

## From A Key into the Language of America<sup>1</sup>

To My Dear and Well-Beloved Friends and Countrymen,  
in Old and New England

I present you with a key; I have not heard of the like, yet framed,<sup>2</sup> since it pleased God to bring that mighty continent of America to light. Others of my countrymen have often, and excellently, and lately written of the country (and none that I know beyond the goodness and worth of it).

This key, respects the native language of it, and happily may unlock some rarities concerning the natives themselves, not yet discovered.

I drew the materials in a rude lump at sea, as a private help to my own memory, that I might not, by my present absence, lightly lose what I had so dearly bought in some few years hardship, and charges among the barbarians. Yet being reminded by some, what pity it were to bury those materials in my grave at land or sea; and withal, remembering how oft I have been importuned by worthy friends of all sorts, to afford them some helps this way. I resolved (by the assistance of The Most High) to cast those materials into this key, pleasant and profitable for all, but especially for my friends residing in those parts.

A little key may open a box, where lies a bunch of keys.

With this I have entered into the secrets of those countries, wherever English dwell about two hundred miles, between the French and Dutch plantations; for want of this, I know what gross mistakes myself and others have run into.

There is a mixture of this language north and south, from the place of my abode, about six hundred miles; yet within the two hundred miles (aforementioned) their dialects do exceedingly differ; yet not so, but (within that compass) a man may, by this help, converse with thousands of natives all over the country: and by such converse it may please the Father of Mercies to spread civility, (and in His own most holy season) Christianity. For one candle will light ten thousand, and it may please God to bless a little leaven to season the mighty lump of those peoples and territories.

It is expected, that having had so much converse with these natives, I should write some little of them.

Concerning them (a little to gratify expectation) I shall touch upon four heads:

First, by what names they are distinguished.

Secondly, their original<sup>3</sup> and descent.

Thirdly, their religion, manners, customs, etc.

Fourthly, that great point of their conversion.

To the first, their names are of two sorts:

First, those of the English giving: as natives, savages, Indians, wildmen (so the Dutch call them *wilden*), Abergeny<sup>4</sup> men, pagans, barbarians, heathen.

Secondly, their names which they give themselves.

1. The text is from the first edition (1643), reprinted by the Rhode Island and Providence Tercentenary Committee (1936).

2. Shaped.

3. Place of origin.

4. Aboriginal.

I cannot observe that they ever had (before the coming of the English, French or Dutch amongst them) any names to difference themselves from strangers, for they knew none; but two sorts of names they had, and have amongst themselves:

First, general, belonging to all natives, as *Nínnuock*, *Ninnimissinnûwock*, *Eniskeetomparwog*, which signifies Men, Folk, or People.

Secondly, particular names, peculiar to several nations, of them amongst themselves, as *Nanhigganûck*, *Massachusêuck*, *Cawasumsêuck*, *Cowwesguck*, *Quintikóock*, *Qunnipiguck*, *Pequuttóog*, etc.

They have often asked me, why we call them Indians, natives, etc. And understanding the reason, they will call themselves Indians, in opposition to English, etc.

For the second head proposed, their original and descent:

From Adam and Noah<sup>5</sup> that they spring, it is granted on all hands.

But for their later descent, and whence they came into those parts, it seems as hard to find, as to find the wellhead of some fresh stream, which running many miles out of the country to the salt ocean, hath met with many mixing streams by the way. They say themselves, that they have sprung and grown up in that very place, like the very trees of the wilderness.

They say that their great god *Kautántowwít* created those parts, as I observed in the chapter of their religion.<sup>6</sup> They have no clothes, books, nor letters, and conceive their fathers never had; and therefore they are easily persuaded that the God that made Englishmen is a greater God, because He hath so richly endowed the English above themselves. But when they hear that about sixteen hundred years ago, England and the inhabitants thereof were like unto themselves, and since have received from God, clothes, books, etc. they are greatly affected with a secret hope concerning themselves.

