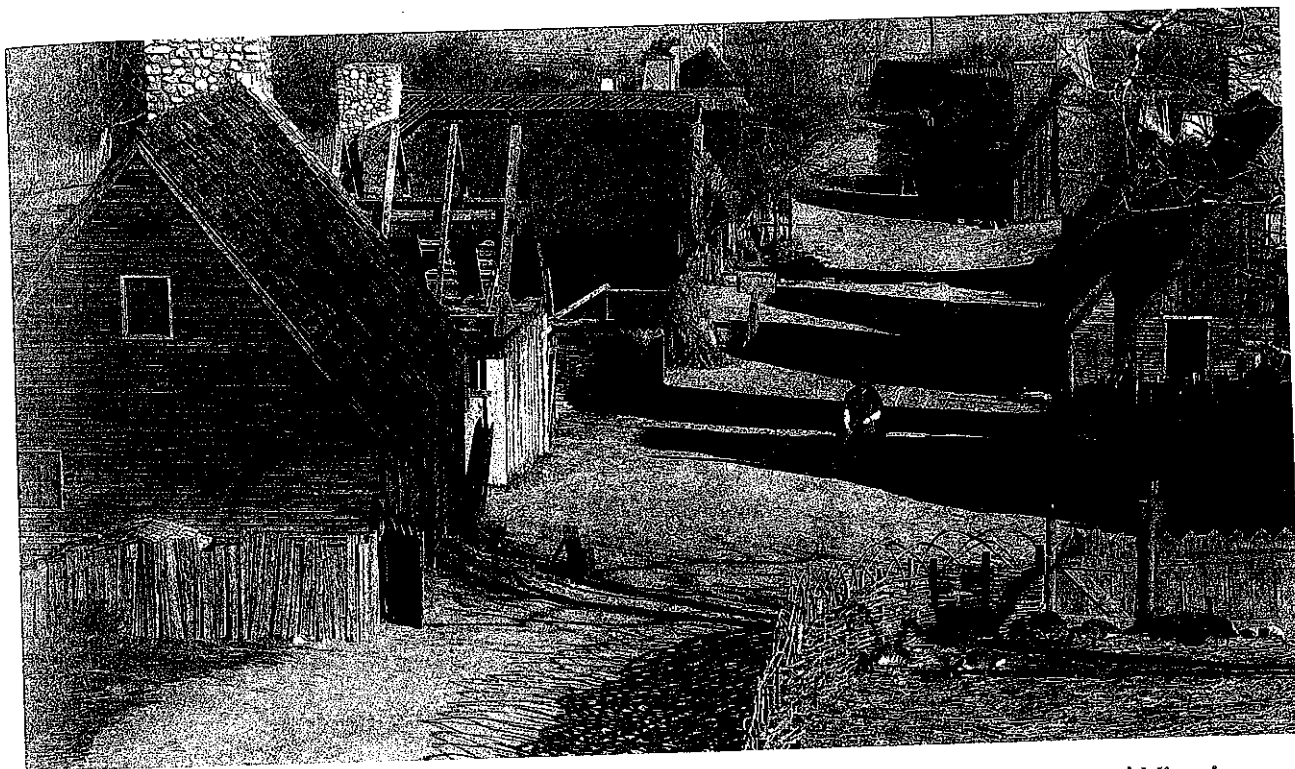
Do you think Bradford's illness would have been included in a secondhand narrative account? Explain.

### Literary Analysis

#### Narrative Accounts

What is revealed here about the Pilgrims' religious beliefs?





March a certain Indian came boldly amongst them, and spoke to them in broken English, which they could well understand, but marveled at it. At length they understood by discourse with him that he was not of these parts, but belonged to the eastern parts, where some English ships came to fish, with whom he was acquainted, and could name sundry of them by their names, amongst whom he had got his language. He became profitable to them in acquainting them with many things concerning the state of the country in the east parts where he lived, which was afterwards profitable unto them; as also of the people here, of their names, number, and strength; of their situation and distance from this place, and who was chief amongst them. His name was Samoset;<sup>28</sup> he told them also of another Indian whose name was Squanto,<sup>29</sup> a native of this place, who had been in England and could speak better English than himself. Being, after some time of entertainment and gifts, dismissed, a while after he came again, and 5 more with him, and they brought again all the tools that were stolen away before, and made way for the coming of their great sachem,<sup>30</sup> called Massasoit,<sup>31</sup> who, about four or five days after, came with the chief of his friends, and other

28. **Samoset** (sam' ə set') (d. 1655) a Pemaquid tribal chief from Maine.

