**First Supply**

**JOHN SMITH**

***From* The General History of Virginia,  
New England, and the Summer Isles**

*The Third Book. The Proceedings and Accidents  
of the English Colony in Virginia*

[**CHAPTER II:**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter2.html) **WHAT HAPPENED TILL THE FIRST SUPPLY**

Being thus left to our fortunes, it fortuned that within ten days scarce ten amongst us could either go, or well stand, such extreme weakness and sickness oppressed us. And thereat none need marvel, if they consider the cause and reason, which was this:

While the ships stayed, our allowance was somewhat bettered by a daily proportion of biscuit, which the sailers would pilfer to sell, give, or exchange with us, for money, sassafras, furs, or love. But when they departed, there remained neither tavern, beerhouse, nor place of relief, but the common kettle.[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn1) Had we been as free from all sins as gluttony and drunkenness we might have been canonized for saints; but our President would never have been admitted for engrossing to his private [use] oatmeal, sack, oil, aquavitæ, beef, eggs, or what not, but the kettle; that indeed he allowed equally to be distributed, and that was half a pint of wheat, and as much barley boiled with water for a man a day, and this having fried some twenty-six weeks in the ship’s hold, contained as many worms as grains; so that we might truly call it rather so much bran than corn. Our drink was water, our lodgings castles in the air.

With this lodging and diet, our extreme toil in bearing and planting palisades, so strained and bruised us, and our continual labor in the extremity of the heat had so weakened us, as were cause sufficient to have made us as miserable in our native country or any other place in the world.

From May to September [1607], those that escaped lived upon sturgeon, and sea crabs. Fifty in this time we buried; the rest seeing the President’s projects to escape these miseries in our pinnace[2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn2) by flight (who all this time had neither felt want nor sickness) so moved our dead spirits, as we deposed him [10 Sept. 1607]; and established Ratcliffe in his place, (Gosnoll being dead), Kendall deposed. Smith newly recovered, Martin and Ratcliffe was by his care preserved and relieved, and the most of the soldiers recovered with the skillful diligence of Master Thomas Wotton our surgeon general.

But now was all our provision spent, the sturgeon gone, all helps abandoned, each hour expecting the fury of the savages; when God, the patron of all good endeavors, in that desperate extremity so changed the hearts of the savages, that they brought such plenty of their fruits and provision, as no man wanted.

And now where some affirmed it was ill done of the Council to send forth men so badly provided, this incontradictable reason will show them plainly they are too ill advised to nourish such ill conceits; first, the fault of our going was our own, what could be thought fitting or necessary we had; but what we should find, or want, or where we should be, we were all ignorant, and supposing to make our passage in two months, with victual to live, and the advantage of the spring to work; we were at sea five months, where we both spent our victual and lost the opportunity of the time and season to plant, by the unskillful presumption of our ignorant transporters, that understood not at all what they undertook.

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Such actions have ever since the world’s beginning been subject to such accidents, and everything of worth is found full of difficulties: but nothing so difficult as to establish a commonwealth so far remote from men and means, and where men’s minds are so untoward as neither do well themselves, nor suffer others. But to proceed.

The new President [Ratcliffe], and Martin, being little beloved, of weak judgment in dangers, and less industry in peace, committed the managing of all things abroad to Captain Smith: who by his own example, good words, and fair promises, set some to mow, others to bind thatch, some to build houses, others to thatch them, himself always bearing the greatest task for his own share, so that in short time, he provided most of them lodgings, neglecting any for himself.

This done, seeing the savages superfluity begin to decrease [he] (with some of his workmen) shipped himself [9 Nov. 1607] in the shallop[3](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn3) to search the country for trade. The want of the language, knowledge to manage his boat without sails, the want of a sufficient power (knowing the multitude of the savages), apparel for his men, and other necessaries, were infinite impediments, yet no discouragement.

Being but six or seven in company he went down the river to Kecoughtan:[4](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn4) where at first they scorned him, as a famished man; and would in derision offer him a handful of corn, a piece of bread, for their swords and muskets, and such like proportions also for their apparel. But seeing by trade and courtesy there was nothing to be had, he made bold to try such conclusions as necessity enforced, though contrary to his commission: let fly his muskets, ran his boat on shore; whereat they all fled into the woods.

