

# **BETTY ALDEN**

**THE FIRST-BORN DAUGHTER OF  
THE PILGRIMS**

**BY  
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FOOTNOTE:

TO  
MY DEAR COUSINS  
MARSTON AND MARY WATSON  
AND THEIR  
HILLSIDE  
WHERE BETTY ALDEN HAS BEEN SO PLEASANTLY CRADLED  
DURING THE PAST YEAR  
This Story of her Life and Times  
IS AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED

## PREFACE.



Everybody has sympathized with Mr. Dick who could not keep King Charles's head out of his memorial, and I hope everybody will sympathize with me who have been unable to keep Betty Alden in this her memorial so constantly as I wished and she deserved. But as the whole includes the less, her story will be found threaded through that of her people and her times in that modest subordination to which the lives of her sex were trained in that day. He who would read for himself the story of this noble woman, the first-born daughter of the Pilgrims, must seek it through ancient volumes and mouldering records, until at Little Compton in Rhode Island he finds upon her gravestone the last affectionate and honorable mention of Elizabeth, daughter of John and Priscilla Alden, and wife of William Pabodie. Or in lighter mood, he may consider the rugged rhyme tradition places in her mouth upon the occasion of the birth of her great great grandchild:—

“Rise daughter! To thy daughter run!  
Thy daughter's daughter hath a son.”

One word upon a subject which has of late been a good deal discussed, but by no means settled, and that is, the burial place of Myles Standish. In the absence of all proof in any such matter, tradition becomes important, and so far as I have been able to determine, the tradition that some of the earliest settlers were buried in the vicinity of a temporary meeting-

house upon Harden Hill in Duxbury is more reliable than the tradition that Standish was laid in an old burying ground at Hall's Corner which probably was not set aside as a burial place in 1656, the date of his death.

It is matter of surprise and regret to most persons that the Pilgrims took so little pains to perpetuate the memory of their graves, and their doing so would have been a wonderful aid to those who would read the palimpsest of the past. But a little recollection diminishes the wonder, if not the regret. Practically, the Pilgrims had neither the money wherewith to import gravestones, nor the skill to fashion and sculpture them; ethically, their lives were fashioned after an ideal, and that ideal was Protestantism in its most primitive intention, a protest against Rome, her creeds and her usages; prayers for the dead were to them a horrible superstition; Purgatory a mere invention of the powers of hell; an appeal to saints, angels, or the spirits of the departed was a direct insult to the Divine Supremacy. The instant the soul left the body Protestantism decreed that it was not only useless but profane to follow it with prayers (much less masses), or with any other remembrance which might be construed as intruding upon "the counsels of the Almighty," so that while private grief was sternly rebuked as rebellion against the chastisements of a just and offended God, every form of funeral service, domestic or congregational, was set aside as superstitious and dangerous.

The only exceptions to this rule were the volleys of musketry fired over the graves of certain of the leaders, as Carver, Standish, Bradford, and a few others, but these stern military honors were unaccompanied by even the prayer of a chaplain.

It was perhaps not altogether from fear of the Indians that the fifty of the Mayflower Pilgrims who were left alive that first spring smoothed the graves of the fifty who were gone, and planted them to corn; possibly they also feared their own hearts, sorely tempted by nature to cherish and adorn those barren graves where so much love and hope lay buried; and any step in that direction was a step backward from that "city" they had crossed the seas to seek in the wilderness.

It is I think certain that not one of the original Pilgrim graves was marked by any sort of monument. The few we now delight to honor were identified by those of their children to whom the third generation erected tablets. A few persons, of loving and unbigoted hearts, begged to be buried beside their departed friends, and Standish in his last will allowed a sunset gleam of his tender nature to shine out when he asked to be laid as near as conveniently might be to his two dear daughters; but neither he nor any of the others who made this testamentary petition mentioned where the graves were, beside which they fain would lie, nor in any one instance have they been positively identified. That of Elder Brewster, concerning whose burial we have many particulars, is altogether unknown, except that it seems to have been made upon Burying Hill. Perhaps that of Standish is there also, for when he says,—“If I die at Duxburrow I should like,” etc., he may mean that if he dies in Duxbury he would fain be carried to Plymouth, there to lie beside his daughters and very likely his two little sons as well.

But to me it seems a small matter, this question of the grave of Standish. He lived to be old and very infirm, and neither his old

age, his infirmities, nor his final surrender to death are any part of his memory. For me, he stands forever as he stood in his glorious prime among the people he so unselfishly championed, a tower of strength, courage, and endurance, the shining survival of chivalry, the gallant paladin whose coat-armor gleams amid the throng of russet jerkins and mantles of hodden gray, like the dash of color with which Turner accents his wastes of sombre water and sky. So let him stand, so let us look upon him, and honor him and glory in him, nor seek to draw the veil with which Time mercifully hides the only defeat our hero ever knew, that last fatal battle when age, and "dolorous pain," and fell disease, conquered the invincible, and restored to earth all that was mortal of a magnificent immortality. We cannot erect a monument over that forgotten grave, but in some coming day let us hope that the descendants of the soldier Pilgrim will possess themselves of the little peninsula where the site of his home may still be traced, and there place some memorial stone to tell that on this fairest spot of fair Duxbury's shore lived and died the man who gave Duxbury her name, and bequeathed to us an inheritance far richer than that which was "surreptitiously detained" from him.

