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ABSTRACT

PRISON NARRATIVES OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

By

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Among the memoirs and military journals published after the Revolution and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century are a number of narratives which detail the experiences of men who had been held by the British as prisoners of war. These narratives enjoyed a certain degree of popularity, and most of them were reprinted at least once. After the Civil War, when the tastes and tempo of American life were changing, these books disappeared from the bookstalls and seemed destined for oblivion.

In the early part of the twentieth century, however, historians began serious investigations of the whole prisoner of war issue, and the prison narratives began to appear in footnotes as documentary sources for conclusions about prison conditions. By the 1940's, the narratives were being examined by literary critics in the context of the more familiar Indian captivity narratives. Recent studies have

continued, when they mention the Revolutionary War prison narratives at all, to group all captivity narratives under the umbrella of the Indian captivity formula. Until the present study, there has been no attempt to examine the prisoner of war narratives on their own terms.

Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons for doing so. In the first place, the narratives have only limited usefulness as historical documents; for the most part, they were written long after the fact by men whose memories were influenced by age, bias, and strong temptations to exaggeration. In the second place, the Revolutionary War narratives have little in common with the Indian captivities except for the fact that the heroes of both were writing about the experience of being held captive. This necessarily involves a distortion because it affords the Revolutionary context in which the prison narratives were written only secondary consideration. To the men who wrote the narratives, however, the Revolution and the myth of republican virtue were of paramount importance.

An examination of the Revolutionary War prison narrative in terms of the Indian captivity formula reveals that, indeed, the prison narrative does not conform and that it has a formula of its own. Instead of the monomythic pattern of separation-transformation-return which characterizes the Indian tale, a formula emphasizing stability and growth governs the prison narrative. The key to the formula is the republican virtue myth, the notion that the uncorrupted patriot is willing to sacrifice his personal interests for the public good. Captivity for the American Revolutionary soldier or seaman, then, was portrayed, not as a transforming experience, but as a test and tempering of the virtue which

enables the prisoner to resist being transformed by his captors. One result is that the prison narrative does not descend into sensationalism, as the Indian narrative often does. Another is that we are forced to seek the significance of the prison narrative in what it can tell us of how nineteenth-century Americans felt about themselves, of the their history, and of their apparent need to recast the period of the Revolution into a kind of golden age of the American character.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 25, 1775, Ethan Allen was taken prisoner by the British after leading an ill-advised and premature attempt to capture Montreal. The Boston Gazette and Country Journal for 30 October 1775 took notice of the fact in a published letter which complained,

> The expedition was a thing of Col. Allen's own head, without orders from the General; and from whom (as well as others) he receives much censure. --If they had been apprised of it, they could have put him in a situation to have succeeded without much danger. --But Allen is a high flying genius, pursues every scheme on its first impression, without consideration, and much less judgment. It is with the utmost difficulty, and through the greatest entreaty, that Gen. Schuyler permitted him to go with the army, knowing his natural disposition; and indeed his fears proved not groundless; and tho' trifling our loss, and the detachment, yet it has given a check to our progress.

The nature of that check was perhaps more moral than material; only about forty of Allen's men were captured with him, and three months later, on December 31, the death of Montgomery and the defeat of the army eclipsed the significance of Allen's misadventure. The campaign closed, a complete failure.

Allen did not, however, slip quietly into obscurity. Shortly after his exchange and return home in May, 1778, he began the serial publication of A Narrative of Col. Ethan Allen's Captivity in The Pennsylvania Packet. The memoir was extremely popular, and it was reprinted eight times during the war and numerous times thereafter.[1] In the book, readers found, not simply a "high flying genius," but a

persona transformed into a Yankee hero who defies English tyranny to its face while remaining true to republican principles. Brooke Hindle, in his introduction to the most recent reissue of the Narrative (1961), links Allen's contemporary popularity specifically to the characterization of the hero returning from captivity to assure the reader "that American resolution, courage, and virtue could, in the end, triumph over British arrogance and cruelty."[2]

Ethan Allen, however, was not alone in creating the myth of the virtuous hero held captive by arrogant Englishmen in the War of Independence. Throughout the final years of the war and well into the nineteenth century, the memoirs of ex-prisoners began appearing in the bookstalls. There were not very many at first. Before 1800, most of the published prison writing appeared in newspapers and tended to be very propagandistic in tone. The most notable narratives which enjoyed separate publication in the eighteenth century were A Narrative of the Capture of John Dodge (Philadelphia, 1779) and John Blatchford's Narrative of Remarkable Occurrences (New London, 1788).[3] From the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of the 1840's, however, a new prison narrative appeared approximately every five or six years. Fanning's Narrative, for example, came out in 1806, and it was followed shortly by Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts in 1809 and The Narrative of Ebenezer Fletcher in 1813. Later came the Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter (1824), Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship from the Manuscript of Capt. Thomas Dring (1829), Thomas Andros' The Old Jersey Captive (1833), The Revolutionary Adventures of Ebenezer Fox (1838), and Charles Herbert's A Relic of the Revolution (1847).[4]

There was, apparently, a market for these narratives in the years following the War of 1812. Richard M. Dorson, writing not simply about prison narratives but about all the Revolutionary War memoirs that appeared then, attributes the "rising market" to nationalistic feeling: "American character types had begun to emerge in newspapers, almanacs, farces, and public house stories, the frontier boaster and the cunning Yankee, and the Revolutionary chronicles amplified these homespun heroes, giving them actual dimensions and proven triumphs."[5] Americans of the time felt a need to discover and celebrate their own history and traditions, and the war narratives achieved popularity for many of the same reasons which underscored the success of professional writers like Irving or Cooper. Alongside of this popular market there arose a more serious antiquarian interest in the narratives as the raw material of national history. It is probably no coincidence that during the Civil War, when national unity was a fragmenting ideal and the American experiment was in real danger of failure, the antiquarian Charles Ira Bushnell published or reissued at least seven of the prison narratives.[6] Bushnell was motivated by national pride. A similar sentiment later led Danske Dandridge to reprint lengthy excerpts from the narratives in her American Prisoners of the Revolution (1911).

Despite the fact that there has been a continuing interest in these narratives, at least through World War I, there has nevertheless been no study which has examined them critically. That this should be true of the nineteenth century is not really surprising because scholars then viewed the narratives more as historical documents than as works which themselves required examination and interpretation. Bushnell, for

example, allowed the material he published to speak for itself, and in his introduction to The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins (New York, 1864) he treats the book as a finished interpretation in its own right, "a valuable contribution to the Revolutionary history of our country" (p. vii). In the twentieth century there has been some movement toward viewing the narratives as texts rather than documents, but until about ten years ago, most commentators relegated the Revolutionary War captivity narratives to footnotes and focused their attention instead upon British prisoner of war policy. Others have attempted to define the prison narrative of the Revolution as a small and not particularly important offshoot of the more familiar Indian captivity narrative, but again the effect has been more to pass over these narratives than to scrutinize them.

It would seem then, that none of the existing interpretations of the significance of the Revolutionary War prison narratives is completely satisfactory. First, the narratives cannot provide reliable historical evidence. Many were written long after the fact from sketchy notes or from memory, and so the accuracy of many of the details contained in the narratives is open to question unless there is strong corroborating evidence from other sources. Even where there apparently is corroboration, the investigator must be careful because in some cases one version of an event is the source for the other and not an independent statement. There is cause, also, to question the author's motivation as well as his accuracy. Many narrative writers claimed in their prefaces that they had been prevailed upon by friends and family to publish the truth of their Revolutionary experiences, and to a certain extent this provided part

of the motivation to write. It is also true, however, that most of these men were in some financial difficulty when they brought out their memoirs. Some were applying for pensions, and these men hoped that their memoirs would create interest in and generally enhance their petitions. Others had been denied pensions and sought to turn a small profit from the publication of their stories. Not one, however, made any attempt to present himself primarily as a historian.

Second, the Revolutionary War captivity narrative simply is not an Indian captivity narrative. There are few, if any, Indians in most of them, and those that do appear are entirely under the control of the British. A more important distinction between the two types, however, is that the mythic content is different. Richard Van Der Beets has written of the Indian captivity memoir in terms of the Monomyth, in which the initiation ritual "consists of three stages or phases: separation, transformation, and enlightened return. The pattern of the Indian captivity experience, in its unfolding narrative of abduction, detention/adoption, and return, closely follows this fundamental configuration."[7] The "fundamental configuration" is, of course, similar in the prison narrative, but with significant differences in the content. The prisoner of war goes into captivity as an indirect but not unforeseeable consequence of his signing aboard a privateer or joining the army, but the Indian captive is more often simply abducted. The transformation which the prisoner of war undergoes is internal--he struggles to remain loyal to the cause despite terrible conditions and frequent betrayal; but the Indian captive is transformed externally--he is forced to share the ritual of a savage captor, to eat entrails or to drink blood, before he can return. The return of the respective captives

differs also: the Indian captive who has undergone a trial or ritual ordeal sees the end of his struggle and of the threat to his identity when he returns to his home and family, but the Revolutionary prisoner returns to put the virtue which has recently been tested into action. The returning prisoner of war in the narratives rejoins not his family but his regiment.

The drama, then, of the prisoner of war narrative takes place within the character of the narrator, and the point at issue is not really the cruelty of the captor so much as it is the virtue of the captive. About this virtue, Gordon S. Wood has observed that, "The sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of the Revolution."[8] The Indian captivity narrative, before it completed its descent into pure sensationalism in the nineteenth century, presented the reader with an Augustinian sense of virtue: the whole experience of captivity was viewed as a test ordained by providence, and the suffering captive could console himself not only with the conviction that his virtue would see him through, but with the expectation that it would be rewarded. The prisoner of war, on the other hand, found himself in a much more existential situation; self-sacrifice and republican virtue are symptoms of a more Roman outlook whereby ultimate reward or punishment are less important than the action itself. The prisoners portray themselves as men who remained loyal, despite great temptation, simply because it was the correct thing to do. There is a serious divergence, then, between the two types of captivity narrative. As Roy Harvey Pearce has suggested, the ultimate significance of the Indian narrative

lies in its contribution to the development of the dime novel,[9] but the prison narrative comes closer to becoming actual autobiography. The ex-prisoner, whether he is writing to justify a pension claim or to entertain and enlighten his grandchildren, is at the same time presenting an interpretation of his own life and motives.

In the first two chapters of the work that follows, I examine the extent and variety of Revolutionary War prison writing and discuss the complex motivations which underlie the writing and publishing of the prison narratives. The third chapter surveys the uses to which prison writing has been put by historians and literary critics. Chapter four demonstrates that an appeal to republican virtue lies at the center of the persona's characterization in the prison narrative, and it provides the basis for the final chapter, which establishes the Revolutionary War captivity narrative as a distinct sub-genre through an examination of its defining characteristics.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

[1]There were five issues in 1779, three in 1780, two in 1849, and one each in 1805, 1807, 1814, 1834, 1838, 1845, 1846, 1852, 1854, and 1930.

[2]The Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen (New York: Corinth, 1961), p. VI.

[3]Dodge's book went into a second edition in 1780: Mr. Dodge's Narrative of His Sufferings among the British at Detroit. Of the Cruel and Barbarous Treatment and Extreme Sufferings of Mr. John Dodge during His Captivity of Many Months among the British at Detroit, in Which Is Also Contained a Particular Detail of the Sufferings of a Virginian, Who Died in Their Hands. Written by Himself; and Now Published to Satisfy the Curiosity of Everyone throughout the United States (Danvers and Salem, 1780). Blatchford's full title is Narrative of Remarkable Occurrences, in the Life of John Blatchford, of Cape Ann, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Containing, His Treatment in Nova-Scotia--the West Indies--Great Britain--France, and the East-Indies, as a Prisoner in the Late War. Taken from His Own Mouth (New London, 1788). Danske Dandridge, American Prisoners of the Revolution (1911; rpt. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1967), p. 139, reports that Blatchford's Narrative first appeared serially in newspapers. For examples of newspaper propaganda, see The Boston Gazette for 16 June 1777 and 17 December 1778, or The Connecticut Courant for 23 June 1777.

[4]Several of these have been reissued in the twentieth century: John S. Barnes, ed., Fanning's Narrative (New York, 1912); The Narrative of Ebenezer Fletcher (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970); Leonard Kriegel, ed., Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter (New York: Corinth, 1962); Lawrence H. Leder, ed., Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship from the Manuscript of Capt. Thomas Dring (New York: Corinth, 1961); and A Relic of the Revolution (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1968).

[5]America Rebels: Narratives of the Patriots (New York: Pantheon, 1953), p. 4.

[6]Bushnell reprinted Blatchford's Narrative in 1865 and Fletcher's in 1866. The following appeared for the first time under his aegis: A Memoir of Eli Bickford, a Patriot of the Revolution (New York, 1865); Alexander Coffin, The Destructive Operation of Foul Air, Tainted Provisions, Bad Water and Personal Filthiness upon Human Constitutions; Exemplified in the Unparalleled Cruelty of the British to the American Captives at New York during the Revolutionary War, on Board Their Prison and Hospital Ships, in a Communication to Dr. Mitchell, dated September 4,

1807. Also a Letter to the Tammany Society, upon the Same Subject, by Captain Alexander Coffin, Jun., One of the Surviving Sufferers, with an Introduction, by Charles I. Bushnell (New York, 1865); A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Levi Hanford, a Soldier of the Revolution (New York, 1863); The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins, Containing Details of His Captivity, a First and Second Time on the High Seas, in the Revolutionary War, by the British, and His Consequent Sufferings, and Escape from the Jersey Prison Ship, then Lying in the Harbour of New York, by Swimming. Now First Printed from the Original Manuscript. Written by Himself. With an Introduction and Notes by Charles I. Bushnell (New York, 1864); and The Narrative of Major Abraham Leggett, of the Army of the Revolution, Now First Printed from the Original Manuscript. Written by Himself. With an Introduction and Notes by Charles I. Bushnell (New York, 1865).

[7]"The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," American Literature, 43 (1972), 553.

[8]The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 53.

[9]"The Significances of the Captivity Narrative," American Literature, 19 (1947-48), 1-20.

ONE: THE VARIETIES OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR PRISON WRITING

An inevitable result of any war is the publication shortly thereafter of the memoirs of many of its leading participants. The American Revolution was no exception. It produced its own crop of explanations and justifications of the military decisions that had made the American victory finally possible. After John Burgoyne returned to England stamped by the humiliation of Saratoga, for example, he attempted to defend his reputation by publishing A State of the Expedition from Canada, as Laid before the House of Commons, by Lieutenant-General Burgoyne, and Verified by Evidence; with a Collection of Authentic Documents, and an Addition of Many Circumstances Which Were Prevented from Appearing before the House by the Prorogation of Parliament (London, 1780). On the patriot side, Henry Lee brought out his two-volume Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States (Philadelphia, 1812), which Mark Boatner has called "not only an essential historical document for any study of war in the South, but . . . also one of the finest military memoirs in the language."[1]

Staff and field commanders, however, were not the only veterans of the Revolutionary to keep journals or publish personal narratives. Many of the junior officers, private soldiers, and common seamen of the eighteenth century were literate, and a number of them committed their experiences to writing. Some were published. For example, Joseph Plumb Martin, a private in the Continental line, gives a lively and humorous account of himself in A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and

Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier; Interspersed with Anecdotes of Incidents That Occurred within His Own Observation (Hallowell [Me.], 1830). There were loyalist memoirs as well, such as Lieut. James Moody's Narrative of His Exertions and Sufferings in the Cause of Government, Since the Year 1776; Authenticated by Proper Certificates (London, 1783).[2]

Revolutionary War prison writing is for the most part the work of the same kind of relatively unknown veterans. Were it not for the journals and memoirs they left behind, most of the prison writers would have dissolved completely into anonymity within a few years of their deaths. As it is, few of their names are recognized today except by a very small group of scholars and antiquarians. Nonetheless, a fairly large body of Revolutionary War prison writing has survived, and this writing can be divided into three basic categories. First, there are the diaries and journals which many of the prisoners kept during their confinement. The second category consists of propaganda published in pamphlets and newspapers during the war. Former prisoners often used exaggerated accounts of their sufferings in prison to stir up anti-British and anti-loyalist feeling. Finally, there are a number of postwar narratives which were written after the war when the harsh tone of propaganda was no longer appropriate and when the writer had to address himself to an audience with little or no first-hand knowledge of the Revolution. The present study will be concerned mostly with the narratives of this third type which were written and published between the end of the war and the 1840's.

An examination of the diaries and of the propaganda provides important background information about the prisons and prisoners,

however, and we must turn our attention to them before we can fully appreciate the context in which the published narratives were written. The diaries and journals, for example, provide us with records of events as they happened, and even though the writer of a prison diary is the victim of his own perspective, it is still likely that the diary is a more accurate reflection of the realities of captivity than the postwar narrative or the propaganda piece. For one thing, diaries are less subject to the effects of faulty memory than memoirs are, especially if many years separate the events from the narration. For another, the journals were kept for the writers themselves and were not intended to reach a wider audience. As a result, the temptation to embellish the truth was less pronounced than would have been the case if the authors had intended to publish.[3] In the diaries, then, we find not prison tales but the raw materials for them.

Four important themes recur in these journals: the inadequacy of the food, the oppressiveness of the boredom, the description of escapes and escape attempts, and the power of patriotism as a sustaining influence. Though these are left for the most part undeveloped, mentioned flatly without comment or context, they emerge as the most important features in the prisoners' perceptions of prison life.

Generally, British policy was to provide prisoners with two-thirds of the rations issued to a soldier or seaman. In many cases, however, this proved inadequate because of the poor quality of the food and because even the full rations of an eighteenth-century private were barely enough to keep a man in good health.[4] The prisoners were, of course, particularly upset by such treatment, and many devoted a great deal of space in their diaries to detailing precisely what food they were given

and what condition they found it in. Dr. Elias Cornelius, for example, was imprisoned in Livingston's Sugar House in New York City for a short time in 1777. His journal records that he and twelve companions were given only "4 pounds of poor Irish Pork and 4 pounds of mouldy bread for 4 days."[5] Another diarist, Jeremiah Greenman, was captured at Quebec, and his first entry as a prisoner describes what he got to eat. On January 1, 1776,

> we ware put all in to a french Covint ware they gave us a gill of rum for a New years gift & sum biscuit / we ware aloued by the genl: 1 pound of bread and a half a pound of meat [,]6 ozenes of butter a weak [,] a half a pint of boyled wrice in a day / we had a Cask of porter gave to us by sum jentel man of the town.[6]

Food is indeed an abiding interest with Greenman. He writes on January 2 that "most of ye prisoners had then sent in to very our provision Salt meat. but don git half so much as is a lowed by the Genl" (p. 24). He notes with pleasure the gift of two additional casks of porter in February and March, but by April he is sure the prisoners are being poisoned:

> Such provision as thay give us thay give us warm bisqu[its] wich we think was poysined for the doctors would cure us jest as thay pleased / Say or do what you would thay would give such phisick as thay thought . . . / Complain of ever so deferent an ayl ment thay would serve us all a like and give one sort of phisick wich proved that we was poysoned but we soon got better. (pp. 26-27)

The situation did not really ever improve, for in July Greenman writes that he received a gift of "Sum Sugar & tea wich I was very glad of for we had Nothing but beef & bread & but little of that" (p. 29).

Lieutenant Jabez Fitch was another prisoner whose journal contains numerous references to food. Because Fitch was an officer when he was taken at the Battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776, he expected

better treatment than that afforded to private soldiers like Greenman. In the matter of food, however, there were very few differences. Six weeks after his capture, Fitch devoted an entire paragraph to the poor quality of the provisions:

> During the 39 Days which I was confind on Board the Ships,[7] I never Tasted any kind of Saus, except a very few Pease, nor Did I Tast any kind of fresh Meat or fish Except four Meals of Quawhogs, while we lay down below the Narrows; nor any Butter, or other kind of provision Except a very Scanty allowance of Salt Meat & Bread, with a small matter of Cheese & Chocalet, which we have purchas'd; We have also Lived about as Scant on acct: of Drink as Victuals also.[8]

Food is a continuing concern of Fitch's. On January 22, 1777, he was removed to New Lots, Long Island and billeted in the farm household of George Rapelye; his entry the next day begins with Scripture and a menu. "In the Morning I Read several Chapters in the Book of Luke, and at about 1/2 after 8 had a good Breakfast on Roasted Clams Bread & Butter & Suppaun [corn meal boiled in milk] & Milk" (p. 105). He found, however, that clams and suppaun had drawbacks as a steady diet, and on April 5 he noted ironically that he had not only to endure his meals but to reimburse Mr. Rapelye for them:

> But one thing more is yet to be taken Notice of, which is that we are Expected to pay no more than 2 Dollars pr: Week for all the Suppaun & Clams that we Eat; & alth'o we could have lived in N. York, among our Friends Cheeper than that, yet we could not have Expected to be furnish'd with half so large a Quantity of these two very valuable Articles. (p. 160)

There is ample support in the pages of the prison diaries for the conclusion of one recent study of Revolutionary War prison conditions: "While the food was alloted regularly, it was often of poor quality and it certainly was a monotonous fare at best. . . . The American captives were not starved, but they were forced, without outside help, to endure upon a diet that was meager and not very healthful."[9]

If the prisoners were hungry, they were also bored. Even though words like "tedious" or "sedentary" recur frequently, the greatest indication of the prisoners' boredom to be found in the journals is the fact that very often they found nothing to record. When Jeremiah Greenman was captured for the second time on May 14, 1781, he had just been made an officer, and so he was paroled to Gravesend in Long Island. A week later he made the following entry do for the 20th and the 21st: "Continuing at my quarters all these days sedantaryly & Condoleing my Misfortune of being a prisoner, it being the first since my being captured, of having an oppertunity to reflect on My Misfortune" (p. 209). In the months of June and July there are a total of ten days covered by the entry, "Nothing Worthy Remark," and the month of August presented Greenman with thirteen unremarkable days. On those days when he does make longer entries, their subjects tend to be gossip about events of the war or speculations about the possibility of being exchanged. His entries for the two-week period from August 6 to August 20 are typical:

> M 6. this day went to Flatt Bush were continued till Evening / then came to my Quaters.
> T 7 to F 10. Continuing at my Quaters sedentary & Nothing Worthy Remark.
> S 11. this after Noon 25 Sail of Shipping went up to New York--
> S 12 to W 15. Continuing at my Quaters / Implying myself in Drawing Several Ships &C--Nothing WR--
> T 16. Adml. Graves return'd with his Fleet--
> F 17 to S 19. Nothing Worthy remar.
> M 20. went as far as Graves End Neck, in the Evening return'd to my quaters. (p. 214)

Besides drawing and walking about, Jeremiah Greenman found himself with very little to do.

Other journals note the boredom of prison life. Dr. Jonathan Haskins was the junior surgeon aboard the privateer sloop Charming Sally

when he was captured in 1777 and confined in Mill Prison in England. Marion Coan, who published Haskins' prison diary in the New England Quarterly in 1944, cautioned in the headnote that the tedious entries had been omitted: "The transcript which follows constitutes about three-fourths of the journal, omitting only such entries as mention merely the weather, the arrival and sailing of ships, and commonplace occurrences which are often repeated."[10] One-fourth of the journal, then, consists of entries born of tedium, and there is ample evidence in the entries which Coan does include that Haskins had a great deal of free time. On July 19, 1777, he "Made a calculation and it cost government 5 pence per diem for everyone confoned here" (p. 298). The implication, of course, is that he had little better to do than concoct and solve arithmetical problems. On January 23, 1778, when for the first time the prisoners were allowed to burn a candle at their own expense, Haskins termed it "a great indulgence" (p. 304).

