

On Our Own Ground

*The Complete Writings
of William Apess,
a Pequot*

Edited and with an Introduction

by Barry O'Connell

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Frontispiece: Portrait of William Apes. Courtesy,
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PART 3
*The
Experiences
of Five Christian
Indians
of the Pequot
Tribe*

The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe (1833) may be, in its first edition, the most artfully constructed of Apess's books. The narration of his own life, which opens the book, articulates an almost unqualified condemnation of white people for what they have done to

the natives of the continent. In form an account of his conversion, it is in effect an exploration of the barriers to achieving an affirmative identity as a Native American in the eastern United States in the first third of the nineteenth century.

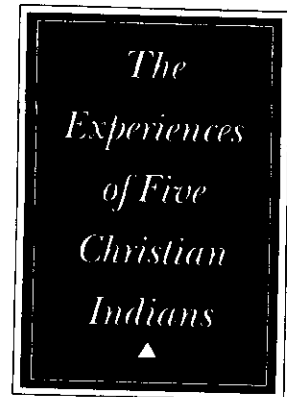
The five conversion accounts which make up the main body of the book can be read as a variation on this theme, though in each of them the discovery that Christianity can be a faith open to all people is formative. With the important exception of Aunt Sally George, all of these people were effectively orphans and either raised in the households of whites or economically bound to them by other means. But for Aunt Sally, all of them can achieve a Christian faith only by overcoming not only the indifference of most whites to the state of Indian souls but also the unapologetic racism practiced by white professors of Christianity. How could an Indian espouse a faith which itself was used to justify his or her oppression? Hannah Caleb strikes this note, which recurs throughout the book: "the poor Indians, the poor Indians, the people to whom I was wedded by the common ties of nature, were set at naught by those professors of grace, merely because we were Indians." The power of Christian faith, then, is shown to be manifested not in whites but in each of these converts, who are, with it, able to overcome the enmity they feel toward white people and love them despite the absence of any reciprocation.

The life of Aunt Sally George is situated so as to heighten the impact of the critique of whites and of their limited grasp of the religion by which they

mean to justify their claims to superiority over Native Americans. Her saintliness impresses itself in no small measure through Apess's reiteration that she was regarded as holy by all who encountered her, white people and Indians. She becomes almost luminous in the text in her power to overcome what the reader has come to understand as the nearly insuperable blindness and hypocrisy of white Christians. Though her account lacks the overt critique of the others, it, too, indicates the personal devastation of being a member of a despised and subordinated group. The conversion crisis in Aunt Sally George's life involves her decision to take her own life when she was a young woman and her being lifted by her prayers to Christ. She does not explain what moved her despair, but at this point in the book a reader needs no elaboration.

The placement of the final conversion account, Anne Wampy's, suggests the subtlety of Apess's grasp of Euro-Americans' images of Indians. Anne Wampy is a drunk, a basket maker, old and poverty-stricken, without children, as clearly at the end of the line as one might get. Only the intensity of her hatred of white people might modulate these enclosing stereotypes. Her conversion near the end of her life becomes, however, not a rejection of Indian ways but an overcoming of the oppression of white people, which she has internalized.

"Conversion," which for most white readers would conventionally have read as a synonym for assimilation, becomes the medium, instead, for an affirmation of Indian pride and autonomy. And whites, not Indians, become those in need of conversion. By expropriating the very language of white justification and turning it back upon them, Apess also engages in a linguistic conversion. His deliberate reversals of the vocabulary of subordination become explicit in the concluding essay, "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man." Christ as a Jew is recalled as a man of color and whites as the most degraded people in his day. Those in need of conversion become the white "civilizers"; the true Christians, by both heritage and practice, become Native Americans: "If you can find a spirit like Jesus Christ and his Apostles prevailing now in any of the white congregations, I should like to know it."



THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MISSIONARY

It is not my intention to descend to particulars in this pamphlet, any farther than to notice the origin of my life for the purpose of giving the youth a transient view between their condition and mine; or those poor children of the forest, who have had taken from them their once delightful plains and homes of their peaceful habitations; their fathers and mothers torn from their dwellings, and they left to mourn, and drop a tear, and die, over the ruins of their ancient sires. Perhaps you may ask, Why is this? I answer, because of deception and power, assisted with the fiery waters of the earth—rum. Such, my young friends, was the case of this poor self-taught Indian youth, whose experiences you are about to read.

My parentage, according to the custom of the country, was none of the least—being the descendant of a chief, or the head officer of the nation. But this availed nothing with me; the land of my fathers was gone; and their characters were not known as human beings but as beasts of prey. We were represented as having no souls to save, or to lose, but as partridges upon the mountains. All these degrading titles were heaped upon us. Thus, you see, we had to bear all this tide of degradation, while prejudice stung every white man, from the oldest to the youngest, to the very center of the heart.

