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Book Review of George Bancroft's A History of the United States

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disclosed to his Landlord and Valet de Chambre, the astounding fact, that he had blundered into the heart of France without a passport, the former fell back from him three paces. At the same moment, his affectionate and grateful servant, by a like instinctive impulse, advanced three paces towards him.

The fall of Charles I, presented to his adherents a case somewhat analogous. History tells us that they were variously affected by it. Some fell back in dismay, while others found themselves drawn more closely toward his exiled son. The former soon found that the successful party had rewards in store for timely submission and zealous service. The latter, driven from their last rallying point, by the fatal battle of Worcester, did but *submit*, and that with undisguised reluctance, to what was inevitable.

Mr. Bancroft seems to think he does honor to our ancestors, by assigning them a place among the former. Now we had always supposed that their true place was among the latter, and we had moreover a sort of pride in so supposing. There are those who will say that there is great arrogance in thus claiming for them a place among the generous and brave and faithful. Others will call it folly to insist, *at this day*, on their fidelity to a *king*, and especially to one who had lost all means of rewarding, or even of using their zeal. We beg leave to set off these imputations against each other. We beg to be allowed to speak of our fathers as they were; and trust that one half of those who shall cavil at the character we impute to them, will acquit us of any very high presumption, when they see that we only claim for them such qualities, as the other half say we ought to be ashamed of. If the same individual is sometimes found assailing us, alternately on both grounds, his consistency in so doing is his affair, not ours.

If we know anything (and we think we do) of the character of the early settlers of Virginia, they were a chivalrous and generous race, ever ready to resist the strong, to help the weak, to comfort the afflicted, and to lift up the fallen. In this spirit they had withstood the usurpation of Cromwell while resistance was practicable, and, when driven from their native country, they had bent their steps toward Virginia, as that part of the foreign dominions of England, where the spirit of loyalty was strongest. We learn from Holmes, vol. i. p. 315, that the population of Virginia increased about fifty per cent. during the troubles. The newcomers were loyalists, who were added to a population already loyal. Could *they*, without dishonor, have been hearty in favor of the new order of things? *They* whose principles had driven them into exile? *They* who, had they remained, would have fought and fallen with Montrose?

A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, from the Discovery of the American Continent to the present time; by George Bancroft. Vol. i. pp. 508. Boston: Charles Bowen. London: R. J. Kennett.

The interest we have felt in this work, is the true cause of our seeming neglect of it. This may appear paradoxical, but is easily explained.

In taking up the book, we naturally turned to that part of which we knew most, and in which we took the greatest interest. There was always something in the early history of Virginia on which we delighted to dwell, and we promised ourselves great pleasure from the contemplation of the character of our forefathers, as we expected to find it portrayed by a diligent historian, who had already acquired the character of a fine writer.

We did indeed find what was intended to be a favorable account of our ancestors. Yet we were disappointed. We found much of direct praise. Yet we were disappointed. We ought perhaps to feel obliged, by Mr. B's disposition to speak kindly of our forefathers, even while his applauses grate upon our feelings. But we are unfortunately constituted. What Mr. Bancroft gives as praise, we cannot accept as praise; and, what is worse, we cannot help suspecting, in all such cases, that a sneer, or something more mischievous, is intended.

Sterne, in his Sentimental Journey, tells us, that when on his way from Calais to Paris, he accidentally

The historical compends with which our youth was familiar, had taught us to form this estimate of the early settlers of Virginia; and we had the more faith in it, because it accords with the hereditary prejudices and prepossessions of the present day. It accounts too, for those peculiarities which, at this moment, form the distinctive features of the Virginian character. It is unique. Whether for better or worse, it differs essentially from that of every other people under the sun. How long it shall be before the "*march of mind*," as it is called, in its Juggernaut car, shall pass over us, and

crush and obliterate every trace of what our ancestors were, and what we ourselves have been, is hard to say. It may postpone that evil day, to resist any attempt to impress us with false notions of our early history, and the character of our ancestors.

We had never looked narrowly into the contemporary authority for the traditions and histories that have come down to us. Mr. Bancroft's account of the matter has led us to do so. Hence our delay to notice his work. Our research has been rewarded by the pleasure of finding full confirmation of all our preconceived notions.

