

# A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson<sup>♦</sup>

MARY ROWLANDSON

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## The Preface to the Reader

*It was on Tuesday Feb. 1. 1675. in the afternoon, when the Narrhagansets Quarters (in or toward the Nipmug Country, whither they were now retired for fear of the English Army lying in their own Country) were the second time beaten up by the Forces of the United Colonies<sup>1</sup> who thereupon soon betook themselves to flight, and were all the next day pursued by the English, some overtaken and destroyed. But on Thursday Feb. 3. the English having now been six days on their March, from their Head-quarters at Wickford, in the Narrhaganset Country, toward, and after the Enemy, and Provision grown exceeding short; insomuch that they were fain<sup>2</sup> to kill some Horses for the supply, especially of their Indian Friends, they were necessitated to consider what was best to be done; and about noon (having hitherto followed the Chase as hard as they might) a Council was called, and though some few were of another mind, yet it was concluded by far the greater part of the Council of War, that the Army should desist the pursuit, and retire: The Forces of Plimouth and the Bay to the next Town of the Bay, and Connecticut Forces to their own next Towns: which determination was immediately put in execution.<sup>3</sup> The consequent whereof, as it was not difficult to be foreseen by those*

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<sup>♦</sup>Recounting her captivity during King Philip's War, Rowlandson wrote *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (London: Joseph Poole, fourth edition, 1682). The preface is thought to have been written by Increase Mather.

<sup>1</sup>King Philip's War was instigated by the Wampanoag chief Metacom (known by New Englanders as King Philip) in 1675 to resist the spreading power of New Englanders through the countryside. Enlisting the assistance of the Nipmuks and Narragansetts, the Wampanoags surprised the settlers with a broad scale assault, destroying several towns, and instigating a crisis that the New England forces had difficulty countering. Mary Rowlandson, the most significant captive in native hands, was seized during the high tide of Native military success. The period of her captivity coincided with the turn in fortunes in the war, when Native lack of food caused the insurrection to falter.

<sup>2</sup>compelled

<sup>3</sup>Each colony—Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut—had their own forces in the conflict.

*that knew the causeless enmity of these Barbarians against the English, and the malicious and revengeful spirit of these Heathen; so it soon proved dismal.*

*The Narragansets were now driven quite from their own Country, and all their Provisions there hoarded up, to which they durst not at present return, and being so numerous as they were, soon devoured those to whom they went,<sup>4</sup> whereby both the one and the other were now reduced to extream straits, and so necessitated to take the first and best opportunity for supply, and very glad no doubt of such an opportunity as this, to provide for themselves, and make spoile of the English at once; and seeing themselves thus discharged of their pursuers, and a little refreshed after their flight, the very next week on Thursday Feb. 10. they fell with mighty force and fury upon Lancaster: which small Town, remote from aid of others, and not being Garrison'd as it might, the Army being now come in, and as the time indeed required (the design of the Indians against that place being known to the English some time before<sup>5</sup> was not able to make effectual resistance; but notwithstanding the utmost endeavour of the Inhabitants, most of the buildings were turned into ashes; many People (Men, Women and Children) slain, and others captivated. The most solemn and remarkable part of this Tragedy, may that justly be reputed, which fell upon the Family of that Reverend Servant of God, Mr. Joseph Rowlandson, the faithful Pastor of the Church of Christ in that place, who being gon down to the Council of the Massachuset, to seek aid for the defence of the place; at his return found the Town in flames, or smoke, his own house being set on fire by the Enemy, through the disadvantage of a defective Fortification and all in it consumed: His precious yoke-fellow,<sup>6</sup> and dear Children, wounded and captivated (as the issue evidenced, and the following Narrative declares) by these cruel and barbarous Salvages. A sad Catastrophe! Thus all things come alike to all: None knows either love or hatred by all that is before him. 'Tis no new thing for Gods precious ones to drink as deep as others, of the Cup of common Calamity: take just Lot (yet captivated) for instance, beside others.<sup>7</sup> But it is not my business to dilate on these things, but only in few words introductively to preface to the following script, which is a Narrative of the wonderfully awful, wise, holy, powerful, and gracious providence of God, toward that worthy and precious Gentlewoman, the dear Consort of the said Reverend Mr. Rowlandson, and her Children with her, as in casting of her into such a waterless pit, so in preserving, supporting, and carrying through so many such extream hazards, upspeakable difficulties and disconsolateness, and at last delivering her out of them all, and her surviving Children also. It was a strange and*

