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## Migrants and Motives: Religion and the Settlement of New England, 1630–1640

VIRGINIA DEJOHN ANDERSON

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NO man, perhaps, would seem to have been an unlikelier candidate for transatlantic migration than John Bent. He had never shown any particular interest in moving; indeed, in 1638, at the age of forty-one, Bent still lived in Weyhill, Hampshire, where both he and his father before him had been born. Having prospered in the village of his birth, John Bent held enough land to distinguish himself as one of Weyhill's wealthiest inhabitants. One might reasonably expect that Bent's substantial economic stake, combined with his growing familial responsibilities—which by 1638 included a wife and five children—would have provided him with ample incentive to stay put. By embarking on a transatlantic voyage—moving for the first time in his life and over a vast distance—Bent would exchange an economically secure present for a highly uncertain future and venture his family's lives and fortunes no less than his own. Yet in the spring of 1638, Bent returned his Weyhill land to the lord of the manor, gathered his family and possessions, and traveled twenty-five miles to the port of Southampton. There, he and his fam-

ily boarded the *Confidence*, bound for Massachusetts Bay.<sup>1</sup>

In doing so, the Bent family joined thousands of other men, women, and children who left for New England between 1630 and 1642.<sup>2</sup> We know more about John Bent than about the vast majority of these other emigrants because certain information has fortuitously survived. Bent's name appears on one of the few extant ship passenger lists of the Great Migration, and genealogists and local historians have compiled enough additional data to sketch in the outlines of his life in Old and New England. Yet despite this rare abundance of information, John Bent's reasons for moving to Massachusetts remain obscure. In fact, the surviving biographical details render the question of motivation all the more tantalizing because they provide no identifiable economic reason for leaving but rather depict a man firmly rooted in his English homeland.

Most accounts of early New England include a general discussion of the emigrants' motivations, but none has dealt with the issue systematically. If we are ever to comprehend the nature and significance of the Great Migration, however, we must understand why men like John Bent left their homes. The Great Migration to New England, unlike the simultaneous outpouring of Englishmen to other New World colonies, was a voluntary exodus of families and included relatively few indentured servants. The movement, which began around 1630, effectively ceased a dozen years later with the outbreak of the English Civil War, further distinguishing it

<sup>1</sup> Allen H. Bent, "The Bent Family," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (hereafter *NEHGR*) 47 (1894): 288-96; E. C. Felton, "The English Ancestors of John Bent, of Sudbury," *NEHGR* 48 (1895): 66; Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), p. 8. The passenger list for the *Confidence* is printed by Henry Stevens, in "Passengers for New England, 1638," *NEHGR* 2 (1848): 108-10, with corrections by H. G. Somerby in *NEHGR* 5 (1851): 440.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the total number of emigrants vary. In 1651 Edward Johnson, a participant in the Great Migration, calculated a total of 21,200 persons. Recent research, however, suggests that Johnson's figure may be as much as a third too large. See J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *[Edward] Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1628-1651* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 58; Henry A. Gemery, "Emigration from the British Isles to the New World, 1630-1700: Inferences from Colonial Populations," *Research in Economic History* 5 (1980): 180, 197-98, 212.

from the more extended period of emigration to other colonies.

These two factors—the emigrants' voluntary departure and the movement's short duration—suggest that the Great Migration resulted from a common, reasoned response to a highly specific set of circumstances. Such circumstances must have been compelling indeed to dislodge a man like John Bent from a comfortable niche in his community. And while Bent and his fellows could not have known it, their reasons for embarking for New England would not only change their own lives but also powerfully shape the society they would create in their new home.

## I

Although modern commentators have disagreed over why New England's settlers left the mother country, none of the original chroniclers ever suggested that motivation was an open question. Edward Johnson, for example, knew exactly why the Great Migration occurred. The author of *The Wonder-Working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England*, who first sailed to Massachusetts in 1630, announced that he and his fellow emigrants left England to escape the evils generated by "the multitude of irreligious lascivious and popish affected persons" who had spread "like Grashoppers" throughout the land. As England strayed from the paths of righteousness, the Lord had sought to preserve a saving remnant of His church by transferring it to an untainted refuge. Johnson adopted a military metaphor to describe the process: the decision to emigrate constituted a voluntary enlistment in Christ's Army, the instrument with which He would "create a new Heaven, and a new Earth in, new Churches, and a new Commonwealth together."<sup>3</sup> Other writers concurred with Johnson's providentialist interpretation. Nathaniel Morton and William Hubbard, both of whom emigrated as children, likewise believed the founding of Massachusetts to be the center-

<sup>3</sup> Johnson's *Wonder-Working Providence*, pp. 23, 25.

piece of a divine plan to preserve the Gospel and proper forms of worship.<sup>4</sup> The most emphatic explication of the settlers' religious motivation, however, came not from a participant in the Great Migration but from a descendant of emigrants. Cotton Mather never doubted that the Lord "carried some Thousands of *Reformers* into the Retirements of an *American Desert*, on purpose," that "He might there, *To* them first, and then *By* them, give a *Specimen* of many Good Things, which He would have His Churches elsewhere aspire and arise unto."<sup>5</sup>

Few modern scholars have shared the steadfast conviction of Mather and his predecessors, but it was not until 1921 that the emigrants' religious motivation was seriously questioned. In that year, James Truslow Adams suggested that most New England settlers—if not their leaders—emigrated "for the simple reason that they wanted to better their condition." By leaving England, colonists escaped "the growing and incalculable exactions of government" while at the same time they enjoyed unprecedented opportunities for freeholdership. Adams felt compelled to discount the colonists' religious motivation because so few became members of New England churches. His thesis soon provoked a spirited response from Samuel Eliot Morison, who questioned Adams's statistics on church membership and pointed out that conversion was no easy process. An excess of piety, rather than a lack of it, might as readily dissuade individuals from claiming fellowship with a church's "visible saints."<sup>6</sup>

For some time the work of Adams and Morison defined the terms of the historical debate as other scholars weighed in with arguments supporting either economics or religion as the

<sup>4</sup> Nathaniel Morton, *New-Englands Memoriall* (originally published 1669; facsimile ed., Boston: Club of Odd Volumes, 1903), p. 83; Rev. William Hubbard, *A General History of New England, from the Discovery to MDCLXXX*, 2d ed. (Boston, 1680), reprinted in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 2d ser. 5 (1848): 109.

<sup>5</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), ed. Kenneth B. Murdock, books I and II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> James Truslow Adams, *The Founding of New England* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921), pp. 121–22; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Builders of the Bay Colony* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930; pbk. ed., 1958), pp. 379–86.

principal force propelling Englishmen from the Old World to the New.<sup>7</sup> More recent writers, however, have woven a more complex web of causality. In his extensive discussion of the background of the emigration from East Anglia, N. C. P. Tyack concluded that economic, religious, and political factors all influenced individual decisions to move.<sup>8</sup> Timothy Breen, Stephen Foster, and David Grayson Allen have likewise suggested that the time has come to cease attempting to “separate the historically inseparable” and to begin examining the interrelationships of various motives. It is quite possible, they have argued, that the emigrants themselves would not have been able to distinguish among a variety of highly localized factors—such as economic distress, religious persecution, the exhortations of a charismatic Puritan leader, or even an outbreak of the plague—and choose the single reason that convinced them to leave their homes.<sup>9</sup>

These scholars have applied a much-needed corrective to what had become a rather stale debate by reminding us that deciding to emigrate was a complicated and highly individualistic affair. But their conclusions are, in the end, disappointing, for they suggest that we must accept the notion that the motives for emigration were so complex as to be irrecoverable. If we examine more closely the lives of the emigrants themselves, we may yet find clues that reveal a common incentive underlying the Great Migration.

In seeking to identify emigrants and explore their motives

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Charles E. Banks, “Religious ‘Persecution’ as a Factor in Emigration to New England, 1630–1640,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 43 (1930): 136–51, with a comment by Samuel Eliot Morison on pp. 151–54; Nellis M. Crouse, “Causes of the Great Migration, 1630–1640,” *New England Quarterly* 5 (1932): 3–36.

<sup>8</sup> N. C. P. Tyack, “Migration from East Anglia to New England before 1660” (Ph. D. diss., University of London, 1951). In a recent article, Tyack argues that religion may well have been the primary cause of the emigration of the “humbler folk” from one English region; see his “The Humbler Puritans of East Anglia and the New England Movement: Evidence from the Court Records of the 1630s,” *NEHGR* 138 (1984): 79–106.

<sup>9</sup> T. H. Breen and Stephen Foster, “Moving to the New World: The Character of Early Massachusetts Immigration,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 30 (1973): 189–220; David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transfer of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 163–204.

for moving, historians have received invaluable assistance from none other than Charles I. Not long after the exodus to Massachusetts began, the king and his archbishop of Canterbury became increasingly concerned about the departure of so many English folk for wilderness homes across the seas. On 21 July 1635, in an attempt to keep track of the movement, Charles I issued a proclamation requiring all those who wished to leave the realm to obtain a special license from the Privy Council. Customs officers were instructed to obtain certain information from prospective emigrants aboard each ship, including name, residence, occupation, age, and destination.<sup>10</sup> Although the royal edict was loosely enforced and the passage of more than three centuries has inevitably reduced the amount of extant information, several of these ship passenger lists do survive, and they provide a unique opportunity to examine the lives of ordinary emigrants.

Seven ship passenger lists, which together include the names of 693 colonists, provide the information upon which this essay is based. These appear to be the only lists that have been published in their entirety from surviving documents.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Charles Boardman Jewson, ed., *Transcript of Three Registers of Passengers from Great Yarmouth to Holland and New England, Norfolk Record Society Publications* 25 (1954): 6–7. See also Ann N. Hansen, "Ships of the Puritan Migration to Massachusetts Bay," *American Neptune* 23 (1963): 62–66.

