



The Scholastic Philosophy of the Wilderness

James Axtell

The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., Vol. 29, No. 3 (Jul., 1972), 335-366.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-5597%28197207%293%3A29%3A3%3C335%3ATSPOTW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-3>

The William and Mary Quarterly is currently published by Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/omohundro.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Scholastic Philosophy of the Wilderness

James Axtell*

*. . . the scholastic philosophy of the wilderness
to combat which one must stand outside and laugh
since to go in is to be lost.*

MARIANNE MOORE

“IN the beginning,” John Locke had written, “all the World was *America*.” There was no money, no unlimited accumulation of property, and consequently no need for elaborate institutions of government to control human greed. Eminently sociable and peaceloving, men in the state of nature lived “according to reason, without a common Superior on Earth, with Authority to judge between them.”¹

When it appeared in 1690 Locke’s picture of the natural condition must have seemed to many Englishmen—whigs at least—a superb blend of historical observation and philosophical acuity. But to three generations of New English colonists it would have appeared overdrawn and dolefully optimistic. For to them primitive New England had not been a natural paradise of “Peace, Good Will, Mutual Assistance, and Preservation,” but rather a “State of Enmity, Malice, Violence, and Mutual Destruction,” a living hell ignited by its barbarous inhabitants.² The Indians threatened to push them into the sea, and nearly succeeded on several occasions, but the threat of physical annihilation was never so alarming to English sensibilities—perhaps because they were blinded to the possibility by their supreme righteousness—as the Indian himself. To the English he stood proudly and defiantly against all that they stood for, all that was good and Christian and civilized. The Indian, in their lights, was immoral, pagan, and barbarous. So, characteristically, they tried to remake him in their own image through the time-honored but formal institutions of English education—the church, the school, and the college. Needless to say, they failed miserably.³

* Mr. Axtell is a member of the Department of History, Yale University.

¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1960), Bk. II, Sec. 49, 319; Sec. 19, 298.

² *Ibid.*, Sec. 19, 298.

³ For recent discussions of the English attempts to convert the Indians to

But education, if it is any good, is never a one-way process; sensitive teachers will learn as much from their students as their students will from them. Nor is it always a didactic process; the imitation of intangible qualities and behavior patterns is as powerful an educational force as formal instruction, perhaps more so because of the reinforcement provided by the visible embodiment of those qualities in living models. Accordingly, it would be surprising if the English themselves did not learn a great deal from the original inhabitants in the crucible of the New England wilderness.

The shifting frontier between wilderness and civilization seems an unlikely place for a school, but the cultures that meet there never fail to educate each other. Although one culture may predominate and tend to teach more than it learns, the educational process is always mutual. Because the New English possessed a clear superiority of technology, government, and population, which eventually tipped the cultural scale against the Indians in a saddeningly total way, it is easy for historians to dwell exclusively on the white efforts to civilize and Christianize the redman. It is easy but it is also unfortunate, for it neglects the lessons that the English learned from the Indians, lessons which, ironically, helped tip that scale against the Indians' own future.

The Indian served as a teacher to the New English in three guises: as neighbor (their hospitable welcomer and uninhibited visitor), as warrior (their mortal enemy or supportive comrade in arms), and as example (a tempting model of a different way of life). In each of these roles, significantly, he met his white students on the frontier where he was culturally secure and they were exposed, often unsure of what they had left behind and not a little tempted by what they found in the woods. In these remote plantations, where it was rightly feared "many were contented to live without, yea, desirous to shake off all Yoake of Government, both sacred and civil, and so transforming themselves as much as well they could into the Manners of the Indians they lived amongst," he found pupils far more receptive to his teaching than he would ever be to theirs. The best of them were young, like the children of Hannah Swar-

"civility," see William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649-1776: Missionary Society to the American Indians* (London, 1961); Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* (Boston, 1965); Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, rev. ed. (Baltimore, 1968); and Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *John Eliot: "Apostle to the Indians"* (Boston, 1968).

ton, who moved from Massachusetts to Maine for "large accommodations in the world, thereby exposing [them] to be bred ignorantly like Indians," but whatever their age, the English soon learned that, when they were in the woods, however uncomfortable they might be in his presence, the Indian was not only the only teacher available but the best as well.⁴

By a stroke of providence that only a Puritan could fully appreciate, the first two Indians who met the New English spoke their language. Samoset was an Algonkian sagamore from Maine, "where some English ships came to fish . . . amongst whom he had got his language." Having shipped to Cape Cod with one of them, he was on his way down east when he boldly approached the newly arrived pilgrims at Plymouth and in broken English offered to help. According to their governor William Bradford, "He became profitable to them in acquainting them with many things concerning the state of the country in the east parts where he lived, which was afterwards profitable unto them; as also of the people here, of their names, number and strength, of their situation and distance from this place, and who was chief amongst them." Even more helpful was Squanto, who had been kidnapped to England in 1614 and accordingly spoke better English than Samoset. This "special instrument sent of God" was their pilot, interpreter, and willing teacher until his death in 1622.⁵

One of the first lessons he taught them, as his brethren would continue to teach each successive wave of settlers, was "how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities." Since the pilgrims had dropped anchor in the "weatherbeaten face" of the New England winter, they had to wait for the spring winds to soften its countenance before they could plant their first crops. But when they did, "either by the badness of the seed or lateness of the season or both, or some other defect," all the English wheat and pease they sowed "came not to good." It was then that Squanto "stood them in great stead" by extending his agricultural knowledge to them.⁶ He was only the first of many Indians who were, as the grateful English acknowledged, "our first instructors for the planting of their *Indian* Corne, by teaching us to

⁴ William Hubbard, *The History of the Indian Wars in New England . . .*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (Roxbury, Mass., 1865), II, 256-257; Emma Lewis Coleman, *New England Captives Carried to Canada . . .* (Portland, Me., 1925), I, 204-205.

⁵ William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), 79-81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81, 85.

cull out the finest seede, to observe the fittest season, to keepe distance for holes, and fit measure for hills, to worme it, and weede it; to prune it, and dresse it as occasion shall require."⁷ In the early years of settlement the Indians' liberal tutelage in the natural life of their woods and fields often provided the English with the slim difference between survival and starvation.

The Indians' generosity is the more remarkable because their only previous knowledge of the English was likely to have been of rapacious seamen and adventurers. As soon as their initial suspicions were laid to rest by the civil conduct of settlers who obviously intended to make permanent residence in their land, they extended the English every courtesy, advice, and endeavor to help them. Roger Williams, who probably knew them better than anyone else, remarked, "I have acknowledged amongst them an heart sensible of kindnesses, and . . . reaped kinnesse again from many, seaven yeares after, when I my selfe had forgotten. . . . If any stranger come in, they presently give him to eate of what they have; many a time, and at all times of the night (as I have fallen in travell upon their houses) when nothing hath been ready, have themselves and their wives, risen to prepare me some refreshing. . . . In Summer-time I have knowne them lye abroad often themselves, to make roome for strangers, *English*, or others." Even in the face of possible affront they maintained an affable courtesy by sleeping outdoors "by a fire under a tree, when sometimes some *English* have (for want of familiaritie and language with them) been fearefull to entertaine them." It was a "strange truth" indeed to those Englishmen who knew them well that "a man shall generally find more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these *Barbarians*, then amongst thousands that call themselves *Christians*."⁸

The Indians were also generous with their time and patience, for some of them were "very willing to teach their language to any *English*."⁹ When two cultures intersect, as they frequently did in New English houses

⁷ William Wood, *New Englands Prospect* . . . (London, 1634), 70.

⁸ Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* . . . (1643), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, I (New York, 1963), 36, 46-47. Daniel Gookin, perhaps the second best authority, wrote that "they are much given to hospitality in their way. If any strangers come to their houses, they will give him the best lodging and diet they have." *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (1674) (Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 1st Ser., I [1792]), 153. Hereafter cited as *Historical Collections of the Indians*.

