"The respective attitudes of the Indians and the English towards one another have often been polarized as "positive" and "negative." The French terms la bienveillance and la malveillance seem more appropriate, as opposing derivatives of vouloir, closely related in meaning and origin to "good will" and "ill will", but capable of broader interpretation. Hence my choice of an introductory aphorism that echoes the ancient proverb, chacun à son goût — "there is no disputing preferences."

A Flash-Back to Ancient Times

Neither mythology nor poetry can be called my forte. Yet today I have to call on both to illustrate my subject. The confrontation of Indians and Englishmen in northeastern North America in the reign of James I was not of the Indians' making, and only incidentally can it be blamed on the Englishmen, jointly or severally. It was brought about by a historical phenomenon called colonization. This phenomenon had been noted for many centuries before there were any Englishmen, but the earliest well-known conflict caused by it is also the first one to offer any semblance to a parallel with the Jamestown, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay colonies. Fernand Braudel (1973) has called the protohistorical colonizing of the Greeks and Phoenicians "a dramatic upheaval." I believe that the same phrase can be applied to the English arrival in North America as colonizers.

Mythology would have it that the Troy of which Homer sang was founded as a colony by Cretans, either directly or by way of Athens (Graves 1955: 2.259-345). Since this would have been considerably earlier historically than any known Phoenician venture of the kind, allow me to aver that the Greeks were the prime colonizers of antiquity. (Please note that the Cretans seem to have been ante-Greek Greeks, linguistically.) A conflict arose between the Cretan-Greek Trojans and an assembly of other Greeks a dozen centuries before Augustus Caesar founded the Roman Empire—with its systematic colonization—and this conflict produced Homer's Iliad.

Historically, the Greeks (who spent ten years trying to subdue Troy) were barbarian invaders; and the Trojans, mercantile, civilized progeny of the Cretans. The Greeks wanted a foothold in Troy for economic and strategic reasons, far beyond the Homeric myth of Helen and Paris, Achilles and Hector. Here is where the parallel lies with the English determination to establish a bridgehead in North America. That the rôles were reversed only augments le piquant de l'analogie, "the piquancy of the analogy."
The English colonization of North America, as generally told, is one of a civilized society, England, attempting to establish a base against an inimical civilized society, Spain, by raising somewhat specious claims to the factually little-known land that stretched from Labrador to Florida. Furthermore, England itself was becoming divided by Puritan and other religious opposition to the established Church, while Spain led a large part of Europe in orthodox and monolithic Roman Catholicism; England suffered from a certain economic malaise, real or potential, in the face of the "American gold" that flooded Spain and Europe; and England's national security was endangered by the Spanish seizure of the Portuguese empire by right of inheritance through Philip II. Unwittingly involved in this civilized struggle for power in Europe were the North American aborigines (at first almost exclusively Algonquians) who occupied the coast and much of the interior chosen by English entrepreneurs for their "legally" most defensible target.

These peoples, scattered sparsely (according to all early accounts) from North Carolina to Maine, were clearly less advanced in their cultural and political development than several nations farther to the south, about which Englishmen of those days could read. And unfortunately nature had not blessed them with either the mineral treasures or the climate found in Mexico and northern South America. In fact the English were particularly disturbed by the climate, which was far from what might have been expected in the latitudes of Spain and Italy. Yet, had the first comers arrived with a smaller burden of national and individual pride and of the common superstitions and prejudices of the day, both the Indians and the climate might have proven less hostile than the colonists found them. Here I feel compelled to revert to Homer's epic tale, for the parallel it provides.

The Greeks, I repeat, were the barbarians in the Trojan war, despite the later birth of Greco-Christian humanism, the joint heritage of Europe and of all the colonial peoples whose roots still lie in Europe. Robert Graves, the classical scholar and anthropologist, has put it bluntly: "in the Iliad all the Greek leaders behave so murderously, deceitfully, and shamelessly, while the Trojans behave so well,..." And again, "Achilles's hysterical behavior when he heard that Patroclus was dead must have shocked Homer," who had by then "found his spiritual home [in Crete] among the departed glories of Cnossus and Mycenae, not beside the camp fires of the barbarous invaders from the North", the Greeks (Graves 1955: 2.311-12).

Here, then, is the parallel. The English colonists, having found a pretext for camping on the edge of a vast Indian domain, much as the Greeks had Helen as a mythological pretext, settled down to take over, spent more than ten years sowing murder, deceit, and shamelessness among the Indians. The English were "civilized," much as the Greeks soon would be, but their behavior was the same. The Indians were as yet underdeveloped in the techniques of civilization, and in that sense can hardly be compared with the Trojans. Nevertheless, even as Priam had raised Troy to a new height of
wealth and power, numbering at least fourteen cities in Asia Minor as allies, so too had Powhatan built a primitive empire with twice that many tributary towns. And as, when Troy fell, her allies became Greek colonies, so when Powhatan abandoned the struggle his allies and tributaries succumbed to the colonizers from England. Even the God in whose name the English lied, deceived, and murdered, bears a strong resemblance to the combined gods of the Greeks, who are summed up by Robert Graves (312) as "greedy, sly, quarrelsome ...." Like the ancient Trojans, the Indians were a people that in a broad and simple sense did "behave well" and were beaten by barbarous attackers.

