

Captain John Smith, Governor of Virginia, Admiral of New England

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so deep set that as Kirkwood put it in February, 1860, "fire would not burn" them out—such a nomination would have been unwise in the extreme.

Fourth, If the foregoing conclusions are well-founded then Grimes' advice to Wm. Penn Clarke in 1856, viz.: "We cannot elect Mr. Seward or any other old politician against whom there are old chronic prejudices which you know are hard to be conquered. To build up and consolidate a new party we must have men who have not been before the people as politicians"—was equally sound on May 18, 1860.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH, GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA,
ADMIRAL OF NEW ENGLAND.

BY REV. WILLIAM SALTER, D. D.

Upon the discovery of America, the new world was divided by the Pope between Portugal and Spain. The first attempt to make a European settlement on the continent was by Portugal in Brazil; the next, by Spain in Cuba, Mexico, and Peru; later, the French came into Canada; afterwards, England attempted to plant colonies on the North Atlantic coast.

In 1585, Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the noblest men in British history, fitted out an expedition to the Carolina coast, but, after disastrous chances from Indian hostilities and from famine, the effort to plant a colony there was abandoned. The first permanent English settlement in America was made at Jamestown in 1607. An abortive attempt was made the same year at the mouth of the Kennebec river in Maine.

The hero of the Jamestown colony was Captain John Smith. He had the daring and adventurous spirit of Columbus. What the discoverer of America did for the whole continent at the close of the 15th century, Captain John Smith did for the North Atlantic coast, for Virginia and New England, at the beginning of the 17th century; he opened the way for their settlement by others.

Captain Smith was not originally at the head of the Virginia colony, but the mismanagement of those who were, and the hostility of the Indians, and the want of food, would have brought it to ruin, had not his bravery and skill averted the disaster.

He was born on the east coast of England, near the sea, of worthy parents, who gave him a fair education. In his ninth year the Invincible Armada of Spain was hovering over England, to dethrone Elizabeth, and bring the country back to Rome. Fears of a Spanish invasion were in many an English home. Amid the agitations of the time the boy grew up in loyalty to the Queen's supremacy, and in dread of Spain and popery. His parents dying a few years afterwards, he was indentured as an apprentice, but disliking the situation, and longing for a roving and adventurous life, he ran away, and enlisted in the war of the Netherlands against Spain. In that service he acquired skill in the use of arms, and became adroit in horsemanship and feats of valor. Determined to see more of the world, he set out to try his fortune against the Turks, then the terror of Europe. Going through France, he embarked at Marseilles for Italy. All on board the ship were Roman Catholics, but himself, and in a furious storm they threw him overboard as another Jonah, but he swam ashore to a little island, whence he was rescued by another ship, on which in a voyage up the Mediterranean he did valiant service in the capture of a Venetian argosy, loaded with a rich cargo, and for his share in the fight he received a good award. He next ventured into Hungary and Transylvania, and fought the Turks. He engaged in single combat with three of their captains, and cut off their heads. For that daring feat King Sigismund gave him a coat of arms, on which the three heads are indicated. He was afterwards captured by the Turks, taken to Constantinople and made a slave, but he rose upon his keeper, and killed him, and after many perils escaped to England. He wrote an account of these adventures, but they seemed incredible to many, and the grandiose style of his narrative subjected him to ridicule. A severe critical investigation, however, has led to general confidence in the veracity of Captain John Smith. He was now twenty-four years of

age. Inflamed with a desire to see still more of the world he went into North Africa, and afterwards served on a French privateer, about the Azores, in making captures at sea. Returning to England in 1606, he shared in the enthusiasm which then prevailed, to plant a colony in Virginia, especially to find mines of gold and silver, like those of Mexico and Peru. He put a little money into the enterprise, and joined the expedition which reached Jamestown April 23, 1607. He was one of the seven men named by King James as Council for the government of the colony. He was superior to his associates in capacity for the work, and they were jealous of him, and intrigued against him, but his resolute spirit and his native force of character triumphed over them, and he became the leading man in the colony. He explored the James river to the falls, where is now the city of Richmond, and was the first to trace the whole coast of Chesapeake Bay and the mouths of the Potomac, the Susquehanna and the Delaware rivers. He cultivated friendship with the Indians, but they proved treacherous, and he was taken prisoner by Powhatan, who was about to kill him, December 16, 1607, when Pocahontas, the chief's daughter, interposed, and saved him from the fatal blow. "She hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine," says Smith, and he paid many a glowing tribute to her noble act in after years.

After many miscarriages and much distress in the colony, Smith was elected President of the Council, September 10, 1608, and by his strong hand as Governor brought about some measure of prosperity and order, until he went back to England, October, 1609, after two and a half years' residence in Virginia. The colony soon relapsed into misery again, and was being abandoned, when Lord Delaware opportunely arrived with supplies and fresh colonists, and saved Virginia.

In August, 1610, Smith published in London *A True Relation of Occurrences and Accidents in Virginia*. It is self-laudatory and magnifies his own exploits and services. It is of special interest as the first book ever printed that contains an account of the first permanent settlement in America by Protestant England. It excited great attention, but was severely censured by friends of those whose mismanagement it

disclosed. Smith lost favor with the "Merchant Adventurers and Planters" in London. He never returned to the colony.

