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THE TREATMENT OF THE INDIANS
IN PLYMOUTH COLONY

DAVID BUSHNELL

In the popular tradition concerning Plymouth Colony, the Indian Squanto has acquired a place almost as honorable as the Mayflower Compact and the first Thanksgiving, and it can fairly be said that Massasoit does not lag far behind. This is as it should be, for the Compact could easily have remained a dead letter and Thanksgiving might never have become a holiday if the Indians of southeastern Massachusetts had chosen to pounce upon the Pilgrim settlement in the dreary winter of 1621. Despite the obvious importance of Indian relations, however, it does not appear that the Pilgrim Fathers carried with them a preconceived Indian policy when they set out from Holland. We know from Bradford that the lurid tales of Indian savagery then circulating through Europe had prepared them to expect the worst,¹ but they seem to have trusted in Captain Miles Standish to improvise a system of defense after their arrival in America. For their other relations with the natives, they trusted in the Ten Commandments. They would attempt to behave with Christian charity toward the Indian, and they intended to be treated with similar decency in return.

Thus the Pilgrims did not doubt for a moment that they should ultimately pay the Indians for the corn and utensils which they found abandoned on Cape Cod and at New Plymouth, nor did they hesitate to demand the promptest restitution whenever the natives stole property of their own. When Squanto was found guilty of petty intrigues inimical to Massasoit they agreed in principle to hand him over to justice, although they were naturally delighted to see the Wampanoag envoys return home before the extradition of the interpreter was finally decreed.² On the other hand, the Pilgrims insisted

¹ William Bradford, History of Plymouth Plantation (Boston, 1898), 33-34.
² Alexander Young, editor, Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers (Boston, 1841), 285-292.
that all Indian grievances should be pressed through proper channels. They did not deny the Massachusetts Indians’ grievances against Weston’s men, but the red men were fully justified in their fear that Plymouth would not permit the Wessagusset settlement to be wiped out by force. And when the natives therefore determined to wipe out the Pilgrims as well, Captain Standish hurried off to stage a preventive massacre at Massachusetts Bay. No further punishment was inflicted, however, and no action whatever was taken against the Cape sachems who had been implicated in the Massachusetts’ conspiracy.³ The natives were given to understand that treachery would not be tolerated, and the English settlers were consequently spared much future trouble. But it was also made clear that the Pilgrims bore the Indians no ill will, and that the aborigines had nothing to fear so long as they behaved themselves.

From the battle of Wessagusset to the outbreak of King Philip’s War few spectacular events mark the history of Plymouth Colony, and fewer still concern the Pilgrims’ relations with the Indians. During these fifty years of peace both peoples were learning little by little to know each other better. The Indians had much to teach about New England geography, while the superior technical knowledge of the English soon worked great changes in the natives’ way of living. It must be admitted, however, that this intercourse was rather one-sided. Squanto deserves full credit for his first lessons in corn cultivation, but the Pilgrims more than repaid the favor by instructing the Indians how to use metal farm instruments.⁴ It is certain that for a time the settlers were very glad to buy Indian basketwork.⁵ Other than this, however, the Indians had nothing to offer save their labor, their land, and a few furs. Their labor, moreover, was never economical. It was occasionally used for cutting firewood and even for ordinary


farm work, but the Town of Plymouth expressly forbade the employment of Indians in the former occupation because of their wasteful methods.\textsuperscript{6}

The Indians’ land was a different matter. In the strictest legal sense no “land question” ever existed, for the Pilgrims recognized that in English and also in Divine law the sole title to landed estate in New England belonged to the English crown. Even on a practical level, Indian claims to the greater part of Plymouth Colony were extremely weak, since most of their territory was used only intermittently as a game preserve. Along the western shore of Cape Cod Bay, furthermore, the native inhabitants had been almost entirely wiped out by the recent plague, so that the Pilgrims scarcely needed Massasoit’s gracious permission to take all the land they could use.\textsuperscript{7}

Nevertheless, the Pilgrims were scrupulously careful to distinguish Indian rights of “occupancy” whenever they pressed beyond the vacant tract on which they raised their first settlements. This was done by means of hoes, cloth, fencing, wampum, or a day’s ploughing; and since the Indians commonly recognized a joint title to lands, the settlers often attempted to have as many Indians as possible affix their marks to the deed of transfer.\textsuperscript{8} There was, however, no strict rule. At times the sacheum and his son sealed the transaction alone; often both the sacheum and the Indians who had enjoyed immediate use of the purchased tract would sign the deed; and occasionally individual Indians were reputed to have full power to sell the land they occupied. At the eastern end of Cape Cod there even lived a certain “Paumpmuniti alias Charles” who seems to have made a business of buying land from his fellow Indians in order to resell it to the Plymouth planters.\textsuperscript{9} On still other

\textsuperscript{6} Records of the Colony of New Plymouth (Boston, 1855-1861), iv, 189; vii, 161 (henceforth referred to as P.C.R.); Records of the Town of Plymouth (Plymouth, 1889), i, 172-173.

\textsuperscript{7} Young, Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers, 245.

\textsuperscript{8} P.C.R., ii, 131; iii, 145; Donald G. Trayser, Barnstable (Hyannis, 1939), 29; Ronald Oliver MacFarlane, “Indian Relations in New England 1620-1760” (MS. thesis, Harvard University, 1933), 21.

\textsuperscript{9} P.C.R., iv, 152; xii, 227-228, 235-236, 238-242; Alice Austin Ryder, Lands of Sippican (New Bedford, 1934), 21.
occasions lands were granted outright by the Indians. The gift of Massasoit to the original settlers is the most notable example, but later donations were also made in recognition of "kindness, respect, and love" shown an Indian's parents, or perhaps to win the favor of an influential politician. But if, at the other extreme, the Indians resolutely refused to part with their lands, the colonial government simply instructed prospective purchasers to look elsewhere. Under Plymouth law it was apparently necessary to pay for totally unoccupied lands if an Indian claimant presented himself, and at least one Indian was able to make his claim good twenty-two years after the English established themselves on his property.