<sup>11</sup> All of the lists used here, along with many others, appear in Charles Edward Banks, *The Planters of the Commonwealth* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1930). Banks's work, however, is not particularly reliable because he usually reordered the lists and often omitted certain information, such as servant-status or birthplace, mixed up family or household groups, or added persons whom he thought belonged to a particular ship even though the names were not listed. I have chosen, therefore, to obtain lists from the following sources:

The *Hercules* (Sandwich, 1635) and a Sandwich ship of 1637: Eben Putnam, "Two Early Passenger Lists, 1635–1637," *NEHGR* 75 (1921): 217–27, with corrections by Elizabeth French Bartlett in *NEHGR* 79 (1925): 107–9.

Weymouth ship, 1635: William S. Appleton, "More Passengers for New-England," *NEHGR* 25 (1871): 13–15.

The *James* (Southampton, 1635): Louise Brownell Clarke, *The Greenes of Rhode Island, with Historical Records of English Ancestry, 1534–1902* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1903), pp. 768–69.

The *Rose* and the *Mary Anne* (Great Yarmouth, 1637): *Transcript of Three Registers*, pp. 21–23, 29–30.

The *Confidence* (Southampton, 1638): see n. 1.

The two Yarmouth lists and the Sandwich list of 1637 were examined by Breen and

All the lists contain the names of emigrants; most also include occupation (for adult males), residence, age, and evidence of family structure. In other words, each list provides sufficiently specific information to permit accurate tracing of individual passengers in the New World. The lists themselves, of course, can only tell us about the emigrants at one moment in time, the date of registration for the voyage, but an astonishingly large amount of additional information can be found in genealogies and local histories. Using these materials, it has been possible to reconstruct the New England careers of 578 emigrants, or 83.4 percent of those included on the lists.

Since no comprehensive record of the total emigrant population exists, one cannot determine the "representativeness" of these seven lists. Certain evidence, however, does suggest their reliability. According to John Winthrop's record of arriving ships, the three busiest years of the migration were 1634, 1635, and 1638; four of the emigrant groups examined here arrived in those years.<sup>12</sup> Both Winthrop's account and the research of Charles E. Banks, one of New England's most productive genealogists, indicate that most ships sailed from ports in southern and eastern England. The ships included here also came from this general area: two each sailed from Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, Sandwich in Kent, and Southampton in Hampshire, while the other left from Weymouth in Dorset. In addition, although information on numbers of passengers is incomplete, it seems that these ships, which carried between 75 and 119 emigrants, were typical. Winthrop noted the arrivals of 47 ships carrying between 80 and 150 people, with an average of about 110 passengers. In numbers of passengers, as well as in ports of origin and timing of departure,

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Foster in "Moving to the New World," pp. 189-220. All seven ships sailed to Massachusetts Bay; although the exact ports of arrival are not known, Salem or Boston are likeliest.

<sup>12</sup> Of 106 ships mentioned by Winthrop, 27 came in 1634, 21 in 1638, and 17 in 1635; see John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage, 2 vols. (Boston, 1825), vol. 1, passim. The other three ships in this study sailed in 1637. Because Winthrop's record of arrivals was not systematic, 1637 may have been either a year of lighter traffic or simply one of lighter documentation.



then, the ships examined here do reflect the patterns established by other sources.

Evidence from these lists suggests that although few emigrants left explicit records of their reasons for moving, the motives of the majority need not remain a mystery. Analyzing the lists in light of supporting genealogical materials enables us to construct a social profile of the emigrants, which can then be compared with that of the English population at large. This comparison in turn suggests that once we know who the emigrants were, we can begin to understand why they came.

## II

The New England settlers more closely resembled the non-migrating English population than they did other English colonists in the New World. The implications of this fact for the development of colonial societies can scarcely be overstated. While the composition of the emigrant populations in the Chesapeake and the Caribbean hindered the successful transfer of familiar patterns of social relationships, the character of the New England colonial population ensured it. The prospect of colonizing distant lands stirred the imaginations of young people all over England but most of these young adults made their way to the tobacco and sugar plantations of the South. Nearly half of a sample of Virginia residents in 1625 were between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine, and groups of emigrants to the Chesapeake in the seventeenth century consistently included a majority of people in their twenties.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, only a quarter of the New England settlers belonged to this age group (table 1).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> James Horn, "Servant Emigration to the Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society and Politics*, ed. Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979), pp. 61–62; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), p. 408. See also Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> All the aggregate information is derived from a computer-aided analysis (using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) of 693 emigrants. Although some

TABLE 1  
DISTRIBUTION OF AGES OF NEW ENGLAND EMIGRANTS

Age (in years)	N	%
0-10	98	23.7
11-20	102	24.7
21-30	102	24.7
31-40	71	17.2
41-50	29	7.0
51-60	10	2.5
61-70	1	0.2
Total	413	100.0

The age structure of New England's emigrant population virtually mirrored that of the country they had left (table 2). Both infancy and old age were represented: the *Rose* of Great Yarmouth carried one-year-old Thomas Baker as well as Katherine Rabey, a widow of sixty-eight. The proportion of people over the age of sixty was, not surprisingly, somewhat higher in the general English population than among the emigrants. Although Thomas Welde reported in 1632 that he traveled with "very aged" passengers, "twelve persons being all able to make well nigh one thousand years," a transatlantic voyage of three months' duration was an ordeal not easily undertaken, and the hardships involved in settling the wilderness surely daunted prospective emigrants of advanced years.<sup>15</sup> On the whole, however, New England attracted people of all ages and thus preserved a normal pattern of intergenerational contact.

information was available for nearly every emigrant, the mix of data varied for each individual; therefore, the totals will vary in different tables. The coverage for some major variables is as follows: sex, 97.9% (679/693); age at migration, 59.6% (413/693); English town or parish of residence, 85.1% (590/693); occupation [for adult males], 77.7% (139/179).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Welde to his former parishioners at Tarling, June/July 1632, in *Letters from New England: The Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1629-1638*, ed. Everett Emerson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), p. 95. Welde also mentioned that several other passengers were infants.

TABLE 2  
AGE STRUCTURE OF THE EMIGRANT POPULATION  
AND ENGLAND'S POPULATION IN 1636

Age (in years)	New England		English Population,
	Emigrants		1636
	N	%	%
0-4	48	11.62	12.40
5-14	81	19.61	19.73
15-24	108	26.15	17.72
25-59	172	41.65	42.03
60+	4	00.97	08.12
Total	413	100.00	100.00

SOURCE: For English figures, see table A3.1, Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, p. 528.

Similarly, the sex ratio of the New England emigrant group resembled that of England's population. If women were as scarce in the Chesapeake as good English beer, they were comparatively abundant in the northern colonies. In the second decade of Virginia's settlement, there were four or five men for each woman; by the end of the century, there were still about three men for every two women.<sup>16</sup> Among the emigrants studied here, however, nearly half were women and girls. Such a high proportion of females in the population assured the young men of New England greater success than their southern counterparts in finding spouses (table 3).<sup>17</sup>

These demographic characteristics derive directly from the fact that the migration to New England was primarily a transplantation of families. Fully 87.8 percent (597 out of 680) of

<sup>16</sup> Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, p. 111 n. 16, p. 336. See also Russell R. Menard, "Immigrants and Their Increase: The Process of Population Growth in Early Colonial Maryland," in *Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland*, ed. Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuse (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 96.

<sup>17</sup> The ratio varied somewhat among individual ships. The *Rose* was the only vessel carrying a majority of women (sex ratio=84), while the *James*, with nearly two men for every woman, had the most unbalanced ratio, 184.

TABLE 3  
SEX RATIO FOR NEW ENGLAND EMIGRANTS

	<i>N</i>	%
Male	386	56.8
Female	293	43.2
Total	679	100.0

NOTE: Sex ratio=132

the emigrants traveled with relatives of one sort or another (table 4). Nearly three-quarters (498 out of 680) came in nuclear family units, with or without children. Occasionally, single spouses migrated with their children, either to meet a partner already in the New World or to wait for his or her arrival on a later ship. Grandparents comprised a relatively inconspicuous part of the migration, but a few hardy elders did make the trip. In 1637, Margaret Neave sailed to Massachusetts with her granddaughter Rachel Dixson, who was probably an orphan. In the following year, Alice Stephens joined her sons William and John and their families for the voyage to New England. More frequently, emigrant family structure extended horizontally, within a generation, rather than vertically, across three generations. Several groups of brothers made the trip together, and when the three Goode-now brothers decided to leave the West Country, they convinced their unmarried sister Ursula to come with them as well.

Thus, for the majority of these New England settlers, transatlantic migration did not lead to permanent separation from close relatives. Some unscrupulous men and women apparently migrated in order to flee unhappy marriages, but most nuclear family units arrived intact. When close kin were left behind, they usually joined their families within a year or so.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In about 80 percent of the cases for which there is information (61 of 77), nuclear families moving to New England brought all of their members along. Only eight families—about 10 percent—are known for certain to have left members behind in

TABLE 4  
THE STRUCTURE OF HOUSEHOLD GROUPS AMONG NEW ENGLAND EMIGRANTS

Categories	Classes	Without Servants	With Servants	Total	%	No. of Emigrants in Each Group Category	
Solitaries	(a) Widowed	2	0	2	38.0	2	
	(b) Single/unknown marital status	56	5	61			73
No family	(a) Co-resident siblings	3	0	3	2.4	6	
	(b) Co-resident relatives of other kinds	1	0	1			2
Simple family households	(a) Married couples, alone	4	6	10	54.8	36	
	(b) Married couples, with children	32	42	74			462
	(c) Husband with children	1	3	4			28
	(d) Wife with children	0	1	1			8
	(e) Widow with children	2	0	2			6
Extended family households	(a) Extended laterally	2	1	3	100.0	18	
	(1) Brothers	2	0	2			16
	(2) Other kin						
	(b) Combinations						
	(1) Nuclear family and servant's family	0	1	1			7
	(2) Nuclear family with others of unknown relationship	1	0	1			10
(3) Brothers and families with mother	0	1	1	6			
Total number of groups:				166	100.0	680	
Total number of emigrants in all groups:						100.0%	

NOTE: This table is modeled on that in Laslett, *Family life and illicit love*, pp. 96-97.