Another journal writer was Captain Samuel Thayer, who left behind a record of his adventures in the Quebec expedition from his setting out from Cambridge in September through his capture on December 31 and his parole the following August.[11] Even though Thayer's entries are often circumstantial, they still reflect the tedium of prison life. Indeed the decision to keep a prison diary at all can be taken as evidence that men like Thayer were bored. The following entries are typical of the tone of his journal:

> July 6. Last night we were lock'd up in our Rooms, for what reason I don't know. This morning 6 vessels arrived, I believe loaded with provisions.
> July 7. Several officers of the Garrison came and looked round in our apartments, but said nothing to us. We were ignorant of the reason until some Sea Captains came into

> the Garden and told us there was a report in town that we intended to set the Seminary [where they were being held] on fire, but they are false reports, & I don't imagine there is not one amongst us that would perform such an action.
> July 8. Different reports. Some say that the Provincials took about 5000 British Prisoners. Others say that the British have taken New York, & that the Pennsylvania & Virginia troops laid down their arms. But the reports are so numerous and various that we can hardly credit the least; next Evening a Sloop of war sail'd down the river.
> July 12. We hear that Major Meigs and Capt. Dearborn are exchanged by Admiral Howe.[12]
> July 17. Nothing remarkable until the 17th, when we hear of a Skirmish take place at Point-au-faire, the Provincials seeing them in their boats, which they stove to Pieces, Killed, wounded and took 400; at 4 o'clock a Brig sail'd up the River.
> July 18. Locked up close in our rooms all night; the reason we are ignorant of. (pp. 291-92)

Because little happened around them, and because what did happen happened for reasons they were ignorant of, the prison diarists devoted much of their attention to recording minutia, gossip, and hearsay.

A final example of the effect of boredom on the diaries of Revolutionary War prisoners can be found in the account of Joseph Ware, who, like Thayer, also accompanied Benedict Arnold to Quebec. The entries for part of January, 1776, are typical:

> 9th to 12th
> Very snowy. The storm very heavy. Three men were stifled to death in the night on duty.
> 12th to 16th
> This morning 60 men went to the hospital with the smallpox. The men have it very favorably.
> 16th to 20th
> Six of the old countrymen, that listed out deserted, and the remainder of them put into prison again, because those deserted.
> 20th to 24th
> Five men died with the small pox. The enemy made an attempt to go out after our people's cannon, and got drove back. There was a continual firing after them.
> 24th to 31st
> Nothing remarkable.[13]

Here death, disease, and desertion are worthy of remark, but only barely so. The entries are blandly stated, and the events excite no particular reaction in Ware himself. The men who wrote the prison journals were, in a word, bored.

Escape and escape attempts provided prison diarists with one subject about which they might write with vigor and enthusiasm, and indeed the pages of the journals abound with accounts of tunnels dug and guards bribed.[14] Even when talking of escape, however, the prisoners often related events in a matter-of-fact way, as if escapes were normal occurrences which did but little to relieve the tedium of those not directly involved. A seaman named William Widger, for example, kept a diary at Mill Prison at Plymouth, England; his entry for April 13, 1781, is typical of the way in which he recorded escape attempts:

> Last Night Mr. Kitts & Hackett with Several more attempted to make their Escape Kitts & Hackett Got into the yard the Centinel discovered them & Fird which alarmd the Guard. they were obligd to take Shellter into the Hospital, and were let into the prison this Morning by Sawing a barr off in the Window, the Guard came into the prison last night but very Sivil.--[15]

Jonathan Haskins adopted a similar tone when treating escape attempts in his journal. "About 2 minutes past 9 p.m.," he noted on January 31, 1778, "Capt. Henry, and Johnson, Boardman, Dale, and Treadwell eloped from this prison and took two centinels with them who were discovered before they got 10 rods off. A great stir to no purpose" (p. 304). Such entries are not at all rare in the prison diaries.

It is not really surprising that the prisoners should treat escape attempts so cavalierly in their journals. For one thing, escape attempts were commonplace, not only in the makeshift jails of New York but also in regular prisons in England. "During the War of American Independence,"

notes British historian Francis Abell, "many prisoners of that nationality were at Forton [the prison at Portsmouth, England], and appear to have been ceaselessly engaged in trying to escape. In 1777 thirty broke out, of whom nineteen were recaptured and were so harshly punished that they complained in a letter which somehow found its way into the London papers."[16] Most commonly, harsh punishment consisted of a stay in the "black hole" with half rations, and it was not unusual for a prisoner emerging from the black hole to begin contemplating his next attempt at freedom right away. Prison breaks and recaptures, then, simply came to be viewed as ordinary and recurring features of tedious prison life. The case, however, was somewhat different when a man came to write down the particulars of his own attempt to run away. For reasons that are obvious, the tone of these accounts is a good deal less lethargic than the tone of the third-person reports, and there is quite a bit more detail. Dr. Elias Cornelius' record of his escape serves as a typical example of how such events were portrayed in the diaries.

On January 16, 1778, Cornelius, who had been a patient at the prison hospital in New York, was told he was to attend to the other sick prisoners despite his own "cough and fever":

> I was now determined to make my escape, although hardly able to undertake it. Just at the dusk of the evening, before the lamps were lighted (having made the Sentinel intoxicated) I with others went out into the back yard to endeavor to make our escape over the fence, the others being backward about going first, I climbed upon a tombstone and gave a spring and went over safely, and then gave orders for the others to do likewise. (p. 10)

One of the party made too much noise; the guards were alerted and Cornelius became separated from the others. By 9:00 p.m. he was down by the river looking for a way to cross to Long Island when he was challenged by a sentinel.

> He bade me advance and give the counter sign, upon which I fancied I was drunk and advancing in a staggering manner, and after falling to the ground, he asked me where I was going, home I told him, but had got lost, and having been to New York, had taken rather too much liquor, and become somewhat intoxicated. He then asked my name which I told him was Marther Hopper (Mr. Hopper lived not far distant). And solicited him to put me in the right road, but told me that I must not go till the Sargent of the Guards dismissed me from him, unless I could give him the counter sign. I still entreated him to let me go knowing the situation I was in. Soon, however, he consented and directed my course which I thanked him for. (p. 11)

In these passages we find a typical feature of the escape story as it was originally recorded in the diaries, and as it later came to be portrayed in propaganda and postwar narratives. The escaping prisoner's tactics most often involve outwitting the enemy rather than physically overcoming him. Cornelius, then, makes one guard drunk, and he pretends he is drunk himself in order to deceive another. Throughout the journals and narratives there are numerous other episodes supporting the notion that Yankee cleverness is more than a match for superior weapons and numbers.[17]

Another feature to be found in Cornelius' account of his escape is the detailing of the hardships he faced while he was on the road. His difficulties were fewer and less severe than those of some others, but their inclusion in the diary serves the usual purpose of describing the writer's dedication to his cause. Soon after he left the sentinel mentioned above, he began to experience new problems.

> At this time the tumor in my lungs broke, and being afraid to cough for fear of being heard, prevented me from relieving myself of the puss that was lodged there. I had now to cross lots that were cleared and covered with snow, the houses being thick on the road, which I was to cross, and for fear of being heard, I lay myself flat on my stomach and crept along on the frozen snow. When I came to the fence, I climbed over, and walked down the road, near a house where there were music and dancing. At this time one of

> the guards came out. I immediately fell down upon my face. Soon the man went into the house, I rose again and crossed the fence into the field and proceeded toward the river, there being no trees or rocks in the field to hinder my being seen, and not being able to walk without being heard as the snow crust was hard enough to permit my walking on it, and the dogs beginning to bark, I lay myself flat again and crept across the field, which took me half an hour. (pp. 11-12)

Soon, Cornelius fell in with "friends of America," who conveyed him to Long Island and finally to Connecticut. In the spring he rejoined the army at Valley Forge.

It is with the treatment of escape that the diaries begin to be something more than tedious accounts of meager menus and calculations of the numbers of nameless sick, dying, and dead. In the escape story we find some of the formulaic elements which become more significant in other forms of prison writing. Elias Cornelius, as we have seen, fell back on his wits in order to get away, and he was willing to endure hardship to insure the success of his attempt. In some of the other journals we find a different element of the emerging formula, and one which will be of particular importance in the discussion of the published narratives; there is evidence in the diaries that prisoners used patriotism and a belief in the virtue of their cause to help them get through the difficulties of captivity.[18]

To some extent, of course, patriotism was the result of group pressure. George Thompson, who was a prisoner at Forton in England from 1777 to 1781, shows concern in his diary that some are accepting offers to enlist in the British service. On January 21, 1779, he records that "this day an Agrement was Mead between the Officers and Seamen and others if enny Mane officer our Mane ofer to Enter on bord of the Britanik Ships of war after the 24 of this present Month Should Sofer the

punishment of 39 Strips and to heave one of his Ears Cut of" (p. 225). Coercion was not always necessary, however; some diarists like William Widger were genuinely patriotic and so, for example, made note of significant dates in their journals. On April 19, 1781, he observed that "this day 6 yers Lexington Battle was fought" (p. 335).

Some diaries record full blown patriotic demonstrations. Jonathan Haskins writes of July 4, 1778:

> This morning when we were turned out, we fixed our badges in our hats, which caused a surprise. The Agent desired to see one of them, which was sent him, and it happened to be one that on the top was wrote in capitals Independence, and on the bottom Liberty or Death, and he not knowing the meaning thereof, was surprised, and concluded we were a going to force the guards, in order to regain our liberty, therefore ordered a double centry at the gate, and immediately sent an express to the Genl. and Adml. Shouldham, and made a great stir, and to his disgrace, as it caused much laughter. It passed on till one o'clock, when we formed in 13 divisions. Each gave 3 cheers till it came to the 13th, when each division joined the 13th and gave a general huzza, which was done with the greatest regularity and order that could be expected. We kept our colours flying while the sun set, then hauled them down; thus ended the day. (p. 426)

Such ritualized celebrations helped the prisoners tolerate the boredom and trying conditions that characterized their everyday experiences, and it helped them to collectively resist the efforts of the British recruiters.[19]

For one of the most telling displays of patriotism in the diaries, we must turn again to that of Dr. Elias Cornelius. While he was being held in New York, his father, a staunch Tory, came in from Long Island to visit and remonstrate with him. As they first came into sight of each other, Cornelius writes,

> My heart at first was troubled within me, I burst into tears and did not speak for some minutes. I put my hand through the grates and took my fathers, and held it fast.

> The poor old gentleman shed many tears and seemed quite troubled to see me in so woeful a place. He asked me how I did I told him poorly but as well as could be expected in such a hideous place, I then asked after the health of Mother Brother & Sisters, he told me they were well. I was filled with joy at hearing this as it was the first time I had heard from them since I entered the service. He asked me "what I thought of myself now and why I could not have been ruled by him, he said he had forewarned me of the cost, and that I had been led away by a bad man (Dr. Latham[]] and that Washington's whole crew would soon be in the same situation" and says he, "did not you never see his excellency's proclamation, whare in was set forth a free grace and pardon to all who would come in voluntarely" (Meaning Sir Wm Hows Proclamation) I told him I had seen it, says he "why then did you not come in then, voluntarely without being brought in by force of arms" Says I, Father what made you think so, did I not tell you my mind before I left your house, and did not you know my disposition? Have not I been faithful in all the duties of a child, to a parent? But, Father you, and every other man must know that it was a very trying thing to me, to leave all my dear friends and turn myself out into the world naked, Does this seem to you, to show a rebellious disposition of temper and mind? When at that time I had not a relative or acquaintance in the Army, not a relative in the world but what were enemies to this once happy country. Believe me dear Father, I was not led away by any man as you supposed. But on the contrary I weighed the matter seriously before I came into the service, the more I meditated the more I was led to believe that the cause in which my countrymen were engaged was a just one, and loudly called for the assistance of every well wisher of his bleeding country. (pp. 9-10)

I have quoted Cornelius at large here to illustrate the depths of the pressures that could operate against the patriotic feelings of a soldier or prisoner. The dedication to the patriot cause that we find in the journals, then, was most probably a sincere reflection of the diarists' beliefs, especially when we consider that the offer of a pardon was always present to any who would renounce that cause. It is probable also that the act of recording patriotic sentiments in the diaries helped reinforce those sentiments. On July 4, 1777, Jonathan Haskins

had been sitting in Old Mill Prison and making daily notations about the weather for approximately a month. From such a vantage point, his own prospects and those of the new United States must have looked grim, but he remarked in his diary: "This day 12 months the United States of America declared independent which they've supported one year. God send they ever may" (p. 298).

A number of prisoners either were not satisfied with a simple journal of events for their own use or perhaps never bothered to produce a record at all until they were released or exchanged or until after they had escaped; in either case, anti-British propaganda in the form of prison narratives began to appear throughout the later years of the war. In these pamphlets and newspaper articles, former prisoners molded and manipulated their prison experiences to create a picture of their British captors as tools of tyranny, men without conscience or humanity. While in the diaries we find that provisions were both scarce and of low quality, in the propaganda pieces we are told by an enraged ex-prisoner that callous profiteering by the commissaries and deliberate efforts by British recruiters to force prisoners to enlist in His Majesty's service lurk behind the problem of inadequate rations. The bored diarist notes everyday events like the changing of the guard or the burial of the dead listlessly, but the propagandist finds in such events the evidence of gratuitous cruelty. The escape stories of the journals are generally flat even when they are fairly well detailed, but escapes in the propaganda literature emphasize disproportionately such elements as the cleverness of the escapee, the delight Tories take in betraying escape attempts or in recapturing fleeing prisoners, and the brutality with

which the British punish returned captives. Finally, patriotism, which is a sustaining force in the diaries, becomes equated with common decency in the propaganda. The Tory or the British soldier are not simply the enemy; instead, their inability to see the inherent righteousness of the patriot cause is taken as evidence that they teeter on the brink of depravity.

Lieutenant Jabez Fitch, who kept a journal not only as a prisoner but for most of his life, wrote A Narative of the Treatment with Which the American Prisoners Were Used Who Were Taken by the British & Hessian Troops on Long Island, York Island, &c., 1776. With Some Occasional Observations Thereon while he was a prisoner on parole at New Lots on Long Island in 1777. A letter to his brother which serves as an introduction to the "narative" makes it clear that Fitch desired to smuggle the manuscript out and have it published. The contrast between Fitch's diary and the 1777 propaganda narrative provides us with an interesting illustration of the ways in which some prisoners transformed their experiences or their records of them into potent political material.[20]

Fitch sets the tone for his piece in the first paragraph by juxtaposing the virtuous against the "Hessian Butcher" or the "American Savage":

> It appears by the various Usage, with which we have been treated during the course of our tedious Imprisonment, that Divine Providence hath not been more particular, in forming the different Features, & various Statures of Mankind, than it hath been in the formation of the various Dispositions & capacitys of the mind; Nor doth there appear to ocular view, a greater Distinction between the well proportion'd Courtier or Citizen, in a Deacent & Beautifull dress & the most deform'd Hessian Butcher, or American Savage, in their murdering or hunting Uniforms, than an attentive Observer may Discover, betwixt the

> Person whose mind is annimated with Sentements of Virtue, Humanity and Friendship to Mankind in Genll:, and the Insolent Clown who knows no satisfaction, but in Acts of Cruelty, Slaughter & Rapine. (p. 137)

Fitch goes on to say that "It would be impossible to Reherse the many Instances of Insult, with which we have been treated," and the reader knows he will soon be introduced to captors who are unfamiliar with "Virtue, Humanity and Friendship to Mankind."

In order to make his point, Fitch indulges in numerous half-truths and embellishments of fact, the marks of the true propagandist. Two examples will serve.[21] First, there is the question of the burial of those prisoners who died while in custody in New York. On November 24, 1776, Fitch's diary contains an almost parenthetical entry on burial: "I then came up to the Burying place, where I see some people Burying two of the Prisoners" (p. 73). Four days later we come upon this note: "In the Afternoon I went onto the Burying Ground & see four of the Prisoners Buryed in one Grave; About 3 oClock I took a very good Dinner with the Frenchmen, soon after which I came home, & went to Mr: Giles's where I had an agreable Conference with him & his Wife" (p. 75). Speaking of the same period of his captivity in the narrative, however, Fitch finds cause for outrage at the way the dead are mishandled:

> Nor was there any more Solemnity or Ceremony bestow'd on those miserable Sufferers, after they were dead, than while living, for their Bodys were thrown out on the ground, where they lay almost naked, Expos'd to the Weather (th'o never so Stormy &c) Indeed 't was said that some of them were Expos'd to the unnatural Devouring of Swine & other greedy Annimals, in a most Inhuman & Ridiculous manner; however this might be, they were most of them Buried, alth'o it was in a manner very uncommon for the Interment of human Bodys, many of them being thrown into the ground in a heep, almost naked, where they were Slightly cover'd over with Earth. (p. 149)

Here Fitch goes beyond reporting facts; even if it is true that upon one occasion or other some animal did eat human flesh, it would still be insufficient to justify the implication that bodies were left exposed to the "unnatural Devouring of Swine" almost as a matter of course. What might or might not be the truth is not at issue here, because Fitch's purpose is to paint a picture of an unnatural enemy.

Another part of that picture has to do with the treatment of the enlisted men among the prisoners. These men were incarcerated under unpleasant conditions in the church basements and sugar houses in New York, and they were ineligible for the parole enjoyed by Fitch and other officers. In December, 1776, Fitch visited some of these unfortunates on a couple of occasions, and the entries in his diary, while they make no attempt to hide the hardship that the prisoners endured, are free of the bitter venom that informs propaganda. After a good dinner of "French Friggazie & Fry'd Oysters . . . I went down to the Dutch Church to see the Prisoners, but the Hessian Guard were grown so very Insolent that they would not suffer me to Talk with them through the Fence; I here lit of Doctr: Mix & went with him to a House on Maiden Lane where we made some stop & warm'd us." The following day,

> About 11 oClock I went down to the Dutch Church again, & Visited the poor Prisoners, whom I found in a very miserable Condition, 4 of em lay dead in the Yard, & several others Dieing in the House; Sargt: Graves appears to have but little Time to Live, as well as several others of our Regt:. & Indeed the whole of em appear Compleet Objects of Pity, & alth'o they may be Depriv'd of that favour, from the powers of Earth & Hell, yet it is to be hope'd that a Superior Power may soon Interpose in their favour, Heav'n grant the happy Period may be Hastened. (p. 89)

The tone here is not at all one of rage. For one thing, Fitch is much too concerned with his own comfort and the company of Dr. Mix to be a

credible spokesman against the cruelty and neglect of the Hessians. For another, we find that the sight of the dead and dying spurs Fitch to a formulaic prayer which implies, but does not directly state, that the "powers of Earth" are incapable of sufficient humanity to pity the victims.

In the "Narrative," however, we find more direct treatment of "the unnatural, the savage & Inhuman Disposition of the Enemy into whose hands we are fallen; & whose Charecter (notwithstanding all their boasts of Lenity & humanity) will bear a Just comparison to those whose tender mercies are Cruelty." The refusal of the guards to allow Fitch to visit the men in prison receives revised treatment in light of this definition of the "unnatural" enemy:

> When we attempted to Visit the Prisoners at the Churches, in their miserable Situation, we were frequently Repuls'd & deny'd Admittance by the Guard, who often treated us with the greatest Insolence, driving us back with their Bayonets, Swords or Canes; Indeed I have often been in danger of being stabb'd, for attempting to speak with a Prisoner in the Yard. (p. 149)

We know this last to be an exaggeration, because Fitch tells us in the diary that he did not go to visit the prisoners very often, and from reading the accounts of those occasions when he did go we discover that he did not try very hard to gain admittance once a member of the guard barred the door. There is a marked difference between Fitch the diarist and Fitch the writer of propaganda.[22]

Much of the propaganda during the war appeared, naturally enough, in the newspapers where it would be likely to reach the broadest possible audience. The dominant theme of these accounts is the unrelenting cruelty of the British and Tories. Philip Jones told his story in The Boston Gazette and Country Journal, which devoted the entire front page

of its June 16, 1777, edition to sworn depositions made by former prisoners. A British Colonel, Jones writes,

> inquired where that damned rebel son of a bitch was, on which the owner of the house [where Jones was hiding] said there was a stranger here, he knew not who he was. The Col. then discharged his pistol loaded with two buck shot into my thigh, and then commanded me to mount a horse which he had with him, and being not able to mount briskly, he struck me over the head with a sword, which dropt my hat, on which the Colonel struck me to the bone on the leg with his sword, then we rode to headquarters, where I was laid on a lock of hay. Being examined by the Colonel what we did to the Irishmen that made them rebel, I answered that I knew no reason excepting they lived better here than at home, upon which he struck me with his sword again on the leg to the bone, on which I lay from Monday to Saturday without being dressed, by which treatment I am likely to be ever a cripple.

Jones here is describing extreme behavior if it ever took place, but the degree to which the story is exaggerated is a good deal less important than the fact that many of the readers of The Boston Gazette would never question its accuracy. The intent of Jones's statement is clearly to reconfirm for the reader the justice of opposing an enemy capable of such cruelty.

Jones's narrative was reprinted by The Connecticut Courant and Hartford Weekly Intelligencer two weeks after its initial appearance in Boston. Indeed, the Courant had been printing a number of prison propaganda pieces throughout June, 1777. On the 16th, "A Just Account of the Treatment Which Mr. Josiah, First Lieutenant of the Continental Brig Ana Doria, Received while a Prisoner" appeared and provided the readers with the usual exaggerations. A week later, a deposition entitled "A Just Account of the Usage the American Prisoners Received from Lord Howe" and signed by William Gamble, Thomas Boyd, and William Darlington complained about cruel treatment, the looting of possessions, short rations,

and the cold and crowded conditions of the provost gaol in New York. In addition to Jones's narrative on the 30th, the Courant printed similar depositions by James Stuart, Samuel Young, and John Caryl. Prison narratives and lists of prisoners became regular features in the newspapers by mid-1777, and they continued to appear throughout the war. Indeed, the notion that cruelty was deliberate in British prisoner of war policy became such a commonplace that in 1781 the New York Gazette could run a satiric piece in which James Rivington offers for sale a book entitled A New and Complete System of Cruelty: Containing a Variety of Modern Improvements in the Art, Embellished with an Elegant Frontispiece, Representing the Inside View of a Prison Ship.[23]

The poet Philip Freneau was a passenger aboard the Aurora out of Philadelphia when she was captured by the British in 1779. Before his release, Freneau was held for a time aboard the prison ship Scorpion; he later detailed his experiences in his well known poem, "The Prison-Ship," which is scathing in its indictment of the British. Less well known is a prose manuscript written in 1780 which is an excellent example of the kind of propaganda that former prisoners were producing. One particular section of Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora contains all the elements of the form and is worth quoting at length. After a number of the prisoners had managed to make their escape in the ship's boat, the sentries, who had been temporarily overcome, initiated reprisals:

> As soon as the sentries got possession of the vessel again, which they had no difficulty in doing, as there was no resistance made, they posted themselves at each hatchway, and most basely and cowardly fired fore and aft among us, pistols and marquets for a full quarter of one hour without intermission. By the mercy of God, they touched but four, one mortally; another had his great toe shot off, the other two slightly.[24]

Again we are given the picture of captors behaving with indiscriminate cruelty toward their captives. Freneau takes care, however, to make sure that we cannot dismiss the incident as an isolated event: "I believe they meant by this piece of cruelty to atone to their masters for their being disarmed in the manner they were" (p. 39). The suggestion that policy condoned and required the inhumanity of prison guards is explicit in this sentence.