It was thought no crime for old and young to hiss at the poor Indians, the noblest work of God, who had met with great misfortunes, and lost everything they had, by those very persons who despised them; yea, look which way they would, they could see no friends, nor even hear a pleasant sound from the lips of the white. Yea, there was but little help for them.

When you read this, ask yourselves if ever you had such trials. If not, begin now to prize your privileges and show pity to those whose fates are wretched and cruel. I shall now enter more fully upon my experience in childhood. It will be well to speak to the point; I shall make but few remarks

here, as I intend publishing, should the Lord spare my life, a book of 300 pages, 18 mo. in size; and there the reader will find particulars respecting my life.¹

My parents were of the same disposition of the Indians, that is, to wander to and fro. And, although my father was partly white, yet he had so much of the native blood that he fashioned after them in traveling from river to river, and from mountain to mountain, and plain to plain, on their journey.

I was born at Colrain, Massachusetts, A.D. 1798, on the 30th day of January.² We lived here but a few months and then removed to Colchester, Connecticut, within about twelve miles of our native tribe; and there, to my sad misfortune, my father and mother parted, I being at this time but a babe, being not more than three years old, and I saw my mother's face no more for twenty years. I was then placed with my grandparents on my mother's side, who, my readers, were not the best people in the world: for they would at times drink New England rum, and then I was neglected. How awful it is to have parents who will drink spirituous liquors or alcohol and, by that, to neglect their dear little children and leave them to suffer. You will see how much I had to suffer on the account of rum.

During my stay with the old folks our fare was hard, there being five children of us, and our fare was about equal as to earthly comforts. Sometimes we had something to eat, and at other times nothing. Many are the times in which we have gone to bed supperless, to rest our little weary limbs, stretched upon a bundle of straw, and how thankful we were for this comfort; and in the morning we were thankful to get a cold potato for our breakfasts. We thought it good fare. There was a white man who lived about a mile off, and he would, at times, bring us some frozen milk, which for a time supplied the calls of nature. We suffered thus from the cold; the calls of nature, as with almost nakedness; and calumny heaped upon us by the whites to an intense degree.

Little children, how thankful you ought to be that you are not in the same condition that we were, that you have not a nation to hiss at you, merely because your skins are white. I am sure that I rejoice for you, that it is not the case. But to proceed: At a certain time, when my grandmother had been out among the whites, with her baskets and brooms, and had fomented herself with the fiery waters of the earth, so that she had lost her reason and judgment and, in this fit of intoxication, raged most bitterly and in the meantime fell to beating me most cruelly; calling for whips, at the same time, of unnatural size, to beat me with; and asking me, at the same time, question after

question, if I hated her. And I would say yes at every question; and the reason why was because I knew no other form of words. Thus I was beaten, until my poor little body was mangled and my little arm broken into three pieces, and in this horrible situation left for a while. And had it not been for an uncle of mine, who lived in the other part of the old hut, I think that she would have finished my days; but through the goodness of God, I was snatched from an untimely grave.

The white man will say, "What cruel creatures, to use children so!" If I could see that this blame was attached to the poor degraded Indians, I should not have one word to say. But when not a whit of it belongs to them, I have the more to say. My sufferings certainly were through the white man's measure; for they most certainly brought spirituous liquors first among my people. For surely no such sufferings were heard of, or known among our people, until the burning curse and demon of despair came among us: Surely it came through the hands of the whites. Surely the red man had never sought to destroy one another as this bane of hell would! And we little babes of the forest had to suffer much on its account. Oh white man! How can you account to God for this? Are you not afraid that the children of the forest will rise up in judgment and condemn you?

Little children, if you have parents that drink the fiery waters, do all you can, both by your tears and prayers and friendly admonitions, to persuade them to stop; for it will most certainly ruin them, if they persist in it. But to proceed: I did not long continue in this situation but was relieved from it by my uncle making his complaint to the selectmen of the town, who took up my case and placed me for a while among some of the white neighbors, until I was healed of my wounds, although it was a year before I was able to help myself much without aid. Being now about five or six years old, it was agreed upon that I should live with this white family until I had arrived at the age of twenty-one. They, being Baptist people and having no children of their own, became more fond of me than is usual for people to be of adopted children and treated me with the utmost kindness, and particularly Mrs. Furman, who was very kind and generous. And as they had agreed to send me to school, accordingly, when I had arrived at the age of six years, they sent me to school. And this they continued to do for six successive winters, which was about all the education that I received. The amount of benefit which I have received from this, none can tell. To God be all the praise.

