



A Good Speed to Virginia
Robert Gray (1609)

Robert Gray was a minister of the Church of England living in London. He published this tract, written in the form of a sermon, to marshal support among the English public for the fledgling colony of Jamestown, founded just two years earlier in present-day Virginia. At the time Gray wrote, the English applied the name Virginia to the entire length of what is now the eastern coast of the United States above Florida. Jamestown was not the first English attempt to colonize the Americas, but it was the first successful attempt, resulting in permanent settlement.

And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying: Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people?

Joshua then answered: If thou beest much people, get thee up to [...] the land of the Perizzites and of the Giants, if Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee.

Then the children of Joseph said: The mountain will not be enough for us, and all the Canaanites that dwell in the low country have chariots of iron [...]

And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasses, saying: Thou art a great people, and hast great power, and shalt not have one lot.

Therefore, the mountain shall be thine, [...] and the ends of it shall be thine, and thou shalt cast out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and though they be strong.

Joshua 17:14-18

[...] When Christopher Columbus made proffer to the kings of England [...] to invest them with the most precious and richest veins of the whole earth, never known before, [...] this offer was [...] rejected [...] In those days, this kingdom was not so populous as now it is. [...] Our country then yielded unto all that were in it a surplusage of all necessities [...], whereby it is manifest that in those days we had no great need to follow strange reports or to seek wild adventures [...] Religion and piety taught us [...] rather to be content with our own than either politicly or ambitiously to undertake uncouth enterprises unto which necessity did no way urge us.

But now God hath prospered us with the blessings of the womb, [...] so that we are now, for multitude, as the thousands of Manasses and as the ten thousands of Ephraim [...] And therefore we may justly say, as the children of Israel say here to Joshua: We are a great people, and the land is too narrow for us. So that whatsoever we have been, now it behooves us to be both prudent and politic, and not to deride and reject good proffers of profitable and gainful expectation, but rather to [...] seek after such adventures whereby the glory of God may be advanced, the territories of our kingdom enlarged, our people both preferred and employed abroad, our wants supplied at home, his Majesty's customs wonderfully augmented, and the honor and renown of our nation spread and propagated to the ends of the world.

Many examples might be produced to move us hereunto, but because they were the practices of rude and barbarous people, they are no exemplary precedents for Christians. But forasmuch as

every example approved in the scripture is a precept, I thought good to handle this conference between the tribe of Joseph, a family in the Israel of God, and Joshua, a faithful and godly prince over the whole commonwealth of God's Israel; which, to my seeming, is much like that plot which we have now in hand for Virginia. For here the people of Ephraim and of the half tribe of Manasses are a great people, and so are we. And by reason of the multitude of their people, the land is too narrow for them; and so stands our case. Whereupon they repair to Joshua to have his warrant and direction to enlarge their borders; and so have many of our noblemen of honorable minds, worthy knights, rich merchants, and divers others of the best disposition solicited our Joshua and mighty monarch, that most religious and renowned King James, that by his Majesty's leave they might undertake the plantation of Virginia. [...]

Now, in the next place, we are to note the direction of Joshua upon the aforesaid complaint of the children of Joseph, which is to enlarge their territories and dilate their borders by destroying God's enemies, the Perizzites and Giants which inhabited the valleys bordering upon Mount Ephraim, which were most abominable idolaters and had no knowledge of the true and only God. From whence we may learn how odious those people are in the sight of God which, having no knowledge of him and his worship, give that honor to the insensible and unreasonable creature which is only due to the omnipotent and almighty Creator. [...] So acceptable a service is it to destroy idolaters, whom God hateth. But forasmuch as God doth not delight in blood, but rather that a sinner should convert and live, [...] it is far more commendable, and out of doubt more acceptable unto God, to reclaim an idolater [...] than to deprive him of life, and to bring him to the knowledge of God and whom he hath sent, Christ Jesus, rather than to kill them in their ignorance and so to bring them into danger both of body and soul [...]