Since these transactions seem to have been almost invariably open and aboveboard it would be unnecessary to discuss the process of purchasing land at any length if it were not for the common opinion that land was a permanent bone of contention between colonists and Indians, and a direct cause of King Philip's War. For one thing, it has often been claimed that the English cheated the Indians unmercifully by paying far less than their lands were actually worth, and at first glance this charge appears to have some basis in fact. Since early colonial deeds were often vague in setting down the boundaries of the tracts purchased, and since the money value of corn, shoes, kettles, and other legal tender varied with both time and place, it is impossible to construct a table showing the average price per acre of land bought from the Indians. Even if a precise scale in pounds, shillings, and iron hoes were available, it would not greatly clarify the problem, for just as land was less valuable to the Indians than to the Pilgrims, all metal artifacts were more highly prized by the natives than by the English settlers. Nevertheless, the Indians can hardly have failed to grasp the fact that a Pilgrim syndicate could buy native lands at Freetown and resell them within a few years at a five hun-

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dred per cent profit,\textsuperscript{12} and it is likely that even sharper rises in land values were not uncommon.

In defense of the Pilgrims it can fairly be said that they were no more to blame than the Indians themselves for what was a natural consequence of economic laws. Lands effectively brought within the range of world-wide economic forces by the expansion of English settlement were obviously worth more than a native hunting reservation, and the profit was not necessarily speculative when lands were improved before being resold. King Philip himself, who cited land “injuries” as one motive for his hostilities against Plymouth Colony, did not hesitate to continue his sales of tribal land almost up to the outbreak of war, the better to enjoy luxuries brought by the English.\textsuperscript{13} As a matter of fact, the sums paid by the English were often far from insignificant; in 1672 Philip sold sixteen square miles to Taunton for £190,\textsuperscript{14} and similarly high prices were not infrequent after the early years of settlement.

Still another line of attack on the Pilgrims’ land purchases has to do with the mental reservations which the Indians are supposed to have made when transferring their lands to the English. In particular it has been charged that whereas the Indians imagined they were transferring a mere right of usufruct, the English were no less convinced that they were acquiring absolute ownership. Although it is impossible to reconstruct exactly what went on in the Indians’ minds, their notions of property were so indefinite that some such confusion may easily have existed both in Plymouth and elsewhere in New England. However, it seems unreasonable to suppose that the Pilgrims’ interpreters were never able to find an intelligible rendering of the word “forever” which constantly appeared in the deeds of purchase, and when the Indians actually did attempt to reassert a right of ownership over land

\textsuperscript{12} Richard LeBaron Bowen, \textit{Early Rehoboth} (Rehoboth, 1945-1946), I, 80.


\textsuperscript{14} Samuel H. Emery, \textit{History of Taunton} (Syracuse, New York, 1893), 114-120.
they had already sold, the English were generous in buying off their pretensions. A long list could be made of the so-called "quit-claim" or "confirmatory" deeds which a new sachem would issue, for a slight compensation, for the purpose of renouncing any rights in tracts of land that had been formally alienated by his predecessors. The Pilgrims were equally reasonable with regard to lands claimed by more than one tribe or band of Indians.\textsuperscript{15} Multiple purchases of one sort or another became so frequent that in 1659 the Colony saw fit to issue firm orders against the practice, on the plausible grounds that such transactions cast doubt on the legality of the original purchase.\textsuperscript{16}

Whatever the Indians may have thought regarding the length of tenure accorded to English purchasers, there is no doubt that they frequently intended to continue hunting or fishing or gathering rushes on their former lands after the English had moved in. Certain Cape Indians likewise desired the right to continue taking blubber from whales washed up on the shore.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, the fact that such conditions were carefully written into the terms of purchase is one reason to doubt that the Indians were entirely unaware of what they were doing in parting with their lands. The specific recognition of Indian rights, moreover, must have spared the Pilgrims much controversy in later years. The records of Plymouth Colony contain numerous instances of Indians prosecuted for "trespass" on English property, and at times a township felt compelled to issue special orders for the purpose of excluding unwelcome Indians from its land.\textsuperscript{18} But it would be rash to assume that such misdemeanors resulted simply from the natives' theory of property, for Englishmen were frequently charged with exactly the same offense.

\textsuperscript{15} Baylies, \textit{New Plymouth}, ii, 225; iv, 90-91.

\textsuperscript{16} P.C.R., xi, 124.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. P.C.R., ii, 131; Paine, \textit{Harwich}, 84; Enoch Pratt, \textit{A Comprehensive History Ecclesiastical and Civil of Eastham, Wellfleet, and Orleans} (Yarmouth, 1844), 11.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Records of the Town of Plymouth}, 1, 94; Leonard Bliss, \textit{History of Rehoboth} (Boston, 1856), 49.
Unfortunately land prices and terms of occupancy were not the only questions capable of causing friction between Pilgrims and Indians. The vague boundaries established in the first land deeds inevitably led to occasional difficulties, although it seems that an amicable settlement was usually reached. While there may well have been instances of obtaining an Indian's "signature" to a deed while he was drunk or other cases of swindling the "poore Indians," the Plymouth authorities were more zealous than most colonial governments to prevent such abuses. From the very start of the settlement a legal permit from the Colony was required before land could be purchased from the natives,¹⁹ and this rule protected the Indians quite as much as it furthered the cause of an orderly English settlement. The law was not always enforced with equal severity, but at least one Pilgrim was actually disfranchised for the offense.²⁰

