



America's Children



Peter of New Amsterdam

by James Otis

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A NOTE TO THE READER

This book was written in the early 20th century, a time when societal attitudes and language were significantly from what we recognize today. As you delve into its pages, you might come across terms and descriptions that our modern sensibilities find offensive or inappropriate. These echo the beliefs and biases of that era, some of which were fueled by ignorance, fear, and misunderstanding.

We've chosen to preserve the original text, providing an unvarnished window into the past. It's essential to approach this reading with an open heart and mind, recognizing the historical context that shaped these terms and views. While we've made progress as a society, the shadows of these old attitudes sometimes persist.

By recognizing and reflecting on the profound impact such perspectives have left on our culture, we can deepen our understanding of history and chart a course towards a more inclusive and compassionate future.

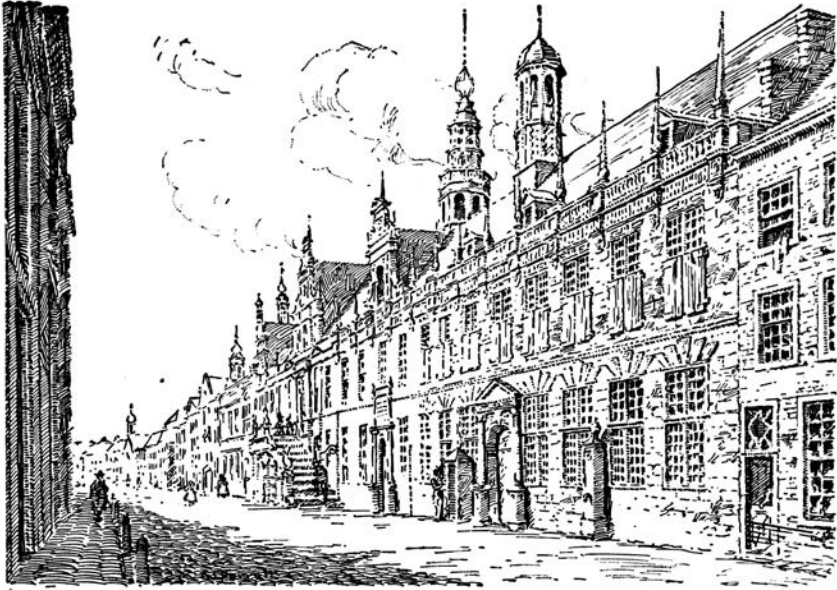
WHERE I WAS BORN

If I ever attempted to set down a story in words, it would be concerning the time when I was much the same as a slave among the Dutch of New Amsterdam, meaning a certain part of the world in that America where so many of my father's countrymen came after they left England, because of the King's not allowing them to worship God in the way they believed to be right.

It sounds odd to say that an English boy was ever held as slave by the Dutch, and perhaps I have no right to make such statement, because it is not strictly true, although there were many years in my life when I did the same work, and received the same fare, as did the negroes in the early days of New Amsterdam.

Before I was born, my father was clerk to the post-master of Scrooby, one William Brewster, and perhaps thus it was that when, because of troubles concerning religion, Master Brewster journeyed to Leyden with a company of people who were called Separatists, my parents went with him.

And so it was that I was born in Leyden, in the year of our Lord, 1612, but I never knew what it was to have a mother, for mine died while I was yet in the cradle; thanks to the care of a loving, God-fearing father, however, I could do very much toward looking out for myself by the time I had come to the age of eight, when I was left entirely alone in the world. I love now to think that during the years of my life while the good man remained on this earth, I did not cause him any great anxiety, and required little care.



Within two months after my father died, which was in the year 1620, many of the congregation in Leyden set off with Master Brewster for the New World, there to build up a city where men might worship God in whatsoever fashion they pleased.

Those of the Separatists who were left behind, cared for me as best they might until a year had passed; but none of them were overly burdened with this world's goods, and, young though I was, I realized, in some slight degree, what a tax the care of a lad nine years old was upon them.

ALONE IN HOLLAND

LATER, those who had in charity taken charge of me also set off to join Master Brewster's company in America, and I, an English boy, was left much the same as alone

in Holland. I could speak the Dutch language, however, and was willing to work at whatever came to hand, so that I earned enough with which to provide me with food; as for clothing, I wore the cast-off garments of the Dutch boys, whose mothers, taking pity upon an orphan, freely gave them to me.

Among the few English then left in Leyden was Master Jan Marais, a professor in the University, whom my father had known; and he, so far as lay in his power, kept a watchful eye over me; but this was only to the extent of inquiring for my welfare when we met by chance, or in recalling my name to those among his Dutch friends who were in need of such services as so young a lad could render.

Now it seems, although I knew nothing concerning it at the time, that there had been formed in Holland, among the merchants, what was known as the West India Company, whose purpose was to make a settlement in that part of the New World which they had named New Netherland, claiming to own it, and there trade



with the savages, or engage in whatsoever of business would bring in money.

Master Peter Minuit—whom I should call Heer Minuit, because such is the Dutch term for master, but the odd-sounding title never did ring true in my ear—had been appointed by this company, which had already sent out some people to the world of America, Director of the settlement that was to be made. He came on a visit of leave-taking to Master Jan Marais, and it so chanced, whether for good or for evil, that while the two were walking in the streets of Leyden, they came upon me, standing idly in front of a cook-shop, and saying to myself that if the choice were given to me I would take this or that dainty to eat.

AN IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION

It may have been in a spirit of fun, or that perhaps Mas-

ter Marais had in mind to do me a good turn, but however it came about, he said as gravely as if I were the burgo-master's son:

“Heer Peter Minuit, allow me to present to you Master Peter Hulbert, who





has had the misfortune to lose both his father and his mother by death.”

Master Minuit was not unlike many others whom I had met, save that there was in his face a certain look which bespoke a kindly heart, or so it seemed, while he gazed at me much as he would at a young calf that he had in mind to purchase.

I never did lay claim to being comely, either as boy or man; but yet it must have been that this sturdy visitor saw something about me which attracted either his closest attention or his charity, for he said with a kindly smile, as he patted me on the head:

“Well, namesake Peter, since nearly all your English friends have gone to America, what say you to voyaging in the same direction?”

I failed to understand the meaning of the question, and probably stood staring at him like a simple; yet at the same time I noted a quick glance from Master Marais, as if the Director had said something which caught his attention. An instant later, he said with more of seriousness in his voice than seemed to me the matter warranted:

“It may not be well, Heer Minuit, to put into the lad’s head a desire that cannot be gratified.”

“And why may it not be?” Master Minuit asked,