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THE GREATEST FACT IN MODERN HISTORY

An address by

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Some years ago Burton Hendrick observed that the founding of Jamestown marks the beginnings of "that extension of England into two hemispheres which is the greatest fact in modern history"; for Jamestown is not only "the cradle of the Republic", but "the cradle also of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa".

To this category of the sovereign overseas Dominions of the British Commonwealth of Nations may be added those portions of the globe where Anglo-Celtic law and order have prevailed over militaristic arrogance or native anarchy throughout the numerous colonies, dependencies, possessions, and mandates of the British Empire.

A review of this expansion during the three hundred and thirty-six years since Admiral Christopher Newport anchored his fleet of three small ships off Cape Henry, the largest barely out-tonnaging the airplanes of the moment, presents a story of achievement which, in its temporal-spiritual values, bears comparison with the spiritual-temporal virtues found in the expansion of Christianity.

On the one hand, it is generally conceded that the doctrines of Christianity were spread in a spirit of idealism, regardless of abuses on the part of those who played the wolf in sheeps' clothing. On the other hand, there is a continuity between the unfolding of the

greatest fact in ancient history and this like, if lesser, fact of the later age; for a re-examination of "old" evidence, in combination with a study of that which has been long ignored or newly discovered, shows that the religious motive was the determining force which sustained the first Anglo-American colony throughout its early years, and which made possible the religion-dominated venture of the founders of Plymouth, who set out under the aegis and with the brotherly love of the liberal-minded Anglican sponsors of Jamestown. In short, from 1609 to 1624 the development of the Jamestown colony represented an earnest effort on the part of the Virginia-London Company to extend the Christian faith in the New World, together with the institutions of free government. In this effort the Separatist exiles in the Netherlands were invited to participate through repatriation under the English flag in Virginia.

With these two objectives held in first esteem by the leaders of the Virginia Company, a third consideration was the welfare of the colonists in association with the "naturals", with whom they were to "live together in amity". "Last and least", there was the hope, or possibility, of material return from an outlay then unique in that this colonial expansion received neither support nor subsidy from the state.

This representation of American beginnings reverses, at least in the order of emphasis, the generally accepted view of the objectives of the projectors of the first permanent overseas settlement under English auspices. Often indeed, this "primary and principal" purpose, frequently reiterated by them, is not even stated—and one must bear in mind that the ideal of converting the American Indian was not then deemed impracticable, partly because of the current English belief in the success of the New World missions under the Spanish Jesuits. So it could be said that the matter reduces itself to the alternative of accrediting the declarations of the projectors, supported by their acts and actions, or the other one of accepting the estimate of their enemies and contemporary detractors.

In his post-graduate years your speaker on this occasion enjoyed the privilege of an acquaintance with James Bryce, then the British Ambassador at Washington. One bit of counsel he gave me has ever been particularly prized, which is: "Always examine the credibility of the witness". So, in the years that followed, the credibility

of the witnesses in the Virginia venture has been tested through locating, collating, correlating, and evaluating their own testimony and that of their contemporaries concerning them. A critical examination of the data thus gathered makes it crystal clear that the declarations of the liberal leaders of the Virginia-London Company should be given long-due credence and proper prominence, while much of the testimony upon which the history of our beginnings has been based is shown to be false or misleading.

Perhaps the briefest epitome of the concept that crass commercialism was the chief or sole objective of the projectors of the first Anglo-American colony is that set forth by the late Professor Charles M. Andrews, whose justly generous obituary notice in the *New York Times* of last September stated that he was "widely regarded as the leading authority of the American Colonial period". His volume which won the Pulitzer prize in 1935 contained the following comprehensive summary of the centuries-old view of the founding of the first colony. Referring to Jamestown, he states:

> The Puritan explanation of the failure of these early efforts at colonization rests on the belief that the former promoters committed three "great and fundamental errors": the main end was carnal, not religious; the first promoters employed unfit instruments—a multitude of rude and misgoverned persons, the very scum of the land; and the failure to establish the right form of government.

Professor Andrews crisply observed that, "The Puritans were right in their estimate".

Although a number of distinguished historians had been consulted with respect to the validity of a radically different approach, it was felt that Professor Andrews offered the best and final test. So the manuscript of the volume which Charles Scribner's Sons have been pleased to call "The Soul of a Nation" was sent to him for comment and in Chapter XI was inserted the summary just quoted. With respect to his courteous and extended reply of October 6, 1941, suffice it to say that, after noting the wide variation between the two conclusions, he expressed approval of the new interpretation without exception or qualification.

That this now-obvious presentation has not been generally recognized is due to several causes, not the least of which is the fact that the first extended narrative of the Jamestown venture was a

compilation by a professional soldier who dwelt almost exclusively upon military episodes and personal incidents, in which, for a time, he was a participant. In so doing he ignored the altruistic or religious aims of those who in England sustained the Virginia enterprise. Of the perilous planning which, in defiance of a despotic king, was required to create a colonial parliament in Virginia, Captain Smith says nothing. Although he mentioned Archer's proposal for a popular assembly when it was brought forward at Jamestown in 1609, it was by way of ridiculing the very concept. Again, with regard to the altruistic attitude of the projectors in their high hopes to civilize the savages, it may be said that while he did not originate the expression that the only good Indian is a dead one, he complained that he had been restrained from subjugating or exterminating the "naturals" by reason of the unrealistic stand of the Virginia-London Company. Finally, he failed to commend or mention the extraordinary outlay of the Company leaders in preparing for Indian-English free schools and a college whereby the savages might be brought to "civilitie" and be trained in the precepts, principles, and practices of Christianity. Largely as a consequence of these omissions from the first extended narrative on Virginia, such matters were successively ignored or overlooked by subsequent writers.

