

## PART 1

### Antecedents and Origins, 1609—1777

“ Tho’ they be Brutish Persons ; yet, they are  
of Mankind, and so objects of Compassion.  
It is an act of Love to our own nature to seek  
their Salvation. . . . ”

*The Reverend Solomon Stoddard, 1723*



RESCUE GROUP (*Erected 1853*)

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# I

## Spirituals and Temporals:

### *The Indian in Colonial Civilization*

THE RENAISSANCE Englishmen who became Americans were sustained by an idea of order. They were sure, above all, of the existence of an eternal and immutable principle which guaranteed the intelligibility of their relations to each other and to their world and thus made possible their life in society. It was a principle to be expressed in the progress and elevation of civilized men who, striving to imitate their God, would bring order to chaos. America was such a chaos, a new-found chaos. Her natural wealth was there for the taking because it was there for the ordering. So were her natural men.

Thus colonial Americans were from the very beginning beset by an Indian problem at once practical and theoretical. Practically, they had to overcome this natural man and to live with him; theoretically, they had to understand him. And they brought with them a pattern of culture, an idea of order, in which theory and practice were taken to be identical. They were certain that man could realize his highest potentialities in only that sort of society which they had left behind them in England. Here in America, it would be possible to realize such a society at its purest and most abundant. Aware to the point of self-consciousness of their specifically civilized heritage, they found in America not only an uncivilized environment, but uncivilized men—natural men, as it was said, living in a natural world. And they knew that the way to civilize a world was to civilize the men in it. Theoretically, savages, as men, were capable of being civilized; practically, they

were bound to be. But practice did not support theory. Indians were not civilized, but destroyed.

Such, in general, was the colonial experience with the Indian; such had been the experience of revolutionary Americans when, in the 1770's, they set out to establish their glorious new-world civilization. The colonial concern with the savage Indian was a product of the tradition of Anglo-French primitivistic thinking—an attempt to see the savage, the ignoble savage, as a European *manqué*. When, by the 1770's, the attempt had obviously failed, Americans were coming to understand the Indian as one radically different from their proper selves; they knew he was bound inextricably in a primitive past, a primitive society, and a primitive environment, to be destroyed by God, Nature, and Progress to make way for Civilized Man. Americans after the 1770's worked out a theory of the savage which depended on an idea of a new order in which the Indian could have no part.

Since it is an aspect of a specifically nationalistic self-consciousness, the American understanding of the Indian after the 1770's is the major concern of this study. First, however, we must look at the antecedents and origins of that understanding in the Renaissance theory of the ignoble savage and its colonial variations. Everywhere in the colonies we can see efforts to understand the Indian as one to be lived with, one whose way of life is simply a corrupt variant of the particular way of life of his civilized neighbors, one who can surely be brought to civilization. Equally, we can see the sad failure of such efforts. The record is one of a failure in theory which made for a failure in practice.

## 1

The Indian whom the sixteenth-century voyagers came to know was, more than anything else, a creature whose way of life showed Englishmen what they might be were they not civilized and Christian, did they not fully partake of the divine idea of order. Viewed in the light of that ordered, civil nature toward which all men, as men, must aspire, he seemed to have fallen as far away from his proper state as he could and yet remain human. The

lesson to be learned everywhere in the Americas was a deep and powerful one for civilized Christians whose intellect was essentially medieval but whose world was fast becoming the one we call modern. For in the New World the Englishman might search in vain for microcosms within the macrocosm, for men whose lives reproduced in little the order of the universe. In America, he might see clearly what he himself would become did he not live according to his highest nature. The Indian became important for the English mind, not for what he was in and of himself, but rather for what he showed civilized men they were not and must not be.<sup>1</sup>

Aboriginal Americans, so English voyagers were again and again to find, denied their holy, human selves and lived like beasts; they were, in the traditional terminology, more animal than rational. The northeastern Indians encountered on Frobisher's second voyage to America are described thus:

If they for necessities sake stand in need of the premisses, such grasse as the Countrey yeeldeth they plucke up and eate, not deintily, or salletwise to allure their stomacks to appetite: but for necessities sake without either salt, oyles or washing, like brute beasts devouring the same. They neither use table, stoole, or table cloth for comelines: but when they are imbrued with blood knuckle deepe, and their knives in like sort, they use their tongues as apt instruments to lick them cleane: in doing whereof they are assured to loose none of their victuals.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, these Indians "live in Caves of earth, and hunt for their dinners or praye, even as the beare or other wild beastes do," and "dare do any thing that their conseites will allowe, or courage of man maie execute."<sup>3</sup> The southeastern Indians described by

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed the sixteenth-century conception of the primitive in "Primitivistic Ideas in the *Faerie Queene*," *JEGP*, XLIV (1945), 139-51. I follow that essay here.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations* (Glasgow, 1904), VII, 224.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 370; and Thomas Churchyard, *A Prayse, and Reporte of Maister Martyn Forboishers* [sic] *Voyage to Meta Incognita* (London, 1578), sig. B iv.

Henry Hawks "are soone drunke, and given to much beastlinesse, and void of all goodnesse."<sup>4</sup> And the savages whom Cabot brought to England are said merely to have been of "demeanour like to brute beastes."<sup>5</sup> This, with hardly a variation, is a regular theme of the voyage narratives. Even the Virginia Indians described so cheerfully in Thomas Hariot's famous *Brief and True Report* (1588)<sup>6</sup> are, for Hariot, interesting as they avoid beastliness, not as they approach humanity. American Indians were everywhere found to be, simply enough, men who were not men, who were religiously and politically incomplete. If it was a brave new world, Caliban was its natural creature, Ferdinand one of its discoverers and planters.

America had to be planted so that sub-humans could be made human. This was one of the civilized Englishman's greatest burdens. In Letters Patent issued in 1606 for the colonizing of Virginia, the King urged the furtherance of a work "which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of His Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such people, as yet live in darkness, and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages living in those parts, to human civility and to a settled and quiet Government . . ."<sup>7</sup> The practical problem of bringing savages to civilization was to be solved by bringing them to the Christianity which was at its heart. Success in empire-building and trade was to be measured by success in civilizing and Christianizing; success in civilizing and Christianizing would assure success in empire-building and trade. Meantime, the Indian, in his savage nature, stood everywhere as a challenge to order and reason and civilization.

The idea of savage nature and savage destiny which seventeenth-century planters took with them to America is most clearly

<sup>4</sup> Hakluyt, IX, 386.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 155.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 374-83.

<sup>7</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Col. Series, America and West Indies, 1675-1676, also Addenda 1574-1675, No. 48.*

and fully set down by the Reverend Samuel Purchas—he who carried on the editing of voyage narratives begun by the Reverend Richard Hakluyt. Towards the end of the long series of narratives which make up *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), Purchas inserts an apologia for English colonization of Virginia.<sup>8</sup> Christian Englishmen, he declares, originally had not the right to despoil heathen Indians of their lands; for ownership of the land is a right in nature, not in God. Hence the Indians cannot be held responsible for not working their land according to God's revealed will; they live only according to the law of nature. Still, the English, as Christians knowing God's will, have an obligation to work that land; for it is almost bare of inhabitants and it is rich in all those things which make for "merchandise." And further, as Christians, they have the obligation to bring the Indians from a state of nature to a state of Christian civility. At first Indians in Virginia had recognized this English obligation, and the English had recognized the Indians' natural right to their lands; the English had obtained lands by legal purchase—all according to the law of nature. But then, in the Virginia massacre of 1622, the Indians had risen against the English, forgetting even that law of nature by which they had lived and in terms of which the English had treated peacefully with them. Now, Purchas is sure, the English have the right to do virtually as they please—or rather, virtually as God would be pleased to have them do.