Even more significant is Plymouth's readiness to guarantee the Indians a full legal title to their lands. At times an Indian would request the government to register his property among the records of the Colony; in such cases the required document was promptly drawn up and the Indian's possession was secured on the same terms as English lands.²¹ The official registration of Indian wills, which became increasingly frequent as the natives learned the ways of judicial procedure, and which often amounted to a virtual entail, had exactly the same effect.²² In the case of Mount Hope, Pocasset, and other leading sites of Indian settlement it seems that the Pilgrims anticipated the natives' wishes, for it was ordered that such lands might not be purchased even if the Indians agreed to sell.²³ The colonists did not necessarily object even if the Indians desired to live and farm alongside the English. They acquiesced when the Indians insisted on retaining a reservation for

¹⁹ P.C.R., xi, 41, 183.
²¹ See, for instance, P.C.R., xii, 225, 242.
²² P.C.R., xii, 228, 231, 233-234; Paine, Harwich, 393.
²³ William Hubbard, A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians (Boston, 1677), 13.
their own use within the bounds of a township that had otherwise extinguished the native titles; and the records of the Town of Plymouth contain more than one instance of land rented or granted outright to individual Indians.24

For the main body of Pilgrim settlers trade was far less important than land. Indian corn was found necessary for the survival of the colonists during their first years in New England, and it was the fur trade that allowed the struggling colony to win its financial independence from the London adventurers. But as soon as the Colony became agriculturally self-sufficient it did not need Wampanoag corn. The fur resources of the Pilgrims' immediate neighbors were always limited, so that Plymouth fur traders were soon compelled to look farther afield, in Maine and Connecticut. The local trade nevertheless throws considerable light on the Pilgrims' relations with the Indians. Official policy was to organize it as a monopoly on somewhat the same lines as the fur trade on the Kennebec. To make matters more certain, the colonists were strictly forbidden to do any trading whatever that involved paying the Indians in money, arms, or liquor.25 But the monopoly system does not seem to have been rigorously enforced, and the holders of the concession were not always very active. In 1640, therefore, it was decided that any colonist might "trade for corne, beads, venison, or some tymes for a beaver skine" without violating Plymouth laws.26

A more effective limitation on the local trade was the continuing prohibition of giving the Indians money, liquor, or arms. The first of these prohibitions was finally lifted in 1669, only to be restored eight years later on the plea that the Indians might use their money for liquor.27 And this excuse is not at all improbable, for the Pilgrims felt very strongly indeed on the subject of "drinking Indians." "They drinke themselves drunke," it was observed, "and in their drunkenes

24 Records of the Town of Plymouth, I, 41, 97, 172.
25 P.C.R., I, 54; xi, 33, 184.
27 P.C.R., xi, 184, 244.
INDIAN TREATMENT, PLYMOUTH COLONY

commit much horred wickednes, as murthering theire nearest relations, &c, as by sadd and woefull experience is made manifest." 28 Even for medical purposes a permit was required before liquor could be given to a native; 29 and few crimes appear so often in the Plymouth court records as the sale of liquor to the Indians.

The colonists felt almost equally strongly on the subject of arming the natives. It is well known that their strongest objection to Thomas Morton of Merrymount was the fact that he supplied his Indian friends with arms and ammunition. 30 This concern is understandable. Whereas the liquor traffic was frowned upon as much because it endangered the Indians' souls as because it threatened to disturb public order, the sale of guns to the Indians was deemed to strike at the very basis of the colonists' security. It is thus remarkable that throughout the 1660's and up to the eve of King Philip's War the prohibition was repeatedly suspended as regards powder and shot and then put back in full force; 31 but on the whole it was strictly enforced, and precautions were taken to prevent the transfer of arms to the natives under the pretense of lending them guns to hunt game in English employment. 32

Despite the list of prohibited articles, the Indians remained eager to trade with the Pilgrims. They were gradually replacing their traditional clothing, tools, and household utensils with the English products, 33 and their sudden awakening to the benefits of civilization is strikingly illustrated by the growing use of wampum as a medium of exchange. Before the coming of the Pilgrims, the Wampanoags and their satellites had felt little need for either commerce or a form of money. But

28 P.C.R., iii, 60.
29 P.C.R., xi, 184.
32 P.C.R., xi, 185. On the enforcement of these regulations, see the index to the first six volumes of the P.C.R.; during King Philip's War giving arms to the Indians became a capital offense (P.C.R., v, 173).
soon after the Dutch instructed the Pilgrims in the potential value of shell beads, this situation changed abruptly. Even so, wampum did little more than facilitate the act of trading; it did not provide the Indians with a favorable trade balance. The Indians of Plymouth Colony could satisfy some of their needs by turning to the manufacture of wampum themselves, but in this industry they never attained the proficiency of the Narragansetts and Pequots.\textsuperscript{34}

To obtain English manufactures, therefore, the Wampanoags and Nausets had to supplement their meagre stocks of furs and wampum with the one thing which they had in abundance and which the English ardently desired: their lands. It is thus easy to understand why the relative values of land and iron kettles were very different among the Indians from what they were among the Pilgrims, and one consequence of this relation was that the trade and land questions tended to merge together. The best examples of the process are to be found among the sachems themselves, who combined the greatest ambition for personal improvement with the greatest territorial resources. Massasoit’s son Alexander, for instance, sold land to redeem a debt which he owed to a Plymouth tavern-keeper who was later convicted of repeatedly selling liquor to the natives; another of Alexander’s deeds could not be recognized as valid in later years until it was established by witnesses that he had been fully sober when affixing his mark to the paper.\textsuperscript{35} There is no evidence, however, that the liquor traffic was a major factor in the land problem. A better example of the connection between trade and land sales is offered by Alexander’s brother and successor, King Philip, who is said to have been exceedingly fond of elegant apparel. As a result of this weakness, Philip surpassed all other Indians in the number of his ill-considered land sales.\textsuperscript{36}

The problems of land tenure and trade with the Indians,


\textsuperscript{35} Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, 1, 79-83.