Wise and judicious men, with whom I have discoursed, maintain their original to be northward from *Tartaria*:<sup>7</sup> and at my now taking ship, at the Dutch plantation, it pleased the Dutch Governor, (in some discourse with me about the natives), to draw their line from Iceland, because the name *Sackmakan* (the name for an Indian prince, about the Dutch) is the name for a prince in Iceland.

Other opinions I could number up: under favor I shall present (not mine opinion, but) my observations to the judgment of the wise.

First, others (and myself) have conceived some of their words to hold affinity with the Hebrew.

Secondly, they constantly anoint their heads as the Jews did.

Thirdly, they give dowries for their wives, as the Jews did.

Fourthly (and which I have not so observed amongst other nations as amongst the Jews, and these:) they constantly separate their women (during the time of their monthly sickness) in a little house alone by themselves four or five days, and hold it an irreligious thing for either father or husband or any male to come near them.

They have often asked me if it be so with women of other nations, and whether they are so separated: and for their practice they plead nature and

5. After the great flood described in the Bible, only Noah and his family remained.

6. I.e., in Chapter XXI of Williams's *Key*, which

has thirty-two chapters.

7. Mongolia.

tradition. Yet again I have found a greater affinity of their language with the Greek tongue.

2. As the Greeks and other nations, and ourselves call the seven stars (or Charles' Wain, the Bear,) <sup>8</sup> so do they Mosk or Paukunnawaw, the Bear.

3. They have many strange relations of one Wétucks, a man that wrought great miracles amongst them, and walking upon the waters, etc., with some kind of broken resemblance to the Son of God.

Lastly, it is famous that the Sowwest (Sowaniu) is the great subject of their discourse. From thence their traditions. There they say (at the southwest) is the court of their great god Kautántowwít: at the southwest are their forefathers' souls: to the southwest they go themselves when they die; from the southwest came their corn, and beans out of their great god Kautántowwít's field: and indeed the further northward and westward from us their corn will not grow, but to the southward better and better. I dare not conjecture in these uncertainties. I believe they are lost, and yet hope (in the Lord's holy season) some of the wildest of them shall be found to share in the blood of the Son of God. To the third head, concerning their religion, customs, manners etc. I shall here say nothing, because in those 32 chapters of the whole book, I have briefly touched those of all sorts, from their birth to their burials, and have endeavored (as the nature of the work would give way) to bring some short observations and applications home to Europe from America.

Therefore fourthly, to that great point of their conversion, so much to be longed for, and by all New-English so much pretended, <sup>9</sup> and I hope in truth.

For myself I have uprightly labored to suit my endeavors to my pretenses: and of later times (out of desire to attain their language) I have run through varieties of intercourses<sup>1</sup> with them day and night, summer and winter, by land and sea, particular passages tending to this, I have related divers, in the chapter of their religion.

Many solemn discourses I have had with all sorts of nations of them, from one end of the country to another (so far as opportunity, and the little language I have could reach).

I know there is no small preparation in the hearts of multitudes of them. I know their many solemn confessions to myself, and one to another of their lost wandering conditions.

I know strong convictions upon the consciences of many of them, and their desires uttered that way.

I know not with how little knowledge and grace of Christ the Lord may save, and therefore, neither will despair, nor report much.

But since it hath pleased some of my worthy countrymen to mention (of late in print) Wequash, the Péquot captain, I shall be bold so far to second their relations, as to relate mine own hopes of him (though I dare not be so confident as others).

Two days before his death, as I passed up to Qunníhticut<sup>2</sup> River, it pleased my worthy friend Mr. Fenwick, (whom I visited at his house in Saybrook Fort

8. I.e., the constellation known as Ursa Major (Great Bear), the Big Dipper, or Charlemagne's wagon ("wain").

9. Asserted, proffered (with none of the modern

connotations of deceit).

1. Conversations.

2. Connecticut.



at the mouth of that river) to tell me that my old friend Wequash lay very sick. I desired to see him, and himself was pleased to be my guide two miles where Wequash lay.

