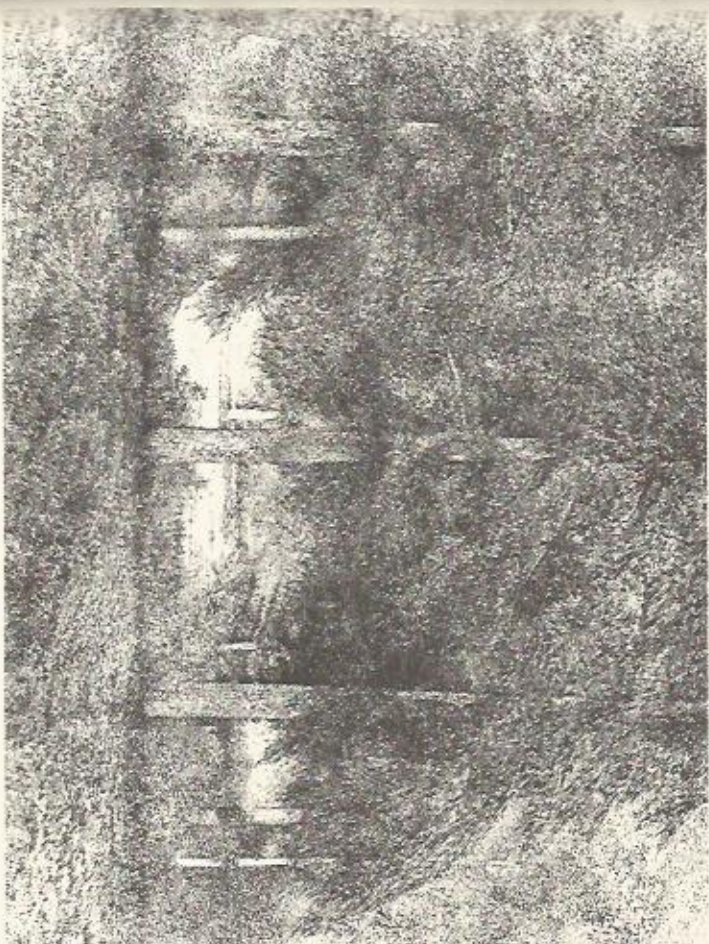


Wilderness and the American Mind

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CHAPTER 1

Old World Roots of Opinion

The land is the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.

Joel 2:3

EUROPEAN discoverers and settlers of the New World were familiar with wilderness even before they crossed the Atlantic. Some of this acquaintance was first-hand, since in the late Middle Ages a considerable amount of wild country still existed on the Continent. Far more important, however, was the deep resonance of wilderness as a concept in Western thought. It was instinctively understood as something alien to man—an insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization had waged an unceasing struggle. The Europeans knew the uninhabited forest as an important part of their folklore and mythology. Its dark, mysterious qualities made it a setting in which the prescientific imagination could place a swarm of demons and spirits. In addition, wilderness as fact and symbol permeated the Judeo-Christian tradition. Anyone with a Bible had available an extended lesson in the meaning of wild land. Subsequent Christian history added new dimensions. As a result, the first immigrants approached North America with a cluster of preconceived ideas about wilderness. This intellectual legacy of the Old World to the New not only helped determine initial responses but left a lasting imprint on American thought.

The value system of primitive man was structured in terms of survival. He appreciated what contributed to his well-being and feared what he did not control or understand. The "best" trees produced food or shelter while "good" land was flat, fertile, and well watered. Under the most desirable of all conditions the living was easy and secure because nature was ordered in the interests of man. Almost all early cultures had such a conception of an earthly paradise. No matter where they were thought to be or what they were

called, all paradises had in common a bountiful and beneficent natural setting in accord with the original meaning of the word in Persian—luxurious garden. A mild climate constantly prevailed. Ripe fruit drooped from every bough, and there were no thorns to prick reaching hands. The animals in paradise lived in harmony with man. Fear as well as want disappeared in this ideal state of nature.¹

If paradise was early man's greatest good, wilderness, as its antipode, was his greatest evil. In one condition the environment, garden-like, ministered to his every desire. In the other it was at best indifferent, frequently dangerous, and always beyond control. And in fact it was with this latter condition that primitive man had to contend. At a time when there was no alternative, existence in the wilderness was forbidding indeed. Safety, happiness, and progress all seemed dependent on rising out of a wilderness situation. It became essential to gain control over nature. Fire was one step; the domestication of some wild animals another. Gradually man learned how to control the land and raise crops. Clearings appeared in the forests. This reduction of the amount of wilderness defined man's achievement as he advanced toward civilization. But progress was slow. For centuries the wild predominated over the precarious defenses thrown up against its influence. Men dreamed of life without wilderness. Significantly, many traditions located paradise on an island or in some other enclosed area. In this way the wild hinterland normally surrounding and threatening the first communities was eliminated. Wilderness had no place in the paradise myth.

The wilds continued to be repugnant even in as relatively advanced civilizations as those of the Greeks and Romans. The celebrations of nature, which abound in classical literature, are restricted to the cultivated, pastoral variety. The beautiful in nature was closely related to the fruitful or otherwise useful.² The Roman poet of the first century B.C., Titus Lucretius Carus, spoke for his

1. Mircea Eliade, "The Yearning for Paradise in Primitive Tradition," *Dædalus*, 86 (1956), 255-67; Loren Baritz, "The Idea of the West," *American Historical Review*, 66 (1961), 618-40; Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935), pp. 290-303; George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1948), pp. 154-74.

2. Lovejoy and Boas, pp. 222-42; Henry Rushton Fairclough, *Love of Nature Among the Greeks and Romans* (New York, 1930); Archibald Colquhoun, *The Love of Nature*

age in *De Rerum Natura* when he observed that it was a serious "defect" that so much of the earth "is greedily possessed by mountains and the forests of wild beasts." Apart from the areas man had civilized, it "is filled full of restless dread throughout her woods, her mighty mountains and deep forests." Yet Lucretius took hope because "these regions it is generally in our power to shun."

Turning to history, Lucretius drew a grim portrait of precivilized life in the wilderness. Men lived a nightmarish existence, hounded by dangers on every hand and surviving through the ancient code of eat or be eaten. With obvious satisfaction, Lucretius related how the race escaped this miserable condition through the invention of clothing, metals, and, eventually, "ships, agriculture, city walls, laws, arms, roads." These enabled man to control wild nature and achieve relative security. Cultural refinements and "all charms of life" followed the release from the wilderness.³

When Lucretius, Horace, Virgil and their contemporaries confessed their love of "nature" and expressed a desire to leave the towns for a "natural" way of life, they meant the pastoral or rural environment. Lucretius, for one, applauded the efforts of the first farmers whose labor "forced the forests more and more to climb the mountain-sides." This made room for the cultivated landscape that was so highly prized. It consisted of "fields, . . . crops, and joyous vineyards, and a gray-green strip of olives to run in between and mark divisions, . . . adorned and interspersed with pleasant fruits, and fenced by planting them all round with fruitful trees."⁴ If this was the ideal, wilderness could only be forbidding and repulsive.

While inability to control or use wilderness was the basic factor in man's hostility, the terror of the wild had other roots as well. One was the tendency of the folk traditions of many cultures to associate wilderness with the supernatural and monstrous. There was a quality of mystery about the wilderness, particularly at night, that triggered the imagination. To frightened eyes the limbs of trees became grotesque, leaping figures, and the wind sounded like a weird

scream. The wild forest seemed animated. Fantastic creatures of every description were thought to lurk in its depths. Whether propitiated with sacrifices as deities or regarded as devils, these forest beings were feared.⁵

Classical mythology contained a whole menagerie of lesser gods and demons believed to inhabit wild places. Pan, the lord of the woods, was pictured as having the legs, ears, and tail of a goat and the body of a man. He combined gross sensuality with boundless, sportive energy. Greeks who had to pass through forests or mountains dreaded an encounter with Pan. Indeed, the word "panic" originated from the blinding fear that seized travelers upon hearing strange cries in the wilderness and assuming them to signify Pan's approach. Related to Pan were the tribe of satyrs—goat-men of a demotical character devoted to wine, dancing, and lust. They were thought to appear only at night and then solely in the darkest parts of the forest. According to Hellenic folklore, satyrs ravished women and carried off children who ventured into their wilderness lairs. Silent and centaurs completed the Greek collection of forest spirits. These monsters had the torso and head of a man and the body and legs of a goat or horse. Usually, they were represented as carrying a club in the form of an uprooted tree which also served as a reminder of their favorite habitat. In Roman mythology satyr-like figures appeared as fauns and also lurked in thickly wooded regions.⁶

In early folk belief, the wildernesses of central and northern Europe also swarmed with supernatural beings. Some were worshipped, but generally with the fear characteristic of the attitude of the unsophisticated toward the incomprehensible. Others received classification as demons and cohorts of the devil. In the Scandinavian countries, for instance, it was thought that when Lucifer and his followers were expelled from heaven, some landed in the forests and became Wood-Sprites or Trolls. Many of the medieval Euro-

³ Among the Romans during the latter decades of the Republic and the first century of the Empire (London, 1912): Charles Paul Segal, "Nature and the World of Man in Greek Literature," *Arion*, 2 (1960), 19-53.

⁴ Titus Lucretius Carus on the Nature of Things, trans. Thomas Jackson (Oxford, 1926), pp. 155, 160, 184ff., 201. Lovejoy and Boas, pp. 192-221, present other instances of "anti-primitivism" among Greek writers.

⁵ Lucretius, pp. 198-99.

⁶ Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (2nd ed., 2 vols., London, 1873), 2, 214-20; Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Wald und Feldkulte* (2 vols., Berlin, 1904-05); James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (3rd rev. ed., 12 vols., New York, 1915), 2, 7-96; 9, 72-108; Alexander Porteus, *Forest Folklore, Mythology, and Romance* (New York, 1928), pp. 84-148.