\textsuperscript{36} Drake, *Old Indian Chronicle*, 58-62.
strictly speaking, could not be separated from the broader question of English authority over the native tribes of New England. The territorial claims of the King of England were more modest in extent than those of the Crown of Castile, and they were based on the sighting of new lands by Cabot and his successors rather than on discovery and a Papal bull. From the point of view of the native inhabitants, however, there could be little difference. The entire process of acquiring land from the natives was based on the assumption that all property rights in New England resided ultimately in the English crown. Similarly the granting of fur monopolies and the careful regulation of all Indian trade reflected a firm belief that the only legitimate government in New England was that of the English king and the colonial authorities acting in his behalf. In his first treaty with the Pilgrims, to be sure, Massasoit obtained the anomalous status of "friend and ally" to his ultimate sovereign, James I, but such glaring inconsistencies do not appear in subsequent treaties.\(^37\) The mere fact of agreeing to become His Majesty's subjects did not, however, place the Indians in the same category as his English vassals. On one occasion, the town of Rehoboth asked Plymouth Court to approve the admission of "Sam, the Indian that keeps the cows," as an inhabitant, but the absence of any further reference to Sam suggests that the petition was not granted.\(^38\) Nor did any Indian ever obtain political rights in Plymouth Colony.

The status of the Indians was further differentiated by the existence of a distinct system for their immediate government. Though willing to assert their jurisdiction over the entire native population of the Colony, the Plymouth authorities were not equally willing to accept the responsibilities and the nuisance of regulating all the Indians' affairs. As a result, the Pilgrims were extremely slow to part with the services of the sachems. When a group of Sandwich Indians asked the Colony Court in 1665 for permission to organize "some orderly way of


\(^38\) Bliss, *Rehoboth*, 60.
government," apparently under the supervision of the missionary Richard Bourne, the Colony agreed only on condition that the new arrangement in no way interfere with the prerogatives of their "superior sachem."\textsuperscript{39} Respect for the sachems was not, however, an invariable rule. As the Indians grew more familiar with English judicial procedure and brought their own disputes into Plymouth courts, the authorities sometimes bluntly told them to refer them to their sachems.\textsuperscript{40} But the colonial government increasingly saw fit to intervene in such cases, and this was particularly true whenever English interests were indirectly involved. It is not surprising that Plymouth Court agreed to hear a case in which an Indian sued squaw sachem Awashunks of Saconet for illegally retaining lands which he desired to sell to the English settlers, nor that the Court found in favor of the plaintiff.\textsuperscript{41} Neither was there ever any doubt regarding jurisdiction in disputes between Englishmen and Indians. The procedure in such cases was not clearly formulated before 1670, when Plymouth enacted that all ordinary disputes between the two races should be heard in first instance by the selectmen of the towns, but the principle had never been questioned. Indeed, the Colony Court seems to have taken a hand directly in many instances, despite the order of 1670, and it reserved the right to treat all cases involving land titles or capital crimes.\textsuperscript{42}

The separate status of the Indian population was also emphasized by the existence of a special legislation which affected the native but not his white neighbor. The best-known examples of such laws are those already mentioned regarding the sale of arms and liquor, but many more restrictions were imposed upon the Indians. The Indian could not buy a horse

\textsuperscript{39} P.C.R., iv, 80.

\textsuperscript{40} P.C.R., v, 102.

\textsuperscript{41} P.C.R., vii, 191. The details of this case are not entirely clear. See also Thomas (Benjamin) Church, \textit{Entertaining Passages Relating to Philip's War} (S. G. Drake, editor, Boston, 1875), 6, note 12; Samuel G. Drake, \textit{The Aboriginal Races of North America} (New York, 1880), 251; Baylies, \textit{New Plymouth}, iv, 63-67.

\textsuperscript{42} P.C.R., xi, 227-228.
without a permit from the Colony, nor could be acquire any boat except his own primitive canoe.\textsuperscript{43} He could not be trusted with sales on credit,\textsuperscript{44} nor could he shoot his gun or make other unpleasant commotion on the Sabbath day or at night. Indeed, the pagan Indian was arbitrarily required to keep the Sabbath as quietly as the Christian settler.\textsuperscript{45} Since the conglomeration of Indians in the capital during court sessions was distasteful to the Pilgrims, the natives were forbidden to draw near on such occasions.\textsuperscript{46}

Even regulations that held good for members of both races were not always equally applied. Thieves of either race could be compelled to make amends by labor; but in the case of at least five Indian thieves this servitude was made perpetual, and they were sold as slaves.\textsuperscript{47} However, even though the penalties against Indians were often different from those decreed for English criminals, they were not necessarily harsher. It was suggested to one group of Indians that they might pay for killing an English mare by destroying wolves on the Colony's account.\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, an "ingenuous" confession sufficed more than once to win easy terms for an Indian culprit. A striking case is that of an Indian who had readily confessed to raping a white woman. The statutory penalty was death, but the Indian was let off with a whipping and an order to leave the Colony "considering hee was but an Indian, and therefore in an incapacity to know the horibleness of the wickednes of this abominable act, with other cercomstances considered."\textsuperscript{49}

Similar reasonableness is shown in the law of 1674 which held that Indians should not be bound by English rules of sworn testimony in court, but instead should testify as in a court of chancery; the Plymouth judges were to use their own

