

## VIII

### POCAHONTAS

IN HIS younger days Powhatan had been a great warrior. He was the chief, or *werowanne*, of eight tribes. Through conquest his dominions had been extended until they reached from the James River to the Potomac, from the sea to the falls in the rivers, and included thirty of the forty tribes in Virginia. It is estimated that his subjects numbered eight thousand. The name of his nation and the Indian name of the James River was Powhatan. His enemies were two neighbouring confederacies, the Mannahoacs, between the Rapahannock and York rivers, and the Monacans between the York and James rivers, above the falls.

Powhatan lived sometimes at a village of his name, where Richmond now stands, and sometimes at Werowocomoco, on the York River. He had in each of his hereditary villages a house built like a long arbour for his especial reception. When Powhatan visited one of these villages a feast was already spread in the long house or arbour. He had a hunting town in the wilderness called Orapax. A mile from this place, deep in the woods, he had another arbour-like house, where he kept furs, copper, pearls, and beads, treasures ~~which~~ he was saving against his burial.

Powhatan had twenty sons and eleven daughters living. We know nothing of his sons except Nanteguas, "the most manliest, comeliest, boldest spirit" ever seen

in "a savage." Pocahontas was Powhatan's favourite daughter. She was born in 1594 or 1595. Of her mother nothing is known. Powhatan had many wives; when he tired of them he would present them to those of his subjects whom he considered the most deserving.

Indians are frequently known by several names. It is a disappointment to learn that the name which the romantic story of this Indian princess has made so famous was not her real name. She was called in childhood Metoax, or Metoake. Concealing this from the English, because of a superstitious notion that if these pale-faced strangers knew her true name they could do her some harm, the Indians gave her **name** as Pocahontas.

Powhatan's authority, like that of all Indian chiefs, was held in check by custom. "The lawes whereby he ruleth," says Captain Smith, "is custome. Yet when he listeth, his will is a law, and must be obeyed: not only as a king, but as halfe a god they esteeme him."

Each village and tribe had its respective chief, or "werowance," as he was called among the Powhatan Indians. The affairs of the tribe were settled in a council of the chiefs and warriors of the several villages.

Powhatan was the great werowance over all, "unto whom," says Captain Smith, "they pay tribute of skinnnes, beads, copper, pearle, deere, turkies, wild beasts, and corne. What he commandeth they dare not disobey in the least thing. It is strange to see with what care and adoration all these people do obey this Powhatan. For at his feete they present whatsoever he commandeth, and at the least frown of his brow, their greatest spirits will tremble! and no marvell, for he is very terrible and tyrannous in punishing such as offend him."

It was a barbarous life in which the little Pocahontas was bred. Her people always washed their young babies in the river on the coldest mornings to harden them. She was accustomed to see her old father sitting at the door of his cabin regarding with grim pleasure a string of his enemy's scalps, suspended from tree to tree, and waving in the breeze. Men in England in her time idealised her into a princess and fine lady. In our time historians have been surprised and indignant at finding that she was not a heroine of romance, but simply an Indian maiden. Such as her life made her she was — in her manners an untrained savage. But she was also the steadfast friend and helper of the feeble colony, and that is why her life is heroic and full of interest.

Powhatan, sensible of the pomp and dignity proper to his position as a great warrior, particularly desired to impress the English who were settling at Jamestown. A member of the colony, Captain Smith had been prisoner for several weeks and was detained until preparations had been made to receive him in state.

When Powhatan and his train had had time to deck themselves in all "their greatest braveries," Captain Smith was admitted to the chief's presence. He was seated upon a sort of divan resembling a bedstead. Before him was a fire, and on either hand sat two young women about eighteen years of age. Powhatan, "well beaten with many cold and stormy winters," wore strings of pearls around his neck, and was covered with a great robe of raccoon skins decorated with the tails. Around the council house was ranged a double row of warriors. Behind these were as many women. The heads and shoulders of the Indians were painted red, many had

their hair decorated with white down, and all wore some savage ornament.

On the appearance of the prisoner a great shout arose from these primitive courtiers. An Indian woman was appointed to bring water for the prisoner to wash his hands in. Another woman brought him feathers to dry them and Captain Smith was then feasted in the "best barbarous manner," and a council was held to decide his fate. This debate lasted a long time, but the conclusion could hardly have been favourable to Captain Smith, since Powhatan was jealous of the white colony already encroaching upon his seclusion at Werowocomoco.