*BOSTON, October, 1891.*

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# CHAPTER I.

## A WHISPER IN THE EAR.

“Tell him yourself, Pris.”

“No, no, Bab, I know too much for that! These men love not to be taught by a woman, although, if all were known, full many a whisper in the bedchamber comes out next day at the council board, and one grave master says to another, ‘Now look you, tell it not to the women lest they blab it!’ never mistrusting in his owl-head that a woman set the whole matter afloat.”

“Oh, Pris, you do love to jibe at the men. How did you ever persuade yourself to marry one of them?”

“Why, so that one of them might be guided into some sort of discretion. Doesn’t John Alden show as a bright example to his fellows?”

“And all through his wife’s training, eh, Pris?”

“Why, surely. Didst doubt such a patent fact, Mistress Standish?”

“But now, Pris, in sober sadness tell me what has given you such dark suspicions of these new-comers, and how do you venture to whisper ‘treason’ and ‘traitor’ about a man who has been anointed God’s messenger, even though it has been in the papistical Church of England?”

“If the English bishops are such servants of antichrist as the governor and the Elder make them out, I should conceive that their anointing would be rather against a man’s character than a warrant for it.” And Priscilla Alden laughed saucily into the thoughtful face of her friend and neighbor, Barbara Standish, who, knitting busily at a little lamb’s-wool stocking, shook her head as she replied,—

“Mr. Lyford is not a man to my taste, and I care not to hear him preach, but yet, we are told in Holy Writ not to speak evil of dignitaries, nor to rail against those set over us”—

“Then surely it is contrary to Holy Writ for this Master Lyford to speak evil of the governor and to rail against the captain, as he doth continually”—

“Who rails against the captain, Mistress Alden?” demanded a cheerful voice, as Myles Standish entered at the open door of his house, and, removing the broad-leafed hat picturesquely pulled over his brow, revealed temples worn bare of the rust-colored locks still clustering thickly upon the rest of his head, and matching in color the close, pointed beard and the heavy brows, beneath which the resolute and piercing eyes his enemies learned to dread in early days now shone with a genial smile.

“Who has been abusing the captain?” repeated he, as the women laughed in some confusion, looking at each other for an answer. Priscilla was the first to find it, and glancing frankly into the face of the man she might once have loved replied,—

“Why, ’tis I that am trying to stir Barbara into showing you what a nest of adders we are nourishing here in Plymouth, and moving you and the governor to set your heels upon them before it be too late.”

As she spoke, the merry gleam died out of the captain’s eyes, and grasping his beard in the left hand, as was his wont in perplexity, he said gravely,—

“These are large matters for a woman’s handling, Priscilla, and it may chance that Barbara’s silence is the better part of your valor. But still,—what do you mean?”

“I mean that Master Oldhame and Master Lyford as the head, and their followers and creatures as the tail, are maturing into a very pretty monster here in our midst, which if let alone will some fine morning swallow the colony for its breakfast, and if only it would be content with the men I would say grace for it, but, unfortunately, the women and children are the tender bits, and will serve as a relish to the coarser meat.”

“Come, now, Priscilla, a truce to your quips and jibes, and tell me what there is to tell. I cry you pardon for noting your forwardness in what concerned you not”—

“Nay, Myles, you’ve said it now,” interposed Barbara, with a little laugh, while Priscilla, gathering her work in her apron, and looking very pretty with her flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes, jumped up saying,—

“At all events, John Alden’s dinner concerns both him and me, and I will go and make it ready; a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, and a penny pipe as well as a trumpet to warn a

deaf man that the enemy is upon him. Put your nose in the air, Captain Standish, and march stoutly on into the pitfall dug for your feet.”

“Come, come, Mistress Alden! These are no words for a gentlewoman,” began the captain angrily, but on the threshold Priscilla turned, a saucy laugh flashing through the anger of her face, and reminding the captain in his own despite of a sudden sunbeam glinting across dark Manomet in the midst of a thunder-storm.

“Here’s the governor coming up the hill, Myles,” whispered she, “and you may finish the rest of your scolding to him. I’m frightened as much as is safe for me a’ready.”

And light as a bird she ran down the hill just as Bradford reached the door and, glancing in, said in his sonorous and benevolent voice, “Good-morrow to you, Mistress Standish. I am sorry to have frightened away your merry gossip, but I am seeking the goodman— Ah, there you are, Captain! I would have a word with you at your leisure.”

“Shall I run after Priscilla, Myles?” asked Barbara, cordially returning the governor’s greeting.