God is to be glorified as His rich and abundant Virginia is properly used, as Englishmen live richly on that land. He is to be glorified, moreover, as Englishmen try to force to civility and Christianity these savages who refuse even to be proper natural men. Here Purchas writes like a voyager of the 1570's and 80's. The Indians are "so bad people, having little of Humanitie but shape, ignorant of Civilitie, of Arts, of Religion; more brutish then the beasts they hunt, more wild and unmanly then that unmanned wild Countrey, which they range rather than inhabite; captivated

<sup>8</sup> *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (Glasgow, 1906), XIX, 218-65.

also to Satans tyranny in foolish pieties, mad impieties, wicked idlenesse, busie and bloody wickednesse; hence have wee fit objects of zeale and pitie . . . ."<sup>9</sup> Zeal and pity are to be rewarded with the riches of Virginia—this God has arranged:

All the rich endowments of Virginia, her Virgin-portion from the creation nothing lessened, are wages for all this worke: God in wisdom having enriched the Savage Countries, that those riches might be attractives for Christian suters, which there may sowe spirituals and reape temporals.<sup>20</sup>

For giving God and civilization to the Indian, the colonial Englishman was to receive the riches of a new world. Already he had God and civilization and rejoiced in the power they gave him. Looking at the Indian in his lack of such power, the Englishman could be sure of what he himself was; looking at himself, he could be sure of what the Indian should be. In America, from the very beginning the history of the savage is the history of the civilized.

## 2

The handful of adventurers who came to plant Virginia in 1607 were sure that they could live peacefully with the Indians; for they were sure that the Indians needed them and their civilization. Mercantile profits, political aggrandizement, and civilizing and Christianizing the savage heathen—these were all integrally part of that glorious plan whereby the new world might be given the intelligible order of the old.<sup>11</sup> In 1609, Sir Thomas Gates, as Governor of the colony, was told by the Virginia Company that

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX, 231.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX, 232.

<sup>11</sup> For a contemporary statement of this design, see *A True and Sincere Declaration of the Purpose and Ends of the Plantation Begun in Virginia* [1610] in Alexander Brown, *The Genesis of the United States* (Boston, 1840), 339-40. For a general account, see Perry Miller, "The Religious Impulse in the Founding of Virginia: Religion and Society in the Early Literature," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Ser. 3, V (1948), 492-522; and "Religion and Society in the Early Literature: The Religious Impulse in the Founding of Virginia," *ibid.*, Ser. 3, VI (1949), 24-41.



his missionaries should work with Indian children, that he must even have children taken from their parents if necessary, since they were "so wrapped up in the fogge and miserie of their iniquity, and so tirrorified with their continuall tirrorany[,] chayned under the bond of Deathe unto the Divell" that they very likely would have to be forced, when young, into the good Christian life.<sup>12</sup> By 1619 at least fifty missionaries had been sent to Virginia to take charge of thirty Indian children who were being educated into Christianity and civilization.<sup>13</sup> Money was being collected in England for a school for the children; and in June 1622 a missionary-rector was appointed.<sup>14</sup> But it was too late. For in April, 1622 the Virginia Indians had attempted to wipe out the English colonists, and failing, had assured their own destruction.

The period from 1607 to 1622, as a matter of fact, had been one of uneasy peace.<sup>15</sup> The Virginia Indians were antagonistic but learned soon that they could not dislodge the English, whose armor protected them from arrows and whose will and determination protected them from the confusions and mistakes attendant upon exploration and pioneering. On their part, although they did not recognize Indian title to land, the English still tried always to purchase such land before taking it over, thus to respect Indian dignity and natural law. They were aware of the power of Powhatan and, after him, of Opechancanough, whose intent it was to league all Indians against them; still they felt that John Rolfe's marriage to Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, in 1613 secured once and for all such treaties as they had arranged with Powhatan. But peace was secured only because Powhatan hoped that the colonial experiment would fail through English ineptitude. When

<sup>12</sup> *Records of the Virginia Company*, III (Washington, 1933), 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 116, 128, 165-66.