\textsuperscript{43} P.C.R., xi, 65, 184.
\textsuperscript{44} P.C.R., xi, 259.
\textsuperscript{45} P.C.R., xi, 60-61, 66.
\textsuperscript{46} P.C.R., vi, 113; xi, 243.
\textsuperscript{47} P.C.R., v, 151-152, 270; vi, 108, 153.
\textsuperscript{48} P.C.R., iv, 17.
\textsuperscript{49} P.C.R., vi, 98.
disccretion in assessing the value of their declarations. Likewise, Indian jurors were occasionally empanelled in cases involving their fellows, although this was not a frequent occurrence. But the Pilgrims' interest in fair treatment of the natives is shown best of all by the willingness of Plymouth courts to grant the Indians redress whenever they were wronged by their white neighbors. The most common offense of the English was negligence in pasturing their cattle, pigs, and horses, with the result that the Pilgrims' animals repeatedly trampled down the Indians' corn fields. The frontier settlement of Rehoboth was the most "unsufferable" offender. Year after year Indian complaints reached the Plymouth court, which ordered the townspeople to build fences around Indian fields at their own expense, and to construct a pound where the Indians might keep delinquent animals until proper compensation was paid. The chief exception was made in the case of Rhode Island horses, which were to be seized outright. In 1671 the Colony went so far as to name officers in each town to view the damage done to Indian fields, and only in the case of Indians living within an English township did the responsibility for fencing rest entirely with the natives.

The same protection was accorded Indians who suffered burglary, false witness, and abuse at the hands of the English, or even those who found that their kettles had been penetrated by a hunter's stray bullet. Recourse was had to intercolonial diplomacy when a Boston man failed to pay a Cape Indian for his services in catching fish. The most spectacular instance of Pilgrim justice, however, was the execution of three English servants for the murder of an Indian bearing wampum. Bradford relates that "some of the rude and igno-

50 P.C.R., xi, 296.  
52 P.C.R., iii, 21, 106, 167, 192, 222. The Indians were likewise instructed to build pounds, possibly because the frontiersmen were slow to carry out the Colony's orders.  
53 P.C.R., v, 62; xi, 143.  
54 P.C.R., ii, 20, 89; v, 152; vi, 24, passim.  
55 John A. Goodwin, The Pilgrim Republic (Boston, 1888), 545.
rant sort murmured” in protest, but exemplary justice was inflicted.  

The Plymouth authorities were not content with mere protection of the Indian against English settlers; they were no less eager to save him from the Devil. With the friendly Massasoit, surprisingly enough, the Christian Gospel found no acceptance. The Wampanoag sachem was primarily interested in the material advantages which a new religion had to offer, and it would seem that he never received a satisfactory answer in this respect. Shortly before his death, Massasoit unsuccess- fully attempted to write a clause against further missionary efforts into the terms of a sale of land. With the Indians of Cape Cod, however, the Pilgrims had better luck. The Cape Indians, like Mayhew’s charges on Martha’s Vineyard, were relatively isolated from their fellow heathen, and the Cape was the scene of the earliest and most vigorous missionary activity. It appears that Richard Bourne, a wealthy merchant of Sandwich, and Captain Thomas Tupper, a Pilgrim soldier, began their work among the natives even before John Eliot’s first visits to the Indians of Massachusetts Bay, but Eliot himself turned his attention to the Cape as early as 1648. In that year he was sent by the United Colonies to end dissension within the English Church at Yarmouth; and Eliot did not miss the opportunity to preach to the local Indians. One deceitful sachem promised to bring his subjects to hear the Apostle’s lesson and then sent them off on a fishing expedition instead. Other Indians, however, were more amenable, and Eliot was happy to learn of a vague local tradition that the natives had once known the true God but had somehow lost contact with Him in the course of time.  

58 Hubbard, Narrative, 8.  
59 Nathaniel Morton, New England’s Memorial (Boston, 1855), 379, 382, 384.  
The most intensive missionary work, on the other hand, had to await the formation of the Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England by act of Parliament in 1649.\(^{61}\) It is possible that Plymouth received less than its due share of the Corporation's remittances, but Bourne and his associates obtained regular grants for the hiring of interpreters and miscellaneous expenses, while the Plymouth authorities were generally assigned a few pounds a year to distribute among "well deserving Indians."\(^{62}\) Richard Bourne continued to lead the way; in 1670 he was formally ordained over the Colony's first Indian church, and to assure the permanence of his efforts, he obtained a grant of land for his converts at Mashpee. Similar reservations of "Praying Indians" were established elsewhere.\(^{63}\) On the eastern side of the Cape the Reverend Samuel Treat rivalled Bourne in the number of his conversions, becoming especially popular with the natives through the visits that he made to their wigwams.\(^{64}\) By the outbreak of King Philip's War, progress had even been made in the center of the Colony, in the vicinity of Middleboro; here John Sassamon, a Harvard alumnus and protégé of Eliot, was established as the first regularly settled Indian minister in New Plymouth.\(^{65}\)

As a result of these combined efforts, Plymouth contained well over a thousand Indian converts in 1674; in addition, 142 of these had learned to read their own language, and nine had been taught to read English.\(^{66}\) By 1685 the total was approaching 1,500. Naturally a small proportion of these Indians were fully accredited members of a Christian Church; the lists mere-


\(^{65}\) Goodwin, *Pilgrim Republic*, 536-538.

ly included "such as do, before some of their magistrates or civil rulers, renounce their former heathenish manners, and give up themselves to be Praying Indians. . . ." 67 But neither could all the English settlers be enrolled as Visible Saints. The fact remains that the Indian population of Plymouth Colony was almost as thoroughly Christianized in 1685 as the Pilgrims themselves, for there were little more than two thousand Indians living in the Colony when the English arrived, 68 and the most obstinate had meanwhile been eliminated by King Philip's War.

