

## XXVI

### WHEN AMERICANS WERE ENGLISH

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*“The Americans are the sons—not the bastards of England . . .”*

*“It is my opinion that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the colonies. . . .”*

*“I rejoice that America has resisted. . . .”*

*“You cannot conquer America. . . .”*—*Speeches of LORD CHATHAM relative to the American Revolution.*

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Settlements in Virginia, Maryland, New England—Love of Local Liberty—English Tradition

FROM the settlement of Virginia, in 1607, to the peace between England and France, in 1763, the colonial power of England developed almost uninterruptedly in almost every portion of the globe. By conquest she had secured Canada and India, but by the free enterprise of individual settlers she had become the mistress of other lands many times more valuable than all the wealth of the Indies, to say nothing of the Canada of that day. But this great power encouraged, at the Court of George III., a spirit dangerous to English liberty—a spirit congenial to a king essentially German in his distrust of representative government; a spirit that counted national greatness by the number of battalions in the field rather than by the happiness of his average citizen. George III. was not the man to understand why Eng-

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lish troops could in a short campaign conquer India and Canada, yet be baffled by colonial militia in Massachusetts, Barbados, and Virginia—he was hopelessly incapable of understanding the character of the people over whom, for their punishment, Providence had sent him to rule.\*

In the early career of the American colonies the English settlers felt socially, religiously, and politically as Englishmen in England. They had no newspapers of their own, no towns worth mentioning, and no political interest that extended further than defending their settlements from Indians and securing good prices for their products. For the first generation or two, while the colonists were mainly English-born, the settlers of Barbados or Virginia were as keenly alive to the "home" questions of the day as though their plantations lay in Devonshire or Yorkshire. The cavalier of England remained a cavalier in the new world, and the war between the Stuarts and the Parliamentary party was waged with but scant mitigation on the other side of the Atlantic. When the head of Charles I. fell in the lap of Cromwell, the act was re-presented in the new world with varying degrees of spirit. In Barbados the government of the Commonwealth was defied by an armed demonstration, and the Virginians at once proclaimed Charles II. their king—even going so far as to send a special committee to invite him from Europe that he might found the

\* "Par la raison même que nous avons pu juger cette nation (Angleterre) de plus près, nous sommes les premiers à admirer la clairvoyance, l'habileté, la ténacité de son gouvernement, l'esprit d'entreprise et d'initiative hardie de son peuple, la solidarité de ses fils, qui lui font une âme nationale égale à aucune autre dans la bonne comme dans la mauvaise fortune."—[Colonel Monteil, 1899, *Revue Hebdomadaire*.]

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“kingdom” of Virginia! His lot might have been more tolerable than that of the Portuguese incumbents of the Brazilian throne, but hardly such as to satisfy his monarchical pretensions.

Judging by the light of subsequent history, it is fair to assume that had this invitation been then accepted, there would have been two headless Stuarts instead of one.

As time passed, however, the American colonies along the Atlantic coast realized, with sadness and some anger, that they had as little to hope from one dynasty as another; that the caprice of a king is but little more harmful than the ignorance or indifference of a parliament, and that in politics, as in private life, the absent are usually adjudged in the wrong.

The government of Cromwell confirmed all the chartered liberties of the colonies; but in 1651 was passed a navigation act which aroused universal colonial resentment, in that it forbade the Americans from trading in other than English ships to and from England. This measure was aimed especially at the Dutch, who at that time did the carrying trade more efficiently and at lower rates than the mother country. In Virginia there was much complaint, because, while the cost of carriage increased, the price of tobacco decreased.

This Navigation Act of Cromwell was, however, so mild an infringement of colonial interest compared with what was enacted by Charles II. on his accession, to say nothing of the measures enacted by James II., that even the most loyal of Virginians realized that their commercial and political salvation lay no longer in

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petitions to Whitehall, but in their own cunning, if not strength.

The first measure of Charles II. on his accession (in 1660) was to forbid any alien from transacting business in the colonies. In 1663 no produce was allowed to enter the colonies excepting in English ships. In 1672 America was forbidden to manufacture any article that might compete with English industry.