Amongst other discourse concerning his sickness and death (in which he freely bequeathed his son to Mr. Fenwick) I closed<sup>3</sup> with him concerning his soul: he told me that some two or three years before he had lodged at my house, where I acquainted him with the condition of all mankind, & his own in particular; how God created man and all things; how man fell from God, and of his present enmity against God, and the wrath of God against him until repentance. Said he, "your words were never out of my heart to this present;" and said he "me much pray to Jesus Christ." I told him so did many English, French, and Dutch, who had never turned to God, nor loved Him. He replied in broken English: "Me so big naughty heart, me heart all one stone!" Savory expressions using to breathe from compunct and broken hearts, and a sense of inward hardness and unbrokenness [*sic*]. I had many discourses with him in his life, but this was the sum of our last parting until our General Meeting.<sup>4</sup>

Now, because this is the great inquiry of all men: what Indians have been converted? what have the English done in those parts? what hopes of the Indians receiving the knowledge of Christ?

And because to this question, some put an edge from the boast of the Jesuits in Canada and Maryland, and especially from the wonderful conversions made by the Spaniards and Portugals in the West-Indies, besides what I have here written, as also, beside what I have observed in the chapter of their religion, I shall further present you with a brief additional discourse concerning this great point, being comfortably persuaded that that Father of Spirits, who was graciously pleased to persuade Japhet (the Gentiles) to dwell in the tents of Shem (the Jews),<sup>5</sup> will, in His holy season (I hope approaching), persuade these Gentiles of America to partake of the mercies of Europe, and then shall be fulfilled what is written by the prophet Malachi,<sup>6</sup> from the rising of the sun (in Europe) to the going down of the same (in America), My name shall be great among the Gentiles. So I desire to hope and pray,

Your unworthy countryman,  
ROGER WILLIAMS

### *Directions for the Use of the Language*

1. A dictionary or grammar way I had consideration of, but purposely avoided, as not so accommodate to the benefit of all, as I hope this form is.

2. A dialogue also I had thoughts of, but avoided for brevity's sake, and yet (with no small pains) I have so framed every chapter and the matter of it, as I may call it an implicit dialogue.

3. It is framed chiefly after the *Narragansett* dialect, because most spoken in the country, and yet (with attending to the variation of peoples and dialects) it will be of great use in all parts of the country.

3. Came to the end of my talk.

4. I.e., until Judgment Day.

5. Japhet was the third son of Noah and, in some traditions, the progenitor of the Indo-European

race (see Genesis 9.18).

6. "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles" (Malachi 1.11).

4. Whatever your occasion be, either of travel, discourse, trading etc. turn to the table which will direct you to the proper chapter.

5. Because the life of all language is in the pronunciation, I have been at the pains and charges to cause the accents, tones or sounds to be affixed, (which some understand, according to the Greek language, acutes, graves, circumflexes) for example, in the second leaf<sup>7</sup> in the word *Ewò He*: the sound or tone must not be put on *E*, but *wò* where the grave accent is.

In the same leaf, in the word *Ascowequáassin*, the sound must not be on any of the syllables, but on *quáss*, where the acute or sharp sound is.

In the same leaf in the word *Anspaumpmaûntam*, the sound must not be on any other syllable but *maûn*, where the circumflex or long sounding accent is.

6. The English for every Indian word or phrase stands in a straight line directly against the Indian: yet sometimes there are two words for the same thing (for their language is exceeding copious, and they have five or six words sometimes for one thing) and then the English stands against them both: for example in the second leaf:

*Cowáunckamish & Cuckquénamish* | I pray your favor.

*From An Help to the Native Language of that Part of America  
Called New England*

FROM CHAPTER I. OF SALUTATION

1. The courteous pagan shall condemn  
Uncourteous Englishmen,  
Who live like foxes, bears and wolves,  
Or lion in his den.
2. Let none sing blessings to their souls, 5  
For that they courteous are:  
The wild barbarians with no more  
Than nature, go so far.
3. If nature's sons both wild and tame, 10  
Humane and courteous be:  
How ill becomes it Sons of God  
To want humanity?