So marching towards their houses, they might see great heaps of corn: much ado he had to restrain his hungry soldiers from [the] present taking of it, expecting as it happened that the savages would assault them, as not long after they did with a most hideous noise. Sixty or seventy of them, some black, some red, some white, some parti-colored, came in a square order, singing and dancing out of the woods, with their *Okee* (which was an idol made of skins, stuffed with moss, all painted and hung with chains and copper) borne before them: and in this manner, being well armed with clubs, targets, bows and arrows, they charged the English, that so kindly received them with their muskets loaded with pistol shot, that down fell their God, and divers lay sprawling on the ground; the rest fled again to the woods, and ere long sent one of their *Quiyoughkasoucks*[*5*](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn5) to offer peace, and redeem their *Okee.*

Smith told them, if only six of them would come unarmed and load his boat, he would not only be their friend but restore them their *Okee,* and give them beads, copper, and hatchets besides, which on both sides was to their contents performed; and then they brought him venison, turkies, wild fowl, bread, and what they had, singing and dancing in sign of friendship till they departed. \* \* \*

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But our comedies never endured long without a tragedy, some idle exceptions being muttered against Captain Smith for not discovering the head of Chicka-hominy river, and [being] taxed by the Council, to be too slow in so worthy an attempt. The next voyage he proceeded so far that with much labor by cutting of trees asunder he made his passage; but when his barge could pass no farther, he left her in a broad bay out of danger of shot, commanding none should go ashore till his return. Himself with two English and two savages went up higher in a canoe; but he was not long absent but his men went ashore, whose want of government gave both occasion and opportunity to the savages to surprise one George Cassen, whom they slew, and much failed not to have cut off the boat and all the rest.

Smith little dreaming of that accident, being got to the marshes at the river’s head, twenty miles in the desert, had his two men slain (as is supposed) sleeping by the canoe, while himself by fowling sought them victual: who finding he was beset with 200 savages, two of them he slew, still defending himself with the aid of a savage his guide, whom he bound to his arm with his garters, and used him as a buckler. Yet he was shot in his thigh a little, and had many arrows that stuck in his clothes but no great hurt, till at last they took him prisoner.

When this news came to Jamestown, much was their sorrow for his loss, few expecting what ensued.

Six or seven weeks[6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn6) those barbarians kept him prisoner. Many strange triumphs and conjurations they made of him, yet he so demeaned himself among them, as he not only diverted them from surprising the fort, but procured his own liberty, and got himself and his company such estimation among them, that those savages admired him more than their own *Quiyoughkasoucks.*

The manner how they used and delivered him is as follows.

The savages having drawn from George Cassen whether Captain Smith was gone, prosecuting that opportunity they followed him with 300 bowmen, conducted by the King of Pamaunkee, who in divisions searching the turnings of the river found Robinson and Emry by the fireside. Those they shot full of arrows and slew. Then finding the captain, as is said, that used the savage that was his guide as his shield (three of them being slain and divers others so galled) all the rest would not come near him. Thinking thus to have returned to his boat, regarding them, as he marched, more then his way, [he] slipped up to the middle in an oozy creek and his savage with him, yet durst they not come to him till being near dead with cold he threw away his arms. Then according to their composition[7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn7) they drew him forth and led him to the fire where his men were slain. Diligently they chafed his benumbed limbs.

He demanding for their captain, they showed him Opechankanough, King of Pamaunkee, to whom he gave a round ivory double compass dial. Much they marvelled at the playing of the fly[8](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn8) and needle, which they could see so plainly, and yet not touch it, because of the glass that covered them. But when he demonstrated by that globe-like jewel, the roundness of the earth, and skies, the sphere of the sun, moon, and stars, and how the sun did chase the night round about the world continually; the greatness of the land and sea, the diversity of nations, variety of complexions, and how we were to them antipodes, and many other such like matters, they all stood as amazed with admiration.

Notwithstanding, within an hour after they tied him to a tree, and as many as could stand about him prepared to shoot him, but the King holding up the compass in his hand, they all laid down their bows and arrows, and in a triumphant manner led him to Orapaks, where he was after their manner kindly feasted and well used.