Things began now to wear a different aspect; and my little heart began again to be expanded, and I began to be inquisitive about many things. At times, the children of God would assemble around me, to worship the Great Spirit, something new to me. Of course I listened with great attention. Their songs were sweet, and as the oil of joy no doubt was in their hearts to indite

1. This seems unambiguously a reference to *A Son of the Forest*, not to an entirely new and second autobiography, and thus suggests that some, if not most, of "The Experience of the Missionary" was drafted before the writing of *A Son of the Forest* in 1828/29.

2. January 31 is the date he gives in *A Son of the Forest*.

their petitions, to nerve their admonitions, to send home the word to the hearts of those who heard it, doubtless made it the more interesting. And so it caught my youthful heart, being a constant hearer of these things. And my mind became more knitted together with them. And I would question Mrs. Furman respecting these things. She would give me a great many good, wholesome admonitions and tell me the young must die as well the old, and often point me to the graveyard and cite me to small graves and warn me to prepare to die. It would leave a powerful effect upon my mind, which was not easily effaced. I recollect the first time I visited a chapel for the worship of God. It being a new place, and looking to me somewhat fine to the eye, I took great liberties, was something like a country clown passing through populous villages and cities, staring all the while upon those fine piles of buildings which he saw, or like a rabble of boys and girls going to church to hear the Indian preach: something so indeed, and so much so that I lost my balance of behavior. And when I returned I received a short address, accompanied with a handsome present, that I have not yet forgotten; it weighed well with me, so that forever afterward I was enabled to keep my balance well. It would be well for heads of families to supply their children with such presents, when needed; it would save the country from much disgrace. But to proceed: When I was about eight years old, the preaching of the Gospel powerfully affected my mind, although I was ignorant of the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ; but I had no doubt but the word was spoken with divine authority, which not only drew tears of contrition from *me* but from many others. But being small, and of little note in the world, no one supposed that I wanted religion.

In those days, the aged thought the youth were not subjects of grace; such is the fact, although it may be surprising to many; so there was none to comfort the little Indian boy. How different now! Lord, help the youth who are exalted to heaven in point of privileges so to prize them, that they might not be thrust down to hell.

I would remark here that many rise up against this doctrine; but why not rise up against, or in opposition to, the state's prison and house of correction and even the gallows itself? These are places to punish the people for their crimes. Some say their crimes are punished here; indeed, this is a new doctrine. Whoever saw a crime in the state's prison, locked up to hard labor; or whoever saw a crime hung up by the neck? How absurd, then, to delineate such doctrine. Crime is crime and stands for what is, let scoffers say what they will; may grace be imparted to enlighten our eyes. But to return: For the profiting of the youth, I would speak a little further of the exercises of my mind. Although they could not believe that I wanted religion, yet the Spirit of the Lord followed me daily; and my mind was so overwhelmed that I could

hardly contain myself to rest without giving vent to my feelings. But little did the people with whom I lived think that I was serious about a future state; and although I could weep to be at church, yet they would deny me at times, saying I only wanted to look at the boys and play with them. Those sudden rebuffs would dampen my serious thoughts, and I would turn away to wicked paths of vice and unite with wicked boys and break the Sabbath, by wandering to and fro about the swamps, hedges, ponds, and brooks, sporting with whatever came in our way. But when I came home at night and retired to rest, the darkness itself was a terror to me, as I would picture to my imagination that the fiends of night stood around me, ready to devour me. Then I would cry to the Lord to have mercy upon my poor soul and promise him, if he would spare me, I would do better. But, when the darkness was past, I, like Pharaoh, forgot my promise: Thus I was led on by wicked youths until I was almost ruined, until I was persuaded to leave my home and wander to and fro to seek my bread. This displeased Mr. Furman; he, supposing I had become discontented, had sought me out another place, without my consent, which displeased me and made me more discontented than ever, I being at this time about ten years of age, entirely unfit to choose for myself. But so it was; I was alone in the world, fatherless, motherless, and helpless, as it were, and none to speak for the poor little Indian boy. Had my skin been white, with the same abilities and the same parentage, there could not have been found a place good enough for me. But such is the case with depraved nature, that their judgment for fancy only sets upon the eye, skin, nose, lips, cheeks, chin, or teeth and, sometimes, the forehead and hair; without any further examination, the mind is made up and the price set. This is something like buying chaff for wheat, or twigs of wood for solid substance.

But to proceed with our story: The place that he had procured for me was with a people professing religion that belonged to the Presbyterian church, and withal very strict. They also thought much of themselves, he being formerly a judge, likewise a member of Congress, in the House of Representatives, and had sufficient to supply all the common calls of life, for all his household.³ I went to try my new home; and while there on trial, they used me pretty fairly, made me a few presents suited to please children, etc. They had now secured my favor, as they thought; the agreement was now made that I should have clothing and schooling, so as to read and write, and plenty of work. Now this man is what is generally called an enlightened Christian.