⁹ Thomas Lechford, *Plain Dealing: or, Newes from New England* (1642) (Mass. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, 3d Ser., III [1833]), 104. Hereafter cited as *Plaine Dealing*.

and Indian wigwams, words are not only the most necessary article of commerce but the easiest medium in which to deal. Most Englishmen were not as fortunate as the pilgrims in having an English-speaking Squanto to help them cope with the American environment and so had to learn something of the Indian's language while teaching him something of theirs. Probably the first words exchanged were the names of natural objects unknown to the other culture. By 1643, for instance, the Indians had incorporated the Englishmen's *chicks*, *cows*, *goates*, *hogs*, and *pigs* into their vocabulary. But the greatest amount of borrowing was understandably done by the English, who were casting virgin eyes on what to them was a new country. At home they had never seen a *moose*, *skunk*, *raccoon*, *beaver*, *caribou*, *opossum*, *woodchuck*, or *rattlesnake*, so it was necessary for them to learn their names from the Indians who knew them well. Besides the natural life of New England the settlers learned to identify many Indian relations—such as *papoose*, *squaw*, *powwow*, *sagamore*, and *sachem*—and cultural artifacts—such as *moccasin*, *tomahawk*, *wigwam*, *succotash*, *hominy*, *toboggan*, *pemmican*, and *wampum*.¹⁰ Even Indian notions of time were drawn upon. In a decision of the Plymouth colony court in 1641, for example, Englishmen were given one or two “moons” to repair or restore the goods they had stolen from an Indian plaintiff.¹¹

The names of a few common plants and animals probably sufficed for most English settlers, but another group of men—admittedly small—needed to go much farther in their comprehension of the Indian language. For it was early recognized that “the way to instruct the *Indians*, must be in their *owne* language, not *English*.”¹² These were the Puritan ministers who wanted to bring the Word of the Christian religion to the unconverted heathens around them, in accordance with the stated goals of the colonization of New England. To King Charles I, who issued the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1628, it was “the principall ende of this plantation” to “wynn and incite the natives

¹⁰ Williams, *Complete Writings*, I, 73, 129; H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States* (New York, 1919), 51-53; John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England* (1675) (Mass. Hist. Soc., *Colls.*, 3d Ser., III [1833]), 251-294. Hereafter cited as *Account of Two Voyages*.

¹¹ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England* (Boston, 1855-1861), II, 20, June 17, 1641.

¹² Lechford, *Plaine Dealing*, 106.

of [the] country to the knowledg and obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of mankinde, and the Christian fayth."¹³ And so their task was to find or create in the Indian tongue abstractions or analogies for the metaphysical presuppositions of the English religion, a task made doubly difficult by the reticulate complexity of Puritan theology. Although the reception of their message was disappointing for a variety of reasons, some beyond their control, several ministers were at least able to deliver it in the Indians' own language.

When two cultures meet across a common frontier, there exists as much potential for conflict as for cooperation, especially when those cultures are at two very different stages of social development. Even when the chosen leaders of both cultures recognize the futility of war and try to quash the antagonisms and irritations that often feed it, the ardent spirits of the greedy, the proud, and the young can never be thoroughly dampened. In New England the pattern was no different. The initially amicable relations between the English and the Indians soon disintegrated under the pressure of their cultural incompatibility. In 1637, 1675, and almost continually after 1689, Indians made war on the Englishmen who were rapidly spreading their hard heelmarks where softoccasins had always tread. And from these opponents the English gradually learned to fight "Indian-style," an ability that once again spelled the difference between their destruction and survival in the New World.

Not all tribes were hostile, nor at any one time, which meant that some tribes, those who by proximity or treaty had grown closer to the English way of life, were able, if willing, to fight at the side of the English. Fortunately for the English, some tribes always were willing, for the redmen of New England were periodically as divided from each other as their white contemporaries in Europe were.¹⁴ Thus in the unfamiliar wilderness battlefields of America it was as much the friendly Indian as his warring brother who taught the New Englishmen how to fight for their very existence.

The first encounter with Indian warfare, during the Pequot War in Connecticut, was too brief for the English to learn very much and too successful for them to need to. In a conflict that lasted only a few months,

¹³ Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *The Founding of Massachusetts: Historians and the Sources* (Indianapolis, 1964), 320.

¹⁴ Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 37-38, 55.

the English troops and their Mohegan allies obliterated the pugnacious Pequots with a final surprise attack and superior firepower. Since the Indians had not yet acquired guns from the Dutch and the French, the English found their fighting methods simply ludicrous. After Mystic Fort, the Pequot stronghold, had been fired and riddled with English bullets, killing most of its five hundred inhabitants, the male survivors charged the English battalia surrounding it with little success, so Capt. John Underhill sent his Mohegans against them "that we might see the nature of the Indian war." By English standards this was so ineffective that "they might fight seven years and not kill seven men. They came not near one another," remarked Underhill, "but shot remote, and not point-blank, as we often do with our bullets, but at rovers, and then they gaze up in the sky to see where the arrow falls, and not until it is fallen do they shoot again. This fight," he concluded, "is more for pastime, than to conquer and subdue enemies."¹⁵

Its ineffectiveness, however, was not due to lack of European firearms, as Lt. Lion Gardiner, the commander of the English fort at Saybrook, discovered when he went into the nearby fields to retrieve several victims of an Indian raid. Not to his surprise, he found "the body of one man shot through, the arrow going in at the right side, the head sticking fast, half through a rib on the left side, which I took out and cleansed it, and presumed to send to the [Massachusetts] Bay, because they had said that the arrows of the Indians were of no force." When the Indians wanted to kill their opponents, especially the English, they had the means and the skill necessary.¹⁶

Still the Indians—both friend and foe—were initially impressed with English warfare, which had changed not a whit from the European style during the seventeen years New England had been colonized. When the Connecticut troops emerged from Fort Saybrook to chase their audacious tormenters, they still "beat up the drum," flew their colors, and marched in serried ranks into the nearest campaign field to "bid them battle." The men were "completely armed, with corselets, muskets, bandoleers, rests, and swords," which, as the Indians themselves related afterward, "did much daunt them." The sight of such martial pageantry

¹⁵ Charles Orr, ed., *History of the Pequot War* (Cleveland, 1897), 82, 84. Roger Williams observed the same kind of fighting among the Narragansetts to the east. *Complete Writings*, I, 204.

¹⁶ Orr, ed., *Pequot War*, 130.

must have impressed the Indians' sense of ceremony, but it was the ferocity of the English in battle that truly awed them. After the Mystic Fort massacre, Captain Underhill boasted, "Our Indians came to us, and much rejoiced at our victories, and greatly admired the manner of English-men's fight, but cried Mach it, mach it; that is, It is naught, it is naught, because it is too furious, and slays too many men." The Indians had little to learn about the art of war, it seems, but the English taught them something about its energetic pursuit.¹⁷

By the same token the English learned at least one technique of wilderness warfare from the natives. When Massachusetts sent one hundred soldiers to Connecticut to quell the Pequots, they were placed under the command of four captains and "other inferior officers," a number unusually high by European standards. So Captain Underhill, one of the officers, felt compelled to explain their deviation from the norm to the English readers of his *Newes from America*. "I would not have the world wonder at the great number of commanders to so few men," he wrote, "but know that the Indians' fight far differs from the *Christian* practice; for they most commonly divide themselves into small bodies, so that we are forced to neglect our usual way, and to subdivide our divisions to answer theirs."¹⁸ Since the Pequot stronghold was ambushed by mass encirclement, a thoroughly European tactic, the American version of "divide and conquer" was not particularly decisive for the English in 1637. However, for more than a century after the outbreak of King Philip's War in 1675, it would prove to be a valuable asset—and even, ironically, on more than one occasion, a liability. But it was only the first of a whole range of military tactics that the English would learn, however tardily, from the New England natives before the Revolution.¹⁹

In the initial encounters of King Philip's War, which was to be fought largely on terrain very different from Connecticut's rocky forests, the English ensigns still "boldly held up [their] Colours in the Front of [their] Compan[ies]" and the troops still planned to "beat up the Enemies Quarters, or give him Battel, if he durst abide it." But the Indians would have none of this European madness, and continued their own successful methods, "seldom or never daring," as a hostile witness put it, "to meet our Soldiers in the open Field, unless when they have very great Advan-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-62, 84; Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 40.

