

AMERICAN HISTORY.

*History of the United States, from the discovery of the American Continent. By George Bancroft. History of the Colonization of the United States. In three volumes, Ninth Edition.*

Bancroft intends to include in this work the entire History of the United States. The volumes before us only embrace the history of its Colonization; and exhibit historical merits of the highest order in every point of view. Whether as regards plan, matter, or composition, so well-digested and comprehensive a history has not appeared since the productions of MILL and HAL-LAM, in if point of mere attraction for the general reader Bancroft's History of the Colonization of the United States does not excel both those standard authors.

To write the early history of the United States has always appeared to us a work of difficulty, from the number of distinct colonies and the minuteness of their events. This difficulty is conquered with great skill and felicity in the work before us. The fundamental canon on which Mr. Bancroft has proceeded, is not to consider mere events, but the principles which those events contain; so that much of the work is a history of subjects, in which the actors, however prominent they may often seem, are in reality subordinate to the exhibition of some large religious, social, or political principle. These subjects, too, are not merely taken up at the point where they intersect the history of the United States, but are often considered from their origin: slavery, for example, giving rise to a rapid survey of that institution from the earliest period till the Dutch vessel arrived in Virginia with her scanty cargo of Negroes. The relation of European events to colonial interests, as well as the circumstances in which the foundation of several colonies originated, enable the author to give variety and relief by episodes or digressions; although it may be doubted whether the clearness resulting from singleness and unity is so well attained, though greater richness and comprehensiveness is without doubt produced.

A summary account of the order and arrangement of the work will convey a better idea of it than any general expressions. The book opens with a brief sketch of the discovery of North America, and a narrative of the early attempts of the French at colonization; condensing into a short chapter a critical view of the claims of the Northmen, and the Gallic career in geographical discovery. The second chapter narrates the practical exertions of the Spaniards in extending a knowledge of that part of the continent which now constitutes the United States; and the third describes the discoveries of the English, and the various abortive attempts at settlement; this preliminary matter not merely introducing the general subject, but presenting a brief and connected history of a series of remarkable voyages, bold adventures, and luckless attempts at permanent colonization. Although chronology is not strictly observed, yet regard is had to the order of time so far as this, that each colony is generally taken in the order of its foundation: and, closely examined, each will be found to have originated in some peculiar condition of European opinion, which either succumbed to or gathered strength from the circumstances in which it was placed. Virginia, the earliest settlement, was first successfully founded by a company with a charter from James the First; and, saving the sovereignty of the monarch, the shareholders in this company possessed as absolute a power over their settlers as the East India Company over its servants. Profit, especially from gold, was the object of the association: the settlers were to labour in common; but had no power whatsoever over their own concerns, or even over the administration of justice. The returns of an East India or mining Company, could not, however, be derived from the clearing and tillage of a soil, fertile even as that of Virginia. Economical necessity compelled the colonial servants of the company to break through the rule of property in common, by assigning small portions of land to each settler; and grants by purchase either in kind or money seem soon to have become the best if not the only source of profit the companies ever got. A political necessity led one governor to summon a general assembly of the colonists: the weakness and distraction of an embarrassed corporation induced the proprietors at home to wink at it: by the time that the fatal mortality of the earlier settlers, the loss of capital, and the party-squabbles of the Virginia Company, had induced the Crown to resume its charters, a state of society where the only source of inequality (colour excepted) was one of ability or property, had already established institutions adapted to its new condition, though ever modified by remembrances of England; and these institutions neither Charles nor Cromwell had leisure, if they had the inclination, to attack. But for the introduction of slavery, Virginia would probably have been nearly as democratic as New England.

Maryland, the adjoining colony to Virginia, originated in a disposition on the part of a wealthy Catholic to procure religious freedom for those of his own sect. Repulsed from Virginia by the tests of Protestant allegiance and supremacy, Lord Baltimore applied to the Crown for a charter; which was granted by Charles the First. It conveyed to Baltimore the powers almost of a feudatory prince; and he himself added perfect freedom of religion. Maryland was the only English colony that ever went forth an entire society, with gentlemen as well as labourers, land-lords as well as land-tillers. The colony exhibited somewhat of the forms of a feudal state in its tenures, and of an old society in its gradation of ranks; and Maryland more than Virginia, ought to exhibit the traces of aristocratical dominion, if scanned by a discriminating eye. The grants of Baltimore were liberal and easy; and the contrast between the proprietary of Virginia and Maryland strikingly exhibits the moral of greediness and liberality: whilst the Virginian companies lost all their subscribed capital in a few years, and were ignominiously dissolved, the proprietors of Maryland drew for some generations a large revenue from the province.

