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JOURNEY TO THE WILDERNESS:
TWO TRAVELERS IN FLORIDA, 1696-1774

by MARY S. MATTFIELD

THE EASTERN COAST of the State of Florida is today heavily populated. From Jupiter Inlet north to the Georgia state line, vacation resorts and permanent communities front the Atlantic all the way. It is not easy to visualize this shore as wilderness through which a traveler could make his way only with the greatest difficulty, a cruel wilderness of burning desert and freezing exposure, of lacerating thorns and shells, and of near starvation. It is still harder to imagine the traveler on this coast beset, not only by natural perils, but also by the menace of hostile, even cannibalistic Indian tribes. Yet that is the situation in which Jonathan Dickinson, author of one of the earliest of Florida travel narratives, found himself in 1696.

Dickinson was a member of a group of travelers shipwrecked near Jupiter Island while on a journey from Port Royal, Jamaica, to Philadelphia aboard the barkentine *Reformation*. A prosperous young Quaker merchant, Dickinson was traveling with his wife and six month-old son; a relative, Benjamin Allen; and the dedicated Quaker evangelist, Robert Barrow, who was returning from a missionary journey to Jamaica. With Dickinson also were eleven of his Negro slaves-four men, six women, and a child-so that with the ship's company of nine the group numbered twenty-five. A severe storm separated the *Reformation* from the vessels with which she was traveling in convoy for fear of French ships, and on September 23 she ran aground. The party had already been stricken by calamities: one of Dickinson's female slaves had died on board, both Benjamin Allen and Robert Barrow were seriously ill, the Dickinson baby had been sickly since birth, and the master of the ship, capable and courageous Captain Joseph Kirle, had recently broken his leg in an accident on board. The problem of getting safely to the mainland and of finding shelter fell to Jonathan Dickinson, who showed himself an energetic leader. Hardly were all the castaways ashore, however, when they were captured by a hostile band of Indians of the Jobeses tribe,

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who bitterly disliked Englishmen, but were subservient to the Spanish governors of Florida. The Indians stripped Dickinson's party of all their possessions and held them prisoner for weeks. During their captivity, they lived in constant fear for their lives, and when finally set free they began the terrible ordeal of journeying, by small boat and on foot, more than 200 miles up the deserted wilderness of the Florida coast to the Spanish settlement at St. Augustine. Five members of the party died on the way. From St. Augustine, the Spanish governor sent them by small boat to Charleston, where they sailed for Philadelphia, reaching their destination at last on the first of April 1697.

Dickinson described his experience in his *Journal, or God's Protecting Providence*. . . . The account was first published in Philadelphia in 1699 and subsequently went through several editions there and in London. The book enjoyed a very considerable popularity and has been reprinted many times. It has been of value on a number of counts over the years. To the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends which first authorized its publication, it was an important Quaker document, a testimony to the Quaker faith and to the protection of God. To the history of printing in America, it has been of significance because of its early issue and the frequency with which it has been reproduced. It furnishes useful and detailed ethnological information about seventeenth-century Indians in Florida, but most important to the modern reader is its interest as a dramatic narrative of travel.¹

Nearly a century after the first publication of Jonathan Dickinson's *Journal*, a very different travel narrative appeared. This was William Bartram's *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, which was published in Philadelphia in 1791. Bartram was a naturalist, the son of the great John Bartram whom Linnaeus called the greatest botanist in the New World. As a young man of twenty, William had accompanied his father on a journey which formed the basis for the elder Bartram's *Description of East Florida*, published in 1769. In 1774, about fifteen years after their first trip, William

1. A full treatment of the bibliographical history of the work is to be found in Charles M. Andrews "God's Protecting Providence: A Journal of Jonathan Dickinson," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXI (October 1942), 107-26.

Bartram made an extensive exploration of southern plant and wild life, and he recorded his travels and his impressions.

Those travels took him from Philadelphia to Charleston, to Savannah and into the Georgia wilderness, and then to East Florida close to the scenes of Jonathan Dickinson's ordeal. From East Florida, Bartram explored the Cherokee territories in West Florida, the land of the Choctaws and the Creeks, Mobile, Pensacola, and Alabama, returning through Augusta, Savannah, and Charleston to Virginia, and at last home to Philadelphia. In the course of his travels, Bartram made detailed observations not only on the plant and animal life of the regions, but also on the social and economic life of the plantations and settlements he visited, and especially on the culture of the Indian tribes. He traveled under the roughest of conditions, usually alone, though occasionally with a single companion or a party of surveyors or traders. He went by small boat, on horseback, and on foot, and he frequently encountered danger from wild animals, fever, storms, and unfriendly Indians. Bartram's book is far from being only a naturalist's record. For all of its detailed factual description and classification of fauna and flora, its interest to the ordinary reader lies in the lyric enthusiasm of its style and in the dramatic quality of the narrative.

To discuss in a single article the narratives of two such widely differing men as have been brought together in the present instance might seem merely an arbitrary or a whimsical editorial proceeding. Surely except for the accidents of geography, of approximate age (Bartram was about thirty-five, Dickinson thirty-three), and of Quaker inheritance, the two would appear to have had almost nothing in common. Dickinson was a merchant who was to go on to a prosperous and highly urban career of business and public service in Philadelphia; Bartram was scientist, philosopher, and lover of nature. The former found himself in the wilderness entirely against his will, responsible for the lives and safety of others, and in terror of the savages. The latter, on the contrary, was a trained and expert woodsman pursuing his researches with the keenest interest and delighted with the opportunity to study the aborigines as well. In brief, Jonathan Dickinson was representative of the attitudes of the seventeenth century and William Bartram of those of the eighteenth. Neither would

have recognized the picture drawn by the other, though Dickinson's "raging seas" and "dismal" land form the same Florida coast of which Bartram exclaimed "how awfully great and sublime is the majestic scene eastward!"² Yet these two men, separated as widely as they are by every apparent trait of character and circumstance, of time and temperament, are in reality identical in one deeply significant way. Not the substance of their narratives, but the spirit in which they were undertaken links them and creates of each account a genuinely significant work. The appeal of travel narratives is an almost universal one, and the two examples presented here make a most powerful appeal indeed. Each is typical of this richly varied genre in every fundamental aspect; each moreover, transcends the limits of the genre to become literature as well as document. And in the process each presents to the reader a unified concept of individual man and his circumstances which affords insights into a developing American consciousness.