¹⁸ Orr, ed., *Pequot War*, 51, emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 153-154.

tage as to their Numbers, or Covert of the Woods and Bushes."²⁰ Some eight months after the start of hostilities an American author had to admit to his English readers that "we have as yet had Nothing like to a Field Battel with the Indians." Nor would they ever. As one warrior told an English captain, "English Fashion is all one Fool; you kill mee, mee kill you! No, better ly somewhere, and Shoot a man, and hee no see! That the best Soldier!"²¹

The "perfidious Subtlety" of their "timerous and barbarous Enemy" thoroughly frustrated the English. One response, typical of uncomprehending students, was to explain away its obvious effectiveness by resort to their own (temporary) inadequacies. The early successes of King Philip's men, wrote the Reverend William Hubbard, the colonies' chief historian of the Indian wars, "must be imputed in a great Measure to our Mens unacquaintedness with the Manner of their fighting, they doing most of their Mischiefs either by Ambushments, sudden Surprizals, or overmatching some of our small Companyes with greater Numbers, having had many Times six or seven to one. [And] possibly also," he admitted, more as an aside than a confession, "many of our Overthrows have proceeded from our too much Confidence in our own Weapons, Courage and Martial Discipline."²²

Another response, one which would color the whole history of colonial New England, was to adapt as quickly as possible to the uninhibited style of Indian warfare. This had two results, one expected but uncertain and the other unintended but inevitable. As they had hoped, it ultimately enabled the English to defeat their teachers for the hegemony of New England. But two other practices, one a direct loan, the other an English "improvement," served to lower their own conduct to the "barbarous" levels they so self-consciously deplored. The English "improvement" was the use of dogs, especially mastiffs. When the Reverend Solomon Stoddard of Northampton recommended to the governor of Massachusetts in 1703 that dogs be used to track Indians and to guard towns, he was well aware that he was departing from "Christian practice." "*If the Indians were as other people are,*" he began, "and did manage their warr fairly *after the manner of other nations,* it might be looked

²⁰ Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 70-71, 133-134.

²¹ Charles H. Lincoln, ed., *Narratives of the Indian Wars 1675-1699*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1913), 57, 238.

²² Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 132; II, 259-260.

upon as inhumane to pursue them in such a manner." And then, like all apologists of war, he proceeded to excuse his own "inhumane" suggestion by dehumanizing the enemy—and in the process a part of himself. "But they are to be looked upon as thieves and murderers, they doe acts of hostility, without proclaiming war, *they don't appeare openly in the field to bid us battle*, they use those cruelly that fall into their hands." In short, "they act like wolves and are to be dealt withall as wolves."²³ It was reasoning such as this, tragically flawed by hubris and lack of compassion, that allowed an order to be given in nearby Hatfield in 1675 for a female Indian captive "to be torn in pieces by dogs."²⁴

The second practice that diminished the New Englishman's humanity was scalping, a direct loan from the Indians. On September 12, 1694, the General Court of Massachusetts passed an act confining all friendly Indians to a cordon sanitaire and offering bounties "for every [hostile] Indian, great or small, which they shall kill, or take and bring in prisoner." Volunteer Indian fighters in "greater or lesser parties"—the first American bounty hunters—received £50 per head, volunteers under pay, £20, and regular soldiers under pay, £10. Since the provincial treasurer was not about to trust the word of every common soldier, the enemy's scalplock had to be produced to receive the bounty, and to prevent fraud a three-month prison sentence and a fine double the amount of the bounty was threatened for trying to pass off a false scalp, especially that of a friendly Indian.²⁵

As the situation along the eastern frontier worsened, the government steadily increased the scalp bounties until by 1722 individual volunteers were receiving £100 per head, a small fortune to poor soldiers but only a tithe of the actual cost to the country of every Indian taken or killed. But something was obviously gnawing at the New English conscience, for only two months after the initial act of 1704 was passed, the court amended it in the direction of "Christian practice." Instead of rewarding the killing of "every Indian, great or small," a scale graduated by age and sex was established, so that the scalps of "men or youths [twelve

²³ Solomon Stoddard to Joseph Dudley, Oct. 22, 1703, *New-England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXIV (1870), 269-270, emphasis mine.

²⁴ Increase Mather, *The History of King Philip's War*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (Boston, 1862), 101n.

²⁵ *The Acts and Resolves . . . of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay . . .* (Boston, 1869-1922), I, 175-176, 594. Just how a bona fide scalp was to be distinguished from a false one was not suggested.

years or older] capable of bearing armes" were worth £100 to any company of volunteers, women and boys above the age of ten, only £10, and no reward was given for killing children under ten years. In a gesture of dubious compassion, such children instead were sold as slaves and transported out of the country.²⁶

Aware of the moral dangers inherent in fostering such "barbarous" practices, the General Court was careful to limit each enactment to one year. But necessity was strong throughout most of the first half of the eighteenth century, and the bounties were renewed year after year in the hope that more volunteers would turn the tide against the eastern Indians. And so they did. Selected techniques of Indian warfare, placed in the hands of a larger English population already possessed of a more advanced technology, eventually sealed the Indians' fate in New England, but not before wreaking upon it their own subtle form of moral vengeance.

It was regrettable that the English resorted to the Indian practice of scalping, but it was probably necessary if they were to survive in the New World. Furthermore, without trying to explain *away* their actions, we should place them in historical perspective. Incredible as it may seem, scalping was a humane improvement upon the standard Indian treatment of their enemies, "it being the custome to cut off their heads, hands, and feete, to beare home to their wives and children, as true tokens of their renowned victorie."²⁷ In his *Key into the Language of America*, Roger Williams translated the ancient Algonquian word for "to cut off, or behead," observing that "when ever they wound, and their arrow sticks in the body of theiremie, they (if they be valourous, and possibly may) they follow their arrow, and falling upon the person wounded and tearing his head a little aside by his Locke, they in the twinckling of an eye fetch off his head though but with a sorry [dull] knife."²⁸ Scalping simply seems to have been reserved for enemies slain a considerable distance from home, "in which is their usual Manner, when it is too far to carry the Heads." As soon as the battle was ended, they always made a fire to "carefully preserve the scalps of the head, drying the inside with hot ashes; and so carry them home as trophies of their

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 530, 558, 594; II, 259; Samuel Penhallow, *The History of the Wars of New-England with the Eastern Indians . . .* (Cincinnati, 1859 [orig. publ. Boston, 1726]), 48, 93.

²⁷ Wood, *New Englands Prospect*, 84.

²⁸ Williams, *Complete Writings*, I, 78.

valour, for which they are rewarded." It was a similar need for proof that prompted the English to encourage the taking of scalps.²⁹

But the historical context of scalping included not only the practices of New England but those of old England as well. And even there "barbarism" was not unknown, as Col. Daniel Axtell discovered in 1660. For his part in the beheading of King Charles I, he was "drawne upon a hardle" to the "Tyborne gallow tree," where he was "hanged, cut downe, his body quickly opened and his intreats burnt; hee was quartered and brought back to Newgate Prison to be boyled and then, as the [nine] others, [his head] to be sett up as his Majesty pleased." In the seventeenth century, the standards of English justice and Indian revenge were never far apart, and the objects of both had little chance of survival. At least the victims of scalping occasionally lived to ripe old age.³⁰

Fortunately, the great majority of military techniques learned from the Indians carried much less danger of moral contagion than scalping. Their danger was further reduced by the well-known example of Benjamin Church, who was at once perhaps the best student of Indian fighting and one of the most humane military leaders in colonial New England. His personal account of the not insignificant role he played in King Philip's War and in several eastern campaigns into the eighteenth century, published by his son in 1716, might well have served the New English both as a guide to the conduct of Indian warfare and as a case-book of moral restraint in the face of great temptation.

Much of King Philip's War was waged in the swampy lowlands of the Plymouth colony and Rhode Island, which gave the Indians an added advantage over their inexperienced rivals. "Every Swamp is a Castle to them," lamented Increase Mather, "knowing where to find us, but we know not where to find them, who nevertheless are always at home, and have in a manner nothing but their lives and souls (which they think not of) to loose . . . and they can live comfortably on that which would starve *English-men*."³¹ Each of the local swamps was "so full of Bushes and Trees, that a Parcel of Indians may be within the Length of a Pike of a Man, and he cannot discover them; and besides, [each] is so soft

²⁹ Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, II, 206.

³⁰ William L. Sachse, *The Diurnal of Thomas Rugg, 1659-1661* (London, 1961), 116. For only a few of the scalping victims who survived, see Penhallow, *Wars of New-England*, 76; Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 129; Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians*, 162.

³¹ Mather, *King Philip's War*, 206-207.