But let us look at his proceedings and see if he was actuated by the spirit of Christ or the custom of the day: Hear, and then decide. And there was work

3. Judge Hillhouse in fact sat in the Continental Congress, never the House of Representatives.

enough. This part of the bargain was completely fulfilled on his part, and that was all. As to my fare, it was none of the best, though middling: It was not so bad as I have seen—I mean my table fare and lodging—but when we came to the clothing part, it was mean enough, I can assure you. I was not fit to be seen anywhere among decent folks, and of course there was no meeting for me to attend, although I had a desire. But this good man did not care much about the Indian boy. He wished to hear me read: I could make out to spell a few words, and the judge said, "You are a good reader." I hope he was a better judge at law. Now, some may think me hard, but truth will stand.

Now, the judge had family prayers and was exact in having all his family to hear him pray; so he would always have a repetition of words, and I soon could pray as well as he; and of course I did not care for his prayers any longer. I would remark, however, that a colored woman, who had lived with the judge for many years, told me that he once prayed, though previous to it there was one of the most powerful thunderstorms that ever was known in these parts; and after he had made that prayer he forgot to pray again.⁴ I expect there are many such in the world. But to proceed: The poor little Indian boy, when the Sabbath came, had nowhere to go to worship God, and so, like all other little boys who are left alone in the world, would stroll about the lots and meditate upon past times and listen to the little songsters of the forest, which would chaunt the praise of God for me, while there was none to take me by the hand and lead me to the holy place or to the fountain of blessedness. Now, if my face had been white, it would have been a town talk. But as it was an Indian face, no matter whether it was dirty or poor or whether I had clothing or not. But the judge has gone to the great Judge above, who will do right. I would not live with him, and he sold me, as a farmer would sell his sheep for the slaughter, without any of my knowledge whatever, to Mr. Williams, of New London; and through hypocrisy alone they carried me along to my place of destination. I had now arrived at the age of about eleven years and a half, and now I found that I had a new home; and in fact, I was not so much displeased with it as some might suppose, for now I found myself in a comfortable situation—enough to eat and drink, and things comfortable to wear—whereas before I was quite destitute of many things. This improvement somewhat settled my mind, and I became more contented. But soon I found that all his household wished me to become their servant, from the cook to the clerk. This I did not stomach well; it was too much for one to bear, to call every man "master." I thought it beneath my dignity; of course, there

4. The contrast Apess is drawing is between rote and spontaneous prayers. For an evangelical, the only genuine prayer comes from the heart, not from memorization. The jab at the judge is sharp, for only once has he been known to utter a "real" prayer and that because he was so frightened by a thunderstorm as to give it out involuntarily.

was war in the wigwam—who should be master. But Mr. Williams settled with us all, and with me in particular, as he said he meant to make me a good boy, but at the same time told me that I must obey the heads of his family, and all this was perfectly right; and some good, I think, was accomplished. However, I never cried out like the poor African, "Massa, Massa—Mister, Mister," but called them by their regular names.

Things now went on smoothly for some time. The general and his family generally attended the Congregational church or society on the Sabbath, to hear the word of God dispensed; though neither he nor his family were religious, yet they used to be often there; and their example was good so far as it went; and so I had an opportunity to attend with them. My mind was much occupied about those who preach the Gospel, there being a difference between those who preach and those who read.⁵ I could discover this; the preaching that I formerly attended was with divine power, which made the language of the speaker eloquent and sublime, and withal called the attention of those who heard it to seek the salvation of their souls; while that of the latter, being a selection of fine sentences, and read off in an elegant style, which only seemed to please the ear and lull the people to sleep. How much better, then, to study and trust in God than to study and trust to head and pen; for a curse is pronounced upon all such: "Cursed is he that putteth his trust in an arm of flesh." And what is the difference whether a preacher puts it in his own arm or the arm of his neighbor? Now, I have not said this because I am biased by any sectarian principle whatever; I should condemn it in one sect as much as in another. But what said our Lord? He said to his servants, "Go and preach the Gospel to every creature." Why did he not say, "Go, read my Gospel to every creature?" Therefore, no man who reads his sermon can be justified in so doing; for Jesus has said, "Now are ye my disciples, if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you." And if they who are the servants of God go astray, and do wrong continually, and place things where they ought not to be, no wonder the churches are all the time in commotion. But to proceed:

After I had attended the meeting a while, I had a desire to attend Methodist meeting, in the same neighborhood. This was altogether new to me; but it was interesting to attend them, and so much so that I desired to be a constant attendant of them. By these meetings I was led to look more into the plan of salvation, that it was free for all: "Whosoever would, let him come and take of the waters of life freely."

