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**“The Devil and Father Rallee”:
The Narration of Father Rale’s War in Provincial
Massachusetts**

By

Thomas S. Kidd

Cotton Mather’s calendar had just rolled over to January 1, 1723, and with the turn he wrote his friend Robert Wodrow of Scotland concerning frightening though unsurprising news: “The Indians of the East, under the Fascinations of a French Priest, and Instigations of our French Neighbours, have begun a New War upon us...”¹ Though they had enjoyed a respite from actual war since the Peace of Utrecht postponed hostilities between the French and British in 1713, New Englanders always knew that it was only a matter of time before the aggressive interests, uncertain borders, and conflicting visions of the religious contest between them and the French Canadians would lead to more bloodshed. Especially uncertain was the status of the “eastern settlements,” above Salem and beyond the mouth of the Piscataqua, where French missions and English and Scottish settlements came uncomfortably close, and where in times of peace native land holdings became more and more valuable to the colonists. Some New Englanders worried that movement into the northeastern borderlands also brought settlers closer to physically and spiritually miscegenated French and Indian Catholics, such as the “half-Indianized French” and “half-Frenchified Indians” which Cotton Mather described as decimating

¹ Cotton Mather to Robert Wodrow, January 1, 1723 (N.S), Wodrow papers, Quarto 20, ff.72-73, National Library of Scotland.

Salmon Falls in 1690.² After 1714, British farmers began again to advance their settlement into the eastern regions, literally putting the borderland Abenakis in the middle between French and British imperial claims. In 1722, the Abenakis' lands would erupt again into a conflict to which the combatants would assign very different meanings.³

The period after the Treaty of Utrecht, the death of Louis XIV, the failed Jacobite insurrection of 1715, and ultimately the Triple Alliance between Britain, France, and the United Provinces (1716) has usually been seen, rightly so, as a time of politically expedient rapprochement between France and Britain that never appeared likely to last.⁴ Yet however great the tension remained between France and Britain in the European theater, the tension was even greater between the French and British settlements of North America, and the settlements of Canada and New England in particular. This heightened tension resulted from several factors. First, the colonies had less clear boundaries, political and physical, separating them. In Europe, aggressors would always have to brave the waters of the Channel. In New England and Canada, the frontier was more fluid despite the presence of the White Mountains and other barriers. Also, the Abenakis and other Native American societies injected a volatile element in the economic and military relations between the competing empires. Though decimated by disease and increasingly by rum, the Indians of northern New England still proved important trading partners and capable fighters, both factors which the French and British wished to have on their side. Finally, the religious sensibilities of the clerical, political and mercantile leadership made relations with the French take on a tone which at times could suggest the apocalyptic. In England, the marginalized dissenters viewed

² On Salmon Falls and quote from Mather, Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 119-120.

³ This article does not seek to retell the "facts" of Father Rale's War, some of which are well-established, and some obscure, but instead it attempts to understand the way New Englanders narrated the war's meaning. The most recent significant work on Rale is a well-researched pietistic biography, Mary Calvert, *Black Robe on the Kennebec* (Monmouth, Maine: Monmouth Press, 1991).

⁴ Jeremy Black, *Natural and Necessary Enemies: Anglo-French Relations in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 10-35.

the French with a particular hatred, but in New England those same dissenters held sway over much of the trades, churches, and government.⁵ Though at the periphery of empire, the leaders of the Canadian and New English provinces were the worst sort of enemies.

In August 1717, Governor Samuel Shute and a diplomatic party made their way to Arrowsick Island at the mouth of the Kennebec River, where at the tiny settlement of George Town they met with representatives of the Abenakis and others, including most significantly representatives from Norridgewock, where the French had maintained a successful Jesuit mission for more than fifty years.⁶ Shute wanted to convince the assembled Indians that King George was the authority over them now, not the young French King Louis XV. With translated and liberally interpreted dialogues as the chief records of such meetings one can hardly be certain of how things went, but if nothing else Shute's nervous condescension comes through clearly.

In the negotiations the British demanded deference and the proper use of symbols to indicate good faith and a submissive spirit, all of which the Indians only practiced haltingly. Shute ordered that before the Indians come to meet they fly a "British Flagg" in their "headmost Canoo." In his speech he told the Indians that he had come to introduce them to their new king, George I, the great defender of British liberty and the Protestant interest, and that they should remember that "they are KING GEORGE's Subjects, under His Allegiance and Protection, and they must by no means hearken to any contrary Insinuations, that they will always find themselves safest under the Government of Great Britain." He needed not specify who might insinuate otherwise. Shute told them that since "KING GEORGE, and the British Nation" were "Christians of the Reformed Protestant Religion" they would for the Indians' benefit send among them a proper missionary (not like the deceitful Jesuits), and he asked that this missionary be treated with gratefulness and respect.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 164.

⁶ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 248.