“Nay, wife, we two will walk up to the Fort,” replied Standish, and replacing his hat, he led the way up the hill to the Fort, where he ushered his friend into a little room contrived in the southeastern angle for his private use: his office, his study, his den, or his growlery by turns, for here was his little stock of books, his writing-table and official records; here his pipes and tobacco; a stand of private arms crowned by Gideon; the

colony's telescope fashioned by Galileo; and here a deep leathern chair with a bench nigh at hand, where through many a silent hour the captain sat, and amid the smoke-wreaths of his pipe mused upon things that had been, things that might have been, and things that never could be, never could have been.

"Have a stool by the porthole, Will; 'tis something warm for September," said he, as he closed the door.

"Ay, but you always have a good air at this east window, and a fair view as well," returned the governor, seating himself.

"The view of the Charity is but a fleeting one, since she sails in the morning," remarked Standish dryly.

"Yes, she does," assented Bradford, with an air of embarrassment not lost upon the captain, who smiled ever so little, and lighted his pipe, saying between the puffs,—

"'Tis safe enough to smoke in this den of mine, Will, and your tobacco is a wonderful counselor."

"Say you so, Myles? Then pass over your pouch, for I am in sore need of counsel and sought it of you."

"Such as I have is at your command, Governor. What is the matter?"

"Well, 'tis hard to put it in any dignified or magisterial phrase, Myles, since, truth to tell, it comes of the distaff side of the house"—

“Ay, ay, I can believe it! Has Priscilla Alden been whispering with your wife?”

“Nay, not that I know of; in truth, ’tis somewhat idler than even that foundation, for Mistress Alden is one of our own, but this—well, to tell the story in manful sincerity, my wife informs me that Dame Lyford, who is as you know in childbed, and much beholden for care and comfort to both your wife and mine, as well as to Priscilla Alden, last night fell a-crying, and said she was a miserable wretch to receive nourishment and tendance at their hands when her husband was practicing with Oldhame and others for our destruction. In the beginning, Alice set this all down as the querulous maundering of a sick woman; but when the other persisted, and spoke of treasonable letters that her husband had writ, and read out to Oldhame in her very presence, Dame Bradford began to pay some heed, and ask questions, until by the time the woman’s strength was overborne and she could say no more, the skeleton of a plot lay bare, which should it be clothed upon with sinew, and flesh, and armor, and weapons, might slay us all both as a colony and as particular men.”

“A dragon, Priscilla called it,” interposed the captain.

“Priscilla! Did Mistress Lyford say as much to her as to my wife?” asked the governor, a little piqued.

“Nay, I know not, for I was, according to my wont, too outspoken to listen as I should.”

“Well, but explain, I beg of you.”

“All is, that Priscilla began some sort of warning anent this very matter, and I angered her with some jibe at women meddling in matters too mighty for them, so that I know not what she might have had to tell.”

The Governor of Plymouth smiled in a subtle fashion peculiar to men whose vision extends beyond their own time. “Women,” said he slowly, as he pressed the tobacco into his pipe,—“women, Myles, are like the bit of lighted tinder I will lay upon this inert mass of dried weed. The tinder is so trivial, so slight a thing, so difficult to handle, so easily destroyed,—and yet, brother man, how without it should we derive the solace and counsel of our pipes?”

Glancing at each other, the soldier and the statesman laughed somewhat shamefacedly, and Myles said,—

“Ay, ’tis the pith of Æsop’s fable of the Lion and the Mouse.”

“Well, yes, although that is a thought too arrogant, perhaps; and yet Master Lion is oftentimes a stupid fellow, though he is styled king of beasts.”

“And what is the net just now, my Lord Lion?” demanded Standish, who could not quite relish Bradford’s philosophy. The governor roused himself at the question, and laying aside his meditative mood replied,—

“We both know, Captain, that all who are with us are not of us, and we have not forgot what false reports those disaffected fellows carried home in the Anne, nor the mutterings and plottings we have heard and suspected since.”

“Shorten John Oldhame by the head and you will kill the whole mutiny.”

“That sounds very simple, but is hardly a feasible course, Captain, especially as we have no proof in the matter, and it is upon this very question of proof that I came to consult you.”

“And I just shut off the only source of proof I am like to get.”

“Nay, it is not likely that Mistress Alden knows more than my wife has already repeated to me of what Dame Lyford can reveal, but our good friend Master Pierce came to my house to-day about some matters I am sending to my wife’s sister, Mary Carpenter, and all by chance mentioned that he had in trust a parcel of letters writ by Lyford, with one or two by Oldhame, and that both men had charged him to secrecy in the business. Now, Standish, those letters contain the moral of the whole matter.”

“To be sure; it is like drawing a double tooth to see them sail out of the harbor.”

“Captain, it is my duty as the chief officer of this colony to learn the contents of these missives.”

“Yes, but how? The traitors will not betray themselves.”

“I must privately open and read their letters,—it is my duty.”

“No, no, Will; no, no! I can’t give in to that; I can’t help you there, man! To open and read another man’s letter, and on the sly, is all one with hearkening at a keyhole, or telling a lie, or turning your back on an enemy without a blow. You can’t do that, Will, let the cause be what it may.”

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