Freneau goes on to report the aftermath of the affair:

> The next morning the Deputy Commissary came on board to muster the company to see who was missing. All that were found wounded were put in irons and ordered to be upon deck, exposed to the burning sun. About four o'clock P.M., one of the poor fellows who had been wounded the night before died. They then took him out of irons, sent him on shore, and buried him. After this no usage seemed to them severe enough for us. We had water given us to drink that a dog could scarcely relish; it was thick and clammy and had a dismal smell. They withdrew our allowance of rum, and drove us down every night strictly at sunset, where we suffered inexpressibly till seven o'clock in the morning, the gratings being rarely reopened before that time. (p. 39)

The inhumanity here is systematic. Clammy water and the foul air below decks from dusk to dawn become, according to Freneau, common means of punishment, and the cruelty is gratuitous because its victims are not those who escaped but those who stayed behind.

By far the most famous of the propaganda narratives is The Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen (1779). This little book contains all the examples of cruelty that are the mainstays of the form, but in the creation of a narrator Allen goes beyond anything we have seen thus far. The character which emerges from the book is self-assertive, witty, clever, and boastful; the introduction is characteristic in its irony and bravado.

> I have been very generous with the British in giving them full and ample credit for all their good usage, of any considerable consequence, which I met with among them during my captivity; which was easily done, as I met with but little, in comparison with the bad, which, by reason of the great plurality of it, could not be contained in so concise a narrative; so that I am certain that I have more fully enumerated the favours which I received, than the abuses I suffered. (pp. 2-3)

It is clear in the voice of such a passage that its writer thinks himself quite a good fellow, and one who has been abused by people he considers worthy of sarcasm but not respect. In Allen's Narrative, in fact, we find that the rage which is so prominent in much of the propaganda is often subsumed in the creation of a persona who is able to transcend the mean or the petty in the interests of America's cause.

He expresses the dedication directly when he describes his feelings as he awaited hanging in Falmouth:

> I reasoned thus, that nothing was more common than for men to die, with their friends round them, weeping and lamenting over them, but not able to help them, which was in reality not different in the consequence of it from such a death as I was apprehensive of; and as death was the natural consequence of animal life to which the laws of nature subject mankind, to be timorous and uneasy as to the event or manner of it, was inconsistent with the character of a philosopher or soldier. The cause I was engaged in, I ever viewed worthy hazarding my life for. (pp. 41-42)

We see stoic virtue in such sentiments. Allen presents himself here as a noble citizen-soldier who, like a latter day Cincinnatus, subordinates his own interests to those of the higher good. That these sentiments most probably represent what Allen would like to have felt at Falmouth rather than what he actually did feel when faced with imminent execution is less important in this context than the fact that when he came to write his narrative, he chose to portray his persona as a stoic hero. This is significant because Allen the propagandist knows that if he can

establish himself as a philosopher as well as a soldier, and if he can rise above the personal concerns echoed in many of the pamphlets and newspaper pieces of the day, he can then identify the patriot position with virtue and self-sacrifice, and the British position with corruption and self-interest.

Throughout the narrative, then, we often come upon Allen's attempts to paint himself as a superior man and to draw the proper political conclusions from the self-portrait. Perhaps the most direct example of this comes out in his description of a strategem he used upon first arriving in England to keep from being summarily hanged. "I requested of the commander of the castle," he writes,

> the privilege of writing to Congress, who, after consulting with an officer that lived in town, of a superior rank, permitted me to write. I wrote in the fore part of the letter, a short narrative of my ill-treatment; but withal let them know that, though I was treated as a criminal in England, and continued in irons, together with those taken with me, yet it was in consequence of the orders which the commander of the castle received from General Carleton; and therefore I desired Congress to desist from matters of retaliation, till they should know the result of the government in England, respecting their treatment towards me, and the prisoners with me, and govern themselves accordingly, with a particular request, that if retaliation should be found necessary, it might be exercised not according to the smallness of my character in America, but in proportion to the importance of the cause for which I suffered--That is, according to my present recollection, the substance of the letter, inscribed "To the Illustrious Continental Congress." This letter was written with a view that it should be sent to the ministry at London rather than to Congress, with a design to intimidate the haughty English government, and screen my neck from the halter.
>
> The next day the officer, from whom I obtained license to write, came to see me, and frowned on me on account of the impudence of the letter, as

> he phrased it, and further added, "Do you think that we are fools in England, and would send your letter to Congress, with instructions to retaliate on our own people? I have sent your letter to Lord North." This gave me inward satisfaction . . . for I found I had come Yankee over him, and that the letter had gone to the identical person I had designed it for. (pp. 38-39)

Allen's picture of the Yankee is not simply someone more clever than his captors, but someone who is capable of using ministerial intrigue and deceit against those very ministers who practice it. The boastful self-satisfaction of this passage is obvious and the attack against the British position subtle, but the two complement one another. If the reader accepts Allen's persona in the Narrative, he accepts a Yankee hero who is stronger and more virtuous than his enemy, the product of a corrupt system of government; there is also the indication that the Yankee's superior virtue and wit will be enough to see him through.

The diaries and the propaganda pieces of the war years, then, provide the background for the narratives which appeared throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The journals give us an insight into what day-to-day prison life might have been like, and the propaganda defines for us the contemporary response to prison conditions and the plight of the prisoners. Both forms also introduce a notion that later became a major feature of the narratives: that virtue and the public good were the principal motivating concerns of the American soldiers and seamen.

As we shall see in the next chapter, however, a devotion to virtue and the cause of liberty is insufficient to explain the motives of the narrative writers satisfactorily. Pressing concerns like poverty and combat disability influenced the decisions of many to publish their memoirs because the years after the War of 1812 were times of rising

nationalistic feeling and a growing market for patriotic literature. Others wrote to support their claims for military pensions or to wonder in print why those claims were denied. They all to some degree were indulging themselves by looking back on their own roles in the war in which the thirteen colonies had "come Yankee" over the British empire.

NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

[1]Encyclopedia of the American Revolution (New York: McKay, 1966), p. 610.

[2]Martin's Narrative has been reissued as Private Yankee Doodle, Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier; ed. George F. Scheer (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), and Moody's was reprinted in 1968 by the New York Times and Arno Press. Numerous other such accounts appeared throughout the nineteenth century; see, for example, The Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire, of Ferguson's Corps (1881; rpt. New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1968); "The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman, of the First Pennsylvania Regiment, from May 26, 1781 to April 15, 1782, Embracing the Siege of Yorktown and the Southern Campaign," Pennsylvania Historical Society Collections, 1 (1853), 303-48; Journal of Major Jeremiah Fogg, during the Expedition of Gen. Sullivan in 1779, against the Western Indians (Exeter, N.H., 1879); Diary of Ezra Green, M.D., Surgeon on Board the Continental Ship-of-War "Ranger," under John Paul Jones, from November 1, 1777, to September 27, 1778 (Boston, 1875); Caleb Haskell's Diary. May 5, 1775-May 30, 1776, A Revolutionary Soldier's Record before Boston and with Arnold's Quebec Expedition, ed. Lothrop Withington (Newburyport, 1881); or Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort, the Massacre That Followed, and the Sacking and Burning of New London, September 6, 1781, by the British Forces, under the Command of the Traitor Benedict Arnold ([New London], 1840). In addition, memoirs and journals written by ordinary soldiers and seamen can be found in a number of anthologies: Henry S. Commager and Richard Morris, eds., The Spirit of Seventy Six, 2 vols. (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1958); Richard M. Dorson, ed., America Rebels: Narratives of the Patriots (New York: Pantheon, 1953); Kenneth Roberts, ed., March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition (New York: Doubleday, 1938); and James Talmon, ed., Loyalist Narratives from Upper Canada (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1946).

[3]Beverly Verloris Baxter, "The American Revolutionary Experience: A Critical Study of Diaries and Journals of American Prisoners during the Revolutionary Period," Diss. University of Delaware, 1976, is a full length study of the diaries and makes a similar point on p. 4; see also Olive Anderson, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain during the American War of Independence," Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 28 (1955), 76n.

[4]See Larry G. Bowman, Captive Americans: Prisoners during the American Revolution (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), pp. 18, 45.

[5]Journal of Dr. Elias Cornelius, A Revolutionary Surgeon. Graphic Descriptions of His Sufferings while a Prisoner in Provost Jail, New York, 1777 and 1778, with Biographical Sketch (Washington, D.C., 1903), p. 6.

[6]Robert C. Bray and Paul E. Bushnell, Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783: An Annotated Edition of the Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 24.

[7]On August 29, Fitch and those taken with him were imprisoned on board the merchantman Pacific; from then until his parole on October 7, Fitch was held temporarily aboard a number of ships.

[8]W. H. W. Sabine, The New-York Diary of Lieutenant Jabez Fitch of the 17th (Connecticut) Regiment from August 22, 1776 to December 15, 1777 (1954; rpt. New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1971), p. 54.

[9]Bowman, p. 74.

[10]"A Revolutionary Prison Diary: The Journal of Dr. Jonathan Haskins," New England Quarterly, 17 (1944), 292.

[11]"Journal of Capt. Simeon Thayer's March through the Wilderness to Quebec," in Roberts, March to Quebec, pp. 243-94.

[12]Meigs and Dearborn were not exchanged until January 10, 1777, and March 10, 1777, respectively.

[13]"Expedition against Quebec. Journal Kept by Joseph Ware, of Needham, Mass., with a Short Genealogy of the Ware Family Annexed. A Journal of a March from Cambridge on an Expedition against Quebec, in Col. Benedict Arnold's Detachment, Sept. 13, 1775," New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 6 (1852), 137.

[14]Two diaries with unusually frequent entries detailing escape attempts are Samuel Cutler's journal published in "Prison Ships, and the Old Mill Prison, Plymouth, England, 1777," New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 32 (1878), 42-4, 184-8, 305-8, 395-8; and "Diary of George Thompson of Newburyport, Kept at Forton Prison, England, 1777-1781, Essex Institute Historical Collections, 76 (1940), 221-42.

[15]"Diary of William Widger of Marblehead, Kept at Mill Prison, England, 1781," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 73 (1937), 334.

[16]Prisoners of War in Britain, 1756 to 1815: A Record of Their Lives, Their Romance, and Their Sufferings (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), p. 215.

[17]For two other examples of prisoners relying on wit, see Hindle, The Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen, pp. 38-9; and Leonard Kriegel, ed., Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter (New York: Corinth, 1962), pp. 19-22.

[18]This phenomenon is more startling than it would appear at first glance. From the British point of view, the war was a civil contest and the patriots rebels and traitors. Throughout the war the British tried diligently to enlist soldiers and seamen from among the prisoners, and they offered "pardons" as enticements. But as Larry Bowman has noted, "It should be emphasized . . . that the majority of American captives refused to desert to the British armed forces. The prospect of escaping a prison simply by signing an enlistment paper must have been an inviting temptation to a man who had no reason to expect a speedy release from prison. Nevertheless, the great majority of the captives remained constant to their pledge of loyalty to the cause" (p. 96).

[19]See George G. Carey, "Songs of Jack Tar in the Darbies," Journal of American Folklore, 85 (1972), 167-80, for an analysis of the use of patriotic songs to relieve boredom and maintain solidarity. Carey later published a collection of these songs in A Sailor's Songbag: An American Rebel in an English Prison, 1777-1779 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976).

[20]The Narative is reprinted in Sabine, pp. 132-58, along with a brief comparison between it and events as recorded in the diary. Baxter also compares the narrative to the diary in the third chapter of her dissertation.

[21]Both Sabine and Baxter cite a number of examples, different from those cited here, to make the same point.

[22]Fitch's Narative never was published during his lifetime, but it is clear that he intended it should be, and so it is proper to speak of it as propaganda. For its publication history, see Sabine, pp. 132-5.

[23]Reprinted in The Connecticut Courant, November 27, 1781.

[24](1899; rpt. New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1971), pp. 37-39. Mary Weatherspoon Bowden, "In Search of Freneau's Prison Ships," Early American Literature, 14 (1979), 174-92, questions Freneau's authorship of Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora and suggests the possibility that Freneau never was held aboard a prison ship: "From the appearance of 'Some Account' in the notebook, its spaciously regulated lines, the absence of immediate revision, the neatness of the handwriting, the repeating of the same word on the bottom of one page and the top of its verso, I can only conclude that Freneau very carefully copied this account into his log book from some other source" (p. 182). Regardless of authorship, however, the propagandistic intentions of the man who wrote Some Account are clear.

TWO: THE POSTWAR CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE

The published narratives of the postwar years occupy a place somewhere between the diaries on the one hand and the propaganda pieces on the other. They are not simply records of events, but neither do they go to the propagandist's extreme of delighting in graphic portrayals of enemy inhumanity. The diarist, for example, might merely note that rations were inadequate in both quantity and quality, but in the "Narrative of Confinement in the Jersey Prison Ship, by John Van Dyke, Captain in Lamb's Regiment, N. Y. S. A.," we find background and commentary about the scarcity of food:

> An agreement was entered into between the British commander-in-chief and the American government, that all the British prisoners in the American lines should be supplied with full rations--as we had supply of the country, the British to furnish the American prisoners with two-thirds allowance; that is, six American prisoners to receive and to live on four British prioners' rations. But on board the Jersey Prison Ship it was short allowance--so short, a person would think it was not possible for a man to live on. They starved the American prisoners, to make them enlist in their service.[1]

Van Dyke here provides more than what we might expect from the diarists, but his tone is not at all inflammatory. Indeed, even though he is describing a situation which he believes to result from a cruel and cynical expediency, he does not allow a sense of outrage to take control of his voice. If we compare his tone to that of "a gentleman of honor and distinction, a prisoner in New York," whose letter appeared in The Boston Gazette on January 27, 1777, we can easily perceive one of the differences between the postwar narrative and wartime propaganda. The

"gentleman" writes:

> The distress of the prisoners cannot be communicated by words, 20 or 30 die every day, they lie in heaps unburied, what numbers of my countrymen have died by cold and hunger, perished for want of the common necessaries of life, I have seen it. This sir, is the boasted British clemency. (I myself had well nigh perished under it.) The New England people can have no idea of such barbarous policy, nothing can stop such treatment but retaliation. I ever despised private revenge, but that of the public must be in this case just and necessary, it is due to the manes of our murdered countrymen, and that alone can protect the survivors, in the like situation, rather than experience again their barbarity and insults, may I fall by the sword of the Hessians.

From this we can see that the gentleman is using facts which a diarist might only have recorded to stir a population to action (perhaps the gentleman himself kept a diary), but the narrative writer, steering his way through the middle ground between the diarist's boredom and the propagandist's rage, could have no such well-defined purpose. In this chapter we will look at some of the motives that led former prisoners to sit down and write out their memoirs after the war.

One very common motivation, of course, was the desire to tell one's story for the benefit of children and grandchildren. Christopher Hawkins, writing in 1834, explains:

> My intention in publishing this narative is confined to the attention of my children, grandchildren, and their descendants, with the hope that they will duly appreciate not only my own sufferings, but those of my contemporaries in the arduous struggle of my country for independence, in which, success crowned the efforts of those who embarked in the American cause. To my descendants and those of my fellows I dedicate this limited narative, at the same time in the hope that their generosity will pardon anything which can be construed as arrogant in this production. . . . My principal design is to amuse and inform my friends and descendants with the sufferings of my youth. If any one shall be so incredulous as to disbelieve this narative, I hope that some of my early contemporaries are still alive, and if they are, I refer to them the truth or falshood of this narative, and feel confident that they will sustain me in ev'ry particular, claiming importance.[2]

Underlying such an intention, of course, is the desire to be remembered by one's family and to communicate the important events of one's life to later generations. Such a limited attempt at immortality is not at all difficult to understand, and it is therefore not very surprising that a number of the former prisoners were motivated by just such considerations.

Charles I. Bushnell, who published The Narrative of Major Abraham Leggett, of the Army of the Revolution (New York, 1865), explains that Leggett wrote for exactly these reasons: "At the request of his children, Major Leggett, in the latter part of his life, commenced writing out a narrative of his revolutionary services. This, however, he did not live to complete" (p. vii). In 1835, Oliver Woodruff, a pensioner and former prisoner of war in the Revolution, addressed a letter to "My Dear Children and Grandchildren," in which he relates his adventures as a soldier and prisoner. His motive for doing so is clear in his first sentence: "let it be remembered after I am dead that I was born on the last day of April in the year seventeen hundred and fifty-five, in the town of Litchfield, and State of Connecticut."[3] This eighty-year-old man simply did not want to be forgotten, and so he wrote down the most significant and interesting events that he had taken part in.

Ebenezer Fox also wrote in old age for the amusement of his grandchildren, but when he had finished he decided to have his book printed. "Should it be thought," he explains, "that my simple narrative does not contain matter of importance sufficient to interest the reader, I can only say, that the partial judgment of friends, and my belief that any circumstances relating to the most interesting period of our history

would prove interesting to the young, must be my excuse for presenting it to the public."[4] Fox here is making his own bid for a small portion of immortality, and this is one of the features which separate Fox and the other postwar writers from the diarists and propagandists. There are other features as well.

In a number of cases the former prisoners intended their narratives to provide their children with something more than a memorial. Some obviously published in the hope of profit. The printer Peter Edes was imprisoned by the British in Boston in 1775, and he kept a diary during his captivity. This diary was published some sixty years later in 1837 "in the hope," according to the editor, "that the same feeling which prompted former efforts, may be again so far excited in his behalf as to bring fruits that may cheer and gladden his evening sun."[5] Andrew Sherburne was equally direct in the preface to his 1828 Memoirs: "With reference to his children, he is not ashamed to confess that the avails which may arise from the sale of this humble performance must be their only inheritance."[6]

Not all narrative writers hoped to reap gains from sales; some had their eyes on acts of Congress. During the war, Congress and the various state assemblies were forced to rely on a system of bounties in order to meet the manpower needs of the Continental Army. Congress had no authority to conscript recruits, and as it became clear that the war would last for some time, the problem of attracting enlistments became more serious. Bounties included payments of money and, increasingly as inflation eroded the value of Continental currency, grants of land to those who would enlist in a regiment for a specified period of time or

for the duration of the war.[7] No such bounties were offered to the officers and men in the naval service, however, and this prompted Lieutenant Luke Matthewman to publish his "Narrative" in the New York Packet shortly after the war. He is quite specific about his motives:

> The intention of publishing the foregoing narrative is, to convey an idea of the sufferings of those who engaged in the naval department during the late war; and I would be understood as considering myself one of the least of those sufferers. This narrative may likewise serve to shew some peculiar disadvantages the Navy Officers laboured under; which, it is conceived, entitle them to a participation of the emoluments granted to their brethren in the land service: such as the allotments of land, and commutation monies, as it is commonly termed. The exclusion of the Navy Officers from these privileges is certainly unfair.[8]

After the war, Matthewman had found himself "destitute of employ," and so it is not surprising that he would think the situation unfair. His narrative is a raucous story of adventures, captures, and escapes designed to establish his own credentials and those of other naval officers as deserving former participants in the Revolution.

The pension laws passed by Congress also provided a motivation for narrative writers and their families. Until 1818, the government provided assistance only for those who had been disabled as a result of their military service, but in that year the first service pension was enacted. Under its provisions,

> every commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer, musician, and private soldier, and all officers in the hospital department and medical staff, who served in the war of the Revolution to the end thereof, or for the term of nine months, or longer, at any period of the war, on the Continental establishment, and every commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer, mariner, or marine, who served at the same time, and for a like term, in the naval service of the United States, and who is, or hereafter, by reason of his reduced circumstances in life, shall be in need of assistance of his country for support, and shall have

> substantiated his claim to a pension in the manner hereinafter directed, shall receive a pension from the United States.[9]

Among the approximately eight thousand applications which were made shortly after the passage of the pension bill was one from Israel R. Potter of Rhode Island. On August 5, 1823, Potter appeared before the district court in Providence and declared,

> that on the breaking out of the Revolutionary war soon after the battle of Lexington he enlisted as a private in Capt. Edmund Johnson's company & Col. Varnum's regiment & marched to Boston then in the possession of British Troops, that he served in said Corps untill he had permission to enlist as a marine on board the Washington a public armed vessel in the service of the United States under the command of Lion Martindale Esq--that he entered on board this vessel in the month of December AD 1775 that soon afterwards they sailed from Plymouth on a cruise, they had not cruised a great while before they were captured by the British ship Fox & carried to Boston first, afterwards to England where he remained a prisoner of war untill the year 1783--And I do solemnly swear, that I was a citizen of the United States on the eighteenth day of March, one thousand eight hundred and eighteen; and that I have not since that time, by gift, sale, or in any manner whatever, disposed of my property, or any part thereof, with intent thereby so to diminish it, as to bring myself within the provisions of an Act of Congress, entitled "An act to provide for certain persons engaged in the land and naval service of the United States in the Revolutionary war" . . . that I have not, nor has any person in trust for me, any property or securities, contracts or debts, due to me; not have I any income other than what is contained in the Schedule hereto annexed, & by me subscribed.[10]

Potter's claim was denied, however. Because poverty had forced him to remain in England after the war and because he was still there at the time the pension law here was passed, he could not qualify as a "resident citizen of the United States." Finding himself without means of livelihood, he published his Life and Remarkable Adventures the following year.

The printer, Henry Trumbull, appended a preface explaining Potter's situation and his motives:

> As it yet remains doubtful whether (in consequence of his long absence) he will be so fortunate as to be included in that number to whom Government has granted pensions for their Revolutionary services, it is to obtain if possible a humble pittance as a remuneration, in part, for the unprecedented privations and sufferings of which he has been the unfortunate subject, that he is now induced to present the public with the following concise and simple narration of the most extraordinary incidents of his life.[11]

While Trumbull hoped for sales, there is an indication that Potter still believed that his pension case might be reviewed. To the end of the narrative is added the deposition of one John Vial of North Providence, Rhode Island, dated 6 August 1823; in it Vial supports Potter's claim to Revolutionary service, and its presence in the narrative seems intended to arouse public interest in Potter's plight (p. 109).

