

The Pilgrim Fathers

by John Buchan, 1875-1940

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To the Adventurous Spirit of the North

Born of the grey sea-shroud,
Born of the wind and spray,
Where the long hills sink to the morning cloud
And the mist lies low on the bay:
Child of the stars and the skies,
Child of the dawn and the rain,
The April shining of ladies' eyes,
And the infinite face of Pain!

Seal on the hearts of the strong,
Guerdon, thou, of the brave,
To nerve the arm in the press of the throng,
To cheer the dark of the grave.

Far from the heather hills,
Far from the misty sea,
Little it irks where a man may fall
If he fall with his heart on thee.

To fail and not to faint,
To strive and not to attain,
To follow the Path to the end of days
Is the burden of thy strain.
Daughter of hope and tears,
Mother, thou of the free,
As it was in the beginning of years
And evermore shall be.

„And this was the word of the wise women who spin among the hills: ‘Counsel for the true-hearted: to follow the Path the King of Errin rides, which is the road to the End of Days.’“

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BEHOLD your heritage, your land of quest!
Long have ye sought, near comes the hour of rest.
Go, children, forth with scrip and staff, and far
In toil of tempest and the dust of war
Seek your continuing city. Seek and pray,
Gird ye and strive and faint not on the way.
God be your strength, your buckler and your sword.
Then forth, my sons! Who followeth with the Lord?

What came ye out to seek? A path of flowers,
A sleep-lulled valley and the silent bowers
Of sinless Edens, where the slumbrous days
Slip past unheeded, and the noon-day blaze
Is cheered by zephyrs born of the warm South,
And grapes of Eschol cool the parched mouth?
Thirst ye for these, or for the soft green fold
Of summer hills, where like a chart unrolled
Lie town and hamlet girt with woody lea
And dewy lawns and the unchanging sea?

Long leagues of ocean whitening to the sky
Sever our path from lands of infancy.
Our homes are lost us, lost the song and rhyme,
The hearth's red glow, the stories of old time,
Corn on the holm-land, fruit upon the tree
And the far-hallowed seats of memory.
But clear our faith as April's first sunrise,
Which bursts the dark and cheers the lonely eyes;

No faltering shakes their steadfastness whose ways
Lie on the King's Path to the end of days.

Ay! on the King's Path! Men have toiled and bled
On the old quest; and we, with king-like head,
Fronting the sword of monarchs and their scorn,
Have dared their terrors; and have trod forlorn
A prouder path than captains of great might
Fair with the pomp and panoply of fight.
Ours is the weary way, which knows no end
Save with the coming of great Death, the Friend;
Ours is the ageless day which sees no close
Till the last sunset bring the set of woes.
Each moment throngs with strife, the lists are built,
The untiring foe is near to ride a-tilt.
Our arm is never slack, our eyes are sore
With dust of tumult surging evermore:
While, like a clarion, rings the immortal word,
„Not peace I bring, not comfort, but a sword.“

What came ye out to seek? A wilderness
Untilled, untouched, a home of loneliness
Set in some forest haunt whose trackless deeps
Darken the shining dawn? The wild deer sleeps
On fields which ye must sow, and by the spring,
Which now is stirred but by the mere-fowl's wing,
The austere chant of thanksgiving must rise
And rugged hearths smoke to the morning skies.
Ours was the quiet lot, where each new day
Brought the old duties. Clear our passage lay
‘Mid sunlit meadows; smoothly through each stage
Life's journey ran, an easy pilgrimage.
So fond our hopes; but sudden came the frost,
Untimely, bitter, and our peace was lost.
„Quit ye like men“—Who wills it, let him hear,
And his the faith which casteth out all fear!
Steeled is his heart to bid the long good-night,
Unblenched he fronts the desert and the fight.

What came ye out to seek? Regret and tears
And the long void of immemorial years?
Not so, my children. Shall a man upbraid
The Lord who him and all his joys hath made?
He, the poor creature, born of grief and shame,
A clot of dust, a spark of heavenly flame!
Shall he by seeking find the majesty
That plants its footsteps on the hills and sea?
For man the servant's task, the bond-slave's place,
To toil and see not of his labour's grace.
The wide creation travaileth in pain;

And shall the pigmy in his griefs complain?
Our lot hath blessings. Fare we near or far,
Our quiet mind shall light its evening star;
Wearied with toil, our bed in desert lands
Shall be the old green couch not made with hands;
The twilights cool our mead when day is done,
And the sweet comfort of the morning sun.
For us, unasked, the autumn fruit shall glow,
The loud fire crackle when the winters blow.

Ours the forgotten life, the elder birth
Of men unwearied in the ancient earth.
Though o'er our path the wrack of battle roll,
No wars perplex the sabbath of our soul.
What though the body be a sacrifice
To the fierce sun or the inclement skies,
The lurking wild beast or the savage king,
We are not sad for all their threatening.
Life is not meat nor drink nor raiment fine,
But a man's courage and the fire divine.
Yea, hearts insurgent 'mid the obedient crowd
We ever bore, and walked upon the loud
And perilous road of honour. Man may fall
And yet attain. And he who hears the call,
And tracks the gleam through rock and wood and fen,
Haps on the treasure hid from petty men.
And as in desert sands the holy race,
Fleeing from Egypt to their destined place,
Nursing their hope through pity and distress,
Set up a shrine amid the wilderness;
So we, lone outlaws in these evening lands,
Yet to the past hold forth unfaltering hands,
And bear old faiths in vanguard of our wars,
And set our eyes upon the ancient stars.

Then forth, my children! lo! the gold of dawn
Burns on yon eastern hill; the grassy lawn,
The tangled forests, fire with morn; the beams
Of a new sun fall on the virgin streams.
Clear sings the bird of hope, and far and nigh
Winds wake the embattled silence of the sky.
The shining footprints of the light to be
Tremble and glow along the inviolate sea.
The world awakes for you, the young the strong;
And we, the old, who wait and wait not long
On the last call, give you a glad God-speed,
True heart in peril and stout arm in need,
While with untroubled eyes we watch and pray
Till the brief dark that fadeth into day.