⁷ Porteus, pp. 114-19; J. H. Philipps, *The Sacred Tree: The Tree in Religion and Myth* (London, 1897), pp. 55-58; Thomas Keightley, *The Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy* (2nd ed., London, 1838), pp. 229-35, 316-18; Robert Graves et al., *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (New York, 1959), pp. 182-85.

pean monsters were lineal descendants of the man-beasts of classical mythology. Russian, Czech, and Slovak folklore spoke of a creature living in forests and mountains with the face of a woman, body of a sow, and legs of a horse.⁷ In Germany, when storms raged through the forests, it was widely believed that the ghostly Wild Huntsman was abroad with his pack of baying hounds, riding furiously and killing everything in his path. Man-eating ogres and the sinister werewolves were also identified with wild, remote regions. While in certain circumstances forest beings, like the elves, could be helpful to men, most were considered terrifying and added to the repulsiveness of wilderness.⁸

Among the Anglo-Saxons, from whom most of the first Americans descended, there were long traditions of locating horrible beasts in the wilderness. The *Beowulf* epic of the eighth century brought together many of these legends. The heart of the story is the conflict between two gigantic, blood-drinking fiends and the tribes that Beowulf led. As the action unfolds it is apparent that wilderness was a concept loaded with meaning for the early Middle Ages. Throughout the poem the uninhabited regions are portrayed in the worst possible light—dark, cold, and gloomy. The fiends are said to live "in an unvisited land among wolf-haunted hills, windswept crags, and perilous fen-tracks." Bravely Beowulf advanced into this wilderness and below "a dismal grove of mountain trees" took his revenge on the monsters.⁹

The most important imaginary denizen of the wildernesses of medieval Europe was the semi-human Wild Man. His naked figure, covered completely with thick hair, appeared widely in the art, literature, and drama of the period.¹⁰ Immensely strong, he was frequently portrayed in the tradition of the classical sileni and centaurs, grasping an uprooted tree. According to folk tradition, the Wild Man lived in the heart of the forest as far as possible from civilization. He was regarded as a kind of ogre who devoured children

7. Porteus, p. 84; Jan Machal, *Slavic Mythology: The Mythology of All Races*, ed. Louis Herbert Gray (13 vols. Boston, 1969), 3, 261-65.

8. The folk traditions of the Teutonic and Nordic peoples, which contain numerous references to wilderness-dwelling spirits, are discussed extensively in Manhardt, Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybras (4 vols. London, 1880); H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Baltimore, 1964); and Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology* (3 vols. London, 1891).

9. *Beowulf*, trans. David Wright (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1957), pp. 59, 60.

10. The definitive study is Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955).

and ravished maidens. The character of his mate varied from place to place. In the Austrian Tyrol and Bavarian Alps, the Wild Woman was imagined to have enormous size, tough bristles, immense pendulous breasts, and a hideous mouth that stretched from ear to ear. Further north in Germany, however, she was thought to be smaller and somewhat less fearsome in appearance. Her principal offense was stealing human babies and leaving her own offspring in their place. Along with the other forest demons, the Wild People invested the gloom of the wilderness with a terrifying eeriness that proved difficult to dispel.

The Judeo-Christian tradition constituted another powerful formative influence on the attitude toward wilderness of the Europeans who discovered and colonized the New World. The authors of the Bible gave wilderness a central position in their accounts both as a descriptive aid and as a symbolic concept. The term occurs 245 times in the Old Testament, Revised Standard Version, and thirty-five in the New. In addition there are several hundred uses of terms such as "desert" and "waste" with the same essential significance as "wilderness" and, in some cases, the identical Hebrew or Greek root.¹¹

Uninhabited land where annual rainfall was less than four inches dominated the geography of the ancient Near East. Such area included a strip of land beginning just west of Jerusalem and paralleling the Jordan River and Dead Sea. From here the desert sprawled southward into the Sinai Peninsula and Arabia.¹² Without advanced technology, men could not survive for long in such an inhospitable environment. In order to distinguish it from the "good" land which supported crops and herds, the ancient Hebrews used a number of terms which have been translated "wilderness."¹³

Even in places where the rainfall was above the crucial four

11. John W. Ellison, *Nelson's Complete Concordance of the Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York, 1957).

12. Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible: A Study in Historical Geography* (New York, 1957), pp. 34-35, 252-66; Robert W. Funk, "The Wilderness," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 78 (1959), 205-14.

13. James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible* (rev. ed. New York, 1963), p. 103; Thomas Harland Horner, "A Study in the Terminology of Nature in Isaiah 40-55" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1955), pp. 41-49; Ulrich W. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness, Studies in Biblical Theology*, 30 (Naperville, Ill., 1963), pp. 18-20.

inches, existence was precarious. An unusually dry season could wither crops and turn arable land into desert. In these circumstances men naturally hated and feared the wilderness. Moreover, since the amount of rain was beyond human influence or understanding, it was reasonable to give its variance a religious explanation. Drought and the resulting wilderness were thought of as the curse dispensed by the divine power in order to show his displeasure.¹⁴ God's approval, on the other hand, meant an abundance of life-giving water. The baptismal rite, for instance, was a symbolic ceremony that the climate and geography of the Near East made meaningful.

The Old Testament reveals that the ancient Hebrews regarded the wilderness as a cursed land and that they associated its forbidding character with a lack of water. Again and again "the great and terrible wilderness" was described as a "thirsty ground where there was no water." When the Lord of the Old Testament desired to threaten or punish a sinful people, he found the wilderness condition to be his most powerful weapon: "I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. . . . I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it."¹⁵ The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah became parched wastes of salt pits and thorny brush as a penalty for the sins of their citizens.

Conversely, when the Lord wished to express his pleasure, the greatest blessing he could bestow was to transform wilderness into "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs." In the famous redemption passage in Isaiah, God promises that "the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad . . . for waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert." To "give water in the wilderness" was a way God manifested his care.¹⁶ It was a fitting image for a people so fearful of the desert.

The identification of the arid wasteland with God's curse led to

14. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (2 vols. London, 1926, 1940), 1, 454-60; Eric Charles Rust, *Nature and Man in Biblical Thought* (London, 1953), pp. 48 ff.; Alfred Haldar, *The Notion of the Desert in Sumero-Akkadian and West-Semitic Religions* (Uppsala, 1960); George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (New York, 1962), pp. 10-15.

15. Deut. 8:15; Isaiah 42:15, 5:6. These and subsequent wordings are according to the *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version* (New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953).

16. Deut. 8:7; Isaiah 35:1-6; Isaiah 43:20. See also Isaiah 41:18-19 and 32:15.

the conviction that wilderness was the environment of evil, a kind of hell. There were several consequences. Like that of other cultures, the Hebrew folk imagination made the wilderness the abode of demons and devils. Among them were the howling dragon or *lan*, the winged female monster of the night called the *lilit*, and the familiar man-goat, *seirim*. Presiding over all was *Azazel*, the arch-devil of the wilderness. He was the key figure in an expiatory rite in which a live goat was brought before the chief priest of a community who symbolically laid upon it the sins of the group. The animal was then led to the edge of the cultivated land and "sent away into the wilderness to Azazel."¹⁷ The ritual has significance not only as the origin of the conception of a "scapegoat" but as a demonstration of the Hebrews' opinion of wilderness.

This idea of the immorality of wild country is also evident in the Old Testament treatment of the paradise theme. From what little we are told about the Garden of Eden it appears to have been, in the tradition of other paradises, the antipode of wilderness. "Eden" was the Hebrew word for "delight," and Genesis represents it as a pleasant place, indeed. The Garden was well watered and filled with edible plants. Adam and Eve were relieved of the necessity of working in order to survive. Fear also was eliminated, since with one exception the creatures that shared paradise were peaceable and helpful. But the snake encouraged the first couple to eat the forbidden fruit and as a punishment they were driven out of the Garden. The world Adam and Eve now faced was a wilderness, a "cursed" land full of "thorns and thistles." Later in the Scripture, Eden and the wilderness are juxtaposed in such a way as to leave no doubt about their original relationship. "The land is like the garden of Eden before them," wrote the author of Joel, "but after them a desolate wilderness." And Isaiah contains the promise that God will comfort Zion and "make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord."¹⁸ The story of the Garden and its loss embedded into Western thought the idea that wilderness and paradise were both physical and spiritual opposites.

The history of the Israelite nation added another dimension to the Judeo-Christian understanding of wilderness. After the Exodus

17. Deut. 16:10. On Hebrew folklore regarding the wilderness see Williams, p. 13; Frazer, 9, 109 ff.; and Angelo S. Rappoport, *The Folklore of the Jews* (London, 1937), pp. 39 ff.

18. Genesis 2:9, 3:17; Joel 2:3; Isaiah 51:3.

from bondage in Egypt about 1225 B.C., the Jews under the leadership of Moses wandered in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for an alleged forty years. The Old Testament account emphasizes the hardships encountered in this "howling waste of the wilderness,"¹⁹ yet the desert experience was immensely important to the tribes of Israel. During these years the God their fathers had worshipped revealed himself as Yahweh and promised to be their special protector. In the heart of the wilderness on Mount Sinai, Moses received the Ten Commandments which created a covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Thereafter the Lord demonstrated his protective power by the miraculous provision of water and food. He also promised that if the Israelites remained faithful to the covenant, he would allow them to escape the wilderness and enter Canaan, the promised land of milk and honey.²⁰

The Israelites' experience during the forty-year wandering gave wilderness several meanings. It was understood, in the first place, as a sanctuary from a sinful and persecuting society. Secondly, wilderness came to signify the environment in which to find and draw close to God. It also acquired meaning as a testing ground where a chosen people were purged, humbled, and made ready for the land of promise.²¹ Wilderness never lost its harsh and forbidding character. Indeed, precisely because of them it was unoccupied and could be a refuge as well as a disciplinary force. Paradoxically, one sought the wilderness as a way of being purified and hence delivered from it into a paradisaical promised land. There was no fondness in the Hebraic tradition for wilderness itself.