Samuel Lincoln, for instance, who traveled aboard the *Rose* in 1637, soon joined his brother Thomas, who had settled in Hingham in 1633. Another brother, Stephen, arrived in the following year with both his family and his mother. Edward Johnson, who had first crossed the ocean with the Winthrop fleet in 1630, returned to England in 1637 to fetch his wife and seven children. For Thomas Starr, who left Sandwich in 1637, migration meant a reunion with his older brother Comfort, a passenger on the *Hercules* two years earlier. Although some disruption of kin ties was unavoidable, it was by no means the rule.

The average size of migrating households was 4.07 persons, which again resembled conditions in the mother country; mean household size in a sample of 33 seventeenth-century English parishes was 4.60 persons.<sup>19</sup> The proportion of single people aboard the ships was, however, higher than that in the English population at large, a fact that substantially reduced the mean household size. The four-person mean therefore tends to obscure the fact that fully 20 percent of the emigrants traveled in family groups of six persons and over 10 percent in groups of eight or more (table 5). The "mean experienced household size"—that is, the household size familiar to the average individual—was a considerably larger 6.31 persons.

Further exploration of demographic patterns reveals other subtle but significant differences between the migrating population and that of England. These differences illustrate the important fact that migration was a selective process; not all people were equally suited to or interested in the rigors of New World settlement. Since the movement to New England

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England. Seventeenth-century court records are interspersed with orders for husbands and wives to reunite with their spouses either in England or New England; see, e.g., George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, 8 vols. (Salem: Essex Institute, 1911–75), 1:123–24, 137, 159, 160, 166, 208, 228, 229, 231, 244, 245, 274, 275, 306, 360.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Laslett, "Mean household size in England since the sixteenth century," in *Household and Family in Past Time: Comparative studies in the size and structure of the domestic group over the last three centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and colonial North America, with further materials from Western Europe*, ed. Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 130.

TABLE 5  
 SIZE OF EMIGRANT GROUPS TRAVELING TO NEW ENGLAND

Size of Group	N of Groups	% of Groups	N of People in Groups of This Size	% of People in Groups of This Size
1	56	33.5	56	8.2
2	13	7.8	26	3.8
3	9	5.4	27	4.0
4	16	9.6	64	9.4
5	18	10.8	90	13.3
6	23	13.8	138	20.3
7	13	7.8	91	13.4
8	7	4.2	56	8.2
9	3	1.8	27	4.0
10	4	2.4	40	5.9
11	1	0.6	11	1.6
12	2	1.2	24	3.5
13	1	0.6	13	1.9
16	1	0.6	16	2.4
Total	167	100.1	679	99.9

was a voluntary, self-selective affair, most of this winnowing-out process occurred before the hearths of English homes, as individuals and families discussed whether or not to leave.

Although family groups predominated within the emigrant population, many individuals came to New England on their own.<sup>20</sup> The vast majority of these solitary travelers were male—men outnumbered women by a factor of ten to one—and together they constituted 38 percent of the emigrant households (table 4). This figure stands in sharp contrast to England's population, where only about 5 percent of all households were composed of one individual.<sup>21</sup> About one in

<sup>20</sup> Servants are not included in this category; they are included in the household with which they traveled.

<sup>21</sup> The figure is based on Laslett's calculations for 100 English communities for the period 1574–1821; see table 4.8 in his "Mean household size," p. 146.

six emigrants aged twenty-one to thirty sailed independently, perhaps drawn to New England by hopes of employment or freeholdership. These men were hardly freewheeling adventurers; instead, they provided the new settlements with skilled labor. The unaccompanied travelers included shoemakers, a carpenter, butcher, tanner, hempdresser, weaver, cutler, physician, fuller, tailor, mercer, and skinner. Some were already married at the time of the voyage, and those who were single seldom remained so for more than a couple of years after their arrival. Through marriage, the men became members of family networks within their communities. Within a few years of his arrival in 1635, for instance, Henry Ewell, a young shoemaker from Sandwich in Kent, joined the church in Scituate and married the daughter of a prominent local family. William Paddy, a London skinner, managed to obtain land, find a wife, and get elected to Plymouth's first general court of deputies within four years of his voyage.<sup>22</sup>

Analysis of the composition of migrating families reveals other important differences between the colonizing population and that of England. Children were a less ubiquitous component of emigrating household groups than they were in the general English population. Between 1574 and 1821, for example, it seems that not less than three-quarters of English households included children. For the New England emigrants at the time of their departure, the figure was just over half of all households (90 of 166). Yet 90 out of 99 emigrating *families* had children, and within these families, children were a conspicuous presence indeed. Most emigrant families that had children had three or more (table 6). The average number of children per family was 3.08, compared to an aver-

<sup>22</sup> For Henry Ewell, see James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England, Showing Three Generations of Those Who Came before May, 1692, . . .*, 4 vols. (Boston, 1860–62), 2:132; C. F. Swift, *Genealogical Notes of Barnstable Families, Being a Reprint of the Amos Otis Papers, Originally Published in the Barnstable Patriot*, 2 vols. (Barnstable, Mass., 1888), 1:359. For William Paddy, see Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 3:328–29; Charles Henry Pope, *The Pioneers of Massachusetts, A Descriptive List, Drawn From Records of Colonies, Towns, and Churches, and Other Contemporaneous Documents* (Boston: the author, 1900), p. 338.



TABLE 6  
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS IN ENGLAND AND NEW ENGLAND

<u>No. of Children</u>	<u>Groups with This Number of Children</u>		<u>Number of Children in Groups of This Size</u>		
	<u>New England</u>		<u>New England</u>		<u>Sample of 100 English Parishes</u>
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	%
1	14	16.1	14	5.2	11.2
2	25	28.7	50	18.7	18.4
3	17	19.5	51	19.0	23.1
4	13	14.9	52	19.4	18.1
5	12	13.8	60	22.4	13.4
6	2	2.3	12	4.5	7.7
7+	4	4.7	29	10.8	7.2
Total	87	100.0	268	100.0	99.1

SOURCE: For English figures, see Laslett, "Mean household size," p. 148.

age of 2.76 for a sample of 100 English communities.<sup>23</sup> Emigrating children did not suffer for lack of playmates aboard ship or in the New World; over half of them came in groups including four or more children.

New England clearly attracted a special group of families. The average age of emigrant husbands was 37.4 years ( $N=81$ ); for their wives the average was 33.8 ( $N=55$ ). The westward-bound ships carried couples who were mature, who had probably been married for nearly a decade, and who had established themselves firmly within their communities. The typical migrating family was complete—composed of husband, wife, and three or four children—but was not yet completed. They were families in process, with parents who were at most halfway through their reproductive cycle and who would continue to produce children in New England. They would be responsible for the rapid population growth that

<sup>23</sup> Figures for English households are from Laslett, "Mean household size," p. 148.

New England experienced in its first decades of settlement. Moreover, the numerous children who emigrated with their parents contributed their efforts to a primitive economy sorely lacking in labor.

The task of transforming wilderness into farmland, however, demanded more labor than parents and their children alone could supply, and more than half of the emigrating families responded to this challenge by bringing servants with them to the New World (table 4). Perhaps some had read William Wood's advice in *New England's Prospect* and learned that "men of good estates may do well there, always provided that they go well accommodated with servants." In any case, servants formed an integral part, just over 17 percent, of the colonizing population and in fact were at first somewhat more commonplace in New England than in England.<sup>24</sup> Most were males (80 of 114) and labored alongside their masters, clearing land, planting corn, and building houses and barns. Their presence substantially increased the ratio of producers to consumers in the newly settled towns.<sup>25</sup>

Household heads, however, knew that servants might easily become a drain on family resources in the critical early months of settlement. Their passages had to be paid and food

<sup>24</sup> William Wood, *New England's Prospect*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 70; Laslett, "Mean household size," p. 152. Ann Kussmaul, in examining the prevalence of servants in husbandry (not domestic servants) found that they comprised 1 to 13 percent of the population in a sample of six seventeenth-century parishes; see her *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 12. Peter Laslett calculated that in Clayworth in 1676, servants were present in 31 percent of the households, and comprised 16.7 percent of the parish's population; see Peter Laslett, *Family life and illicit love in earlier generations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 90. Since the vast majority of New England servants were male, Kussmaul's figures may provide the more relevant comparison here; that comparison indicates that servants in early New England may have been up to twice as common as in England.

<sup>25</sup> Wrigley and Schofield calculated the "dependency ratio" for England over five-year intervals for the period from 1541 to 1871. This ratio measures the numbers of persons aged 0 to 14 years and over 60 years—presumably those too young or too old to provide much productive labor—as a proportion of every 1,000 persons in the general population. In England in 1636, the dependency ratio was 674 per 1,000; among the New England emigrants studied here, the comparable figure was a considerably lower 475 per 1,000. See E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 528.

and shelter provided at a time when those commodities were at a premium. Hence, when arranging for a suitable labor supply, masters heeded the advice of writers like William Wood, who emphasized that emigrants should not take too many servants and should choose men and women of good character. "It is not the multiplicity of many bad servants (which presently eats a man out of house and harbor, as lamentable experience hath made manifest)," he warned, "but the industry of the faithful and diligent laborer that enricheth the careful master; so that he that hath many dronish servants shall soon be poor and he that hath an industrious family shall as soon be rich."<sup>26</sup> Most families attempted to strike a balance between their need for labor and available resources by transporting only a few servants. Nearly half of the families brought just one and another quarter of them brought only two.

### III

Before departing for New England, the emigrants had called a wide variety of English towns and villages their homes (see fig. 1). Most lived in the lowland area of England, a region that extends south and east of a line drawn diagonally from Teesmouth in the northeast to the port of Weymouth on the Dorset coast. The lowlands in general enjoyed a more even topography, drier climate, and richer soil than did the highlands to the north and supported the bulk of the country's population.<sup>27</sup> Within this expanse of southeastern England, those who chose to emigrate had known many different forms of social organization, agricultural practice, industrial development, and local government. At one end of the spectrum, Parnell Harris, William Paddy, and Edmund Hawes all left the burgeoning metropolis of London, which was about to overtake Paris as the largest city in Europe; at the other, the widow Emme Mason left the tiny Kentish parish of Eastwell,

<sup>26</sup> Wood, *New England's Prospect*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Thirsk, "The Farming Regions of England," in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 4, 1500-1640, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 2-15.