29. **Squanto** (skwān' tō) (d. 1622) a member of the Pawtuxet tribe who in 1614 had been kidnapped by an English sea captain and taken to Spain to be sold as a slave. He escaped and eventually returned to Massachusetts in 1619, only to find that his home village had been destroyed by plague.

30. **sachem** (sā' chem) chief.

31. **Massasoit** (mas' ə soit') (c. 1580–1661) the supreme sachem (chief) of the Wampanoag peoples.

### ▲ Critical Viewing

What can you learn about the lifestyle at Plymouth Plantation from this photograph of an authentic re-creation of the settlement? [Infer]

### Reading Check

Who is Samoset, and how do the Pilgrims meet him?



attendance, with the aforesaid Squanto. With whom, after friendly entertainment, and some gifts given him, they made a peace with him (which hath now continued this 24 years)<sup>32</sup> in these terms:

1. That neither he nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of their people.
2. That if any of his did any hurt to any of theirs, he should send the offender, that they might punish him.
3. That if anything were taken away from any of theirs, he should cause it to be restored; and they should do the like to his.
4. If any did unjustly war against him, they would aid him; if any did war against them, he should aid them.
5. He should send to his neighbors confederates, to certify them of this, that they might not wrong them, but might be likewise comprised in the conditions of peace.
6. That when their men came to them, they should leave their bows and arrows behind them.

After these things he returned to his place called Sowams,<sup>33</sup> some 40 mile from this place, but Squanto continued with them and was their interpreter, and was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation. He directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit, and never left them till he died. He was a native of this place, and scarce any left alive besides himself. He was carried away with diverse others by one

32. now . . . 24 years The treaty actually lasted until King Philip's War began in 1675.

33. Sowams (sō' ämz) present site of Warren, Rhode Island.

**▲ Critical Viewing** Do you think this picture is an accurate representation of history? Why or why not? [Judge; Support]

#### Literary Analysis Narrative Accounts

What does Bradford reveal about his religious beliefs in this description of Squanto as a "special instrument"?

Hunt,<sup>34</sup> a master of a ship, who thought to sell them for slaves in Spain; but he got away for England and was entertained by a merchant in London and employed to Newfoundland and other parts, and lastly brought hither into these parts. . . .



[1621] . . . They began now to gather in the small harvest they had,<sup>35</sup> and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength, and had all things in good plenty; for as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want. And now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides water fowl, there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides they had about a peck of meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not feigned, but true reports.

34. **Hunt** Thomas Hunt was captain of one of the ships in John Smith's expedition (page 70).  
35. **They . . . had** This section of Bradford's narrative is often titled "The First Thanksgiving."

### Critical Reading

1. **Respond:** If you had been making the journey on the *Mayflower*, what would you have done to prepare for life in America?
2. (a) **Recall:** What were some of the hardships the Pilgrims faced during their trip across the Atlantic and their first winter at Plymouth?  
(b) **Interpret:** What do their troubles suggest about the climate and landscape of Plymouth?
3. (a) **Recall:** How do the Pilgrims explain Squanto's role in their experience? (b) **Interpret:** What does this explanation suggest about the Pilgrims' religious convictions?
4. (a) **Draw Conclusions:** What do you think is the message that Bradford tries to convey in this narrative? (b) **Apply:** How might the message have meaning for people today?
5. **Hypothesize:** In what ways might this account have been different if the Pilgrims had settled farther south?
6. **Evaluate:** How has this account changed your impression of the Pilgrims? Explain.

### Vocabulary Builder

**feigned** (fānd) *adj.*  
pretended; sham



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William Bradford  
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