FROM CHAPTER II. OF EATING AND ENTERTAINMENT

1. Coarse bread and water's most,<sup>8</sup> their fare,  
O England's diet fine;  
Thy cup runs ore<sup>9</sup> with plenteous store  
Of wholesome beer and wine.
2. Sometimes God gives them Fish or Flesh, 5  
Yet they're content without;  
And what comes in, they part to<sup>1</sup> friends  
And strangers round about.

7. Page.  
8. Mostly.

9. Over.  
1. Divide among.

3. God's providence is rich to his,  
 Let none distrustful be;  
 In wilderness, in great distress,  
 These ravens have fed me.

*FROM CHAPTER VI. OF THE FAMILY AND BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE*

1. How busy are the sons of men?  
 How full their heads and hands?  
 What noise and tumults in our own,  
 And eke<sup>2</sup> in Pagan lands?
2. Yet I have found less noise, more peace  
 In wild America,  
 Where women quickly build the house,  
 And quickly move away.
- [3] English and Indians busy are,  
 In parts of their abode:  
 Yet both stand idle, till God's call  
 Set them to work for God. Mat. 20.7.<sup>3</sup>

*FROM CHAPTER XI. OF TRAVEL*

1. God makes a path, provides a guide,  
 And feeds in wilderness!  
 His glorious name while breath remains,  
 O that I may confess.
2. Lost many a time, I have had no guide,  
 No house, but hollow tree!  
 In stormy winter night no fire,  
 No food, no company:
3. In him I have found a house, a bed,  
 A table, company:  
 No cup so bitter, but's made sweet,  
 When God shall sweet'ning be.

*FROM CHAPTER XVIII. OF THE SEA*

- [1] They see God's wonders that are call'ed  
 Through dreadful seas to pass,  
 In tearing winds and roaring seas,  
 And calms as smooth as glass.
- [2] I have in Europe's ships, oft been  
 In King of terror's hand;  
 When all have cried, "Now, now we sink,"  
 Yet God brought safe to land.
- [3] Alone 'mongst Indians in canoes,  
 Sometime o'er-turn'd, I have been  
 Half inch from death, in ocean deep,  
 God's wonders I have seen.

2. Also (archaic).

3. "And about the eleventh hour he [Christ] went out, and found others standing idle, and said unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day

idle?' They said unto him, 'Because no man hath hired us.' He said unto them, 'Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive'" (Matthew 20.6-7).

## FROM CHAPTER XXI. OF RELIGION, THE SOUL, ETC.

*Manit-manittó, wock.*

| God, Gods.

*Obs.* He that questions whether God made the world, the Indians will teach him. I must acknowledge I have received in my converse<sup>4</sup> with them many confirmations of those two great points, Hebrews II. 6. viz:

1. That God is.

2. That He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him.

They will generally confess that God made all, but them in special, although they deny not that Englishman's God made Englishmen, and the heavens and earth there! yet their Gods made them and the heaven, and earth where they dwell.

*Nummusquauna-múckqun manit.* | God is angry with me?

*Obs.* I have heard a poor Indian lamenting the loss of a child at break of day, call up his wife and children, and all about him to lamentation, and with abundance of tears cry out! "O God thou hast taken away my child! thou art angry with me: O turn Thine anger from me, and spare the rest of my children."

If they receive any good in hunting, fishing, harvest etc. they acknowledge God in it.

Yea, if it be but an ordinary accident, a fall, etc. they will say God was angry and did it, *musquàntum manit* God is angry. But herein is their misery:

First, they branch their God-head into many gods.

Secondly, attribute it to creatures.

First, many gods: they have given me the names of thirty seven which I have, all which in their solemn worships they invoke, as:

*Kautántowwit* the great Southwest God, to whose house all souls go, and from whom came their corn, beans, as they say.

*Wompanand.*

| The Eastern God.

*Chekesuwànd.*

| The Western God.

*Wunnamaméanit.*

| The Northern God.

*Sowwanànd.*

| The Southern God.

*Wetuómanit.*

| The House God.

Even as the papists have their he and she saint protectors as St. George, St. Patrick, St. Denis, Virgin Mary, etc.

*Squáuanit.*

| The Woman's God.