*Figure 1*  
**English Origins of Passengers**  
**on Seven Ships to Massachusetts, 1635–1638**



The numbers of passengers from each county (and London) are as follows — Berkshire: 6, Dorset: 18, Hampshire: 54, Kent: 182, London: 3, Middlesex: 1, Norfolk: 152, Oxford: 20, Somerset: 33, Suffolk: 36, Wiltshire: 86, Worcestershire: 1. English residences were unknown for 101 passengers. After a map by Richard Stinely in David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transferal of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 17. Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture. Used with permission.

which was "not more than a mile across each way" and whose church in 1640 counted just 55 communicants.<sup>28</sup>

A relatively large proportion of the New England settlers dwelled in urban areas prior to their emigration. In addition to London, substantial towns such as Norwich in Norfolk, Canterbury in Kent, and Salisbury in Wiltshire were residences for scores of prospective colonists. In the mid-seventeenth century, only about one out of five Englishmen was a town-dweller, whereas at least one of three emigrants had lived in a community with three thousand or more inhabitants. Fully 60 percent of the future New Englanders came from market towns. Although these communities were not "urban" on the same scale as a large provincial capital like Norwich or Canterbury, they differed qualitatively from their neighboring communities. Each served as a focus for networks of trade and distribution, and often for the social life, of its surrounding region.<sup>29</sup>

New England would never offer its first generation of settlers anything approaching the bustle and complexity of the urban centers they had abandoned. But large towns best furnished prospective emigrants like the locksmith William Ludkin or the cutler Edmund Hawes with markets for their specialized skills. Emigrants involved in trade resided in sizable towns like Norwich, Romsey, or Sandwich, which provided access to important commercial networks. Likewise, prospective settlers who made their livings in the cloth industry fre-

<sup>28</sup> E. A. Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy, 1650-1750," *Past and Present* 37 (1967): 44; Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, 2d ed., 12 vols. (Canterbury, 1797-1801), 7:399, 411. For the most recent discussion of the diversity of New Englanders' origins, see Allen, *In English Ways*; see also Powell, *Puritan Village*.

<sup>29</sup> Two hundred emigrants, out of 590 with known English residences, came from the seven towns of Canterbury, Dover, Great Yarmouth, London, Maidstone, Norwich, and Salisbury. Population figures for these towns are in John Patten, *English Towns, 1500-1700* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1978), pp. 106, 111-12, 251; Wrigley, "A Simple Model," p. 44; C. W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent: A Social and Economic History* (London: Longmans, 1965), pp. 30-31. For market towns, see Alan Everitt, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce," in *Agrarian History*, 4:470-75, 488-90.

quently depended on the manufacturing and marketing amenities of large towns such as Norwich, Salisbury, Canterbury, and Sandwich. Weavers from these towns acquired yarn from local spinners, produced a multitude of different fabrics, and often sold them as well.<sup>30</sup>

Town life also equipped future emigrants with complex and regionally distinctive experiences of local government. Most incorporated boroughs were run by an annually elected mayor, but the numbers and duties of subsidiary officeholders varied widely.<sup>31</sup> Admission to a town's body of freemen—which often brought enfranchisement and eligibility for officeholding—was based on different criteria in different places. In Norwich, Nicholas Busby and William Nickerson probably achieved freeman status by completing seven-year apprenticeships and proving competence in their craft as weavers. Henry Bachelor and Nathaniel Ovell, two emigrants from Dover, however, would have had to demonstrate that their lands were worth at least five pounds a year.<sup>32</sup> Electoral practices also varied. In Reading, home of the emigrant Augustine Clement, the town's aldermen selected the mayor; in Salisbury, the mayor was chosen by the common council. In

<sup>30</sup> K. J. Allison, "The Norfolk Worsted Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries [Part I]," *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research* 12 (1960): 73–78; G. D. Ramsay, *The Wiltshire Woollen Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 2–19; Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 123–26.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to a mayor, Dover had 12 *jurats* and a 36-member common council. Southampton had 9 justices, a sheriff, 2 bailiffs, and 24 common councilmen, plus an equal number of burgesses, while Newbury had a high steward, a recorder, 6 aldermen, and 24 capital burgesses, and Canterbury had a recorder, 12 aldermen, and 24 common councilmen. See Rev. John Lyon, *The History of the Town and Port of Dover, and of Dover Castle; with a Short Account of the Cinque Ports*, 2 vols. (Dover, 1813–14), 1:218; Richard Warner, *Collections for the History of Hampshire, and the Bishopric of Winchester* . . . , 5 vols. (London, 1795), 1:179; anon., *The History and Antiquities of Newbury and Its Environs, Including Twenty-Eight Parishes, Situate in the County of Berks* . . . (Speenhamland, 1839), p. 129; Hasted, *History and Topographical Survey . . . of Kent*, 11:28.

<sup>32</sup> Both Busby and Nickerson were freemen; whether Bachelor and Ovell were also is unknown. See Jewson, *Transcript of Three Registers*, pp. 21–22; John Evans, *Seventeenth-Century Norwich: Politics, Religion, and Government, 1620–1690* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 8; Lyon, *History of the Town and Port of Dover*, 1:22.

Norwich, freemen voted in both municipal and parliamentary contests.<sup>33</sup> Each borough had its own distinct political calendar regulating its citizens' participation in local affairs, often in accordance with liturgical cycles inherited from pre-Reformation days. Mayors were chosen on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady (2 February) in Dover, on the first of May in Norwich, on St. Matthew's Day (21 September) in Newbury, All Souls' (2 November) in Maidstone, and on the Monday after St. Andrew's Day (30 November) in Sandwich.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, seventeenth-century English towns, especially the larger ones, often encompassed a multiplicity of civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. If Edmund Batter, Michael Shafflin, or any of the other emigrants from Salisbury lived in the cathedral close, their neighborhood was administered by the diocesan dean and chapter, who clashed at times with the municipal government.<sup>35</sup> Provincial centers such as Canterbury and Norwich were divided into several parishes; the Kentish city had at least eight in 1640, while the East Anglian capital boasted thirty-four parishes.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, town-dwellers lived in the midst of a more heterogeneous population than did persons who resided in the countryside. Major textile manufacturing centers received an influx of foreign artisans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The newcomers, mainly Dutch and Walloon tradesmen, settled primarily in Kent and East Anglia and helped to revitalize the depressed cloth industry in those areas. Their congregations

<sup>33</sup> Rev. Charles Coates, *The History and Antiquities of Reading* (London, 1802), p. 65; Mary E. Ransome, "City Government, 1612–1835," in *A History of Wiltshire*, ed. R. B. Pugh and Elizabeth Crittall, 12 vols., The Victoria History of the Counties of England (London: Oxford University Press, for the University of London Institute of History, 1956–75), 6:105; Evans, *Seventeenth-Century Norwich*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Lyon, *History of the Town and Port of Dover*, 2:267, 287; Evans, *Seventeenth-Century Norwich*, p. 57; *History and Antiquities of Newbury*, p. 129; William Newton, *The History and Antiquities of Maidstone, the County-Town of Kent* (London, 1741), p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Slack, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury, 1597–1666," in *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700: Essays in Urban History*, ed. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 187–88.

<sup>36</sup> Hasted, *History and Topographical Survey . . . of Kent*, 11:214–86; Breen and Foster, "Moving to the New World," p. 199 n. 27.

grew rapidly and often gained important concessions from local authorities—such as permission to worship separately—which helped both to maintain their sense of identity and to impart a more cosmopolitan flavor to the towns in which they lived.<sup>37</sup>

In the countryside, although the contrasts were perhaps less striking, villages also differed significantly from one another. Much of seventeenth-century England was an intricate patchwork of parishes with particular local customs dating from time out of mind. Ancient practice often dictated the shape of the landscape, patterns of settlement, modes of landholding, and rituals of agrarian activity. Even within a single county, substantial variation was evident. The emigrant Nathaniel Tilden's home in Tenterden lay in the densely wooded Wealden region of southern Kent, where most of the land was devoted to pasture. He probably spent much of his time tending cattle and perhaps a few sheep and pigs. Many Wealden farms contained dairy houses and cheese chambers; Lydia Tilden and her daughters may have supplemented the family's diet and income by converting some of their herd's milk into cheese and butter. In addition, the Tildens and their servants, like other Wealden farmers, probably cultivated a dozen or so acres of wheat, oats, and peas for domestic use. Since mixed farming of this sort left farmers and their families with spare time at certain periods of the year, some Tildens may have turned to by-employments, like spinning for local cloth producers, to keep themselves busy and to earn a few shillings during the slack months.<sup>38</sup>

Thomas Call and his family, who sailed to New England in 1637, lived only twenty-odd miles north of the Tildens, but their agricultural routine would have been quite different. The Calls lived in Faversham, a village of about a thousand

<sup>37</sup> K. J. Allison, "The Norfolk Worsted Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries [Part 2]," *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research* 13 (1961): 61–69; Dorothy Gardiner, *Historic Haven: The Story of Sandwich* (Derby: Pilgrim Press, 1954), pp. 182–85; Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 123–24.