The diary of Charles Herbert, who died in 1808, was published by his widow under circumstances similar to those which led Potter to bring out his Life and Remarkable Adventures. Molly Parker, Herbert's widow, appeared in the Essex County, Massachusetts Probate Court on September 8, 1846, to apply for a pension under the new laws passed in 1838 and 1842, which extended eligibility to include the widows of former soldiers and sailors. In her deposition she cites Herbert's naval service and two years' confinement at Mill prison, "for evidence of which she respectfully refers to a Copy of a journal kept by her late husband and which is deposited in the Pension Office in Washington."[12] This application was unsuccessful, and in 1847, the diary appeared in print with a title designed to appeal to as broad an audience as possible; it was called A Relic of the Revolution, Containing a Full and Particular Account of

the Sufferings and Privations of All the American Prisoners Captured on the High Seas, and Carried into Plymouth, England, during the Revolution of 1776; with the Names of the Vessels Taken--the Names and Residence of the Several Crews, and Time of Their Commitment--the Names of Such as Died in Prison, and Such as Made Their Escape, or Entered on Board English Men-of-War; until the Exchange of Prisoners, March 15, 1779. Also, an Account of the Several Cruises of the Squadron under the Command of Commodor John Paul Jones, Prizes Taken, etc., etc. By Charles Herbert, of Newburyport, Mass. Who Was Taken Prisoner in the Brigantine Dolton, Dec., 1776, and Served in the U. S. Frigate Alliance, 1779-1780.[13] In addition to Herbert's text, there is a "Sketch of the Author" by R. Livesey, who concludes with an appeal:

> It is to be regretted that Mrs. Herbert has not been able to obtain either the pension allowed by the law of our land to widows of Revolutionary soldiers and sailors, or the prize money due to her husband from government. How slow are we to reward those who struggled hard for our liberties. . . . Hoping that liberal sales will enable the publisher to render to the widow of Charles Herbert a liberal donation, it is submitted to a generous public, by the publisher. (p. 16)

We do not know whether the widow ever received her "liberal donation," but we do know that under the broader pension act of 1848 she was "Inscribed on the Roll at the rate of 57 Dollars 88 Cents per annum, to commence on the 4th day of March, 1848."[14]

Others who published their memoirs after the war claimed to be motivated by more traditional concerns. The focus of Thomas Andros' narrative is evident in his title, The Old Jersey Captive: or a Narrative of the Captivity of Thomas Andros, (Now Pastor of the Church in Berkley,) on Board the Old Jersey Prison Ship at New York, 1781. In a Series of Letters to a Friend, Suited to Inspire Faith and Confidence

in a Particular Divine Providence (Boston, 1833). During the war Andros had seen service in a variety of capacities on land and at sea, and it was only after the war that he entered the ministry. He qualified for a pension under the act of 1818, but he waited until 1833, when he was seventy-four years old, to publish his narrative. By that time he had been unable to perform his duties as a "religious teacher of the congregational denomination" for a number of years, and so we might speculate that Andros, like many of the others, hoped to profit from sales. Whatever the case, it should not be at all surprising that the old man should desire to write out a providential interpretation of his captivity.[15]

Andros was not the only former prisoner to reinterpret his experiences as a captive in the light of religion. After the war, Andrew Sherburne became a Baptist minister, and in the preface to his Memoirs we find a statement of religious belief: Sherburne has

> exhibited the merciful interpositions of Providence amidst distresses, dangers and death, with the hope that others may be led to place their trust in God. He has given to his countrymen a "plain, unvarnished tale" of the sufferings of those, who, in the war of our independence, sustained the cause of liberty in the "tented field" or "on the mountain wave." Most fervently does he wish that Americans may properly appreciate the freedom which they enjoy, while they learn the price of its purchase.

These are not uncommon sentiments for a minister, and if we link them to Sherburne's suggestion, quoted earlier, that the narrative and proceeds from it would be the only inheritance his children would receive, we can see that for Andrew Sherburne the Memoirs is a kind of final testament.

Other postwar narrative writers claimed to be writing for different reasons. Nathaniel Fanning, in the preface to his Memoirs (published anonymously in 1806), explains that his motives are patriotic:

> The author of the following pages, at the time they were first written, never intended that they should appear before the public eye. But through the earnest solicitation of a number of friends, who having read his Journal, from which the following sheets have been compiled; he has been induced (together with a view of opposing the zeal with which certain characters in this country have strove lately to debase the American name, by branding it with the epithet of coward, poltroon, "not so brave as an Englishman," and the like; which has often sounded in the ears of the author,) to change his intentions, and to commit the whole to the press.[16]

Thomas Dring, whose Recollections of the Jersey Prison-Ship came out in 1829, seems to be less interested in the American name than in setting the record of his own participation in the war straight. Albert G. Greene, who prepared Dring's manuscript for posthumous publication, has this to say:

> Not being intended for publication, at least in the form in which he left it, he appears to have bestowed but little regard on the language in which his facts were described, or the arrangement or connexion in which they were placed. His only aim, indeed, appears to have been, to commit faithfully to paper his recollections of all the principal events which transpired during his own confinement, and the material circumstances in relation to the general treatment of the prisoners.[17]

Dring himself echoes the thought in the opening pages of his narrative:

> The principal motive of the writer of the following pages, in recording the facts which they contain, was originally to strengthen his recollections of the particulars relative to the events which he has described. Although nearly half a century has elapsed, since these events occurred, yet so indelible was the impression which they left on his mind, that they seem in all their details, but as the things of yesterday; and if memory remains to him, they will go with him, in all their freshness, to the grave. (p. 4)

From this we can see that, on one level at least, Dring set out his experiences on paper so as to better order and understand them himself.[18]

The motives of the postwar narratives, then, are in fact quite complex. In addition, we must certainly allow for the fact that the

intentions of those who published narratives were not necessarily the ones we find expressed in the titles and prefaces. Consider, for example, the case of the Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts (Bennington, Vt., 1809). Roberts opens his book with a conventional statement of purpose:

> But few things are more frequent, perhaps, than for men to conceive, that the occurrences of their lives have been singular, and that they possess a sufficiency of interesting incident, if understandably communicated, to excite surprise, produce pleasure, & probably be of some service to mankind; in displaying the changes of life, and the bounty and care of a kind superintending providence.
>
> The writer and subject of these memoirs is ready to acknowledge that this idea has frequently impressed his mind, and from his having been very often requested to make his sufferings and escapes public, by those to whom he has made them partially known, he has at length decided to comply with their request, and while his aim will be to render the narrative worthy of public notice, from its incidental variety and manner of relation, his intention is to pay a strict regard to truth, and to detail events in the language of honest simplicity.[19]

Some ninety pages later the book comes to its conclusion, and by the end Roberts' perceptions of what he has done and why he has done it have changed. The final paragraph of the book is entirely in italics, and it contains the following observation:

> I am, by my suffering in the public cause, so early as my fifty-ninth year, reduced to the inability of seventy or upward: and indeed, so severe have been the effects of my sufferings, in the year 1778 (for which I never have yet, not perhaps ever shall receive a dollar, as payment from Congress) that I verily believe, in the time which has since elapsed, I have not been able to perform more than half the labor that I might otherwise have done; and at present, from the disorder having fallen into my right arm, I am rendered almost totally unable to attend to bodily labor of any kind. (p. 96)

There is certainly a hint of bitterness in the tone of the parenthetical phrase which is out of keeping with the evidences of the "bounty and care of a kind superintending providence" which Roberts had led us to expect

at the beginning of the narrative. We cannot say with any certainty whether Roberts published his Memoirs because he simply wanted to tell his story, because he hoped to profit from sales of the pamphlet, or because he was planning to petition the government for assistance and thought to use the narrative to supplement his claim. We do know that no subsequent reprinting followed the original appearance of the Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts in 1809, and that the Military Service Records division of the General Services Administration has no record of a pension application under the name of Lemuel Roberts.

The range of prison writing published in the seventy-five years following the American Revolution is, as we have seen in this brief survey of the writers' stated motives, rather broad. On the one hand we have men like Ebenezer Fox or Christopher Hawkins who had as their principal motivation the desire to perpetuate the memory of their experiences among the younger generations of their own families. On the other are those who sought to turn their sufferings into financial gain; as we have seen, Luke Matthewman, Israel Potter, and Andrew Sherburne were all quite candid about their hopes for remuneration. Between these extremes we see such narratives as The Old Jersey Captive of Thomas Andros or the Memoirs of Nathaniel Fanning, narratives which seem apparently to have been public testimony to religious or political belief. The issue is further complicated because a number of works were published, not by their authors, but by their widows or their children, and the considerations underlying posthumous publication are as complex and as diverse as those which led the authors themselves to publish. Charles I. Bushnell was an antiquarian, and his part in the publication of The

Adventures of Christopher Hawkins was motivated by a concern for the preservation of the materials of history. Molly Parker, the widow of Charles Herbert, was in her eighties and in extreme financial need when A Relic of the Revolution was published in 1847. A wide variety of concerns must be acknowledged as influences in the appearance of Revolutionary War captivity narratives in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This variety leads to a number of difficulties for the student attempting to examine these narratives. First, there is the problem of discovering whether there is a common thread binding these memoirs together. If former captivity is the only thing shared by the narrative writers, then plainly there is little reason to study them outside of their somewhat limited usefulness as historical documents; but if the narratives can be shown to share a number of characteristics, despite the fact that they were produced for any number of reasons, then we will have identified a distinct sub-genre of the captivity tale. It is the contention of this study that such a core of shared characteristics indeed exists and that the development of the Revolutionary War captivity narratives is governed by a formula which distinguishes them from the Indian captivity narratives. As we shall see in chapter four, the Revolutionary War formula depends for its appeal upon an important revolutionary myth, the myth of republican virtue.

A second problem related to the varieties of interests these narratives serve is the problem of evaluating their significance. As works of literary imagination, the captivity narratives of the American Revolution have little value because they are crudely written, highly

episodic, and often anti-climactic. Moreover, the Revolutionary War narratives cannot be easily shown to lead to any broad popular literary movement in the way that the Indian captivity narrative has been shown by Roy Harvey Pearce to be a significant source for the dime novel and the American novel of sensibility. The significance of these narratives must lie in their implications for American social history, not literary history, and these implications will be discussed below.

Finally, there is a third difficulty to be encountered. In any autobiographical writing there exists a gray region between fact and fiction, between what actually happened and what the autobiographer adds or leaves out. There are a number of factors which influence this gray area, and they range from faulty memory to poor judgment to self-serving duplicity. When we study autobiography or personal narrative, then, we can never be precisely certain about the accuracy of all the incidents the author portrays. As a result, even if we accept the notion that the ultimate significance of the narratives is historical, we must be very careful when we come to cite the narratives as historical sources. The interests of a Lemuel Roberts, embittered by the government's failure to provide him with a pension or back pay, are more than adequate to inspire some skepticism about the role he assigns himself in his Memoirs. This problem of reliability will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter, which reviews the scholarly uses to which the prison writing of the Revolution has been put.

NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

[1]Historical Magazine, May, 1863, p. 148.

[2]The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins (New York, 1864). Though Hawkins had intended to publish his Adventures, he died in 1837, and so the narrative did not see print until 1864 when Charles I. Bushnell collaborated with Hawkins' son Christopher.

[3]"Reminiscences of a Soldier of the Revolution," Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine, 46 (1914), 260.

[4]The Revolutionary Adventures of Ebenezer Fox of Roxbury, Massachusetts (Boston, 1838), p. vi.

[5]Samuel Lane Boardman, Peter Edes, Pioneer Printer in Maine, a Biography; His Diary while a Prisoner by the British at Boston in 1775, with the Journal of John Leach Who Was a Prisoner at the Same Time (Bangor, 1901), p. 89.

[6]Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne: A Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution (Utica, N. Y., 1828).

[7]See Boatner, pp. 842-43.

[8]"Narrative of Lieut. Luke Matthewman of the Revolutionary Navy from the New York Packet, 1787," Magazine of American History, 2 (1878), 184.

[9]Quoted in W. T. R. Saffell, Records of the Revolutionary War: Containing the Military and Financial Correspondence of Distinguished Officers; Names of the Officers and Privates of Regiments, Companies, and Corps, with the Dates of Their Commissions and Enlistments; General Orders of Washington, Lee and Greene at Germantown and Valley Forge; with a List of Distinguished Prisoners of War; the Time of Their Capture, Exchange, etc. To Which Is Added the Half Pay Acts of the Continental Congress; the Revolutionary Pension Laws; and a List of the Officers of the Continental Army Who Acquired the Right to Half-Pay, Commutation, and Lands, 3rd. ed. (1894; rpt. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1969), p. 512.

[10]United States General Services Administration, Military Service Records, File #8369.

[11]Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter, ed. Leonard Kriegel (New York: Corinth, 1962), p. 4. Since Potter's deposition is signed with his mark, we must assume that he had at least an amanuensis, possibly Trumbull the printer.

[12]United States General Services Administration, Military Service Records, File #15175. A note in the file dated 13 March 1911 asserts that the journal referred to by Molly Parker "cannot be found."

[13]This has been reprinted as A Relic of the Revolution (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1968).

[14]It is unlikely that the publication of A Relic of the Revolution had any influence on the subsequent decision of the pension board to grant Molly Parker an allowance.

[15]See United States General Services Administration, Military Service Records, File # S. 5247.

[16]John S. Barnes, ed., Fanning's Narrative, Being the Memoirs of Nathaniel Fanning, an Officer of the Revolutionary Navy, 1778-1783 (New York, 1912), p. I.

[17]Albert Greene, Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship from the Manuscript of Capt. Thomas Dring, ed. Lawrence L. Leder (New York: Corinth, 1961), p. v.

[18]For an interesting examination of the background to the publication of personal narratives of revolutionary experiences, see James H. Pickering's introduction to his facsimile edition of The Spy Unmasked or, Memoirs of Enoch Crosby, Alias Harvey Birch, the Hero of James Fenimore Cooper's The Spy, by H. L. Barnum (Harrison, N. Y.: Harbor Hill Books, 1975), p. XXIa: "The Spy Unmasked belongs to a time very much different than our own. It must be read--for indeed it was written--as part of the intensely patriotic literary outpouring that accompanied the first four decades of our national life, roughly 1790 to 1830, a period during which America was very much intent upon creating the story of its own unique Revolutionary past. The nationalism of these years inspired an increasing number of patriotically motivated productions--histories, annals, biographies, memoirs, narratives, novels, plays, and poems--all dedicated to memorializing in a way that their readers could readily understand the events connected with America's birth. . . . James Fenimore Cooper's The Spy was one such attempt to capture, perpetuate, and honor the past; H. L. Barnum's The Spy Unmasked was still another."

[19]Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts Containing Adventures in Youth, Vicissitudes Experienced as a Continental Soldier, His Sufferings as a Prisoner, and Escapes from Captivity. With Suitable Reflections on the Changes of Life. Written by Himself (Bennington, Vt., 1809), p. 3.

THREE:

REVOLUTIONARY WAR PRISON WRITING AND SCHOLARSHIP

Until Beverly Verloris Baxter wrote her dissertation in 1976, no one had ever had ever subjected the writing of Revolutionary War prisoners to direct scholarly examination.[1] For over a century, however, historians have referred to the diaries and narratives in their studies of the war and of the treatment of prisoners, and during the past thirty years, critics of American literature have begun citing Revolutionary War narratives in their discussions of the Indian captivity narratives and the rise of the dime novel. This use of the prison writing rests upon what we shall see are inadequate assumptions about the diaries and postwar narratives: the historian has tended to accept the material as documentary evidence of prison conditions and prisoner of war policy, and the critic has generally accepted the narratives of the Revolution as a not especially fruitful branch of the already established Indian captivity narrative genre.

The problem for the historian is simply that, for the most part, prison writing of the Revolution is not reliable enough to justify its use as evidence. That this should be true of propaganda, which distorts facts intentionally, and of the narratives, which were often composed from memory long after the fact, seems obvious enough. Yet we find problems of reliability even when we examine the diaries. We know, for

example, that there is plagiarism involved in the journals of Jonathan Carpenter and Timothy Connor, two prisoners at Forton.[2] There is also some question as to the authorship of Jonathan Haskins' diary.[3] It seems clear, then, that caution is advisable and that statements about what happened in the prisons which are supported solely by journals and memoirs necessarily invite skepticism.

There are, nevertheless, numerous examples of such uncritical use of prison writing in the historical literature. In the nineteenth century, the main emphasis of scholarship in American history was the collection of source materials and not the evaluation of them,[4] and so it was not at all unusual to find sentiments like those which Charles Ira Bushnell prefaced to The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins (New York, 1864): "The work . . . is truthful and candid, and upon the whole, a well written production. It is, moreover, full of incident and adventure, very minute in its details, and of intense interest. It will, we think, be considered as a valuable contribution to the Revolutionary history of our country" (p. vii). Moreover, this kind of unquestioning confidence in the accuracy of Revolutionary War prison writing is by no means characteristic only of commentators writing in the last century.

In 1913, for example, Gardner Weld Allen published a two-volume study entitled A Naval History of the American Revolution.[5] Chapter XVIII is devoted to "Naval Prisoners," and in it, Allen relies heavily upon prison writing to support his conclusions. When he discusses conditions aboard the Jersey (II, 629-36), he cites Thomas Andros' The Old Jersey Captive, The Revolutionary Adventures of Ebenezer Fox, and An Historical Sketch, to the End, of the Revolutionary War, of the Life

of Silas Talbot (New York, 1803) as primary evidence of cruel and inhumane treatment. Allen even goes so far as to base statements upon propaganda pieces like Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora by Philip Freneau, and he does so apparently because he accepts these sources as essentially factual. "The accounts of the treatment of prisoners in New York," he writes, "unquestionably authentic though perhaps colored by privation, are difficult to reconcile with the humane character of some of the British officers in command" (II, 622). He allows the difficulty to stand, however, and nowhere in the chapter does he come any closer to questioning the accuracy of the prison memoirs than he has come here in noting that they are "perhaps colored by privation."

Other historians have also relied on narratives to document studies of the British prison system. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Richards, for example, published "The Pennsylvania-German in the British Military Prisons of the Revolutionary War"[6] for the Pennsylvania-German Society in 1924; his essay is put together, however, not from any specifically German materials, but from such memoirs as Ethan Allen's Narrative and Jabez Fitch's Diary. That he takes his sources at face value can be inferred from part of Richards' introductory statement: "So terrible were the sufferings of these victims of heartless and rapacious British hirelings that the student of history, who, today, reads the scanty memoirs emanating from the pens of a few of the very few survivors, can hardly be brought to give credence to what he sees on the printed page" (p. 6). In a sense, of course, this is precisely the point, but Richards is a bit wide of it and does give credence too readily to the kind of

exaggerations found on the pages of Ethan Allen's propagandistic memoir.

The trend has continued throughout much of the present century. In 1960, Richard H. Amerman opened an article about prison treatment with what had become a familiar observation: "Although set in an 18th-century era of 'temperate' warfare, the Revolution was cruelly expensive in terms of patriot Americans who died as prisoners under shocking conditions of confinement."[7] When we examine the basis of Amerman's claim of "shocking conditions," however, we discover that it consists largely of depositions and letters published in newspapers during the war by former prisoners. The following year, Howard Lewis Applegate concluded that conditions at Old Mill Prison were unnecessarily harsh in an article which depended almost exclusively upon prison diaries for support.[8] Apparently for a number of historians, the temptation to accept what the prisoners had to say about themselves and their captors has overcome the dictates of prudence.

There is, of course, a certain degree of patriotism at work here which helps to explain the phenomenon. It has been the position of British historians to argue that conditions generally were not as bad as their American counterparts charged, and that when conditions did deteriorate, it was mostly because of factors beyond the control of the British commissaries.[9] American historians have tended in the main to respond by reaffirming their belief in the heroic suffering of the Revolutionary War prisoners and by using the diaries and narratives as their primary sources of information. A great deal of the history written about prisoners of war during the Revolution consists, in fact, of American charges of cruelty countered by English denials and appeals to extenuating circumstances.[10]

Not all writers, however, have taken the prisoners at their word. As early as 1909, James Lenox Banks sounded the following note of caution: "The authority for many of the statements made in reference to the prison ships in the War of the Revolution and the treatment of the prisoners on those ships is largely the unproved charges of early writers and tradition founded on the bitter feeling of the day."[11] But as we have seen, few have followed Banks's lead in questioning the "authority" of prison narratives and propaganda. The refusal to do so is perhaps less surprising than it might be, because Banks's book is a defense of the administration of David Sproat, the British commissary of naval prisons in New York. His thesis was an unpopular one, and as a result his good sense went unnoticed.

In recent studies, it has sometimes been the case that historians are led into difficulty even when they are trying to be careful and sufficiently skeptical. In a 1969 article, Jesse Lemisch cites Jabez Fitch's unpublished memoir, A Narrative of the Treatment with which the American Prisoners were Used, Who Were Taken by the British and Hessian Troops on Long Island, to make the point that "The New York prison ships primarily held soldiers after the Battle of Long Island."[12] Unfortunately, Lemisch referred to a text published as Prison Ship Martyr, Captain Jabez Fitch: His Diary in Facsimile (New York, 1903), which was a re-issue of a facsimile published by Mrs. Stephen Van Culen White in 1897. Mrs. White had received the manuscript from Vernon D. Fitch, the captain's great-grandson, and in her edition she reprinted the younger Fitch's prefatory remarks, in which the reader learns that Fitch "was captured on Long Island on the memorable 27th of August, 1776, and endured an

eighteen months' imprisonment on the British prison ships, where he contracted a scorbutis complaint which embittered and rendered almost insupportable more than thirty years of his life." W. H. W. Sabine, the most recent editor of Fitch's diary and narrative, takes up the story:

> obviously Vernon D. Fitch had never seen his great-grandfather's Diary for the period of his captivity. What is more surprising is that he cannot have read through the Narrative to which he was supplying his prefatory remarks. The Narrative, as well as the Diary, shows that Fitch was only 39 days on the Mentor and other ships, after which he lived on land. The Diary shows too that the total length of his captivity was not eighteen but fifteen and a half months, and that fully thirteen of those months were passed under conditions which included no greater hardship than the limitations of a parole. . . . Mrs. White's facsimile edition of 1897 obscured the truth about Jabez Fitch still more by its inclusion of pictures of the prison-ship Jersey, and of "a shaving cup and strop made by Captain Bissell on board the prison ship Jersey and presented to Mr. Fitch." The Jersey had much to do with the purpose of the Martyrs Memorial Fund, of which Mrs. White was chairman, but it had nothing to do with Fitch or Bissell.[13]

Lemisch's source here is faulty, then, from at least two points of view. First, the narrative he cites was in fact a propaganda tract, but inasmuch as he refers to Fitch only to verify a fact about who was on the prison ships (as opposed to how they were treated), the objection is minor and probably not substantive. Second, and more important, however, is the fact that the front matter of the edition cited suggests incorrectly that Fitch was in a real position to know who generally did inhabit the prison ships. As we can see, the use of Revolutionary War prison writing as documentary evidence is an enterprise fraught with traps and pitfalls.

Perhaps the most interesting example of the difficulty of establishing the reliability of the prison texts involves the estimate of the

number of prisoners who died aboard the Wallabout prison ships in New York. Mark Boatner in the Encyclopedia of the American Revolution mentions estimates ranging from the "7,000 or 8,000" of Henry Steele Commager and R. B. Morris to upwards of 11,000, which was the number published when the bones were interred in 1808.[14] Boatner concludes in favor of the higher number and maintains that "reputable modern authorities estimate that as many as 11,500 prisoners died aboard the N. Y. C. prison ships" (p. 895). The reputable modern authorities are Thomas C. Cochran and Wayne Andrews, editors of the Concise Dictionary of American History (New York: Scribner's, 1962), who note, "It has been estimated that some 11,500 men died on these ships" (p. 767).

When we seek sources for these figures, however, we begin to run into difficulty. On May 8, 1783, the New York Packet, and the General Advertiser ran the following notice from "An American" "To all Printers of public Newspapers":

> Tell it to the world, and let it be published in every Newspaper throughout America, Europe, Asia and Africa, to the everlasting disgrace and infamy of the British King's commanders at New-York: That during the late war, it is said, 11,644 American prisoners have suffered death by their inhuman, cruel, savage and barbarous usage on board the filthy and malignant British prison-ship, called the Jersey, lying at N. Y. Britons tremble, lest the vengeance of Heaven fall on your isle, for the blood of these unfortunate victims!

This notice was reprinted in 1849 in Revolutionary Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties; with an Account of the Battle of Long Island, and the British Prisons and Prison-Ships at New-York by Henry Onderdonk, Jr., who appended a note questioning the article's accuracy:

> The above paragraph is the original source of all the reports of the vast numbers who perished in the prison ships. What number died, cannot be even guessed at; all is rumor and conjecture, whether it was 11,500, or half that number.[15]

There is little indication, however, that other historians shared Onderdonk's misgivings.