*Muckquachuckquànd.*

| The Children's God.

*Obs.* I was once with a native dying of a wound, given him by some murderous English who robbed him and ran him through with a rapier, from whom in the heat of his wound, he at present escaped from them, but dying of his wound, they suffered death at New Plymouth, in New England, this native dying called much upon *Muckquachuckquànd*, which of other natives I understood (as they believed) had appeared to the dying young man, many years before, and bid him whenever he was in distress call upon him.

Secondly, as they have many of these fained deities; so worship they the creatures in whom they conceive doth rest some deity:

4. Conversation.



*Keesuckquànd.*  
*Nanepaûshat.*  
*Paumpágussit.*  
*Yotáanit.*

The Sun God.  
 The Moon God.  
 The Sea.  
 The Fire God.

Supposing that deities be in these, etc.

\* \* \*

They have a modest religious persuasion not to disturb any man, either themselves English, Dutch, or any in their conscience, and worship, and therefore say:

*Aquiewopwaïwash.*  
*Aquiewopwaïwock.*  
*Peeyàuntam.*  
*Peeyaúntamwock.*  
*Cowwéwonck.*

Peace, hold your peace.

He is at prayer.  
 They are praying.  
 The soul.

Derived from *cowwene* to sleep, because say they, it works and operates when the body sleeps. *Míchachunck*, the soul, in a higher notion which is of affinity, with a word signifying a looking glass, or clear resemblance, so that it hath its name from a clear sight or discerning, which indeed seems very well to suit with the nature of it.

*Wuhóck.*  
*Nohòck: cohòck*  
*Awaunkeesitteoúwincohòck:*  
*Tunna-awwa commítchichunck-*  
*kitonckquèan?*  
*An. Sowánakitaíuwaw.*

The body  
 My body, your body

Whether goes your soul when you  
 die?  
 It goes to the southwest.

*Obs.* They believe that the souls of men and women go to the southwest, their great and good men and women to Kautántowwit, his house, where they have hopes (as the Turks have of carnal joys). Murderers, thieves and liars, their souls (say they) wander restless abroad.

Now because this book (by God's good providence) may come into the hand of many fearing God, who may also have many an opportunity of occasional discourse with some of these, their wild brethren and sisters, and may speak a word for their and our glorious Maker, which may also prove some preparatory mercy to their souls: I shall propose some proper expressions concerning the creation of the world, and man's estate, and in particular theirs also, which from myself many hundreds of times, great numbers of them have heard with great delight, and great convictions; which, who knows (in God's holy season), may rise to the exalting of the Lord Jesus Christ in their conversion, and salvation?

*Nétop Kunnatótemous.*  
*Natótema:*  
*Tocketunnântum?*  
*Awaun Keesiteoúwin*  
*Kéesuck?*  
*Aúke Wechêkom?*  
*Míttauke.*

Friend, I will ask you a question.  
 Speak on.  
 What think you?  
 Who made the heavens?

The earth, the sea?  
 The world.



Some will answer *Tattá*, I cannot tell, some will answer *Manittôwock*, the gods.

*Tà suóg Manittôwock*  
*Maunaũog Mishauinawock.*  
*Nétop machàge.*  
*Paũsuck naũnt manit.*  
*Cuppíssittone.*  
*Cowauwaũnemun.*

A phrase which much pleaseth them, being proper for their wandering in the woods, and similitudes greatly please them.

*Kukkakótemous, wâchitquáshouwe.*  
*Kuttaunchemókous.*  
*Paũsuck naũnt manit kéésittin*  
*keesuck, etc.*