Here we see the beginning of that narrowest of all mercantile systems which regarded the colony simply as an estate to be exploited without reference to the interests of the colonists themselves.

This system reproduced much that was most objectionable in the Spanish system, with far less justification; for the American colonies had settled themselves without cost to the mother country and asked not even military protection.

With the Stuarts an end was put to religious toleration in Virginia, and as for New England, already in 1634, Archbishop Laud took into his own hands the supervision of all emigrants for Massachusetts, permitting none to go thither excepting such as were "orthodox." \*

But these measures did not prevent the steady development of the colonies in population and wealth, for they were to a large extent modified in America, if not completely ignored. Contraband trade flourished, and the English Government was so much oc-

\* Laud was born in 1573, and decapitated, by order of the Long Parliament, in 1645. In 1633 he was made Archbishop of Canterbury, and by his readiness to support the royal measures in opposition to those of the people he earned the gratitude of the Stuarts—much as Bismarck in 1863 earned the gratitude of William I. of Prussia.

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cupied with European affairs that its efforts in America were never backed by adequate means for their enforcement.

As early as 1670, Virginia, which sixty years before had been on the point of being abandoned as worthless, counted 38,000 white inhabitants with 2,000 black slaves. The militia force numbered 8,000, and was called out each month for drill, while her frontiers were protected by five forts mounting thirty pieces of artillery.

In spite of what had happened, the royalist sentiment still survived until Charles II. alienated his last supporters in Virginia when he handed over this republic, as he might have done an English farm, to a couple of his personal friends. Such crass political blundering as this was required—such cruel indifference to human rights, before our loyal English ancestors in America even whispered about political independence!

Indeed, in those days the torch of liberty, after kindling freedom on the American seaboard, had almost expired in the land of its origin; and while Englishmen of New England, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia were perfecting parliamentary government and broadening themselves in the practice of political and religious toleration, the people of England were apparently sinking to a lower social and moral plane under the influence of a statecraft modelled after the pattern of Versailles.

Maryland, which had been founded in 1632 by Lord Baltimore, enacted (in 1649) "that no person professing to believe in Jesus Christ shall from henceforth be

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any ways troubled in respect of his or her religion"—an act almost unique of its kind and as startling to Europe, in that century, as was in 1776 the Declaration that all men were politically equal. It was reserved to Maryland, founded by a Roman Catholic, to be the first American colony, perhaps the first of Christian States, in which all Christian sects were not merely tolerated, but cordially welcomed.

Quakers fled thither from New England, and already in the same year (1649) a hundred Puritans settled in Maryland under Lord Baltimore's protection, to escape the High Church persecution of Virginia.

Persecution was the order of the day. Scarcely any liberal-minded man was so radical as to desire its abolition—but there were many who desired that it should be done on a democratic basis. They stoutly resented the arbitrary persecution of a king or an archbishop, but maintained with equal stoutness the right of the people's representatives to pass measures of intolerance. Thus the Puritans of New England, organized on the basis of universal suffrage and with officials elected only for a single year, enacted measures which to a Quaker, a High Church man, to say nothing of a Roman Catholic, appeared monstrous. But while the New England statute-books bristled with savage penalties for those who transgressed a narrow theological creed, let us not forget that the Puritan applied this law to himself and invited no man to suffer with him—nor did he go out of his way to inconvenience those who preferred other ways of salvation. There was no Inquisition in New England, there was no pretension of punishing mere heresy that was not linked

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with an overt act contrary to the statute-book. There were isolated cases of hardship where fanaticism availed itself of a legal pretext for the purpose of indulging in cruelty; but these cases resembled those, happily few, which marred the annals of Queen Elizabeth. The law was severe, but it was rarely applied, excepting when obtrusively challenged by such as sought the notoriety of martyrdom. It is a favorite subject for contemporary humor—the intolerance of our Puritan ancestors while professing liberty for themselves—it is a theme particularly congenial to churchmen with a leaning toward the Papacy. But such jibes can have but scant currency so long as our libraries preserve authentic records of what was achieved by the men who first settled New England.