It is not the degree of so-called civilization, or even the presence of a Shakespeare in that civilization, that matters in an assessment of the character of the colonizers. It is merely that historically superior arms and superior ruthlessness won out in Virginia just as Agamemnon's cold-blooded war of attrition sapped the vitality of the Trojans.

More Immediate Background of English Expansion

Leaving mythology and poetry for the moment, let me introduce a bit of history relative to the colonizing efforts of the English in what is now the north-to-middle-eastern part of the United States. For two reasons I shall deal most gingerly with the religious aspects of the more northern efforts. First, religion is no more a forte of mine than mythology. And second, what little expertise I may have in history fades into a dream about the middle of the Thirty Years War: say, just after Charles I without benefit of Parliament signed secret peace treaties with Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and Philip IV of Spain (1630-1631).

The Turkish assault on Europe that brought about the downfall of the tottering Eastern Roman Empire in 1453 led to a wave of Turkish expansion under Suleyman the Lawgiver that was halted only at the walls of Vienna in 1566. It naturally produced fear, hatred, and a lasting religious enmity among the English which found its expression in Jamestown, Plymouth, and the Massachusetts Bay colony. There the God-fearing protestants, pilgrims, and puritans refused to consider Indian beliefs as anything other than devil-worship, just as the western world generally considered the sultan of Turkey an instrument of Satan. On the other side of the picture, the sultan accepted Jesus as a Great Prophet, and the North American Indians were willing to admit that the Christian God was militarily mightier than Manito or Okee. The relative tolerance of the non-Christians is a historical fact. The intolerance of the Christians survives to this day—even between Christian and Christian.

Pertinently to Virginia and the Indians, about 1600 Captain John Smith, "both lamenting and repenting to have seen so many Christians slaughter one another," somewhat illogically set off to slaughter "the Turkes." Yet only a few years later he was chary of slaughtering the Indians. In fact, he seems to have had a certain sympathy for them. His English background and training could not permit any lack of respect by anybody else towards him (his military
captaincy should be remembered, too) but he himself showed due respect for Powhatan and his sub-chiefs, as well as for the often-misguided common Indian browbeaten by some werowance, or village chief. Nevertheless, when he and the colony were starving, or threatened with extinction, Smith was the first to do enough browbeating to feed the colonists or to save their lives. At the same time, the callous "revenge" visited on the Indians by some of his comrades was beyond Smith's conception of justice or proper behavior.

The Commonalty vs. the Individuals: Good Will and Ill Will

To return to my introductory aphorism and paragraph, let me briefly mention the "good will" or indifference of the Indians as to the English. I say "briefly" because nothing is factually available for the earliest period outside English sources. True, a generation later, say after the 1630s, a sprinkling of Indian reactions are found (always, still, in English) which indicate that the Indians did not all follow the pattern set by Pocahontas, but generally adhered to their old traditions, particularly in religious matters. Otherwise, the "will" of the Indians, so far as we can conjecture it, can be summed up as neither good nor ill, but was initially indifferent or impassible, always with an admixture of curiosity, suspicion, just-in-case propitiation, and xenophobic animosity. Most likely, the Indians were merely testing, to see how the English might fit into their own way of life.

The malveillance of the English in general, on the other hand, does not have to be guessed at. It derived from the Bible (especially the Old Testament) and the sacrosanct English social order, neither one of which had anything good to say about people (if they were "people") who had never heard of Jehovah, James I, the House of Lords, merchant princes, gold, or starched ruffs. As for that rarest of commodities, bienveillance, I shall speak of it next, at some length.

Indeed, I have been inspired to address you today chiefly on that subject by the almost simultaneous appearance on my desk of two works on Indians and Englishmen. The largest of these was the scholarly study The invasion of America, by my good friend Francis Jennings (1975); the other, a monograph, Roger Williams, Thomas More, and the Narragansett Utopia, by John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz (1976-77), known to some of you at least, as the recent editors of Roger Williams', A key into the language of America (1973). The monograph stresses Williams' bienveillance, and at the same time shows, or suggests, how such good will came to be, and attracted my immediate attention because of my own endeavors to find a basic cause for Captain John Smith's exceptionally understanding attitude towards the Indians: exceptionally, in terms of time and place.

Jennings' work—which I admit I have not yet had time to finish digesting—is such a brilliant exercise in polemics that I could not but be tempted to look unusually carefully into his facts and interpretations, particularly in Part I, which constitutes just one half of the text. While I admire his zeal and his thorough research, I cannot help feeling
that he has grabbed a blunderbuss and started shooting savage Englishmen without taking aim. There were indeed, among the vast majority of intolerant, God-fearing Englishmen, a few men of good will. John Smith was one; Samuel Argall, another Virginia colonist, was another, well-known for his good will, patience, and understanding. Others of this stripe were Richard Hakluyt the preacher and Sir Walter Ralegh, John White, a portrayer of the Indians, and Thomas Harriot, the first Englishman to study an Algonquian language.