<sup>14</sup> See Wesley Frank Craven, *The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, 1607-1689* (Baton Rouge, La., 1949), pp. 142-44; and Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 411-15.

<sup>15</sup> Accounts of the details vary. I follow those in Matthew P. Andrews, *Virginia, the Old Dominion* (New York, 1937), pp. 23-24, 30, 56-57, 66-70, 99-107, 104-107; and Craven, *The Southern Colonies*, p. 146.

Powhatan died in 1616, his successor, Opechancanough, continued the policy of watching and waiting. Meantime, the English became surer and surer that their peaceful, civilizing, Christianizing ways were winning over the Indians; and they encouraged the Indians to come to them as good friends. Then, on April 1, 1622 (March 22, O. S.) suddenly and without warning the Indians rose over a hundred-mile area and killed all Englishmen they could—at least 347. That the massacre failed to wipe out all the English was owing, God willing, to the last-minute warning of an Indian convert. God willed, moreover, English vengeance in punitive expeditions in 1622 and 1623. The problem now became one of simple survival. The savages had committed themselves. As the Reverend Samuel Purchas triumphantly pointed out, they no longer had any rights, since they had broken even the law of nature by which, as natural men, they should have lived.

The assurance with which Englishmen had first gone to the Virginia Indians was that of the Protestant humanist with his supreme confidence in the order of nature:

And surely [it had been written in a promotional tract of 1609] so desirous is man of civill society by nature, that he easily yields to discipline and government, if he see any reasonable motive to induce him to the same . . . for it is not the nature of men, but the education of men, which make them barbarous and uncivill, and therefore chaunge the education of men, and you shall see that their nature will be greatly rectified and corrected; seeing therefore men by nature so easily yelde to discipline and government upon any reasonable shewe of bettering their fortunes, it is everie mans dutie to travell both by sea and land, and to venture either with his person or with his purse, to bring the barbarous and savage people to a civill and Christian kinde of government, under which they may learne how to live holily, justly, and soberly in this world, and to apprehend the meanes to save their soules in the world to come, rather than to destroy them, or utterly to roote them out . . . <sup>16</sup>

After 1622, however, it seemed to most Englishmen in Virginia

<sup>16</sup> Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* [1609], ed. W. F. Craven (New York, 1937), Sig. [C 1v]–C 2r.

that destruction of the Indians was warranted. This free and open pioneering declaration is characteristic of a new sentiment:

Because our hands which before were tied with gentlenesse and faire usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Savages, not untying the Knot, but cutting it: So that we, who hitherto have had possession of no more ground then their waste, and our purchase at a valuable consideration to their owne contentment, gained; may now by a right of Warre, and law of Nations, invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us.<sup>17</sup>

The Indian became for seventeenth-century Virginians a symbol not of a man in the grip of devilish ignorance, but of a man standing fiercely and grimly in the path of civilization.<sup>18</sup> In 1644 when Opechancanough tried again to wipe out the English, the Virginians were ready, and rather easily put him down, captured him, and allowed him to be killed by his guard. His successor sued for peace and was granted it for an annual tribute and, inevitably, for all the land that the English might want. From this time on, with nearby Indians secured as allies against possible incursions by Indians from the north and west, Virginia Indian troubles were strictly frontier troubles, somehow distant from the civilized affairs of Jamestown and the tidewater plantations. In 1675 an Indian uprising forced frontier planters to unite in their own defense and to defy the royal governor who would not give them adequate support; the result, of course, was Bacon's rebellion, in which the Indian problem came to be only incidental. Steadily the Indian problem became the western problem which it was for American society in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Steadily such missionary work as was to be done was becoming a matter of distant, enlightened philanthropy and

<sup>17</sup> Edward Waterhouse, "A Declaration of the State of the Colonie and Affaires in Virginia" [1622], *Records of the Virginia Company*, III, 556-57.