It was now that the Lord began to revive his work. The powers of darkness began to gather round, that the light of the Gospel might be shut out. Beelzebub was busy, both day and night, to prevent good. He employed

5. That is, between those who preach without a written text and those who read their sermons.

all that would work for him, from the pharisee to the educated scholar in the desk, even down to the peasant and drunkard that reeled around in gutters and mud puddles in the street. It was now that these people had to suffer much; they were openly called the scum and filth of the earth, deceivers, and, in a word, all the calumny that could be heaped upon them, by those who ought to have known better. It was said that it was a disgrace for any character of respectability to attend these meetings. But I can say this much about it; I believe it arose from sectarian bigots. Not that I could suppose that they (the Methodists) were free from it, but have as much as their neighbors; and it is the case with all sects, that they are more or less bigoted. And if they are, they need not join with the devil's crew, to do all the hurt they can to one another. This, to me, does not look much like religion.

But the work of God rolled on, like an overwhelming flood. Persecution seemed to cement the hearts of the brethren and sisters together, and their songs were sweet. Their prayers and exhortations were like arrows sticking in the heart of their King's enemy, while the preachers poured the thunders of the law upon them, as if God himself had spoken to them, as he did to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai, that they should fear and tremble at his word.

My heart now became much troubled, and I felt determined to seek the salvation of my soul, for their sayings did not affect me much (although they did not want me to attend their meetings), though I had neither respectability nor character to lose but was like the partridge upon the mountain, a mark for them all to shoot at, and hiss at, and quack at—which often put me in mind of the geese and crows.⁶

But, notwithstanding, this sectarian nonsense raged most bitterly, and I do suppose that they who could help it would not be willing for their dogs to go there to meeting, for fear of bringing disgrace upon themselves. I would to God that people were more consistent than what they are. Say, would you like to lose everything that was near and dear to you, merely because your skin is white? I had to do it, merely because I had a red one. Judge ye, if this is right; and if not, stop where you are, and cease to do evil and learn to do well. But again, as I had no character to lose, I became a constant attendant on these meetings, and although a sinner before God, yet I had no disposition to make sport of the people of God or his word. Why I mention this is because so many go on purpose to sport with one another and make derision of the people of God, and those, too, who call themselves gentlemen and ladies. Such, how-

ever, disgrace themselves and are, in the judgment of good men, and their Maker, below the beasts of the field. Shame! shame! shame! to be so indecent, who boast of so much correctness and purity! But, notwithstanding the people would be so bad, yet the "Lord had respect unto his people, and his ears were open to the cries of his servants, and his ears were open to their supplication"; and in answer to prayer, he was pleased to revive his work; the Holy Ghost moved upon the face of the congregation; and his children were built up, and gathered strength at every meeting, and were built up in the most holy faith of the Gospel, and soon the power of the Holy Ghost fell powerfully among the people, so that the cries of the wounded were distinctly heard at every part of the house. The great Physician of souls was present, to heal all that would come to him and seek his favor. Thus the work of God went on most powerfully, so much so that Satan and his army retreated, at times, before it; and then would gather around it like a thick cloud of darkness, and mimic the catamount, or owls of the forest, or the young lion, which had lost its mother, and roaring to be answered. But the Lord assisted his servants to overcome them, through the word of his testimony.

It was now that conviction settled upon my mind, more and more; and I was more serious than usual. But being young, only about fourteen years of age, was somewhat flighty; though when I considered how great a sinner I was before God, and how often I had grieved the good Spirit of the Lord, my distress for mercy was very great.

At one of these meetings I was induced to laugh, not because I wanted to but to hide my distress from those around me. Being among the young people, I did not wish for them to know it; but such was my seriousness that it could not be hid, and I became affected, even unto tears, until they coursed down my cheeks like rain. And when the bold persecutors saw it, they inquired if I was one of the Lamb's people.

Brother Hill was at this time preaching from these words: "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." He spoke feelingly of his (Christ's) sufferings on the cross; of his precious blood, that flowed like a purifying river from his side; of his sustaining the accumulated weight of the sins of the whole world; and dying to satisfy the demands of justice, which could only be appeased by an infinite atonement. I felt convinced that Christ had died for all mankind; that age, sect, color, country, or situation made no difference. I felt assured that I was included in the plan of redemption, with all my brethren. No one can conceive with what joy I hailed this new doctrine, as it was called. It removed all my excuses, and I freely believed that all I had to do was to look in faith upon the Lamb of God, who made himself a free-will offering for unregenerated and wicked souls, upon the cross. My spirits were depressed; my crimes were arrayed before me; and no tongue can tell the

6. The pronouns can confuse here. "Their sayings" are those of the "respectable," like the Williamses who scorned the Methodists as vulgar and disreputable, while "their meetings" are those of the Methodists who welcomed the boy.

anguish of soul I felt. After meeting, I returned home with a heavy heart, determined to seek the salvation of my soul.