Throughout history, the traveler's tale has always exercised a particular fascination over the mind of his hearer. The journeys of a Xenophon or a Marco Polo were assured of an audience very nearly as enthralled as those for which the great epics had been told, and for much the same reason. The journey-plot of legend—the wanderings of a hero among the perils of remote and unknown lands, among strange men and stranger monsters, and his eventual return to the upper world of the familiar—has its roots deep in our being. And the traveler in the latitudes of actuality, who may document his wanderings and classify his monsters, makes a powerful dual appeal to our daylight taste for fact and to our unconscious need for myth.

The New World provided an especially fruitful subject for narratives of travel. The spirit of exploration was fired by the possibilities of an unknown land, where savages and unfamiliar wild beasts roamed the forests. Travel narratives date from the earliest days of the colonies, forming an invaluable source of information about the spirit as well as the lives of the people who settled and developed the continent. Thus, representative types of American travel narration are many and varied, and the role

2. E. W. and C. M. Andrews (eds.), *Jonathan Dickinson's Journal* (New Haven, 1961), 5, 6; Mark Van Doren (ed.), *William Bartram, Travels* (New York, 1928), 73.

of the narrator himself is varied also. Whatever the purpose and special interest of the writer, however, the best examples of this mode all reflect certain dominant traits. Courage and endurance, boundless curiosity, and alertness of observation are common characteristics. Still another is the tendency to self-revelation which the nature of the genre encourages.

This self-revelation would appear to be a natural result of the use of the first person in narration. Works such as these achieve a fairly simple and obvious unity from the conventions of the form. The traveler, whether his narrative is presented as a sustained account, as a series of letters, or more typically as a diary, traditionally sets forth on a journey, encounters adventure, records his impressions of persons, places, manners, and events, and eventually arrives at his destination or comes full circle to return home. His record is typically in the first person; either he is telling his own story, as is true of William Bartram, or he is the spokesman for his group, as is the case for Jonathan Dickinson. In either situation, we gain the advantages inherent in the first person: immediacy, quick sympathy, the sense of authenticity. Above all, we have a single point of view at work on the material. Whatever the function of the individual work, therefore, the most characteristic demonstrate a lively narrative technique, at the very least a use of anecdote, at best a sustained sense of development which is closely akin to fiction.

Indeed, the travel narrative would appear to be a literary form in which the possibility of fiction is inherent. To the extent that the point of view dramatizes itself through self-revelation and through the conscious structuring of material, the work becomes a dramatic entity. Those narratives which have the greatest interest as literature are those in which a sense of metaphor can be felt. The traveler who sees his journey in symbolic terms creates a piece of genuine literature, however crude or slight, because he consciously or unconsciously selects and arranges the same mass of detail to be found in any travel narrative in an order which approaches art - the art of fiction. This dominant characteristic linking the travel narrative to fiction is not a late or an essentially evolutionary development. Instead, it is often found in works of the seventeenth century as well as in those by later pre-Romantic writers. The tendency of the devout Puritan

or Quaker was to see his earthly experience in spiritual terms. The godly conceived of the established social order on the American frontier as a bulwark against the godlessness of the Indians and of primitive nature, and against their de-civilizing influences. His struggle in the wilderness, a release from bondage or a goal attained, thus became for the devout seventeenth century traveler such as Dickinson a significant demonstration of the workings of Divine Providence.

The usual traveler of the Revolutionary period, on the other hand, took a more secular view of civilization and was typically concerned with the physical facts of his journey for their own sake. In his growing interest in man as a social being, he collected with complete catholicity data which he might, in Thomas Jefferson's phrase, "apply usefully for . . . [his] country." For a traveler like Congressman William Loughton Smith of South Carolina, recording the bustle of a new republic at work settling its practical affairs, civilization connoted tangible values. Material prosperity as reflected in fine new buildings and thriving communities interested him greatly, and he stood in a sense in an equilibrium between an old and a new order, between a view of society as a defensive stockade and a view of social institutions as tending to be both corrupt and corrupting. Especially revealing is Smith's enthusiastic use of the term *romantic*. While he was sufficiently the fashionable man of his age conventionally to admire picturesque natural beauty, he dwelt with greatest satisfaction on the prosperous, the arable, the cultivated scene. The area about Middletown, Connecticut, he found "a most romantic country, thickly settled, highly cultivated, and adorned both by nature and art. . . ." ³ For most men of Smith's interests, the wilderness seems to have had few cosmic implications, either dark or golden; thus few travelers of the period saw their journeys in other than literal terms. The modern reader is more aware of the real conflict underlying the surface conflicts of their narratives, but their own lack of such awareness leaves the works without thematic organization to give purpose to the dramatic organization. For

3. Albert Mathews (ed.), *The Journal of William Loughton Smith, 1790-1791* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1917), 43. Smith was a South Carolina congressman and later a diplomat. His journal includes a record of the congressman's tour with President Washington's party through the New England States.

this reason, few eighteenth century travel narratives, however lively or historically significant, ever quite evince the elusive fusion we term literature.

In the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, the principles of the Enlightenment, of Deism, of the philosophies of Locke and Rousseau, had helped to make possible a new attitude toward the American wilderness and toward the Indian. In a romanticist's quest for the truth behind the fact, some men saw their travels as a spiritual pilgrimage in which nature played the unifying role that Divine Providence had played for the Puritan. It is this spiritual concept which links the Quaker Jonathan Dickinson to the naturalist William Bartram a century later. It is this concept of the wilderness journey as metaphor which lies at the heart of some of the chief American novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and which directly anticipated the narratives of the greatest of American travelers, Francis Parkman and Henry David Thoreau.