The extent of the missionaries' success is further shown by the fact that the natives had come to shoulder the greater part of their own spiritual guidance. From the very start, the missionaries had been assisted by Indian "teachers" and interpreters, and by 1686 a friend of the natives could complain that Indian teachers received three or four pounds a year for constant work, whereas English missionaries were paid up to £20 for preaching to the Indians only three or four times. 69 Equally significant was the loyalty of the Praying Indians to Plymouth Colony during King Philip's War.

The long years of peace with the Indians that had distinguished Plymouth Colony came to an abrupt end in the reign of Philip, the third Wampanoag sachem known to the Plymouth settlers. In view of the generally fair treatment which had been accorded to the Plymouth Indians, it is surprising that an Indian war should begin in New Plymouth; and it is more so that the Indians should attribute the entire guilt to the Pilgrim Fathers. Yet Philip himself did not hesitate to remind the people of Massachusetts Bay that they were shedding the blood of their sons merely to pull Plymouth chestnuts out of the fire. 70 Moreover, the bitter controversy between Philip


69 The Hinckley Papers, 131-132.

70 John Gorham Palfrey, History of New England During the Stuart Dynasty (Boston, 1876), III, 188, note 2; Goodwin, Pilgrim Republic, 551.
and Plymouth Colony has given rise to a strong tradition that pictures Philip as a veritable Indian statesman who saw the impending doom of his race at the hands of his grasping neighbors and staked the redress of countless legitimate grievances on a carefully laid conspiracy against English rule in New England. If the war was well planned, however, the evidence does not seem to support it. Philip appears to have begun the struggle with a wholly inadequate store of arms, and despite both threats and entreaties many of his immediate neighbors had not yet decided which side to support when war broke out.\(^71\)

Philip's unpreparedness can probably be explained by the hypothesis that he had only begun his scheming when his hand was forced by premature revelation of the plot. The necessity for his supreme effort is less easily established. Philip laid greatest stress on the unfair absorption of the Indians' "planting lands," both by unjust arbitration of land disputes and by such practices as getting an Indian drunk in order to purchase his lands for a fraction of their worth,\(^72\) but the general land policy of Plymouth Colony would suggest that he can have had no very serious grievances in this respect. In particular there is no specific mention in Plymouth records or in contemporary narratives of major land disputes with Philip; and though the English settlers would hardly leave a fair statement of Philip's complaints, one could at least expect a passing reference. Likewise it has never been shown that the Wampanoags lacked sufficient farm land; by the time of Philip's War, in fact, they could get along with much less than before, thanks to new methods learned from the English. Nor could the reduction of their hunting lands have disastrous effects for a primarily agricultural people. Philip further complained of the damages done to Indian corn by English cattle and of the sale of liquor to the natives.\(^73\) In both cases, however, the

\(^{71}\) Church, *Entertaining Passages*, 5-14; Thomas Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts* (Salem, 1795), 1, 267.


Plymouth government was quite as anxious as he was to correct the abuse. The frontier settlements found some difficulty in enforcing the Colony's orders, yet probably neither abuse was so serious as to explain a recourse to arms.

Thus it is not impossible that Palfrey was right in regarding the war as a wholly wanton and even irrational attack by the Indians upon Plymouth Colony; such an hypothesis is indirectly supported by the legends that Philip himself opposed war but that his policy was influenced by young braves chafing under an unwelcome peace.74 A wild venture of this sort would naturally be encouraged by the various petty irritations which arose along the frontier, and for which both Englishmen and Indians were to blame. In fairness to Philip, however, it must be said that the trampling of cornfields and the sale of liquor were not the only irritations. There were also political grievances that the sachem for some reason failed to emphasize. It has already been seen that the Indians' nominal acceptance of Plymouth authority became increasingly real as the English settlements were consolidated; and even though one cannot unreservedly state the rights and wrongs of the matter, it appears that the Plymouth authorities tended to be somewhat tactless in their dealings with the later Wampanoag rulers.

Only once was there any serious doubt of the loyalty of Massasoit; it was cast by Squanto, and the white man's good friend nearly lost his life when his falseness was discovered. In return for the chief's friendship the English more than once came to his support against Indian rivals.75 On the accession of Massasoit's son Alexander in 1662, however, rumors of treachery at once began to gain credence, and the sachem was ordered to come to Plymouth to explain his conduct. After a probably justifiable delay he appeared at the Pilgrim capital, satisfied the authorities of his loyalty, and was immediately


dismissed. Despite the romantic tale that Alexander died of chagrin soon afterwards, there is no real evidence that he was mistreated by the English settlers during this episode.\textsuperscript{76} Yet no sooner had he been succeeded by his younger brother than exactly the same process was repeated with Philip. Again it seems that there was no basis for Plymouth's suspicions, and the incident was closed with a renewal of the treaty between the English and the Wampanoags. New suspicions arose in 1667. Once more the authorities recognized in the end that they possessed no concrete evidence and let the matter drop, although they compelled Philip to pay the cost of the proceedings.\textsuperscript{77} Nevertheless relations with Philip were, on the whole, friendly during the first part of his rule. On one occasion, he apparently vowed to suspend land sales for a seven-year period, but the exact circumstances of this decision are by no means clear.\textsuperscript{78} He did not keep his pledge, and it is probable that his need for English money to live in royal state was as much responsible for his change of heart as pressure from the Plymouth authorities.