The point in contest between Mr. Bancroft and the received histories is this:

The histories represent Virginia as having been loyal to the last; as having stood in support of the title of Charles II, after every other part of the British dominions had submitted to Cromwell, and as having been the first to renounce the authority of the protector, and return to their allegiance. All this Mr. Bancroft denies; and all this, except the last proposition, (that in italics) we affirm. In proof, we appeal to the very authorities on which Mr. Bancroft relies.

Indeed, we are at a loss to know how he himself escaped the conclusion against which he protests so strongly. It may not be true that Charles II was proclaimed in Virginia, as Robertson says, before he had been recognized in England. Mr. Hening (1 Sts. at Large, p. 529, quoted by Bancroft) may be right, when he says, that, if such were the fact, the public records should show it. But his book is full of proof that the records are incomplete. Is there not such proof in this instance? Let us examine.

The first act of the session of March 1660, assumes the supreme power. The second appoints Sir William Berkeley governor, and prescribes that he shall govern according to the "ancient laws of England, and the established laws" of Virginia. The third repeals all laws inconsistent with "the power now established;" and the fourth makes it penal to "say or act anything in derogation" of the government thus established.

Here is evidence enough of a new order of things, and yet it is not so very clear what that new order was. Hening says (*ubi supra*) that Berkeley was elected just as Mathews had been. Wherein then was the innovation? The recital in the preamble of the act last quoted, (1 Hen. Sts. p. 531) may give a clue to this.

It is there set forth that "it hath been thought necessary and convenient by the present Burgesses of this Assembly, the representatives of the people, during the time of these distractions, to take the government into their own power, with the conduct of the ancient laws of England, till such lawfull commission or commissions appear to us, as wee may DUTIFULLY submit to, according us by DECLARATION SET FORTH BY US doth MORE AMPLY appeare."

Now where is this MORE AMPLE DECLARATION, concerning their idea of such a commission as they might DUTIFULLY submit to? Is not here an hiatus *valde deflendus*? Yet such are the tattered manuscripts from which Mr. Hening's compilation is made, that the loss of the whole or a part of any document is quite common.

Enough appears, however, to show that this declaration did not amount to a recognition of Charles as king

de facto; because the above mentioned Act I, directs that all writs shall issue in the name of the assembly. But it is equally clear that he was; at least tacitly, acknowledged as king *de jure*; that the government was established provisionally, and subject to his pleasure; and that the power assumed was held FOR HIM.

Now when we consider these things; when we find Robertson, on the authority of *Beverley* and *Chalmers*, saying that "as Sir William Berkeley refused to act under an usurped authority, they (the assembly) boldly erected the royal standard, and acknowledging Charles II to be their lawful sovereign, proclaimed him with all his titles;" we may doubt the accuracy of the statement, *in extenso*, but we cannot agree that even that statement shall be stigmatized as a fiction.

Mr. Hening tells us (1 Sts. p. 513) that *Beverley* was near the scene of action, and wonders that he should have *misunderstood* or *misrepresented*. Wonderful indeed it *would* have been; for in March 1662, we find him clerk to the House of Burgesses. See 2 Hen. Sts. p. 162. We find too, in the same volume, p. 544, that Berkeley refused to act without the advice of the council; that on receiving this he agreed to act, and that "HIS declaration TO BE governor (not the act electing him) were PROCLAIMED by order of the assembly." Berkeley (be it remembered) was the last royal governor, and his commission had never been revoked, his election is not for any specific term, and the act is accompanied with a condition that he shall call an assembly at least once in *every two years*. How is this, if he was only elected to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Mathews, who, just one year before, had been elected to *serve two years*. Is not Berkeley in of his old commission?