To the reader of the twentieth century, with his advantage of perspective, the search for the meaning of the wilderness never ceased to be a continuing factor in the development of American thought. The dilemma of an advanced culture confronting an undeveloped society which marks a crisis of contemporary world civilization lends added relevance to the struggles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in America. The extent to which an individual writer consciously or unconsciously reflects a unified view of this basic conflict helps to determine the literary potential of his work. The individual who faces a world totally alien to his experience of civilization tests not only his physical but his moral resources. When his deepest inner conviction persuades him that without the checks of civilization and orthodox religion evil must prevail, the wilderness holds genuine terrors. When, on the contrary, civilized society is prejudged as corrupting to "natural" virtue, a journey to the wilderness becomes a spiritual quest, a self-conscious return to the source. In either case, the real world of concrete factual experience is inevitably a projection of the writer's view. Both Jonathan Dickinson and William Bartram illustrate this quality in their writing.

In each case, the metaphor is conveyed through a thoroughly representative specimen of the American narrative of travel. Like

William Wood and John Josselyn in the Colonial period, Bartram represents the traveler-naturalist. Jonathan Dickinson exemplifies two types, for his account of seventeenth-century Florida is at once a captivity narrative like that of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson and a remarkable providence like those collected by Increase Mather. The role played by each of our travelers reflects one or more typical adaptations. Each is far more than a mere recorder. Dickinson interpreted the survival of his party through months of hardship in the wilds of Florida's east coast as proof of the protecting providence of God. Many times, he wrote, they expected death, "but on a sudden it pleased the Lord to work wonderfully for our preservation, and instantly all these savage men were struck dumb."⁴ So his journal was read by his fellow Quakers as a tract.

William Bartram played a dual role, that of naturalist and that of apologist. Bartram gave a detailed and precise technical account of the physical character of the regions through which he traveled, their vegetation and wild life, and their beauty. One of the avowed purposes of his book was to demonstrate that "nature is the work of God omnipotent," through showing the presence of reason and harmony in the animal and vegetable worlds. His was a romantic's view of nature, and through it he orders his observations. Bartram's secondary purpose, like the colonial Daniel Gookin's, was the vindication of the Indians, of whom he believed that "as moral men they certainly stand in no need of European civilization," and for whose wise treatment he made very enlightened and intelligent recommendations.⁵

Both of these men display in their narratives the chief personal characteristics which distinguish so many other writers of travel. Both were men of energy and courage; Bartram faced calmly such hazards as Florida alligators and Florida hurricanes, and Dickinson's bravery in confronting both the "cannibals" of the Florida

4. Andrews, *Dickinson's Journal*, 8. Wood wrote *New England's Prospect. A True, Lively, and Experimental Description of that Part of America, Commonly Called New England . . .* (London, 1639), and Josselyn published *An Account of Two Voyages to New England* (London, 1674). Mrs. Rowlandson's account of her captivity by Indians is included in Charles H. Lincoln (ed.), *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1679-1699* (New York, 1913).
5. Van Doyen, *William Bartram*, 21, 26-27, 385. Daniel Gookin, a colonial Massachusetts Indian official, wrote *Historical Collections of the Indians of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1792), in 1674.

coast and his almost intolerable physical sufferings makes a profoundly moving book. Both shared the keen observation and insatiable curiosity which mark the best of such accounts, and vividly employ concrete details which are the result of such observation. In the midst of his distress, Dickinson noted that the bag in which berries were given to his starving party was woven of grass, and he curiously watched the Indians' method of spear-fishing.

Dickinson described at length the way in which his captors brewed a native drink, "of the leaves of a shrub (which we understood afterwards . . . is called *Casseena*), boiling the said leaves, after they had parched them in a pot; then with a gourd having a long neck and at the top of it a small hole which the top of one's finger could cover, and at the side of it a round hole of two inches diameter, they take the liquor out of the pot and put it into a deep round bowl, which being almost filled containeth nigh three gallons. With this gourd they brew the liquor and make it froth very much. It looketh of a deep brown color. In the brewing of this liquor was this noise made which we thought strange; for the pressing of this gourd gently down into the liquor, and the air which it contained being forced out of the little hole at top occasioned a sound; and according to the time and motion given would be various."⁶ This was the same "black drink" or infusion of Cassine later observed by Bartram in ceremonies among the Indians.

Dickinson notes the precise dimensions of some of the Indian dwellings, so that while expecting death at any instant he was collecting useful Florida anthropological data. Bartram, too, recorded a multitude of homely details which warm the formality of his more elevated rhetoric. He described his troubles with "mosquitoes," detailed his supper menus, and warned his readers of the diuretic properties of certain wild fruits. Bream was his "favourite fish," he confided, and he furnished directions for preparing "Indian jelly" from smilax root, not omitting, of course, the botanical classification of the plant. Bartram's preoccupation with detail is a scientific one, and he devoted the last of the four parts of his book to an ambitious compilation of Indian data, catalogues of tribes and dialects, descriptions of Indian appearance,

6. Andrews, *Dickinson's Travels*, 24-25.

dress, laws, rituals, and folkways in general. He discriminated scrupulously in his attempt to characterize the essential differences among tribes, and was obviously carrying out his own recommendation for "atonement for our negligence in the care of the present and future well being of our Indian brethren." In his descriptions of white plantations and settlements, Bartram is equally concerned with vivid detail, and thus presents a panorama of life in the remoter southern territories in the 1770s.⁷

In all of these ways, both travel narratives considered here are typical of their genre, but both go beyond these limits to demonstrate the essential properties of fiction. In each, the extent of self-revelation, of dramatization of a point of view, of the use of narrative to convey a theme, and of the metaphoric quality of the journey itself, all work together to create a literature of the wilderness.