Ground, that an Englishman can neither go nor stand thereon, and yet these bloody Savages," marveled a contemporary, "will run along over it, holding their Guns across their Arms (and if Occasion be) discharge in that Posture."³² The English commanders always ordered their pursuing men out of the swamps at nightfall, "not thinking it Safe to tarry longer in so dangerous a Place, where every One was in as much Danger of his Fellows as of his Foes, being ready to fire upon every Bush they see move (supposing *Indians* were there)." For they had been "taught by late Experience how dangerous it is to fight in such dismal Woods, when their Eyes were muffled with the Leaves, and their Arms pinioned with the thick Boughs of the Trees, as their Feet were continually shackled with the Roots spreading every Way in those boggy Woods." As far as the English were concerned, it was "ill fighting with a wild Beast in his own Den."³³

But Church, long a resident of the outreaches of the Plymouth colony and Rhode Island, knew the swamps and their red inhabitants well, which he turned to good advantage when Philip began his assaults on the isolated Plymouth villages in June 1675. Commissioned a captain in the Plymouth militia, he quickly ventured out with raiding parties of colonials and friendly Indians in hopes of catching the "wild Beast in his own Den," having made it clear to the Plymouth Council of War "that if he should take the Command of Men, he should not lye in any Town or Garrison with them, but would lye in the Woods as the Enemy did." In his opinion, forts were "only Nests for Destruction." Once in the woods he put his knowledge of Indian tactics to work while continuing to learn from his Indian comrades.

His manner of Marching thro' the Woods was such, as if he were discovered, they appeared to be more than they were. For he always Marched at a wide distance one from another, partly for their safety: and this was an *Indian* custom, to March thin and scatter. Capt. *Church* inquired of some of the *Indians* that were become his Souldiers, *How they got such advantage often of the English in their Marches thro' the Woods?* They told him, That . . . the *Indians* always took care in their Marches and Fights, not to come too thick together. But the *English* always kept in a heap together, that it was as easy to hit them as to hit an House, [and] that if at any time they discovered a company of *English* Souldiers in the

³² Lincoln, ed., *Narratives*, 31.

³³ Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 85, 87.

Woods, they knew that there was all, for the *English* never scattered; but the *Indians* always divided and scattered.³⁴

Another maneuver which went against European practice was to have his men not all fire at once in volleys "lest the Enemy should take the advantage of such an Opportunity to run upon them with their Hache[t]s." He avoided ambushes by never "return[ing] the same way that he came" and forbidding his men telltale fires to satisfy their "Epidemical plague of lust after Tobacco." And he could "skulk" with the best of his enemies, always ensuring that he had several Indians in his company because "they exceed most of our *English* in hunting and Sculking in the woods, being always us'd to it; and it must be practised if ever we intend to destroy those *Indian* Enemies." At the final engagement with Philip on Mount Hope in August 1676, Church characteristically advised an officer who was given the honor of approaching first that "his custom in the like cases was to creep with his company on their bellies, until they came as near as they could; and that as soon as the Enemy discovered them they would cry out; and that was the word for his Men to fire and fall on."³⁵ It was shrewdness like this that leads one to suspect that if several crucial pages were missing from the Indian handbook of war, they were probably taken by Benjamin Church.

Church's knowledge of their ways quickly brought him a large measure of success over the hostile Indians. To an ordinary man this would have presented an overwhelming temptation to visit an understandable rage and thirst for revenge upon his captives. But Church was a man of uncommon mettle. Besides possessing a strong sense of humanity and compassion, he had lived amongst the Indians much of his life and could not erase the instinctive knowledge he had of them as *human beings*. He was simply incapable of the kind of venomous imprecations Cotton Mather would use in 1689 to arouse battlebound New English soldiers to a fighting pitch. "*Vengeance, Dear Country-men! Vengeance upon our Murderers,*" he cried from Boston's North Church. "Let your *Courage*, in the Name of God be daring enough to Execute that *Vengeance* on them . . . *Beat* them small as the *Dust before the Wind*, and *Cast them*

³⁴ Benjamin Church, *The History of King Philip's War*, ed. Henry Martyn Dexter (Boston, 1865 [orig. publ. 1716]), 67, 122-123; Church, *The History of the Eastern Expeditions against the Indians and French*, ed. Dexter (Boston, 1867 [orig. publ. 1716]), 86.

³⁵ Church, *King Philip's War*, ed. Dexter, 28, 32-33, 121, 133, 145; Church, *History of Eastern Expeditions*, ed. Dexter, 133.

out, as the *Dirt in the Streets* . . . those Ravenous howling *Wolves*.³⁶ How different was Church's sense of Christian justice when his Indian soldiers presented him with Little Eyes, a Sogkonate who had left the tribe to join Philip upon their making peace with the English, and threatened to kill Church at the dance celebrating the treaty. The Indians "signified to him that now he had an opportunity to be revenged on him, but the Captain told them, *It was not English-mans fashion to seek revenge; and, that he should have the same quarter the rest had*."³⁷

The same scrupulousness on another occasion earned him the "loss of the good Will and Respect of some that before were his good Friends." In July 1675 "a Number of the Enemy . . . had surrendered themselves Prisoners on terms promised" by the captain of the English garrison. "And had their promises to the *Indians* been kept, and the *Indians* faredly treated, 'tis probable that most if not all the *Indians* in those Parts, had soon followed the Example of those that had now surrendered themselves; which would have been a good step toward finishing the War," then only one month old. But in spite of all that Church and the captain could "say, argue, plead, or beg, some body else that had more Power in their hands improv'd it; and without any regard to the promises made them on their surrendering themselves, they were cary'd away to *Plymouth*, there sold, and transported out of the country." It is not difficult to see why this action was "so hateful" to Church.³⁸

Equally disturbing to the captain was the barbarous use of prisoners by his Indian soldiers which was countenanced by his superiors. When one of his Mohegans captured a wounded Indian, "some were for torturing of him to bring him to a more ample confession, of what he knew concerning his Country-men. [But] Mr. *Church* verily believing he had been ingenious in his confession, interceded and prevailed for his escaping torture." When the army continued its march, the prisoner's wound "somewhat disinabling him for Travelling, 'twas concluded he should be knock'd on the Head" by his captor before the assembled English troops and their general around a "great fire." "Mr. *Church* taking no delight in the Sport, fram'd an arrant [errand] at some distance among the baggage Horses."³⁹

³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Souldiers Counsell'd and Comforted* (Boston, 1689), 28.

³⁷ Church, *King Philip's War*, ed. Dexter, 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 45-47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

The following year, as the long war was grinding to a climax, Church decimated most of Philip's forces in a swamp fight, taking or killing 173 men. Although the causes for vengeful action had accumulated beyond number after fourteen months of savage fighting, Church ensured that his prisoners were "well treated with Victuals and drink," so well indeed that "they had a merry Night . . . not being so treated a long time before." And thinking they were giving him cause for joy, "some of the *Indians* now said to Capt. Church, Sir, You have now made Philip ready to dye, for you have made him as poor, and miserable as he us'd to make the English; for you have now killed or taken all his Relations." They concluded by telling him "that they believed he would now soon have his head." But instead of bringing delight to a rancorous spirit, wrote his son, "*this [a]bout had almost broke his heart.*"⁴⁰ In men like Church, the full meaning of Christian charity becomes palpable.

The success with which Benjamin Church selectively adapted the style of Indian fighting to his own uses stands in doleful contrast to the indiscriminate adoptions of other English officers. One of these was Capt. Thomas Lothrop, who was sent on September 18, 1675, with a company of eighty men—"the very Flower of the County of Essex"—to escort a wagon train of corn from Deerfield to beleaguered Hatfield. But on that "most fatal Day, the Saddest that ever befel *New-England*," according to William Hubbard, his company was ambushed and all but seven or eight men killed, "which great Defeat came to pass by the unadvised Proceeding of the Captain (who was himself slain in the first Assault) although he wanted neither Courage nor Skill, to lead his Souldiers: but having taken up a wrong Notion about the best Way and Manner of fighting with the *Indians* (which he was always wont to argue for) *viz.* that it were best to deal with the *Indians* in their own Way, *sc.* by skulking behind Trees, and taking their Aim at single Persons, which is the usual Manner of the *Indians* fighting one with another; but herein was his great Mistake," Hubbard correctly discerned, "in not considering the great Disadvantage a smaller Company would have in dealing that way with a great Multitude"—the *Indians* numbered seven to eight hundred that day—"for if five have to deal with one, they may surround him, and every one to take his Aim at him, while he can level at but one of his Enemies at a time. . . . Had he ordered his Men to march in a Body,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

as some of his Fellow-commanders advised, either backward, or forward, in Reason they had not lost a Quarter of the Number of those that fell that Day by the Edg of the Sword. For the *Indians*, notwithstanding their Subtilty and Cruelty, durst not look an *Englishman* in the Face in the open Field, nor ever yet were known to kill any Man with their Guns, unless when they could lie in wait for him in an Ambush, or behind some Shelter, taking Aim undiscovered."⁴¹ In raw hands the tactics of Indian warfare, like sorcerers' magic, could easily turn upon their apprentices.