The Exodus experience established a tradition of going to the wilderness for freedom and the purification of faith. When a society became complacent and ungodly, religious leaders looked to the wilderness as a place for rededication and refuge. This is the meaning behind Jeremiah's plea: "Oh that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place, that I might leave my people . . . for they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men." When Elijah

19. Deut. 32:10.

20. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York, 1968), pp. 107-37; W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, *A History of Israel* (2 vols., Oxford, 1932), I, 67-111.

21. For amplification see Williams, pp. 15-16; Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, pp. 20-36; and Robert T. Anderson, "The Role of the Desert in Israeli Thought," *Journal of the Bible and Religion*, 27 (1959), 41-44.

sought inspiration and guidance from God, he went into the wilderness a symbolic forty days and received it, like Moses, on a deserted mountain.²² Sometimes an entire group left the settled parts of Israel for the wilderness with the intention of achieving a degree of purity and simplicity that would in fact prepare the way for the Messiah's coming. The most famous of these apocalyptic communities was that of the Essenes, who lived in caves near the Dead Sea in the second century before Christ. They hoped their sojourn, like the one of their ancestors in the Sinai desert, would lead to another and better promised land.

The importance of wilderness as a sanctuary was perpetuated in Christianity. John the Baptist was the New Testament counterpart of Moses, Elijah, and the Essenes. He sought the wild valley of the Jordan River to revitalize faith and make ready for the Messiah.²³ Each one of the Gospels connected John with the prophet mentioned in Isaiah whose voice would be heard crying "in the wilderness" to prepare God's way. When Jesus went to John in the Judean Desert for baptism the prophecy was fulfilled. Immediately thereafter Christ "was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."²⁴ This experience, complete with forty days of fasting, alluded to the testing of Israel during the Exodus. And wilderness retained its significance as the environment of evil and hardship where spiritual catharsis occurred. Jesus emerged from the wilderness prepared to speak for God.

In early and medieval Christianity, wilderness kept its significance as the earthly realm of the powers of evil that the Church had to overcome. This was literally the case in the missionary efforts to the tribes of northern Europe. Christians judged their work to be successful when they cleared away the wild forests and cut down the sacred groves where the pagans held their rites.²⁵ In a more figurative sense, wilderness represented the Christian conception of the situation man faced on earth. It was a compound of his natural inclination to sin, the temptation of the material world, and the

22. Jeremiah 9:2; I Kings 19:4-18.

23. John H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York, 1951), pp. 1-32. The uses of wilderness in the New Testament are discussed in full in Mauser, pp. 62 ff.

24. Isaiah 40:3-5; Matthew 4:1.

25. Philpott, *Sacred Tree*, p. 18; Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York, 1964), p. 218.

forces of evil themselves. In this worldly chaos he wandered lost and forlorn, grasping at Christianity in the hope of delivery to the promised land that now was located in heaven.

Yet Christianity also retained the idea that wild country could be a place of refuge and religious purity. A succession of Christian hermits and monks (literally, one who lives alone) found the solitude of the wilderness conducive to meditation, spiritual insight, and moral perfection. Saint Anthony's lifelong retirement in the third century to the desert between the Nile and the Red Sea was the classic example. Subsequently monasticism flourished, and numerous zealots sought solitary retreats.²⁶ In the fourth century Saint Basil the Great established a monastery in a wilderness south of the Black Sea and proudly reported, "I am living . . . in the wilderness wherein the Lord dwelt." Basil's description of the forested mountain on which he lived even suggested some recognition of beauty in wilderness,²⁷ but his virtual uniqueness in this respect dramatizes the general indifference in his time. On the whole the monks regarded wilderness as having value only for escaping corrupt society. It was the place in which they hoped to ignite the flame that would eventually transform all wilderness into a godly paradise.

The tradition of fleeing into uninhabited country to obtain freedom of worship persisted strongly into the Middle Ages. Late in the twelfth century, for instance, Peter Waldo, a merchant of Lyons, began advocating a form of Christian asceticism that included the surrender of all worldly wealth and pleasure. The established Church took a dim view of Waldo's implied criticism of its materialism. Excommunication followed in 1184, and Waldo and his followers were hounded as heretics. Refusing to surrender their beliefs and facing death at the hands of the Inquisition if they remained in society, several thousand Waldensians elected to flee into the Piedmontese Alps on the border between France and Italy. In the caves and secluded valleys of this wilderness they

26. Walter Nigg, *Warriors of God: The Great Religious Orders and their Founders*, ed. and trans. Mary Ilford (New York, 1959), pp. 19-50; Charles Kingsley, *The Hermits* (London, 1891), pp. 21-82; Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (London, 1936), pp. 41-53; Williams, pp. 28 ff.; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York, 1953), pp. 221-35; Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (London, 1913), pp. 29 ff.

27. Saint Basil: *The Letters*, trans. Roy J. Delarratt (4 vols. London, 1926), I, 261; 107-11.

found escape from religious persecution as well as an environment conducive to their philosophy of self-abnegation.²⁸

Among medieval Christians St. Francis of Assisi is the exception that proves the rule. He stood alone in a posture of humility and respect before the natural world. Assuming that birds, wolves, and other wild creatures had souls, St. Francis preached to them as equals. This challenge to the idea of man as above, rather than of, the natural world might have altered the prevailing conception of wilderness. But the Church stamped St. Francis' beliefs as heretical. Christianity had too much at stake in the notion that God set man apart from and gave him dominance over the rest of nature (Genesis 1:28) to surrender it easily.²⁹

The belief that good Christians should maintain an aloofness from the pleasures of the world also helped determine attitude toward wilderness. The ideal focus for any Christian in the Middle Ages was the attainment of heavenly beatitudes, not enjoyment of his present situation. Such a point of view tended to check any appreciation of natural beauty. Thus during the Renaissance, Christianity offered considerable resistance to the development of joy in perceiving wild landscapes. Petrarch's 1366 ascent of Mount Ventoux provides an example. He initially had no other purpose in climbing than experiencing some of the "delight" he found in wandering "free and alone, among the mountains, forests, and streams." After an all-day effort, Petrarch and his brother gained the summit. "The great sweep of view spread out before me," Petrarch wrote to a friend, and "I stood like one dazed." Clouds floated beneath his feet, and on the horizon he could see the snow-covered Alps. Had he descended from the mountain at this point Petrarch might have retained an undiminished sense of enjoyment in the view, but it occurred to him to look at the copy of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* he was accustomed to carry. By chance he

28. Emilio Comba, *History of the Waldenses of Italy* (London, 1889); Alexis Mus-ton, *The Israel of the Alps: A Complete History of the Waldenses*, trans. John Montgomery (2 vols. London, 1873).

29. For this interpretation of St. Francis I am in debt to Lynn White, Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," a paper read December 26, 1966 to the American Association for the Advancement of Science and scheduled for publication in a forthcoming issue of *Science*. The general problem of the conception of the man-land relationship in Western culture is considered in Clarence J. Glacken's monumental *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* which, at the author's kindness, I read in manuscript before its publication by the University of California Press.

opened to the passage that admonished men not to take joy in mountains or scenery but rather to look after their salvation. Petrarch responded as a Christian: "I was abashed, and . . . I closed the book, angry with myself that I should still be admiring earthly things who might long ago have learned . . . that nothing is wonderful but the soul." After this he hurriedly left the peak, "turned my inward eye upon myself," and returned to his inn, muttering imprecations at the way the world's beauty diverted men from their proper concerns.³⁰

With the cases of St. Francis and Petrarch in mind, a comparison of early Western attitude toward wilderness with that of other cultures dramatizes the great influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition in arousing and nourishing antipathy. In the Far East, by way of contrast, the man-nature relationship was marked by respect, bordering on love, absent in the West. India's early religions, especially Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism, emphasized compassion for all living things. Man was understood to be a part of nature.³¹ And wilderness, in Eastern thought, did not have an unholy or evil connotation but was venerated as the symbol and even the very essence of the deity. As early as the fifth century B.C., Chinese Taoists postulated an infinite and benign force in the natural world. Wilderness was not excluded. Far from avoiding wild places, the ancient Chinese sought them out in the hope of sensing more clearly something of the unity and rhythm that they believed pervaded the universe.³² In Japan the first religion, Shinto, was a form of nature worship that deified mountains, forests, storms, and torrents in preference to fruitful, pastoral scenes since the wild was thought to manifest the divine being more potently than the ru-

ral.³³ In linking God and the wilderness, instead of contrasting them as did the Western faiths, Shinto and Taoism fostered love of wilderness rather than hatred.

Largely as a result of their religious views but possibly also because their relatively advanced and populous civilizations had tamed most of their countries, Chinese and Japanese landscape painters celebrated wilderness over a thousand years before Western artists. By the sixth century, canvases which hoped to capture the spiritual significance of nature, were a major art form. Frequently the artist-philosopher made a pilgrimage into the wilderness and remained there many months to meditate, adore, and penetrate, if possible, to inner harmonies. Wild vistas dominated this genre, while human figures, if they appeared at all, took secondary importance to cliffs, trees, and rivers.³⁴

Kuo Hsi, the eleventh-century Chinese master of landscapes, expressed his artistic philosophy with pen as well as brush. His *Essay on Landscape Painting* began by asking, rhetorically, "why does a virtuous man take delight in landscapes?" The answer was that away from civilization man "may nourish his nature." Expanding on this, Kuo Hsi continued: "the din of the dusty world and the locked-in-ness of human habitations are what human nature habitually abhors; while, on the contrary, haze, mist, and the haunting spirits of the mountains are what human nature seeks, and yet can rarely find." According to him the purpose of landscape painting was to make it possible for men to experience the delights and absorb the lessons of nature when they could not do so directly. That Kuo Hsi had wilderness in mind rather than the pastoral is evident from his lengthy opening section in the *Essay* where the emphasis was entirely on streams, rocks, pine trees, and, especially, mountains.³⁵

Freed from the combined weight of Classicism, Judaism, and Christianity, Eastern cultures did not fear and abhor wilderness.