And surely so desirous is man of civil society, by nature, that he easily yields to discipline and government if he see any reasonable motive to induce him to the same. [...] Seeing, therefore, men by nature so easily yield to discipline and government upon any reasonable show of bettering their fortunes, it is every man's duty to travel, 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 civil and Christian kind of government, under which they may learn how to live holily, justly, and soberly in this world and to apprehend the means to save their souls in the world to come, rather than to destroy them or utterly to root them out. For a wise man, but much more a Christian, ought to try all means before they undertake war; devastation and depopulation ought to be the last thing which Christians should put in practice. Yet forasmuch as every example in the scripture, as I said, is a precept, we are warranted by this direction of Joshua to destroy willful and convicted idolaters, rather than to let them live, if by no other means they can be reclaimed.

The report goeth that in Virginia the people are savage and incredibly rude. They worship the devil, offer their young children in sacrifice unto him, wander up and down like beasts, and in manners and conditions differ very little from beasts, having no art, nor science, nor trade to employ themselves or give themselves unto; yet, by nature, loving and gentle and desirous to embrace a better condition. Oh, how happy were that man which could reduce this people from brutishness to civility, to religion, to Christianity, to the saving of their souls! Happy is that man, and blessed of God, whom God hath endowed either with means or will to attempt this business; but far be it from the nature of the English to exercise any bloody cruelty amongst these people. Far be it from the hearts of the English to give them occasion that the holy name of God should

be dishonored among the infidels, or that, in the plantation of that continent, they should give any cause to the world to say that they sought the wealth of that country above or before the glory of God and the propagation of his kingdom. [...] And therefore, although the children of Joseph have an express commandment, here in this place, to destroy those idolaters and possess their land, yet forasmuch as we have no precept but by example, we must first try all means before weapons; and when we take them into our hands, necessity of preserving our own lives must rather move us to destroy the enemies of God than either ambition, or greediness of gain, or cruelty, or any private respect whatsoever. [...]

[Some might question] by what right or warrant we can enter into the land of these savages, take away their rightful inheritance from them, and plant ourselves in their places, being unwronged or unprovoked by them. Some affirm, and it is likely to be true, that these savages have no particular propriety in any part or parcel of that country, but only a general residency there, as wild beasts have in the forest, for they range and wander up and down the country without any law or government, being led only by their own lusts and sensuality. There is not *meum et tuum* amongst them; so that if the whole land should be taken from them, there is not a man that can complain of any particular wrong done unto him.

But the answer to the aforesaid objection is that there is no intendment to take away from them by force that rightful inheritance which they have in that country. For they [...] have offered to yield into our hands, on reasonable conditions, more land then we shall be able this long time to plant and manure; and out of all question, upon easy composition with them, we may have as much of their country yielded unto us, by lawful grant from them, as we can or will desire. So that we go to live peaceably among them, and not to supplant them [...]

Moreover, all politicians do, with one consent, hold and maintain that a Christian king may lawfully make war upon barbarous and savage people, and such as live under no lawful or warrantable government, and may make a conquest of them, so that the war be undertaken to this end: to reclaim and reduce those savages from their barbarous kind of life, and from their brutish and ferine manners, to humanity, piety, and honesty. [...] Those people are vanquished to their unspeakable profit and gain, which by conquest are abridged of the liberty, sin, and impiety. [...] Whereby we see that [...] we might lawfully make war upon the savages of Virginia, our project having the ends aforesaid. And therefore let every man that is, or will be, an adventurer in this plantation examine his whole heart; and if he find that he is drawn to partake in this business to draw the savages from their barbarous kind of life to a more civil, honest, and Christian kind of life, let him not doubt of the lawfulness of it, but let him cheerfully and liberally put his helping hand to this business.

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Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. An additional paragraph break inserted, and some long sentences broken up, for readability. A misplaced word relocated. A probably erroneous singular (*the thousand of Manasses*) converted to plural. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and the placement and formatting of a biblical citation modernized or Americanized.

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