That caution is advisable becomes apparent, nevertheless, when we recognize that the British kept very sketchy records of the prisoners and what happened to them, and that the casual manner in which those who did die were buried would render it difficult to make an accurate count of the bodies, if indeed any were ever attempted. During the latter part of the war, when the Jersey and other prison ships were anchored in Wallabout Bay, the common practice each morning was to load into boats the bodies of those prisoners who had died during the night, and to row them ashore where they were quickly buried in shallow, common graves. No gravestones or markers were placed, and no records were kept.

After the war there was nothing much said or done about the "prison ship martyrs," as they came to be called, until 1803, when excavations for the new Brooklyn Navy Yard disinterred great numbers of the bones. John Jackson, the man who owned the property upon which a number of the bones were found, was a Sachem of the Tammany Society of New York, and he decided that instead of simply having the remains buried in the local churchyard, he would allow the Society to take charge of the interment. In 1808, under the leadership of Benjamin Romeyn, the Grand Sachem, the bones were buried and memorialized, and the Society published An Account of the Interment of the Remains of 11,500 American Seamen, Soldiers and Citizens, Who Fell Victims to the Cruelties of the British on Board Their Prison Ships at the Wallabout, during the American Revolution. With a Particular Description of the Grand & Solemn Funeral Procession, Which Took Place on the 26 May 1808. Jackson donated the land upon which the

Society erected the tomb; the cornerstone was inscribed, "Sacred to the memory of that portion of American Seamen, Soldiers and Citizens, who perished on board the Prison ships of the British at the Wallabout during the Revolution."

In 1832, Romeyn acquired the property when it was sold for taxes, and he erected an antechamber with a new inscription: "The portal of the tomb of the 11,500 patriot Prisoners of War, who died in dungeons and pestilential Prison ships in and about the city of New York."[16] The figure of 11,500 took on by virtue of this one action a tangible solidity, but it is one based on as little evidence as the newspaper estimate of 11,644. In An Account of the Interment, all we find is the following unsatisfactory statement: "How many perished on board these Prison-ships, and how many were . . . carried to this modern Golgatha, cannot be accurately stated. It is ascertained, however, with as much precision as the nature of the case will admit, that upwards of 11,000 died on board the Jersey alone. The probability therefore is, that the real number of victims were many thousands more" (p. 5). It is likely that David Ramsay's History of the American Revolution (Philadelphia, 1789) provided the Tammany Society with its source because of similarities in phrasing; Ramsay had written, "It has been asserted, on as good evidence as the case will admit, that in the last six years of the war upwards of eleven thousand persons died on board the Jersey" (II, 285). In both cases, the use of a passive construction and the lack of specific citation invite skepticism.

Sixteen years after the funeral procession and burial, Albert Greene published Captain Thomas Dring's memoir, Recollections of the Jersey

Prison-Ship, and the narrative shows evidence that Dring or Greene or both were acquainted with the Tammany Society text. In the first chapter, where Dring establishes his credentials, we find a somewhat softened estimate of the number of prison ship dead, but the wording suggests a conscious borrowing: "The number of those who perished on board the prison and hospital ships at the Wallabout, has never been, and never can be known. It has been ascertained, however, with as much precision as the nature of the case will admit, that more than ten thousand died on board the Jersey, and the hospital ships Scorpion, Strombolo, and Hunter" (p. 21). That Dring, who was after all writing almost fifty years after the fact, should turn to published sources to refresh his memory is not surprising; that Dring's phrasing should so closely follow that of An Account of the Interment, however, seems significant, especially since he chose to lower the number of dead and to increase the number of ships on which they died. But the significance went largely unnoticed throughout the nineteenth century, in part, perhaps, because the number 11,500 had been chiseled in stone at the Wallabout monument, and in part because the Jersey had become a popular symbol of alleged British inhumanity and so "upwards of 11,000" appeared bolder upon the page than Dring's more conservative ten thousand.[17] In any case, the number 11,500 has had a curious longevity which has certainly profited from the fact that upon a quick perusal Ramsay, the Tammany Society, and Dring appear to provide independent sources for an estimate in five figures.[18]

Indeed, it is only recently that historians have begun to doubt that so many died aboard the prison ships. In 1971, Charles H. Metzger, referring to the writer of An Account of the Interment and his estimate

of "upwards of 11,000," wrote:

> We must conclude that this figure was wide of the mark. For he cites no source in support of this estimate, and the headquarters papers of General Clinton, so far as we could discover, contain no reports on casualties on these vessels. Our suspicion is bolstered by the circumstance that after he repeated this figure on a later page he indulged in an outburst of emotion, an exhortation to compassion, proper perhaps in oratory but inappropriate in sober history. Moreover, if we may assume that some men were not casualties, it taxes the imagination how the total number implied could have been confined on this one vessel of moderate size. (p. 282)

Larry G. Bowman has tried to determine exactly how many prisoners the British Navy held, both on the New York prison ships and at Old Mill and Forton in England. His conclusion is enlightening:

> An actual count of the number of men captured and imprisoned by the Royal Navy simply can not be compiled. A host of problems arises when trying to develop a census of the captives. As mentioned before, the eighteenth century did not exhibit the modern day penchant for precise record keeping, and what few documents survived are incomplete. The material only hints at answers and does little to provide solid evidence upon which reliable totals may be computed. An educated guess concerning the absolute number of men captured by the British Navy would not be more than eight thousand seamen throughout the entire war.[18]

If we accept Bowman's "educated guess," we must drastically reduce the old figure of eleven thousand, because Bowman's number includes men held in England as well as on the prison ships, and because we must suppose that a significant number of the prisoners at the Wallabout survived their ordeal. It would thus appear that the Tammany Society and Dring were advancing estimates of the number who died which may have been more than twice as great as the actual figure. We can see, then, that personal memoirs and patriot pamphlets can be very misleading. Historians cannot and should not ignore such documents, but they must be wary when they use them.

Historians are not the only scholars who have turned their attention to the Revolutionary War prison narratives, and in the 1940's, critics of American literature began to take an interest in them. The general trend, however, has been to view the prisoner of war narrative in the larger context of the Indian captivity narrative, which had been part of the literary scene since the seventeenth century.[20] Phillips D. Carleton early in the decade published an article suggesting that the Indian captivities should receive "better treatment"--"They are, I believe, unique, vigorously written narratives containing in their painful realism, their simple unaffected prose, their revelation of a pioneer people, the virtues of true literature. . . . The material is exciting enough in itself--but its chief value for the contemporaries who read it was its truth."[21] Although Carleton says nothing directly about Revolutionary War captivity narratives, there is nothing in the article to exclude them; indeed, his treatment of the Indian narratives has much in common with the way in which the historians we have been discussing handled the prison writing. In both cases, part of the significance of the narratives lay in their alleged truth, their ability to give us a picture of what life was like for those captured, whether by the British or by the Indians.

In 1947, Roy Harvey Pearce viewed the situation differently. He was less convinced than Carleton of the truth of the captivities, and in an article that traced the genre from its seventeenth-century beginnings, he concluded that "It is as the eighteenth-century equivalent of the dime novel that the captivity narrative has significance for the history of our literature."[22] However, when he comes to view the

Revolutionary War narrative, Pearce's assumption that these narratives descend from the Indian tales and that the basic ingredient is sensationalism leads him to what I believe is misplaced emphasis. "The Narrative of Mr. John Dodge (1779)," he writes, "in which hatred is shifted from the French- to the British-inspired Indian, is marked by a minute description of the 'thoughts that must have agitated the breast of a man, who but a few minutes before saw himself surrounded by Savages,' and who was now being saved in proper melodramatic style" (p. 9). I will not deny the presence of "proper melodramatic style," but when we turn to examine the whole of Dodge's text, we discover that Indians play only an incidental role and that sensationalism is obviously subordinated to a patriotic purpose.

In the first place, Dodge identifies, not Indians, but the British as the villains in the titles to both editions of his Narrative: A Narrative of the Capture and Treatment of John Dodge by the English at Detroit (Philadelphia, 1779) and Mr. Dodge's Narrative of his Sufferings among the British at Detroit (Danvers and Salem, 1780). Second, he places the real blame squarely on the head of Detroit's British Governor, Henry Hamilton, who incited the Indians by telling them that "the Americans were going to murder them all and take their lands; but if they would join him, they would be able to drive them off, and that he would give them twenty dollars a scalp" (p. 7). The point of British responsibility is reinforced a few pages later in what is perhaps the most sensationalistic scene of the narrative:

> Those sons of Britain offered no reward for Prisoners, but they gave the Indians twenty dollars a scalp, by which means they induced the Savages to make the poor

> inhabitants, who they had torn from their peaceable homes, carry their baggage till within a short distance of the fort, where, in cold blood, they murdered them, and delivered their green scalps in a few hours after to those British barbarians, who, on the first yell of the Savages, flew to meet and hug them to their breasts reeking with the blood of innocence, and shewed them every mark of joy and approbation, by firing of cannon, &c. (pp. 13-4)

And finally, the book's resolution clearly supports the conclusion reached about it in Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783 by Philip Davidson: John Dodge's Narrative is not a dime novel but anti-British propaganda.[23] "Had the love of my country no ways prompted me to act against the tyranny of Britain," writes Dodge, "I leave it to the world to judge, whether I have not a right to revolt from under the domination of such tyrants, and exert every faculty God has given me to seek satisfaction for the ill usage I received; that if I had ten thousand lives, and was sure to lose them all, I think, should I not attempt to gain satisfaction, I should deserve to be a slave the remainder of my life" (p. 27). Dodge's emphasis and Pearce's are not quite the same.

In addition to Dodge's Narrative, Pearce specifically mentions The Narrative of Ebenezer Fletcher, a Soldier of the Revolution (1813)[24] as another example of a prison narrative in the Indian captivity tradition (p. 16 n.) Again, I think that to make this particular association is to leave the reader with a somewhat distorted view. Pearce himself may have been led astray by the book's sub-title, which states that Fletcher was "taken prisoner at the battle of Hubbardston, Vt., in the year 1777, by the British and Indians," but the only sentence which mentions Fletcher's treatment by Indians while a captive comes at the end of a litany of his troubles almost as an afterthought:

> Some of the enemy were very kind; while others were very spiteful and malicious. One of them came and took my silver shoe-buckles and left me an old pair of brass ones, and said exchange was no robbery; but I thought it was robbery at a high rate. Another came and took off my neck handkerchief. An old negro came and took my fife, which I considered as the greatest insult I had received while with the enemy. The Indians often came and abused me with their language; calling us Yankees and rebels; but they were not allowed to injure us. I was stripped of everything valuable about me. (p. 16)

Fletcher was but sixteen-years old when he was captured, and while his narrative voice betrays something of the callow youth, he does not exploit his material for sensational effect.

Richard Van Der Beets, in a 1973 dissertation, refines the Pearce thesis without really changing it to any great extent. "The entire range of captivity narratives," represents for Van Der Beets, "a single developing genre--a genre reflecting variations of cultural application and effect, but nonetheless a single genre in terms of the shared literary and archetypal, as well as historical and narrow cultural, significances of the narratives."[25] Like Pearce, Van Der Beets sees the narratives moving in the direction of the dime novel and penny dreadful: "Accounts first became stylized and romanticized for literary 'effect,' then rendered overtly sensational and melodramatic though still grounded largely in fact, and finally fictionalized--culminating in the outright novel of sensibility with the context of Indian captivity employed as a fictive device for narrative management" (p. 44). The Revolutionary War prison narratives are made to fit into the scheme; Van Der Beets sees them only as part of the developing Indian captivity genre, and he never examines them in their own context, as personal narratives written by participants in a war for national independence. He goes so far as to suggest that

the Revolution might properly be called the "British and Indian War" and that the narratives of the period "serve in many ways as vehicles for anti-British propaganda of the kind directed against the French in the earlier French and Indian captivities" (p. 37).[26]

There is, however, less anti-French propaganda in the narratives of the French and Indian War than we might otherwise expect. Instead, we find books which either examine the workings of divine providence in directing the course of events or revel in the lurid detail of Indian cruelty. Gilbert Tennent, for example, wrote the original introduction for The Dangers and Sufferings of Robert Eastburn, and His Deliverance from Indian Captivity (1758; rpt. Cleveland, 1904), and Eastburn himself was a Presbyterian deacon. A 'Plain Narrativ' of the Uncommon Sufferings and Remarkable Deliverance of Thomas Brown, of Charlestown in New England (1757-1760) (1760) fulfills its promise of the title page to depict "divers Tortures and Shocking Cruelties, that were practiced by the Indians on several English Prisoners;--one of whom he saw burnt to Death, another tied to a Tree and his Entrails drawn out, &c &c."[27]

There is nothing in the prison narratives published after the Revolutionary War which quite compares with either type. Only in The Old Jersey Captive (1833) by Thomas Andros and in the Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne (1828) does providence play a significant role, and they both were ordained ministers. None of the postwar narratives portray incidents of cruelty without pointing out as well a proper political interpretation. The prisoner of war narrative of the Revolution, in short, differs in a number of key ways from the mainstream Indian captivity narrative and from the French and Indian War tale. For one thing, it pays

little homage to providence and a providential view of history, and when providence is mentioned at all, it most often reflects a commonplace of expression and not a testimony of belief. For another, the Revolutionary War narrative refrains from sensationalized depictions of violence and brutality for their own sake. Finally, this group of narratives focuses its attention upon the plight of a narrator in the hands of a political, not a religious or racial, foe. The result is a sub-genre of personal narrative which must be dealt with on its own terms.

Such an investigation has never been undertaken, yet, as we have seen, studies based to some degree on prison writing or studies attempting to discuss such writing in different contexts continue to be published. The simple fact is that the Revolutionary War captivity narratives are not especially useful sources of historical information, and they are not merely another kind of Indian captivity. Instead, these narratives provide us with a group of narrative <u>personae</u> who share not only the experience of captivity but a special viewpoint about that experience, because a prisoner in a revolution, in a civil war, faces the problem of loyalty as well as the more straightforward problem of survival. It is this particular feature--the notion that virtue manifests itself as loyalty regardless of pressure and consequence--which separates the Revolutionary narrative from the Indian narrative, and it is within this context of revolutionary virtue that the memoirs of men like Thomas Andros and Ebenezer Fletcher must be examined. This examination will be the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

[1]"The American Revolutionary Experience: A Critical Study of Diaries and Journals of American Prisoners during the Revolutionary Period," Diss. University of Delaware, 1976.

[2]See John K. Alexander, ed., "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: The Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter," Vermont History, 36 (1968), 75-6, for a discussion of the plagiarism. Connor's journal was printed by William Cutler in New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 30 (1876), 174-7, 343-52; 31 (1877), 18-20, 212-3, 284-8; 32 (1878), 70-3, 165-8, 281-6; 33 (1879), 36-41.

[3]John K. Alexander, "Jonathan Haskins' Mill Prison Diary: Can It Be Accepted at Face Value?" New England Quarterly, 40 (1967), 561-4.

[4]David D. Van Tassel makes the point in Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 101-2: "One way in which historical societies measured their success was to point not to the quality but to the quantity of documents they had put into print. . . . A single document or manuscript might appear insignificant, but in the aggregate they formed the stuff from which history was distilled."

[5](1913; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962).

[6]The Pennsylvania-German Society Proceedings and Addresses, 32 (1924), 5-33.

[7]"Treatment of American Prisoners during the Revolution," New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings, 78 (1960), 257.

[8]"American Privateersmen in Mill Prison during 1777-1782," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 97 (1961), 303-20. John K. Alexander, "'American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison during 1777-1782': An Evaluation," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 102 (1966), 318-40, carefully outlines the distortions in Applegate's analysis.

[9]See, for example, Olive Anderson, "American Escapes from British Naval Prisons during the War of Independence," Mariner's Mirror, 41 (1955), 238-40, and "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain during the American War of Independence," Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 28 (1955), 68-83; and Eunice H. Turner, "American Prisoners of

War in Great Britain, 1777-1783," Mariner's Mirror, 45 (1959), 200-6. Earlier, Francis Abell discussed the problem in a wider context in Prisoners of War in Britain.

[10]A recent study by Charles H. Metzger, The Prisoner in the American Revolution (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1971), takes the unreliability of prison writing into account; nevertheless, Metzger's main conclusion seems to be that American prisoner of war policy was not only more humane than that of the British, but that in fact the British policy was deliberately cruel. "The application of physical as well as moral pressure to American prisoners to induce or compel them to enlist in the military forces of their captors appears to have been so general that it gave occasion for periodic protest and not a little fruitless correspondence. . . . While we can fathom, and perhaps appreciate, the motivation of the British, it is impossible to condone the measures employed to attain their purpose" (p. 135).

[11]David Sproat and Naval Prisoners in the War of the Revolution, with Mention of William Lenox, of Charleston (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1909), pp. 1-2.

[12]"Listening to the 'Inarticulate': William Widger's Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons," Journal of Social History, 3 (1969), 8 n.

[13]The New-York Diary of Lieutenant Jabez Fitch, p. 133.

[14]P. 895. Boatner's estimates come from Commager and Morris, The Spirit of Seventy Six, II, 854, and from An Account of the Interment of the Remains of 11,500 American Seamen, Soldiers and Citizens, Who Fell Victims to the Cruelties of the British on Board Their Prison Ships at the Wallabout, during the American Revolution. With a Particular Description of the Grand & Solemn Funeral Procession, Which Took Place on the 26 May 1808. And an Oration Delivered at the Tomb of the Patriots by Benjamin DeWitt, M. D. A Member of the Tammany Society or Columbian Order (New York, 1808).

[15](1849; rpt. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat, 1970), p. 245. See also Connecticut Gazette, April 25, 1783, and Pennsylvania Packet, April 29, 1783.

[16]For the details about the burial of those prisoners who died in captivity I am indebted to Charles Ira Bushnell's long note in The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins, pp. 266-80, and to Eugene L. Armbruster, The Wallabout Prison Ships, 1776-1783 (New York, 1920), pp. 22-3. Armbruster includes a comment upon Romeyn's decision to include the patriots who died in the city dungeons in his inscription: "First, some of the bodies of Prisoners who had died in dungeons in New York, were brought to the Long Island shore for burial. Second, he himself had been for seven weeks a Prisoner in two of the prisons in New York City and wanted to be buried with these remains. Regarding the

inscription of the cornerstone of 1808: There is no record extant which would plainly show that any American Soldiers were brought on board of any of the Wallabout Prison Ships for permanent confinement."

[17]See Henry R. Stiles, Letters from the Prison-Ships of the Revolution (New York, 1865), pp. 46-7 n., for a typical view of the Jersey's significance: "Her character, as one of the most loathsome and dismal prisons to which British inhumanity consigned their prisoners, is too well known, and has been too often recited to require any lengthy description at our hands. Sufficient it is to know that the terrible sufferings which were endured by thousands of American soldiers and sailors during the Revolutionary War, have rendered her name a synonym for prison-ship."

[18]Thomas Andros, The Old Jersey Captive, p. 8, also quotes a figure in line with Dring's and the Tammany Society's, and on no better evidence. Yet acceptance of mortaility in the range of 11,000 has found its way into standard reference materials. Amerman, p. 268, accepts the estimate, and George G. Carey, "Songs of Jack Tar in the Darbies," Journal of American Folklore, 85 (1972), 169, quotes a figure of twelve thousand dead for the Jersey alone. Lemisch, p. 9 n., tries to be more balanced: "Since we do not know how the figure of 11,644 was derived, we must distrust it. But British prison officials who were in New York after the war had ample opportunity to deny it and never did. . . . Conservative projections on the basis of known daily death rates derived from sources cited in this article produce a total of over 11,000." But upon examination, this does not hold up either. Since no accurate records of prison mortality were kept, David Sproat, the former commissary, would have no real way to counter the figure published in the papers. Also, the "sources cited in this article" are mostly prison narratives and wartime newspaper accounts, and these are of questionable reliability.

[19]Captive Americans, p. 61.

[20]Occasionally we find captivity narratives examined, not as part of the Indian captivity tradition, but as sources for subsequent literary works. The obvious example is Kenneth Roberts' March to Quebec. Roberts began seeking out these journals originally for background information for his novel Arundel, and he states his purpose for publishing annotated reprints of them: "In order to simplify the work of those wishing to consult these records, they have been brought together in this book for the first time" (p. xi). Arnold Rampersad, Melville's Israel Potter: A Pilgrimage and Progress (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1969) is interested in Potter's Life and Remarkable Adventures (1824) only insofar as it served to inspire Melville. About the memoir itself he writes, "From the point of view of literary excellence, there is nothing remotely remarkable about the Life and Remarkable Adventures. There is evidence to doubt its validity as sincere autobiography; it does not hesitate to employ melodrama to hold attention, or maudlin sentimentality to encourage sympathy. Structurally it is without distinction; its central character invites pity but not admiration; its

peripheral figures are faceless sufferers or illdefined agents" (p. 44).

[21]"The Indian Captivity," American Literature, 15 (1943-44), 169.

[22]"The Significances of the Captivity Narrative," American Literature, 19 (1947), 13.

[23](Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), p. 402.

[24]Charles I. Bushnell reprinted the fourth edition of 1827 in 1866; Bushnell's edition has again been reissued (Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), and it is this modern reprint from which I have taken quotations.

[25]"The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre," Diss. University of the Pacific, 1973, p. v.

[26]See also Van Der Beets, "The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," American Literature, 43 (1972), 548-62, and Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973); and David L. Minter, "By Dens of Lions: Notes on Stylization in Early Puritan Captivity Narratives," American Literature, 45 (1973), 35 - 47. Larry Lee Carey, "A Study of the Indian Captivity Narrative as a Popular Literary Genre, ca. 1675-1875," Diss. Michigan State University, 1978, borrows from the work of John Cawelti to examine the literary formula employed by the narrative writers; although Carey does include a chapter on the Revolutionary War, the narratives he examines are specifically Indian narratives, usually describing experiences on the western frontier. Carey does not take up those narratives which are the subject of the present study.

[27]Brown's Plain Narrativ is reprinted in The Magazine of History with Notes and Queries, 1 (1908), 209-21.

FOUR: REVOLUTIONARY VIRTUE AND THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE PERSONA

The writer of a Revolutionary War prison narrative, especially if he hoped to profit from sales, faced the task of making his book appealing to as many readers as possible, and this was by no means easy. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, when most of the narratives were published, there were at least two obstacles to the potential popularity of Revolutionary War memoirs. First, the veteran of the Revolution was not an unambiguous figure in society; although he was a hero and patriot, he became a nuisance and embarrassment as well in the years following the war. The issue, not surprisingly, was money.

During the war, pay in the Continental Army was almost always in arrears, and the situation in state militia regiments was never much better. The tremendous inflation in Continental currency served only to make the problem more severe, and the collapse of the currency in 1781 brought the situation to crisis. The financial instability created by the war and by attempts to solidify the economy after the war led to continuing difficulties. Congress was chased from Philadelphia by a mutiny in the Pennsylvania line in 1783. The hard money policy of the Massachusetts legislature spelled financial ruin for independent farmers, many of whom resorted to arms in Shay's Rebellion of 1786 and 1787. In 1794 the state of Georgia defied a Supreme Court decision and refused to repay a war

debt to a private citizen of another state who had brought suit. In the same year, participants in the Whiskey Rebellion in western Pennsylvania opposed a levy on the distilling of whiskey with the same vehemence with which they had opposed the Stamp Act thirty years earlier. In addition, there was the normal flood of petitions and applications for back pay, bounty land, unpaid prize money, and disability pensions. And despite the fact that many veterans were unemployed and indigent,[1] Congress was in no position to make good on all these claims. Against such a backdrop, a narrative writer had to take care to create a _persona_ who stopped short of accusing the citizenry, his potential readers, of ungenerous ingratitude for his sacrifices.