Fortunately for the English, not all Indian techniques were double-edged. Two in particular involved only the adoption and use of ordinary native artifacts—the moccasin and the snowshoe. Moccasins, the supreme footwear for fast, quiet forest travel, were made of elk or deerskin, hair side in, "which yet being excellently tann'd by them, is excellent for to travell in wet and snow; for it is so well tempered with oyle," testified Roger Williams, "that the water cleane wrings out; and being hang'd up in their chimney, they presently drie without hurt as my selfe hath often proved."⁴² Another advantage was that they were "absolutely necessary for the purpose of adjusting their snowshoes," which were made, said one European, "like a large Racket we play at *Tennis* with, lacing them with *Deers-guts* and the like." "These snowshoes, made in lozenge shape," said another, "are more than two feet long and a foot and a half broad . . . by means of which they easily walk on the snow."⁴³ In the deep snows of Maine, where the spring sun comes late in the year, both were necessities, as the colonists realized when the theater of war shifted to the northern and eastern frontiers after 1689.

The need was not unfelt even earlier, for during the first winter of King Philip's War "the Foot [soldiers] were unable to do any Service in the Depth of the Snow, and Sharpness of the Cold, . . . unless they carried Rackets under their Feet, wherewith to walk upon the Top of the Snow." But it was not until June 14, 1704, the same year that the scalp bounty was raised to £100, that the Massachusetts General Court, in an act "for the more ready and better pursuit after the Indian rebels

⁴¹ Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 112-113, 212.

⁴² Williams, *Complete Writings*, I, 145.

⁴³ Father Sébastien Rale to Monsieur his Brother, Oct. 12, 1723, in Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, LXVII (Cleveland, 1900), 135; Josselyn, *Account of Two Voyages*, 297.

in the winter, upon the snow," ordered that one-half of the colonial militia "shall, each of them, at his own charge, be provided with a pair of good serviceable snow-shoes and mogginsons" before the tenth of November. Officers were to send to Boston lists of their men who had complied with the order so that they might be reimbursed three shillings, and a fine of ten shillings was levied for each neglect. Soon thereafter, to ensure that the militia of each of the four northern counties received sufficient equipment, the court ordered five hundred pairs of snowshoes to be made. When the time of compliance approached, several companies on the frontiers petitioned the court to raise their reimbursement from three to five shillings since they found that "a pr of good snow shoes, Mogesons and bands will cost 10 s money at the least." The military need for this equipment was so pressing that the subsidy was raised without a murmur. And not without reason, for by the following winter, "little or no spoil was done on any of our frontiers; the enemy being so terrified by reason of snow-shoes (which most of our men were skillful in) that they never attempted coming at such a season after." Once again, it was the successful adoption of the Indians' own tactics and technology that gave the English the palm and eventually the domination of New England.⁴⁴

People alter their life styles for both negative and positive reasons. They are always to some degree disappointed or unhappy with their present lives, but perhaps more important, they are also attracted—tempted—by an alternative which seems to answer their dissatisfactions. This alternative life style is generally personified by familiar living models, people whose mode of living conveys an appearance of harmony, integrity, and contentment. When the settlers of New England became disenchanted with their own lives complicated by the demands of civilization, it was the Indians' more primitive existence that tempted them toward a change of life.

One form of temptation—perhaps among people of different color the most elemental—was sexual. But the attraction seems to have been all on one side; the Indians never cared to lie with white people, even when they enjoyed sovereign power over their bodies in captivity. Only during wartime, when atrocity stories are normally bruited to condition a people's

⁴⁴ Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 158; II, 130; *Mass. Acts and Resolves*, I, 547; VIII, 42, 92, 429; Penhallow, *Wars of New-England*, 41.

hatred of the enemy, did the English insinuate that the Indians defile "any Woman they take alive, . . . afterwards putting her to Death."⁴⁵ Such flagrant propaganda could not stand before the impeccable testimony of the many English women who returned from captivity with their chastity and lives intact. As late as 1724 an English woman could say from a year's experience in captivity that "the Indians are very civil towards their captive women, not offering any incivility by an indecent carriage, (unless they be much over-come in liquor,) which is commendable in them, so far."⁴⁶

One explanation for the Indians' lack of interest in English women emerged during the initial stages of the Pequot War, when a sixteen-year-old girl captured from Wethersfield reportedly told her English redeemers that the Indians "did solicit her to uncleanness." This may have been mere wishful thinking, for Edward Johnson told a fuller and much different story. "Having taken these two prisoners," he said, "they did not offer to abuse their persons, *as was verily deemed they would*, questioned them with such broken English, as some of them could speak, to know whether they could make Gunpowder. Which when they understood they could not doe, their prize proved nothing so pretious a Pearle in their eyes as before; for seeing they exceeded not their own Squawes in Art, their owne thoughts informed them they would fall abundantly short in industry, and *as for beauty they esteeme black beyond any colour*." If Johnson is right, English women were not sexually assaulted because they were not attractive to Indian men, who always preferred their own women. "Wherefore," saw Johnson with his English eyes, "their Squawes use that sinfull art of painting their Faces in the hollow of their Eyes and Nose, with a shining black, out of which their tip of their Nose appeares very deformed, and their cheeke bone, being of a lighter swart black, on which they have a blew crosse dyed very deepe. This is the beauty esteemed by them." Perhaps it was no coincidence that to these same Indians the Devil appeared "in a bodily shape, sometimes very ugly and terrible, and sometimes like a *white boy*."⁴⁷

The English, on the other hand, suffered from no such cultural inhibitions. Many of them, men and women, could not resist the physical

⁴⁵ Lincoln, ed., *Narratives*, 30.

⁴⁶ Samuel G. Drake, ed., *Tragedies of the Wilderness . . .* (Boston, 1846), 125.

⁴⁷ Orr, ed., *Pequot War*, 71; J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence 1628-1651*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1910), 149-150, 263, emphasis mine.

attraction of these magnificent people of "savage hue." The English found many faults with their initially admired hosts over the course of time, but they could never put aside their unreserved admiration for the Indian physique. The sensuality of William Wood's description is at once a good example and an explanation of the Indians' seductive mien.

Of their Stature, most of them being betweene five or six foote high, straight bodied, strongly composed, smooth skinned, merry countenanced, of complexion something more swarthy than *Spaniards*, black hair'd, high foreheaded, blacke ey'd, out-nosed, broad shouldred, brawny arm'd, long and slender handed, out brested, small wasted, lanke bellied, well thighed, flat kneed, handsome growne leggs, and small feete: In a word, take them when the blood briskes in their veines, when the flesh is on their backs, and marrow in their bones, when they frolick in their antique deportments and *Indian* postures; and they are more amiable to behold (though onely in *Adams* livery) than many a compounded phantasticke in the newest fashion.⁴⁸

John Josselyn's evocation of Indian women was no less titillating. "The *Indesses* that are young," he wrote, "are some of them very comely, having good features, their faces plump and round, and generally plump of their Bodies . . . and as soft and smooth as a mole-skin, of reasonable good complexions, but that they dye themselves tawnie, many prettie Brownetto's and spider finger'd Lasses may be seen amongst them."⁴⁹ If the Indians were typically seen as young, wild, passionate, and alluring, but somehow tainted in the blood—as dark beauty is often portrayed in literary convention—the frequency with which the English succumbed to their aroused passions appears in a clearer light.⁵⁰

For succumb they did, as early as 1631. At the September session of the Massachusetts General Court "a young fellow was whipped for soliciting an Indian squaw to incontinency. Her husband and she complained of the wrong, and were present at the execution, and very well satisfied."⁵¹ In the Plymouth colony, where the English lived more closely with their Indian neighbors, the opportunity for cross-cultural unions was greater. During the seventy years of Plymouth's autonomy, several cases of

⁴⁸ Wood, *New Englands Prospect*, 62-63.

⁴⁹ Josselyn, *Account of Two Voyages*, 294.

⁵⁰ Wilcomb E. Washburn, "A Moral History of Indian-White Relations: Needs and Opportunities for Study," *Ethnohistory*, IV (1957), 51.