This night I slept but little; at times I would be melted down into tenderness and tears; and then again, my heart would seem as hard as adamant. I was awfully tempted; the evil one would try to persuade me that I was not in the pale of mercy. I fancied that evil spirits stood around my bed; my condition was deplorable, and awful; and I longed for day to break, as much as the tempest-tossed mariner, who expected every moment to be washed from the wreck he fondly clings to; so it was with me, upon the wreck of the world, buffeted by Satan, assailed by the world; sometimes in despair; then believing against hope; my heart, at times, seemed almost broke, while the tears of contrition coursed down my cheeks like rain.

But sin was the cause of all this, and no wonder; I groaned and wept; I had often sinned, and my accumulated transgressions had piled themselves as a rocky mountain upon my heart; and how could I endure it? The weight thereof seemed to crush me down; in the night seasons, I had fearful visions, and would often start from my sleep and gaze around the room, as I was ever in dread of seeing the evil one ready to carry me off. I continued in this frame of mind for more than seven weeks. My distress, finally, became so acute that the family took notice of it; some of them persecuted me because I was serious and fond of attending meetings. Now persecution raged on every hand, within and without; and I had none to take me by the hand and say, "Go with us and we will do you good." But in the midst of difficulties, so great to one only little more than fourteen years of age, I ceased not to pray for the salvation of my soul: Very often my exercises were so great that sleep departed from me. I was fearful that I should wake up in hell. And one night I was in bed mourning, like the dove for her absent mate, I fell into a doze. I thought I saw the world on fire; it resembled a large bed of coals, red, and glowing with heat; I shall never forget the impression it made upon my mind. No tongue can tell or possibly describe the agony of my soul; for now I was greatly in fear of dropping into hell, that awful place, where the smoke of their torments ascendeth up forever and ever. I cried earnestly for mercy; then I was carried to another place where perfect happiness seemed to pervade every part, and the inhabitants thereof. Oh, how I longed to be among them and partake of their happiness. I sighed to be freed from pain and misery; I knew that nothing but the attenuated thread of life kept me from sinking into the awful lake which I beheld. I cannot think it is in the power of human language to describe the feelings that rushed upon my mind at that moment, or thrilled through my veins; everything seemed to bear the signet of reality. When I awoke, I was glad to find it was a vision and not a reality. I went on from day to day, with my head bowed down, seeking the Savior of sinners, but without

success. The heavens appeared to be brass; my prayers wanted the wings of faith to waft them to the skies. The disease of my heart increased; the heavenly Physician had not stretched forth his hand and poured upon my soul the panacea of the Gospel; the scales had not fallen from my eyes; and no ray of celestial light had dispelled the darkness that had gathered around my soul; the cheering sound of sincere friendship fell not upon my ear. It seemed as if I was friendless, unpitied, and unknown; and at times I wished to become a dweller in the wilderness. Who can wonder, then, that I was almost in despair, surrounded by difficulties and apparent dangers? But I was resolved to seek the salvation of my soul with all my heart; to trust entirely to the Lord and, if I failed, to perish pleading for mercy at the foot of the throne. I now hung all my hopes upon the Redeemer, and clung with indescribable tenacity to the cross, on which he purchased salvation for my soul, "the vilest of the vile." The result was such as is always to be expected, when a lost and ruined sinner throws himself entirely on the Lord—*perfect freedom*. On the 15th day of *March*, in the year of our Lord, 1813, I heard a voice saying unto me, in soft and soothing accents, "*Arise, thy sins that are many are all forgiven thee; go in peace and sin no more.*" There was nothing very singular, save that the Lord stooped to lift me up, in my conversion.

I had been sent into the garden to work, and while there, I lifted up my heart to God, when, all at once, my burden and fears left me; my soul was filled with love; love to God, and love to all mankind. Oh, how my poor heart swelled with joy! And I would cry, "Glory to God in the highest." There was not only a change in my heart but everything around me. The scene was entirely changed; the works of God praised him, and I saw in everything that he had made his glory shine. My love now embraced the whole human family; the children of God, I loved most dearly. Oh, how I longed to be with them; and when any of them passed me, I would gaze at them until they were lost in the distance. I could have pressed them to my bosom, as they were more precious to me than gold, and I was always loath to part with them whenever we met together. The change, too, was visible in my very countenance. I enjoyed great peace of mind, and that peace was like a river, full, deep, and wide, and flowing continually. My mind was employed in contemplating the works of God and in praising his holy name. I dwelt so particularly upon his mercy and goodness that I could praise him aloud, even in my sleep, and when I awoke, it was glory to God and the Lamb, and my heart burnt continually with the love of God. Well might the poet say,

O for such love, let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break;
And all harmonious human tongues
The Savior's praises speak.