Their order in conducting him was thus: Drawing themselves all in file, the King in the midst had all their pieces and swords borne before him. Captain Smith was led after him by three great savages, holding him fast by each arm, and on each side six went in file with their arrows nocked. But arriving at the town (which was but only thirty or forty hunting houses made of mats, which they remove as they please, as we our tents) all the women and children staring to behold him, the soldiers first all in file performed the form of a bissone[9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10fn9) so well as could be; and on each flank, officers as sergeants to see them keep their orders. A good time they continued this exercise, and then cast themselves in a ring, dancing in such several postures, and singing and yelling out such hellish notes and screeches, being strangely painted, every one his quiver of arrows, and at his back a club; on his arm a fox or an otter’s skin, or some such matter for his vambrace;[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn1) their heads and shoulders painted red, with oil and pocones[2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn2) mingled together, which scarletlike color made an exceeding handsome show; his bow in his hand, and the skin of a bird with her wings abroad dried, tied on his head, a piece of copper, a white shell, a long feather, with a small rattle growing at the tails of their snakes tied to it, or some such like toy. All this while Smith and the King stood in the midst guarded, as before is said, and after three dances they all departed. Smith they conducted to a long house, where thirty or forty tall fellows did guard him, and ere long more bread and venison was brought him than would have served twenty men. I think his stomach at that time was not very good; what he left they put in baskets and tied over his head. About midnight they set the meat again before him. All this time not one of them would eat a bit with him, till the next morning they brought him as much more, and then did they eat all the old, and reserved the new as they had done the other, which made him think they would fat him to eat him. Yet in this desperate estate to defend him from the cold, one Maocassater brought him his gown, in requital of some beads and toys Smith had given him at his first arrival in Virginia.

Two days after, a man would have slain him (but that the guard prevented it) for the death of his son, to whom they conducted him to recover the poor man then breathing his last. Smith told them that at Jamestown he had a water[3](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn3) would do it, if they would let him fetch it, but they would not permit that, but made all the preparations they could to assault Jamestown, craving his advice, and for recompense he should have life, liberty, land, and women. In part of a table book[4](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn4) he writ his mind to them at the fort, what was intended, how they should follow that direction to affright the messengers, and without fail send him such things as he writ for. And an inventory with them. The difficulty and danger he told the savages of the mines, great guns, and other engines exceedingly affrighted them, yet according to his request they went to Jamestown, in as bitter weather as could be of frost and snow, and within three days returned with an answer.

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But when they came to Jamestown, seeing men sally out as he had told them they would, they fled; yet in the night they came again to the same place where he had told them they should receive an answer, and such things as he had promised them, which they found accordingly, and with which they returned with no small expedition, to the wonder of them all that heard it, that he could either divine, or the paper could speak.

Then they led him to the Youthtanunds, the Mattapanients, the Payankatanks, the Nantaughtacunds, and Onawmanients upon the rivers of Rappahannock and Potomac; over all those rivers, and back again by divers other several nations, to the King’s habitation at Pamaunkee, where they entertained him with most strange and fearful conjurations:

As if near led to hell,

Amongst the devils to dwell.

Not long after, early in a morning a great fire was made in a long house, and a mat spread on the one side, as on the other; on the one they caused him to sit, and all the guard went out of the house, and presently came skipping in a great grim fellow, all painted over with coal, mingled with oil; and many snakes’ and weasels’ skins stuffed with moss, and all their tails tied together, so as they met on the crown of his head in a tassel; and round about the tassel was as a coronet of feathers, the skins hanging round about his head, back, and shoulders, and in a manner covered his face; with a hellish voice, and a rattle in his hand. With most strange gestures and passions he began his invocation, and environed the fire with a circle of meal; which done, three more such like devils came rushing in with the like antique tricks, painted half black, half red, but all their eyes were painted white, and some red strokes like mutchatos,[5](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn5) along their cheeks. Round about him those fiends danced a pretty while, and then came in three more as ugly as the rest, with red eyes, and white strokes over their black faces. At last they all sat down right against him, three of them on the one hand of the chief priest, and three on the other. Then all with their rattles began a song, which ended, the chief priest laid down five wheat corns. Then straining his arms and hands with such violence that he sweat, and his veins swelled, he began a short oration. At the conclusion they all gave a short groan and then laid down three grains more. After that, began their song again, and then another oration, ever laying down so many corns as before, till they had twice encircled the fire. That done, they took a bunch of little sticks prepared for that purpose, continuing still their devotion, and at the end of every song and oration, they laid down a stick betwixt the divisions of corn. Till night, neither he nor they did either eat or drink, and then they feasted merrily, with the best provisions they could make. Three days they used this ceremony, the meaning whereof they told him was to know if he intended them well or no. The circle of meal signified their country, the circles of corn the bounds of the sea, and the sticks his country. They imagined the world to be flat and round, like a trencher,[6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html" \l "ch10afn6) and they in the midst.