In 1614, he sailed on a fishing voyage along the coast of New England. It proved a very profitable and pleasant voyage, and gave him a most favorable impression of the country. In the summer of that year he explored the coast from the Penobscot to Cape Cod in an open boat.

The next year he sailed again for New England, but was driven back by storms. In 1616, being assisted by "Merchant Adventurers" of Plymouth, who made him Admiral of New England, he sailed again, but was overtaken by pirates, and by a French ship of war, and taken prisoner, and after countless hazards in sea-fights with pirates and Spaniards, was landed in France, and got back to England.

Afterwards he attempted to get up another expedition. But the fates went against him. Former associates and helpers distrusted him. He appealed to Lord Bacon and others of the nobility in vain for assistance in planting a colony in New England. Henceforth he could only labor with his pen to awaken his countrymen to the great opportunity which New England afforded them to make new homes and gain wealth.

A Description of New England, which he published in 1616, with a map, gave a glowing account of the country, of its many good harbors, and the superior quality of the fish in those waters. Captain John Smith has the honor of giving to New England its name, and of being the first to call attention to its prospective advantages. His language shows the vision of a prophet and a seer. In a generous spirit, upon his own motion, and at his own expense, he gave his book and map a wide circulation among the hardy sea-going fishermen of Devon and Cornwall, and called them to advance the honor and glory of England, and the Protestant religion, in the new world, by removing thither. He not only circulated his writings, but prosecuted the desire of his heart by personal visits and talks among the people. He said that New England was not an island, as some had conjectured, but "stretching

into the main, God does know how many thousand miles, and one of the great empires that would one day arise.”

He spoke of the pleasure, when men were tired of planting and building, they might find “to recreate before their own door, in their own boats, upon the sea, where with a small hook and line, by angling, man, woman and child may take divers sorts of excellent fish.” He described the country as—

* * * a most excellent place for health and fertility, and of all the four parts of the world I have seen not inhabited, could I have means to transport a colony, I would rather live here than anywhere. The main staple hence to be extracted for the present is fish, which may seem a mean commodity, yet who will take pains and consider the sequel, will allow it well worth the labor. Who doth not know that the poor Hollanders, chiefly by fishing in all weathers in the open sea, are made a people so hardy and industrious, and by vending this commodity are made so mighty, strong, and rich, as no State but Venice is so well furnished with so many fair cities, strong fortresses, abundance of shipping, and all sorts of merchandize, as well as of gold, silver, precious stones, silks, velvets, and cloth of gold? What voyages and discoveries, east and west, north and south, yea, about the world, make they? What an army by sea and land have they long maintained, in despite of one of the greatest princes of the world; and never could the Spaniard with all his mines of gold and silver pay his debts, his friends, and army, half so truly as the Hollanders have done by this contemptible trade of fish. This is the chiefest mine, and the sea the source of those silver streams of all their virtue, which hath made them the very miracle of industry, the only pattern of perfection for these affairs; and the benefit of fishing is the *primum mobile*, which turns all to this height of plenty, strength, honor, and exceeding admiration.

In 1619, says the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Smith “offered to lead out the Pilgrim Fathers to North Virginia, but they would not have him.” He was an obsequious and complaisant courtier of King James, and of his son, Prince Charles, and had little regard for the convictions of the Pilgrim Fathers, who called for a reformation both of manners, and of the Church of England. Howbeit, his *Description of New England*, and of the opportunities there afforded to industries and enterprise, may have awakened their desire or encouraged their plans to go thither. “They had a great hope,” says one of their number, “and an inward zeal of laying some good foundation; or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the

kingdom of Christ in these remote parts of the world, though they should be but as stepping-stones unto others for performing so great a work."

Afterwards, Captain John Smith in his *General Historie*, 1624, wrote somewhat reproachfully as well as honorably, of the Pilgrim Fathers. He called them "Brownists, self-willed, whose humorous ignorance caused them for more than a year to endure a wonderful deal of misery with an infinite patience." To the last he kept up his faith in Virginia and in New England. He revised and republished what he had previously written. His writings are verbose, tedious, overloaded with vanity and pride and repetition, nor are his narratives always consistent with each other. These things have discredited the memory of one who is nevertheless entitled to honor as first and foremost in promoting the exploration and settlement of those portions of the continent where our national life began. He died in 1631, aged 51 years. His motto was *Vincere est vivere*. "The Epitaph to his Memory," in the church where he was buried in London shows the appreciation of his friends for his heroic character:

Here lies one conquered, who hath conquered Kings,
Subdued large territories, and done things
Which to the world impossible would seem,
But that the truth is held in more esteem.
Shall I repeat his former service done
In honor to his God and Christendom;
How that he did divide from Pagans three
Their heads and lives, types of his chivalry;
For which great service in that climate done,
Brave Sigismundus, King of Hungarian,
Did give him as a coat of arms to weare
Those conquered heads got by his sword and speare;
Or shall I tell of his adventures since,
Done in Virginia, that large continuence;
How that he subdued kings unto his yoke,
And made those Heathen fly, as wind doth smoke;
And made that land, being so large a station,
A habitation for our Christian Nation
Where God is glorified, their wants supplied,
Which else for necessaries might have died?

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