⁷ Massachusetts Bay Province, *George Town on Arrowsick Island Aug. 9th 1717* (Boston, 1717), 1-3. On Joseph Baxter's experience as Massachusetts'

The Abenakis and their colleagues were not quite as deferential to the governor as he had hoped. When the conference resumed the next day, the spokesmen for the assembled tribes said they were pleased to have such a high representative of the great king with them, but that they would obey “KING GEORGE” only “if we like the Offers made us.” Shute said that they had the order wrong: their obedience would be rewarded with “just Offers.” The Indians would not concede on land or religion, however, insisting that the British not encroach on their land, and perhaps more ominously, telling Shute that as far as his missionary, “GOD has given us Teaching already, and if we should go from that, we should displease GOD.” The Jesuits had their hold among them already, as the New Englanders had suspected. On the second night of the conference the Indians, “in a hasty abrupt manner,” left behind their British flag. That night the Indians sent over a letter brought to the Jesuit mission from Quebec’s Governor Vaudreuil, who said that Louis XV had instructed him that the French had not given any Indian lands away to the British and that if necessary the French would defend Abenaki land rights. The letter came by way of “their Jesuit,” Sebastien Rale.⁸

Sebastien Rale was reared in the counter-reformation zeal of French Catholicism that sent Jesuits and other missionaries on journeys across the known and unknown world. He came to North America in 1689, and after several brief stints among various tribes he settled at Norridgewock on the Kennebec River. Zealous and hardly averse to controversy with French or English authorities, Rale found himself at one of the most hotly disputed grounds of the early imperial contests.⁹ Rale exhibited an unusually high personal sympathy toward Abenaki culture, as he memorably wrote to his brother that after many years

missionary to the Abenakis and his frustrations with Rale, see Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 250-254.

⁸ Massachusetts Bay Province, *George Town on Arrowsick Island*, pp. 6-7, 9-10. Francis Parkman argued only somewhat convincingly that the correct spelling is Sebastien Rale from an autograph dated November 1712. Rale’s last name was alternatively spelled Racle, Rasle, Rasles, Ralle, Rallè, Râle, and Rallee. Francis Parkman, *A Half-Century of Conflict* v. 1 (Boston, 1892), 216. Fannie H. Eckstorm, “The Attack on Norridgewock, 1724,” *New England Quarterly* 7 (3) 1934: 541-542.

⁹ Parkman, *Half-Century*, 214-218.

among them “I assure you that I see, that I hear, that I speak, only as a savage.” As Colin Calloway has aptly noted, for Rale the conversion process seems to have been at least culturally mutual.¹⁰

Though it is not clear to what extent Rale’s influence catalyzed the Abenakis’ resistance against the British, there is no question that Rale viewed the contest as a matter of British incursions against Abenaki land rights, and also as a matter of religious principle. As Rale noted in a 1720 letter widely circulated among the British authorities (Samuel Sewall would call this “Friar Ralle’s railing Letter”),

The English say it’s the Fryer or Mr. Vaudreuil that stirs up war, but...’tis you English, you seize our Lands against our will and thereby take away our prayers, more valuable to us than our Lands or bodies...Shall they be Cheated, driven from their Lands & prayers, & shall not I counsel & defend them? They shall sooner take away my Life than hinder me.¹¹

Seeming to relish the role of advocate for the Abenakis’ rights, Rale became an irritant and then a major threat to New England’s security, and the perfect image of evil:¹² a conniving and deceitful French Jesuit inciting the Indians to resist British encroachments and eventually rise up and attack British settlements. As the Superior-General of the Jesuits in New France later reported, Rale eventually became “very odious to the

¹⁰ Quoted in Colin Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 89. See also Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euroamerican Relations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 177-178.

¹¹ Letter contained in James Baxter, *The Pioneers of New France in New England* (Albany, NY, 1894), 96-104; quote from 102-103.

¹² I employ the language of “image” and “imagination” in a way similar to Benedict Anderson’s enormously influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6 and *passim*.

English.”¹³ The British had long entertained images of the evil French Catholic “other,” and New Englanders had regularly heard about the lies and agitations of the Jesuits among the Indians of New France, most notably in Cotton Mather’s relation of Bomaseen’s “confession” in 1699. Bomaseen was a captured Indian chieftain who reportedly told a minister in Boston in 1692 that:

The French taught ‘em, That the Lord JESUS CHRIST,
was of the French Nation; That His Mother, the Virgin
Mary, was a French Lady; That they were the English
who had Murdered him; and, That...all that would
Recommend themselves unto his Favour, must Revenge
His Quarrel upon the English, as far as they can.¹⁴

The French Jesuits had been imagined primarily through second-hand accounts and rumors previously, but now the evil other had been made flesh in the form of Sebastien Rale. The conflict that Rale fomented manifested in political terms “the theological myth of the war between good and evil,” as David Shields has put it, and this “war between civility and barbarism” represented by the British and the French/Indians respectively “preserved the theological interdiction of ‘the other.’”¹⁵ The symbolic power of Rale in many New Englanders’ minds therefore should not be underestimated. While peace lasted in Britain for twenty-three years after the Triple Alliance, in New England the French threat was exacerbated and finally shifted to the hot war which New Englanders imagined was born out of the literally hellish mixing of Jesuit lies and Indian savagery.