<sup>38</sup> Thirsk, "Farming Regions of England," pp. 57–59; Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 75–82.



inhabitants located in the northern part of the county near the coast. Here, unlike the region around Tenterden, the country was "a fine extended level, the fields of a considerable size, and most unincumbered with trees or hedgerows."<sup>39</sup> Because of its fertile soil and easy access by water to London, north Kent had become an important supplier of the city's food. Thomas Call's neighbors concentrated on the production of wheat and, to a lesser extent, barley. Much of the grain harvested from their fields was shipped either to the metropolis or, if of lower quality, sent along the coast to other parts of the country. In addition, Call probably grew a crop of beans or peas as fodder for his animals. Since north Kentish farms tended to be larger than those in the Weald, Call was likely to have owned more land than Nathaniel Tilden did in Tenterden. Perhaps he used some of his acreage to plant an orchard; by the middle of the seventeenth century, farmers in his neighborhood had begun to produce large quantities of cherries for market.<sup>40</sup>

Agricultural diversity likewise prevailed in the county of Norfolk, where Henry and Elizabeth Smith of New Buckenham lived with their two sons. Norfolk's wood pasture region, like the Kentish Weald, supported a considerable population of small farmers engaged in stock rearing and dairying. Large hedges marked the boundaries of enclosed fields where cattle grazed and farmers cultivated small plots of barley, wheat, and rye, and perhaps some oats and peas, for household consumption. In these wooded regions in both counties, manorial organization was weak, its function reduced to intermittent financial and legal administration which intruded only sporadically into inhabitants' daily lives. The Smiths, like the Tildens, may also have engaged in by-employments, such as combing wool or weaving flax, during the winter months.

But the Moulton, Page, and Dow families, who emigrated

<sup>39</sup> Hasted, *History and Topographical Survey . . . of Kent*, 6:319.

<sup>40</sup> F. J. Fisher, "The Development of the London Food Market, 1540-1640," in *Essays in Economic History*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson, 3 vols. (London: E. Arnold, 1954-62), 1:136, 138-42; Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 74-82, 90; Thirsk, "Farming Regions of England," pp. 56-57, 62.

from the small coastal village of Ormsby, knew a different Norfolk. They lived and worked in a district devoted to the twin agricultural pursuits of grain cultivation and sheep rearing. Barley, rye, and wheat were again the main crops but here were grown for market. Sheep provided fertilizer as they were bred and fattened for sale. Manorial structure maintained its hold; inhabitants lived in nucleated villages and often farmed cooperatively in open fields. The lords of the manors, who stood at the apex of society in this sheep-corn region, grazed their flocks on tenants' harvested and fallow fields and dominated the local sheep market. As husbandmen, John Moulton, Robert Page, and Henry Dow may not have owned any sheep themselves but might have preferred instead to leave that enterprise to the local gentry while they concentrated on planting cereals. Although arable regions did not generally sustain much local industry, northern Norfolk was unusual in that several of its villages supported worsted cloth manufacture. The three Ormsby families who emigrated may well have spun yarn or have woven fabric in addition to farming.<sup>41</sup>

Other rural routines regulated the lives of emigrants from southwestern counties. Peter Noyes and John Bent followed ancient custom when they returned their lands to the lord of the manor in the open-field parish of Penton in Hampshire before embarking for New England. Property-holding in this grain-growing and sheep-rearing downland enmeshed farmers in a network of feudal dues and practices.<sup>42</sup> Dorsetshire farmers such as Edmund and William Kerley labored in a pastoral region of dairying and pig raising dominated by the local manor, while across the border in southern Wiltshire, Edmund and John Goodenow farmed in another common-field district devoted to sheep-and-corn husbandry. To the west, Robert and Joan Martin worked in Batcombe, Somerset, a small village where the "lands are all enclosed, but not

<sup>41</sup> Thirsk, "Farming Regions of England," pp. 46-49, 42-46; K. J. Allison, "The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Agricultural History Review* 5 (1957): 12-30.

<sup>42</sup> Powell, *Puritan Village*, pp. 3, 7-10.

crowded with wood; and there is a greater proportion of pasture than tillage."<sup>43</sup> In the migration to New England, then, not only would villagers and townsfolk intermingle but farmers would also encounter other countrymen with very different experiences of rural life.

#### IV

The diversity of the emigrants' English backgrounds—and their urban origins in particular—influenced the distribution of their occupations. Virtually the same number of men were engaged in farming and in artisanal trades not involved with cloth manufacture; slightly fewer earned their livings in the textile industry (table 7).<sup>44</sup> Most of the cloth workers emigrated from cities well known for their textile manufacture; half of the fourteen weavers left Norwich, while five of the sixteen tailors had lived in Salisbury. The geographical distribution of the other artisans was more even, yet many also had congregated in urban areas. Ten of the eleven shoemakers came from Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Sandwich, and Marlborough, while the only two joiners had lived in Canterbury and Norwich. Nearly all of the men with highly specialized

<sup>43</sup> Thirsk, "Farming Regions of England," p. 4; Powell, *Puritan Village*, fig. 2; Eric Kerridge, "Agriculture c. 1500–c. 1793," in the *Victoria History of Wiltshire*, 4:43–45; quotation from John Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset . . .*, 3 vols. (Bath, 1791), 3:466; Thomas G. Barnes, *Somerset 1625–1640: A County's Government During the "Personal Rule"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> In the category "agriculture" (33.8% of the total of men with listed occupations), I have included 30 husbandmen, 5 yeomen, 6 laborers, and 6 men called "husbandmen or laborers," a dual label retained in the coding. "Cloth trades" includes 1 clothier, 14 weavers, 16 tailors, 2 mercers, a calenderer, and a fuller (25.2%). "Other artisans" consists of 1 hempdresser, 13 shoemakers, 2 tanners, 1 skinner, 12 carpenters, 1 sawyer, 3 joiners, 3 coopers, 1 "moulter," 2 butchers, a brewer, a painter, a cutler, 2 ropers, a chandler, and a locksmith (33.1%). "Trade" includes 2 merchants and a grocer (2.2%); "Maritime" includes 2 mariners and a fisherman (2.2%); and "professional" includes 2 surgeons, 2 ministers, and a schoolmaster (3.6%). This occupational distribution is roughly similar to that obtained by N. C. P. Tyack for 147 East Anglian emigrants. He found 16.3% of his sample in agriculture, 23.1% in cloth trades, 26.5% in other artisanal trades, 3.4% each in trade and maritime occupations, and 27.2% in the professions. This last figure includes a large number of ministers leaving East Anglia in the early 1630s. See Tyack, "Migration from East Anglia," appendix 3.

TABLE 7  
OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT MALE EMIGRANTS

Category	N	%
Agriculture	47	33.8
Cloth trades	35	25.2
Other artisans	46	33.1
Trade	3	2.2
Maritime	3	2.2
Professional	5	3.6
Total	139	100.1

skills lived in large towns; the locksmith William Ludkin in Norwich, the cutler Edmund Hawes in London, the surgeon John Greene (who appears to have been a physician, not a barber-surgeon) in Salisbury. Artisans, both in the cloth trades and in other pursuits, formed a greater proportion of the emigrant population than tradesmen did in the English population as a whole. In 1696, Gregory King estimated that “freeholders” and “farmers” outnumbered “artizans and handicrafts” by a factor of more than seven to one; among the emigrants to New England, however, artisans predominated by a ratio of nearly two to one.<sup>45</sup>

The occupational spectrum of future New Englanders placed them at the more prosperous end of English society. As farmers and artisans, prospective emigrants belonged to that part of the population that—according to Gregory King—“increased the wealth of the kingdom.” Yet in striking contrast to Virginia, where, at least initially, the population included “about six times as large a proportion of gentlemen as England had,” New England attracted very few members of the upper class.<sup>46</sup> Sir Henry Vane and Sir Richard Saltonstall were

<sup>45</sup> Charles Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship, 1603–1763* (London: Longman, 1965), p. 239.

<sup>46</sup> Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship*, p. 239; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, p. 84.

unique among the leaders of the migration, and for the most part even they submitted to government by such gentle but untitled figures as John Winthrop and Thomas Dudley. On the whole, emigrants were neither very high nor very low in social and economic status. Husbandmen predominated among the farmers who came to Massachusetts; thirty of them emigrated compared to just five yeomen.<sup>47</sup> By the seventeenth century, the legal distinctions between the status of yeoman and that of husbandman had largely eroded and evidence indicates that the labels generally denoted relative position on the economic and social ladder. Both groups primarily made their livings from the land, but yeomen were generally better off. New England, however, was peopled by less affluent—but not necessarily poor—husbandmen.<sup>48</sup>

Emigrant clothworkers practiced trades that also placed them on the middle rungs of the economic ladder. Textile manufacturing in the early seventeenth century employed the skills of dozens of different craftsmen, from the shearmen, carders, and combers who prepared wool for spinning to the wealthy clothiers who sold the finished product. But the emigrant clothworkers did not represent the entire spectrum of skills; most were weavers and tailors who made a modest living at their trade. While it is true that, during his impeachment trial, the former bishop of Norwich was accused of harrasing some of the city's most important and prosperous tradesmen—including the weavers Nicholas Busby, Francis Lawes, and Michael Metcalf—out of the land, these emigrants' economic status was probably exaggerated.<sup>49</sup> Most urban weavers

<sup>47</sup> Tyack found a similar result: twenty-two husbandmen, one yeoman, and one "farmer"; see "Migration from East Anglia," pp. 54–56, and appendix 3, vi–via.

<sup>48</sup> Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeoman in the Tudor and Early Stuart Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), pp. 11–13, 23–33; Gordon Batho, "Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Yeomen," in *Agrarian History*, 4:301–6; Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 37–39. Husbandmen could, in fact, be quite well-off. Benjamin Cooper, a husbandman who sailed on the *Mary Anne*, died during the voyage in 1637. An inventory of his estate, recorded in Massachusetts that September, amounted to £1,278.12.00; Probate docket no. 4, Suffolk County Registry of Probate, Boston, Mass.