⁵¹ James Kendall Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop's Journal "History of New England" 1630-1649*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1908), I, 67.

fornication involving colonists and Indians appeared on the court docket, only one of which ever accused an Indian of attempting English virtue. The conduct of Mary, the wife of Duxbury's Robert Mendame, typified the direction of New England's sexual solicitations. On September 3, 1639, she was sentenced to be "whipped at a cart taylor" through the town and to wear a badge of sin—the scarlet letter—on her left sleeve forever for "useing dalliance divers tymes with Tinsin, an Indian, and after committing the act of uncleannesse with him." Tinsin, who had confessed their crime through an interpreter, was only whipped at the post with a halter about his neck "because it arose through the allurements and inticement of the said Mary, that hee was drawne thereunto." Singularly exceptional was the case of Sam, an Indian, who violated Sarah Freeman "by laying her down upon her backe, and entering her body with his." Ordinarily rape brought the death penalty, but the court, "considering he was but an Indian, and therefore in an incapacity to know the horribleness of the wickednes of this abominable act," commuted his sentence to a whipping and expulsion from the colony. Since this unique violation of the normal pattern of sexual temptation did not occur until 1682, Sam may well have been sufficiently anglicized by his familiarity with the English to exchange in a moment of weakness or confusion imported for native standards of beauty and sensuality. If so, it was a costly lapse.⁵²

Intercultural dalliance was one thing, and easily handled by English justice and public opinion, but sometimes lust gave way to love, raising the spectre of marriage outside the carefully hedged fold. The problem was raised in a formal way in March 1635 when the Massachusetts General Court entertained and then immediately referred a question concerning the propriety of Indian-white marriages, but it never regained the court's attention. Instead of civil law, public opinion was left to police untoward affections, with what success we can only guess. Only when a mixed couple entered the judicial lists for an offense of a legal nature did the fact of their union come to light.⁵³

Probably most couples of necessity lived far from the obdurate center of English society, close to if not actually in the tolerant homes of the Indian partners. If the colonial reaction to Joshua Tift, a "Renegadoe

⁵² Shurtleff, ed., *Plymouth Colony Records*, I, 132; VI, 98.

⁵³ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, I (Boston, 1853), 140, Mar. 4, 1635.

English Man of *Providence*," is an accurate measure, mixed marriages were regarded with an unmerciful eye, especially if the Englishman accepted more than a spouse from the Indians. During the first winter of King Philip's War, English scouts wounded and captured Tift, who "upon some Discontent amongst his Neighbours, had turned *Indian*, married one of the *Indian Squawes*, renounced his Religion, Nation and natural Parents all at once, fighting against them. . . . He had in his Habit conformed himself to them amongst whom he lived. After Examination, he was condemned to die the Death of a Traytor" by hanging and quartering, "which was accordingly done." "As to his Religion he was found as ignorant as an Heathen"—a clear warning to backsliders—"which no doubt caused the fewer Tears to be shed at his Funeral; Standers by being unwilling to lavish Pity upon him that had divested himself of Nature itself, as well as Religion, in a Time when so much Pity was needed elsewhere."⁵⁴ It was with such transparent disdain for mixed marriages—those divestments of "Nature itself"—that Connecticut outlawed "renegades" in their 1650 Code of Laws. To discourage "diverse persons [who] departe from amongst us, and take up their abode with the Indians, in a prophane course of life," the General Court threatened imprisonment for three years "at least" and a fine or corporal punishment.⁵⁵ Perhaps legislation could deter mixed marriages to some degree, but it could never throttle the distinctly "heathenish" mode of life that many Englishmen adopted on the remote borders of colonial society. Of all the dangers posed by the "wast howling wilderness" of America, none was more alarming to the New English than that they and their children could be converted from "civility" to "barbarism" by its seductive freedom and its seducing inhabitants.

When the king's commissioners surveyed the state of New England in 1665, bent on pulling the independent Americans firmly under the royal wing, they found that the people of Maine "for the most part are fishermen, and never had any Governement amongst them, and most of them are such as have fled thither from other places to avoyd Justice. Some here are of Opinion," they gloated, "that as many Men may share in a Woman, as they doe in a Boate, and some have done so." If the Maine county court records are any indication, the commissioners

⁵⁴ Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, I, 162; Lincoln, ed., *Narratives*, 67.

⁵⁵ J. Hammond Trumbull and C. J. Hoadly, eds., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1850-1870), I, 530.

had hit upon a hard truth about one notorious New England frontier, but they had only touched the tip of a moral iceberg. Although many men *and* women were indicted for adultery and "living apart from one's spouse," they could not compete numerically with those Down Easters presented at the monthly sessions for slander, drunkenness, profanity, assault, trespass, Sabbath breaking, and, perhaps most telling of all to an orthodox Puritan, neglect of public worship.⁵⁶

The inhabitants of the scattered, lonely farms and fishing villages of Maine represented best those who were, the social critics of the day accused, "contented to live without, yea, desirous to shake off all Yoake of Government, both sacred and civil." And with good reason, for as one plainspoken fisherman informed a Massachusetts minister sent to convert the worshippers of the pine and the cod, "Sir, You are mistaken, you think you are Preaching to the People at the Bay; our main End was to catch Fish." Since their homes had been the brawling seaports of western England, of Cornwall and Devon, not the Puritan villages of East Anglia, no one needed to be told that such men were not highly amenable to the civilized order of the Puritan ideal. In 1639 one struggling official lamented that "every man is a law to him selfe. It is a bad kind of livinge to live in a place where is neather law nor government amonge people." Twenty years later the colony was still so literally lawless that the York County Court ordered fifty copies of the latest Massachusetts statutes for the several towns with the pointed observation that "the well regulateing of Civill Societys depends much In haveing good Laws, which must bee first known before they can bee either executed or obeyed, the necessity whereof being of more then ordinary usse to us in these parts."⁵⁷ Harvard's president clearly had his northern neighbors in mind when he observed in 1655 that some "account it their happiness to live in the wast howling wilderness, without any ministry, or schoole, and means of education for their posterity, they have much liberty (they think) by this want, they are not troubled with strict Sabbaths, but they may follow their worldly bussiness at any time, and their children may

⁵⁶ William Willis *et al.*, eds., *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Maine Historical Society, *Collections*, 2d Ser. [1869-1916]), IV, 298, hereafter cited as *Documentary History of Maine*; Charles Thornton Libby *et al.*, eds., *Province and Court Records of Maine*, Maine Hist. Soc., Publications (Portland, Me., 1928-), I-V, hereafter cited as *Maine Records*.

⁵⁷ Hubbard, *Indian Wars*, II, 256; Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), Bk. I, 15; Willis *et al.*, eds., *Documentary History of Maine*, III, 171, July 10, 1639; Libby *et al.*, eds., *Maine Records*, II, 78, July 4, 1659.

drudg for them at plough, or hough, or such like servil employments, that themselves may be eased."⁵⁸

Down Easters may have been the worst, but they were certainly not the only offenders of Puritan sensibilities. The infamous group of Gortonists lived in Rhode Island "without any means for instructing them in the wayes of God, and without any civil Government to keep them in civility or humanity." In her travels through Connecticut in 1704, Sarah Knight of Boston felt that the Indians' polygamous marriages and easy "Stand away" divorces were "too much in Vougue among the English in this Indulgent Colony as their Records plentifully prove, and that on very trivial matters," some "not proper to be Related by a Female pen." But even in the heart of Massachusetts civilized currency had been debased. "There hath been in many professors" of the Puritan faith, scolded the Boston synod in 1679, "an insatiable desire after Land, and worldly Accommodations, yea, so as to forsake Churches and Ordinances, and to live like Heathen, only that so they might have Elbow-room enough in the world." When people moved thus into the shadowed corners of the land, bidding defiance "not only to Religion, but to Civility it self," such places inevitably became "Nurseries of Ignorance, Prophane-ness and Atheism," something no good Puritan society could countenance or did.⁵⁹

At the September session of the Massachusetts General Court in 1642, John Winthrop noted, "we were informed of some English to the eastward, who ordinarily traded powder to the Indians, and lived alone under no government." Whereupon a gentleman was dispatched to confiscate their powder and presumably to urge them to more orderly living arrangements. Ten years later the Plymouth Court ordered Joseph Ramsden to move "near unto som neighborhood," having "lived with his family remotely in the woods from neighbours." The unsociable Mr. Ramsden evaded the issue until June 1656 when the court insisted that he move by October or have his house pulled down. He moved. In 1675 the same court ordered three men to "frequent the publicke wor-

⁵⁸ Charles Chauncy, *Gods Mercy, Shewed to his People . . .* (Cambridge, Mass., 1655), 15-16.