Jonathan Dickinson's confrontation of the wilderness posed not only the obvious physical perils, but also the problem of moral survival in a world without meaning. Florida was a land in which the known values ceased to operate. The Indians were pagans; the Spanish at St. Augustine were Papists, so the shipwrecked travelers were truly cast upon their own moral resources. In this predicament, the threat of cannibalism—real or fancied—serves as a recurrent image for all the forces of primitive savagery. The Indians are called "a barbarous People such as were generally accounted man-eaters," and part of the group were quartered in an Indian town where Dickinson reported, it was only "about a twelvemonth since a parcel of Dutchmen were killed who, having been cast away . . . were here devoured by these cannibals, as we understood by the Spaniards." The very ambiguity makes the threat the more unsettling in this nightmare experience in which appearance often fails to be equated with actuality.⁸

Beyond the fear that they were to be "shot, burnt, and eaten," Dickinson's major apprehension was the fate of his infant son if the parents were to die. "One thing did seem more grievous to me and my wife than any other thing," he wrote, ". . . that our child would be kept alive, and bred up as one of these people; when this thought did arise it wounded us deep." This horror

7. Van Doren, *William Bartram*, 357; Andrews, *Dickinson's Travels*, 27, 67, 144, 148, 194.

8. Andrews, *Dickinson's Travels*, 7, 49.

that a Christian might revert to a life of savagery was one of the overriding anxieties of the devout in the seventeenth century, for there were a sufficient number of instances to justify the fear. There is an unconscious irony in the fact that the baby, "at death's door from the time of its birth," should thrive when casually and indiscriminately nursed by the Indian women, so that he "began now to be cheerful, and have an appetite to food." Instead, it was Dickinson himself who at least partly succumbed to the evil which he encountered outside his known world, and who deteriorated morally even though he survived.⁹

In telling his story, Dickinson emerges very clearly as a man. From the events and the tone of the narrative alone, the reader can know him as a forceful, vigorous leader, an acute observer, an affectionate husband and father. Courageous as he was—and his *Journal* is an almost unbearable record of the courage with which he and his party faced their trials—Dickinson was neither epic hero nor saint. His very human weaknesses are defined in the narrative by the presence of the truly saintly Robert Barrow, the aged Quaker missionary who was to die as a result of his sufferings only a few days after reaching his destination. Barrow's words and actions as reported by Dickinson, and his final letter to his wife which is appended to the *Journal* demonstrate an innocence, a martyr's simplicity of spirit, unlike that of the younger man. The picture of Barrow on the First Day following the capture is in character: ". . . Being most of us sat together, Robert Barrow desired our people to wait upon the Lord: in which time Robert had a word in season unto us, and afterwards went to prayer, all the Indians coming about us, and some younger sort would be mocking; but not to our disturbance."¹⁰

Barrow was a hairshirt as much as he was an example to his companions in adversity. The patience with which he endured encouraged them; the sweet stubbornness with which he refused to tell a lie when the English-hating Indians asked his nationality put all their lives in jeopardy. It was clearly Barrow in whom the Society of Friends took greatest pride when it commissioned the publication of this book. The gentle Robert Barrow preserved his Quaker faith intact: he would not lie even to a heathen In-

9. *Ibid.*, 10, 26, 37.

10. *Ibid.*, 15.

dian; he bore all in silence and patience; he was responsive to the kindness of the Spanish priest even with his "shaven Pate"; his very death was edifying and exemplary.¹¹

Jonathan Dickinson was another sort of Quaker. Saints are few in any generation; representative men provide a more useful index to the temper of their age, and in his weaknesses as well as his strengths Dickinson was a fair representative. This is the pious Quaker who, like his Puritan counterpart in New England, found a worldly concern with material prosperity perfectly compatible with his spiritual values, even perhaps in some sense a tangible measure of or reward for such values. The Spanish governor, Laureano de Torres y Ayala, gave Dickinson and the master of the ship credit in order to purchase supplies for the trip from St. Augustine to Charleston, although they were strangers. Dickinson twice mentions that he and Captain Kirle made certain that the rest of the party "signed their obligation . . . to pay their proportion of what was provided . . .," and one recognizes the sound business practices of the successful merchant.¹² This is also the sincere seventeenth-century Christian who could exhibit a callousness toward his slaves that chills even the least sentimental reader and who saw in the Florida Indians only the sub-human agents of infernal powers. He was, in short, a decent civilized man precipitated into a wilderness hell for which accepted civilized values had little relevance. His narrative becomes a strongly integrated story because the actual world of the wilderness is so keenly felt and vividly presented, and because the concrete descriptive details move from mere imagery toward symbol as they are shaped by Dickinson's point of view.

Dickinson's ordeal involves a gradual alteration of his role as the drama progresses. Aboard the *Reformation* before the disaster, Dickinson was the fully responsible man, a leader by right of his social position, capability, and youthful energy. When the ship's captain broke his leg, it was Dickinson who set it successfully. In the world of the familiar his paternal responsibility extended to his Negroes, and he referred to his dying Indian slave Venus as one "of my family." He shouldered the responsibility for landing all the party safely on the Florida coast after the wreck, and it is

11. *Ibid.*, 91.

12. *Ibid.*, 64-65; Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Under Five Flags* (Gainesville, 1960), 135.

evident that the rest turned to him as a natural leader. Even the Indians recognized that he was in some sense in charge of the group. That he commanded respect we learn from several revealing episodes. When it became possible for only one man to go to St. Augustine for help, the "generality" were anxious that it should be Dickinson himself, and "some of them grew choleric" at the rather more logical choice of the one man who spoke Spanish. Again, when the small ship's boat containing several of the group was in danger from heavy seas (at the same stretch of Florida coast which was to be the setting of Stephen Crane's closely parallel adventure in "The Open Boat") the master and his experienced seamen insisted that it was impossible to reach shore through the breakers. Yet Dickinson the landsman was able to persuade them to make a further attempt: "And it pleased God to order it so that we went on shore, as though there had been a lane made through the breakers." It is clear that the man had considerable force of character, yet stripped as naked as the rest of the survivors, he was stripped of civilization as well.¹³