<sup>49</sup> John Browne, *History of Congregationalism and Memorials of the Churches in Norfolk and Suffolk* (London, 1877), p. 89.

from Norfolk in this period had goods worth no more than £100, and one out of five did not even own his own loom.<sup>50</sup> Among the non-clothworking artisans, shoemakers and carpenters predominated, and they too worked in trades that would bring comfort, if not riches. All in all, the New England-bound ships transported a population characterized by a greater degree of social homogeneity than existed in the mother country. Despite Winthrop's reminder to his fellow passengers on the *Arbella* that "some must be rich some poor, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subieccion," New Englanders would discover that the process of migration effectively reduced the distance between the top and the bottom of their social hierarchy.<sup>51</sup>

## V

In a letter to England written in 1632, Richard Saltonstall commented on the social origins of New England's inhabitants. "It is strange," he wrote, "the meaner sort of people should be so backward [in migrating], having assurance that they may live plentifully by their neighbors." At the same time, he expressed the hope that more "gentlemen of ability would transplant themselves," for they too might prosper both spiritually and materially in the new land. For young Richard, the twenty-one-year-old son of Sir Richard Saltonstall, New England promised much but as yet lacked the proper balance of social groups within its population that would ensure its success. The migration of the "meaner sort" would help lower the cost of labor, while richer emigrants would "supply the want we labor under of men fitted by their estates to bear common burdens." Such wealthy men would invest in the colony's future even as they enhanced their own spiritual welfare by becoming "worthy instru-

<sup>50</sup> Allison, "Norfolk Worsted Industry [Part I]," pp. 76–77. Lack of suitable records makes it nearly impossible to assess the emigrants' economic positions prior to their voyages; even the few extant tax lists are inaccurate measures of total wealth. See Breen and Foster, "Moving to the New World," pp. 198–99 n. 27.

<sup>51</sup> "A Modell of Christian Charitie." *Winthrop Papers*, 5 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929–47), 2:282.

ments of propagating the Gospel” to New England’s natives.<sup>52</sup>

Saltonstall wrote early in the migration decade, but the succeeding years did little to redress the social imbalance he perceived in Massachusetts. Two years later, William Wood could still write that “none of such great estate went over yet.”<sup>53</sup> Throughout the decade of the 1630s, New England continued to attract colonists who were overwhelmingly ordinary. Demographically they presented a mirror image of the society they had left behind, and socially and economically they fairly represented England’s relatively prosperous middle class. The question is inescapable: why did so many average English men and women pass beyond the seas to Massachusetts’ shores?

Whether or not they have assigned it primary importance, most historians of the period have noted that economic distress in England in the early seventeenth century must have been causally related to the Great Migration. These were years of agricultural and industrial depression, and farmers and weavers were conspicuous passengers on the transatlantic voyages. A closer examination of the connections between economic crisis and the movement to New England, however, indicates that the links were not as close as they have been assumed to be.

Agriculture—especially in the early modern period—was a notoriously risky business. Success depended heavily upon variables beyond human control. A dry summer or an unusually wet season rendered futile the labor of even the most diligent husbandman, and English farmers in the early seventeenth century had to endure more than their share of adversity. While the decade of the 1620s began propitiously, with excellent harvests in 1619 and 1620, the farmers’ luck did not hold. The next three years brought one disastrous harvest after another; improvement in 1624 was followed by dearth in 1625. The beginning of the 1630s, especially in the eastern

<sup>52</sup> Richard Saltonstall to Emmanuel Downing, 4 February 1631/2, in *Letters from New England*, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, *New England’s Prospect*, p. 68.

counties, was marked by further distress; in 1630, the mayor of Norwich complained that "scarcity and dearth of corn and other victuals have so increased the number and misery of the poor in this city" that civic taxes had to be boosted to unprecedented heights and the city's stock of grain dwindled dangerously. In 1637, a severe drought spawned further hardship.<sup>54</sup>

Although this period of agricultural depression undoubtedly touched the lives of many English families, it did not necessarily compel them to emigrate. The worst sustained period of scarcity occurred in the early 1620s, a decade or so before the Great Migration began; if agrarian distress was a "push" factor, it produced a curiously delayed reaction. Furthermore, annual fluctuations were endemic in early modern agriculture. Englishmen knew from experience that times would eventually improve, even if that day were unpleasantly distant; moreover, they had no reason to suppose that farmers in New England would somehow lead charmed lives, exempt from similar variations in the weather. In addition, dearth was not an unmitigated disaster for families engaged in husbandry: as supplies of grain and other products shrank, prices rose. In 1630, a year with one of the worst harvests in the first half of the seventeenth century, the price of grain was twice what it had been in the more plentiful years of 1619 and 1620. Thus for farmers involved in market agriculture, a bad year, with half the yield of a good one, could still bring the same income.<sup>55</sup> As the Norwich mayor's lament amply demonstrates, the people really hurt in times of scarcity were city-dwellers dependent on the countryside for their food. That urban dwellers left for New England to assure themselves of a steady food supply, however, is highly unlikely. Emigrants would

<sup>54</sup> B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600–1642: A Study in the Instability of a Mercantile Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pp. 55, 57, 101, 110–11; Peter Bowden, "Agricultural Prices, Farm Profits, and Rents," *Agrarian History*, 4:623–32; Tyack, "Migration from East Anglia," pp. 124–37; and "Grain Shortages in 1630–31 and the Measures Taken in Somerset, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Norwich," in *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents*, ed. Joan Thirsk and J. P. Cooper (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 37–38.

<sup>55</sup> Thirsk, *Agrarian History*, vol. 4, Statistical Appendix, table 6, pp. 849–50.



surely have anticipated the primitive state of the region's agriculture; reports of scarcity at Plymouth and the early Massachusetts Bay settlements had quickly filtered back to England. Moreover, emigrating urban artisans certainly understood that, in the New World, responsibility for feeding their families would lie in their own hands—hands more accustomed to the loom or the last than the plow.

The slump in England's textile industry has also been accounted an incentive for emigration. The industry was indeed mired in a severe depression in the early seventeenth century; it is true as well that a quarter of the adult male emigrants were employed in a trade related to cloth manufacture. The weavers Nicholas Busby, Francis Lawes, and Michael Metcalf of Norwich all completed their apprenticeships at a time when the textile trade "like the moon [was] on the wane," and the future of Norfolk's preeminent industry was growing dimmer each year.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the sixteenth century, the county's traditional worsted manufacture had steadily lost ground in its European markets to a developing continental industry. In southern England and the West Country, broadcloth producers suffered reverses as well. In 1631, the clothiers of Basingstoke, Hampshire—a town about fifteen miles southwest of the home of the emigrant weaver Thomas Smith of Romsey— informed the county's justices that the "poor do daily increase, for there are in the said town 60 householders, whose families do amount to 300 persons and upwards being weavers, spinners, and clothworkers, the most of them being heretofore rated towards the relief of the poor, do now many of them depend upon the alms of the parish" and begged for some kind of relief.<sup>57</sup>

The decline in sales of the white, undressed fabric that had

<sup>56</sup> The quotation is from a parliamentary debate of 1621, in Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change*, p. 54.

<sup>57</sup> Allison, "Norfolk Worsteds Industry [Part I]," pp. 73, 78–80; Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 121–22; Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics, and Society in Kent, 1500–1640* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977), p. 356; quotation from "Depression in the Hampshire Cloth Industry, 1631," in *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents*, pp. 38–39.

been the mainstay of English clothiers proved to be irreversible. At the same time, however, certain sectors in the textile industry recovered by switching over to the production of "new draperies." These fabrics, lighter in weight and brighter in color than the traditional English product, were made from a coarser—and therefore cheaper—type of wool. They were introduced in England largely by immigrant Dutch and Walloon artisans, who were frequently encouraged by local authorities to take up residence in England. East Anglia and Kent became centers of the revitalized industry; the cities of Norwich, Canterbury, and Sandwich counted scores of these north European "strangers" among their inhabitants. With the end of hostilities between England and Spain in 1604, trade expanded, and the new fabrics found ready markets in the Mediterranean and the Levant. By the mid-seventeenth century, the production of Norwich stuffs—new versions of worsted wool—had "probably raised the prosperity of the industry to an unprecedented level" and brought renewed prosperity to a number of beleaguered artisans as well.<sup>58</sup>

We cannot know whether worsted weavers like Nicholas Busby, William Nickerson, or Francis Lawes adapted to prevailing trends in their trade, but they seem not to have been in serious economic straits at the time they decided to go to Massachusetts. The identification of Busby, Lawes, and Michael Metcalf among Norwich's most important tradesmen at Bishop Wren's impeachment trial, even if those claims were somewhat exaggerated, attested to their standing in the community. Busby's service as a *jurat* responsible for checking the quality of worsted wool produced in the city certainly indicated that he had achieved considerable status in his profession. Economic advancement attended professional prominence: before their departure for the New World, Busby and his wife owned a houselot in a prospering parish in the northern part of the city. In the countryside as well, some cloth

<sup>58</sup> Allison, "Norfolk Worsted Industry [Part 2]," pp. 61–77, quotation from p. 77; Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change*, pp. 136–62; Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent*, pp. 123–36; Evans, *Seventeenth-Century Norwich*, p. 16; Ramsay, *Wiltshire Woollen Industry*, 2d ed., pp. 65–84, 101–21.

workers managed to make a good living in hard times. Thomas Payne, a weaver from the village of Wrentham in Suffolk, emigrated to Salem in 1637 but died soon thereafter. His will, written in April 1638, not only listed property recently acquired in Salem, but also mentioned his share in the ship *Mary Anne*, on which he had sailed to Massachusetts. At the time of his departure from Suffolk, then, Payne could not only afford his family's transportation costs but also had funds to invest in the New England enterprise.<sup>59</sup>

Even if evidence did suggest that emigrant weavers were compelled by economic adversity to leave their homeland, Massachusetts would not have been a wise choice of destination if they hoped to continue in their trade. Flight to the Netherlands, a place with a well-developed textile industry, would have been a more rational choice for artisans worried about the fate of their trade in England and anxious to persist in its practice. Massachusetts lacked both the wool supply and the intricate network of auxiliary tradesmen—such as combers, carders, calenderers, fullers, dyers, etc.—upon which England's weavers depended. Several of the emigrants packed up their looms along with their other belongings, but there is little evidence that they were able to earn their livings in Massachusetts solely by weaving.<sup>60</sup>

Arguments linking the Great Migration to economic hardship in England all share an important weakness. Although historians have discovered that many *places* from which emigrants came suffered from agricultural or industrial depression, they have had little success in connecting those unfavorable economic circumstances to the fortunes of individual emigrants. On the contrary, it appears that the families that

<sup>59</sup> Evans, *Seventeenth-Century Norwich*, pp. 18, 21–22; William L. Sachse, ed., *Minutes of the Norwich Court of Mayoralty*, *Norfolk Record Society Publications* 15 (1942): 68; Anna C. Kingsbury, *A Historical Sketch of Nicholas Busby the Emigrant* (n.p., 1924), pp. 5–8; Nathaniel E. Paine, *Thomas Payne of Salem and His Descendants: The Salem Branch of the Paine Family* (Haverhill, Mass.: Record Publishing Co., 1928), p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> Jewson, *Transcript of Three Registers*, contains lists of East Anglians heading for Holland. Most appear to have been going for short periods of time—to visit friends or to enter military service—and not to pursue their trade.

went to New England had largely avoided the serious setbacks that afflicted many of their countrymen during those years.