In 1671, however, more serious trouble occurred. The usual rumors had arisen, in part because of a murder near Boston in which Philip was rumored to have had a hand;\textsuperscript{79} but it is quite possible that the English had more important grounds for their suspicions, since they viewed the matter in a much more serious light than any of the preceding "conspiracies." Philip ultimately agreed to meet Plymouth envoys at Taunton on April 10, provided a Massachusetts delegation went along to ensure fair play, but far from showing remorse over his recent activities, he countered by accusing Plymouth of certain unspecified injuries to his "planting land." According to the colonists, it was then shown that his charges were absurd, whereupon Philip admitted his military preparations but


\textsuperscript{77} P.C.R., IV, 25-26, 151, 164-166.

\textsuperscript{78} Drake, \textit{Aboriginal Races}, 198-199.

claimed they were directed against the Narragansetts. This, too, is said to have been disproved, and Philip finally admitted that he had been conspiring against the English “from his own naughty heart.” He reaffirmed his allegiance to the English crown and to New Plymouth, and agreed to deposit his arms as security for future good behavior.\textsuperscript{80}

Peace now seemed to have returned, and at this juncture the Praying Indians of Cape Cod came loyally to the government’s support with a spate of treaties couched in the most picturesque phrases:

\ldots forasmuch as the English, and wee, the poor Indians, are as of one blood, as Acts 17th, 26, for wee doe confess wee poor Indians in our lives were as captives under Sathan, and our sachems, doe-ing their wills whose breath perisheth, as Psalms 146, 3, 4; Exodus 15, 1, 2, &c; but now wee know by the word of God, that it is better to trust in the great God and his strength. Psalm 118, 8, 9; and besides, wee were like unto wolves and Lyons, to destroy one another; but wee hope and believe in God; therefore wee desire to enter into covenant with the English respecting our fidelitie, as Isai: 11, 6.\ldots\textsuperscript{81}

Not all Indians, however, showed this humility. Since the alarm had been general, Plymouth also attempted to disarm many of Philip’s friends and subjects, and in this endeavor the authorities met with some resistance. Awashunks of Saco-net, for instance, was bullied into accepting the English demands, but she could induce only forty-two of her subjects—not including her two sons—to obey the order for surrender of arms.\textsuperscript{82} Nor was this truly surprising, since even a largely sedentary people such as the Indians of Plymouth Colony still derived at least part of their livelihood from hunting, and it would seem that the bow and arrow had long gone out of fashion. Philip himself, moreover, bluntly refused to meet the full demands of the colonial government. He insisted, prob-

\textsuperscript{80} P.C.R., v, 63; Drake, \textit{Old Indian Chronicle}, 64-72; Hubbard, \textit{Narrative}, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{81} P.C.R., v, 66-67.

\textsuperscript{82} P.C.R., v, 75; Drake, \textit{Old Indian Chronicle}, 74-75, 81-82.
ably with some justification, that the treaty of Taunton referred only to arms that he and his men had left outside when they entered to confer with the English, and he refused to hand over any more. Moreover, he appealed to the government of Massachusetts Bay which strangely informed Plymouth that the Taunton agreements did not make Philip a subject of the Colony, but merely a friend. Nevertheless Philip was finally brought to terms in much the same manner as before. A general conference was arranged, although this time Connecticut, too, sent a delegation; a full confession was obtained; and Philip agreed to pay a fine of £100 and to kill a yearly quota of five wolves in payment for the trouble he had caused.83

The fine which was thus levied against Philip was clearly unreasonable, even for an Indian chief; indeed it may well be connected with the fact that one year later Philip was compelled to mortgage a small tract of land in view of his inability to pay certain monies that he owed to the Colony.84 This time, however, peace really did return to New Plymouth, and it lasted until early in 1675. The English chroniclers, to be sure, were convinced that Philip began plotting a general war immediately after the humiliation at Taunton, but conditions were outwardly so calm that the embargo on giving arms and ammunition to the Indians was partially lifted in 1674.85 Then in February of the following year new reports of Philip's impending treachery were carried to Plymouth by John Sassamon, the Indian preacher at Middleboro. Following the traditional procedure, Philip came to Court, but no conclusive evidence was found against him, and he was allowed to return home with a mere admonition.86 Yet the problem was not so easily solved, for, a week after his own visit to Plymouth, Sassamon had been found dead beneath the ice of Assowamsett Pond. There were at once some suspicions of foul play, and later in

83 P.C.R., v, 76-79.
85 Hubbard, Narrative, 13; P.C.R., xi, 237.
86 P.C.R., x, 362-363.
the spring of 1675 "by a strange Providence, an Indian was found, that by Accident was standing unseen upon a Hill [and had seen three of Philip's men] murder the said Sassamon." 87

The tardy appearance of such a witness seems somewhat suspicious, and the Indians had a story that the informer was merely trying to avoid payment of a gambling debt by having his creditors executed for murder. Still another version implied that Sassamon was murdered because of his missionary activities. 88 On the other hand, it is not impossible that the Indian was telling the truth. There is nothing inherently implausible in the explanation that he had refrained from doing his duty sooner for fear that the same thing would happen to him that had happened to Sassamon, and that the truth was finally divulged when he shared his knowledge with a Praying Indian. 89 Be that as it may, the three Indian culprits were haled before Plymouth Court, tried by a jury to which certain of the "most indifferentest, gravest, and sage Indians" had been added, and duly executed. 90

Nothing was done, however, about Philip himself, for Plymouth showed a laudable dislike of proceeding on mere suspicion. Plymouth hoped that as soon as the Wampanoag sachem observed that no action was intended against him for lack of evidence he would desist from his warlike intentions; around the middle of June a conciliatory message was sent off in which he was merely requested to disband his forces. 91 But, unfortunately, the authorities were too optimistic. Whether Sassamon had been correct in February or not, by June there was no doubt that Philip was engaged in a general conspiracy. The hostile nature of his activities was amply confirmed by so trustworthy a witness as Benjamin Church, who obtained his information directly from meetings with his good friend

87 Hubbard, Narrative, 15; Increase Mather, History of King Philip's War (Boston, 1862), 47-48.
89 Hubbard, Narrative, 15; Increase Mather, King Philip's War, 47-48.
90 P.C.R., v, 167-168; Drake, Old Indian Chronicle, 96.
91 P.C.R., x, 363-364; Hubbard, Narrative, 16-17.
Awashunks and with other Indians, including the very envoys sent out by Philip to win support for his cause. After the middle of the month, border incidents became frequent, and after an English settler had been goaded into firing the first shot, the Indians launched their war with the Swanzey massacre of June 24.

