

LIFE UNDER THE PURITANS

William Sancroft (1617–1693) to

William (1610–1651), Baron Widdrington

Fressingfield, 21 October 1648

I am here in Sloughland, in the midst of quicks and quagmires, but know not how to get out of them without the help of Pacolet's horse¹ or a team of Ganzas of Domingo Gonzales' breed.² Here are so many bogs and rebels that were the women but a little more generally sluts, and the cloaks turned into rugs, I should pronounce myself in Ireland and venture to date this from Knockfergus, instead of Fressingfield. Otherwise (but that the houses stand at too much distance), I am tempted to dream myself in the city of Venice. I am sure we are every way five miles at least to the *terra firma*, so that when we go forth, I am ready to call aloud for a gondola; and when we return, we are sure to land at puddle wharf.

I came hither to see my friends, but how should I come at them? We walk not, but wade forth indeed sometimes to take the air, and go over sea to our next neighbor; and though the house be within ken, yet we may say, as Martial of *Novius*, *Nemo tam prope tam proculque nobis*.³

Ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλά μεταξὺ

Λίμυα τε, ποταμοὶ τε, θαλασσά τε ἤχηεσσα

Hogs here return no more to their wallowing, for they, and all creatures else, are continually in the mire. Briefly, the place I live in is like those twenty cities Solomon gave Hiram—the land of Cabul, the land of dirt.⁴ And yet would you think it, a Saniack, with his Timariots,⁵ were got hither before me through all these discouragements to enslave the poor Christians that are left? Some few gentlemen who are scattered here and there, but broken and shattered, like so many half-demolished crosses, to preserve the memory of our former Christendom.

And yet, sir, I would have you know it, we have preaching still amongst us. In our parish, the wainscot groans under a beardless elder, as very a lay presbyter as ever Geneva dreamt of; one that had, I think, served out half his apprenticeship, and is now set up in another trade, the undoing of the Apocalypse. Ever since the defeat of that Scottish anti-Christ in Lancashire, he cries aloud from the pulpit, "Babylon is fallen;" and having transmuted his quondam brethren into Gog and Magog, he is now puzzling his geography to find Artageddon about Preston and Warrington Bridge.

I know you must needs expect suitable disputes to so precious a Rabbi; take a taste of them. One, a carpenter, as if he had hewn out Moses' tables with his own chip-axe, knows the utmost extent of the law; and can keep it, and do whatsoever else is required, to perfection. And is very sorry there are but ten commandments; for if there were as many more, he could keep them all. Another, his own fellow and of the same presumption, yet, I know not how, the other day unhappily forgot the sixth commandment, and offered a hatchet at his wife so furiously that, had she not fled to the next justice for refuge, he might have proved a perfect Boccold,⁶ and have acted the same tragedy upon her as John of Leyden did upon the Queen of Israel.

¹ Pacolet, a dwarven enchanter, built a wooden horse which could instantly carry the rider anywhere in the world, with which he saved Valentine, Orson, and Clerimond from Ferragus, a Muslim ruler.

² In Francis Godwin's popular 1638 tale, *The Man in the Moone*, Domingo Gonzales escapes shipwreck on a desert island by riding extremely large birds (ganzas), and is borne to the moon.

³ "He is nearest to us, and farthest from us," — Martial, Book 2, epigram 87

⁴ ¹¹and Hiram, King of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired, King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. ¹²But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. ¹³Therefore he said, "What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?" So they are called the land of Cabul to this day. — I Kings 9:11–13 (ESV)

⁵ Saniack, Timariot — Muslim warriors

⁶ John Bockold of Leiden (c. 1509–1536) militant Anabaptist and polygamist ruler of Leiden (1534–1535)

And now, since it is so lewd a place I sojourn in, a place, both in the literal and metaphorical sense, of the worst ways imaginable, you might justly wonder what detains me here so long, etc.

Lest you might wonder such a country as this should be called High Suffolk, but that the critics tell us *altum et profundum* make no real difference.

Henry Cary, *Memorials of the Great Civil War in England* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), II:40–42.