The respectable castaways were acutely distressed by the theft of all their clothing, though the Indians eventually gave them woven grass loin cloths and a few skins such as they themselves wore. Modesty ceased to be essential, though protection from insects and the weather became a serious problem. There is a peculiar - though unconscious - appropriateness in the scene of the Indians tormenting their victims: "We brought a great Bible and a large book of Robert Barclay's to this place. And being stripped all as naked as we were born, and endeavoring to hide our nakedness; these cannibals took the books, and tearing out the leaves would give each of us a leaf to cover us; which we took from them: at which time they would deride and smite us; and instantly another of them would snatch away what the other gave us, smiting and deriding us withal."¹⁴

The episode suggests a grotesque parody of the Fall in the context of this monstrous anti-Eden, where the Bible does not function and where Dickinson is naked and almost defenseless on the spiritual as well as the physical plane. Throughout the narrative, the problem of clothing is constantly present and serves as an emblem of civilization itself. The Spanish sentinels at the

13. Andrews, *Dickinson's Travels*, 4, 6, 8, 19-20, 35.

14. *Ibid.*, 22.

coastal lookout-station grudgingly lent Mary Dickinson a "blanket to be left at the next sentinel's house," for they had almost no supplies of their own. The governor at St. Augustine was able to provide some thin linen garments for the half-frozen refugees, but no wool, and to obtain clothing and food for the trip to civilized Charleston, Dickinson contemplated the inhumane step of selling his remaining Negroes in this alien and barren land.¹⁵

His attitude toward food necessarily paralleled his degree of involvement with the wilderness. At first, when the castaways were offered fish by the Indians, their "exercise was too great . . . to have any inclination to receive food." "The sense of our conditions stayed our hungry stomachs," Dickinson wrote, "for some amongst us thought they would feed us to feed themselves." The wild palmetto berries which formed a staple of Indian diet were at first loathsome to the captives: "Not one amongst us could suffer them to stay in our mouths; for we could compare the taste of them to nothing else, but rotten cheese steeped in tobacco." In a few days, however, they were reduced even to this, for necessity triumphed over civilized tastes, and Dickinson explained that "enjoying health and strength, and hunger growing violent, we would be tasting the berries, though we would reap no satisfaction." Before long, they were to be glad to steal these berries from the Indians, and at St. Augustine, Dickinson noted, "we found our palates so changed by eating of berries that we could not relish the taste of salt any more than if it had no saltiness in it." So the influence of the wilderness lingered. At the height of their tribulations, "the gills and guts of fish, picked off a dung-hill, was acceptable," and the constant suspicion that their savage hosts might be cannibals gained added poignancy in the presence of such hunger as this. Even the comparatively civilized Spanish guides later proved little less savage, for they were very reluctant to share any of their rations. Indeed, at one point, Dickinson recalled, "we got to an Indian plantation (this was the first place we saw anything planted) being full of pumpkin vines and some small pumpions on them but the Spaniards were too quick for us and got all before us. . . ." ¹⁶

With physical survival such a primitive struggle, it is no surprise that conventional civilized ties and responsibilities dropped

15. *Ibid.*, 56, 58, 63.

16. *Ibid.*, 12, 13, 26-27, 33, 37, 44, 47, 61.

away one by one, that in the wilderness even Dickinson becomes progressively more callous toward others as conditions become more desperate. During the hideous northwest gale and freezing cold of November 13, 1696, as they were making their way many miles northward to the first Spanish sentinel's house, self-preservation alone actuated nearly all the group. They "made all speed, one not staying for another that could not travel so fast"; and finally, though he tried hard to keep them together, Dickinson was forced to abandon both his "kinsman Benjamin Allen" and Robert Barrow in order to save his wife and child.¹⁷ This was difficult enough: "I used my endeavor to comfort and cheer my wife, entreating her, not to let grief overcome her; . . . I had an Indian mat with a split in it, through which I put my head, hanging over my breast unto my waist: under this I carried my child, which helped to break the wind off it; but the poor babe was black with cold from head to foot, and its flesh as cold as a stone; yet it was not froward. . . . About two o'clock in the afternoon we came up with our Negro woman Hagar with her child at her back almost dead. . . . We had lost sight of Robert Barrow by this time. . . ."¹⁸

At last they did reach the shelter of the sentinel's house, where there was a fire, a little food, and "plenty of hot caseena drink." At this point in his narrative, Dickinson candidly reveals himself as somewhat less than heroic and justifies himself. He was exhausted and numb with cold, and he did not respond as the self-assured and responsible young merchant aboard the Reformation would surely have done. For all his usual forcefulness, he could not persuade the sentinels to go back for those left behind, and all except Robert Barrow, who eventually reached safety through his own efforts, were to perish of exposure. The slaves Jack, Caesar, and Quenza died on that shore, and Hagar is dismissed in a few words: "I understood that our Negro woman Hagar got hither late last night having her child dead at her back, which the Spaniards buried." Dickinson acknowledged that he was "under a great concern for our kinsman [Benjamin Allen]; the Spaniards we could not prevail upon to go and fetch him, or to carry wherewith to make a fire: which had they done and found them living, it might have preserved them. But we hoped Negro Ben would bring our kinsman." Dickinson had learned when

17. *Ibid.*, 51-52.

18. *Ibid.*, 52-53.

Robert Barrow came to the shelter, an "hour or two" after Dickinson himself arrived, that Negro Ben had alone turned back to try to rescue Allen. In fact, the part played by Negro Ben throughout is a fascinating minor role to which Dickinson neglected to do justice. From a scant dozen scattered and off-hand allusions it becomes evident that Ben, Captain Kirle's personal Negro, was a rather remarkable man. He showed devotion and initiative, tended his injured master carefully, helped launch and navigate the boat, and he managed somehow to go back for the boat when the Indians had forced their captives to leave it some thirty miles behind. He made an heroic effort to find Benjamin Allen in the dark, and he nearly lost his own life. Dickinson is not to be blamed for not recognizing the implications of Negro Ben, both for the survival of his own party and for the larger development of American literature. The latter remained for Cooper, for Melville, for Twain, and for Faulkner to explore. In Dickinson's view, Ben was simply useful property, and as such his master was "inclined to sell" him at St. Augustine for necessary clothing and provisions.¹⁹

Nor is Dickinson to be blamed for not trying to help Negro Hagar and her child, or even for not going back for Benjamin Allen. He has compromised with the wilderness for survival and has won, but on wilderness terms. He has saved his own life and the lives of his wife and his son by jettisoning all the impedimenta of civilization and of religion except for a fundamental spark of hope in God.

