

LAND HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES.

IN SIX CHAPTERS.

(For the Review.)

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(CHAPTER II Continued.)

To show that Virginia's history repeats the evils that always have manifested themselves where land ownership concentrates into the hands of the few, we quote from a conservative English writer: "No one can read the annals of the time," says Doyle, "and not feel that the political atmosphere was full of venality and corruption. The smaller public offices were constantly turned into sources of unrighteous gain. The transfer of land was rendered costly by the manipulation of official fees. The wages paid to members of the Assembly were exorbitant and were increased by various illegitimate allowances. Frugality in the management of public business was neglected, and the committees of the Assembly chose to meet at an alehouse rather than at the Court-House itself. "Meanwhile it was shown by many indications that the representatives were wholly out of harmony with their constituents. Popular grievances went unheeded. Indeed the Assembly itself, because of its extravagance and its corruption, was the main grievance. The colonists felt that they were mocked with the nominal enjoyment of free institutions, while in truth they had lost all control over the conduct of those who professedly represented them." Thus we can see that what happened in Rome and in England which borrowed its land system from Rome, came to pass in Virginia. As soon as the land was monopolized by the few, the government became corrupt and the instrument of exploitation in the interests of the landlords. It is so now. It will always be so with the present land system enthroned.

Let us examine the evidence of the later history of Virginia. By 1640, or twenty years preceding the restoration of Charles II, the population had multiplied four-fold, reaching almost 40,000. In spite of restrictions, the export trade had steadily increased. There were friendly relations with the Indians. There was tranquility and a certain tone of contentment. But with all this in their favor, "the settlers became aware of defects in the social and political system which had been overlooked in the presence of a rapidly increasing prosperity." "Shortcomings in the social state of the colony, the accumulation of land in a few hands, the lack of towns, of schools and of churches, all began to be felt, and even if not laid directly to the charge of the government, served later to swell the general sense of discontent. The political atmosphere was full of ominous warnings. The discontent which was engendered by internal corruption was stimulated by an attack from without.

"When Charles II returned to the throne, the law was re-enacted that the English colonies, including Virginia, should trade only with England, in Eng-

lish ships, manned by Englishmen." This law was enforced without mercy. The entire commerce of Virginia was thus held in the inexorable clutch of England. This was an enormous blunder. It crippled the colony, discouraged production, and brought the Virginia planter to the verge of despair. To retaliate, the planters resorted to the short-sighted policy of destroying a part of the crop to enhance the price. This failed as it always does. The price of tobacco fell almost to nothing. The Virginia planter was reduced to sore straits. With this to exasperate as restive a people as the Virginians, there were other irritating circumstances in addition. Charles II rewarded his supporters with patents and grants of land, mostly in America. Virginia had become a Royal Province in 1624 and was so up to this time—1660. Without a word of warning, by the scratch of the royal pen, Virginia with her 40,000 inhabitants, was conveyed, as a man conveys his private estate, to two of the King's favorites, Lord Arlington and Lord Culpepper, two of the trickiest courtiers of the realm. They were to have "all that entire tract, territory, region, and dominion of land and water commonly known as Virginia together with the territory of Accomack, to be held by the said noblemen for a space of thirty-one years at a yearly rent of forty shillings." They were to have all the quit-rents and lands that had reverted to the crown; to make conveyance in fee simple; and to manage all things after their pleasure. No holder of land by valid title was to be disturbed, but with this single exception they were to be masters of Virginia. This portentous grant raised a great outcry. All the honest men "squatting" on the Crown lands were liable to be turned out of their homes at a moment's warning. The revenues of the colony were to be received by the new owners. They were to appoint the public officers, lay off new counties, and *have control of the church*. The colonists resisted this outrage at the very beginning. An Agent was sent to England to see the King's councillors. A long wrangle ensued and a compromise was reached, by which a Charter was to be granted to the Colonist with such provisions as should prevent their liberties being endangered in the future. Also a provision that no tax should be laid on them without the consent of the governor, Council, and Assembly. Moreover in their pitiful dependence and utter helplessness in this extreme hour, "they agreed to form the commonality of Virginia into a corporation for the purpose of purchasing the territorial rights of Culpepper and Arlington."

The result of this grant although modified by the charter, left great tracts of land in possession of these two Lords. Culpepper was later appointed Governor. "He began his career in Virginia saddled with the reputation of an unscrupulous extortioner and at enmity with no small portion of the community. He was drawing quit-rents from an enormous territory on which he had never expended a single farthing." He is represented as actuated throughout his whole career by the meanest rapacity, losing no opportunity of increasing his income. Two years later for an annual pension in present values of about \$12,000 he abandoned the larger share of his Virginia grant, retaining only what is called the Northern Neck of several thousand acres. Wealth comes easy when some King gives one land to command labor.