Governor Shute eventually elicited signatures to an agreement of submission, but the George Town treaty solved little in the ongoing tensions between the British, the French and the Indian go-betweens.

¹³ Quoted in Colin Calloway, *Dawnland Encounters: Indians and Europeans in Northern New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), 81.

¹⁴ Cotton Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum* (Boston, 1699), 127-128.

¹⁵ David Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 206.

Reflecting these tensions was a pamphlet published in London called *Some Considerations on the Consequences of the French Settling Colonies on the Mississippi*, written by an anonymous author, likely a New Englander, perhaps in summer 1718.¹⁶ The pamphlet expressed hope that the political situation in France had improved with the death of Louis XIV, but cautioned that French plans to develop the North American backcountry with “their most vigorous Efforts for establishing Commerce, and planting Colonies in this promising Country” should give the British settlements and governments grave concern. This author was certainly more interested in trade and land issues than religion (since we do not know his identity we cannot connect this with his religious persuasion), but he knew that part of the French effort toward commercial hegemony in the backcountry was converting the Indians.

Some Considerations made it clear that French peacetime expansion was going forward, and their ties to the Indians were becoming ever-stronger. Britain, and New England specifically, must respond in kind. The pamphlet argued that the British should focus particularly on the fortification of Nova Scotia in order “to make Head against the French.” Otherwise, from “Canada to Louisiana” the French would surround the British colonies with their own colonists and allied Indians, forming a backcountry noose ready to hang the defenseless Britons.¹⁷ Besides the enticements of trade, the author suspected that the French controlled the Indian populations through miscegenation and conversion. The French territory was burgeoning with a “prodigious Increase...chiefly ascribed to their inter-marrying with the Indians, whom by this means they firmly engage in their Interest.” And as for the Jesuits, in “every Tribe there are some Missionary Priests, and tho’ few or none of the Savages have ever been made thorough Converts to the Truths of the Christian Religion, yet in all other Matters they look upon these good Fathers as Teutelar Gods, and give themselves up entirely to be directed by their Councils.” This was the worst case imaginable: the Jesuits controlled the Indians for French purposes but gave them no

¹⁶ For authorship and date, see Beverly Bond, “Introduction,” in *Some Considerations on the Consequences of the French Settling Colonies on the Mississippi*, reprint (Cincinnati, OH: Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, 1928), 8-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

saving religion. It was no wonder that the French used the Jesuits to control the backcountry Indians, this author concluded: “he ought to be a cunning Man that treats with the Indians, and therefore the French leave that Business to the Jesuits.”¹⁸

At George Town in November 1720, agents of the Massachusetts government again conferred with the eastern Indians attempting to convince them that the Jesuits were wrong to question British land claims in Maine. New England’s commissioners pleaded with the Indians not to listen to “Ralle”: “we must further Observe to you how wickedly the Jesuit has Imposed on you,” especially given the peace between France and Britain. They insisted that Rale was full of “falsness and Deceit,” and they warned that aggressive cooperation with the French would only lead to their “utter Ruin and Destruction.” Ominously, the Indians “made no Reply.”¹⁹

By 1721 these suspected threats by the French and their Jesuit-influenced tribes became terrifyingly real to the New Englanders of the eastern settlements. In August, Governor Shute warned the General Court and New Englanders that “the Indians to the number of 200 have marched in a hostile manner under French Colours, accompanied by two Jesuits into the town of Arrowsick...and afterwards delivered an insolent and menacing Letter directed to me your Governour.” According to Shute, it was time to prepare for war.²⁰

By March of the next year Shute was warning the colony against “Monsieur Rallee, the French Jesuit” specifically. Shute reported that a detachment of New Englanders stationed in the eastern settlements had been sent to capture the Jesuit, but that Rale had escaped, leaving behind incriminating letters which made plain that Rale, as the agent of the French Canadian government, was inciting the Indians “against His Majesty’s Liege Subjects,” promising the Indians ammunition enough to “drive the English from their just Settlements.”²¹ This confirmed what

¹⁸ Ibid., 38, 41.

¹⁹ *Conference with the Kennebeck Indians*, November 25, 1720, contained in Appendix, Baxter, *Pioneers of New France*, 288.

²⁰ *Boston News-Letter*, August 21, 1721.

²¹ *Boston News-Letter*, March 12, 1721-1722.

the Massachusetts' leadership and the eastern settlers believed all along, that the French Canadian government and ultimately the French crown was using Jesuit deceptions to co-opt the Indians into murdering Englishmen, capturing their families, and burning their towns, all part of a hellish plot to annihilate their religious and mercantile liberties.

Shute had his own troubles with the Massachusetts General Court concerning his power to act against Rale, part of a general contest common to the period between governor and assembly's powers. After the failed attempt to seize Rale, the Abenakis responded with revenge raids on Brunswick and other British settlements, and in July 1722 Shute declared war against the eastern Indians, proclaiming them, "with their confederates, to be robbers, traitors, and enemies to his Majesty King George."²² The Court, for its part, did not seem opposed to prosecuting the war against Rale and the Indians, they just wanted to control the purse strings to finance the campaign. Shute, in a remarkable display of the unpredictability of British imperial agents, became furious with the Court's intransigence, and in January 1723 he boarded a merchant ship for London and left New England, apparently without notifying anyone but personal servants.²³ With this, Lieutenant-Governor William Dummer took over the management of the conflict that in British memory would become known as Dummer's War.