As Dickinson has learned to know the wilderness, there has been a subtle but inexorable change in himself, unconsciously demonstrating a basic truth. The enemy is not the Indian, but nature itself. At first the Indian conforms to Dickinson's predetermined judgment; he is a godless savage whose religious ceremonial is subhuman, involving "fearful noise some like the barking of a dog, wolf, and other strange sounds . . . and "a hideous howling, very irksome to us. . . ." Again, at the ceremonial dance of the red-and black-painted chiefs, the Indians look "like Furies," and the descriptive imagery is all drawn from the animal rather than from the human world. Yet the Indian is clearly an ambiguous quantity. The castaways are undeniably mistreated, stripped,

19. *Ibid.* 11, 43, 54-56, 62-63.

struck, derided, threatened. Even among the Indians themselves, however, there is sympathy for the Dickinson party, and many intercede for the victims. "When some of them would go to shoot, others of them would catch hold of their bows or arm." The chiefs and their wives in particular are kind to their captives, and one old chief even washes the feet of Robert Barrow and Mary Dickinson. Although they were kept short of food, the diet of the Indians themselves was little better, for these were extremely primitive Florida tribes living on fish and berries. As they went nearly naked themselves, they had no real understanding of the civilized travelers' need for clothing. The cause of much of their hostility was political; a survival of the years of antagonism between England and Spain which affected the Indians still, even though Spain had recently signed a treaty with the English. In actuality, the civilized Spanish were nearly as cruel as the Indians, forcing Dickinson's band to travel when they were unfit and giving them very little food or clothing. The causes of this inhumanity were the conditions of the wilderness itself. The governor of St. Augustine described the poverty of the country to Dickinson after his rescue, and explained the inability to give him what the Spanish themselves did not have. The immediate conflict, then, is not with the Indians or the Spanish, but with barren Florida and the bitter weather which took lives even the savages had spared. The underlying conflict exposes the inner wilderness, the natural motives which operate when the boundaries of the known world are passed.²⁰

Jonathan Dickinson attempted to structure his experience in terms of his conscious conviction. His salvation must, therefore, have been the work of Providence. As his ordeal begins, he was "in a good frame of spirit, being freely given up to the will of God." But there is a decline, significant even in a narrative written in retrospect, in the number of allusions to God's intervention as the conflict progresses. The greater the degree of necessary adaptation to barbarity, the more remote the familiar value system becomes. At first while the Indian alone is the personification of the enemy, acknowledgments of God's direct preservation stud the pages of the *Journal*. Fewer than half the number appear in the crucial latter portion in which unconsciously the writer reflects

20. *Ibid.*, 13, 23, 25, 29, 38, 51, 54-56, 61.

their apparent irrelevance to his condition. Evil has become more diffused, goodness more remote. Dramatically, in recounting the climactic agon of November 13, Dickinson belatedly re-imposes the familiar logic on the darkness. When he reached the outer limits of human endurance, "a secret hope would arise (though involved with human doubts and fear) that the Lord would yet preserve us." Thus, Dickinson's experience becomes a highly-qualified victory for his world view, but a victory nevertheless. A modern reader might question both Dickinson's concept of causality and the viability of his value system. For him, however, his belief made it possible to see his journey in unified metaphoric terms; thus his book achieves unity as a work of literature.²¹

William Bartram's *Travels* exhibits a similar unity. Bartram was, of course, a very different sort of writer from Jonathan Dickinson, but his book is equally the product of the world view which shaped it. The greater degree of sophistication and self-awareness which marks the later work has enabled its author to embody his view in a consciously dramatic narrative with all the essential properties of fiction. Bartram has assembled his facts about a central purpose; his use of imagery is functional; and his sustained metaphor for the wilderness has major implications for American literature.

Bartram himself emerges as representative of the best in late eighteenth-century American thought and as a man of great personal charm. The romantic sensibility of Bartram the poet, which so strongly influenced the work of both Wordsworth and Coleridge, is balanced by a tough-minded practicality; the nobility of his idealism was far from naive. In many ways he resembled Jefferson in his scientific interests, his social philosophies, and his energetic temperament. It is so easy to see William Bartram as a romantic primitivist that it is possible to overlook the rational and pragmatic side of his nature. It is essential to an understanding of his strategy in the *Travels*, however, to recognize this complementary aspect of his point of view, and to remember also that he writes of the wilderness as a man who has been there.

Bartram was no languid sentimentalist, botanizing at his leisure in a settled countryside, but a genuine explorer who had spent years of hardship beyond the frontier of the civilized world.

21. *Ibid.*, 8, 53.

The reasons he assigned for his travels are revealing: "Continually impelled by a restless spirit of curiosity, in pursuit of new productions of nature, my chief happiness consisted in tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty, and perfection of the great Almighty Creator, and in the contemplation, that through divine aid and permission, I might be instrumental in discovering, and introducing into my native country, some original productions of nature, which might become useful to society."²² This harmony of utility and idealism is entirely in character, as is the touch of human vanity in the contrast, modestly implied in the same passage, between his motives and those of "a young mechanic on his adventures" who traveled briefly with Bartram but who declined to make the dangerous trip to the Indian trading post. The mechanic was looking for a comfortable position in a prosperous community, and Bartram observed that "each of our pursuits was perhaps equally laudable."²³ His recurrent mixture of high-mindedness and harmless vanity helps to make Bartram an endearingly human figure. And the practicality recalls Jefferson's view that the purpose of travel was to gather data which one might "apply usefully" for America.