30. C. B. Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (rev. ed. New York, 1968), pp. 46-63; J. W. T. Manson, *The Meaning of Shinto* (New York, 1935).

31. Hugo Munsterberg, *The Landscape Painting of China and Japan* (Rutland, Vt., 1953), pp. 3 ff.; Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Berkeley, Cal., 1962); Arthur de Caste Sowerby, *Nature in Chinese Art* (New York, 1949), pp. 153-60; Otto Fischer, "Landscape as Symbol," *Landscape*, 4 (1953), 24-33; Benjamin Roland, Jr., *Art in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 65-68.

32. Kuo Hsi, *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, trans. Shio Sakamishi (London, 1935), p. 30.

33. James Harvey Robinson and Henry Winchester Rolle, eds., *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters* (and rev. ed. New York, 1914), pp. 297, 313-14, 317-20. A relevant secondary discussion is Alfred Biese, *The Development of the Feeling for Nature in the Middle Ages and Modern Times* (London, 1903), pp. 109-20.

34. Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, trans. Mrs. Charles E. B. Russell (New York, 1906), passim; A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (New York, 1954), pp. 276 ff.

35. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (4 vols. Cambridge, 1952), 2, 33-164; Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (Boston, 1955), pp. 43 ff.; Maraharu Anesaki, *Art, Life, and Nature in Japan* (Boston, 1938), pp. 3-28.

Nor did they feel the conflict between religion and appreciation of natural beauty which caused Petrarch's anguish on Mount Ventoux. But Western thought generated a powerful bias against the wilderness, and the settlement of the New World offered abundant opportunity for the expression of this sentiment.

CHAPTER 2

A Wilderness Condition

Looking only a few years through the vista of futurity what a sublime spectacle presents itself! Wilderness, once the chosen residence of solitude and savageness, converted into populous cities, smiling villages, beautiful farms and plantations!

Challcothe (Ohio) *Supporter*, 1817

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE resolved to see wilderness during his 1831 trip to the United States, and in Michigan Territory in July the young Frenchman found himself at last on the fringe of civilization. But when he informed the frontiersmen of his desire to travel for *pleasure* into the primitive forest, they thought him mad. The Americans required considerable persuasion from Tocqueville to convince them that his interests lay in matters other than lumbering or land speculation. Afterwards he generalized in his journal that "living in the wilds, [the pioneer] only prizes the works of man" while Europeans, like himself, valued wilderness because of its novelty.¹ Expanding the point in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville concluded: "in Europe people talk a great deal of the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight," he added, "the . . . march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature."²

The unfavorable attitude toward wilderness that Tocqueville observed in Michigan also existed on other American frontiers. When William Bradford stepped off the *Mayflower* into a "hideous

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New Haven, Conn., 1960), p. 385. For the circumstances of the Michigan trip and a slightly different translation see George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), pp. 144-99.

2. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley (2 vols. New York 1945), 2, 74.

and desolate wilderness" he started a tradition of repugnance. With few exceptions later pioneers continued to regard wilderness with defiant hatred and joined the Chillicothe *Supporter* in celebrating the advance of civilization as the greatest of blessings. Under any circumstances the necessity of living in close proximity to wilderness—what one of Bradford's contemporaries called "a Wilderness condition"—engendered strong antipathy. Two centuries after Bradford, a fur trader named Alexander Ross recorded his despair in encountering a "gloomy," "dreary," and "unhallowed wilderness" near the Columbia River.³

Two components figured in the American pioneer's bias against wilderness. On the direct, physical level, it constituted a formidable threat to his very survival. The transatlantic journey and subsequent western advances stripped away centuries. Successive waves of frontiersmen had to contend with wilderness as uncontrolled and terrifying as that which primitive man confronted. Safety and comfort, even necessities like food and shelter, depended on overcoming the wild environment. For the first Americans, as for medieval Europeans, the forest's darkness hid savage men, wild beasts, and still stranger creatures of the imagination. In addition civilized man faced the danger of succumbing to the wildness of his surroundings and reverting to savagery himself. The pioneer, in short, lived too close to wilderness for appreciation. Understandably, his attitude was hostile and his dominant criteria utilitarian. The conquest of wilderness was his major concern.

Wilderness not only frustrated the pioneers physically but also acquired significance as a dark and sinister symbol. They shared the long Western tradition of imagining wild country as a moral vacuum, a cursed and chaotic wasteland. As a consequence, frontiersmen acutely sensed that they battled wild country not only for personal survival but in the name of nation, race, and God. Civilizing the New World meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into good. In the morality play of westward expansion, wilderness was the villain, and the pioneer, as hero, relished its destruction. The transformation of a wilderness into civiliza-

3. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), p. 62; Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1658-1651* (1654), ed. J. Franklin Jameson, *Original Narratives of Early American History*, 7 (New York, 1910), p. 100; Alexander Ross, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River* (London, 1849), pp. 143, 146.

tion was the reward for his sacrifices, the definition of his achievement, and the source of his pride. He applauded his successes in terms suggestive of the high stakes he attached to the conflict.

The discovery of the New World rekindled the traditional European notion that an earthly paradise lay somewhere to the west. As the reports of the first explorers filtered back the Old World began to believe that America might be the place of which it had dreamed since antiquity. One theme in the paradise myth stressed the material and sensual attributes of the new land. It fed on reports of fabulous riches, a temperate climate, longevity, and garden-like natural beauty.⁴ Promoters of discovery and colonization embellished these rumors. One Londoner, who likely never set foot in the New World, wrote lyrically of the richness of Virginia's soil and the abundance of its game. He even added: "nor is the present wilderness of it without a particular beauty, being all over a natural Grove of Oaks, Pines, Cedars . . . all of so delectable an aspect, that the melancholiest eye in the World cannot look upon it without contentment, nor content himselfe without admiration."⁵ Generally, however, European portrayals of a material paradise in the New World completely ignored the "wilderness" aspect, as inconsistent with the idea of beneficent nature. Illogically, they exempted America from the adverse conditions of life in other uncivilized places.

Anticipations of a second Eden quickly shattered against the reality of North America. Soon after he arrived the seventeenth-century frontiersman realized that the New World was the antipode of paradise. Previous hopes intensified the disappointment. At Jamestown the colonists abandoned the search for gold and turned, shocked, to the necessity of survival in a hostile environment. A few years later William Bradford recorded his dismay at finding Cape Cod wild and desolate. He lamented the Pilgrims' inability to find a vantage point "to view from this wilderness a more goodly coun-

4. Loren Baritz, "The Idea of the West," *American Historical Review*, 66 (1961), 618-40; Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise* (Urbana, Ill., 1961), pp. 36 ff.; Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World* (New York, 1964), pp. 1-34; Louis B. Wright, *The Dream of Prosperity in Colonial America* (New York, 1963); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964), pp. 34-72.

5. [Edward] Williams, *Virginia . . . Richly and Truly Praise'd* (1650) in Peter Force, *Treats and Other Papers* (4 vols. New York, 1947), 3, No. 11, 11.

try to feed their hopes."⁶ In fact, there was none. The forest stretched farther than Bradford and his generation imagined. For Europeans wild country was a single peak or heath, an island of uninhabited land surrounded by settlement. They at least knew its character and extent. But the seemingly boundless wilderness of the New World was something else. In the face of this vast blankness, courage failed and imagination multiplied fears.

Commenting on the arrival of the Puritans some years after, Cotton Mather indicated the change in attitude that contact with the New World produced. "Lady Arabella," he wrote, left an "earthly paradise" in England to come to America and "encounter the sorrows of a wilderness." She then died and "left that wilderness for the Heavenly paradise."⁷ Clearly the American wilderness was not paradise. If men expected to enjoy an idyllic environment in America, they would have to make it by conquering wild country. Mather realized in 1693 that "Wilderness" was the stage "thru" which we are passing to the Promised Land.⁸ Yet optimistic Americans continued to be fooled. "Instead of a garden," declared one traveler in the Ohio Valley in 1820, "I found a wilderness."⁹

How frontiersmen described the wilderness they found reflected the intensity of their antipathy. The same descriptive phrases appeared again and again. Wilderness was "howling," "dismal," "terrible." In the 1650s John Eliot wrote of going "into a wilderness where nothing appeareth but hard labour [and] wants," and Edward Johnson described "the penuries of a Wilderness."¹⁰ Cotton Mather agreed in 1702 about the "difficulties of a rough and hard wilderness," and in 1839 John Plumbé, Jr. told about "the hardships and privations of the wilderness" in Iowa and Wisconsin.¹¹ Invariably the pioneers singled out wilderness as the root cause of their difficulties. For one thing, the physical character of the primeval forest proved baffling and frustrating to settlers. One chronicler of

the "Wilderness-work" of establishing the town of Concord, Massachusetts portrayed in graphic detail the struggle through "unknown woods," swamps, and flesh-tearing thickets. The town founders wandered lost for days in the bewildering gloom of the dense forest. Finally came the back-breaking labor of carving fields from the wilderness.¹² Later generations who settled forested regions reported similar hardships. On every frontier obtaining cleared land, the symbol of civilization, demanded tremendous effort.