<sup>18</sup> See John Martin, "The Manner Howe to Bringe the Indians into Subjection," a report prepared for the Virginia Company, December 15, 1622, *ibid.*, III, 704-706.

charity.<sup>19</sup> Meantime, Virginians, in mastering their new land, had mastered its aboriginal inhabitants.

When, in 1622, Virginians discovered they had to destroy or be destroyed, they ceased trying to understand the Indian; for such understanding presumably would avail them little. Hence such accounts of Indians as they wrote come before 1622 and reflect the early, optimistic views of men who are certain that savages can be readily civilized. The accounts from 1607 through 1622 are few and simply to the point.

In his *Nova Britannia* (1609) Richard Johnson reports briefly and straightforwardly. Virginia, he writes, "is inhabited with wild and savage people, that live and lie up and downe in troupes like heards of Deere in a Forrest: they have no law but nature, their apparell skinnes of beasts, but most goe naked: the better sort have houses, but poore ones, they have no Arts nor Science, yet they live under superior command such as it is, they are generally very loving and gentle, and do entertaine and relieve our people with great kindnesse: they are easy to be brought to good, and would fayne embrace a better condition."<sup>20</sup> In his *The New Life of Virginea* (1612) Johnson makes practical suggestions for bringing such natural men to a better condition. Seeing no need for violence, he advises the Virginia planters, "In steed of Iron and steele you must have patience and humanitie to manage their crooked nature to your form of civilitie . . ."<sup>21</sup>

Henry Spelman's manuscript *Relation of Virginea* (1613) fills in random but particular observations on Indian Life—on religion, habitations, marriage customs, naming of children, care of the sick, burial, government, executions, agriculture, quarrels, war, pastimes—yet his prime interest is still in the fact that there is a minimal sense of order and discipline, something analogous to civilized order, in Indian society. Of religion, he observes that

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Spotswood's discussion of his interest in work with Indian children in a letter to the Bishop of London, November 11, 1711, *Virginia Historical Society Collections*, n. s., I (1882), 126.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Force, *Tracts*, I, no. 6, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, I, no. 7, pp. 18-19.

although "for y<sup>e</sup> most part they worship y<sup>e</sup> divell," such worship is, however bad, still worship. And concerning Indian "Justis and goverment," he is pleased to discover that although he had thought the Indians were by nature lawless, yet he has found laws justly administered among them.<sup>22</sup>

The most hopeful view is that of Alexander Whitaker, minister at Henrico, in his *Good Newes from Virginia* (1613). Whitaker observes that the Indians acknowledge a "great good God" but that they fear the Devil more; they worship him and are virtually slaves of their "Priests," who "are no other but such as our English Witches are." Then:

Wherefore my brethren, put on the bowells of compassion, and let the lamentable estate of these miserable people enter in your consideration: One God created us, they have reasonable soules and intellectuall faculties as well as wee; we all have *Adam* for our common parent: yea, by nature the condition of us both is all one, the servants of sinne and slaves of the divell . . . .

But if any of us should misdoubt that this barbarous people is incapable of such heavenly mysteries, let such men know that they are farre mistaken in the nature of these men, for besides the promise of God, which is without respect of persons, made as well to unwise men after the flesh, as to the wise, &c. let us not thinke that these men are so simple as some have supposed them: for they are of body lustie, strong, and very nimble: they are a very understanding generation, quicke of apprehension, suddaine in their dispatches, subtile in their dealings, exquisite in their inventions, and industrious in their labour.

What kind of a society do these savage servants of Satan have?