The practicality which qualifies Bartram's romantic perspective extends to such fundamental subjects as nature and the Indian. No enemy of "progress" of the true sort, he frequently admired thriving settlements, and he noted that a beautiful savannah in West Florida "would, if peopled and cultivated after the manner of the civilized countries of Europe, without crowding or incommoding families, at a moderate estimation, accommodate in the happiest manner above one hundred thousand human inhabitants, besides millions of domestic animals; and I make no doubt this place will at some future day be one of the most populous and delightful seats on earth."²⁴ Wild nature alone, then, is not Bartram's sole interest, and in the same way he qualified his picture of the Indians by attempting "to exhibit their vices, immoralities, and imperfections." There is no conflict in this mixed view, since it reinforces his total concept of the American wilderness.²⁵

22. Van Doren, *William Bartram*, 82.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 211, 377.

25. *Ibid.*, 183.

Fundamentally, of course, it is entirely accurate to term William Bartram a romantic. He is deeply concerned with the life of inner experience and of the imagination. Although he still used the terminology of a somewhat static theory of the universe—*mechanism, watch, inimitable machines*—the individual is of primary importance. “In the wilderness of Florida,” he finds himself “alone indeed, but under the care of the Almighty . . .,” but in view of the fact that everything else in that wilderness is under the care of the same “sovereign Creator,” Bartram’s God is far from being the personal deity of a Jonathan Dickinson. Nature itself is a spiritual force: when Bartram was despondent, he observed that “many objects [of the natural world] met together. . . , and conspired to conciliate and . . . compose my mind, heretofore somewhat dejected and unharmonized: all alone in a wild Indian country, a thousand miles from my native land, and a vast distance from any settlements of white people.”²⁶ His romantic conception of nature caused him to personify and humanize natural objects. When a huge rattlesnake failed to strike him, he was determined “to protect the life of the generous serpent,” and he found “manifest examples of premeditation, perseverance, resolution, and consummate artifice” even among much lower species. Given his conviction of harmony and order in wild nature, the romantic idea that outside civilization man is likewise free to attain an inherent harmony follows logically.²⁷

Bartram’s cohering view of nature includes the Indians. He had ample opportunity to observe them closely as he moved through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, and to hear them spoken of by traders and settlers with whom he traveled or visited. He visited several different tribes, and he lived in Indian villages where he had many friends and was widely known by an Indian name signifying “The Flower Hunter.” From certain tribes there was occasionally real danger to the white man, and Bartram took reasonable and sensible precautions on his solitary travels. But fear failed to color his impressions, and it is interesting to compare his factual observations with those of Jonathan Dickinson. The languages of the Indians, Bartram observed, were often “musical,” and he discerned a “softness and melancholy air” in their songs

26. *Ibid.*, 15, 21, 144, 270.

27. *Ibid.*, 22, 223.

which contrasts sharply with the "hideous" howling of Dickinson's Florida captors. In costume and dance there is an equivalent difference in Bartram as compared with the outlandishness emphasized by a Dickinson or a Rowlandson.²⁸ Bartram's Indians have religions of their own and some even acknowledged the sacredness of the white man's Sabbath. He knew that he might be accused by his readers of "partiality or prejudice" in favor of the Indians, but in reality his account provides plenty of examples of Indian misconduct, including one epic ten-day drinking bout utilizing, of course, white man's liquor. Bartram's conclusion is a characteristic tempering of romanticism with his own good sense. The first Indian encountered in the *Travels* might have stepped straight from the pages of *Oroonoko* or *The Last of the Mohicans*: he is a fierce Seminole outlaw who spares Bartram's life through "natural or innate" "moral principle." Yet Bartram does not advocate a return to a primitive state of nature: Indian society has its own social laws and organizations, and its vices exist "in no greater excess than [among] other nations of men." Bartram recognizes that many of the problems of the Indians could be attributed to the fact that "the white people have dazzled their senses with foreign superfluities" and that wise and humane methods should be adopted to "plan for their civilization and union with us." For union there must be, despite the "natural" goodness of the Indian.²⁹

It has been remarked here that Bartram was no enemy to "progress" of the true sort. This distinction needs clarification in the light of his underlying theme. On the one hand, Bartram was a sociable young man who could complain when he remembered the delights of Charleston hospitality that he felt like Nebuchadnezzar, "constrained to roam in the mountains and wilderness, there to herd and feed with the wild beasts of the forests." He was equally a dedicated lover of nature who could rejoice to find himself amid the solitude of a remote Florida swamp. The same complexity existed in his view of the expansion of civilization. When based on virtue, liberality, hard work, and an unsentimental democracy, material prosperity and progress appeared altogether admirable, and unlike his nineteenth-century counter-

28. *Ibid.*, 201, 207, 218, 298-300, 351, 354, 406. For reference to Rowlandson, see footnote 5.

29. *Ibid.*, 26, 44-46, 183-84, 362.

part, Thoreau, he could regard social institutions with optimism. Yet he could nevertheless regret the passing of the buffalo, and he could recall with nostalgia that the Indian ruins near Lake George on the St. Johns River, now surrounded by cultivated land, had fifteen years earlier "possessed an almost inexpressible air of grandeur, which was now entirely changed." Thus Bartram reflects an ambiguity toward the past not uncommon in American thought. The Indian ruins themselves provide a convenient image for this shifting attitude. At one time they are "very magnificent monuments of the power and industry of the ancient inhabitants of these lands"; at another, the piles of human bones "exhibit scenes of uncultivated nature. . . , rather disagreeable to a mind of . . . sensibility, since some of these objects recognize past transactions and events, perhaps not altogether reconcilable [*sic*] to justice and humanity." At still another site, the "monuments of the ancients," a burying-ground of the Yemassee, provide merely "a night of peaceful repose" for the solitary traveler.³⁰

Ambivalent as William Bartram appears to have felt toward the past, there is little doubt that it was into that past he traveled when he journeyed to the southern wilderness. What the wilderness meant to him he dramatized clearly by his conscious use of one sustained metaphor; that metaphor he conveyed through his rhetoric.