The pioneers' situation and attitude prompted them to use military metaphors to discuss the coming of civilization. Countless diaries, addresses, and memorials of the frontier period represented wilderness as an "enemy" which had to be "conquered," "subdued," and "vanquished" by a "pioneer army." The same phraseology persisted into the present century; an old Michigan pioneer recalled how as a youth he had engaged in a "struggle with nature" for the purpose of "converting a wilderness into a rich and prosperous civilization."¹³ Historians of westward expansion chose the same figure: "they conquered the wilderness, they subdued the forests, they reduced the land to fruitful subjection."¹⁴ The image of man and wilderness locked in mortal combat was difficult to forget. Advocates of a giant dam on the Colorado River system spoke in the 1950s of "that eternal problem of subduing the earth" and of "conquering the wilderness" while a President urged us in his 1961 inaugural address to "conquer the deserts." Wilderness, declared a correspondent to the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1965, "is precisely what man has been fighting against since he began his painful, awkward climb to civilization. It is the dark, the formless, the terrible, the old chaos which our fathers pushed back. . . . It is held at bay by constant vigilance, and when the vigilance slackens it swoops down for a melodramatic revenge."¹⁵ Such language animated the wilder-

6. Bradford, p. 62.
7. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (2 vols. Hartford, Conn., 1853), 1, 77. The original edition was 1702.

8. Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (London, 1689), p. 13. Alan Heimert, "Puritanism, the Wilderness, and the Frontier," *New England Quarterly*, 26 (1953), 369-70, has commented on this point.

9. Adlard Welby, *A Visit to North America* (London, 1821), p. 69.

10. Eliot, "The Learned Conjectures" (1690) as quoted in Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, p. 102; Johnson, p. 75.

11. Mather, *Magnalia*, 1, 77; Plumbé, *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin* (St. Louis, 1839), p. 21.

12. Johnson, pp. 111-15. For a dramatic portrayal of the forest as obstacle, see Richard G. Lillard, *The Great Forest* (New York, 1947), pp. 65-94.

13. General B. M. Cutcheon, "Log Cabin Times and Log Cabin People," *Michigan Pioneer Historical Society Collections*, 39 (1901), 611.

14. George Cary Eggleston, *Our First Century* (New York, 1905), p. 255. The representation in late-nineteenth century literature of evil, menacing nature has been discussed in Carleton F. Culmsee, *Malign Nature and the Frontier*, Utah State University Monograph Series, 8, (Logan, Utah, 1950).

15. Asbel Manwaring and Ray P. Greenwood, "Proceedings before the United States Department of the Interior: Hearings on Dinosaur National Monument, Echo

ness, investing it with an almost conscious enmity toward men, who returned it in full measure.

Along with the obstacle it offered to settlement and civilization, wilderness also confronted the frontier mind with terrifying creatures, both known and imagined. Wild men headed the menagerie. Initially Indians were regarded with pity and instructed in the Gospel, but after the first massacres most of the compassion changed to contempt.¹⁶ Sweeping out of the forest to strike, and then melting back into it, savages were almost always associated with wilderness. When Mary Rowlandson was captured in the 1670s on the Massachusetts frontier, she wrote that she went "mourning and lamenting, leaving farther my own Country, and travelling into the vast and howling Wilderness." The remainder of her account revealed an hysterical horror of her captors and of what she called "this Wilderness-condition." A century later J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur discussed the imminence of Indian attack as one of the chief "distresses" of frontier life and described the agony of waiting, gun in hand, for the first arrows to strike his home. "The wilderness," he observed, "is a harbour where it is impossible to find [the Indians] . . . a door through which they can enter our country whenever they please." Imagination and the presence of wild country could multiply fears. Riding through "savage haunts" on the Santa Fe Trail in the 1830s, Josiah Gregg noticed how "each click of a pebble" seemed "the snap of a firelock" and "in a very rebound of a twig [was] the whisk of an arrow."¹⁷

Wild animals added to the danger of the American wilderness, and here too the element of the unknown intensified feelings. Reporting in 1690 on the "discommodities" of New England, Francis Higginson wrote that "this Countrey being verte full of Woods and

Wildernesses, doth also much abound with Snakes and Serpents of strange colours and huge greynesse." There were some, he added, "that haue [have] Rattles in their Tayles that will not flye from a Man . . . but will flye upon him and sting him so mortally, that he will dye within a quarter of an houre after." Clearly there was some truth here and in the stories that echo through frontier literature of men whom "the savage Beasts had devoured . . . in the Wilderness," but often fear led to exaggeration. Cotton Mather, for instance, warned in 1707 of "the Evening Wolves, the rabid and howling Wolves of the Wilderness [which] would make . . . Havock among you, and not leave the Bones till the morning." Granted this was a jeremiad intended to shock Mather's contemporaries into godly behavior, but his choice of imagery still reflected a vivid conception of the physical danger of wild country. Elsewhere Mather wrote quite seriously about the "Dragons," "Droves of Devils," and "Fiery flying serpents" to be found in the primeval forest.¹⁸ Indeed, legends and folktales from first contact until well into the national period linked the New World wilderness with a host of monsters, witches, and similar supernatural beings.¹⁹

A more subtle terror than Indians or animals was the opportunity the freedom of wilderness presented for men to behave in a savage or bestial manner. Immigrants to the New World certainly sought release from oppressive European laws and traditions, yet the complete license of the wilderness was an overdose. Morality and social order seemed to stop at the edge of the clearing. Given the absence of restraint, might not the pioneer succumb to what John Eliot called "wilderness-temptations?"²⁰ Would not the proximity of wildness pull down the level of all American civilization? Many feared for the worst, and the concern with the struggle against barbarism was widespread in the colonies.²¹ Seventeenth-

16. Park and Split Mountain Dams," (April 9, 1960), Department of the Interior Library, Washington, D.C., pp. 535, 555; John F. Kennedy, "For the Freedom of Man," *Vital Speeches*, 27 (1961), 227; Robert Wernick, "Speaking Out: Let's Spoil the Wilderness," *Saturday Evening Post*, 238 (Nov. 6, 1965), 12.

17. Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (rev. ed., Baltimore, 1965); Jones, *O Strange New World*, pp. 50 ff.

18. Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration* (1683) in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln, Original Narratives of Early American History, 19 (New York, 1913), pp. 126, 131-32; Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London, 1782), 272; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies or the Journal of a Santa Fe Trader* (2 vols. New York, 1845), 1, 88.

19. Higginson, *New-Englands Plantation* (1690) in *Force*, 7, No. 12, 11-12; John Lawson, *Lawson's History of North Carolina* (1714), ed. Frances L. Harris (Richmond, Va., 1961), p. 29; Cotton Mather, *Frontiers Well-Defended* (Boston, 1707), p. 10; Mather, *Wonders*, pp. 13, 85.

20. Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 8 ff.; Jones, pp. 6 ff. The European precedent for this practice has been noted in Chapter 1.

21. Oscar Handlin, *Race and Nationality in American Life* (Garden City, N.Y., 1957), p. 114; Louis B. Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier* (Indianapolis, 1955), esp. pp. 11-45; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma* (Boston, 1963) has used the example of John Winthrop to demonstrate how the Puritan emphasis on the organic community was in part a response to the license of the wilderness. Roy Har-

century town "planters" in New England, for instance, were painfully aware of the dangers wilderness posed for the individual. They attempted to settle the northern frontier through the well-organized movement of entire communities. Americans like these pointed out that while liberty and solitude might be desirable to the man in a crowd, it was the gregarious tendency and controlling institutions of society that took precedence in the wilderness.

Yale's president, Timothy Dwight, spoke for most of his generation in regretting that as the pioneer pushed further and further into the wilds he became "less and less a civilized man." J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur was still more specific. Those who lived near "the great woods," he wrote in 1782, tend to be "regulated by the wildness of their neighborhood." This amounted to no regulation at all; the frontiersmen were beyond "the power of example, and check of shame." According to Crèvecoeur, they had "degenerated altogether into the hunting state" and became ultimately "no better than carnivorous animals of a superior rank." He concluded that if man wanted happiness, "he cannot live in solitude, he must belong to some community bound by some ties."²²

The behavior of pioneers frequently lent substance to these fears. In the struggle for survival many existed at a level close to savagery, and not a few joined Indian tribes. Even the ultimate horror of cannibalism was not unknown among the mountain men of the Rockies, as the case of Charles "Big Phil" Gardner proved.²³ Wilderness could reduce men to such a condition unless society maintained constant vigilance. Under wilderness conditions the veneer civilization laid over the barbaric elements in man seemed much thinner than in the settled regions.

It followed from the pioneer's association of wilderness with hardship and danger in a variety of forms, that the rural, controlled, state of nature was the object of his affection and goal of his labor. The pastoral condition seemed closest to paradise and the

²² vey Pearce contends that "the Indian became important for the English mind, not for what he was in and of himself, but rather for what he showed civilized men they were not and must not be"; Pearce, *Savages of America*, p. 5.

²³ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York* (4 vols. New Haven, Conn., 1821-22), 2, 441; Crèvecoeur, *Letters*, pp. 55-57, 271.

²⁴ LeRoy R. Hafen, "Mountain Men: Big Phil the Cannibal," *Colorado Magazine*, 13 (1960), 53-58. Other examples may be found in Ray A. Billington, *The American Frontierman: A Case Study in Reaction to the Primitive* (Oxford, 1954) and Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind* (Lexington, Ky., 1957), pp. 77 ff.

life of ease and contentment. Americans hardly needed reminding that Eden had been a garden. The rural was also the fruitful and as such satisfied the frontiersman's utilitarian instincts. On both the idyllic and practical counts wilderness was anathema.