Finally, there is a civill government amongst them which they strictly observe, and shew thereby that the law of Nature dwelleth in them: for they have a rude kinde of Common-wealth, and rough government, wherein they both honour and obey their Kings, Parents, and Governours, both greater and lesse, they observe the limits

<sup>22</sup> I have used the text of Spelman's relation printed in *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. Arber and Bradley (Edinburgh, 1910), "Introduction," I, ci-cxiv.

of their owne possessions, and inicroach not upon their neighbours dwellings . . . .

Thus there are in the Virginia Indians glimmerings of the light of civilized nature—glimmerings of an idea of rational, holy order with its government, laws, and sense of private property. Clearly “these unnurtured grounds of reason” in the Indians urge upon all Christians the hope and necessity of bringing them to Christian civility and its glories. Whitaker promises more details; but he is sure now of the essentials.<sup>23</sup>

The details are systematically given by Captain John Smith; the system assumed is that of the naturally minimal order of savage life, with its natural aspiration towards the higher life of Christian civility. Smith’s central account is in his *Map of Virginia, with a Description of the Countrey, the Commodities, People, Government and Religion* (1612).<sup>24</sup> (This is virtually the same account he gives in the *General History of Virginia* [1616].) He begins with names of tribes and statistics, and then proceeds to descriptions: his Indians are comely, brown (but all born white), close shaven, very strong and agile, inconstant, timorous, quick of apprehension, “all *Savage*,” covetous, malicious, as honest as could be expected. He is fascinated and revolted by their gaudy dress, their barbaric ornaments, and their monstrous body painting. He observes that they live in groups of six to twenty in houses “built like our Arbors” and that they have gardens which they work together. The men fish, hunt, war, and occupy themselves generally with “such manlike exercises”; and “the women and children do the rest of the worke.” In this careful manner Smith goes methodically through the whole range of Indian culture as he has observed it: diet, weapons, tools, utensils, boat-building, cloth-making, fishing, hunting, war, music, entertainment, and medicine.

But what interests him most is Indian religion and government, to which he devotes two separate sections of his account. “There

<sup>23</sup> *Good Newes from Virginia* [1613] (New York, 1936), pp. 24-27.

<sup>24</sup> *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. Arber and Bradley, I, 65-84.

is," he says, " yet in *Virginia* no place discovered to bee so *Savage* in which the *Savages* have not a religion . . . ." " But," he points out immediately, " their chiefe God they worship is the Divell." Devil-worship, in fact, deforms the whole of a religion dominated by evil priests who are agents of Satan and who must be paid Satanic homage. So the religious ceremonies of these people are diabolical, with outrageous costumes, conjuring, singing and dancing—even human sacrifice. They believe that only the chiefs and priests live after death, and these with the Devil whom they worship; the common people, they suppose, do not have life after death. There is hope for Christian conversion; some have sought it already. But for the present "... in this lamentable ignorance doe these poore soules sacrifice themselves to the Divell, not knowing their Creator."

Indian government, although savage, is more enlightened than Indian religion :

Although the countrie people be very barbarous; yet have they amongst them such government, as that their Magistrates for good commanding, and their people for due subjection and obeying, excell many places that would be counted very civill.

It is a monarchical government, with an emperor ruling over kings. The emperor is Powhatan; and he is supreme, ruling not by written laws, but by custom. " Yet when he listeth, his will is a law and must bee obeyed: not only as a king, but as halfe a God they esteeme him." Each king and his people hold their land directly from the emperor; and they live within its limits, fearing always to violate any of his commands; for he is hard and cruel. He has tried, Smith notes, to frighten the English, but he has failed, and peace has been secured. Throughout his account Smith has been sure that it will always remain so.

But it did not remain so. The massacre of 1622 made the hope of Christianization and civilization seem unreal beyond practical reason. Essentially, the problem presented by the Indian came to be taken as one not of securing peace but of surviving. So Virginians concerned themselves little with knowing the Indian; for he was literally not worth knowing. Not until the early eighteenth