While Shute's efforts at prosecuting the war had almost ground to a halt because of arguments with the assembly, Dummer enjoyed more success both because of his political tact and because as factions in the government squabbled over power, Indian attacks proceeded apace. Most notably, at the easternmost British settlement at St. George River, Penobscots under the guidance of the French Jesuit Father Étienne Lauerjat made several raids and in winter 1723 laid siege to the garrison there.²⁴ For their part, New Englanders also made raids against Lauerjat and the Penobscots, burning the village of Panawamske and

²² Quoted in Samuel Penhallow, *The History of the Wars of New-England with the Eastern Indians, or a Narrative of their Continued Perfidy and Cruelty* (Boston, 1726, reprint New York: Kraus, 1969), 90.

²³ Parkman, *Half-Century*, 240.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 243-244; Penhallow, *Indian Wars*, 97.

the mission chapel there in February.²⁵ The Jesuits and the Indians proved elusive though, and through 1724 New Englanders seemed only to be able to destroy their property, instead of taking their lives.

With New England's worries about a Jesuit/Indian alliance in war having come true, the pastors quickly constructed this as a godly, noble war, a narrative that the Abenakis had no printed means to counter.²⁶ⁱ Benjamin Colman, the leader of eastern New England's pastors, reported to his Scottish friend Robert Wodrow that the war was a great burden on New Englanders: "We need your prayers...These Salvages are also papists, and entirely frenchified."²⁷ Likewise, Cotton Mather wrote to another English correspondent, couching the war in terms of the French Catholic and Jacobite threat to Britons generally: "A French priest, with Countenance from the Governor of Canada, has instigated our Eastern Indians, to begin a war upon us; animated with an Expectation, that France and the pretender were bringing things to pass, that would allow all Canada, openly to back them..."²⁸ Colman, Mather, and others helped narrate and publicize the war as a new episode in the European and North American battle between Catholicism and Protestantism, news of which had filled the Boston presses for years.

For his Boston audience, Benjamin Wadsworth gave what would become the dominant narrative of the war when he preached *True Piety the Best Policy for Times of War* in August after the declaration of war. It was normal to expect that God's enemies will sometimes come to attack God's people, Wadsworth argued, and in those times "when GOD's People are assaulted, molested, threatened with ruin by their enemies; they're oblig'd to stand on their own defence, and to indeavour

²⁵ Parkman, *Half-Century*, pp. 244-245, Penhallow, *Indian Wars*, 94.

²⁶ See similar analysis of Indian narrative silence in Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 48-68.

²⁷ Benjamin Colman to Robert Wodrow, June 11, 1723, in Niel Caplan, ed., "Some Unpublished Letters of Benjamin Colman, 1717-1725," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 77 (1965), 131.

²⁸ Cotton Mather to Isaac Noble, January 14, 1723-1724, in Worthington C. Ford, ed. *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, n.d.), vol. 2, 695.

the conquering of those, who unjustly strive to conquer and destroy them.” But Wadsworth was equivocal, he also hinted that New England’s sin may have brought this attack from the north. “We are a professing but a very degenerate People, GOD is angry with us.” God had sent smallpox the previous year, “yet we’re not at all Reform’d by it.” Increasingly pressing the New Englanders, God had sent a drought, increased the activity of pirates, and now war had come.²⁹ Wadsworth used the threat of defeat as a rallying point for holiness, and he insisted that if New England would trust in God for victory it would surely come, for “GOD never fails those, who sincerely Pray to Him and Trust in Him.”³⁰ If this was a jeremiad in the classic sense, then it struck a rather optimistic chord: it was a relatively simple matter for New England to win the war: they only needed to trust in God, stay away from provoking sins, and he would destroy their wicked enemies. Especially in the face of Catholic and heathen oppressors, many New Englanders remained concerned but confident that God would intervene on their behalf.³¹

Other pastors had sterner warnings for New Englanders, though, that they might possibly lose to their Catholic and heathen foes. Thomas Foxcroft warned that this latest episode may reflect a hardening of God’s judgment against the “incorrigible” people of New England. This “day of Battel & War, wherein we are frequently made to bleed by the Sword of the Wilderness” was the latest in a series of severe physical judgments. But Foxcroft was more concerned, as New England’s leaders seemed increasingly to discuss, that “the too sensible Withdraw of the Spirit of GOD from among us, affords the most awful Symptom, that GOD is setting his face against us.”³²

Solomon Stoddard issued the sternest indictment of all, however, and traced New England’s judgment to failures in evangelism. His

²⁹ Benjamin Wadsworth, *True Piety the Best Policy for Times of War* (Boston, 1722), 2-3, 22-23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³¹ For a similar interpretation of the jeremiad’s meaning see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), 54.