*Napannetashèmittan naugecautím-*  
*monab nshque.*

*Naũgom naũnt wukkesittínnes-*  
*wâme teâgun.*

*Wuche mateâg.*

*Quttatashuchuckqún-nacau-*  
*skeesitínnes wâme.*

*Nquittaqúnne.*

*Wuckéesitin wequâi.*

*Néesqunne.*

*Wuckéesitin Keésuck.*

*Shúckqunnewuckéesitin Aũke kà*  
*wechêkom*

*Yóqunne wuckkéesitin Nippauus*  
*kà Nanepaũshat.*

*Neenash-mamockúwash wêquan-*  
*antíganash.*

*Kà wâme anócksuck.*

*Napannetashúckqunne Wuckéesit*  
*tin pussuckseésuck wâme.*

*Keesuckquíuke.*

*Ka wâme namaũsuck. Wechekom-*  
*míuke.*

*Quttatashúkqunne wuckkéésittin*  
*penashímwock wamè.*

*Wuttàke wuchè wuckeesittin pau-*  
*suck Enin, or, Eneskéetomp.*

*Wuche mishquòck.*

*Ka wesuonckgonnakaũnes Adam,*  
*túppautea mishquòck.*

*Wuttàke wuchè, Câwit míshquock,*

*Wuckaudnúmmenes manit*  
*peetaũ-gon wuche Adam.*

*Kà wuchè peteaũgon. Wuckeesitín-*  
*nes pausuck squàw.*

*Kà pawtouwúnnes Adâmuck*

How many gods be there?

Many, great many.

Friend, not so.

There is only one God.

You are mistaken.

You are out of the way.

I will tell you, presently.

I will tell you news.

One only God made the heavens  
 etc.

Five thousand years ago and  
 upwards.

He alone made all things.

Out of nothing.

In six days He made all things.

The first day He made the light.

The second day He made the  
 firmament

The third day He made the earth  
 and sea.

The fourth day He made the sun  
 and the moon.

Two great lights.

And all the stars.

The fifth day He made all the  
 fowl.

In the air, or heavens.

And all the fish in the sea.

The sixth day He made all the  
 beasts of the field.

Last of all he made one man.

Of red earth,

And called him Adam, or red  
 earth.

Then afterward, while Adam, or  
 red earth, slept,

God took a rib from Adam, or red  
 earth.

And of that rib he made one  
 woman.

And brought her to Adam.

*Nawônt Adam wuttúnnawaun  
 nup-peteâgon ewò.  
 Enadashúckqunne, aquêi,  
 Nagaû wuchè quttatashúckqune  
 anacaûsuock Englishmánuck.  
 Enadashuckqunnóckat tauba-  
 taūmwock.*

When Adam saw her, he said,  
 "This is my bone."  
 The seventh day He rested,  
 And, therefore, Englishmen work  
 six days.  
 On the seventh day they praise  
 God.

*Obs.* At this relation they are much satisfied, with a reason why (as they observe) the English and Dutch, etc., labor six days, and rest and worship the seventh.

Besides, they will say, we never heard of this before: and then will relate how they have it from their fathers, that Kautántowwít made one man and woman of a stone, which disliking, he broke them in pieces, and made another man and woman of a tree, which were the fountains of all mankind.

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- [1.] Two sorts of men shall naked stand  
 Before the burning ire  
 Of him that shortly shall appear,  
 In dreadful flaming fire.
- [2.] First, millions know not God, nor for  
 His knowledge care to seek:  
 Millions have knowledge store, but in  
 Obedience are not meek.
- [3.] If woe to Indians, where shall Turk,  
 Where shall appear the Jew?  
 O, where shall stand the Christian false?  
 O blessed then the true.

2 Thes. 1.8<sup>5</sup>

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FROM CHAPTER XXX. OF THEIR PAINTINGS

- [1.] Truth is a native, naked beauty; but  
 Lying inventions are but Indian paints;  
 Dissembling hearts their beauty's but a lie.  
 Truth is the proper beauty of God's saints.
2. Foul are the Indians' hair and painted faces,  
 More foul such hair, such face in Israel.  
 England so calls herself, yet there's  
 Absalom's foul hair and face of Jezebel.<sup>6</sup>
- [3.] Paints will not bide Christ's washing flames of fire,  
 Feigned inventions will not bide such storms:  
 O that we may prevent him, that betimes,  
 Repentance tears may wash off all such forms.

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5. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey

not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thesalonians 1.7-8).

6. See 2 Samuel 14.26 and 2 Kings 9.30.