

SQUANTO AND SAMOSET AMERICAN HEROS

The following is transcribed from the book “THE LIGHT AND THE GLORY” by Peter Marshall and David Manuel. This part started around the sixth, seventh or eighth page of Chapter Six. The Indians who lived near Plymouth are truly hero’s of America. Squanto, the lone survivor of his tribe was instrumental in the survival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Read below this brief history of the life of Squanto.

Indian coming? Surely he meant Indians coming!

Disgusted, Captain Standish shook his head, even as he went to look out the window—to see a tall, well-built Indian, wearing nothing but a leather loincloth striding up their main street. He was headed straight for the common house, and the men inside hurried to the door, before he walked right in on them. He stopped and stood motionless looking at them, as though sculpted in marble. Only the March wind broke the silence.

“Welcome!” he suddenly boomed, in a deep, resonant voice.

The Pilgrims were too startled to speak. At length, they replied with as much gravity as they could muster: “Welcome.”

Their visitor fixed them with a piercing stare. “Have you got any beer?” he asked them in flawless English. If they were surprised before, they were astounded now.

“Beer?” one of them managed.

The Indian nodded.

The Pilgrims looked at one another, then turned back to him.

“Our beer is gone. Would you like . . . some brandy?”

Again the Indian nodded.

They brought him some brandy, and a biscuit with butter and cheese, and then some pudding and a piece of roast duck. To their continuing amazement, he ate with evident relish everything set before him. Where had he developed such an appetite for English food? How, in fact, had he come to speak English? For that matter who was he, and what was he doing here?

But they would have to wait, for obviously he did not intend to talk until he had finished his repast. Finally, the time for answering questions came. His name was Samoset. He was a sagamore (or chief) of the Algonquins, from what is now Pemaquid Point in Maine. He had been visiting in these parts for the past eight months, having begged a ride down the coast with Captain Thomas Dermer, an English sea captain who was known to the Pilgrims by reputation. He had been sent out to explore the coast for Council for New England, the company to whom they would now be applying for a patent. Apparently Samoset’s sole motivation was a love of travel, and he had learned his English from various fishing captains who had put in to the Main shore over the years.



Now they asked the crucial question: What could he tell them of the Indians hereabouts? And the story he told gave everyone of them cause to thank God in their hearts. This area had always been the territory of the Patuxets, a large, hostile tribe who had barbarously murdered every white man who had landed on their shores. But four years prior to the Pilgrims' arrival, a mysterious plague had broken out among them, killing every man, woman and child. So complete was the devastation that the neighboring tribes had shunned the area ever since, convinced that some great supernatural spirit had destroyed the Patuxents. Hence the cleared land on which they had settled literally belonged to no one! Their nearest neighbors, said Samoset, were the Wampanoags, some fifty miles to the southwest. These Indians numbered about sixty warriors. Massasoit, their sachem (or chief), had such wisdom that he also ruled over several other small tribes in the general area. And it was with Massasoit that Samoset had spent most of the past eight months.

Who were the Indians out on the cape, who had attacked them? These were the Nausets, who numbered about a hundred warriors. The previous summer they had attacked Captain Dermer and killed three of his men. The Nausets hated the white man, because several years before one Captain Thomas Hunt had tricked seven of their braves into coming aboard his ship on the pretext of wanting to trade with them. He had taken them, along with twenty Patuxets, to Spain, where he sold them into slavery.

By the time he had done with his tale-telling, it was nightfall. Samoset announced that he would sleep with them, and return in the morning. Captain Standish put a discreet watch on him, but Samoset slept the sleep of the untroubled. And in the morning he left, bearing a knife, a bracelet and a ring as gifts to Massasoit.

That was the last they saw of him, until the following Thursday when he returned accompanied by another Indian who also spoke English, and who was, of all things, a Patuxet! The second Indian was Squanto, and he was to be, according to Bradford, "a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation." The extraordinary chain of "coincidences in the man's life is in its won way no less extraordinary than the saga of Joseph's being sold into slavery in Egypt. Indeed, in ensuing months, there was not a doubt in any of their hearts that Squanto, whose Indian name was Tisquantum was a Godsend.

His story really began in 1605, when Squanto and four other Indians were taken captive by Captain George Weymounth, who was exploring the New England Coast at the behest of Sir Ferdinando Gorges. The Indians were taken to England, where they were taught English, so that Gorges could question them as to what tribes populated New England, and where the most favorable places to establish colonies would be. Squanto spent the next nine years in England, where he met Captain John Smith, recently of Virginia, who promised to take him back to his people on Cape Cod, as soon as he



himself could get a command bound for there. Actually, he did not have too long to wait. On Smith's 1614 voyage of mapping and exploring, Squanto was returned to the Patuxets, at the place Smith named New Plymouth.

Sailing with Smith's expedition on another ship was Captain Thomas Hunt, whom Smith ordered to stay behind to dry their catch of fish and trade it for beaver skins before coming home. But Hunt had another, more profitable cargo in mind. As soon as Smith Departed, he slipped back down the coast to Plymouth, where he lured twenty Patuxents aboard, including Squanto, apparently to barter, and promptly clapped them in irons. He proceeded down to the Cape, where he scooped up seven unsuspecting Nausets. All of these took to Malaga, a notorious slave-trading port on the coast of Spain, where he got 20 pounds for each of them (fourteen hundred dollars a head). No wonder the slave trade was such a temptation! Most of them were shipped off to North Africa, but a few were bought and rescued by local friars, who introduced them to the Christian faith. Thus did God begin Squanto's preparation for the roll he would play at Plymouth.