The foundation of Democratic New England arose from the persecutions to which the Puritans were subject. They were rather permitted to colonize than sent out as colonists: the exiles of Holland, sick of foreign manners, departed with nothing but a sort of understanding from James the First that they might go without his troubling himself about them. The Independents in religion were Republicans in politics, and most assuredly equal in worldly goods; and in the depth of winter, with the certainty of every hardship before them, and the prospect of famine, they framed a constitution, which has the two peculiarities of being the first clear and unquestionable illustration of the old Whig theory of the "social compact," and of being the model of the Democracy of the United States. The Quaker colonization of Pennsylvania, (prefaced in Mr. Bancroft by a history of the sect and a view of its doctrines,) was equally Democratic—more free, or rather absolutely free, in religious matters; and established voting "not

by the confused way of cries and voices, but by the balloting box." The present state of New York, first founded by Holland under the title of the New Netherlands, furnishes the author with an opportunity of making a digression to Dutch history, and giving an account of Dutch discovery and colonization till the conquest of the settlement by the New England militia and a British fleet. Georgia, the last plantation, and even now little more than a century old, originated in a charitable desire to furnish debtors and other destitute persons with a means of livelihood: and though the main honour is due to Oglethorpe, (whom Pope selected to illustrate the innate workings of benevolence,) yet it indicates the progress of a more exalted public opinion, when such a design could meet with public supporters. The other colonies—some of them offshoots of the older settlements, some of them founded on proprietary principles, where the Crown granted the territory to individuals, and they colonized as they could, in the mode most favourable for their own profit—though not possessing such distinct and characteristic features as the original plantations, have still points of discrimination. To discern the principles of each—to describe the struggles and difficulties, and often the dangers of the first settlers—to narrate the growth of the settlement, and to carry down the particular history of each and the general history of all—is the purpose of this work; varied, as we have said already, by frequent digressions to universal, European, or English history, when they touch upon the colonization of the United States, and by frequent portraits of European worthies, when connected with America.

Though a good plan is essential to a good work, and may be received as evidence of an understanding of the subject, design without execution is of little avail. But the execution of the *History of the Colonization of the United States* is of a high order. Mr. Bancroft has from nature the first requisite of an historian—an historical mind; an understanding which can comprehend the past, an acumen to detect the general principle enveloped in particular facts, and a perception that seizes upon the true characteristic of things, and assigns both to men and events their proper scale and station; while, if not secure from the charge of partiality, he is perhaps as impartial as any national historian, tested by a stranger, would be found. These native qualities have been assiduously cultivated by collateral as well as direct studies. Mr. Bancroft is not only familiar with all the authorities essential to a mastery of his subject, but he appears to have formed his taste by an assiduous perusal of at least the English classics; his work, independent of internal evidence, containing illustrations or allusions germane to his subject, but scattered in writers to whom no one would have referred who was reading for the occasion. The result of natural bias and long time is great condensation and great spirit; though full of matter, the work is not crowded, and though the digressions may detract from its singleness, they do not impede and do not confuse,—unless in the chronology, which it is difficult to avoid when events concurrent in point of time cannot be concurrently related. The author well selects the striking points of an incident, and gets at once to the pith of the conclusion; and his rapid narrative sometimes outruns and always keeps pace with the expectation of the reader.

The model of the writer is Gibbon; though as regards mere diction, the native inflation of an American is substituted for the stateliness of the English historian; and Mr. Bancroft uses the figure of personification more than his prototype—having, apparently, derived it from De Tocqueville, of whom there are visible traces in his last volume. But the imitation, or at least the study of Gibbon, is chiefly shown in a sort of assumed elevation of mind, in the pregnant brevity of adjunctive epithets, and in the artfully allusive mode of the Roman historian, who suggests more to the mind by allusion than he could present by description. In these indications Mr. Bancroft is very large and very comprehensive. At the same time, though the allusive style indicates more than can be told; it does not tell things so clearly, or impress them so distinctly, as a direct narrative.