During this solemn debate Captain Smith must have felt anything but comfortable. He did not know his doom until two stones were brought in and placed before Powhatan. Then as many as could lay hands on him dragged him to the feet of the chief and laid his head upon the stones. The executioners raised their clubs to beat out his brains. Such a scene was not uncommon in this forest court. From childhood these savage men and women were accustomed to exult in the most barbarous tortures and executions. It is then the more wonderful that the heart of a little Indian maiden should have been touched with pity for the doomed white man. Pocahontas, a child of ten or twelve, and "the king's dearest daughter," pleaded for the life of the captive. But "no entreaty could prevail" with the stern Powhatan.

The warriors were ready to strike the blow, when the child flew to the side of Captain Smith, took "his head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death, whereat," says the quaint narrative "the Emperor [Powhatan] was contented he should live to make him

hatchets and her beads and copper," thinking he was ~~accustomed~~ to follow all occupations. "For," says the story, "the king himself will make his own robes, shoes, bows, arrows, and pots," while he would "plant, hunt, or do any thing so well as the rest."

Powhatan did not long detain Captain Smith for such trivial uses as making trinkets for Pocahontas. It had become the desire of his heart to possess the powerful weapons and tools of the English. He saw that a friend in Jamestown would be a good thing, and he perhaps hoped from friendly commerce with the colony to acquire ascendancy over other Indian tribes.

He took occasion to express his wishes to Captain Smith in a curious manner.

Two days after his rescue from death he had the captive taken to one of his arbour-like buildings in the woods and left alone upon a mat by the fire. The house was curtained off in the centre with a mat. Soon a most doleful noise came from behind the mat, and Powhatan, disguised in "the most fearfulest manner," and looking "more like a devil than a man," entered, with some two hundred Indians, painted black. The outcome of this impressive ceremony was that Powhatan told Captain Smith that they were now friends, and that he would presently send him home, and that when he arrived at Jamestown he must send him two great guns and a grindstone. In return he said he would give him the country of Capahowosick, and would always consider him his son.

Captain Smith was accordingly sent to Jamestown with twelve guides. The Indians delayed on their journey, though the distance was short. They camped in the woods one night, and feasted sumptuously; but

Captain Smith was in constant fear of his life still, "expecting every hour to be put to one death or another." He was, however, led in safety to the fort. Here he treated his savage guides with great hospitality, and showed Rawhunt, a trusty servant of Powhatan, two demi-culverins (long cannons carrying a nine-pound shot) and a mill-stone to carry to his chief. The Indians however, "found them somewhat too heavy." For their benefit, Captain Smith had the guns loaded with stones, and discharged among the boughs of trees covered with icicles. The crashing fall of the ice-laden limbs so frightened the Indians that they fled, "half dead with fear," and it was some time before they could be induced to return. Presents of various toys were given them for Powhatan and his family, and they went away satisfied.

The winter of 1607-08 was remarkably cold, both in Europe and America. In the midst of its severity an accident resulted in a fire which destroyed many of the reed-thatched cottages, the palisades, and much of the provisions of the colonists at Jamestown.

Powhatan still looked with covetous eyes upon the glittering swords, the ponderous muskets, and the serviceable pistols of the English. So long as the white man used supernatural bullets and sharp-edged swords and the red man possessed only tomahawks of stone and stone-pointed arrows and javelins, so long were the English safe from Indian attacks. It was now the ambition of Powhatan's life to obtain a goodly store of English weapons, instead of the rude wooden swords used by the Indians. Savage-like, he went about his purpose in the most crafty way with the most innocent air. And sent twenty turkeys "to express his love," with the request that Captain Smith would return the compliment with a

present of twenty swords. But Smith refused, **knowing** it would cut the throat of the colony to put such weapons into the hands of the crafty chief.

Powhatan was not to be thus outdone. If he could not procure the swords in one way he would in another. "He caused his people with twenty devices to obtain" as many swords. The Indians became "insolent." They surprised the colonists at their work. They would lie in ambuscade at the very gates of Jamestown and procure the weapons of stragglers by force. The council in England had deemed it the only wise policy to keep peace with the savages at all hazards, and a wise policy it was if it were not carried too far. The orders from this body had been very strict; the colonists were in no way to offend the Indians.