But Squanto was too enterprising to stay long in a monastery. He attached himself to an Englishman bound for London, and there met and joined the household of a wealthy merchant, where he lived until he embarked for New England with Captain Dermer in 1619. It was on this same trip that Dermer had picked up Samoset at Monhegan, one of the more important fishing stations in Main, and dropped them both off at Plymouth. At which time Dermer wrote to a friend (presumably on the New England Council): "I will first begin with that place from whence Squanto, or Tisquantum, was taken away, which on Captain Smith's map is called Plymouth, and I would that Plymouth [England] had the like commodities. I would that the first plantation might be here seated . . ."

When Squanto stepped ashore six months before the Pilgrims arrived, he received the most tragic blow of his life: not a man woman, or child of his tribe was left alive! Nothing but skulls and bones and ruined dwellings remained.

Squanto wandered aimlessly through the lands he had played in as a child, the woods where he had learned to hunt, the place where he had looked forward to settling, once his career with the English was finished. Now there was nothing. In despair he wandered into Massasoit's camp, because he had nowhere else to go. And that chief, understanding his circumstances, took pity on him. But Squanto merely existed, having lost all reason for living.

That is, this was his condition until Samoset brought news of a small colony of peaceful English families who were so hard pressed to stay alive, let along plant a colony at Patuxet. They would surely die of starvation, since they had little food and nothing to plant but English wheat and barley. A light seemed to come back to Squanto's eye, and he accompanied Samoset, when the latter came to Plymouth as Massasoit's interpreter. For the chief himself had come with all sixty of his warriors, painted in startling fashion.

Edward Winslow was elected to meet Massasoit, and make him a gift of two knives and "a pot of strong water." What Massasoit really wanted was Winslow's armor and sword, but before he could make this clear through his interpreters, Winslow began to discourse smoothly and at length, making a long speech which said nothing, in the finest diplomatic tradition. Eventually Massasoit nodded, smiled, and went to Governor Caver.

He was ushered into one of the partially finished houses. To a fanfare of trumpet and drum, which pleased him immensely. Next they drank a toast to Massasoit, who

lifted the pot of strong water himself and took an enormous draft, which made his eyes water and caused him to sweat profusely.

But out of the meeting came a peace treaty of mutual aid and assistance which would last for forty years and would be a model for many that would be made thereafter. Massasoit was a remarkable example of God's providential care for His Pilgrims. He was probably the only other chief on the northeast coast of America who (like Powhatan to the south) would have welcomed the white man as a friend. And the pilgrims took great pains not to abuse his acceptance of them. On the contrary, the record of their relations with him and his peoples is a strong testimony to the love of Christ that was in them.

When Massasoit and his entourage finally left, Squanto stayed. He had found his reason for living. The English were like little babies, so ignorant were they of the ways of the wild. Well, he could certainly do something about that! The next day, he went out and came back with all the eels he could hold in his hands—which the Pilgrims found to be "fat and sweet" and excellent eating. How had he ever caught them? He took several young men with him and taught them how to squash the eels out of the mud with their bare feet, and then catch them with their hands.

But the next thing he showed them was by far the most important, for it would save every one of their lives. April was corn-planting month in New England, as well as Virginia. Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to plant corn the Indian way, hoeing six-foot squares in toward the center, putting down four or five kernels, and then fertilizing the corn with fish. At that, the Pilgrims just shook their heads; in four months they had caught exactly one cod. No matter, said Squanto cheerfully' in four days the creeks would be overflowing with fish.

The Pilgrims cast a baleful eye on their amazing friend, who seemed to have adopted them. But Squanto ignored them and instructed the young men in how to make the weirs they would need to catch fish. Obediently the men did as he told them, and four days later the creeks for miles around were clogged with alewives making their spring run. The Pilgrims did not catch them; they harvested them!

So now the corn was planted. Pointing spokelike to the center of each mound were three fishes, their heads almost touching. Now, said Squanto, they would have to guard against wolves. Seeing the familiar bewildered look on his charges' faces, he added that the wolves would attempt to steal the fish. The Pilgrims would have to guard it for two weeks, until it had a chance to decompose. And so they did, and that summer, twenty full acres of corn began to flourish.

Squanto helped in a thousand similar ways, teaching them how to stalk deer, plant pumpkins among the corn, refine maple syrup from maple trees, discern which herbs were good to eat and good for medicine, and find the best berries. But after the corn, there was one other specific thing he did which was of inestimable importance to their survival. What little fishing they had done was a failure, and any plan for them to fish commercially was a certain fiasco. So Squanto introduced them to the pelt of the beaver, which was then in plentiful supply in northern New England, and in great demand throughout Europe. And not only did he get them started, but he guided them in trading, making sure they got their full money's worth in top-quality pelts. This would prove to be their economic deliverance, just as corn would be their physical deliverance.

It amazes me how we can look back at our short history as a nation and see God's hand in providing us with our needs and protecting us from danger. This same God is still in charge.

~Adverse Yaw.