<sup>4</sup>The Narragansetts ate the Nipmucks food stores.

<sup>5</sup>A Nipmuk, James Quanaohit, had warned the English about the planned assault on Lancaster.

<sup>6</sup>wife

<sup>7</sup>the story of Lot in Genesis 14:12.

*amazing dispensation, that the Lord should so afflict his precious Servant, and Hand-maid: It was as strange, if not more, that he should so bear up the spirits of his Servant under such bereavements, and of his Hand-maid under such Captivity, travels, and hardships (much too hard for flesh and blood) as he did, and at length deliver and restore. But he was their Saviour, who hath said, When thou passest through the Waters, I will be with thee, and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the Fire, thou shalt not be burnt, nor shall the flame kindle upon thee, Isai. 43. Ver. 3. and again, He woundeth, and his hands make whole, He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea in seven there shall no evil touch thee: In Famine he shall redeem thee from death; and in War from the power of the sword, Job. 5. 18, 19, 20. Methinks this dispensation doth bear some resemblance to those of Joseph, David and Daniel, yea and of the three Children too,<sup>8</sup> the stories whereof do represent us with the excellent textures of divine providence, curious pieces of divine work: And truly so doth this, and therefore not to be forgotten, but worthy to be exhibited to, and viewed, and pondered by all, that disdain not to consider the operation of his hands.*

*The works of the Lord (not only of Creation, but of Providence also, especially those that do more peculiarly concern his dear ones, that are as the apple of his eye, as the signet upon his hand, the delight of his eyes, and the object of his tenderest care) are great, sought out of all those that have pleasure therein. And of these, verily this is none of the least.<sup>9</sup>*

*This Narrative was Penned by this Gentlewoman her self, to be to her a Memorandum of Gods dealing with her, that she might never forget, but remember the same, and the several circumstances thereof, all the daies of her life. A pious scope, which deserves both commendation and imitation. Some Friends having obtained a sight of it, could not but be so much affected with the many passages of working providence discovered therein, as to judge it worthy of publick view, and altogether unmeet that such works of God should be hid from present and future Generation: and therefore though this Gentlewomans modesty would not thrust it into the Press, yet her gratitude unto God, made her not hardly perswadable to let it pass, that God might have his due glory, and others benefit by it as well as her selfe.*

*I hope by this time none will cast any reflection upon this Gentlewoman, on the score of this publication of her Affliction and Deliverance. If any should, doubtless they may be reckoned with the nine Lepers, of whom it is*

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel 3

<sup>9</sup>Increase Mather and his son Cotton Mather throughout the last decades of the seventeenth century were engaged in various efforts to collect illustrious providences—accounts of miracles and events that signaled God’s intentions toward New Englanders. Rowlandson’s narrative may have been written in response to Increase Mather’s general call for accounts that would result in *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providence*.

said, Were there not ten cleansed, where are the nine? *but one returning to give God thanks. Let such further know, that this was a dispensation of publick note, and of Universal concernment; and so much the more, by how much the nearer this Gentlewoman stood related to that faithful Servant of God whose capacity and employment was publick, in the House of God, and his Name on that account of a very sweet saviour in the Churches of Christ. Who is there of a true Christian spirit, that did not look upon himself much concerned in this bereavement, this Captivity in the time thereof, and in this deliverance when it came, yea more than in many others? and how many are there to whom, so concerned, it will doubtless be a very acceptable thing, to see the way of God with this Gentlewoman in the aforesaid dispensation, thus laid out and pourtrayed before their eyes.*