Transforming the wild into the rural had Scriptural precedents which the New England pioneers knew well. Genesis 1:28, the first commandment of God to man, stated that mankind should increase, conquer the earth, and have dominion over all living things. This made the fate of wilderness plain. In 1629 when John Winthrop listed reasons for departing "into . . . the wilderness," an important one was that "the whole earth is the lords Garden & he hath given it to the sonnes of men, and with a general Condition, Gen. 1:28: Increase & multiply, replenish the earth & subdue it." Why remain in England, Winthrop argued, and "suffer a whole Continent . . . to lie waste without any improvement."²⁴ Discussing the point a year later, John White also used the idea of man's God-appointed dominion to conclude that he did not see "how men should make benefit of [vacant land] . . . but by habitation and culture."²⁵ Two centuries later advocates of expansion into the wilderness used the same rhetoric. "There can be no doubt," declared Lewis Cass, soldier and senator from Michigan, in 1890, "that the Creator intended the earth should be reclaimed from a state of nature and cultivated." In the same year Governor George R. Gilmer of Georgia noted that this was specifically "by virtue of that command of the Creator delivered to man upon his formation—be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it."²⁶ Wilderness was waste; the proper behavior toward it, exploitation.

Without invoking the Bible, others involved in the pioneering process revealed a proclivity for the rural and useful. Wherever they encountered wild country they viewed it through utilitarian spectacles: trees became lumber, prairies farms, and canyons the sites of hydroelectric dams. The pioneers' self-conceived mission

²⁴ Winthrop, *Conclusions for the Plantation in New England* (1630) in *Old South Leaflets* (9 vols. Boston, 1895), 2, No. 50, 5.

²⁵ White, *The Planters Plea* (1630) in Force, *Tracts*, 2, No. 3, 2. For a discussion of similar rationales which the Puritans used in taking land from the Indians see Chester E. Eisinger, "The Puritans' Justification for Taking the Land," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 84 (1948), 191-48.

²⁶ Cass, "Removal of the Indians," *North American Review*, 30 (1890), 77; Gilmer as quoted in Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore, 1935), p. 83.

was to bring these things to pass. Writing about his experience settling northern New York in the late eighteenth century, William Cooper declared that his "great primary object" was "to cause the Wilderness to bloom and fructify." Another popular expression of the waste-to-garden imagery appeared in an account of how the Iowa farmer "makes the wilderness blossom like the rose." Rural, garden-like nature was invariably the criterion of goodness to this mentality. A seventeenth-century account of New England's history noted the way a "howling wilderness" had, through the labors of settlers, become "pleasant Land." Speaking of the Ohio country in 1751, Christopher Gist noted that "it wants Nothing but Cultivation to make it a most delightful Country." Wilderness alone could neither please nor delight the pioneer. "Uncultivated" land, as an early nineteenth-century report put it, was "absolutely useless."²⁷

At times the adulation of the pastoral became charged with emotion. On a trip to the fringe of settlement in the 1750s Thomas Pownall wrote: "with what an overflowing Joy does the Heart melt, while one views the Banks where rising Farms, new Fields, or flowing Orchards begin to illuminate this Face of Nature; nothing can be more delightful to the Eye, nothing go with more penetrating Sensation to the Heart." Similarly, on his 1806 journey of discovery Zebulon M. Pike conceived of the wild prairies near the Osage River as "the future seats of husbandry" and relished the thought of "the numerous herds of domestic cattle, which are no doubt destined to crown with joy these happy plains." Several decades later, in the Sierra, Zenas Leonard anticipated in a few years even those mountains being "greeted with the enlivening sound of the workman's hammer, and the merry whistle of the ploughboy."²⁸

27. Cooper, *A Guide in the Wilderness or the History of the First Settlements in the Western Counties of New York with Useful Instructions to Future Settlers* (Dublin, 1810), p. 6; John B. Newhall, *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846* (Burlington, 1846), ix; Anonymous, *A Brief Relation of the State of New England* (1683) in Force, *Tracts*, 4, No. 11, 4-5; Christopher Gist's *Journals*, ed. William M. Darlington (Pittsburgh, 1893), p. 47; Gabriel Franchère, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America*, ed. and trans. J. V. Huntington (New York, 1853), p. 329.

28. Thomas Pownall, *A Topographical Description of . . . Parts of North America* (1776) as *A Topographical Description of the Dominions of the United States of America*, ed. Lois Mufkern (Pittsburgh, 1939), p. 31; Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *The Expedition of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, ed. Elliott Coues (3 vols., New York, 1893), 2, 514; *Adventures of Zenas Leonard: Fur Trader*, ed. John C. Evans (Normal, Okla., 1959), p. 94.

Frontiersmen such as these looked through, rather than at, wilderness. Wild country had value as potential civilization.

Enthusiasm for "nature" in America during the pioneering period almost always had reference to the rural state. The frequent celebrations of country life, beginning with Richard Steele's *The Husbandman's Calling* of 1668 and continuing through the more familiar statements of Robert Beverley, Thomas Jefferson, and John Taylor of Caroline, reveal only a contempt for the wild, native landscape as "unimproved" land.²⁹ When wilderness scenery did appeal, it was not for its wildness but because it resembled a "Garden or Orchard in England."³⁰ The case of Samuel Sewall is instructive, since his 1697 encomium to Plum Island north of Boston has been cited³¹ as the earliest known manifestation of love for the New World landscape. What actually appealed to Sewall, however, was not the island's wild qualities but its resemblance to an English countryside. He mentioned cattle feeding in the fields, sheep on the hills, "fruitful marshes," and, as a final pastoral touch, the doves picking up left-over grain after a harvest. In Plum Island Sewall saw the rural idyll familiar since the Greeks, hardly the American wilderness. Indeed, in the same tract, he singled out "a dark Wilderness Cave" as the fearful location for pagan rites.³²

Samuel Sewall's association of wild country with the ungodly is a reminder that wilderness commonly signified other than a material obstacle or physical threat. As a concept it carried a heavy load of ethical connotations and lent itself to elaborate figurative usage. Indeed, by the seventeenth century "wilderness" had become a fa-

29. American attraction to the rural is fully discussed in Marx, *Machine in the Garden*; Santford, *Quest for Paradise*; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), pp. 121 ff.; and A. Whitney Griswold, *Farming and Democracy* (New York, 1948).

30. George Percy, "Observations" (1625) in *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625*, ed. Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Original Narratives of Early American History, 5 (New York, 1907), p. 16. The same rhetoric was employed when pioneers emerged from the heavy, Eastern forest onto the open, garden-like prairies of Indiana and Illinois; James Hall, *Notes on the Western States* (Philadelphia, 1838), p. 56.

31. Perry Miller, in *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y., 1956), pp. 215, 295, and in *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston, 1961), p. 199, contends that Sewall's "cry of the heart" marked the moment at which the Puritan became an American "rooted in the American soil" and took "delight in the American prospect."

32. Sewall, *Phaenomena . . . or Some Few Lines Towards a Description of the New Haven* (Boston, 1697), pp. 51, 59-60.

vorite metaphor for discussing the Christian situation. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* summarized the prevailing viewpoint of wilderness as the symbol of anarchy and evil to which the Christian was unalterably opposed. The book's opening phrase, "As I walk'd through the Wilderness of this World," set the tone for the subsequent description of attempts to keep the faith in the chaotic and temptation-laden existence on earth. Even more pointed in the meaning it attached to wilderness was Benjamin Keach's *Tropeologia, or a Key to Open Scripture Metaphor*. In a series of analogies, Keach instructed his readers that as wilderness is "barren" so the world is devoid of holiness; as men lose their way in the wilds so they stray from God in the secular sphere; and as travelers need protection from beasts in wild country, so the Christian needs the guidance and help of God. "A Wilderness," Keach concluded, "is a solitary and doleful Place; so is this World to a godly Man."³³

The Puritans who settled New England shared the same tradition regarding wilderness that gave rise to the attitudes of Bunyan and Keach. In the middle of his 1664 dictionary of the Indian language Roger Williams moralized: "the Wilderness is a clear resemblance of the world, where greedie and furious men persecute and devour the harmlesse and innocent as the wilde beasts pursue and devour the Hinds and Roes." The Puritans, especially, understood the Christian conception of wilderness, since they conceived of themselves as the latest in a long line of dissenting groups who had braved the wild in order to advance God's cause. They found precedents for coming to the New World in the twelfth-century Waldensians and in still earlier Christian hermits and ascetics who had sought the freedom of deserts or mountains. As enthusiastic practitioners of the art of typology (according to which events in the Old Testament were thought to prefigure later occurrences), the first New Englanders associated their migration with the Exodus. As soon as William Bradford reached Massachusetts Bay, he looked for "Pisgah," the mountain from which Moses had allegedly seen the promised land. Edward Johnson specifically compared the Puritans to "the ancient Beloved of Christ, whom he of old led by the hand from Egypt to Canaan, through that great and terrible Wilderness." For Samuel Danforth the experience of John the

33. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That which is to Come*, ed. James Blanton Wharey (Oxford, 1928), [p. 9]; Keach, *Tropeologia* (4 vols., London, 1681-82), 4, 391-92.