The military history of King Philip’s War is too well known to require retelling, and the most important engagements took place outside Plymouth Colony. The struggle, nevertheless, had a profound effect upon the condition of Plymouth’s Indian inhabitants. The Praying Indians, to begin with, were subjected to considerable suspicion despite their unwavering loyalty to the English. This distrust was unfounded, but it is easily understandable in view of the aroused feeling of the English settlers and the common report that an Indian’s chief delight was to “rob, kill and roast, lead captive, slay . . . blaspheme.” It was some time before the Pilgrims could realize that such things were not going to happen on Cape Cod; and hence it was only in the face of a rapidly deteriorating military situation that the Colony finally agreed to a general enlistment of loyal Indians. But such slights as this were nothing compared with the lot of the hostile Indians. An indeterminate number perished as casualties of war or fled from the Colony never to return; a relatively small number, including Church’s friends from Saco, were permitted to make a timely submission and resettle in Plymouth Colony on much the same terms as before. The rest of Philip’s followers, however, were classed as prisoners of war and formally enslaved. It would seem that many Indians who had been encouraged to surrender in the

92 Church, Entertaining Passages, 5-14.
94 From “Upon the Elaborate Survey,” by B.H. in Hubbard, Narrative; no page number in original, page 24 in Drake edition (Roxbury, 1865).
95 P.C.R., v, 186-187; Church, Entertaining Passages, 67-69. It is not true, however, that Plymouth used no Indian troops until the spring of 1676; acting apparently on his own authority, Church had made use of them at the very start of the war.
hope of kinder treatment met exactly the same fate.\textsuperscript{96}

The General Court of November, 1676, determined that all adult male captives must be sold out of the Colony,\textsuperscript{97} but the rule did not apply in every case. Ringleaders of the revolt and any Indians who had taken part in major atrocities were summarily tried and executed; nor did the authorities spare certain war criminals who had been given quarter by Captain Church, for his commission did not authorize an indiscriminate show of mercy.\textsuperscript{98} Likewise Philip's young son, though scarcely an adult male Indian, was condemned to be sold as a slave to Bermuda; but this might almost be termed an act of generosity, since several Plymouth clergymen, citing Scriptural precedents, had advised that he be put to death for the future security of the state.\textsuperscript{99} Women and children, on the other hand, were allowed to remain in the Colony, where they were employed as domestic servants or perhaps taught some useful craft. Indeed, a few male prisoners were similarly favored; Captain Church, for instance, was allowed to retain some of his own captives on the interesting condition that they should perform military service under his command if need arose.\textsuperscript{100}

Although the fate of the hostile Indians thus varied rather widely, they were all eliminated as an independent factor in the life of Plymouth Colony. The problem of Indian relations, therefore, was decidedly eased in many respects. Military preparedness could be comfortably forgotten as far as any internal danger was concerned. Similarly the land question was greatly simplified by the confiscation of rebel lands, and, in fact, one group of loyal Indians was asked to accommodate a few English settlers on their lands in payment for the Colony's services in defending them against King Philip.\textsuperscript{101} The decline of the


\textsuperscript{97} P.C.R., xi, 242.

\textsuperscript{98} P.C.R., v, 204-206; Hubbard, \textit{Narrative}, 98, 109; Church, \textit{Entertaining Passages}, 100, 101, 178-179.

\textsuperscript{99} Baylies, \textit{New Plymouth}, iii, 190-191.

\textsuperscript{100} P.C.R., v, 207, 225; MacFarlane, \textit{Indian Relations}, 631.

\textsuperscript{101} P.C.R., v, 224-225; vi, 63; x, 407-408.
pagan population, moreover, brought the first phase of missionary activity to its close.

The elimination of the stronger sachems, however, finally compelled the Colony to devise a regular system of Indian government. This was done by a law of July, 1682, which ordered that every ten adult Indians should unite to elect one of their number as a "tithingman" for the general supervision of their affairs. All the Indian "tithingmen" of a given township, in turn, were to gather together to hold courts among the natives, to name Indian constables, and to assess the Indians' taxes. In these functions they were to be assisted by a specially appointed English overseer, who was instructed to collect his charges and once each year read aloud the laws of Plymouth Colony.¹⁰²

Otherwise there was no major change in the treatment of the Indians; they were about as well cared for in Plymouth courts as before, and they continued to be protected against guns and liquor. Instead it was the Indians who had changed, for Plymouth was now truly a Christian commonwealth, and in the fight for survival the lowly Praying Indians had shown themselves fitter than King Philip. Their descendants, in fact, are still living in the Old Colony today. They are, of course, much fewer in number, but this results in part from a natural process of race mixture. In any case, it would be unfair to blame the Pilgrim Fathers for the extinction of the Indian population. The most that can be said against them is that they introduced a new system of diseases and of society to which the Indians could not fully adjust themselves for several generations. Certainly the battle casualties of the Wampanoags cannot be blamed solely upon the English. It is true that the Pilgrims generally treated the natives as a race apart, but there is no evidence that, on the whole, they dealt more harshly with the Indians than with one another.

¹⁰² P.C.R., xi, 252-253.