Notwithstanding the length to which this notice has already extended, a just idea of the work will be best conveyed by allowing it to speak for itself, and exhibit examples of its various features. Beginning at the beginning, we adduce a specimen of the author's comprehension and condensation. We know not that any essential point of fact or of opinion is omitted in the following sketch of the claim of the Northmen to the discovery of America; about which volumes have been written, and numerous controversies have taken place.

CLAIM OF THE NORTHMEN TO THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

"The national pride of an Icelandic historian has indeed claimed for his ancestors the glory of having discovered the Western hemisphere. It is said that they passed from their own island to Greenland, and were driven by adverse winds from Greenland to the shores of Labrador; that the voyage was often repeated; that the coasts of America were extensively explored, and colonies established on the shores of Nova Scotia or Newfoundland. It is even suggested that these early adventurers anchored near the harbour of Boston, or in the bays of New Jersey; and Danish antiquaries believe that Northmen entered the waters of Rhode Island, inscribed their adventures on the rocks of Taunton River, gave the name of Vinland to the South-east coasts of New England, and explored the inlets of our country as far as Carolina. But the story of the colonization of America by Northmen rests on narratives mythological in form and obscure in meaning, ancient yet not contemporary. The chief document is an interpolation in the history of Sturleson, whose zealous curiosity could hardly have neglected the discovery of a continent. The geographical details are too vague to sustain a conjecture; the accounts of the mild winter and fertile soil are, on any modern hypothesis, fictitious or exaggerated; the description of the natives applies only to the Esquimaux, inhabitants of hyperborean regions; the remark which should define the length of the shortest winter's day has received interpretations adapted to every latitude from New York to Cape Farewell; and Vinland has been sought in all directions from Greenland and the St. Lawrence to Africa. The nation of intrepid mariners whose voyages extended beyond Iceland and beyond Sicily, could easily have sailed from Greenland to Labrador: no clear historic evidence establishes the natural probability that they accomplished the passage."

"You have always nature," says Reynolds to the portrait-painter: and so has the historian of any period of which tolerable records have been preserved. Hence, any history, in competent hands, will present at least a picture of society and a portrait of persons, quaint and curious, and marked by passions and vices if not rising to historical dignity. This was especially the case in America; the bulk of whose founders were the necessitous, the sturdy, or the independent-thinking;

whose leaders possessed daring enterprise at the least, and whose position drove them upon strange shifts to procure food, not to mention wealth. Our elderly readers must have heard in their youth traditional accounts of trepanning or kidnapping men to the plantations; and the youngest may get an inkling of the practice in the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Here is a picture of its earlier stages under the commonwealth and the Stuarts.

WHITE SLAVERY IN THE PLANTATIONS.

"Conditional servitude, under indentures or covenants, had from the first existed in Virginia. The servant stood to his master in the relation of a debtor, bound to discharge the costs of emigration by the entire employment of his powers for the benefit of his creditor. Oppression early ensued: men who had been transported into Virginia at an expense of eight or ten pounds, were sometimes sold for forty, fifty, or even threescore pounds. The supply of white servants became a regular business; and a class of men, nicknamed spirits, used to delude young persons, servants and idlers, into embarking for America, as to a land of spontaneous plenty. White servants came to be a usual article of traffic. They were sold in England to be transported, and in Virginia were resold to the highest bidder; like Negroes, they were to be purchased on shipboard, as men buy horses at a fair. In 1672, the average price in the Colonies, where five years of service was due, was about ten pounds; while a Negro was worth twenty or twenty-five pounds. So usual was this manner of dealing in Englishmen, that not the Scots only, who were taken in the field of Dunbar, were sent into involuntary servitude in New England, but the Royalist prisoners of the battle of Worcester; and the leaders in the insurrection of Penruddock, in spite of the remonstrance of Haselrig and Henry Vane, were shipped to America. At the corresponding period in Ireland, the crowded exportation of Irish Catholics was a frequent event, and was attended by aggravations hardly inferior to the usual atrocities of the African slave-trade. In 1685, when nearly a thousand of the prisoners condemned for participating in the insurrection of Monmouth were sentenced to transportation, men of influence at Court, with rival importunity, scrambled for the convicted insurgents as a merchantable commodity.

"The condition of apprenticed servants in Virginia differed from that of slaves chiefly in the duration of their bondage; and the laws of the colony favoured their early enfranchisement."

The leaning of our author is to drawing characters, and his book abounds with them; in some sense resembling an historical portrait-gallery. They embrace many Englishmen who were connected with the Colonies by having filled office there or assisted in founding them, and some whose influence upon American advancement was less immediate. The most convenient for extract here is the character of Smith, the true founder of the colony of Virginia.