When Bartram undertook his solitary quest, he deliberately retraced the route followed earlier by his father, John Bartram, of whom he was justifiably proud. Thus in a personal sense, it was his own past he sought. To a limited extent, it was also America's past, since he interested himself in events of history and in the remains of ancient Spanish and Indian settlements. Ultimately, however, it was a more remote past still, as his dominant image system makes plain. As he approached the Carolina coast by sea, on the very first stage of his journey, the magnificence of the scene presents "an idea of the first appearance of the earth to man at the creation," and throughout the book the wilderness is seen as Eden, A plantation is charming in its "primitive simplicity," an uninhabited island is a "blissful garden" and a "blessed unviolated spot of earth." This is by no means a Biblical Eden only, for Bartram recounts a Creek Indian legend of a terrestrial paradise

30. *Ibid.*, 56, 62, 74, 84-85, 101, 130, 255-57, 263-64, 286, 292. Bartram called the St. Johns River, "St. Juan."

inhabited by "daughters of the sun," and he graphically depicts the Seminole warriors as wandering in an "elysium" where his rest is guarded by "the Deity; Liberty, and the Muses, inspiring him." The classic Elysian fields recur often, and a handsome stock-farmer and his bride are hailed as Venus and Adonis. Ovid would have based a metamorphosis on the exotic snake bird of Florida, the reader is assured. This is a very generalized *Urwelt*, borrowing from many mythologies, and emphasizing merely the "sublime enchanting scenes of primitive nature." Living among the Indians, Bartram found his situation "like that of the primitive state of man," and there is a "divine simplicity and truth" in Indian hospitality. Bartram the hero-voyager has an archetypal comrade in his friend the young Seminole prince, and "the most perfect human figure" he had ever seen was another Seminole. He idealizes the Seminole girls, and the "sylvan scene of primitive innocence" represented by the Cherokee maidens gathering strawberries is straight from the Golden Age. Bartram goes deeper into the past still in his fascination with the awesomeness of the swamps and of the primordial serpent. His descriptions of rattlesnakes, alligators, and giant tortoises, of semi-tropical vegetation, of steaming mists and subterranean streams, of wild birds in "an inexpressible uproar," sound more prehistoric than primitive. It is almost a temptation, given Bartram's classical as well as his botanical interests, to imagine the *Ramus Aureus* among the other "original productions of nature" in his collection.³¹

Bartram's ordering of material to convey his underlying theme is a consciously artistic one. The casual reader risks misconstruing the level of his diction as Twain did Cooper's, unless its purpose is recognized. At times, it is true, Bartram's exalted tone and idiom reach the heights of unconscious parody and add immeasurably to the delight of the modern reader. "Behold how gracious and beneficent shines the roseate morn!" cries Bartram, and in the context the line works with complete success. At times, however, his touch falters just at the end of a passage and all is lost; admiring the farm of a liberal and humane slave-holder, he observes: "The slaves comparatively of a gigantic stature, . . . were mounted on the massive timber logs; the regular heavy

31. *Ibid.*, 30, 38, 47, 69, 107, 110, 126, 143, 170, 198, 206, 210, 219, 257, 284, 288-90, 374.

strokes of their gleaming axes re-echoed in the deep forests; at the same time, contented and joyful, the sooty sons of Africa forgetting their bondage, in chorus sung the virtues and beneficence of their master in songs of their own composition." Bartram's heightened eloquence is appropriate to his point of view, however, as it is to Cooper's romantic intention, and we do not look for a realistic rendering of dialect speech. When Bartram's rustic host, "reclining on a bear-skin, spread under the shade of a Live Oak, smoking his pipe" rose to greet him, we are not surprised when he says, "Welcome, stranger; I am indulging the rational dictates of nature . . .," since we know that this is really Eden and not prosaic East Florida.³²

In his technique of organization, Bartram has achieved a greater artistic success. His methods closely resemble the novelistic, and add much to the interest of the book. The structure of the *Travels* anticipates Thoreau's more elaborate technique. Except for the final section (in reality a supplement or appendix constituting a treatise on Indian culture) the book forms an organic whole. Though it comprises a number of separate trips covering several years' time, it has been unified to present the effect of a single journey. The novelistic treatment begins with the heading of Chapter I - "The Author Sets Sail From Philadelphia, And Arrives At Charleston, From Whence He Begins His Travels" - and the story is instantly enlivened by a storm at sea. Dramatic scenes follow one another in quick succession: the confrontation of the Indian outlaw, an encounter with a trading schooner bearing news of an Indian raid, epic battles with alligators, the "extraordinary deliverance" from the wolf. Bartram's special interest in natural history is turned to stylistic purposes, as he artfully uses the set pieces of description or the scientist's notes to impede or accelerate the rhythms of his narrative. A further, though perhaps less conscious, device for producing excitement is Bartram's tendency to shift into the present tense as he reports especially beautiful or keenly-felt experiences. The final scene of the narrative sustains the dramatic and the metaphoric interest to the end. Traveling north from Alexandria, Virginia, Bartram encountered intense cold, and by the time he crossed into Maryland, snow was deep and

32. *Ibid.*, 72, 207, 257.

traveling difficult. After almost insuperable difficulties, he finally managed to cross the half-frozen Susquehanna, and he set out for his destination, returning to Philadelphia and his father's house in the cold and snow, a not inappropriate end for a journey to a vanishing Eden.³³

For both Jonathan Dickinson and William Bartram, the thriving urban bustle of Philadelphia marked the conclusion of a deeply significant adventure. To the former, the city was the land of promise after his captivity and the Florida desert; to the latter it was the world after the Fall when the gates of the Garden were closed. The vivid literal details of each experience, therefore, were invested by its narrator with implications far beyond the literal. Thus, although both Dickinson's *Journal* and Bartram's *Travels* effectively serve the function of document, both contribute as well to our understanding of the growth of an American literature.

33. *Ibid.*: 115-19, 127-28, 135, 144-45, 275, 282. Chapter IV of Part III illustrates the alternation of narration and description very well.