Baptist seemed the closest parallel to the New England situation, although he too likened their mission to that of the children of Israel.³⁴

While the Puritans and their predecessors in perfectionism often fled to the wilderness from a corrupt civilization, they never regarded the wilderness itself as their goal. The driving impulse was always to carve a garden from the wilds: to make an island of spiritual light in the surrounding darkness. The Puritan mission had no place for wild country. It was, after all, a city on a hill that John Winthrop called upon his colleagues to erect. The Puritans, and to a considerable extent their neighbors in the plantations to the south,³⁵ went to the wilderness in order to begin the task of redeeming the world from its "wilderness" state. Paradoxically, their sanctuary and their enemy were one and the same.³⁶

Recent scholarship has glossed over the strength of the Puritans' intellectual legacy concerning wilderness. Their conception of the American wilderness did not come entirely or even largely "out of that wilderness itself," as Alan Heimert alleges.³⁷ They realized before leaving Europe that they were, as John Winthrop put it in 1629, fleeing "into . . . the wilderness" to found the true Church.³⁸ And their Bibles contained all they needed to know in order to have wilderness. Contact with the North American wilderness only supplemented what the Puritans already believed. In this sense the colonists' conception of the wilderness was more a product of the Old World than of the New.³⁹

34. Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, ed. J. Hammond Trumbull, Publications of the Narragansett Club, 1 (Providence, R.I., 1856), p. 190; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, p. 62; Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 59; Danforth, *A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1671), pp. 1, 5, 9.

35. On this point see Perry Miller, "The Religious Impulse in the Founding of Virginia: Religion and Society in the Early Literature," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 5 (1948), 402-522, and Louis B. Wright, *Religion and Empire: The Alliance Between Piety and Commerce in English Expansion, 1528-1633* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948).

36. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, pp. 73 ff., explores the meaning of this relationship.

37. Heimert, "Puritanism, the Wilderness, and the Frontier," 96.

38. Winthrop, *Conclusions*, 5.

39. In comparison to the impulse to redeem the wilderness, I am deliberately minimizing as of secondary and ephemeral significance the notion of some Puritans that the Atlantic Ocean was their Sinai desert and that Canaan lay across it in New England. Heimert, 901-02, discusses this position briefly.

Without intending to belittle my debt to him, I am also discounting Perry Miller's

For the Puritans, of course, wilderness was metaphor as well as actuality. On the frontier the two meanings reinforced each other, multiplying horrors. Seventeenth-century writing is permeated with the idea of wild country as the environment of evil. Just as the Old Testament scribes represented the desert as the cursed land where satyrs and lesser demons roamed, the early New Englanders agreed with Michael Wigglesworth that on the eve of settlement the New World was: "a waste and howling wilderness, / Where none inhabited / But hellish fiends, and brutish men / That Devils worshiped." This idea of a pagan continent haunted the Puritan imagination. Wigglesworth went on to term North America the region of "eternal night" and "grim death" where the "Sun of righteousness" never shone. As a consequence "the dark and dismal Western woods" were "the Devils den." Cotton Mather believed he knew how it got into this condition: Satan had seduced the first Indian inhabitants for the purpose of making a stronghold. From this perspective, the natives were not merely heathens but active disciples of the devil. Mather verged on hysteria in describing "the Indians, whose chief Sagamores are well known unto some of our Captives to have been horrid Sorcerers, and hellish Conjurers and such as conversed with Daemons."⁴⁰ The wilderness that harbored such beings was never merely neutral, never just a physical obstacle.

As self-styled agents of God the Puritan pioneers conceived their mission as breaking the power of evil. This involved an inner battle over that "desolate and outgrown wilderness of humane nature,"⁴¹ and on the New England frontier it also meant conquering wild nature. The Puritans seldom forgot that civilizing the wilderness meant far more than profit, security, and worldly comfort. A manichean battle was being waged between "the cleare sunshine of the Gospel" on the one hand and "thick antichristian darkness" on

contention that the nature of the Puritans "errand" to the New World changed by the late seventeenth century from leading the Reformation to conquering the American wilderness: *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), Chapter 1. The latter purpose, I feel, was strong from the beginning and was, moreover, always a necessary part of the former.

40. Wigglesworth, *God's Controversy with New England* (1682) in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 12 (1871), pp. 83, 84; Mather, *Magnalia*, 1, 42; Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum: An History of Remarkable Occurrences in the Long War which New-England hath had with the Indian Savages* (1699) in Lincoln, ed., *Narratives*, p. 242. For elaboration on the idea of Indians as devils see Jones, *O Strange New World*, pp. 55-61, and Pearce, *Savages of America*, pp. 19-35.

41. "R.I., "The New Life of Virginia (1612) in Force, *Tracts*, 1, No. 7, 7.

the other.⁴² Puritan writing frequently employed this light-and-dark imagery to express the idea that wilderness was ungodly. As William Steele declared in 1652 in regard to missionary work among the Indians, the "first fruits of a barren Wilderness" were obtained when civilization and Christianity succeeded in "shining . . . a beame of Light into the darkness of another World." Cotton Mather's *Magnalia* concerned the wondrous way that religion "flying . . . to the American Strand" had "irradiated an Indian Wilderness." Those who resisted the "glorious gospel-shine" fled, as might be expected, ever deeper into "forrests wide & great."⁴³

In view of the transcendent importance they attached to conquering wilderness the Puritans understandably celebrated westward expansion as one of their greatest achievements. It was a ceaseless wonder and an evidence of God's blessing that wild country should become fruitful and civilized. Edward Johnson's *Wonder-Working Providence* of 1654 is an extended commentary on this transformation. Always it was "Christ Jesus" or "the Lord" who "made this poore barren Wilderness become a fruitful Land" or who "hath . . . been pleased to turn one of the most hideous, boundless, and unknown Wildernesses in the world . . . to a well-ordered Commonwealth." In Boston, for instance, the "admirable Acts of Christ" had in a few decades transformed the "hideous Thickets" where "Wolves and Beares must up their young" into "streets full of Girtles and Boys sporting up and downe."⁴⁴ Johnson and his contemporaries never doubted that God was on their side in their effort to destroy the wilderness. God's "blessing upon their undertakings," the elderly John Higginson wrote in 1697, made it possible that "a wilderness was subdued . . . Towns erected, and Churches settled . . . in a place where . . . [there] had been nothing before but *Heathenism*, *Idolatry*, and *Devil-worship*."⁴⁵ The New England colonists saw themselves as "Christ's Army" or "Souldiers of Christ" in a war against wildness.⁴⁶

42. Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sunshine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New-England* (1648) in Joseph Sablin, *Sablin's Reprints* (10 vols. New York, 1895), 10, 1; Mather, *Magnalia*, 1, 61.

43. William Steele, "To the Supreme Authority of this Nation" in Henry Whitfield, *Strength out of Weakness* (1652) in Sablin's *Reprints*, 5, [23] Mather, *Magnalia*, 1, 25; Wigglesworth, *God's Controversy*, p. 84.

44. Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, pp. 71, 108, 248.

45. Higginson, "An Attestation to the Church-History of New-England" in Mather, *Magnalia*, 1, 13.

46. Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, pp. 60, 75.

One reason why the Puritan settlers portrayed wilderness as replete with physical hardships and spiritual temptations was to remind later generations of the magnitude of their accomplishment. The credit for this feat, of course, went to God, but the colonists could not hide a strong sense of pride in their own role in breaking the wilderness. One of the first explicit statements appeared in the *Memoirs of Roger Clap*. A member of the group who arrived in New England in 1630, Clap decided in the 1670s to write an account of the early days for the instruction of his children. He detailed the distresses of life in the "then unsubdued wilderness" and the many "wants" of God's servants. Then, directly addressing the second generation, he drew the moral: "you have better food and raiment than was in former times; but have you better hearts than your forefathers had?" In 1671 Joshua Scottow used the same theme when he demanded that the initial colonists' "Voluntary Exile into this Wilderness" be "Recollected, Remembered, and not Forgotten."⁴⁷ Implied was a relationship between the dangers of the wilderness and the quality of those who faced them. A few years later John Higginson looked back on his long experience as a pioneer and declared: "our wilderness-condition hath been full of humbling, trying, distressing providences." Their purpose, he felt, had been to determine "whether according to our professions, and [God's] expectation we would keep [H]is commandments or not."⁴⁸ Survival seemed an indication of success in this respect. Portrayed as a harsh and hostile environment, wilderness was a foil that emphasized the predicament and accentuated the achievement of pioneers.

The sinister connotation of wilderness did not end with the seventeenth century. Representatives of later generations, especially those persons who came into direct contact with the frontier, continued to sense the symbolic potency of wild country. While John

47. *Memoirs of Capt. Roger Clap* (1773) in Alexander Young, *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1840), pp. 331, 335; Scottow, *Old Men's Tears for their own Deceitful Mixed with Fears of their and Posterities further falling off from New-England's Primitive Constitution* (Boston, 1691), p. 1. Roger Williams stressed his agony in the Rhode Island wilderness for a similar purpose: Perry Miller, *Roger Williams* (Indianapolis, 1953), p. 52. Secondary commentary on the question may be found in Kenneth B. Murdock, "Clio in the Wilderness: History and Biography in Puritan New England," *Church History*, 24 (1953), 221-38.

48. Higginson, "Attestation" in Mather, *Magnalia*, 1, 16.

than Edwards might occasionally derive spiritual joy from, and even perceive beauty in, natural objects such as clouds, flowers, and fields, wilderness was still beyond the pale.⁴⁹ For Edwards, as for his Christian predecessors, "the land that we have to travel through [to Heaven] is a wilderness; there are many mountains, rocks, and rough places that we must go over in the way."⁵⁰ Following the Puritans, Americans continued to interpret wilderness in Biblical terms. When Eleazar Wheelock founded Dartmouth College on the upper Connecticut in 1769, he took as his motto "Vox Clamantis in Deserto." The use of "desert" to describe a forest in this and so many other accounts suggests that the Old Testament was even more important than New England actuality in determining reaction to the wilderness. The Dartmouth motto also was reminiscent of John the Baptist, and the initial impulse behind the college was similar: spreading the Word into a pagan realm. Later college founders advanced boldly into the west with a comparable idea of striking the spark that would in time transform darkness into light. Joseph P. Thompson, for instance, closed an 1859 speech before the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education At the West with an exhortation: "go you into the moral wilderness of the West; there open springs in the desert, and build a fountain for the waters of life."⁵¹ Wilderness remained the obstacle to overcome.