³² Thomas Foxcroft, *God’s Face set against an Incorrigible People* (Boston, 1724), 47.

relatively well-known *Question Whether GOD is not Angry* (1723) is best understood in the context of Father Rale's War (Stoddard was also responding to Grey Lock's War, a separate but closely related conflict between western Abenakis and English settlers north of Stoddard's Northampton beginning in 1723,³³ though Stoddard made no distinction between the two conflicts). Stoddard argued that ever since the Jews rejected the gospel, it had become incumbent upon the people of God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, many of whom like New England's natives waited in darkness for the light of God's truth. Everyone knows, even in England, that "we have little care of the Heathen," and God in judgment has sent "Epidemical Diseases and Devourers." Not only have the Indians remained unspellized, but "God has made them a terrible scourge to us, in Philips War and since that by their joyning with the French; and in this present War." Since New England would not obey God and bring the gospel to them, New England's natives became "instruments to punish us."³⁴

The charters of Massachusetts and Connecticut had expressly intended to evangelize the colonies' Indians, "but we have done very little to Answer our Profession." Stoddard, lamenting that their English brethren knew all about their neglect of the gospel, held up an international model to further shame his readers:

There is at this day a great deal done in the East-Indies, by the Germans and Danes for the Propagation of the Gospel. Worthy Men are sent over; many are brought to the Profession of the Faith; the Bible is Printed in their own Language; great Contributions are sent over to advance that Work; and the Name of Christ is renowned among them; and the People that have been in Darkness have seen great Light. And it is a matter of Shame, that when others are carrying the Gospel many thousands of Miles, from their own Country; We suffer them that

³³ Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 162, and Colin Calloway, *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 113-131.

³⁴ Solomon Stoddard, *Question whether God is not Angry* (Boston, 1723), 6.

dwell among us, and that are Borderers to us; to lie in
 Darkness, and Afford them very little Help for their
 Deliverance.³⁵

Stoddard saw great advances in world evangelization happening through the agency of the Halle Pietists,³⁶ and in light of their work New England looked sinfully complacent. Making them look even worse, however, was the example of the Catholics. Consider Stoddard's pan-American perspective on the state of religion and the propagation of the enemy's religion as well: "The Spaniards, have done a great deal to bring the Indians in Peru and Mexico to their Religion: And the Portuguese to bring the Indians in Brazil, and the Indies, to theirs. And the French, are diligent in Canada, and elsewhere, to gospelize them." The New Englanders, who have access to the "true Religion" and yet will not share it even with their heathen neighbors, should be ashamed in light of the Catholic works.

If only New England's Christians would share the truth with the Indians, then the Indians would certainly become less hostile to New England's settlements. But if they remain complacent, Stoddard warned, some believe that "the Christians in America will Indianize and become that Gog and Magog spoken of, Rev. 20."³⁷ What a terrible irony if New England was to become so apostate that they became like the Indians instead of the Indians becoming like them? This fear seems to have had a subtle currency among New Englanders who cringed at settlers founding towns too close to the Indians with no established churches there yet. Such developments might lead in the end to a special place in eschatology for New England, but shockingly as Satan's Gog and Magog instead of as the New Jerusalem.

If only New Englanders would obey the command to evangelize, the provinces would be far better off in temporal affairs, Stoddard predicted. "If they continue Heathens they will be apt to fall in with the Papists; if

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

³⁶ On Halle and August Hermann Francke, see among others W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime, 1648-1789* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 77-82.

³⁷ Stoddard, *Question of Whether God*, pp. 10-11.

they continue Heathens they will carry it Provokingly...But if they be brought to Religion, then there will be Hopes of a Durable Peace.” In a bleak close to the tract, Stoddard proposed that converting the Indians would be “much better, than to Destroy them.” Some, Stoddard conceded, wanted nothing more than to annihilate the native populations. “These men shew a Bloody Spirit: ‘Tis much better to convert them,” Stoddard offered.³⁸ Some might wonder at the magnanimity of even Stoddard’s proposal, but the question was really moot: with few exceptions the record of New England since King Philip’s War was meager in benevolence and brutal in violence, especially once the conditions of international war, both hot and cold, placed many of the Abenakis and others in league with the Britons’ inveterate enemies.

Regardless of Stoddard’s reservations, by summer 1724 the colonies had become sufficiently alarmed to try to bring the war to a bloody end. Reports became more numerous of Indian aggressions, and in April the Indians’ “greatest stroke” came when they managed to ambush the patrolling company led by Captain Josiah Winslow, a promising recent Harvard graduate. Winslow was killed along with many of his company, including a number of “friend” Indians.³⁹ An increasing number of reports were now coming from the eastern settlements of attacks on church members and elders, women, and children, some of whom were carried to Canada. With frightening news coming in weekly from the frontier, Dummer secured support from the assembly to cut off the serpent’s head, as they saw it.

In August, an expedition was commissioned to go the heart of the Jesuit’s mission, destroy the town of Norridgewock, and hopefully kill the Jesuit, which would likely end the war.⁴⁰ A group of two hundred eight men sailed in whaleboats up the coast of Maine, got off at Teuconick (Taconic Falls) and marched toward Norridgewock. On August 12 they entered Norridgewock, and from the beginning the fight was a rout: the colonists killed and drove out scores of Indian men, women, and children, while the poorly trained and overmatched Indians

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³⁹ Penhallow, *Indian Wars*, 98; *Boston Gazette*, no. 240, June 22, 1724.