But of the loyalty of Virginia there can be no doubt. That this was in no wise abated by the fall of Charles I, and the exile of his son, is equally certain. The act, passed immediately after, making it high treason to justify the murder of the one, or to deny the title of the other, puts that out of dispute. They certainly did not stand out, when the battle of Dunbar and the fall of Montrose had left the loyal party without hope either in England or Scotland. But look at the very act of surrender. Study its terms, and see the temper displayed there. Do they acknowledge the *authority* of parliament or protector? No: they do but *submit* to power. There is no profession of allegiance, nor was any oath of allegiance ever administered during the commonwealth. They engage indeed so to administer their power as not to contravene "the government of the commonwealth of England, and the laws there established." But this was a proceeding which a respect for *private rights* required. They stipulate moreover, that Virginia shall enjoy as free a trade as England herself, and put an end to all the authority of commissions from England. It was by such commissions that the king had governed. That "government by commissions and instructions" is declared to be for the future "null and void." The usurper had clutched the sceptre of the king of *England*. That of the king of *Virginia* he was not allowed to touch. Accordingly no more commissions came from England. We hear no more of them until the election of Berkeley. We are then told that the government is provisional, and only to endure until a *lawful commission* shall appear. What

commission? Whose? The protector's? The parliament's? No. The act of surrender (1 Hen. St. p. 363) had abolished them. But it had not abolished the rights of the king; and the power of the assembly and governor is thus made to wait on them.

Strange as it may seem, the act of surrender contains no word recognizing the rightful authority of the parliament, nor impeaching that of the king. On the contrary, as if to exclude any such idea, this remarkable clause is inserted:

"That there be one sent *home*, at the present governor's choice, to give an account to HIS MA'YTY, of the surrender of HIS COUNTRY."

Home! There is a simple pathos in the use of this word here, which speaks volumes to the heart. None can feel more deeply than we do, how utterly unworthy of this steady and passionate loyalty, was the wretch who was its object. But they knew not his faults. They only knew him in his lineage and his misfortunes; and though he had no place to lay his head, yet wherever their messenger might find the outcast, there was the home of their hearts. We mean nothing profane. God forbid! But we cannot help being reminded of the weak warm-hearted boy, who stood by his master's cross, and gazed with looks of love upon his dying face, when the stronger and bolder of his followers had "forsaken him and fled." We are more proud to be descended from the men who stood forward in the business of that day, than we should be to trace ourselves to Adam, through all the most politic and prudent self-seekers that the world has ever seen.

But to return to Mr. Bancroft. Affairs being thus settled, things went on quite peaceably; and he hence infers that the Virginians were entirely reconciled to Cromwell and his parliament. Moreover, he finds them claiming the supreme power, as residing in the colonial legislature; and from this he most strangely infers a loyalty to the parliament, the model of which he represents them as so eager to copy. Now Mr. Bancroft himself tells us (p. 170) that as early as 1619, Virginia first set *the world* the example of equal representation. From that time they held that the supreme power was in the hands of the colonial parliament, then established, and the king as king of Virginia. Now the authority of the king being at an end, and no successor being acknowledged, it followed as a *corollary from their principles* that no power remained but that of the assembly; and so they say. Does this look like a recognition of Cromwell and his parliament, or the reverse?

But Mr. Bancroft seems to think that Virginia could not have failed to be weaned from her attachment to the king, and won over to Cromwell and his parliament, by the magnanimity and justice of their proceedings. He adverts to the article in the treaty of surrender, by which Virginia had stipulated for a trade as free as that of England, and assures us that "its terms were *faithfully observed till the restoration.*" (p. 241.) He adds at p. 246, that "the navigation act of Cromwell was not designed for the oppression of Virginia, and was not enforced within her borders." Hence he says (p. 241) that the pictures drawn by Beverley, Chalmers, Robertson, Marshall, and Holmes, of the discontent produced by commercial oppression, are all "pure fiction."

Now what says the reader to the following extract

from a memorial on behalf of the trade of Virginia, laid before Cromwell in 1656?

"What encouragement the poor planter has had to sweeten his labor, since the Dutch were excluded trade, appears by the *general complaint* of them all, that they are the merchant's slaves, who will allow them scarce a half-penny a pound for their tobacco. Beside that, since the Dutch trade was prohibited, till this year there has been a great deal of their tobacco left behind for want of freight, and spoiled, to the almost undoing of divers of them." * * * "This is an inconvenience which has attended *that act for navigation*," "but unless it be a *little* dispensed withal, it will undoubtedly ruin part of the trade it was intended to advance. 'Tis true the people of themselves, some of them at least, have this year endeavored their own relief by *secret trade with the Dutch*," &c. &c.