The veteran's position in society, then, was one difficulty faced by the narrative writer, but the other was perhaps more formidable. As adventure stories, Revolutionary War prison narratives had to compete with the Indian captivities, but they did so at a disadvantage. Stated simply, the cruel excesses of naked, uncivilized savages are more easily exploited for the purposes of Gothic sensationalism than are the arrogant inhumanity and callous brutality of the British and Tories. This is true, at least in part, because Indians are exotic and mysterious in a way that Englishmen are not, and the element of mystery is a stock device in the creation of horror and hair-raising adventure. The Revolution was essentially a civil war, and despite the fact that cruelties abounded and that the _Jersey_ prison ship provided an excellent symbol of British inhumanity, the sufferings endured by the prisoners were at least familiar and, to a degree, understandable. The enemy, after all, shared their language, religion, and customs, and one result is that the narrative writers were

somewhat restricted in the extent to which they could appeal to the kind of Gothic effects which increasingly were coming to characterize Indian captivity tales.

A comparison will help illustrate the point. Ethan Allen's Narrative is full of propagandistic bombast, and in it he goes to some effort to expose British cruelty. One of his strongest passages follows:

> I next invite the reader to a retrospective sight and consideration of the doleful scene of inhumanity, exercised by General Sir William Howe, and the army under his command, towards the prisoners taken on Long Island, on the twenty-seventh day of August, 1776; sundry of whom were, in an inhuman and barbarous manner, murdered after they had surrendered their arms; particularly a General Odel, or Woodhull, of the militia, who was hacked to pieces with cutlasses, when alive, by the light horsemen, and a Captain Fellows, of the Continental Army, who was thrust through with a bayonet, of which wound he died instantly. Sundry others were hanged up by the neck till they were dead; five on the limb of a white oak tree, and without any reason assigned, except that they were fighting in defense of the only blessing worth preserving.[2]

This is a strong indictment, and the image of General Woodhull being "hacked to pieces" is a fine sensational touch, but it pales before the description of the death of a man named Flinn as it is portrayed in A Narrative of the Incidents Attending the Capture, Detention, and Ransom of Charles Johnston, of Botetourt County, Virginia, Who Was Made Prisoner by the Indians, on the River Ohio, in the Year 1790; Together with an Interesting Account of the Fate of His Companions, Five in Number, One of Whom Suffered at the Stake:

> Incisions were made through the muscular parts of his arm, between the elbows and shoulders, and, by thongs of buffalo hide passed through them, he was secured to a strong stake. A fire was kindled around him. A group had collected, among whom he discerned a white man. Flinn asked, if he was so destitute of humanity, as to look on and see a fellow-creature suffering in this manner, without an effort to his relief? This man instantly went into the adjacent village, informed the traders there of the plight Flinn was in, and

> of the necessity for interposition in his favour without loss of time. They made up the customary value of a prisoner in silver broaches, which they delivered to the white man; and he hastened back, not doubting that the ransom which he carried would be accepted: but it was peremptorily rejected. . . . All the ingenuity of the savages was exercised in aggravating his torments, by all those means which they know so well how to employ. His firmness remained unshaken; and he acted the same part which their own warriors perform on such awful trials. Nothing could break his heroic resolution. At length the fire around him began to subside. An old squaw advanced to rekindle it. When she came within his reach, he kicked her so violently, that she fell apparently lifeless. His tormentors were then exasperated to the highest point, and made incisions between the sinews and bones at the back of his ankles, passed thongs through them, and closely fastened his legs to the stake, in order to prevent any repetition of their exertion. The old squaw, who by this time had recovered, was particularly active in wreaking her vengeance for the blow he had inflicted upon her. She lighted pine torches, and applied their blaze to him; while the men bored his flesh with burning splinters of the same inflammable wood. His agonies were protracted until he sunk into a state of insensibility, when they were terminated by the tomahawk.[3]

Flinn's ordeal at the stake is portrayed here in excruciatingly graphic detail because the horror of death at the hands of savages is a major theme of Johnston's book. The thongs sewing Flinn to the stake, the Indians' refusal to forgo the delights of torture even for silver, and the demonic thirst for vengeance on the part of the old squaw all strike the reader as unnatural and extreme, and this, of course, enhances the sensational effect. What Allen's version of Woodhull's death portrays is merely grim because hangings and stabbings, however cruel and unjustified, were all too commonplace in the American experience. Johnston, on the other hand, offers the unusual and the bone-chilling.

The narrative writers of the Revolution, then, found themselves in need of something more than sensationalism to hold their books together and to capture the interest of a popular audience. They answered that

need by grounding their memoirs in the myth of republican virtue, the notion that the independent and self-governing American was more virtuous and public-spirited than his British counterpart, who was, of course, corrupted by a tyrannical monarchy and ministerial system. The decision to tell their stories from this perspective solved a number of problems for the writers of prisoner of war narratives. The most obvious of these is audience appeal; to characterize those who fought the war as motivated by concerns of virtue and public duty is to help impart a tradition of heroism to the beginnings of the nation. Readers, then, were invited to bask in the reflection of the noble deeds of the patriots and to feel that they too were part of the revolutionary experiment. Comments about the poverty of the authors and the unfairly narrow limitations of the pension laws were relegated to apparently subordinate positions outside the narrative proper, and such remarks usually appeared either in prefaces or postscripts.

Another problem solved by the republican virtue motif is the whole issue of plot. It is not difficult to write an exciting captivity narrative if the story is filled with daring escape attempts against a background of cruelty and intrigue. Many of the Revolutionary War writers, however, had no such interesting tales to tell because their prison experiences consisted entirely of boredom and deprivation. As a result, the major conflict in the Revolutionary War captivity narrative becomes internalized; instead of pitting the captive against his enemies, these narratives portray the struggle between republican virtue and self-interest within the character of the narrative <u>persona</u>. In this way the writers are able to transform a story in which essentially nothing

happens into one of considerable tension and interest.

The myth of republican virtue was not, of course, the invention of the postwar narrative writers. William D. Liddle, for example, in a 1978 article entitled "'Virtue and Liberty': An Inquiry into the Role of the Agrarian Myth in the Rhetoric of the American Revolutionary Era," characterizes the eighteenth-century yeoman farmer as "a moral symbol for that age." He goes on to define the agrarian view of virtue which he finds as a basis of revolutionary rhetoric: "Virtue . . . required free men to put the welfare of the community above their own private ends, whatever the incentives to personal aggrandizement might be."[4] Bernard Bailyn finds exactly the same kind of classical virtue underlying the patriotic pamphlets written before the war. Comparing America to ancient Rome, he writes,

> For the colonists, arguing the American cause in the controversies of the 1760's and 1770's, the analogies to their own times were compelling. They saw their own provincial virtues--rustic and old-fashioned, sturdy and effective--challenged by the corruption at the center of power, by the threat of tyranny, and by a constitution gone wrong. They found their ideal selves, and to some extent their voices, in Brutus, in Cassius, and in Cicero, whose Catilinarian orations the enraptured John Adams, aged 23, declaimed aloud, alone at night in his room. They were simple, stoical Catos, desperate, self-sacrificing Brutuses, silver-tongued Ciceros, and terse, sardonic Tacituses eulogizing Teutonic freedom and denouncing the decadence of Rome.[5]

To the eighteenth-century American, the myth of the yeoman motivated by a kind of Roman virtue was a commonplace; indeed, after the war former Revolutionary officers formed a fraternal organization called The Society of the Cincinnati. In his study of the American constitutions written in the years after the war, Gordon S. Wood has found that the Americans of the time believed in the notion that "Frugality, industry, temperance,

and simplicity--the rustic traits of the sturdy yeoman--were the stuff that made society strong. The virile martial qualities--the scorn of ease, the contempt of danger, the love of valor--were what made a nation great."[6]

It is important to emphasize here that, while republican virtue is significant as an informing myth behind much of the rhetoric of the Revolution, self-sacrificing virtue will not in reality suffice to explain the motivations of Revolutionary Americans. Regular service in the Continental Army tended to attract mostly the less well-off members of society, and Congress and the states were often constrained to raise the bounties for enlistment in order to keep the armed forces fully manned. The newspapers provide further evidence that the myth was not the reality. For one thing, they are littered with offers of rewards for the return of deserters. For another, the newspapers often contain descriptions of less than virtuous acts on the part of the citizens. The Boston Gazette and Country Journal, for example, printed a resolution of the Cambridge Committee of Safety on July 17, 1775: the committee threatened to take action against "some evil minded Persons, taking Advantage of the Confusions occasioned by the Battles of Lexington and Charlestown, have plunder'd and carted off into several Parts of this and the neighboring Colonies, sundry Goods and Household Furniture, belonging to some of the unhappy Sufferers of Boston and Charlestown." The Connecticut Gazette of February 23, 1776, reports:

> Some take advantage of the times to lett out their houses at a higher price than usual, and it is said indeed, that some have even doubled their rents.-- This is a crime of dark complexion,--a crime engendered by a sordid love of self; bro't forth by a principle of ingratitude, worse than the sin of

> witchcraft, and nursed to its present size by an implacable hatred to the rights of mankind.

"Bob Centinel," writing in the Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer for November 3, 1778, examines the paradox of republican virtue, an ideal to which all subscribe but to which many do not adhere:

> ATTENTION!--my fellow-citizens, to your rulers of every order; for if you do not attend to them, they will attend to themselves, and not to you. No free people ever long preserved their liberty and happiness without watching those who hold the reins in government. . . .
> ATTENTION!--to your Commissaries of Prisoners, that they treat the unfortunate men under their care with all humanity and indulgence consistent with the public safety, and no more; that the prisoners we have, be faithfully exchanged for the redemption of our brethren; that no clandestine trade with our enemies be carried on in our flags, &c. and nothing done, that may bear the least appearance of a secret bargain, between a British officer, tory merchant, or mercenary whig, and an American Commissary.
> ATTENTION!--to British Commissaries; British insinuations, and British arts, and take care that their gold be not more fatal to you than their lead. The last has slain its thousands, the first may purchase for millions. Observe where it is like to go; mark its effects in every order; and let the sovereign remedy be ever kept, a wakeful attention in the body of the people. No people in their senses would refuse a good peace, but take care, that in the shape of peace, you do not embrace the most miserable bondage, and without remedy.

All three of these passages are in fact admonitions against a self-interest detrimental to the public good; they are encouragements to the practice of republican virtue, and there are numerous and recurring calls to self-sacrifice in all the newspapers of the war years. The violation of the myth by some made those who remained true to it do so with all the more fervor.[7]

If, as we have seen, republican virtue was an important ideal in eighteenth-century America, it is then easy to understand how readily

exploitable it was in the nineteenth century. In the popular imagination, the American Revolution had been a virtuous struggle in the cause of the rights of man. In popular biography there was a similar reverence for the same kind of classical virtue. "Parson Mason Locke Weems," writes David D. Van Tassel,

> discovered a key and established a formula for writing biographies likely to appeal to the nation as a whole. He made national symbols of his subjects, legendary giants of republican virtue and bravery, of revolutionary figures created heroes for a hero-starved people--heroes of fact for a people accustomed to such heroes of legend as Beowulf and King Arthur. Weems put no great emphasis upon the regions from whence his subjects came and gave the fullest account of their roles in the American Revolution. He imitated the behavior books which taught such universal virtues as honesty, bravery, and thrift by representing these qualities or the lack of them. . . . Weems wrote stories of American citizens who could be held up as shining examples of the popular virtues.[8]

It is within this context of the popular ideal of republican virtue that an examination of the Revolutionary War prison narratives begins to bear fruit, and we can now turn directly to them.

Major Abraham Leggett was taken at Fort Montgomery and confined at New York in the Old City Hall and later in the Old Provost. "While I was a Prizener," he tells us in his narrative, "I Had Very Flattering offers if I would Join the British, or in otherwise would Take Protection and Go into Business in New York--my answer was, I have put my Hand to the Plow and Cant look back--I shall Stand by my Country."[9] For the Revolutionary prisoner, republican virtue became simply a matter of loyalty to the cause, but that loyalty could be terribly difficult to maintain. While Major Leggett had only to resist "Very Flattering offers," others woke daily to conditions of deprivation and cruelty, and they were taunted by the guards with the promise that their sufferings could be

relieved if they would only enlist in His Majesty's service.[10] Prisoners aboard the Jersey, for example, probably suffered more than any others did throughout the war; one of them, Alexander Coffin, gives us this picture of what he saw the day he came aboard:

> On my arrival on board the old Jersey, I found there about eleven hundred prisoners; many of them had been there from three to six months, but few lived over that time if they did not get away by some means or other. They were generally in the most deplorable situation, mere walking skeletons, without money, and scarcely clothes to cover their nakedness, and overrun with lice from head to foot. The provisions . . . that were served out to us was not more than four or five ounces of meat, and about as much bread, all condemned provisions from their ships of war, which no doubt were supplied with new in their stead, and the new in all probability charged by the commissaries to the Jersey.[11]

This is a typical description, and one like it can be found in all the memoirs of former Jersey prisoners. What can also be found are testimonies to virtue. Thomas Dring claims, "During the whole period of my confinement, I never knew a single instance of enlistment from among the prisoners of the Jersey."[12] Thomas Andros writes,

> If there was any principle among the prisoners that could not be shaken, it was the love of their country. I knew no one to be seduced into the British service. They attempted to force one of our prize Brig's crew into the navy, but he chose rather to die, than performing duty, and he was again restored to the prison-ship.[13]

As we can see, a man's willingness to remain true to his country's cause is the touchstone of his virtue and heroism in the world created by Dring and Andros.

Sometimes, as in the case of Ebenezer Fletcher, the narrator's sense of loyalty and self-sacrifice is naive or ill-defined at first. This boy was only sixteen years old when he was wounded in the back at the Battle of Hubbardton.

> I flattered myself that our men would come back after the battle was over and take me off; but to my great surprise, two of the enemy came so nigh, I heard one of them say, "Here is one of the rebels." I lay flat on my face across my hands, rolled in my blood. I dared not stir, being afraid they meant me, by saying, "here is one of the rebels." They soon came to me, and pulled off my shoes, supposing me to be dead. I looked up and spoke, telling them I was their prisoner, and begged to be used well. "Damn you," says one, "you deserve to be used well, don't you? What's such a young rebel as you fighting for?"[14]

At that point young Fletcher probably did not know why he had been fighting. He had simply joined the army and assumed that all would go well, or at least that his friends would pick him up after the fighting. The persona Fletcher creates in his book learns the real meaning of republican virtue only after his capture and subsequent escape.

Fletcher's wounds had not completely healed when he ran off from his captors, and after a few painful nights alone in the woods he found himself wishing he had never escaped. At this point he was still responding as a young boy might, but he found his own republican feelings at a farmhouse he stopped at along the way.

> I got to the door just as the man arose from his bed. After the usual compliments, I asked him how far it was to the British encampments? He answered about fifty rods. "Do you want to go to them?" says he. I never was more at a stand what reply to make. As none of the enemy appeared about the house, I thought if I could persuade this man to befriend me, I might avoid them; but if he should prove to be a tory, and know from whence I came, he would certainly betray me. I stood perhaps a minute without saying a word. He seeing my confusion, spoke again to me: "Come," said he, "come into the house." I went in and sat down. I will tell you, said I, what I want, if you promise not to hurt me. H replied, "I will not injure you, if you do not injure us." This answer did not satisfy me, for as yet I could not tell whether he would be a friend or foe. I sat and viewed him for some minutes, and at last resolved to tell him from whence I came and where I wished to go, let the event be what it would. I was a soldier, said I, in the Continental

> army, was dangerously wounded and taken prisoner, had made my escape from the enemy, and after much fatigue and peril, had got through the woods, being directed to this house by the crowing of a cock. He smiled and said, "You have been rightly directed, for had you gone to either of my neighbors, you undoubtedly would have been carried to the enemy again; you have now found a friend, who will if possible protect you. It is true they have forced me to take the oath of allegiance to the king; but I sincerely hope the Americans will finally prevail, for I believe their cause to be just and equitable; should they know of my harboring rebels, as they call us, I certainly should suffer for it. Anything I can do for you without exposing my own life, I will do." I thanked him for his kindness, and desired him not to expose himself on my account. (pp. 28-30)

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. For one thing, it represents the first time that Fletcher commits himself entirely to the republican cause without any external support. At Hubbardton he had relied upon his friends and their loyalty, but that had been a naive reliance. Here we find him announcing himself as a Continental soldier "let the event be what it would"; Fletcher's persona has identified itself with the revolutionary cause. It is also interesting in the structure of this narrative that Fletcher's declaration is immediately reinforced by the response of the farmer. Up to this point Fletcher had met with occasional kindness and occasional cruelty, but this is the first instance in which motives are presented in a context larger than that embraced by the self-interest of the characters. The farmer is willing to help Fletcher despite the very real risks involved because he believes that the revolutionary position is "just and equitable"; in other words, the farmer is acting from a sense of republican virtue and thereby confirming Fletcher's own dedication. A final significance of this passage is that it marks the end of Fletcher's innocence. The boy who had been wounded and taken at Hubbardton began to deal with his situation and its attendant problems

more realistically and more confidently after his conversation with the farmer.

An example of Fletcher's new attitude can be found in an incident which took place shortly after the one discussed above. Several Tories approached Fletcher on the road and accused him of being a rebel spy. He replied that he was no spy, that he was on his way to the home of his friend Joshua Priest, and that he would answer all their questions if they would accompany him there.

> I then in the presence and hearing of my tory followers, told Priest the story of my captivity and escape: also repeated the insolent language used by the tories towards our people, when prisoners with the enemy, finding Priest my friend, I said many severe things against the tories, and fixed my countenance sternly on those fellows, who had pretended to lord it over me and stop me on the way. They bore all without saying a word, but looked as <u>surly as bulls</u>.
>
> I soon found these tory gentry had premeditated carrying me back, and were seeking help to prosecute their design. My friend Priest loaded his gun, and said he would give them a grist, if they dared come after me: but failing of getting any persons to join them, I was not molested. (p. 39)

Here we find the familiar scorn for cowardly Tories and the willingness on the part of the patriots to stand up to it. Priest and Fletcher were only two against several, but the Tories said and did nothing. Virtue and meanness here have a political base, and Fletcher defines his persecutors in political, not moral, terms. He implicitly completes the equation between republicanism and virtue in this incident, and he ends his narrative a few pages later by underscoring the notion of self-sacrifice: "And now, kind reader, wishing that you may forever remain ignorant of the real sufferings of the veteran soldier, from hunger and cold, from sickness and captivity, I bid you a cordial adieu" (pp. 43-4).

Ebenezer Fletcher was not alone in using an ideal of republican virtue as an important influence in his own passage to maturity. Christopher Hawkins was only thirteen years old when he signed aboard the privateer schooner Eagle. He says of himself at the time that he know little of the sea or of politics, but that he was attracted by the prospect of the glory and wealth to be gained by the taking of British prizes. By the time he was fourteen he had been captured and pressed into the British service as a waiter. He immediately laid plans for escape and discussed them with a companion named Rock.

> I soon intimated to Rock my intention of escape. He then said he would escape with me. I undertook to dissuade him from attempting it, and as a reason that he was an englishman and had no family connections in America--thus being situated if he should not succeed he would be severely punished. That my case was very different from his--that I had parents and a large circle of family connections who were interested in my fate, and all of them engaged in support of the cause of American independence--that I considered the attempt on my part hazardous in the extreme, but I considered it my duty however perilous the effort might be, to undertake the enterprize, and more especially as I was compelled on board the frigate to perform service against my country.[15]

Whether Hawkins actually viewed his case as "hazardous in the extreme" is open to question. He certainly saw a difference between the dangers he faced and those awaiting an Englishman like Rock should he be caught attempting to desert. It seems reasonable to assume that despite the references to duty and country, Hawkins' real interest was to return again to his family. A true notion of virtue and self sacrifice would come to him only after his second capture when, instead of being assigned comfortable duty aboard a frigate, he was imprisoned below the decks of the Jersey.

Hawkins portrays the first night of this second captivity as one charged with patriotism and disdain for the loyalist guards:

> The singing was excellent and its volume was extensive--and yet extremely harsh to the taste of the captors. The guard frequently threatened to fire upon us if the singing was not dispensed with, but their threats availed them not. They only brought forth higher notes and vociferous defiance from the crew. The poetry of which the songs were many of them composed, was of the most cutting sarcasm upon the british and their unhallowed cause. I recollect the last words of each stanza in one song were, "For America and all hers sons forever will shine." In these words it seemed to me that all the prisoners united their voices to the highest key, for the harmony produced by the union of two hundred voices must have grated upon the ears of our humane captors in a manner less acceptable than the thunder of heaven. For at the interval of time between the singing of every song the sentinels would threaten to fire upon us and the officers of the frigate would also admonish with angry words. "Fire and be damn'd" would be the response from perhaps an hundred voices at the same instant. The singing would again be renewed and louder if possible. . . . The cowardly tyrants dared not fire upon us, notwithstanding their repeated threats--They were often set at defiance sometimes in the following words--"We dare you to fire upon us. It will be only half work for many of the prisoners are now half dead from extreme sufferings." (pp. 63-4)

The ideal informing this passage is, of course, simple patriotic virtue. Hawkins portrays himself and his fellow prisoners as cheerful in the face of cruel oppression; "Fire and be damn'd," they tell their cowardly captors. Indeed, the passage introduces a long section of the narrative in which Hawkins paints the sufferings endured aboard the Jersey in some detail to give the reader a picture of what the patriot prisoners went through in the cause of liberty, and the reader is invited to admire the self-sacrifice.

Hawkins himself soon made plans to escape and managed one night to swim ashore. In his travels on Long Island he found assistance at several farmhouses, and in a contrast between two of the women who helped him, Hawkins gives us an explicit definition of the myth of republican virtue:

> The one was loyal to enthusiasm, and prayed for the success of British arms and the subjugation of the people to their unhallowed ambition, and the confiscation of the property of all those patriots who had drawn the sword in defence of their rights; the other patriotic to the cause of civil liberty, and no sacrifices too great for the purpose of securing freedom and independence. In the short space of eight hours both had treated me with the most generous and unalloyed hospitality. The former for the reason that, through fear her agency might send me back into New York again into a loathsome and dreadful captivity, I had avowed myself to be in favour of the oppressive measures of the british crown towards my bleeding and suffering countrymen. The latter because I had escaped from captivity and from the power of these oppressors. (p. 133)

In short, we are told that the first woman acted from spite, and the second from altruism. It is this myth--that the Revolution represented republican virtue overthrowing base tyranny--that underlies all the action in the captivity narratives and serves as the central motivation of the narrative personae.