We should learn from this what rapacious characters are developed by the unlimited power over men through the ownership of land. Nor can this class trust the ballot in the hands of the landless man. In 1670 the Governor limited the franchise to landholders. The man driven from the soil must have no voice in righting the wrongs that oppress him. Disfranchising men of any color is always an effort of the landlord element to prevent concerted effort on the part of the laboring masses to regain what has been taken from them.

When the Virginia colony was but fifty-six years old, the smouldering embers of discontent burst forth in a flame of resentment toward the constituted authority representing royalty. The colonists were growing restive under the galling yoke of royal authority. The democratic aristocracy fought first and last for the doctrine that the personal right and safety of the citizen was paramount to all other considerations. Their grievances were many and it needed but a small spark to ignite the tinder. The chief actor in producing this discontent was the Governor, Sir William Berkley. He had come to Virginia in 1642 and had been chief executive from that time till 1676, excepting an interval of about eight years. He was a Cavalier of Cavaliers; believed in monarchy and the established church as a devotee believes in his saint. He believed in swift and bloody punishment for rebels and dissenters. He lived at Greenspring on an estate of about a thousand acres, not far from Jamestown. Here he had plate, servants, carriages, seventy horses, and fine orchards, and entertained in his manor-house after a royal fashion. With the graces and amenities of his social world, he welcomed all who stood for King and Church with courtly smiles, bowing low in silk and lace; and when a wealthy planter was ushered in and feasted, he used the occasion to cast vituperation upon his enemies. He was a merciless zealot and was known as the Emperor of Virginia.

In 1670, after a peace of nearly thirty years, the Indians threatened a massacre. At the urgent request of the frontier settlers the Governor would not make any move to stop these serious encroachments for fear, some say, that he would lose his monopoly of the Indian fur trade. Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., offered his services to the Governor to take a command and drive off the Indians. But Berkley refused to give him a commission. Thereupon, Bacon declared that if the Indians committed any more depredations, he would fight them, "commission or no commission." Bacon was a natural orator, a man of brains and standing, owned two large states, was only twenty-eight years old but had been a member of the Assembly, and was now to be the Cromwell of Virginia.

The news came that on Bacon's upper estate the Indians had killed his overseer and a servant; that they were carrying fire and tomahawk throughout the frontier. The people rushed to arms and Bacon was clamorously called upon to take the command. He made a speech full of bold and vehement spirit and enlarged upon the grievances of the times—an ominous indication of the coming events just one hundred years later. He sent Berkley for a commission, but it was not forthcoming. Berkley feared Bacon's popularity and

did not want him to gain fresh laurels by having the name of saving the country from the ravages of the Indian. But Bacon, true to his word, assumed the command, met the enemy at a place near Richmond and completely routed them. Berkley then issued a proclamation denouncing Bacon and his followers as rebels. The war was then on between Bacon, whom the people loved, and Berkley whom the people hated. Both sides began to raise an army. Berkley later declared Bacon a traitor. Rebellion was in the air. Two little armies met and the Governor's forces were routed, But at the moment of victory for the rebels, their idol and leader died, and the sudden protest of the people against bad government came to naught. Bacon's men disbanded and went to their homes broken-hearted. Now that the white-haired Governor had the rebels at his mercy, he turned on them with tiger-like ferocity. He had promised his fellowers that if they won he would confiscate the estates of the rebels and give them to his friends. This he now proceeded to do, giving to Virginia as black and villainous a record of land-robbery as is found on the blood-stained pages of Irish extortion and confiscation. Twenty-three of the leaders were hung, fifty of the large estates and small were confiscated, and the women and children of the rebel leaders were turned out of homes and left to the mercies of their friends. This was the last important event in the land history of Virginia during the seventeenth century. It was the first American Revolution against the landed aristocracy of England, and had Washington lost we would have witnessed the same scenes of murder and confiscation on a gigantic scale.

It yet remains to review the growth and development of the colony under the plantation system, the century following this rebellion and preceeding the Revolution. Like every people rooted and grounded in land aristocracy, the same evils and vices appeared among them, though not to such a degree as in England during the same period when the rapacious and gambling spirit of the Georges was eating like a cancer into the morals of society. According to Cooke, "An immense change had taken place in society since the early plantation time. What was rude had become luxurious. The log-houses gave place to fine manor-houses. The pioneer who had scarcely dared to stir abroad without fire-arms, was now a ruffled dignitary who rode in his coach-and-four as a justice, a vestryman, or a worshipful member of the House of Burgesses. His land, purchased for a trifle, had become a great and valuable estate. No creditor could touch it, for it was entailed on to his oldest son. The wilderness of Virginia had been turned into a new England where the Lord of the Manor ruled and his son would rule after him." "This development of the first adventurers into nabobs and lords may be said to have fairly begun with the Cavalier invasion after the execution of Charles I. Many of these immigrants were men of rank and brought with them the views and habits of the English gentry. They set the fashion of living and continued to influence Virginia usages to the time of the Revolution." The planter was a feudal patriarch mildly ruling everybody; drank wholesale wine; entertained everyone; held big festivities at Christmas with huge log-fires in the great fire-place,