Is not this decisive? If it does not prove the fact, it at least proves the complaint. Mr. Bancroft denies both. Perhaps this paper is a forgery. Perhaps Mr. Bancroft never saw it. YES HE DID. It is the same paper to which he refers at p. 247, note 2, in the very paragraph in which he says that Cromwell's navigation act was not designed for, nor enforced in Virginia. Mr. B. indeed says "the war between England and Holland necessarily interrupted the intercourse of the Dutch with the English colonies." But this memorial is of the year 1656, and peace had been concluded April 15, 1654.

Robertson speaks of the colonial governors during the interregnum, as having been *named* (that is his word) by Cromwell. This is roundly denied. On what authority? None. The election proves nothing certainly. It might have been a mere form, though it was probably something more. But what was easier than a recommendation which it would be perhaps best to conform to? How often was the speaker of the house of commons so chosen in England?

Mr. Bancroft's view of this matter stands thus: Virginia elected her own governors. Bennett, Digges, and Mathews, were commonwealth's men. She freely chose them as governors. Ergo. She had gone over to the commonwealth.

Now there is no proof of either of these propositions. We doubt both. For if it were established that these gentlemen were, as we suspect, forced on the colony, it would not be clear that they were therefore commonwealth's men. We doubt very much whether any such were to be found. They might have been the least violent among the royalists, and therefore preferred.

Of Col. Bennett we know something traditionally. The idea that he was a parliamentarian is new to us. We should require some better proof than the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. He was indeed, one of the parliamentary commissioners at the time of the surrender. So was Claiborne, a warm friend and favorite of Sir William Berkeley, continued in his office of secretary of state, by the legislature, at Berkeley's request, after his restoration. 1 Hen. Sts. p. 547. Bennett himself retained his place at the council board, where he still found himself, as before the restoration, in the company of cavaliers, such as Morrison, Yardly, Ludlow, &c. &c.*

* The characters and principles of these gentlemen may throw some light on the subject. If we can ascertain those of the mem-

If then Bennett was, as we conjecture, recommended to the assembly by the parliamentary commissioners, what induced them to choose him? The answer is given by Mr. Bancroft at p. 241. He had become ob-

bers of the council, elected by the assembly, we shall have a clue to the temper of the assembly itself. We may know the tree by its fruit. If we find that body electing to a place in the council men of very decided political character, we shall have a right to believe that those associated with them by the vote of the same body were, at least, not zealous members of the opposite party. In this case the maxim "*noscitur a socio*," will surely apply. Let us see what lights we can bring to bear on this subject.

In Churchill's voyages (vol. vi. p. 171) is "A Voyage to Virginia, by Col. Norwood." He was a cavalier, and came over in company with Francis Morrison, also a cavalier. Norwood was also a kinsman of Berkeley. Arriving here, they found Sir Henry Chichely, Col. Yardly, Wormely, and Ludlow, whom they recognized as old friends and cavaliers.

Now in the council elected along with Bennett, immediately after the surrender, we find two of these gentlemen, Yardly and Ludlow. The latter had been a member of Berkeley's council that had concurred (October 1649) in declaring it to be high treason to defend the proceedings of parliament against Charles I, or to deny the title of his son. West, the first named member of Bennett's council, had occupied the same place in that of Berkeley. Pettus and Bernard were also members of both. We might conjecture that they had dissented from the act referred to, if we did not find them associated with Yardly and Ludlow. We find too that Harwood, who had been speaker of the assembly of October 1649, was also one of Bennett's council. The whole number was thirteen, and here are six notorious royalists. Of what complexion could the other seven have been? Two of them, Taylor and Freeman, were members of the assembly of 1647, from two most loyal counties.

In July, 1653, Col. Walter Chiles, who had been a member in October 1649, was speaker.

In November, 1654, Col. Edward Hill, another of them, was speaker. He was in high favor after the restoration. He was transferred to the council in 1655.

We find the name of Charles Norwood, as clerk of the assembly, from that time.