CHARACTER OF JOHN SMITH.

"Disunion completed the scene of misery. It became necessary to depose Wingfield, the avaricious President, who was charged with engrossing the choicest stores; and who was on the point of abandoning the colony and escaping to the West Indies. Ratcliffe, the new President, possessed neither judgment nor industry: so that the management of affairs fell into the hands of Smith, whose deliberate enterprise and cheerful courage alone diffused light amidst the general gloom. He possessed by nature the buoyant spirit of heroic daring. In boyhood he had sighed for the opportunity of "setting out on brave adventures"; and though not yet thirty years of age, he was already a veteran in the service of humanity and of Christendom. His early life had been given to the cause of freedom in the Low Countries, where he had fought for the independence of the Batavian Republic. Again, as a traveller, he had roamed over France, had visited the shores of Egypt, had returned to Italy, and, panting for glory, had sought the borders of Hungary, where there had long existed an hereditary warfare with the followers of Mahomet. It was there that the young English cavalier distinguished himself by the bravest feats of arms, in the sight of Christians and Infidels: engaging fearlessly and always successfully in the single combat with the Turks, which from the days of the Crusades, had been warranted by the rules of chivalry. His signal prowess gained for him the favour of Sigismundi Bathori, the unfortunate Prince of Transylvania. At length he, with many others, was overpowered in a sudden skirmish among the glens of Wallachia, and was left severely wounded in the field of battle. A prisoner of war, he was now, according to the Eastern custom, offered for sale "like a beast in a market-place," and was sent to Constantinople as a slave. A Turkish lady had compassion on his misfortunes and his youth, and, designing to restore him to freedom, removed him to a fortress in the Crimea. Contrary to her commands, he was there subjected to the harshest usage among half-savage serfs. Rising against his task-master, whom he slew in the struggle, he mounted a horse, and through forest-paths escaped from thralldom to the confines of Russia. Again the hand of woman relieved his wants; he travelled across the country to Transylvania; and there bidding farewell to his companions in arms, he resolved to return "to his own sweet country." But as he crossed the Continent, he heard the rumours of civil war in Northern Africa, and hastened, in search of untried dangers, to the realms of Morocco. At length returning to England, his mind did not so much share as appropriate to itself the general enthusiasm for planting states in America; and now the infant commonwealth of Virginia depended for its existence on his firmness. His experience in human nature under all its forms, and the cheering vigour of his resolute will, made him equal to his duty. He inspired the natives with awe, and quelled the spirit of anarchy and rebellion among the emigrants. He was more wakeful to gather provisions than the covetous to find gold; and strove to keep the country more than the faint-hearted to abandon it. As autumn approached, the Indians, from the superfluity of their harvest, made a voluntary offering; and supplies were also collected by expeditions into the interior. But the conspiracies that were still formed to desert the settlement, first by the selfish Wingfield, and again by the imbecile Ratcliffe, could be defeated only after a skirmish, in which one of the leaders was killed; and the danger of a precipitate abandonment of Virginia continued to be imminent till the approach of winter, when not only the homeward navigation became perilous, but the fear of famine was removed by the abundance of wild-towl and game. Nothing then remained but to examine the country."

As an example of the narrative style, (although this is not so well exhibited in examples,) we will give a specimen from the colonization of Georgia.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE MORAVIANS.

"While the neighbouring province of South Carolina displayed "a universal zeal for assisting its newly and bulwark," the persecuted protestants known to us as