Thus a "charitable humour prevailed" until Captain Smith was the man they "meddled" with. This fiery soldier did not wait for deliberation. He hunted the miscreants, and those whom he captured he "terrified" with whipping and imprisonment. In return, the Indians captured two straggling Englishmen, and came in force to the very gates of Jamestown, demanding seven Indians, whom, "for their villainies," Smith had detained. The irrepressible Captain immediately headed a sally in which he forced the Indians to surrender the Englishmen unconditionally. He then examined his prisoners, but they were faithful to their chief, and he could get nothing from them. He made six of them believe, by "several volleys of shot," that he had caused one of their number to be killed. They immediately confessed, in separate examinations, to a plot on the part of Powhatan to procure the weapons, and then to cut the throats of the colonists. Captain Smith still

detained the Indians, resolving to give them a wholesome fright.

Pocahontas presently came to Jamestown, accompanied by Indian messengers. Her father had sent them with presents, and a message excusing "the injuries done by some rash, untoward captains, his subjects, desiring their liberties for this time with the assurance of his love forever."

When Captain Smith had punished his seven prisoners as he thought fit, he "used them well" for a few days, and delivered them to Pocahontas, pretending that he saved their lives only for the sake of the little Indian girl.

One cannot refrain from admiring in the brave colonists and their captain the fortitude and persistence that they showed, and the wonderful tact with which they managed the natives. Many had died, some had recovered, and others were still sick.

Captain Smith had been installed as president. He governed the colony wisely. His measures were doubtless severe, but severity was necessary among these men totally unqualified for a frontier life, with an unwise management in England, and endless discontent and jealousy at Jamestown. Men shut up together in hard circumstances are sure to fall out.

Captain Smith went energetically to work to better the condition of the colony. Jamestown was once more the scene of busy activity. Church and storehouse were repaired, new houses built for more supplies, and the fort altered in form. The soldiers were drilled every day upon a plain called Smithfield. Here crowds of Indians would gather to watch with wonder the Englishmen shoot at a mark.



Captain Smith, to quiet all fears, and to show his willingness to assist in the business on hand, as well as to hasten an affair which would consume so much valuable time, undertook with four companions a journey to Werowocomoco, to ask Powhatan to come to Jamestown.

It was now the season to trade for corn with the Indians.

When the Englishmen reached the home of Powhatan they found that he was some thirty miles away. They were received by the steadfast friend of all white men, Pocahontas. She sent messengers for her father, and undertook to entertain her friends while they waited.

The Englishmen were left in an open space, seated on a mat by the fire. Suddenly they heard a "hideous noise" in the woods. Supposing that Powhatan and his warriors were upon them, they sprang to their feet, grasped their arms and seized two or three old Indians who were near them. Pocahontas came to them, however, with her apology, saying that they might ~~kill~~ her "if any hurt were intended." Those who stood near, men, women and children, assured the white men that all was right. Presently thirty young women came rushing out of the woods. Their only covering was a cincture or apron of green leaves; they were gaily painted, some one colour and some another. Every girl wore a pair of deer's horns on her head, while from her girdle and upon one arm hung an otter's skin. The leader wore a quiver of arrows, and carried a bow and arrow in her hands. The others followed with swords, clubs and pot-sticks.

"These fiends, with most hellish shouts and cries,"

says the ungallant narrator, "cast themselves in a ring about the fire, singing and dancing with most excellent ill variety." This masquerade lasted about half an hour, when the Indian girls disappeared as they had come.

They again reappeared in their ordinary costume. Pocahontas invited Captain Smith to a dinner which had been spread for him with "all the savage dainties" which they could procure. They tormented the captain by pressing around him saying, "Love you not me? Love you not me?" While he feasted they danced, and ended by conducting him to his lodging with fire-brands for torches.

Powhatan arrived the next day. Cold weather had come and famine began to stare the colonists in the face. The president set out for the country of the Nansemond Indians. These people refused not only to provide the four hundred bushels of corn which they had promised in their treaty with the colonists on their previous visit, but they refused to trade at all. Their excuse was that they had used up the most that they had, and that they were under commands from Powhatan neither to trade with the English nor to allow them to enter their river. The English had recourse to force, and the Indians fled at the first volley of musketry without shooting a single arrow. The first cabin the white men discovered they set on fire. The Indians immediately desired peace, and promised the English half that they had. Before night all the boats were loaded with corn, and the English sailed some four miles down the river. Here they camped out for the night in the open woods on frozen ground covered with snow.

The manner in which these adventurers of nearly