In March, 1655, Col. Thomas Dew was a member of the council. He had been speaker of the assembly in 1652, the first elected under Bennett. We know (we do not ask historians to tell us this) that he was a loyal clansman, who was driven to Virginia by his hatred of the usurpers, and to accommodate his name to English orthography, changed the spelling from that of "Dhu"—since made familiar to all readers of poetry—by Sir Walter Scott. He is now (in 1655) in the council, making in that body seven known loyalists.

In the legislature of that year, we have the name of Sir Henry Chichely.

In 1656, Col. Morrison (the companion of Ludlow's voyage) is speaker.

In the next assembly (1658) John Smith was speaker. We know nothing certainly of him; but it was that assembly that deposed Mathews. They gave him Berkeley's friend, Claiborne, as secretary of state; and for councillors, among others, West, Pettus, Hill, Dew, and Bernard. They made some changes, but turned out none of that party. At the same time they introduced Col. John Carter, another of Norwood's friends. He had been chairman of the committee, on the report of which the assembly had just acted. Horsenden, another of the same committee, was elected to the council at the same time.

In March 1659, Hill, who had left his place in the council, is again speaker. In March 1660, the assembly which reinstated Berkeley, retained Bonnett and five other of the old councillors, of whose characters we have no other indication. These were Robins, Perry, Walker, Read, and Wood. What they were may be inferred from this fact. Morrison, moreover, was elected at the same time.

Can we believe, in the face of these facts, that the loyalty of Virginia ever wavered? That it bowed before the storm we know. That the assembly, in one instance, passed a vote of disfranchisement against the author of a seditious paper, appears in 1 Hon. Sts. p. 380. But we also find that this vote was reversed as soon as they heard of the death of Oliver Cromwell.

noxious to Berkeley, and had been "compelled to quit Virginia." For what does not appear. Hardly for disloyalty. In 1 Hon. Sts. p. 235, we have his name and that of Mathews signed to a paper of as enthusiastic loyalty as was ever penned, presented to the king after his rupture with parliament.

But what reason have we for supposing this interference with the freedom of election? We answer that our reasons are twofold.

1. The authority of Robertson, who relies on Beverley and Chalmers, and doubtless consulted all the authorities he could find, is entitled to some weight. Had he said the governors were appointed by Cromwell, we should know that he spoke at random. But his use of the equivocal word "*named*," shows that he knew what he was talking about, and considered what he was saying.

2. But in Hen. Sts. 499 to 505, is an evidence that we think conclusive. Mathews took it into his head to dissolve the assembly. They immediately voted the act a nullity, and civilly invited the Governor to go on with the business. To this he assented, revoking the order, but proposing to "referre the dispute of the power of dissolving and the legality thereof to his Highnesse the Lord Protector." This was in 1658, and the Lord Protector was then Richard Cromwell, and not Oliver, under whom Mathews had been elected.

The house took fire immediately at this proposed appeal, and deposed Mathews, and having solemnly declared the "power of government" to reside in themselves, they re-elect him, saying that he is "by us invested" with the office.

Now what did this mean, if circumstances had not been such as justify the notion entertained by Mathews that he derived his authority from some other source, so as to have the right of dissolving the assembly. Had there been no interference on the part of Cromwell, this whole proceeding would have been idle and ridiculous. Yet it is obviously the proceeding of men not disposed to trifle, and who well understood what they were about.

Now compare this peremptory proceeding with that which took place soon after on the death of Mathews. Richard Cromwell had then abdicated, and there was therefore no shadow of authority in England to restrain the action of the assembly. But what do they do? They elect Sir William Berkeley provisionally, making the continuance of his authority and their own to determine on the coming of a "lawful commission." Now, such commission, as we have already shown, could only come from the king; it was his plan of government; it had not been practiced by the parliament; and the right to exercise it had been denied to them and renounced by them. Does not this conduct of the assembly show that they anticipated the restoration of one whose right they had always maintained?

So far, we have done little more than to express our dissent from Mr. Bancroft's conclusions. In a single instance, to which we have adverted, he must be suspected of wilfully misrepresenting his authorities. We allude to the memorial addressed to Cromwell in favor of the trade of Virginia, of which he was certainly aware, and which clearly disproves his own statement. Had this been the only instance of the sort, we should have passed it over more lightly. But it does not stand alone.