I continued in this happy frame of mind for some time; it was very pleasant to live in the enjoyment of pure and undefiled religion, and naught could I see but seas of rest and waves of glory before me. I wanted only the wings of angels to waft me to Paradise, that I might dwell around the throne of God forever. But alas! I dwelt in a tent below, that held me fast and would not let me go, and here to resist the fiend, the Christian's foe—to war, and tug, and toil at the oar of prayer, till time with me no more should be; and then, if faithful to my Lord, with all the faithful saints should be.

But here I can say, I had none to make me the object of their care, to encourage me to press forward in the ways of well doing. But, on the other hand, persecution raged most bitterly, and soon I was deprived of that privilege that was near and dear to me: such as the privilege of class meetings, and other means of grace, that are usually among the Methodists; and being young, I was again led astray. How hard it is to be robbed of all our earthly rights and deprived of the means of grace, merely because the skin is of a different color; such had been the case with me.⁷ I would ask the white man if he thinks that he can be justified in making just such a being as I am, or any other person in the world, unhappy; and although the white man finds so much fault because God has made us thus, yet if I have any vanity about it, I choose to remain as I am, and praise my Maker while I live that an Indian he has made.

But again: The burden that was heaped upon me, at this time, was more than I could bear, being only about fifteen years old, and I now began to relapse back again into my former state. I now became acquainted with wicked and silly youths, and one of them whose name was *Miner* and myself agreed to try some other parts of the world. Children as we were, we made the best arrangements for our journey that we could; and so off we started and steered our course for New York. With difficulties and fears, we arrived there. Many of the people thought that we were sailor boys, as we informed them that we had been privateering and had been taken and set on a shore near New London and were going home to New York, to our parents; and it being wartime, we informed the people all we knew about it. When we had arrived at New York City, and almost alone in the world, and but little economy to take care of ourselves, we thought best to engage in the war.⁸ So I became a musician in the army, while my comrade went on board of a privateer.

We now parted, and I went with the soldiers to Canada, where I experi-

7. In the 1837 edition this is revised to "with us poor colored people." At the end of this paragraph a similar revision implicates his experience with that of all people of color: "that Indians he has made."

8. The War of 1812. Aposs enlisted in April 1813 when he was fifteen.

enced all the horrors of war; fought in the great Battle of Lake Champlain, with General McComb, with Hampton and Wilkinson, at the Mills. After the war was over, I went to Montreal and from thence to upper Canada, Fort Niagara; from thence to Kingston, and through the wilderness, and saw many of my brethren, who ornamented the wood with their camps and chanted the wild beasts of prey with their songs.⁹ Being now satisfied with these regions and their curiosities, I now began to think of home and those kindred friends who had long before buried me beneath the sods of the forest, to behold my face no more forever here, being gone so long, nearly five years.

This journey was not instructing to the paths of virtue but of vice—though I did not forget the past, and often recollected those happy moments, and sighed on account of my condition, but had no heart to pray, no pious parents to instruct me, no minister of God's holy word to notice me and pour into my ear the blessed truths of God, but a poor, destitute, helpless child of the forest, all alone in the world, as it were. I now made the best of my way home to my kindred in the flesh, and when I arrived there, I found them surprised and rejoiced to see me on this side of the grave. After a while I became more steady and began once more to attend the worship of God, and had a desire to return for my backsliding state to the worship of God, that I might enjoy his smiles again. For it was now that I had become wretched and miserable through the deceitfulness of sin, and bad examples of the white soldiers, and nothing but thick darkness gathered around me; and, apparently, my situation was worse than before. It was now harder to seek the Lord than it was when I was young, for now my sins were redoubled; and it appeared indeed that there was no mercy for me. And when I went to pray and call upon God for mercy, I was met by the enemy of souls, who very readily thrust a dart at me filled with a message of despair, that there was nothing but eternal death for me; that I had committed the unpardonable sin, by having sinned against the Holy Ghost, and it was all in vain for me to try again for help in God; that he was sure that I should make up his host in hell.¹⁰

My distress became more acute than ever; but I attended the meetings where God's children meet and at last I made known my distress to them; and they, the dear children of God, comforted me, by saying that Christ would have mercy upon the worst of sinners, and encouraged me to pray; and then prayed with and for me.