Appeals to the myth appear in a number of forms. Lemuel Roberts, for example, embraces it directly when he explains his motives for his second army enlistment:

> On my term of enlistment expiring [in 1775] I returned home, pretty much determined to give up the idea of having any thing further to do with a soldier's life: But meeting with some disappointments, and my elder brother returning home by agreement with me, to take charge of the family, together with the news arriving of the unfortunate failure of our troops in their attempt upon Quebec, together with the solemn tidings of the death of the brave General Montgomery, it altogether weighed too heavily on my mind to admit of my staying at home, and I enlisted for a year's service, into the Company of Captain Thomas Alexander, in Col. Porter's regiment, of the Massachusetts' line, and in April 1776 we marched from Old Hadley for Quebec.[16]

Despite several captures and escapes, Roberts insists that the dedication to the cause described above never wavered. When, for example, he was threatened by a British lieutenant during an interrogation about the

battle of Monmouth, Roberts tells us that he remained firm and cheerful, and he fashions a dialogue to demonstrate his resolve:

> I told him all I know of the matter, Sir, is, that our most intelligent papers state, that in a few days, if Clinton continues on his present route, our army have great hopes they shall Burgoyne him. Burgoyne him, G--D--them, says he; then they call it Burgoyning of him do [they]. Yes, please your honor says I, that is the name [?] printers give it. (p. 68)

A short while later Roberts and his companions refuse "to claim any title as officers" even though as officers they could obtain paroles. This apparently incomprehensible behavior can be explained by the fact that the men planned to attempt an escape and so had no desire to sign paroles they intended to violate (pp. 69-70). Again, this is a direct assertion that Roberts and the other prisoners are motivated by loyalty and honesty, even if self-interest dictates more devious tactics. And, as we have already seen, Roberts ends his narrative by alluding to his personal "sufferings in the public cause" (p. 96).

John Blatchford presents the myth early in his narrative, but instead of simply asserting it, he gives it more force by describing its betrayal. Blatchford and five companions have worked "ten or twelve days" to tunnel out of a Canadian prison when suddenly their plans are discovered.

> But while we were in the midst of gaity, congratulating each other upon our happy prospects, we were basely betrayed by one of our own countrymen whose name was Knowles: he had been a midshipman on board the Boston frigate, and was put on board the Fox when she was taken by the Hancock and Boston.--What could have induced him to commit so vile an action cannot be conceived, as no advantage could accrue to him from our detection, and death was the certain consequence to many of his miserable countrymen--that it was so, is all I can say.
>
> A few hours before we were to have attempted our escape, Knowles informed the sergeant of the guard (Mr. Bible) of our design; and by his treachery lost

> his country the lives of more than a hundred valuable citizens--fathers and husbands--whose return would have rejoiced the hearts of now weeping fatherless children, and called forth tears of joy from wives, now helpless and disconsolate widows.[17]

The persona Blatchford creates simply cannot deal with the treachery of Knowles; he has no way to understand it because he assumes that virtue and loyalty to the Revolution are uppermost in the minds of the prisoners. That Knowles stood to gain nothing from his actions only renders the situation more incredible to Blatchford, because for him betrayal of the cause is betrayal of everything. All he can do is dwell on the widows and orphans for whom he is willing to sacrifice his comfort because he must preserve the myth of republican virtue.

In some cases, a commitment to republican virtue was the product of considerable soul-searching and inner tension. When Ebenezer Fox was confined aboard the Jersey, he observed that a major contributor to the despair of the American prisoners was the unlikelihood of a speedy release:

> The long detention of American sailors on board of British prison-ships was to be attributed to the little pains that were taken by our countrymen to retain British subjects, who were taken prisoners on the ocean during the war. Our privateers captured many British seamen; who, when willing to enlist in our service, as was generally the case, were received on board our ships. Those, who were brought into port, were suffered to go at large; for in the impoverished condition of the country, no state or town was willing to subject itself to the expense of maintaining prisoners in a state of confinement: they were permitted to provide for themselves. In this way, the number of British seamen was too small for a regular and equal exchange. Thus the British seamen, after their capture, enjoyed the blessings of liberty, the light of the sun, and the purity of the atmosphere, while the poor American sailors were compelled to drag out a miserable existence amid want and distress, famine and pestilence. As every principle of justice and humanity was disregarded by the

> British in the treatment of their prisoners, so likewise every moral and legal right was violated in compelling them to enter into their service.[18]

The reason for Fox being so circumstantial on this point is that Fox himself escaped prison ship horrors by enlisting for service in the West Indies, and he goes to some pains to examine his motives and exonerate himself. The enlistment, of course, constituted a violation of the ideal, whether Fox would thereby be forced to take up arms against the United States or not. On the other hand, Fox in no way considers himself a traitor. His defense, of himself and of republican virtue, hinges therefore on the subsequent intention to desert the British service at the first opportunity:

> Situated as we were, there appeared to us to be no moral turpitude in enlisting in the British service, especially when we considered that it was almost certain we should soon be impressed into the same. Our moral discernment was not clear enough to perceive, that it was not safe "to do evil that good may come." We thought the end justified the means, and, in despair of any improvement being in prospect for our liberation, we concluded that we would enlist for soldiers, for the West-India service, and trust to Providence for finding an opportunity to leave the British for the American service. (pp. 140-41)

The defensive tone here is plain: the enlistment was the result of faulty discernment and not moral turpitude. Immediately after signing, however, Fox sees the full gravity of his deed. "How often did we afterwards lament," he writes, "that we had ever lived to see this hour! how often did we regret that we were not in our wretched prison-ship again, or buried in the sand at the Wallabout!" (p. 145) In other words, Fox examines himself here in terms of the ideal and concludes that a miserable and anonymous death in the cause of liberty is far preferable to the mean and self-serving offense he has committed by putting on a British uniform.

The rest of the book, which consists entirely of the details of Fox's desertion and escape, represents for Fox a return to the grace he has forfeited.

The moral implications of this return are quite explicit. After considerable difficulties, Fox and his companions were able to run away from the British, but they still faced the problem of getting back to the United States. Although the obstacles seemed formidable, the Americans resolved this time to avoid moral shortcuts; in contrast to what took place on the Jersey there would be no doing evil to effect good, at least within limits.

So, for example, in their attempt to get off the island of Jamaica, they managed to commandeer a sailboat with four local black men and a boy aboard. Taking the boat seemed justified by the nature of their plight and by military practice, but what to do with the crew presented a more subtle problem:

> Had we been disposed to do an unjust action, we had an opportunity of realizing a considerable sum of money, by carrying them off to Cuba and selling them for slaves.
>
> The temptation was great to men destitute of funds as we were; but our moral sense overcame the temptation, and we gave them their choice to proceed with us on our voyage, or expose themselves to the hazards of drowning by attempting to swim ashore. They accepted the latter proposition. (pp. 189-90)

By overcoming the temptation to adopt the easy course of action and by returning honorably at last to his native Boston, Fox is able to take a place again under the umbrella of public virtue.

That his return to America and his return to virtue should coincide is not at all accidental, because Fox believes that virtue and a spirit of self-sacrifice result from the political climate of one's homeland as

much as from one's own personal morality. Consider, for example, this description of the non-American prisoners whose lot on the Jersey was more wretched than that of Fox and his companions:

> The lowest dungeon was inhabited by those prisoners who were foreigners, and whose treatment was more severe than that of the Americans. . . . Many of these men had been in this lamentable condition for two years, part of the time on board other prison-ships; and, having given up all hope of ever being exchanged, had become resigned to their situation. These men were foreigners, whose whole lives had been one continual scene of toil, hardship, and suffering. Their feelings were blunted, their dispositions soured; they had no sympathies for the world; no home to mourn for; no friends to lament for their fate. (pp. 105-6)

Nathaniel Fanning expressed similar feelings a good deal more strongly in his narrative. After being exchanged from a naval prison in England, Fanning was sailing as a passenger from France to America when he was shipwrecked:

> After I got safe on shore, I could not help reflecting on my past misfortunes, which it seemed to me were never to end. However, I soon recovered from such visionary ideas; I grew calm, and I came to this determination, never to attempt again to cross the vast Atlantic Ocean until the god of war had ceased to waste human blood in the western world. I considered that it made but a little difference whether I fought under the French or American flag, as long as I fought against the English; and besides, the French at the time were our allies and best friends.[19]

Fanning's experiences in France, however, pointed out to him that very real differences existed between his lot and that of his "allies and best friends":

> My reflections now led me to consider from what source originate such multitudes of beggars in France, and after weighing the subject every way maturely, I concluded it must be owing to the government under which they lived, being at this time swayed by a king, with his swarms of nobles, farmers general, and other royal leaches, who are continually preying upon and devouring the hard

> earnings of the people. O, my country, how happy a lot has Providence placed her in. (p. 149)

Again we find that an important source of virtue is a government which allows its citizens to be naturally hard-working and self-reliant. What Crevecoeur had said about America found echoes in the writing of these prisoners, because for them, America was a source of strength as well as liberty. Even Israel Potter, whose Life and Remarkable Adventures is a somewhat embittered attempt to induce the government to award him a pension, gives voice to the myth. After a long discussion of postwar poverty in England, he writes that America, "like a phenix from her ashes, having emerged from a long, an expensive and bloody war, and established a constitution upon the broad and immovable basis of national equality, now promises to become the permanent residence of peace, liberty, science, and national felicity."[20]

We can see, then, that the narrative writers derived a number of benefits from their decision to associate their personae with the ideal of republican virtue. This chapter began with the assertion that the myth provided audience appeal, and this is certainly true. The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of rising nationalism, and Americans needed to feel good about themselves. The prison memoirs tapped into this need because they portrayed simple men behaving altruistically in the service of a cause larger than themselves. The heroes of the captivity tales were people with whom the readers could identify, people whose sacrifices confirmed the American's satisfaction in his national righteousness. No other circumstance serves as well to explain why a pamphlet like The Narrative of Ebenezer Fletcher, which is neither well written nor particularly exciting, should have been reprinted four times between 1813 and 1827.

A related circumstance, of course, is the fact that America was a nation in search of a history, and this too worked in favor of the narrative writers who presented themselves as men who sacrificed personal interests for the public good. We have already seen that men like Parson Weems attempted to fill the historical void by making larger-than-life heroes out of the leaders of the Revolution. The captivity narrative personae, as less prominent but no less virtuous participants in the struggle, laid claim to the same kind of self-sacrificing heroism, and there is some evidence that the public was willing to accept them in this light. On February 10, 1803, Samuel L. Mitchell presented a memorial to the Senate and House of Representatives on behalf of the former prisoners. In it he compared those who died in the British prisons to the heroes of ancient Greece and so tried to compensate for America's lack of a past by linking the Revolutionary struggle to the traditions of classical antiquity:

> If the ancient Grecian Republics--if Athens, the noblest of them all, raised columns, temples and pyramids to commemorate those who fell in the fields of Marathon and Plateae in defense of their country; can America be backward, and yet just, in paying her tribute of respect to the memories of citizens, who, equally patriotic and meritorious, perished less splendidly, in the prisons of unheeded want and cruel pestilence.[21]

This lack of heroes coupled with a public desire to honor and revere what they considered to be their own noble and upright national origins worked well to the advantage of the writers of captivity narratives; by tying into the myth of republican virtue they were able to offer themselves as candidates.

Other benefits were less public. Simply in terms of the narrative structure of the books, the notion of republican virtue provided a

touchstone by which all the action could be measured. For men like Andros and Dring aboard the Jersey, virtue and dedication to the cause of liberty were what gave the incredible suffering meaning; heroic self-sacrifice can make sense only if the cause is worthwhile, and the willingness of others to sacrifice provides self-fulfilling evidence of that worth. For Fletcher, an education in republican virtue corresponded with the personal growth of his narrative persona, and the boy we meet in the narrative matures as he comes to grips with the broad issues of the struggle in which he is engaged. Blatchford finds the extreme of villainy in the betrayal of the ideal, and his narrative leaves little doubt about why Tories were held in deepest contempt by the former prisoners.[22] And all of the writers shared in the belief that America was particularly blessed, that the tendency to public virtue was one of the rewards of living in a free society, and this was the most important part of the myth because it brought all the other elements together. Americans were virtuous and deserved to win the Revolution because America was worthy of their sacrifice.

There is also a psychological bonus conferred on the narrative writers by the myth of republican virtue. As we saw earlier, many of these books came to be written because their authors found themselves in financial distress; several--Ebenezer Fletcher and Lemuel Roberts for example--were permanently disabled during the war, and to some extent the narratives provided an answer to whether or not the suffering had been worth it. If the myth were true, if America could fulfil the promise of the myth, then of course the suffering became a point of pride and not something to be regretted. Whether it was conscious or not, when each of these writers

sat down to his book, he took the myth and made it live, and in doing so he gave meaning to his own existence. This indeed may be the most important reason why republican virtue lurks behind every character and every incident in the Revolutionary War narratives.

The fullest and most direct statement of the myth appears at the end of Alexander Coffin's published letter on The Destructive Operation of Foul Air, Tainted Provisions, Bad Water and Personal Filthiness:

> I have given you part of the history of my life and sufferings; but I endeavoured to bear them as became an American. And I must mention, before I close, to the everlasting honour of those unfortunate Americans who were on board the Jersey prison-ship, that notwithstanding the savage treatment they received, and death staring them in the face, every attempt (which was very frequent) that the British made to persuade them to enter on board their ships of war or in their army, was treated with the utmost contempt; and I never knew, while I was on board, but one instance of defection, and that person was hooted at and abused by the prisoners till the boat was out of hearing. The patriotism in preferring such treatment, and even death in its most frightful shapes, to the serving the British, and fighting against their own country, has seldom been equalled, certainly never excelled. And if there be no monument raised with hands to commemorate the virtue of those men, it is stamped in capitals on the heart of every American acquainted with their merit and sufferings, and will there remain so long as the blood flows from its fountain. (p. 15)

There is little question that the myth of republican virtue was stamped in capitals on America's heart in the early nineteenth century, and that is why it is not at all surprising that we find the myth at the heart of the Revolutionary War captivity narrative.

NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

[1]Indeed, many of the veterans had not been too well off to begin with. John Shy, A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence (New York: Oxford, 1976), pp. 172-73, writes: "The pattern is clear, and it is a pattern that reappears wherever the surviving evidence has permitted . . . inquiry. Lynn, Massachusetts; Berks County, Pennsylvania; Colonel Smallwood's recruits from Maryland in 1782; several regiments of the Massachusetts Line; a sampling of pension applicants from Virginia--all show that the hard core of Continental soldiers . . . who could not wangle commissions, the soldiers at Valley Forge, the men who shouldered the heaviest military burden, were something less than average colonial Americans. As a group they were poorer, more marginal, less well anchored in society." Jesse Lemisch makes a similar point about those who served aboard privateers and in the navy in "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd. ser., 25 (1968), 371-407.

[2]The Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen, pp. 78-79. The controversy surrounding the circumstances of Gen. Nathaniel Woodhull's death dragged on through the 1840's. Other versions can be found in Onderdonk, Revolutionary Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties, pp. 36-41.

[3]Reprinted in Van Der Beets, Held Captive by Indians, pp. 298-99.

[4]South Atlantic Quarterly, 77 (1978), 21, 27.

[5]The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967), pp. 25-26.

[6]The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787, p. 52.

[7]See Charles Royster, "'The Nature of Treason': Revolutionary Virtue and American Reactions to Benedict Arnold," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd. ser., 36 (1979), 163-93, for a discussion of this phenomenon. Royster gives an instance of the importance of the ideal during the Revolution despite the reality of Toryism and treason: "Private Samuel Downing was in the 2nd. New Hampshire Regiment at Tappen, New York, when Arnold defected. In 1863, when Downing was one hundred years old, an interviewer asked him about Arnold. The old man's memory had changed the facts, but the Revolutionaries in 1780 would have approved of the reaction to Arnold's treason which Downing gave to posterity: 'he ought to have been true. We had true men then; 'twasn't as it is now. Everybody was true: the tories we'd killed or driven to Canada'" (p. 190). Other examinations of virtue in the Revolution include Royster's forthcoming

A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783 and Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd. ser., 24 (1967), 3-43, which has been reprinted in Edmund S. Morgan, The Challenge of the American Revolution (New York: Norton, 1976), pp. 88-138.

[8]Recording America's Past, pp. 70-71.

[9]The Narrative of Major Abraham Leggett, p. 23.

[10]As we have already seen, the British did attempt to use their prisons and prison ships as inducements to enlistments; see Bowman, Captive Americans, pp. 94-97. For a discussion and documentary sample of the controversy surrounding the British treatment of naval prisoners at New York, see Banks, David Sproat and Naval Prisoners.

[11]The Destructive Operation of Foul Air, Tainted Provisions, Bad Water and Personal Filthiness, pp. 7-8. Coffin's statement was originally a letter to the editor and appeared in Medical Repository, 11 (1807), 260-67.

[12]Recollections of the Jersey Prison-Ship, p. 90.

[13]The Old Jersey Captive, p. 18.

[14]The Narrative of Ebenezer Fletcher, pp. 14-15.

[15]The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins, pp. 47-48.

[16]Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts, pp. 27-28.

[17]Narrative of Remarkable Occurrences, in the Life of John Blatchford, p. 4.

[18]The Revolutionary Adventures of Ebenezer Fox, pp. 130-31.

[19]Fanning's Narrative, ed. John S. Barnes, p. 146.

[20]Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter, p. 77.

[21]Quoted in An Account of the Interment, p. 8.

[22]Dring (p. 89) characterizes the guards: "We always preferred the Hessians, from whom we received better treatment than from the others. As to the English, we did not complain; being aware that they merely obeyed their orders in regard to us; but the Refugees or Royalists, as they termed themselves, were viewed by us with scorn and hatred."

FIVE: THE PRISON NARRATIVE FORMULA

The work of John G. Cawelti has shown that popular literature can be viewed as the formulaic depiction of basic archetypal patterns, and that "by discovering these . . . universal story types, we will be better able to differentiate what is particularly characteristic of an individual culture or period from those aspects of formulas which are a function of more universal psychological and artistic qualities."[1] In the case of the Indian captivity narrative, this kind of examination has already been done. Richard Van Der Beets, for example, has defined the whole spectrum of Indian captivities as a single genre:

> The discrete historical and cultural significances of the Indian captivity narrative, however illuminating they may be in their religious, propagandistic, and visceral applications, are subordinate to the fundamental informing and unifying principle in the narratives collectively: the core of ritual acts and patterns from which the narrative derive their essential integrity. The variable cultural impulses of the narratives of Indian captivity are then but a part of their total effect, and the narratives are more than the simple sum of their parts. The result is a true synthesis. The shared ritual features of the captivity narratives, manifested in both act and configuration, provide that synthesis.[2]

For Van Der Beets, the "fundamental informing and unifying principle" is that of the Monomyth, "that of the Hero embarked upon the archetypal journey of initiation. The quest, or ancient ritual of initiation, is a variation of the fundamental Death-Rebirth archetype and traditionally involves the separation of the Hero from his culture, his undertaking a long journey, and his undergoing a series of excruciating ordeals in passing from ignorance to knowledge" (p. 553). The thrust of the argument

here is not so much to establish that Indian captivity narratives share deep-rooted patterns with other literatures as it is to assert that the differences between Indian captivities are of less significance than the unifying patterns. Specifically, Van Der Beets is attempting to amend the view of Roy Harvey Pearce, who "conceived of the Indian captivity narrative as but a thread in the loose fabric of American cultural history; consequently he discerned not a single genre but rather several 'popular' sub-literary genres ranging from the religious confessional to the noisomely visceral thriller, their several significances shaped and differentiated largely by the society for which the narratives were intended" (p. 549). We can see, then, that, according to Van Der Beets, such diverse features as religious testimony and dime-novel sensationalism do not actually fragment the genre; instead, they provide the constellation of ritual which illuminates the essentially monomythic structure underlying all the Indian captivity narratives. The result is a study of how one culture--that of white Americans of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries--reinterpreted an archetypal pattern to answer its own needs.

The argument which Van Der Beets presents is compelling, at least as it applies to the Indian narratives. He extends the limits of the genre, however, to include the Revolutionary War narratives:

> The propaganda value of the captivity narrative became more and more evident and was increasingly a factor in narratives treating experiences during the eighteenth century. . . . The Revolution (often called "The British and Indian War"), during which many tribes shifted allegiance to the English against the settlers, called forth . . . inflammatory accounts of Indian outrages, depredations, and captivities.[3]

Such a view must either ignore the narratives we have been discussing, or it must distort them to some extent in order to make them fit the paradigm.

We must remember that, even though Indian outrages took place during the Revolution, Indian problems were peripheral to the central issues. It is not surprising, then, when we discover that Van Der Beets cites only three specific narratives from the Revolution and that each of these is rather well removed from the revolutionary context. The first is the "Destruction of the Settlements at Wyoming," which appeared in Affecting History of the Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Manheim's Family (Philadelphia, 1794); this is anti-British inasmuch as it blames Colonel John Butler, the Tory commander of the enemy forces, for the massacre, but the focus is squarely on the Indians and the cruelties they practiced. The other two examples are weaker. The Sufferings of John Corbley's Family was also first published in the Manheim anthology, but the author makes no mention of the British or of the Revolution. Later, when it was reissued in Samual G. Drake's Indian Captive; or, Life in the Wigwam (Auburn, 1850), an anti-British preface written by Rev. William Rogers was added. Finally, Van Der Beets mentions A True Narrative of the Sufferings of Mary Kinnan (Elizabethtown, N. J., 1795) as another example of a memoir of "The British and Indian War," yet it contains nothing about the Revolution except an apostrophe to "cruel Britain."[4] These three narratives, then, are in fact Indian captivity narratives with little direct link to the Revolutionary War. Other narratives, like those of Andros or Dring who had no contact with Indians at all, are simply not mentioned, but the reader is left with the impression that all captivity narratives are essentially the same.

There are, however, three important respects in which the formula of the Revolutionary War narratives differs from that of the Indian captivities.

The first, of course, involves the myth of republican virtue which informs every element of the Revolutionary War formula. Second, the transformation which the hero of a Revolutionary War narrative experiences is not at all like that experienced by the Indian captive. Finally, the return which completes the monomyth cycle and the Indian captivity formula is much more complex in the Revolutionary War captivity--the returning soldier often concludes that, while he has remained true, his society has been corrupted.

In the previous chapter we have seen how, for the writers of the Revolutionary War captivity narratives, republican virtue became the touchstone by which they evaluated their own behavior and that of their fellow prisoners. Because the Indian captives were in less control of their fate than the prisoners of war, however, the existence of an absolute moral standard of captive behavior is of little importance in the Indian captivity narrative. The privateer held aboard the Jersey was always free to enlist in the King's service and thereby relieve his own suffering and deprivation, but the captive carried off by the Indians was completely at the mercy of his captors. The Revolutionary prisoner, then, not only had to endure the hardships of captivity, but he had to remain loyal to the cause, to the myth of republican virtue, as well.

The Indian captive experienced captivity as a threat to his life and to his identity, but not as a threat to his loyalty. Indeed, even when Indian captives willingly became adopted members of the tribes that held them, it was more the result of a long process of acculturation than of any betrayal of principle. The experience of captivity for the two groups, then, was simply different.

It is this moral standard of republican virtue which accounts for the different ways in which the Indian captive and the prisoner of war are

transformed by their experiences. In "The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," Richard Van Der Beets characterizes the change:

> But it is in the captivity experience itself--the transformation by immersion into an alien culture accompanied by ritualized adoption into that culture--that constitutes the initiatory process and prepares for the enlightened return or rebirth of the initiate. This process of transformation in the captivity experience involves first a ritual initiatory ordeal, followed by a gradual accomodation of Indian modes and customs, especially those relating to food, and finally a highly ritualized adoption into the new culture. (p. 554)

The experience Van Der Beets describes here is a direct challenge to the captive's identity. The initial ordeal which most Indian captives were forced to endure was the running of the gauntlet, and Van Der Beets provides quite a number of examples of captives who were stripped and beaten upon first arriving in an Indian camp. Running a gauntlet could prove fatal, since some of the Indians lining the way were armed with hatchets, but the more likely result was to impress the captive with how fully alone he was and how totally his life was in the control of his captors. The random beating of a naked captive by an entire village, including the women and children, served to demoralize and to dehumanize him, and for the narrative writer, this was the first step in a deep transformation of his sense of personal identity. The Revolutionary War prisoner, however, usually suffered little more than the loss of any valuable property--such as money or a good coat--found in his possession at the time of his capture. While this practice certainly angered the prisoners and often left them with inadequate clothing against the weather, it is presented in a flat matter-of-fact manner in the narratives. The prisoners resented their loss, but they did not perceive themselves as demoralized or dehumanized by it.