⁴⁰ Fannie Eckstorm, “The Attack on Norridgewock, 1724,” *The New England Quarterly*, 7 (3) 1934: 541-578.

apparently killed none of the British. Abenaki and French memory had Rale dying submissively under a large crucifix,⁴¹ while the British reported that upon returning to the village they found “Monsieur Ralle the Jesuit, their chief Commander,” in one of the houses firing on them. The soldiers reported that they burst in and discovered Rale loading his gun to fire again. Rale supposedly declared that “he would give no quarter, nor take any,” upon which one of the lieutenants shot Rale through the head. The soldiers plundered the village, destroyed the icons and sacred vessels of the mission, scalped Rale and the dead Indian men, and marched back to Teuconick. After noting his execution, the *Boston News-Letter*’s *nota bene* remarked in its report, “Ralle the Jesuit, has generally appeared at the Head of the Indians in their Rebellions and was the Chief Fondater of this War.”⁴² Cotton Mather provided this reading of the war and Rale’s death:

The Barbarous and Perfidious Indians in our Eastern Country, being Moved by the Instigation of the Devil and Father Rallee; have begun Hostilities upon us. They did it, when the French Hopes of a Fatal Revolution on the British Empire, deceived them. And it was not long before the Hairy Scalp of that Head in the House of the Wicked, paid for what Hand he had in the Rebellion, into which he Infuriated his Proselytes.⁴³

In Mather’s mind, there was no doubt that the French Jesuit and Satan were in league against New England. For his dalliance with the devil and the Indians, Rale was not only killed but his “hairy scalp” taken, finalizing his descent into savagery and degradation in many New Englanders’ imaginations.⁴⁴ Not only that, Mather traced Rale’s plot to Jacobite threats, including the “Atterbury Plot,” discovered in England in

⁴¹ See for example Morrison, *Embattled Northeast*, 186.

⁴² *Boston News-Letter*, August 20, 1724, *Boston Gazette*, no. 248, August 17, 1724; and Parkman, *Half-Century of Conflict*, 245-247.

⁴³ Cotton Mather, *Edulcorator* (Boston, 1724), 27.

⁴⁴ On the symbolic value of hair in English culture see Lepore, *Name of War*, 93.

1722, that would have supposedly murdered King George and his family.⁴⁵ Mather viewed both the Jacobite threat to return the exiled Stuart kings to the throne, and the present war with the Abenakis, as motivated by a general French conspiracy against the British empire, the bulwark of the Protestant cause.

The presumed connections between the French Catholic, Jacobite, and Abenaki threats made sense to those with access to Boston's public sphere, because news on Catholic hostilities against Protestants was regular fare in the print culture of Boston and its environs. For readers and audiences of the *Boston Gazette*, it could be no coincidence that the same issue that reported Rale's death also reported that the Jesuits seemed to be taking over the court of France, and that they were summarily executing French Protestant preachers, sending Protestant men to the galleys, jailing women and shaving their heads, and taking Protestant children from their families and giving them a Roman Catholic upbringing and education.⁴⁶ And such stories were nothing new. From news of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 to reports of the massacre of Polish Protestants at Thorn in 1724, newspapers and sermons' constant refrain of Catholic persecution of Protestants in Europe warned New Englanders that they could be next, should they fail to be vigilant and pious.⁴⁷

French authorities saw matters differently, and for about a year after Rale's death the French and their Abenaki allies remained motivated to seek revenge for Rale whom they saw as a political and religious martyr. Vaudreuil for one wrote a highly inflammatory letter to Dummer soon after Rale's death. He assumed that Dummer would have to answer to George I for "the late Murther Committed by your order on the person of

⁴⁵ See letter from the government of New Hampshire to King George, *Boston Gazette*, no. 204, October 14, 1723. Murray Pittock, *Jacobitism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 52-53.

⁴⁶ *Boston Gazette*, no. 248, August 17, 1724.

⁴⁷ On news of religious persecutions and imagining an international Protestant identity in New England, see Thomas S. Kidd, "Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst': World News, the Catholic Threat, and International Protestantism in Provincial Boston," *New England Quarterly* (forthcoming). On the Huguenots, Thorn, and other persecutions see among others Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, 14-18, 215-216, and passim.

that french Missionary whose head I know you set a price on...” Rale had not been a political agent of the French, Vaudreuil insisted, but had only done his religious duty, and the Abenakis among whom he ministered had a sincere commitment to the “Catholick Religion.” Vaudreuil did not completely rule out a moderated peace (assuming, of course, that it could only be moderated by him), but he chastised Dummer, saying that “you must blame no Body but your selves for all the Violence and Hostilities those Indians have Committed against your Nation...” These Indians are truly Catholic and true friends of the French, Vaudreuil insisted, and therefore when the English invaded their lands and tried to steal their allegiance, it was no wonder that they resisted with violence. Likewise, Vaudreuil warned, it will be no wonder if they respond with violence to the “last Cruelty and unjust Attempts Committed of late against them and their Missionary...”⁴⁸ⁱⁱ