An alternative interpretation of the colonists' economic motivation has recently been proposed by Peter Clark, who discovered similarities between the New England settlers and "betterment migrants" traveling within the county of Kent during the decades preceding the English Civil War. Betterment migrants, like the New England colonists, were persons of solid means who, Clark argues, sought further to improve their economic positions. Most betterment migrants traveled only a short distance, usually to a nearby town; the New Englanders differed from them primarily through the immense length of their transatlantic journeys. On the whole, betterment migrants were not especially mobile; in their search for opportunity, they generally moved just once in their lives. New England emigrants like John Bent, while they lived in England, also tended to be geographically stable. In addition, betterment migrants shared with the Massachusetts settlers a tendency to rely on kin connections in their choice of destinations.<sup>61</sup>

Clark's model of betterment migration fits the New England movement in certain particulars, but it makes little sense within the larger context of the transatlantic transplantation. If migration to New England was not a sensible economic decision for farmers or weavers hurt by hard times in England, it was even less sensible for people doing well. Most emigrants exchanged an economically viable present for a very uncertain future. As we have seen, nearly one in ten was over forty years old at the time of the migration and had little reason to expect to live long enough to enjoy whatever prosperity the New World might bring. The emigrant groups studied here all left England five or more years after the Great Migration had begun and a decade and a half after the landing at Plymouth; they surely heard from earlier arrivals that New England was no land of milk and honey. If any had a chance to read Edward

<sup>61</sup> Clark, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 372-73, and "The migrant in Kentish towns 1580-1640," in *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, pp. 134-38.

Winslow's *Good Newes from New England*, published in 1624, he or she would have learned that the "vain expectation of present profit" was the "overthrow and bane" of plantations. People might prosper through "good labor and diligence," but in the absence of a cash crop, great wealth was not to be expected. The message of William Wood's *New England's Prospect*, published a decade later, was similar. Some colonists were lured westward by descriptions of plenty, Wood acknowledged, but they soon fell to criticizing the new society, "saying a man cannot live without labor." These disgruntled settlers "more discredit and disparage themselves in giving the world occasion to take notice of their dronish disposition that would live off the sweat of another man's brows. Surely they were much deceived, or else ill informed, that ventured thither in hope to live in plenty and idleness, both at a time." Letters as well as published reports informed would-be settlers that New England was not a particularly fertile field for profit. In 1631, one young colonist wrote to his father in Suffolk, England, that "the cuntrey is not so as we ded expecte it." Far from bringing riches, New England could not even provide essentials; the disillusioned settler begged his father to send provisions, for "we do not know how longe we may subeseiste" without supplies from home.<sup>62</sup>

If prospective emigrants were not hearing that New England offered ample opportunities for economic betterment, they *were* informed that life in Massachusetts could bring betterment of another sort. When Governor Thomas Dudley provided the countess of Lincoln with an account of his first nine months in New England, he announced that "if any come hether to plant for worldly ends that canne live well at home hee comits an error of which he will soon repent him. But if for spirituall [ends] and that noe particular obstacle hinder his removeall, he may finde here what may well content him."

<sup>62</sup> Edward Winslow, *Good Newes from New England: or a true Relation of things very remarkable at the Plantation of Plimoth in New-England* (London, 1624), reprinted in *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth, from 1602 to 1625*, 2d ed., ed. Alexander Young (Boston, 1844), pp. 272-73, 370-71; Wood, *New England's Prospect*, p. 68; [?] Pond to William Pond, *Winthrop Papers*, 3:18.

Dudley worried that some might be drawn to Massachusetts by exaggerations of the land's bounty and wanted to make clear who would benefit most from emigration. "If any godly men out of religious ends will come over to helpe vs in the good worke wee are about," the governor wrote, "I think they cannot dispose of themselves nor of their estates more to God's glory and the furtherance of their owne reckoning."<sup>63</sup> New England promised its settlers *spiritual* advantages only; men merely in search of wealth could go elsewhere. Emmanuel Downing, in a letter to Sir John Coke, clarified the important difference between New England and other colonial ventures. "This plantation and that of Virginia went not forth upon the same reasons nor for the same end. Those of Virginia," he explained, "went forth for profit. . . . These went upon two other designs, some to satisfy their own curiosity in point of conscience, others . . . to transport the Gospel to those heathen that never heard thereof."<sup>64</sup>

Both published tracts and private correspondence advertised New England's religious mission. In *The Planter's Plea*, Rev. John White proclaimed that "the most eminent and desirable end of planting Colonies, is the propagation of Religion." Prospective emigrants learned from the Rev. Francis Higginson's *New-England's Plantation*, published in 1630, that "that which is our greatest comfort . . . is, that we haue here the true Religion and holy Ordinances of Almighty God taught amongst us: Thankes be to God, we haue here plentie of Preaching, and diligent Catechizing, with strickt and carefull exercise, and good and commendable orders to bring our People into a Christian conuersation with whom we haue to doe withall."<sup>65</sup> Indeed, New England's Puritan predilections

<sup>63</sup> "Gov. Thomas Dudley's Letter to the Countess of Lincoln, March, 1631," in *Tracts and Other Papers Relating Principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America, From the Discovery of the Country to the Year 1776*, ed. Peter Force, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1836-46), 2:12.

<sup>64</sup> This letter is quoted in *Letters from New England*, p. 93. For a similar statement, see John Winthrop's "General Observations: Autograph Draft," *Winthrop Papers*, 2:117.

<sup>65</sup> John White, *The Planter's Plea* (London, 1630), reprinted in *Tracts and Other Papers*, 2:12; Rev. Francis Higginson, *New-England's Plantation with The Sea Jour-*

were so well known that colonial leaders feared retribution from the Anglican establishment in England. *The Planter's Plea* specifically sought to dispel rumors that Massachusetts was overrun with Separatists, and, during the early 1630s, Edward Howes maintained a steady correspondence with John Winthrop, Jr. concerning similar allegations of New England radicalism. In 1631, Howes reported that "heare is a mutteringe of a too palpable seperation of your people from our church gouernment." The following year, he again informed Winthrop of claims that "you neuer vse the Lords prayer, that your ministers marrie none, that fellowes which keepe hogges all the weeke preach on the Saboth, that euery towne in your plantation is of a seuerall religion; that you count all men in England, yea all out of your church, and in the state of damnacion." Howes knew such rumors were false but feared that many other Englishmen believed them. The spread of such lies endangered not only the colony's reputation but perhaps its very survival as well.<sup>66</sup>

Prospective emigrants, then, could hardly have been unaware of the peculiar religious character of New England society. Accounts of the region's commitment to Puritanism were too numerous to be overlooked; those who made the voyage had to know what they were getting into. Adherence to Puritan principles, therefore, became the common thread that stitched individual emigrants together into a larger movement. As John White declared, "Necessitie may presse some; Noveltie draw on others; hopes of gaine in time to come may prevaile with a third sort: but that the most and most sincere and godly part have the advancement of the *Gospel* for their maine scope I am co[n]fident."<sup>67</sup>

White's confidence was by no means misplaced. The roster

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*nal and Other Writings* (facsimile, Salem: Essex Book and Print Company, 1908), p. 108. See also the letter from Edward Trelawney to his brother Robert in *Letters from New England*, pp. 175–78.

<sup>66</sup> White, *Planter's Plea*, pp. 33–36; Edward Howes to John Winthrop, Jr., 9 November 1631 and 28 November 1632, *Winthrop Papers*, 3:54, 100–101.

<sup>67</sup> White, *Planter's Plea*, p. 36.

of passengers to New England contains the names of scores of otherwise ordinary English men and women whose lives were distinguished by their steadfast commitment to nonconformity, even in the face of official harassment. The *Hercules* left Sandwich in 1635 with William Witherell and Comfort Starr aboard; both men had been in trouble with local ecclesiastical authorities. Anthony Thacher, a nonconformist who had been living in Holland for two decades, returned to Southampton that same year to embark for New England on the *James*. Two years later, the *Rose* carried Michael Metcalf away from the clutches of Norwich diocesan officials. Metcalf had appeared before ecclesiastical courts in 1633 and again in 1636 for refusing to bow at the name of Jesus or to adhere to the “stinking tenets of Arminius” adopted by the established Church. Before his departure, Metcalf composed a letter “to all the true professors of Christs gospel within the city of Norwich” that chronicled his troubled encounters with church officials and explained his exclusively religious reasons for emigration. Thomas and Mary Oliver, Metcalf’s fellow parishioners at St. Edmund’s in Norwich, had also been cited before the arch-episcopal court in 1633 and set sail for Massachusetts the same year as Metcalf. Other emigrants leaving in 1637 were John Pers and John Baker, two Norwich residents evidently also in trouble with church officials; Joan Ames, the widow of the revered Puritan divine William Ames, who had only recently returned from a lengthy stay in Rotterdam; and Margaret Neave and Adam Goodens, whose names appeared on Separatist lists in Great Yarmouth. Peter Noyes, who emigrated in 1638, came from a family long involved in nonconformist activities in England’s southwest.<sup>68</sup>

Although New England was not populated solely by unsuc-

<sup>68</sup> Clark, *English Provincial Society*, p. 372; Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary*, 4: 270–71; Breen and Foster, “Moving to the New World,” pp. 202–3, 207 n. 37; Jewson, *Transcript of Three Registers*, p. 8; Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research, 1550–1641*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 2:309; Powell, *Puritan Village*, p. 4; “Michael Metcalfe,” *NEHGR* 16 (1862): 279–84. The incomplete survival of ecclesiastical records in England makes it impossible to discover the full extent of colonists’ troubles with the authorities.



