Captain John Smith was a soldier of fortune who had adventures in Europe and Africa before sailing to the New World to establish the first British colony in America, Jamestown. Because of a difficult and hazardous voyage, only 105 of the original party of 143 landed at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Captain Smith was held prisoner by Indians for a time and, according to legend, was sentenced to death and rescued by Pocahontas, daughter of Chief Powhatan (pow'ə tan').

Captain Smith remained in America until 1609, serving as president of the council of Jamestown. During his administration, the settlement began to recover from disease and starvation, strengthened their defenses, and planted crops. In 1608 he wrote A True Relation, the first English book written in America. But the book that sparked the most intense interest in the New Land was his Description of New England (1616). Quite promotional in nature, it lured colonists to America in search of the good life that had eluded them in the old country. The following excerpt, titled “The New Land,” is taken from this work. In 1609, suffering from a severe gunpowder wound, he returned to England, where he continued to promote Virginia until his death in 1631.

The New Land
John Smith

ho can desire more content, that hath small means, or but only his merit to advance his fortunes, than to tread and plant that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he have but the taste of virtue and magnanimity, what to such a mind can be more pleasant, than planting and building a foundation for his Posterity, got from the rude earth, by God's blessing and his own industry without prejudice to any? If he have any grain of faith or zeal in Religion, what can he do less hurtful to any, or more agreeable to God, than to seek to convert those poor Savages to know Christ, and humanity, whose labors with discretion will triple requite thy charge and pains? What so truly suits with honor and honesty, as the discovering things unknown, erecting Towns, peopling Countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things unjust, teaching virtue and gain to our native Mother-Country, a kingdom to attend her; find employment for those that are idle because they know not what to do: so far from wronging any, as to

cause Posterity to remember thee; and remembering thee, ever honor that remembrance with praise? . . .

Here nature and liberty afford us that freely, which in England we want, or it costeth us dearly. What pleasure can be more, than (being tired with any occasion ashore, in planting Vines, Fruits, or Herbs, in contriving their own grounds to the pleasure of their own minds, their Fields, Gardens, Orchards, Buildings, Ships, and other works, etc.) to recreate themselves before their own doors in their own boats upon the Sea; where man, woman and child, with a small hook and line, by angling, may take divers sorts of excellent fish, at their pleasures? And is it not pretty sport, to pull up two pence, six pence, and twelve
pence, as fast as you can haul and veer a line? He is a very bad Fisher [that] cannot kill in one day with his hook and line, one, two, or three hundred Cods: which dressed and dried, if they be sold there for ten shillings a hundred, though in England they will give more than twenty, may not both the servant, the master, and merchant, be well content with his gain? If a man work but three days in seven, he may get more than he can spend unless he will be excessive. Now that Carpenter, Mason, Gardener, Tailor, Smith, Sailor, Forgers, or what other, may they not make this a pretty recreation though they fish but an hour in a day, to take more than they can eat in a week? Or if they will not eat it, because there is so much better choice, yet sell it, or change it, with the fishermen or merchants for anything they want. And what sport doth yield a more pleasing content, and less hurt and charge than angling with a hook; and crossing the sweet air from Isle to Isle, over the silent streams of a calm Sea? Wherein the most curious may find pleasure, profit, and content.

Thus, though all men be not fishers, yet all men, whatsoever, may in other matters do as well. For necessity doth in these cases so rule a Commonwealth, and each in their several functions, as their labors in their qualities may be as profitable, because there is a necessary mutual use of all.

For Gentlemen, what exercise should more delight them, than ranging daily these unknown parts, using fowling and fishing, for hunting and hawking? And yet you shall see the wild hawks give you some pleasure, in seeing them stoop (six or seven times after one another) an hour or two together, at the schools of fish in the fair harbors, as those ashore at a fowl; and never trouble nor torment yourselves, with watching, mewing, feeding and attending them; nor kill horse and man with running and crying, “See you not a hawk?” For hunting also, the woods, lakes and rivers afford not only chase sufficient, for any that delights in that kind of toil or pleasure; but such beasts to hunt, that besides the delicacy of their bodies for food, their skins are so rich, as they will recompense thy daily labor with a Captain’s pay.

For laborers, if those that sow hemp, rape, turnips, parsnips, carrots, cabbage, and such like, give twenty, thirty, forty, fifty shillings yearly for an acre of ground, and meat, drink, and wages to use it, and yet grow rich; when better, or at least as good ground may be had and cost nothing but labor; it seems strange to me, any such should there grow poor.

My purpose is not to persuade children from their parents; men from their wives; nor servants from their masters; only such as with free consent may be spared: But that each parish, or village, in City, or Country, that will but apparel their fatherless children of thirteen or fourteen years of age, or young married people that have small wealth to live on, here by their labor may live exceeding well: provided always, that first there be a sufficient power to command them, houses to receive them, means to defend them, and meet provisions necessary for them; for any place may be over-lain and it is most necessary to have a fortress (ere this grow to practice) and sufficient masters, (as, Carpenters, Masons, Fishers, Fowlers, Gardeners, Husbandmen, Sawyers, Smiths, Spinsters, Tailors, Weavers, and such like) to take ten, twelve, or twenty, or as there is occasion, for Apprentices. The Masters by this may quickly grow rich; these may learn their trades themselves, to do the like, to a general and an incredible benefit, for King and Country, Master and Servant.

1. *pence* (pens), pennies, the basic coins of the old British currency.
2. *excessive* (ek ses’iv), wasteful.
3. *fowling* ... *hawking*. Smith suggests hunting wild fowl and fishing can substitute for the English gentleman’s usual sports of hunting game and catching birds with trained hawks.
4. *stoop*, swoop of a hawk toward its prey.
5. *mewing*, putting hawks in cages when they are shedding their feathers.
6. *over-lain*, probably “besieged.”
7. *ere* ... *practice*, before an attack occurs.