⁵⁹ Jameson, ed., *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence*, 223; Sarah Knight, *The Private Journal kept by Madame Knight, On a Journey from Boston to New-York in the Year 1704* (Albany, N. Y., 1865), 55; Increase Mather, *The Necessity of Reformation . . .* (Boston, 1679), 7; Joseph Easterbrooks, *Abraham the Passenger* (Boston, 1705), 3.

ship of [some town], and live otherwise orderly" or to leave the colony for "liveing lonely and in a heathenish way from good societie." When the civil authority could no longer stem the flow of land-hungry settlers toward the exposed frontier, the church was beckoned as a last-ditch alternative. If Puritan society could not arrest their movement, Cotton Mather argued, at least the ministry could "Enlighten them; Antidote them; Fortify them with strong *Preservatives*" against the dangers of Indian captivity and Popish delusion.⁶⁰

Mather was not exaggerating the dangers of frontier living; they were real and omnipresent and insidious, especially for the children who were expected to carry the Puritan ideal across the generations. And they were felt very early. Only a year after he had arrived in Massachusetts, John Winthrop, Jr., was warned by an English correspondent "that ye become not a prey to the spoyler, and your children turne heathen." In 1677 the General Assembly of Connecticut, considering the resettlement of wartorn towns, cited the "woeful experiance in the late warr" which showed that "liveing in a single and scattering way, remoate from townships and neighbourhood" weakened the commonwealth and tempted the "posterity of such, most of them are endangered to degenerate into heathenish ignorance and barbarisme."⁶¹

The New English conception of white "heathenism" was no idle phantom or religious bugbear; its characteristics were increasingly observable as the two cultures of New England mingled and melded across their common frontier. In addition to teaching them "*Our Vice*," asked Cotton Mather, "have not we also *Followed the Indians?* The Indians are Infamous, especially for Three Scandalous Qualities: They are *Lazy Drones*, and love *Idleness* Exceedingly: They are also most impudent *Lyars*, and will invent Reports and Stories at a strange and monstrous rate; and they are out of measure *Indulgent* unto their Children, there is no Family-Government among them.⁶² But, O how much do our people Indianize in every one of those Abominable things!" In a perfect phrase,

⁶⁰ Jameson, ed., *Winthrop's Journal*, II, 80; Shurtleff, ed., *Plymouth Colony Records*, III, 6-7; V, 169; Cotton Mather, *Frontiers Well-Defended* (Boston, 1707), 50.

⁶¹ Edward Howes to John Winthrop, Jr., Nov. 9, 1631, *Winthrop Papers*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Publications, III (Boston, 1943), 55; Trumbull and Hoadly, eds., *Connecticut Colony Records*, II, 328.

⁶² Cotton here followed his father Increase, who contended in 1679 that the chief fault of New England was in family government, in which too many parents and masters were "sinfully indulgent" toward their children. "In this respect, Christians in this Land, have become too like unto the Indians." *Necessity of Reformation*, 5.

"*Criolian Degeneracy*" inflicted promising New English youth when they were "permitted to run wild in our Woods." Yet the dangers were not only civil, but eternal as well, for in those notoriously "Ungospellized Plantations," where "no *Minister* of God [is] countenanced," "Satan *terribly* makes a *prey* of you, and *Leads you Captive to do his Will.*" And all of New England knew the meaning of captivity. As Hampshire County, in Massachusetts's western extremity, expressed it for King George III, "many of our Children . . . were captivated, bred up in popish and pagan Ignorance, and [educational] inlargement never granted; but have become implacable enemies to your own friends."⁶³

The history of colonial New England, like that of most societies, has its share of contradictions and anomalies, but perhaps nothing is more inherently intriguing—or more important to our story—than the diametric difference between the educational power of the Indians and of the English over each other. For beside the doleful failure of English education to civilize and Christianize the Indians stands the impressive success with which the Indians converted the English to their "barbarous" way of living. Benjamin Franklin spoke of a decisive century and a half of American experience when he compared the human results of each process. "When an Indian Child has been brought up among us," he wrote in 1753, "taught our language and habituated to our Customs, yet if he goes to see his relations and make one Indian Ramble with them, there is no perswading him ever to return." But "when white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and lived a while among them, tho' ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them."⁶⁴

It is too easy, having read only the few novelists who have treated this theme, to underestimate the impact of "Indianization" upon the

⁶³ Cotton Mather, *The Way to Prosperity* (Boston, 1690), 27, 34; Mather, *A Letter to Ungospellized Plantations* (Boston, 1702), 14; Mather, *The Present State of New England . . .* (Boston, 1690), 32; Henry Lefavour, "The Proposed College in Hampshire County in 1762," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, LXVI (1936-1941), 53-79, quotation on p. 77.

⁶⁴ Leonard W. Labaree *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 1959-), IV, 481-482, May 9, 1755.

American character by assuming that it was confined to a mere handful of impressionable children and adult misfits. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In 1782 Hector de Crèvecoeur wondered "by what power does it come to pass, that children who have been adopted when young among these people, can never be prevailed on to re-adopt European manners?" But he was not talking of isolated individuals, "for *thousands* of Europeans are Indians," he wrote, "and we have no examples of even *one* of those Aborigines having from choice become Europeans!" And he does not seem to have been exaggerating for literary effect. Firm figures are impossible to come by, as can be imagined, but judging from New England alone, Crèvecoeur's estimate has the ring of truth.⁶⁵

Between 1689 and 1713, the years of the heaviest Indian depredations along the northern and eastern frontiers of New England, about 600 men, women, and children were taken by the Indians and less frequently by the French and marched northward into captivity.⁶⁶ Of these, 174 (29 percent) definitely returned to New England, having been ransomed or exchanged for French prisoners. An additional 146 captives (25 percent) exchanged their bondage for French naturalization and baptism by the Catholic Church. This means that if we include those captives who chose to remain with the Indians, anywhere from 25 to 71 percent of English captives may have refused to return to New England. A reasonable estimate, based on the proportion of captives in French and Indian hands in 1705 (5:3), would be 40 percent, 25 percent (146) becoming French Canadians, 15 percent (90) becoming full-fledged Indians, and some

⁶⁵ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* . . . (London, 1912 [orig. publ. 1782]), 213-215, emphasis mine. Pierre de Charlevoix tells us that the French "in rather large numbers" were equally captivated by the Indian mode of life and would not return to "civilization." *Le Journal d'un Voyage . . . dans l'Amérique Septentrionale*, VI (Paris, 1744), 32-33.

⁶⁶ Coleman, *New England Captives*, I, Chap. 4, lists by name a minimum of 437 captives for this period. From a variety of New English sources to which she refers, we also know that at various times a total of 601 captives remained in Canada, although obviously a certain residual overlap occurred in the figures for years fairly close together. (Two lists exist for 1695 and 1699, however, in which there is no overlap, accounting for 65 persons remaining.) If we add to those persons remaining (assuming for the moment an absence of overlap) the 174 persons who definitely returned to New England, we arrive at an inflated total of 775 persons who may have been captive in this 25-year period. If from that figure we subtract Ms. Coleman's definite figure of 437, we get a potential of 338 extra captives, which, if we diminish by 50% for inflationary overlap, yields a plausible (and probably conservative) 169 unrecorded captives. These, added to Ms. Coleman's known captives, yield about 600 captives.

of them practicing Catholics as well. Indeed this may well be a conservative estimate. For in 1724 during the Three Years' War, the first major outbreak of fighting since the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Joseph Stevens wrote the Massachusetts General Court from Canada where he was trying to redeem two of his sons: "Inasmuch as there are upward of Fifty of our People in the hands of the Indians that have been taken in this War, who unless some speedy care be taken to redeem them will probably turn Roman Catholicks and Embrace their Religion, as *above an hundred others (taken Prisoners Before this Warr)* have done, who will by no means be persuaded to Return to their Native Countrey again, but are led on in Superstition and Idolatry."⁶⁷ If the Indians were capable of winning the allegiance and affections of 15 percent of all the Americans they captured before 1782, Crèvecoeur's announcement that "thousands of Europeans are Indians" ceases to surprise, but leaves us to search for an explanation.