*To conclude, Whatever any coy phantasies may deem, yet it highly concerns those that have so deeply tasted how good the Lord is, to enquire with David, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? Psal. 116. 12. He thinks nothing too great: yea, being sensible of his own disproportion to the due praises of God, he calls in help; O magnifie the Lord with me, let us exalt his Name together, Psal. 34. 3. And it is but reason, that our praises should hold proportion with our prayers; and that as many have helped together by prayer for the obtaining of this mercy, so praises should be returned by many on this behalf; and forasmuch as not the general but particular knowledge of things makes deepest impression upon the affections, this Narrative particularizing the several passages of this providence, will not a little conduce thereunto: and therefore holy David, in order to the attainment of that end, accounts himself concerned to declare what God had done for his Soul, Psal. 66. 16. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what God hath done for my Soul, i. e. for his Life: See Ver. 9, 10. He holdeth our soul in life, and suffers not our feet to be moved; for thou our God hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Life-mercies are heart-affecting-mercies; of great impression and force, to enlarge pious hearts in the praises of God, so that such know not how but to talk of Gods acts, and to speak of and publish his wonderful works. Deep troubles, when the waters come in unto the Soul, are wont to produce vows: Vows must be paid, It is better not vow, than to vow and not pay. I may say, that as none knows what it is to fight and pursue such an enemy as this, but they that have fought and pursued them: so none can imagine, what it is to be captivated, and enslaved to such Atheistical, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, (in one word) diabolical Creatures as these, the worst of the heathen; nor what difficulties, hardships, hazards, sorrows, anxieties, and perplexities, do unavoidably wait upon such a condition, but those that have tried it. No serious spirit then (especially knowing any thing of this Gentlewomans Piety) can imagine but that the vows of God are upon her. Excuse her than if she come thus into the publick, to pay those Vows. Come and hear what she hath to say.*

*I am confident that no Friend of divine Providence, will ever repent his time and pains spent in reading over these sheets; but will judge them worth perusing again and again.*

*Here Reader, you may see an instance of the Sovereignty of God, who doth what he will with his own as well as others; and who may say to him, what dost thou?<sup>10</sup> here you may see an instance of the Faith and Patience of the Saints, under the most heart-sinking Tryals: here you may see, the Promises are breasts full of Consolation, when all the World besides is empty, and gives nothing but sorrow. That God is indeed the supream Lord of the World: ruling the most unruly, weakening the most cruel and salvage: granting his People mercy in the sight of the most unmerciful: curbing the lusts of the most filthy, holding the hands of the violent, delivering the prey from the mighty, and gathering together the out-casts of Israel. Once and again, you have heard, but here you may see, that power belongeth unto God: that our God is the God of Salvation: and to him belong the issues from Death. That our God is in the Heavens, and doth what ever pleases him. Here you have Samsons Riddle exemplified, and that great promise, Rom. 8. 28. verified: Out of the Eater comes forth meat, and sweetness out of the strong;<sup>11</sup> The worst of evils working together for the best good. How evident is it that the Lord hath made this Gentlewoman a gainer by all this Affliction, that she can say, 'tis good for her, yea better that she hath been, than she should not have been, thus afflicted.*

*Oh how doth God shine forth in such things as these!*

*Reader, if thou gettest no good by such a Declaration as this, the fault must needs be thine own. Read therefore, peruse, ponder, and from hence lay up something from the experience of another, against thine own turn comes: that so thou also through patience and consolation of the Scripture mayest have hope,*

PER AMICUM.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Job 9:12

<sup>11</sup>Samson's riddle is found in Judges 14:14

<sup>12</sup>"By a friend." Thought to be Increase Mather.