Much of the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne suggests the persistence into the nineteenth century of the Puritan conception of wilderness. For him wild country was still "black" and "howling" as well as a powerful symbol of man's dark and unnamed heart. In several of Hawthorne's short stories wilderness dominated the action. Its terrifying qualities in *Roger Malvin's Burial* (1831) prompted a man to shoot his son in retribution for a dark deed the father performed earlier in "the tangled and gloomy forest." The protagonist of *Young Goodman Brown* (1835) also found the wilderness a nightmarish locale of both the devil and devilish tenden-

49. For examples of Edwards' appreciation of natural beauty see Alexander V. C. Allen, *Jonathan Edwards* (Boston, 1890), pp. 355-56, and *Images or Shadows of Divine Things by Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven, 1948), pp. 135-37, 50. "True Christian's Life," *The Works of President Edwards* (4 vols. New York, 1822) 4, 375.

51. Thompson, *The College as a Religious Institution* (New York, 1859), p. 34. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, pp. 141 ff., discusses the expansion of colleges in terms of the paradise tradition.

cies in man. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) climaxed Hawthorne's experimentation with the wilderness theme. The primeval forest he creates around seventeenth-century Salem represents and accentuates the "moral wilderness" in which Hester Prynne wandered so long. The forest meant freedom from social ostracism, yet Hawthorne left no doubt that such total license would only result in an irresistible temptation to evil. The illegitimate Pearl, "imp of evil, emblem and product of sin" is the only character at home in the wilderness. For Hawthorne and the Puritans a frightening gulf, both literal and figurative, existed between civilization and wilderness.⁵²

The increasing tendency to redefine America's mission in secular rather than sacred terms made little difference in regard to antipathy toward wilderness. Insofar as the westward expansion of civilization was thought good, wilderness was bad. It was construed as much a barrier to progress, prosperity, and power as it was to godliness. On every frontier intense enthusiasm greeted the transformation of the wild into the civilized. Pioneer diaries and reminiscences rang with the theme that what was "unbroken and trackless wilderness" had been "reclaimed" and "transformed into fruitful farms and . . . flourishing cities" which, of course, was "always for the better."⁵³ Others simply said the wilds had been made "like Eden."⁵⁴

This taming of the wilderness gave meaning and purpose to the frontiersman's life. In an age which idealized "progress," the pioneer considered himself its spearhead, performing a worthy cause in the interest of all mankind. While laboring directly for himself and his heirs, pioneers and their spokesmen were ever conscious that

52. References are to *The Complete Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Old Manse ed., 22 vols., New York, 1903). For illustration in Hawthorne's use of wilderness I am indebted to R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955), pp. 111-34; Wilson O. Clough, *The Necessary Earth: Nature and Solitude in American Literature* (Austin, Texas, 1964), pp. 117-25; Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton, N.J., 1965), pp. 69-131; and Chester E. Eisinger, "Pearl and the Puritan Heritage," *College English*, 52 (1951), 323-29.

53. Judge Wilkinson, "Early Recollections of the West," *American Pioneer*, 2 (1843), 161; William Henry Milburn, *The Pioneer Preacher: Rifle, Axe, and Saddle-Bags* (New York, 1858), p. 26; J. H. Colton, *The Western Tourist and Emigrant's Guide* (New York, 1850), p. 25; and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1844), 7, 84.

54. As quoted from a 1796 account in Jones, *O Strange New World*, p. 212.

greater issues hung in the balance. Orators at state agricultural society gatherings harped on the theme of the beneficent effect of the law of "progressive development or growth" under whose guidance cities sprang "from the bosom of the wilderness." They raised paeans to those who worked "until the wilderness has blossomed with the fruits of their toil, and these once western wilds are vocal with the songs of joy."⁵⁵ As the pioneer conceived it, the rewards of this process were far greater than bountiful harvests. Was he not the agent of civilization battling man's traditional foe on behalf of the welfare of the race? After all, it was he who broke "the long chain of savage life" and for "primeval barbarism" substituted "civilization, liberty and law" not to speak of "arts and sciences."⁵⁶ Put in these terms, there could be little doubt of the value of destroying wilderness. As Andrew Jackson asked rhetorically in his 1830 inaugural address, "what good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute?"⁵⁷ In the vocabulary of material progress, wilderness had meaning only as an obstacle.

The nineteenth-century pioneer's emphasis on material progress did not entirely exclude the older idea of conquering wilderness in the name of God. William Gilpin, an early governor of Colorado and trumpeter of America's Manifest Destiny, made clear that "Progress is God" and that the "occupation of wild territory . . . proceeds with all the solemnity of a providential ordinance." It was, in fact, the "hand of God" that pushed the nation westward and caused the wilderness to surrender to ax and plow. The frontiers-

55. A. Constance Barry, "Wisconsin—Its Condition, Prospects, Etc.: Annual Address Delivered at the State Agricultural Fair," *Transactions of the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society*, 4 (1856), pp. 266, 268.

56. Columbus Ohio State Journal (1827) as quoted in Roscoe Carlyle Bailey, *The Old Northwest Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1950), 2, 46; *Leaves of Indiana* (1844-25) in Bailey, 2, 46; Dr. S. P. Hildreth, "Early Emigration," *American Pioneer*, 2 (1843), 134.

57. Andrew Jackson, "Second Annual Message," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed. J. D. Richardson (10 vols., Washington, D.C., 1896-99), 2, 531. On the doctrine of progress and its incompatibility with appreciation of wilderness see Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., *The Idea of Progress in America, 1615-1860* (New York, 1944); Moore, *Frontier Mind*, pp. 199-208; Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*; and Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (New York, 1965), pp. 7-21.

men never forgot that one of their chief aims was the "extension of pure Christianity"; they viewed with satisfaction the replacement of the "savage yell" with the "songs of Zion." Settlement and religion went together. Charles D. Kirk summarized in an 1860 novel the frontier view of the westward march as "the tramp, tramp, steady and slow, but sure, of the advancing hosts of Civilization and Christianity."⁵⁸

Understandably, subjugation of wilderness was the chief source of pioneer pride. Indeed the whole nation considered the settlement of the West its outstanding accomplishment. Timothy Dwight even felt it worthy of comparison with the cultural magnificence of Europe. "*The conversion of a wilderness into a desirable residence for man*," he declared early in the century, "at least . . . may compensate the want of ancient castles, ruined abbeys, and fine pictures."⁵⁹ For a young country, self-conscious about its achievements and anxious to justify independence with success, the conquest of wilderness bolstered the national ego.⁶⁰ "What a people we are! What a country is this of ours," choried Josiah Grinnell in 1845, "which but as yesterday was a wilderness." On a humbler level the individual pioneer felt a glow of pride in clearing the land or breaking the virgin sod. One guidebook for settlers advertised: "you look around and whisper, 'I vanquished this wilderness and made the chaos pregnant with order and civilization, alone I did it.'" The same note often sounds in the rhetoric of a President who takes great pride in the way his family made the "barren" and "forbidding" country in the valley of Texas' Peder-nales River "abundant with fruit, cattle, goats and sheep."⁶¹

Of course, many pioneers deliberately chose to live in the wilderness. Many moved westward to a new homestead, legend has it, when they could see a neighbor's smoke. Love of the wilds, however, did not prompt this behavior but rather a hunger for their

58. Gilpin, *Mission of the North American People: Geographical, Social and Political* (Philadelphia, 1873), p. 99; John Reynolds, *The Pioneer History of Illinois* (Belleville, Ill., 1852), p. 228; Hildreth, "Early Emigration," 136; Kirk, *Warring and Warring in the Wilderness* (New York, 1860), p. 38.

59. Dwight, *Travel*, 1, 18.

60. For evidence that the possession of wilderness also served this purpose see Chapter 4.

61. Grinnell, *Sketches of the West* (Milwaukee, 1847), pp. 40-41; Sidney Smith, *The Settlers' New Home: or the Emigrant's Location* (London, 1846), p. 19; Lyndon B. Johnson, "State of the Union: The Great Society," *Vital Speeches*, 32 (1965), 197.

destruction. Pioneers welcomed wild country as a challenge. They conceived of themselves as agents in the regenerating process that turned the ungodly and useless into a beneficent civilization. To perform this function wilderness was necessary, hence the westward urge. Only a handful of mountain men and voyageurs were literally absorbed by the forest and ignored the regenerative mission. Reverting to the primitive, in some cases even joining Indian tribes, these exceptions regarded civilization with the antipathy most pioneers reserved for wilderness.⁶²

Tocqueville, on the whole, was correct in his analysis that "living in the wilds" produced a bias against them. Constant exposure to wilderness gave rise to fear and hatred on the part of those who had to fight it for survival and success. Although there were a few exceptions, American frontiersmen rarely judged wilderness with criteria other than the utilitarian or spoke of their relation to it in other than a military metaphor. It was their children and grandchildren, removed from a wilderness condition, who began to sense its ethical and aesthetic values. Yet even city dwellers found it difficult to ignore the older attitudes completely. Prejudice against wilderness had the strength of centuries behind it and continued to influence American opinion long after pioneering conditions disappeared. Against this darker background of repugnance more favorable responses haltingly took shape.

62. Almost by definition, written accounts of men who completely broke the ties with civilization are practically nonexistent. Moore, *Frontier Mind*, Billington, *American Frontiersmen*, Stanley Vestal, *Mountain Men* (Boston, 1937), Sydney Greenbie, *Furs to Furrows: An Epic of Rugged Individualism* (Gardner, Idaho, 1939), especially Chapter 19; Hiram Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (3 vols. New York, 1902), 1, 65 ff., and Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur* (New York, 1931) provide illuminating insights. Lewis Mumford, *The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture* (New York, 1926), pp. 55-56, argues against my interpretation.