Moravians heard the message of hope, and, on the invitation of the Society in England for Propagating the Gospel, prepared to emigrate to the Savannah. A passage, provisions in Georgia for a whole season, for themselves and their children, free for ten years, to be held for a small quit-rent, the privileges of native Englishmen, freedom of worship—these were the promises made, accepted, and honorably fulfilled. On the last day of October, 1733, "the evangelical community well supplied with Bibles and hymn-books, catechisms and books of devotion, conveying in one wagon the few chattels, in two other covered ones their feeble companions, and especially their little ones, after a discourse and prayer and benedictions, cheerfully, and in the name of God, began their pilgrimage. History need not tell what charities cheered them on their journey, what towns were closed against them; or how they entered Frankfort-on-the-Maine, two by two, in solemn procession, singing spiritual songs. As they floated down the Maine, and between the castled crags, vineyards, and the white-walled towns that adorn the banks of the Rhine, their conversation, amidst hymns and prayers, was of justification, of and sanctification, and of standing fast in the Lord. At Rotterdam they were joined by two preachers, Bolzius and Gronau, disciplined in charity at the Orphan-house in Halle. The passage of six days carried them from Rotterdam to Dover, where several of the trustees visited them, and provided considerably for their wants. In January, 1734, they set sail for their new homes. The majesty of the ocean quickened their sense of God's omnipotence and wisdom; and as they lost sight of land, they broke out into a hymn to his glory. The setting sun, after a calm, so kindled the sea and the sky that words could not express their rapture; and they cried out, "How lovely the creation! how infinitely lovely the Creator!" When the wind was adverse, they prayed, as it changed, one opened his mind to the other on the power of prayer, even the prayer "of a man subject to like passions as we are." As the voyage excited weariness, a devout listener confessed himself to be an unconverted man; and they reminded him of the promise to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembling at the word. As they sailed pleasantly with a favouring breeze, at the hour of evening-prayer, they made a covenant with each other, like Jacob of old, and resolved by the grace of Christ, to cast all the strange gods which were in their hearts into the depths of the sea. A storm grew so high that not a sail could be set; and they raised their voices in prayer and song amidst the tempest; for to love the Lord Jesus as a brother gave consolation. At Charleston, Oglethorpe bade them welcome; and in five days more the wayfaring men, whose home was beyond the skies, pitched their tents near Savannah.

"It remained to select for them a residence. To cheer their principal men as they toiled through the forest and across brooks, Oglethorpe, having provided horses, himself joined the little party. By the aid of blazes, trees and Indian guides, he made his way through marshes; a fallen tree served as a bridge over a stream, which the horses swam for want of a ford; at night he encamped with them abroad round a fire, and slept every fatigue till the spot for their village was chosen, and like the little stream which formed its border, was named Ebenezer. There they built their dwellings, and there they resolved to raise a column of stone in token of gratitude to God, whose providence had brought them safely to the ends of the earth."

The war of the Revolution, and the circumstances which led to it, are reserved for another work; but the *History of the Colonization of the United States* approaches its close, an indication is given of the coming change, in a natural introduction of the public opinion in America a quarter of a century before the outbreak, and a somewhat forced insertion of the character of Washington. Here is the first:

COLONIAL VIEWS OF INDEPENDENCE, 1748.

"Men believed that England, from motives of policy had not desired success in the conquest of Canada. There is reason enough for doubting whether the King, if he had the power, would wish to drive the French from their possessions in Canada." Such was public opinion at New York, in 1748, as preserved for us by the Swedish traveller Peter Kalm. "The English colonies in this part of the world," he continues, "have increased so much in wealth and population that they will vie with European England. But to maintain the commerce and the power of the metropolis, they are forbidden to establish new manufactures, which might compete with the English; they may dig for gold and silver only on condition of shipping them immediately to England; they have, with the exception of a few fine places, no liberty to trade in any parts not belonging to the English dominions; and foreigners are not allowed the least commerce with these American colonies. And there are many similar restrictions. These oppressions have made the inhabitants of the English colonies less tender towards their mother-land. This coldness is increased by the many foreigners who are settled among them; for Dutch, Germans, and French, are here blended with English, and have no special love for Old England. Besides, some people are always discontented, and love change; and exceeding freedom and prosperity nurse an untameable spirit. I have been told, not only by native Americans but by English emigrants, published that within thirty or fifty years the English colonies of North America may constitute a separate state, entirely independent of England. But as this whole country lies towards the sea unguarded, and on the frontier is kept uneasy by the French, these dangerous neighbours are the reason why the love of these colonies for their metropolis does not utterly decline. The English government has therefore reason to regard the French in North America as the chief power that urges their colonization to submission."

From the Prefaces we learn that the first volume of this work was published in 1834, and another appeared in 1838. We have an impression that a reprint of the entire history was contemplated in London; but we have never seen it, or heard of its completion. A copy reached us from Boston, some months ago; and bears no indication of a London publisher; though, not to be immediately bought, the book no doubt could be readily procured through the American agents and houses. To such readers as are more particular in the appearance of an historian than with other authors, we may say that the work is got up in a style which, for the title-page, would not be distinguished from the best productions of British bibliopoles.—*London Colonial Gazette.*

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