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After this they brought him a bag of gunpowder, which they carefully preserved till the next spring, to plant as they did their corn, because they would be acquainted with the nature of that seed.

Opitchapam, the King’s brother, invited him to his house, where, with as many platters of bread, fowl, and wild beasts as did environ him, he bid him welcome; but not any of them would eat a bit with him, but put up all the remainder in baskets.

At his return to Opechancanoughs, all the King’s women and their children flocked about him for their parts, as a due by custom, to be merry with such fragments.

But his waking mind in hideous dreams did oft see wondrous shapes,

Of bodies strange, and huge in growth, and of stupendous makes.

At last they brought him to Meronocomoco,[7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html" \l "ch10afn7) where was Powhatan their Emperor. Here more than two hundred of those grim courtiers stood wondering at him, as he had been a monster, till Powhatan and his train had put themselves in their greatest braveries. Before a fire upon a seat like a bedstead, he sat covered with a great robe, made of rarowcun[8](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn8) skins, and all the tails hanging by. On either hand did sit a young wench of 16 or 18 years, and along on each side the house, two rows of men, and behind them as many women, with all their heads and shoulders painted red, many of their heads bedecked with the white down of birds, but every one with something, and a great chain of white beads about their necks.

At his entrance before the King, all the people gave a great shout. The Queen of Appamatuck was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, instead of a towel to dry them. Having feasted him after their best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan; then as many as could laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs to beat out his brains, Pocahontas, the King’s dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death, whereat the Emperor was contented he should live to make him hatchets, and her bells, beads, and copper, for they thought him as well[9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10afn9) of all occupations as themselves. For the King himself will make his own robes, shoes, bows, arrows, pots; plant, hunt, or do any thing so well as the rest.

They say he bore a pleasant show,

But sure his heart was sad.

For who can pleasant be, and rest,

That lives in fear and dread:

And having life suspected, doth

It still suspected lead.

Two days after, Powhatan having disguised himself in the most fearfulest manner he could, caused Captain Smith to be brought forth to a great house in the woods, and there upon a mat by the fire to be left alone. Not long after from behind a mat that divided the house, was made the most dolefulest noise he ever heard. Then Powhatan more like a devil than a man, with some two hundred more as black as himself, came unto him and told him now they were friends, and presently he should go to Jamestown, to send him two great guns, and a grindstone, for which he would give him the country of Capahowosick, and forever esteem him as his son Nantaquoud.

So to Jamestown with 12 guides Powhatan sent him. That night they quartered in the woods, he still expecting (as he had done all this long time of his imprisonment) every hour to be put to one death or other, for all their feasting. But almighty God (by his divine providence) had mollified the hearts of those stern barbarians with compassion. The next morning betimes they came to the fort, where Smith, having used the savages with what kindness he could, he showed Rawhunt, Powhatan’s trusty servant, two demiculverins[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bfn1) and a millstone to carry Powhatan. They found them somewhat too heavy, but when they did see him discharge them, being loaded with stones, among the boughs of a great tree loaded with icicles, the ice and branches came so tumbling down, that the poor savages ran away half dead with fear. But at last we regained some conference with them, and gave them such toys; and sent to Powhatan, his women, and children such presents, as gave them in general full content. \* \* \*

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[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn1). The common stores.

[2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn2). Small sailing ship.

[3](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn3). A boat for use in shallow waters.

[4](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn4). A village near the mouth of the James River ruled by the son of Powhatan.

[5](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn5). Priests.

[6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn6). In actuality, about three weeks.

[7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn7). Agreement.

[8](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn8). Compass card.

[9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bn9). A military maneuver.

[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn1). Forearm armor.

[2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn2). A red dye.

[3](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn3). Medicine.

[4](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn4). Notebook.

[5](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn5).Mustaches.

[6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn6).Platter.

[7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn7).The chief’s town, on the James River, where they arrived January 5, 1608.

[8](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn8).Raccoon.

[9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10abn9).Capable.

[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/1259609057/epub/OPS/xhtml/Chapter10.html#ch10bbn1).Cannons capable of ?ring shots of about ten pounds.