Regardless of the French desire to gain vengeance for Rale, the war slowed during late 1724 and through 1725, becoming more focused on periodic raids, and the ventures of New England’s bounty hunters. New Englanders were tired of the war but also seemed to agree with Cotton Mather, who again reported to his correspondent Wodrow that Rale’s “wretched Scalp” had paid for his stirring up the “Eastern Indian proselytes,” and that now “we are in a hopeful way of utterly destroying them.”⁴⁹ⁱⁱⁱ Toward this end, Dunstable’s John Lovewell raised up parties of border-dwelling men to range about northern New England seeking to exterminate as many Indians as possible, with the promise of government bounties according to how many scalps they could bring home.^{50iv} New England’s prosecution of the war had sunk to a grisly low.^{51v}

⁴⁸ Vaudreuil to Dummer, October 29, 1724, contained in Baxter, *New France*, 341-346.

⁴⁹ Cotton Mather to Robert Wodrow, June 15, 1725, in Wodrow Papers, Quarto 21, ff.103-104, National Library of Scotland.

⁵⁰ On scalping and scalp bounties as practiced by the English colonists, see James Axtell and William Sturtevant, “The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping?” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 37 (3) 1980: 468-472.

⁵¹ For secondary accounts of John Lovewell’s raids, see among others Parkman, *Half-Century of Conflict*, 259-271; Gail Bickford, “Lovewell’s Fight, 1725-1958,” *American Quarterly*, 10 (3) 1958: 358-366; Fannie Eckstorm,

In May 1725 Lovewell and his party went deep into the borderlands, toward Lake Winipesaukee (in central New Hampshire), seeking to take more Indian scalps and to push Indian settlements as far back toward the White Mountains as possible. There Lovewell and many of his men would lose their lives in the immediately celebrated “Fight at Piggwacket” on the Saco River, after which Lovewell would be immortalized as a martyr to the Protestant cause. When Lovewell and his party came upon a lone Indian shooting ducks, they advanced but were met by another Indian whom they swiftly killed. Their chaplain Jonathan Frye reportedly peeled off the man’s scalp.^{52vi} Suddenly the company was overwhelmed by a heated Indian attack, and Lovewell, Frye, and many others were mortally wounded. The bounty hunters limped back south with only one-third of their men left alive.

Lovewell and his men fit well into the growing literature on Christian adventurer-heroes coming out of the Boston presses. Increasingly, the cosmopolitan imperial culture of New England supplied an interest in figures such as Indian fighters and brave heroes of the sea, and Lovewell provided a near-perfect model. Samuel Penhallow argued that the Lovewell expedition showed that “though our actions...can bear no comparison with those of our British forces (which have caused the world to wonder) yet not to mention the bravery of these worthies, who died in the bed of honor, and for the interest of their country, would be a denying them the honor that is due unto their memory.” Perhaps these were not as great as the British forces at Blenheim (which Penhallow surely had in mind), but these provincials were due an honored memory.^{53vii}

Thomas Symmes, pastor at Bradford, agreed and immediately delivered the sermon “Historical Memoirs of the Late Fight at Piggwacket,” and sent it off to Boston for publication. Symmes argued that just as it was appropriate for Israel to memorialize Joshua’s defeat of

“Pigwacket and Parson Symmes,” *The New England Quarterly*, 9 (1936): 378-402.

⁵² David Jaffee, *People of the Wachusett: Greater New England in History and Memory, 1630-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 96; Axtell and Sturtevant, “The Unkindest Cut,” 471.

⁵³ Penhallow, *Indian Wars*, 114.

the Amalekites and the “Aborigines of Canaan,” so New England rightly should remember Lovewell’s men. Symmes recounted the battles and Lovewell’s death, and then reflected in his sermon on II Samuel 1:27, part of David’s funeral poem for Saul and Jonathan. Symmes said that David’s poem was not effete or overly passionate, but instead was “sufficiently Brave and Manly,” fit to commemorate the masculine and pious man of God dead in battle. The sermon warned not to take Lovewell’s death as a punishment specifically against the men, for “the most Skilful, Dextrous, Couragious and Successful Soldiers, had need be truly Religious and well prepared for Death; seeing they’r not Invulnerable, but as liable to Die as others.” True religion does not teach that death in a holy war will bring heavenly rewards, in contrast to “the wretched Jesuites or Friers,” who promise “their deluded Proselytes, the barbarous Indians” that they will bypass Purgatory and go straight to heaven if they die in battle. However, Symmes did speculate that God’s providence intervened both to raise the men up and to strike them down. “They were Men form’d and rais’d up by Providence to serve us in pursuing an Enemy,” and yet, “the Hand of the LORD appears in all this, that so many brave Men should descend into Battle and perish.”^{54viii}