His main drift, in his account of these transactions, seems to be, to show that Virginia had taken the infection of Republicanism; that she was effectually weaned from her allegiance; that she desired nothing but to set up for herself; and that the use she proposed to make of the abdication of Richard, and the consequent suspension of executive power in England, was to establish the supremacy of her legislature. In this view the assembly are represented as requiring of Berkeley the distinct acknowledgment of their authority, which he, we are told, recognized without a scruple. "I am" said he, "but the servant of the assembly."

Now what will the reader say when he reads the passage from which these words are copied. It runs thus:

"You desire me to do that concerning your titles and claims to land in this northern part of America, which I am in no capacity to do; for I am but the servant of the assembly: *neither do they arrogate to themselves any power, farther than the miserable distractions in England force them to.* For when God shall be pleased to take away and dissipate the unnatural divisions of their native country, *they will immediately return to their professed obedience.*"

Is this an assertion of the supremacy of the assembly? Is it not the very reverse? He disclaims any power to act in a certain behalf. Why? Because he is but the servant of the assembly; he has no power but what is given by them, and *they do not pretend to have any such to give.* On their principles, they could not. Looking for the restoration, they expected "some commission" by which any authority they could establish would be superseded; their provisional government was the result of necessity, and its powers were limited to the nature of that necessity. Every thing that could wait was made to wait.

What is the meaning of this strange attempt to pervert the truth of history, and to represent Virginia as being as far gone in devotion to the parliament as Massachusetts herself? Why does it come to us, sweetened with the language of panegyric, from those who love us not, and who habitually scoff at and deride us? Is it intended to dispose us to acquiesce in the new notion, "that the people of the colonies, all together, formed one body politic before the revolution?" Against this proposition we feel bound to protest. We hold ourselves prepared to maintain the negative against all comers and goers, with tongue and pen; and to resist the practical results, if need be, with stronger weapons. When Virginians shall learn to kiss the rod of power; to desert their friends in trouble, and to take part with the strong against the weak, it will then be in character to disparage the memory of our forefathers, and to say, they were even such as ourselves. But until we have done something to dishonor our lineage, let us speak of them as they were,

"Faithful among the faithless;

Among the faithless, faithful only they."

We have said nothing of Mr. Bancroft's style. It is our duty as critics to take some notice of it; and, we apprehend, he might think himself wronged if we did not. He is obviously very proud of it; and, in saying this, we fear we have condemned it. An ambitious style is certainly not the style for history. To say nothing of the frequent sacrifice of perspicuity to orna-

ment, there is a tone in it which excites distrust. We find ourselves, we know not how, diffident of statements which come to us in the language of declamation, antithesis and epigram.

In our boyhood Hume's history was put into our hands; and we remember our surprise at hearing something said in praise of his style. *Style!!* Was that style? A plain story, told just as we should have told it ourselves? Partridge would as soon have thought of admiring Garrick's acting. The king was the actor for his money, and Mr. Bancroft's would then have been the style for ours.

We have no doubt, for example, we should have been delighted with the following passage, introduced into a description which closes the author's remarks on the very question we have been discussing. We give it for the benefit of any of our young friends, who may be preparing an oration for the fourth of July. It would be nothing amiss, on such an occasion, for a "moonish youth" not yet out of his first love scrape. But from a grave historian, with a beard on his chin, we cannot approve it. We give it as a sample. *Ex pede Herculem.* "The humming-bird, so brilliant in its plumage, and so delicate in its form, quick in motion, yet not fearing the presence of man, haunting about the flowers, like the bee gathering honey, rebounding from the blossoms out of which it sips the dew, and as soon returning" to renew its many addresses to its delightful objects, "was ever admired as the smallest and the most beautiful of the feathered race."

Alas! Alas! If this is the way to write history, we fear we shall have to leave our northern neighbors to tell the story their own way. It is a hard case. Let them write our books, and they become our masters. But we cannot help ourselves. We cannot contend with those who can write history in this style. Our only defence is not to read. A more effectual security would be, not to buy. In that case they would not write; and we should not only avoid being led into error, but might escape the injury of being misrepresented to others. But Mr. Bancroft's book is in print, and we must abide the mortification of having all who may read it, think of our ancestors as he has represented them. We have comfort in believing that they will not be very numerous.