



## How Pocahontas became a Christian Thomas Dale (1614)

*In 1610, in what is now Virginia, war broke out between English colonists and the Powhatans, the indigenous people who controlled the area. During the war, the English kidnapped Pocahontas, the teenaged daughter of the Powhatan chief. By holding Pocahontas hostage, the English forced the Powhatans to agree to a truce. The truce stipulated that the Powhatans would return weapons and tools they had captured from the English and would hand over renegades, English colonists who had defected to the Powhatans.*

*For almost a year, the English waited for the Powhatans to turn over the captured weapons and the renegades. Finally an English military leader, Thomas Dale, took an army upriver, deeper into Powhatan territory, to demand that the Powhatans comply with the terms of the truce. Dale took with him Pocahontas, who was still living with the English as a hostage. This letter, written by Dale to an Anglican minister back in England, describes what happened next.*

Right Reverend Sir:

By Sir Thomas Gates, I wrote unto you of such occasions as then presented themselves, and now again by this worthy gentleman, Captain Argall, I salute you; for such is the reverend regard I have of you as I cannot omit any occasion to express the sincere affection I bear you. You have ever given me encouragements to persevere in this religious warfare until your last letters; not for that you are now less well affected thereunto, but because you see the action to be in danger by many of their non-performances who undertook the business. I have undertaken—and have as faithfully, and with all my might, endeavored—the prosecution with all alacrity as God that knoweth the heart can bear me record; what recompense or what rewards, by whom or when, I know not where to expect but from him in whose vineyard I labor, whose church, with greedy appetite, I desire to erect. [...] You shall briefly understand what hath betide since my last and how we now stand [...]

Sir Thomas Gates having embarked himself for England, I put myself into Captain Argall's ship, with a hundred and fifty men [...], and [...] went unto Pamaunkie River, where Powhatan<sup>a</sup> hath his residence and can, in two or three days, draw a thousand men together; with me I carried his daughter, who had been long prisoner with us. It was a day or two before we heard of them. At length they demanded why we came; I gave for answer that I came to bring him his daughter, conditionally he would (as had been agreed upon for her ransom) render all the arms, tools, swords, and men that had run away, and to give me a ship full of corn, for the wrong he had done unto us. If they would do this, we would be friends; if not, burn all. They demanded time to send to their king; I assented, I taking, they receiving, two pledges to carry my message to Powhatan.<sup>b</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Whenever Dale refers to "Powhatan," he means not the Powhatan people but the Powhatan chief, Pocahontas's father.

<sup>b</sup> In other words: Two of Dale's men went ashore as messengers to the Powhatan chief, and Dale took two Powhatans hostage to ensure the messengers' safety.

All night, my two men lay not far from the waterside. About noon the next day, they told [my men] the great king was three days' journey off; that Opochankano was hard by, to whom they would have had [my men] deliver their message, saying that what he agreed upon and did, the great king would confirm. This Opochankano is brother to Powhatan and is his and their chief captain, and one that can as soon (if not sooner) as Powhatan command the men. But my men refused to [give] my message unto any save Powhatan, so they were brought back, and I sent theirs to them. They told me that they would fetch Simons to me, who had thrice played the renegade, whose lies and villainy much hindered our trade for corn. But they delayed us, so as we went ashore they shot at us. We were not behindhand with them, killed some, hurt others, marched into the land, burned their houses, took their corn, and quartered all night ashore.

The next day, we went further up the river. They dogged us and called to know whither we went. We answered: to burn all if they would not do as we demanded and had been agreed upon. They would, they said, bring all the next day; so we forbore all hostility [and] went ashore, their men in good numbers coming amongst us. But we were very cautious and stood to our arms. The king's daughter went ashore but would not talk to any of them, scarce to them of the best sort, and to them only, that if her father had loved her, he would not value her less then old swords, pieces, or axes; wherefore she would still dwell with the Englishmen, who loved her. At last came one from Powhatan, who told us that Simons was run away to Nonsowhaticond (which was a truth, as afterwards appeared) but that the other Englishman was dead (which proved a lie, for [later] Mr. Hamor, whom I employed to Powhatan, brought him to me); our pieces, swords, and tools within fifteen days should be sent to Jamestown, with some corn; and that his daughter should be my child and ever dwell with me, desiring to be ever friends, and named such of his people and neighbor kings as he desired to be included and have the benefit of the peace; promising if any of our men came to him without leave from me, he would send them back, and that if any of his men stole from us or killed our cattle, he would send them to us to be punished as we thought fit. With these conditions, we returned; and within the time limited, part of our arms were sent, and 20 men with corn, and promised more, which he hath also sent. Opochankano desired I would call him friend, and that he might call me so, saying he was a great captain and did always fight; that I was also a great captain, and therefore he loved me; and that my friends should be his friends. So the bargain was made, and every eight or ten days I have messages and presents from him, with many appearances that he much desireth to continue friendship.

Now may you judge, sir, if the God of battles have not a helping hand in this: that having our swords drawn, killing their men, burning their houses, and taking their corn, yet they tendered us peace and strive with all alacrity to keep us in good opinion of them, by which many benefits arise unto us. First, part of our arms, disgracefully lost long ago (kept by the savages as monuments and trophies of our shames), redelivered, some repair to our honor; our cattle to increase, without danger of destroying; our men at liberty to hunt freely for venison, to fish, to do anything else or go any whither, without danger; to follow the husbanding of their corn securely, whereof we have above five hundred acres set and, God be praised, in more forwardness than any of the Indians that I have seen or heard of this year. Roots and herbs we have in abundance; all doubt of want is, by God's blessing, quite vanished and much plenty expected. And, which is not the least material, we may, by this peace, come to discover the country better, both by our own travels and by the relation of the savages as we grow in familiarity with them.

Powhatan's daughter I caused to be carefully instructed in Christian religion, who, after she had made some good progress therein, renounced publicly her country idolatry; openly confessed her Christian faith; was, as she desired, baptized; and is since married to an English gentleman of good understanding (as by his letter unto me, containing the reasons of his marriage of her, you may perceive); another knot to bind this peace the stronger. Her father and friends gave approbation to it, and her uncle gave her to him in the church. She lives civilly and lovingly with him and, I trust, will increase in goodness as the knowledge of God increaseth in her. She will go into England with me, and were it but the gaining of this one soul, I will think my time, toil, and present stay well spent.

**Source:** Thomas Dale to D.M., June 18, 1614, in Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia* (London: John Beale, 1615; rpt. Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1860), 51-59, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t59c76w9w>. Public domain.

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