“They are really better to us than we are to them.”

John Lawson, North Carolina, 1709

A British naturalist and explorer, Lawson visited many Indian settlements in the Carolinas and later settled in North Carolina. Just before the outbreak of the Tuscorara War, he was captured and killed by Tuscarora Indians.

They are really better to us than we are to them. They always give us Victuals at their Quarters, and take care we are arm’d against Hunger and Thirst. We do not so by them (generally speaking) but let them walk by our Doors Hungry, and do not often relieve them. We look upon them with Scorn and Disdain, and think them little better than Beasts in Human Shape; though, if well examined, we shall find that for all our Religion and Education we possess more Moral Deformities and Evils than these Savages do, or are acquainted withal.

We reckon them Slaves in Comparison to us, and Intruders, as oft as they enter our Houses, or hunt near our Dwellings. But if we will admit Reason to be our Guide, she will inform us that these Indians are the freest People in the World, and so far from being Intruders upon us, that we have abandon’d our own Native Soil to drive them out and possess theirs. Neither have we any true Balance in Judging of these poor Heathens, because we neither give Allowance for their Natural Disposition, nor the Sylvian Education and strange Customs (uncouth to us) they lie under and have ever been train’d up to. . . We trade with them, it’s true, but to what End? Not to show them the Steps of Virtue and the Golden Rule, to do as we would be done by. No, we have furnished them with the Vice of Drunkenness, which is the open Road to all others, and daily cheat them in everything we sell, and esteem it a Gift of Christianity not to sell to them so cheap as we do to the Christians, as we call ourselves. Pray let me know where is there to be found one Sacred Command or Precept of our Master that counsels us to such Behaviour? Besides, I believe it will not appear, but that all the Wars which we have had with the Savages were occasion’d by the unjust Dealings of the Christians towards them.

“they will seldom injure a Christian, except if given cause for it”

Christoph von Graffenried, North Carolina, 1711

Von Graffenried was co-founder with Lawson and others of the New Bern settlement in North Carolina.

I have heard and observed many more such things among the Indians. But because so many authors have written about them that my remarks would only pass for repetition I will not relate more, except to say concerning the cruel and barbarous manner of the Indians, that they are indeed furious when one angers them; but if one leaves them in peace, does them no harm, and treats them according to their ways in a friendly and goodhearted manner, they will seldom injure a

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6 Sylvian education, i.e., natural learning in the woodlands.

Those qualities in savages challenge our just esteem. They should make us charitably consider their barbarities as the effects of wrong education and false notions of bravery and heroism, while we should look on their virtues as sure marks that nature has made them fit subjects of cultivation as well as us, and that we are called by our superior advantages to yield them all the helps we can in this way. Cruel and unmerciful as they are by habit and long example in war, yet whenever they come to give way to the native dictates of humanity, they exercise virtues which Christians need not blush to imitate.

“They are all equal.”

James Adair, 1775

An Irish immigrant, Adair became a trader with Indians in the southern colonies and lived with the Chickasaw in the Mississippi River valley for six years.

They are all equal — the only precedence any is given of superior virtue, oratory, or prowess; and they esteem themselves bound to live and die in defense of their country. . . . The head-men reward the worthy with titles of honor, according to their merit in speaking or the number of enemies’ scalps they bring home. Their hearts are fully satisfied if they have revenged crying blood, enabled themselves by war actions, given cheerfulness to their mourning country, and fired the breasts of the youth with a spirit of emulation to guard the beloved people from danger, and revenge the wrongs of their country. Warriors are to protect all, but not to molest or injure the meanest. If they attempted it, they would pay dear for their folly. . . .

The equality among the Indians, and the just rewards they always confer on merit, are the great and leading — the only motives that warm their hearts with a strong and permanent love to the country. Governed by the plain and honest law of nature, their whole constitution breathes nothing but liberty.