There were at least three kinds of reasons, each intersecting and reinforcing the others, why so many New Englishmen chose to remain with their Indian captors. Many stayed, in the first place, because they found Indian life morally superior to English civilization and Catholicism more satisfying than Puritanism. According to her Indian husband, Eunice Williams, the celebrated daughter of the Reverend John Williams of Deerfield, "no go" because "her father marry twice times. He no have marry, she go." Sylvanus Johnson, who lived with the Indians from the age of six to ten, "always maintained that the Indians were a far more moral race than the Whites." Another young Deerfield captive, Mary Harris, eventually married an Indian and moved to Ohio, where an English traveler met her in 1751. He wrote in his journal that "she still remembers [after forty-seven years] they used to be very religious in N.E. and wonders how the White men can be so wicked as she has seen them in these woods." About the same time two male captives, recent converts to Catholicism, also condemned New England's fall from religious grace. One said that "he prefers being a slave with the Indians than in his country where there is no religion." (His father was dead and by New England law "whoever has been ransomed, if obliged to borrow the money, is bound to service until he have repaid by his labor the sum he cost.") The other sounded a similar note; he refused re-

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 153, emphasis mine.

demption because "he hated too strongly the English nation where he was almost a slave to give up his religion and liberty."⁶⁸

Although Puritans resented the Jesuits' perfidious "stratagem[s] to seduce poor children . . . from the simplicity of the gospel to Romish superstition," they could not gainsay the effectiveness of their conversion efforts, especially with younger children who in New England had only begun to catechize and to memorize Scripture. The tenacity of belief possessed by two Deerfield girls, captured at the age of seven and eight respectively, testifies to the Jesuits' success in religious education. Several years after her capture, Mary Field and her Indian husband visited her family in their new Connecticut home. She told her brother Pedajah, who had been born after the Deerfield raid, that someday he would be carried off so that he too could enjoy the Indian life and Catholic religion. Indeed he thought the attempt was once made in Northfield, but he escaped in a canoe. After ten years with the Indians, Hannah Hurst married a thirty-two-year-old Indian widower and received baptism in the Catholic Church. The priest wrote in his register that "she has declared many times she does not wish to leave the Savages, with whom she wished to die a Christian." Among Indian captives from New England her stance was not unusual.⁶⁹

The second explanation for the retentive power of Indian culture is the nature of the adoptive process by which captives were thoroughly integrated into the social life and kinship structure of the tribe. When Mrs. James Johnson was adopted by the rich son-in-law of the grand sachem, she later wrote, "I was introduced to the family, and was told [by the interpreter] to call them brothers and sisters, I made a short reply, expressive of gratitude"—a matter of much importance to the Indians⁷⁰—"for being introduced to a house of high rank, and requested

⁶⁸ Erwin H. Ackerknecht, "White Indians," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XV (1944), 35; Coleman, *New England Captives*, I, 120-121; II, 88, 312.

⁶⁹ John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion . . .* (Springfield, Mass., 1908 [orig. publ. Boston, 1707]), 52-53, 58, 70; Coleman, *New England Captives*, II, 78, 96.

⁷⁰ When Stephen Williams showed some eagerness to be bought by a Frenchman, his Indian captors prevented it and threatened him with death for being ungrateful for his preservation and adoption. "It is no wonder," he wrote, "that children that are small will not speak to their friends when they come to see them, but they will scofe and deride them, because the indians have taught them so, will be angry if they do otherwise." *What Befell Stephen Williams in his Captivity* (Deerfield, Mass., 1889), 9.

their patience while I should learn the customs of the nation. . . . I had a numerous retinue of relations, whom I visited daily . . . [and] my new sisters and brothers treated me with the same attention that they did their natural kindred, but it was," she admitted, "an unnatural situation to me." It would not have been to a younger child who had lost one or both of her own parents, as was the situation of many captives. But even Mrs. Johnson, like so many Englishmen who returned from Indian life, had to defend their singular humanity. "Those who have profited by refinement and education, ought to abate part of the prejudice, which prompts them to look with an eye of censure on this untutored race . . . Do they ever adopt an enemy," she asked, "and salute him by the tender name of brother?"⁷¹

Adoption was the more serious for the Indians because it was often used to replace fallen sons or daughters. And, as Governor Duquesne once told Governor Shirley of Massachusetts, "there is nothing so difficult as to get their slaves from them, especially when they have distributed them among their Wigwams to make up for their Dead."⁷² Twenty-two-year-old Zadock Steele's description of his adoption brings home the mutual benefits that accrued to both captors and captives.

All the Indians, both male and female, together with the prisoners, assembled and formed a circle, within which one of their chiefs, standing upon a stage erected for the purpose, harrangued the audience in the Indian tongue. Although I could not understand his language, yet I could plainly discover a great share of native eloquence. His speech was of considerable length, and its effect obviously manifested weight of argument, solemnity of thought, and at least human sensibility. I was placed near by his side, and had a fair view of the whole circle. After he had ended his speech an old squaw came and took me by the hand and led me to her wigwam, where she dressed me in a red coat, with a ruffle in my bosom, and ordered me to call her *mother*. She could speak English tolerably well; but was very poor, and therefore unable to furnish me with very sumptuous fare. My food was rather beneath a savage mediocrity; though no doubt my new mother endeavored as far as lay in her power to endear the affections of her newly-adoped yet ill-natured son. . . . As I was blest with an excellent voice for singing, I was the more beloved by, and, on that account, received much better treatment

⁷¹ *A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson* . . . (Springfield, Mass., 1907 [orig. publ. Walpole, N. H., 1796]), 67-68, 71, 76-77.

⁷² Coleman, *New England Captives*, II, 254.

from, my new mother, as well as from other Indians. I was allowed the privilege of visiting any part of the village in the daytime, and was received with marks of fraternal affection and treated with all the civility an Indian is capable to bestow.⁷³

As Hector de Crèvecoeur realized, there was "in their social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to anything to be boasted of among us."⁷⁴

Finally, many New Englishmen became Indians because, as two adult converts acknowledged, they enjoyed "the most perfect freedom, the ease of living, [and] the absence of those cares and corroding sollicitudes which so often prevail with us." When the New English had an explanation for the startling desertion of their neighbors from the civilized fold, they refused to impute any major responsibility to the educational inadequacies of their own culture and instead blamed the natural condition of man as they knew it. "The human mind is naturally averse to control," said Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, Revolutionary soldier and Indian expert. "All men naturally wish for ease, and to avoid the shackles of restraint." Benjamin Franklin, another Massachusetts man long familiar with the Indians, singled out the "proneness of human Nature to a life of ease, of freedom from care and labour," but he argued with unintended irony, "care and pains . . . are necessary to support . . . our manner of life" with its "infinite Artificial wants." The same perspective obviously appealed to the romantic nature of Hector de Crèvecoeur, who planned to move his family to an Indian village to escape the ravages of the Revolutionary War. "There must be something more congenial to our native dispositions," he wrote with undisguised admiration, "than the fictitious society in which we live; or else why should children, and even grown persons, become in a short time so invincibly attached to it? There must be something very bewitching in their manners, something very indelible and marked by the very hands of nature."⁷⁵

What contemporaries saw as the marking hand of nature was in reality the powerful fist of culture, molding in its image its neophytes from another world. When the Reverend John Williams saw "several poor children, who had been taken from the eastward the summer before, . . .

⁷³ *The Indian Captive; or a Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Zadock Steele* (Springfield, Mass., 1908 [orig. publ. Montpelier, Vt., 1818]), 70-72.

⁷⁴ Crèvecoeur, *Letters*, 215.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 215; Labaree *et al.*, eds., *Franklin Papers*, IV, 481-483; Crèvecoeur, *Letters*, 215.

in habit very much like Indians, and in manners very much"—the word is crucial—"symbolizing with them," he was witnessing the educational impact of a culture marked by an uncommon integrity, by social cohesion and a unity of thought and action.⁷⁶ In short, New English captives stayed with their Indian families because they had become enchanted by

. . . the scholastic philosophy of the wilderness
to combat which one must stand outside and laugh
since to go in is to be lost.⁷⁷

And the arcane complexity of the Puritan philosophy, with its burdens of civility and constraint, could simply not release them from its spell.

⁷⁶ Williams, *Redeemed Captive*, 37, emphasis mine.

⁷⁷ Marianne Moore, "New York," *Observations* (New York, 1924), 65.