What could Symmes say to explain the death of these “magnanimous Soldiers,” these ones who had supposedly gone out as the Israelites against the Amalekites? At this difficult point Symmes retreated to the harshest kind of jeremiad, asking whether New England’s sins had not actually killed the brave Lovewell? The pastors had repeatedly asked the people of New England to reform their ways, to “Repent and do our first Works!” But the people had not listened, and now “by the sore Judgment of War, and particularly by the Fall of our Brethren we are now weeping over, GOD is loudly calling upon us to amend our Ways...” So Symmes attributed this particular failure to the sins, not of Lovewell and his men, nor of the pastors, but of the “people” generally. But he did not despair, and sounded the typical optimistic note, because in the end God could do no other than destroy his enemies on the borders: “Let us return to the Almighty and he will build us up. He will soon subdue our Enemies, and give us Peace in our Borders...Is the brave Lovewell and other brave Men dead! Who made them what

⁵⁴ Thomas Symmes, *Historical Memoirs of the Late Fight at Piggwacket* 2nd ed. (Boston, 1725), 1, 19-20, 24-26.

they were?...It was the Lord of Hosts, who...can easily raise up others...^{55ix}

In the end it seemed that the death of Rale and the fatigue of the Abenakis led to the war's end. With Rale's death, the apparent leader of the French/Indian menace was gone, and despite the patriotic value of Lovewell's martyrdom, the British soon lost interest in taking more Indian scalps, particularly if it meant searching deep into the New Hampshire and Maine borderlands for the enemy. In November 1725 representatives from the leading tribes met with Massachusetts officials to put a rather anticlimactic end to the conflict. The proposed treaty had a hollow ring of expedience and fatigue. The tribal representatives agreed to submit to British rule, especially agreeing to maintain "a firm and constant amity and friendship with all the English, and will never confederate or combine with any other nation to their prejudice."^{56x} Samuel Penhallow, for one, hoped that the Indians would not rise up again, but sounded the familiar refrain that the British would do well to bring more Indians into their sphere of trade, and to try once again to bring the true gospel to them.

If trading houses, which are now resolved on...be well regulated, it may (under God) be a means of our tranquility; especially if the government can also prevail with them to receive the ministry for their instruction in the principles of the true religion.^{57xi}

With Rale dead and hot war stopped again at least for the time being, New Englanders turned their attention to other issues: orderly serial town settlement, expansion of trade and debates over mediums of exchange, contests over power between the governor and assembly, and occasional fights over episodes such as natural disasters and epidemics. Surprisingly, the Abenakis managed to maintain much of their lands and population numbers in Maine despite the historiographical convention that Father Rale's war led them to permanently relocate, and New England's silent acceptance of the Abenakis' continuing presence again

⁵⁵ Ibid., 26-27, 32.

⁵⁶ Treaty contained in Penhallow, *Indian Wars*, 120.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 124.

suggests the catalytic role played by Rale's image in exciting British hostilities.^{58xii} Whatever the case, in the responses to Rale's War one can see that many New Englanders were deeply concerned with their place in the contests of empire and the worldwide battle for the fate of Christianity. For years, New Englanders had heard with deep concern and fascination about the threatened existence of Protestant groups in France, the Palatinate, and even in England with the 1715 uprising and the continuing Catholic threats from within and without.^{59xiii} Now, at the hands of Rale and his legions of sympathetic Indians, world war had come to New England's provinces. The ministers, officials, and settlers who responded to the war found it both terrifying, and yet unsurprising.

Seen from the perspective of an observer troubled by the exploitation of the Abenakis and their land claims, one might easily and accurately describe this war as the result of unfair acquisitions by British settlers. Likewise, James Axtell has lamented that Rale died because "France and England subordinated religion to politics in their struggle for continental hegemony."^{60xiv} But the New Englanders imagined and wrote it differently- they believed that Rale died because of religion, politics, and more.^{61xv} New England's narrators of the war believed that dark forces inspired by the French empire and the Roman Catholic church were gathered in the borderlands, and radical commitment to holiness and the Protestant cause seemed the only hope for New England to fend off its would-be destroyers. Building a noble Christian identity

⁵⁸ See David Ghere, "The 'Disappearance' of the Abenaki in Western Maine: Political Organization and Ethnocentric Assumptions," *American Indian Quarterly* 17 (2) 1993: 204. See also David Ghere, "Myths and Methods in Abenaki Demography: Abenaki Population Recovery, 1725-1750," *Ethnohistory* 44 (3) 1997: 511-534.

⁵⁹ See Kidd, "Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst."

⁶⁰ Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 254.

⁶¹ Jill Lepore's model of understanding the written narrative of war as crucial to the erasure of its inconvenient, unpleasant, or even barbaric realities helps us understand how New Englanders constructed this as a godly fight by Protestant Britons against aggressive and degraded French Catholics and their Abenaki allies, despite the historically-simpler explanation of the conflict over land claims. See Lepore, *Name of War*, ix-xv.

set against the savage Abenakis and Antichristian French helped these Britons in the borderlands of the North American contest for empire set clear boundaries, a cultural, political, and, in this case, religious project which some have called the essence of negotiating a frontier life.⁶²

⁶² On the frontiers and boundary setting, see William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin (New York: Norton, 1992), 15; cited in Lepore, *Name of War*, xiii.