9. Aposs was around the Bay of Quinte in Ontario, with either a community of Mohawks on the northeast shore or a community of Mississaugas on the southwest shore.

10. The unpardonable sin was despair, that is, to believe that one's own sin and sinfulness were greater than God's love and power.

I sought the Lord for weeks and months, and at last I began to see that I had received some of his divine approbation: To say that I immediately had as clear an evidence as I had before, I cannot. But when I acknowledged myself a sinner before the people and confessed what a sinner I had been, then the light of God's countenance broke into my soul, and I felt as if I were on the wings of angels and ready to leave this world. I united with the Methodists, and was baptized by immersion, and strove to walk with them in the way to heaven, and can say that I spent many happy hours with them in the worship of God; and to this day, I most heartily rejoice that I was brought again from the dead to praise God. After a while, I began to exercise my gift in the way of prayer and exhortation and was blest in so doing. I began to be exercised more abundantly about the salvation of precious souls and began to have a desire to call sinners to repentance in a public way; and it appeared I could not rest in any other way. But I knew that I was weak and ignorant as to the letter; and not only so, I was already a hissing-stock and a byword in the world, merely because I was a child of the forest; and to add any more occasion to the weak and scornful family of the whites was more than I wished to do; but there was no peace for me, either by day or night. Go I must, and expose my ignorance to the world, and strive to preach, or exhort sinners to repentance. I soon found men like adders, with poison under their tongues, hissing around me; and to this day, I find now and then one hissing at me. My trials again were many, and apparently more than I could bear; but I entreated of God to show me my duty and prayed to him for a token of his grace, when I went to call sinners to repentance. The Lord heard my prayer, and sent down his awakening power, and convinced sinners of the error of their ways; but I was too unbelieving, believing that I was not the character that God should take to thresh the mountains of sin. The angel of the Lord appeared to me in the visions of the night and read some extracts of John's Gospel. It appeared that before me there was a plain, and upon that the sun shone delightfully; but it was a difficult place for me to reach, being a dark and winding way, through mire, but I reached it; here I was encouraged by the angel to persevere. It was now, when I awoke, that I was troubled still the more; and night and day it was preach, preach, though many thought it would be a miracle for such an ignorant creature as I to preach the Gospel. But it is a fact that I had a difficult road to travel before I really got to preaching; but I can say that I have seen the salvation of the Lord in so doing, and God has made me, the unworthiest of all his servants, the humble, happy instrument in bringing many to bow at his scepter. To him be all the glory forever.

I would now say that I have been a regular member in the Methodist Episcopal and Protestant Methodist church for about nine years; in the Methodist Episcopal church I was an exhorter for eighteen months. I left

them in good standing, and with good credentials on April 11, 1829, and united with the Protestant Methodists, not because I had anything very special against the former, any further than their government was not republican.¹¹ Their religion is as good as it ever was. I have been in the Protestant church something like four years, as a preacher of the Gospel; and in that time have received holy orders as an authorized minister of Christ, to attend to the duties of a pastor; and I am no sectarian whatever, but boldly declare that I have preached for all that would open their doors; and all sects have bid me welcome; and this is as it should be. May God pour his Spirit upon them all, and all the world. Amen.

William Apess

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MISSIONARY'S CONSORT
(Written By Herself)

I was born in Lyme, Conn., A.D. 1788 on the third day of January. My father was a descendant of one of the Spanish islands, or a native of Spain. My mother was an English woman, a descendant of the Woods family of Lyme. My father died when I was small, and like all other fatherless children, I had to be placed out among strangers. My mother, having but little property and not being able to sustain me, being a poor child, this was done before I had arrived at my sixth year, and among people, too, who neither feared God nor regarded man but blasphemed their blessed Maker, and that too with the greatest impunity. The woman was a proud and haughty person and often raged most bitterly at me, and that too for the most trivial things. I had no pious parents or guardians to teach me the paths of virtue; I never recollect any serious impression made on my mind while I lived with these people, by their admonitions. One day it was suddenly suggested to my mind that God saw me, and I was afraid to die. I was guilty before him, and I wished to find some place to hide from his presence; but, since I have found Jesus precious to my soul, I have regretted that I sought him not when I was young; but I had none to lead me to the blessed fountain of holiness, where my sins might be washed away; there was none that cared for my precious soul.

I was now residing at Mr. D. Gillet's, in Lyme, being now about twelve years of age, and about this time a circumstance happened that it was thought best that I should go home. I went home and there stayed about two months, as senseless to the reality of a future state as the beasts of the field. And then I was again bound out to Mr. Aniel Ely, in Lyme, where I continued until I was

11. In 1837, "as I then understood it" is added, further softening any hint of his estrangement from the Methodist Episcopal church.