The Revolutionary War captivities devote a lot of attention to descriptions of prison conditions and prison routine. Thomas Dring's Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship, for example, is not so much chronological in its organization as it is topical: each subdivision describes a different feature of life aboard the Jersey. The typical reaction to conditions of deprivation and cruelty is resignation. The Indian captive, on the other hand, had more to do than simply accustom himself to prison routine. After running the gauntlet, the Indian captive still faced other threats to his identity:

> the captive then underwent the second phase of transformation by a gradual accomodation to Indian practices and modes. The most striking and consistently recorded of these accomodations is at once the most fundamental: that of food. In narrative after narrative, captives describe an initial loathing of Indian fare, then a partial compromise of that disgust under extreme hunger, and ultimately a complete accomodation and, in many cases, even relish of the Indian diet.[5]

Isaac Jogues, for example, declares near the end of his narrative that "Such food as this, with the intestines of deer full of blood, and half putrefied excrement, and mushrooms boiled, and rotten oysters, and frogs, which they eat whole, head and feet, not even skinned or cleaned; such food, had hunger, custom, and want of better, made, I will not say tolerable, but even pleasing."[6] The ability to find such fare pleasing represents a tremendous accomodation to Indian customs and practices, and it is the product of a highly personal transformation.

There is nothing like this kind of internal transformation of the hero in the Revolutionary War narratives. We saw in the first chapter that food--or more precisely the lack of it--was a principal concern of the men who kept prison diaries and a major complaint of those who wrote

propaganda. In the narratives too we find ample treatment of the subject, but without any hint of real accomodation. John Van Dyke's description of the fare aboard the Jersey is typical:

> Every man in the mess of six took his daily turn to get the mess's provisions; one day I went to the galley, and drew a piece of salt boiled pork. I went to our mess to divide it; I held the pork in my left hand, with a jack-knife in my right to mark it in six parts . . . I cut each one his share, and each one of us eat our day's allowance in one mouthful of this salt pork, and nothing else. One day, called pea day, I took the drawer of our Doctor's (Hodges of Philadelphia) chest, and went to the galley, which was the cooking place . . . with my drawer for a soup dish; I held it under a large brass cock--the cook turned it--I received the allowance for my mess--and behold! brown water and fifteen floating peas--no peas on the bottom of my drawer--and this for six men's allowance for twenty-four hours. The peas were all on the bottom of the kettle; those left would be taken to New York, and, I suppose, sold. One day in the week called pudding day; three pounds of damaged flour--in it would be green lumps--such as their men would not eat, and one pound of very bad raisins, one-third raisin sticks; we would pick out the sticks, mash the lumps of flour, put all, with some water, in our drawer, mix our pudding, and put it in a bag with a tally tied to it, with the number of our mess; this was a day's allowance.[7]

There is no evidence that Van Dyke ever found the pork, the peas, or the pudding not only tolerable but pleasing. Moreover, the provisions for prisoners aboard the Jersey and the other prison ships were perhaps the worst of the war. Andrew Sherburne, who was held at Mill Prison in England, found less to complain of: "The provision while I was there, was in general, pretty good, but we had not half enough of it" (p. 83). We can see, then, that however otherwise unpleasant the prison experience was to the Revolutionary War captives, it did not involve threats to their cultural identity like those faced by Jogues and others who came to enjoy eating the bowels of deer. The experience, and thus the literary

expression of it, was not the same.

In the Indian narratives, the direction of the transforming is clear. Van Der Beets writes: "The final phase of transformation, as represented in the captivity experience, is that which effects the deepest immersion into the alien culture and completes the initiation of the Hero: symbolically 'becoming' an Indian by ritualized adoption into the tribe."[8] The fact that Indians were an alien culture is, of course, the key to the different meanings of captivity which we find in the Indian narratives and in those of the Revolution. The monomythic transformation of the Indian captives consisted in his absorption into a new culture, and this absorption took place with at least tacit agreement on the part of the captive. Indeed, the Indian narratives abound with stories of captives who refuse to return to white society even after they have been "rescued," and there are numerous references to captives who have forgotten how to speak English. The hero of the Revolutionary War prison narrative does not confront an alien culture, nor does he undergo any threats to his sense of cultural identity. For the Revolutionary War prisoner, the issue at stake is his virtue, specifically his loyalty, and this requires that his narrative take on a different cast. The transformation of this hero involves no threat to his identity; instead, he is transformed from a youth whose virtue is untested and naive into a man who has suffered for a cause and remained true to it.

Finally, there is the question of the captive's return. Van Der Beets tells us that in the case of Indian captives, most, "having been given up for dead or at best considered 'lost' after capture, were received on their return by relatives and friends in the sense of having

come from the grave, reborn to the world from which they had passed by means of symbolic death."[9] This symbolic return from the dead is the natural resolution of the monomyth as it is played out in the Indian captivity narrative--the cycle of separation, transformation, and return is completed. In the Revolutionary War narrative, however, simple return from captivity is insufficient to resolve the tension and complete the story because the primary myth is the myth of republican virtue which must be worked out in terms broader than any concern for the personal fate of the hero can encompass. The final resolution of the Revolutionary War captivity narrative is and must be the success of the Revolution, the vindication of republican virtue. The title page of Ebenezer Fletcher's Narrative, for example, promises us the story of how the hero was severely wounded and taken prisoner at the battle of Hubbardston, Vt., in the year 1777, by the British and Indians, at the age of 16 years, after recovering in part, made his escape from the enemy, and travelling through a dreary wilderness, followed by wolves, and beset by Tories on his way, who threatened to take him back to the enemy, but made his escape from them all, and arrived safe home; this looks as if it might fit into the pattern which Van Der Beets identifies as the basic configuration of Indian narratives, but Fletcher's Narrative in fact does not end with his safe return. Fletcher rejoins his regiment after his escape, and he only ends his book when the war and his term as a soldier come to an end. In these narratives, the ideal of republican virtue becomes the real center of attention, and it diverts some interest from the changes and difficulties experienced by the individual heroes.

It should now be clear that an examination of the prisoner of war narratives of the Revolution on the basis of the Indian captivity

narrative formula is inadequate. The initiation into captivity, which Van Der Beets correctly sees as the starting point of the Indian captive's monomythic journey, is not a significant element in the Revolutionary War narratives, which almost invariably begin with the hero's decision to fight for his country. The captivity experience leads to transformation and symbolic death in the Indian tales, but for the prisoners of war, no real transformation takes place. Instead, we find that prison tests and tempers virtues which were latently present in the heroes' personae before they were captured. The final difference between the two groups of narratives involves the resolution of the story; while the Indian captive returns home to safety, the prisoner of war who escapes or who is exchanged returns to the service of his country.

The republican virtue formula, then, is similar to the Indian captivity formula inasmuch as both consist of three main stages, but instead of the separation-transformation-return pattern which characterizes the Indian tale, we find in the Revolutionary War narrative a pattern in which the hero first commits himself somewhat naively to a cause, and then has that commitment severely tested. This formula finally culminates, not in return, but in confirmation of republican virtue and rededication to the republican cause. Differences in the mythic content of the two varieties of narratives are, of course, the basis for the different formulaic patterns--the Indian captivity narrative as a journey of initiation in which the hero survives but is transformed by threats to his cultural and personal identity, while the Revolutionary War prison narrative is a tale of progress toward moral and political maturity brought about by an ordeal testing the hero's integrity.

In the first stage of the Revolutionary War prison narrative, the hero portrays himself as a youth going naively off to war and glory. We have already seen how young boys like Lemuel Roberts, or Christopher Hawkins, or Ebenezer Fletcher joined the army or went to sea without any real understanding of the meaning of their actions or the possible outcome. Republican virtue for these boys is virtue untested, a set of platitudes about free Americans and oppressive British tyrants. Once the boy is captured and made a prisoner, however, his perception of himself and the cause change radically because for the first time he is forced to face the consequences of revolution realistically. As a prisoner, he might starve in the hold of a smallpox-infested hulk or in an ad hoc prison ashore, and he would regularly be offered the promise of good treatment and provisions if he would but abandon his foolish notions of rebellion. The circumstances of prison life thus lead the naive hero to examine, perhaps even to question, his original commitment, and the subsequent testing of his virtue provides much of the tension in the narratives.

This trial by ordeal is the second stage of the Revolutionary captivity formula, but the ultimate effect on the prisoner differs from the transformation Van Der Beets describes in the Indian captivity. Instead of undergoing a symbolic death, the Revolutionary prisoner of war faces death squarely, and by choosing to endure suffering rather than betray his comrades and principles, he manages in a sense to transcend death. The Indian captive emerges from his ordeal a changed human being, but the prison narrative hero is essentially the same after his imprisonment as before except that he is very much stronger. Instead of having his

identity transformed, the Revolutionary War prisoner has his virtue confirmed and reinforced.

The final stage of the formula begins when the hero gains his release from captivity, and it is in this stage that he puts his renewed sense of virtue to action. There are two basic patterns followed in this stage: the prisoner escapes or he is exchanged, but in either case he returns to Revolutionary service. Escape, of course, can add a good deal of excitement to a narrative, but in these stories the escape motif serves more importantly to show how virtue and tenacity can be rewarded. Perhaps the best single example of a narrative emphasizing escape is the Narrative of Remarkable Occurrences, in the Life of John Blatchford, in which the distinction between the second and third stages is quite blurred by the fact that Blatchford's story is a long series of escapes and recaptures. Throughout them all, the hero's resolve holds firm despite numerous discouraging setbacks. After several abortive escape attempts both in Canada and in the West Indies, for example, Blatchford was shipped to England, but he tried to get away again while the ship was off the Irish coast:

> I jumped overboard, with intention of getting away; but unfortunately I was discovered and fired at by the marines: the boat was immediately sent after me, took me up and carried me on board again. At this time almost all the officers were on shore, and the ship was left in charge of the sailing-master, one Drummond, who beat me most cruelly;--to get out of his way I run forward--he followed me, and as I was running back he came up with me and threw me down the main hold. The fall, together with the beating, was so severe that I was deprived of my senses for a considerable time; when I recovered them I found myself in the carpenter's birth, placed upon some old canvass, between two chests, having my right thigh, leg and arm broken, and several parts of my body severely bruised. In this situation I lay eighteen days. (p. 7)

Blatchford's story is full of such frustrations and hardships--he was even pressed into service by the British East India Company but managed to

escape--and it was always his trust in providence and his devotion to the American cause which sustained him. The role of republican virtue in the escapes of Fletcher and Hawkins was discussed in the previous chapter. In each case, the escaping prisoner portrays his efforts as the operation of a virtue and loyalty superior to that of the enemy, especially Tories who had betrayed and continued to betray that ideal. The second pattern of this final stage also advances the myth of republican virtue because exchanged prisoners in the narratives return, not to their families and the relative ease of civilian life, but to the fighting. We have seen earlier, for example, that Nathaniel Fanning chose service with the French rather than a return to America as a passenger after his exchange because "it made but a little difference whether I fought under the French or American flag, as long as I fought against the English" (p. 146). The point, then, is that regardless of how the narrative persona managed to free himself from his captors, it was his duty to use that freedom in the service of republican virtue. Even Israel Potter, who was not able to return to America until almost fifty years after the war, ends his narrative with rhapsodic praise of the American republic because his return was to the ideal, not to the Rhode Island farm which had long since been sold or to the family which had scattered or died off.

An examination of the Revolutionary Adventures of Ebenezer Fox provides an excellent example of how the three-part formula works to provide the reader with an adventure tale which is in fact a presentation of the republican virtue myth. The book opens to present us with a laughably naive boy romantically influenced by all the talk of political liberty which abounded in Boston in the 1770's. On the night of April 18,

1775, Fox and a boy named Kelley ran off from their parents in Roxbury in search of adventure. Their destination was Providence, where they expected to be able to ship out and see the world, and they hurried all the more toward it because of the unusual commotion in the streets that night; they thought the bustle preceding the battle of Lexington was in fact a massive attempt to find them and return them to their families. After near capture by the British aboard a coastal smuggler and a second successful smuggling voyage to Cape Francois, Fox, a young patriot who still had learned little of republican virtue, returned to visit his parents and was forced to sign on as an apprentice to a barber and wigmaker. When the master was drafted, he sought a substitute:

> The spirit of adventure had been suppressed, but not destroyed, within me. The monotonous duties of the shop grew irksome, and I longed for some employment productive of variety. The opportunity seemed favorable to my desires; and, as my elder fellow apprentice was fearful that he might be called upon, he encouraged me in the project, and I resolved upon offering my services. (p. 47)

In September, 1779, Fox enlisted in the militia, but his regiment never saw action. After his discharge, and again in search of prize money and adventure, he signed aboard a privateer, The Protector.

Throughout the first five years of fighting, then, Fox maintained his boyish enthusiasm. Indeed, he saw the war as a means for the relief of boredom and as an avenue to possible wealth. Ideas of patriotism and republican virtue are not really absent in Fox's characterization of these early years, but they are not at all emphasized because they were ideas in the air, which could be heard everywhere, and for the Fox persona they were ideas yet to be tested. It was easy to be a patriot, it could even be fun, as long as patriotism offered the possibility of excitement and

monetary gain. When patriotism offers only the prospect of an unpleasant death, however, the patriot is faced with a challenge to his integrity which cannot be evaded.

For Fox, the challenge began when The Protector was attacked by the men-of-war Roe-Buck and May-Day. This event provides a sharp juxtaposition of naive patriotism and true republican virtue: For the adventure-seeking boy, even capture by the enemy can be taken lightly--Fox used the confusion of the situation to indulge himself:

> Our capture was now considered no longer problematical; and, being unwilling that the stores, especially of crackers, cheese, and porter, should fall a prey to the appetite of the enemy, and not knowing when we should have an opportunity of enjoying such luxuries again, I invited about a dozen of my friends into the store room, where we exerted ourselves to diminish the quantity of this part of the prize which we thought would shortly be in possession of the enemy. The porter made us cheerful if not happy, and having sat and drank to our satisfaction, we shook hands as friends soon to part, uncertain when we should meet again, and returned on deck without our absence having been noted. (p. 84)

This light tone continues even after the British have boarded Fox's ship. Each man aboard The Protector had been given fifteen dollars in specie to hide on his person so that at least some of the money might not fall into the hands of the enemy; as we have already seen, however, prisoners were routinely searched and plundered of all of value, and so the British were soon aware that each man was carrying cash:

> Such was the art which some had exercised in hiding the money, that they were stripped entirely naked before it was found. One fellow had secreted his share so effectually, that it baffled all searching operations to find it; and the officer, being confident that the fellow had it about him, took the satisfaction of giving him a tremendous kick in the rear by way of conclusion, roaring out at the same time, "Away with you, you damned rebel, into the hold." (pp. 86-87)

Unlike the threatening initiations to captivity found in the Indian tales, Fox's first experiences as a captive seem almost burlesque, but all of that changes in a single sentence when Fox boards the Jersey: "I now found myself in a loathsome prison, among a collection of the most wretched and disgusting-looking objects that I ever beheld in human form" (p. 97).

In the Revolutionary War captivity narrative, the conditions under which the prisoners were forced to live operated to steel a nascent sense of republican virtue and make it strong, and we see this at work in Fox's tale. The realities aboard the Jersey had caused him to abandon his naive notions, but they also fostered more realistic ones. Fox mentions, for example, the hasty burials on the beach at the Wallabout. Those prisoners fortunate enough to be chosen for the work parties who went ashore with the dead each day "were hurried away before their task was half completed, and forbidden to express their horror and indignation at the insulting negligence toward the dead." Such callous behavior on the part of the British produced but bitter fruit for them, because Fox goes on to say, "The emotions thus suppressed, only glowed the more intensely within their bosoms, and contributed as much as any other cause to keep alive the hatred and animosity toward their enemies" (p. 111). Such testing and trying of the men is typical of the genre, for in the Revolutionary captivity we are presented with heroes who use their suffering to strengthen their devotion to cause rather than attempt to relieve it by betrayal.

In the case of Ebenezer Fox, however, the path toward republican virtue was a bit crooked; as we saw in the previous chapter, he and several of his friends tried to find a shortcut to freedom by enlisting in

the British service and then looking out for the first opportunity to desert. Nevertheless, this was not an abandonment of the principles of republican virtue, but a faulty approach to the problem of escape. We have already seen the self-recriminations Fox suffered and the rededication to purpose which the incident precipitated, and we are left to conclude simply that Fox strayed from the path but returned, and that his virtue, having undergone a severe test, was the stronger for it.

Ultimately Fox's escape was successful, and it marks the end of the second stage of the narrative--the naive boy has become the republican hero. The third stage involves the hero's return, but in the Revolutionary War narrative this return is dependent upon the triumph of the American cause. When Fox arrives in Cuba after his escape from the British West Indies, he signs on an American thirty-two gun frigate, the Flora, despite the fact that she was bound for active duty and France and not for Boston and home. In fact, Fox was still in France when he received word of the American victory, and he finally returned home as a crew member aboard an American warship. His own glorious homecoming, then, was subsumed by the more general celebration of the United States' defense of independence. The story of Ebenezer Fox is a kind of allegorical parallel to the story of the progress of republican virtue, and in Fox's persona and that of the other narrative writers we see the triumph of that virtue.

There is one other feature of the Revolutionary War captivity narratives which deserves mention. Most of them were written or published quite a long time after the events which they describe took place. Some of the reasons why this is so and some of the factors which motivated

the writers were discussed in the second chapter, but the fact that twenty, thirty, or forty years separate the events from their retelling has a significance beyond the scope of that earlier discussion. Ostensibly, these tales were addressed to the children and grandchildren of the men who wrote them, but in a broader sense they were intended to remind the whole post-revolutionary generation of what common people had done in the name of freedom. Republican virtue is the central myth of these books because the old soldiers feared that devotion to it was slipping away, that, in the words of Private Samuel Downing, "'twasn't as it is now. Everybody was true." The need to believe this about their own lives and about their own part in the nation's history provides a strong determining force for the way in which the former prisoners shaped the Revolutionary War captivities. That need may in fact be stronger than the desire to supplement a pension application or to pick up a meager return in sales. Viewed in these terms, occasional lapses into bitterness make emotional sense despite the fact that they contradict the mythology of the narratives as a whole. Lemuel Roberts was a great praiser of republican virtue, and he wrote, by his own admission, because he needed the money. Yet while he is ever at pains to promote the virtuous ideal, he cannot resist noting as well that "injustice is too often done by officers, to soldiers who risk their lives with boldness, and who render essential service to their country, and thus a good cause is too often fatally injured" (p. 26). That Roberts never received a pension is, of course, one explanation for the remark, but a better one is the suggestion that by 1809 when his book was published Roberts had come to believe that as a soldier he truly did follow the ideal, that he

really was a virtuous republican. What we have, then, in the Revolutionary War prison narrative is a genre quite distinct from the Indian captivity narrative with which it is often grouped because it uses personal narrative as a vehicle for national historical mythology and not as an illustration of a providential interpretation of history or as a framework for highly sensationalized novels of sensibility. In a sense, these narratives rather self-consciously attempt to provide a nineteenth-century American audience with a glimpse into the nation's only claim to a golden age.

NOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

[1]"Notes toward a Typology of Literary Formulas," Indiana Social Studies Quarterly, 26 (Winter, 1973-74), 21. Cawelti has further refined his ideas on literary formulas in The Six-Gun Mystique (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971) and in Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[2]"The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," p. 549; see also Larry Carey, "A Study of the Indian Captivity Narrative as a Popular Literary Genre, ca. 1675-1875."

[3]Held Captive by Indians, p. xvii.

[4]See "The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre," pp. 36-38; the three narratives are reprinted in Held Captive by Indians, pp. 205-7, 237-42, 319-32.

[5]"The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," p. 555.

[6]"Captivity of Father Isaac Jogues, of the Society of Jesus, Among the Mohawks," reprinted in Held Captive by Indians, pp. 33-34.

[7]"Narrative of Confinement in the Jersey Prison Ship," p. 148.

[8]"The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," pp. 557-58.

[9]Ibid., p. 561.

CONCLUSION

When the former prisoners of war in the American Revolution sat down to write out their memoirs, they may possibly have had the example of the Indian captivity narratives in mind, but what they produced was quite different. The sensationalized depiction of inhuman cruelty and daring escapes, which came more and more to characterize the Indian captivities of the nineteenth century, was never really a major concern of the men who described the crushing tedium of Forton and Mill or the disease and deprivation which reigned aboard the Jersey. Instead, the prison narratives strike the reader as somewhat more introspective and interpretive; the prisoners who looked back on their wartime experiences chose in their narratives to emphasize dedication and sense of purpose, and to explain, not so much what they had endured, but why they had been willing to endure it. The gratuitous cruelties of the British and Tories take on significance in the prison narratives only inasmuch as they are illustrative of the virtue and steadfastness of the prisoners who nevertheless remained loyal to the patriot cause. Richard Van Der Beets argues convincingly that the Indian captivity narrative dramatizes a profound transformation in the hero's character, but in the Revolutionary War story we have the declaration of the hero's refusal to be transformed by his captors.

It is this difference between the two varieties of captivity narrative which provides us with the key to understanding their respective significances.

The Indian narrative, as Roy Harvey Pearce has pointed out, has been the wellspring of a rich popular literary tradition which includes American Gothics like Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntley and, later, the dime novel. The Revolutionary War prison narrative, on the other hand, gave rise to no such tradition; its importance lies in what it tells us about how nineteenth-century Americans perceived themselves and their national history. Through the myth of republican virtue, the narrative writers were able to affirm that the cause of 1776 had indeed been just and that the men of 1776 had been true, and the message was an important one for a new nation which, unlike Great Britain, lacked a historical mythology and pantheon of heroes. In Recording America's Past, David Van Tassel notes that throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, state historical societies devoted themselves to the collection of documents and materials which would establish the American Revolution as an event of significance for mankind, because each state wished to lay claim to a share of the glory. The same desire motivated individuals: some men wrote their memoirs to demonstrate the virtue of a golden age, and others read the narratives in order to partake in the swell of national pride. It is not surprising, then, that Thomas Andros, who wrote The Old Jersey Captive when he was old and indigent and infirm, should begin his narrative by pointing out that "Virgil represents AEneas as soothing the breasts of his afflicted companions with this remark, 'Perhaps the recollection of these things will hereafter be delightful.'"

Ultimately, the prison narratives of the Revolution do not really qualify as adventure stories because their basic appeal is not so much excitement as national mythology. Such appeals, of course, were common in the first part of the last century, and professional writers like

Cooper were as enthusiastic as the narrative writers in their praise of the principles of the Revolution. Statements of national pride and national virtue, however, were ultimately insufficient to prevent the sectionalism which culminated in the Civil War, and after that war the myth of republican virtue no longer sufficed as a formulaic basis on which to base popular literature. In this connection it is significant that it was during the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, that Charles I. Bushnell published no fewer than seven prison narratives, seven testimonies to republican virtue, at his own expense. The myth had had its heyday and it was over. Bushnell's books did not sell.

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