One needs to be accurate with the earliest accounts, and to learn to distinguish between the independent writers and adventurers on the one hand, and the follow-the-leader body of noblemen, knights, esquires, merchants, and clergy on the other. The clergy were professionally against any idea or practice which did not conform to the tenets of the Church, or to the convictions of one or another non-conformist group, including the Pilgrims and Puritans who conformed only within their own framework. The merchants followed whatever principles favored their personal cause best, so that, if the Indians were ready to strike a fair bargain, they were considered possessed by the devil because the bargain was not fairer to themselves. The esquires followed the knights, and they together joined the nobles. That these should bestow scorn, contempt, futile hatred, and cruelty on the naked "man of the forest" is not surprising. The Pope, perforce non-Anglican, merited even greater opprobrium.

All in all, the "gentlemen adventurers" who went to America in person reflected, as a whole, the traits of their peers and superiors who remained in England. "There were fallings out and quarrels," as Professor Sir Walter Raleigh has written, "and no one was certain whom to obey, because there were many who took upon them to be masters." Indeed, "the English gentleman adventurer was . . . headstrong, giddy, and insubordinate" (Raleigh 1903-5). It is such people at whom Jennings hurls his thunderbolts for their treatment of the Indians. Well and good! But we must remember that they treated one another in about the same fashion. The first half of the seventeenth century was an age of violence. So is this latter half of the twentieth. We ought to be able to understand the earlier rampages that also were a part of life.

What I am slowly getting around to say is that there were perhaps two handfuls of invaders whose attitudes were compassionate and comprehending. These few, I believe, should be named and signalized, along with the reasons for their greater humanity within the overall spirit of violence. The most prominent of these were Captain John Smith, William Strachey (one-time secretary of the Jamestown colony), Captain (later Sir) Samuel Argall, William Wood, and Roger Williams, along with the earlier John White and Thomas Harriot.

Smith operated so far as he could in the best interests of the Indians--despite his determination to make them feed the lazy colonists. In fact, to assume or imply that Smith did not exert every effort to understand and appreciate the
Indians (in his case, all of them Algonquians) is to fly in the face of what he wrote and what he did. I would even go so far as to say that there are clear hints that Powhatan perceived this characteristic in Smith, for how else are we to explain the manner in which he treated him? Surely, we cannot say that Powhatan was afraid of Smith. Why, then, should he have taken Smith under his wing, so to speak, and not only made his daughter Pocahontas the "savior" of Smith and his messenger to him, but even gave him a village near his own residence on the modern York River? It is true that we have only Smith's word for much of this, but there can be no doubt about the part played by Pocahontas, and circumstantial evidence seems to bear out my other suppositions.

What I have been interested in presenting today, however, is a handful of notes on the general matter of basic Indian and English biases, not a bewailing of the occasional shortcomings of Francis Jennings' anticolonial essay, and certainly not an apologia pro John Smith. The second work I mentioned some little time ago--Teunissen and Hinz's monograph on Roger Williams--is the first dispassionate study I have chanced on which looks into the matter of the influences (i.e., biases) affecting the attitude of one early English colonist vis-à-vis the Indians and their culture. The joint authors, with a background of serious study of the Indians involved--the Narragansetts--including their language and customs, have made an admirable inquiry into the working of the mind of one highly individual Englishman, a "university type," as opposed to the military or religious type from which most of the leaders were chosen. And they have come up with an appealing and convincing suggestion that Roger Williams saw in the Indians a living example of something at least similar to Thomas More's Utopians (I have omitted his distracting "labels" of knight and saint). It is beyond my purpose to analyze what evidence is offered, and I refer anyone interested to the article in question. I merely want to offer the study as one worthy of deep regard by those who are interested in what "made the early colonists tick."

In my forthcoming edition of the Complete Works of Captain John Smith there will be new basic facts regarding Smith for use in a future study of this type, including hitherto unused material pertinent to his career in eastern Europe. Strachey's life has been published fairly recently (Culliford 1965), but I have not run across any analysis of his position vis-à-vis the Indians; the same can be said of John Pory (Powell 1977), whose interest in colonization was brief. Samuel Argall needs further attention--passages in my own work on Pocahontas (Barbour 1970) seem to be the latest available word. Williams and Wood, and possibly Weston, need further exploration in depth.

So, in this layman's only-too-human opinion, much remains to be done before we can form a sound historical judgment of the Englishmen who made the first lasting contacts with the Indians, and of the Indians who reacted to these contacts in their own way. As I have said at the outset, the idea of colonization caused it all; not the individuals who took
part. As Fernand Braudel has soundly observed (1973), "We must go far back in time, . . . before we can achieve a valid perspective on the sixteenth century." The same applies to the seventeenth. Regarded in this perspective light, it can hardly be sustained that all Englishmen were malveillants, or that the Anglo-Indian contacts of themselves were an evil thing.

Let us look into what good was done. I am convinced that both sides in the uneven struggle were acting according to their best lights, and this meant that they were acting according to their biases. For this reason, we need much further study of the biases in Indian and Englishman alike.