cessful defendants in ecclesiastical court proceedings, the nonconformist beliefs of other emigrants should not be underestimated merely because they avoided direct conflict with bishops and deacons. John Winthrop's religious motivation has never been in doubt even though he was never convicted of a Puritan offense. Winthrop's "General Observations for the Plantation of New England," like Metcalf's letter to the citizens of Norwich, emphasized the corrupt state of England's ecclesiastical affairs and concluded that emigration "wilbe a service to the church of great consequens" redounding to the spiritual benefit of emigrants and Indians alike. Those few men who recorded their own reasons for removal likewise stressed the role of religion. Roger Clap, who sailed in 1630, recalled in his memoirs that "I never so much as heard of *New-England* until I heard of many godly Persons that were going there" and firmly believed that "God put it into my Heart to incline to Live abroad" in Massachusetts. John Dane, who seems to have spent most of his youth fighting off his evil inclinations, "bent myself to cum to nu ingland, thinking that I should be more fre here then thare from temptations." Arriving in Roxbury in the mid-1630s, Dane soon discovered that relocation would not end his struggle with sinfulness; the devil sought him out as readily in the New World as in the Old.<sup>69</sup>

To declare that most emigrants were prompted by radical religious sentiment to sail to the New World, however, does not mean that these settlers resembled Hawthorne's memorable "stern and black-browed Puritans" in single-minded pursuit of salvation. The decision to cross the seas indelibly marked the lives of those who made it. Even the most pious wrestled with the implications of removal from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. Parents often objected to the departure of their children; a son following the dictates of his conscience might risk the estrangement of a disappointed

<sup>69</sup> *Winthrop Papers*, 2:111; "Memoirs of Roger Clap," *Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society Collections* 1 (1844): 18-19; "John Dane's Narrative, 1682," *NEHGR* 8 (1854): 154.

father.<sup>70</sup> Although religious motivation is the only factor with sufficient power to explain the departure of so many otherwise ordinary families, the New England Puritans should not be seen as utopians caught up in a movement whose purpose totally transcended the concerns of daily life.

Solitary ascetics can afford to reject the things of this world in order to contemplate the glories of the next; family men cannot. Even as prospective settlers discussed the spiritual benefits that might accompany a move to New England, they worried about what they would eat, where they would sleep, and how they would make a living. In the spring of 1631, Emmanuel Downing wrote with considerable relief to John Winthrop that the governor's encouraging letters "haue much refreshed my hart and the myndes of manie others" for "yt was the Iudgement of most men here, that your Colonye would be dissolved partly by death through want of Food, howsing and rayment, and the rest to retorne or to flee for refuge to other plantacions."<sup>71</sup> Other leaders and publicists of the migration continued both to recognize and to sympathize with the concerns of families struggling with the decision of whether or not to move, and they sought to reassure prospective settlers that a decision in favor of emigration would not doom their families to cold and starvation in the wilderness. At the same time, the way in which these writers composed their comforting messages to would-be emigrants underscored the settlers' understanding of the larger meaning of their mission.

Although several of the tracts and letters publicizing the migration contained favorable descriptions of the new land, they were never intended to be advertisements designed to capture the interest of profit-seekers. When John White, Thomas Dudley, and others wrote about the blessings of New

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., the story of Samuel Rogers in Kenneth W. Shipps, "The Puritan Emigration to New England: A New Source on Motivation," *NEHGR* 135 (1981): 83-97. Both Roger Clap and John Dane noted that their fathers, at least initially, protested their emigration; see "Memoirs of Roger Clap," p. 18; "John Dane's Narrative," p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> Edward Downing to John Winthrop, 30 April [1631], *Winthrop Papers*, 3:30.

England's climate, topography, and flora and fauna, they simply hoped to assure godly English men and women that a move to the New World would not engender poverty as well as piety. In *The Planter's Plea*, John White succinctly answered objections that New England lacked "meanes of wealth." "An unanswerable argument," White replied, "to such as make the advancement of their estates, the scope of their undertaking." But, he added, New England's modest resources were in "no way a discouragement to such as aime at the propagation of the Gospell, which can never bee advanced but by the preservation of Piety in those that carry it to strangers." For, White concluded, "nothing sorts better with Piety than Compete[n]cy." He referred his readers to Proverbs 30:8—"Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." Thomas Dudley in effect explicated the meaning of "competency" in a New England context when he listed such goods as "may well content" a righteous colonist. In Massachusetts, Dudley noted, settlers could expect to have "materialls to build, fewell to burn, ground to plant, seas and rivers to ffish in, a pure ayer to breath in, good water to drinke till wine or beare canne be made, which togeather with the coves, hoggs, and goates brought hether allready may suffice for food." Such were the amenities that emigrants not only could but should aspire to enjoy.<sup>72</sup>

John White repeatedly assured his readers that "all Gods directions"—including the divine imperative to settle New England—"have a double scope, mans good and Gods honour." "That this commandement of God is directed unto mans good *temporall and spirituall*," he went on, "is as cleere as the light."<sup>73</sup> The Lord, in other words, would take care of His own. To providentialists steeped in the conviction that God intervened directly in human lives, that divine pleasure or disapproval could be perceived in the progress of daily events,

<sup>72</sup> White, *Planter's Plea*, p. 18; "Dudley's Letter to the Countess of Lincoln," p. 12. See also Wood, *New England's Prospect*, p. 68.

<sup>73</sup> White, *Planter's Plea*, p. 2; italics added.

White's statement made eminent sense. If emigrant families embarked on their voyages with the purpose of abandoning England's corruption in order to worship God according to biblical precepts in their new homes, and if they adhered to this purpose, they might expect as a sign of divine favor to achieve a competency, if not riches. Thus John Winthrop could assert that "such thinges as we stand in neede of are vsually supplied by Gods blessing vpon the wisdome and industry of man." The governor's firm belief in the connection between divine favor and human well-being explains why in his "Particular Considerations" concerning his own removal out of England, he admitted that "my meanes heere [in England] are so shortned (now my 3 eldest sonnes are come to age) as I shall not be able to continue in this place and imployment where I now am." If he went to Massachusetts, Winthrop anticipated an improvement in his fortunes, noting that "I [can] live with 7. or 8: servants in that place and condition where for many years I have spent 3: or 400 *li.* per an[um]." Winthrop, despite these musings on his worldly estate, did not emigrate in order to better his economic condition. Rather, he removed in order to undertake the "publike service" that God had "bestowed" on him and hoped that God might reward him if his efforts were successful. In similar fashion, thousands of other emigrants could justify their decisions to move to New England. They believed that, by emigrating, they followed the will of God and that their obedience would not escape divine notice. In return for their submission to His will, the emigrants sincerely hoped that God might allow them—through their own labor—to enjoy a competency of this world's goods.<sup>74</sup>

Historians have generally agreed that early New England displayed a distinctive social character. The first colonists, after all, succeeded in creating a remarkably stable society on the edge of a vast wilderness. But stability alone does not sum up the New Englanders' achievement, for colonists who went

<sup>74</sup> *Winthrop Papers*, 2:143–44, 126.

to other parts of North America also established lasting settlements. What set New England society apart was its Puritan heritage. Religious and social ideals became inextricably intertwined as settlers applied the Puritan concept of the covenantal relationship between God and man to their temporal as well as religious affairs. When New Englanders pledged themselves to God in their churches and to each other in their towns, they imbued their society with a deeply spiritual significance. Other British colonists would also strive to create social harmony, but none would do so with the same intensity of religious purpose as New England's founding generation.<sup>75</sup>

Ironically, the scholarly portrait of New England society has largely been drawn without reference to the identity of the emigrant population. Historians have instead turned to the writings of religious leaders and to the formulaic language of town covenants in order to explicate the meaning of the New England experiment. And while their efforts have produced a most coherent and convincing analysis of that society and culture, their conclusions are rendered even more compelling when the character and motivation of the emigrants themselves are also taken into account. For then it becomes clear that the predilections of the emigrants were just as important as the prescriptions of the clergy in shaping New England society.

At the heart of the colonists' achievement lies an apparent

<sup>75</sup> Some of the major works on New England Puritanism and its relationship to social stability include Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1970); Timothy Breen and Stephen Foster, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement: A Study of Social Cohesion in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973): 5-22. In their recent work on early Virginia, Darrett and Anita Rutman have argued that communalism also characterized English colonies in the Chesapeake region and was not specifically a function of religious belief. David Allen has also suggested that much of what we have assumed to be distinctively Puritan in Massachusetts in fact represents transplanted local English customs. Yet for reasons that I hope are clear from this essay, I believe that New England culture was indeed distinguished by its Puritan character and that its pervasive Puritanism resulted from the shared beliefs of the emigrants themselves. See Rutman and Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984); Allen, *In English Ways*.

paradox. Settlers in Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut created a remarkably unified culture and a homogeneous society in a setting where the power of central authorities was exceedingly weak. Preachers and magistrates could have expended every effort extolling the virtues of communal and spiritual harmony and yet failed miserably had not their audience shared in their aspirations. But since the majority of emigrants responded to a common spiritual impulse in moving to New England, they readily accepted the idea of the covenant as the proper model for their social as well as spiritual relationships. Indeed, covenants, because of their voluntary nature, provided the only truly effective means of maintaining social cohesion where coercive power was limited. The social homogeneity of the emigrant population—the absence of both rich and poor folk—unintentionally reinforced covenantal ideals by reducing the differences in status among partners. In this way, social fact joined with communal ideals to create a society of comparative equals pledged to one another's support. At the same time, social and religious covenants helped settlers from diverse geographical and occupational backgrounds to come to terms with their new common enterprise. Emigrants concerned solely with their own material improvement would scarcely have acceded so readily to an ideal of mutual cooperation. It is only because most colonists (at least initially) placed the good of their souls above all else and trusted in the Lord to provide for them that the story of New England's origins occupies a unique place in American history.

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