Another thing that helped to obscure the truth during these several centuries is found in the well-earned reputation for commercial enterprise of Sir Thomas Smith, who by appointment of the king, became the first president, or "treasurer", of the Virginia-London Company. Extensive trading in Europe and the Orient had made him the wealthiest merchant of London. In his eyes, prior to 1609, exploration in the Occident might offer a new Eldorado or provide a better route to an old one. Although Sir Thomas lost interest in Jamestown when very soon he realized that it would return no material dividends, he never lost interest in holding an office which afforded personal prestige and political power. The evidence is strong, though absolute proof is lacking, that he profited by selling spoiled East India supplies at high prices to the Virginia Company while he bought some Virginia products at below cost.

The liberal group in the Company, representing the great majority of its active members, contemporaneously called the "patriot party", in contrast to their opponents, who were called the "Court"

or "Spanish party", finally unseated Sir Thomas; and it is significant that the auditors then appointed could never get an accounting of his stewardship. Just before his death, he aided the king in the proceedings which led to the dissolution of the Company—but not until the Company had scored an achievement unique in history, which was the establishment of self-government in a colony by virtue of granting the popular election of a colonial parliament.

There are other reasons why the story of American beginnings has been so long misinterpreted and consequently misunderstood, following what may be called the "channeling" of the story. The oftener the historic-historical route was traversed, the deeper became the ruts and the more difficult it appeared to get out, although several excellent opportunities presented themselves.

One of these opportunities came in 1877, when after three centuries less seven years, the Historical Society of the State of Maine discovered and published the long-lost "Discourse on Western Planting" which Richard Hakluyt had presented at the Court of Queen Elizabeth and which not only induced that sovereign to grant a patent to Walter Raleigh but also laid the basis for the preeminence of the religious motive that later was to sustain the Jamestown colony through its most critical period. It was this motive which inspired the annual appeals to all the parishes and people of England to support the overseas venture. In short, if maintenance had been attempted merely on the prospect of material gain or even of national expansion, the venture must certainly have failed, with the indefinite postponement of Anglo-American settlement at Jamestown, Plymouth, or anywhere in North America.

There can be little doubt that Hakluyt's "Discourse", followed by his constant interest in America, exercised a profound influence in causing earnest laymen to give the religious motive first place in considering and promoting American colonization. Hakluyt's voice was contemporaneously acknowledged by Sir Philip Sidney, who called him a veritable "trumpet" for the cause; and the Scottish historian, William Robertson, wrote in the following century that England was more indebted to Hakluyt for her American colonies than to "any man of that age". Hakluyt's major theme, to use his own words, was the "enlargement of the gospel of Christ". This thought was echoed and re-echoed in practically all the pronouncements of the Virginia-London Company.

The connection between Hakluyt's "Discourse" and the declarations of the Virginia Company was not made, and its publication caused no appreciable change in historical exposition, which continued in its accustomed channels.

Twenty years after the discovery of Hakluyt's "Discourse" another and better opportunity to get out of the historic-historical ruts appeared in the publication of the papers discovered in the Spanish archives and collated by Alexander Brown in *The Genesis of the United States.* In his post-graduate days, when your speaker first began his research in the colonial field, stretching over two continents and extending to distant India, he made a special trip to Boston in order to ask the publishers why American historians had not taken advantage of this remarkable compilation to prepare an entirely new approach to American beginnings. The distinguished gentleman this cub reporter interviewed in the matter was unable to answer the query.

A third major opportunity for reconstructing the American colonial narrative came with the gradual publication over some thirty years of *The Records of the Virginia Company;* yet the first scholar who examined the entire collection to advantage in the printed form presented a dissertation in which he proceeded to deepen the old ruts of the ancient route. In short, he offered an analysis of the work of the Virginia Company the subtitle of which is "The Failure of a Colonial Experiment". Evidently the author agreed with the old Puritan opinion that Jamestown was spawned by profiteers in the dark of the moon.

The story of Virginia beginnings, which are identical with those of the United States, goes back far beyond Jamestown. There are two dates of vast significance in the final decade of the fifteenth century. One of these is celebrated as a national holiday. The other is unsung and practically unknown; and yet we owe as much, perhaps, or more, perhaps, to the date no one commemorates. The first is, of course, the 12th of October, marking the landfall of Christopher Columbus in the West Indies; and the second is the 24th of June, which marks the landing of John Cabot on the continent Columbus never saw. Columbus made his claims on behalf of the despotism, which was Spain. Five years later, Cabot claimed North America for the incipient democracy, which was England, even under Tudor rule.

Although John Rastell, lawyer and printer, urged as early as 1517 the overseas claims of England upon his fellow-countrymen, and Richard Eden in 1555 wrote the first books in English on the New World, it took a combination of the first great idealist and the first great imperialist to make an attempt at settlement some thirty years after Eden had stirred the imagination of Englishmen. This first idealist of note was the geographer-historian and churchman, Hakluyt; and the first of the long line of British imperialists was Raleigh. Inspired by Hakluyt it was Raleigh's exploratory expedition in 1584 which led to the naming of the new country—a well-worn fact which is mentioned here because it seems necessary to call attention to the generally unrecognized point that what Elizabeth called "Virginia" covered the Cabot-made claims of England to a territory described as of "an huge and unknown greatnesse". For some time, this territorial extent was called "the continent of Virginia or America". By "Virginia", therefore, Elizabeth meant all of North America except only any part thereof which was "actually possessed", as in Florida, "of a Christian Prince".

Whatever may have been the religious intensity of the versatile and somewhat volatile but always gallant Raleigh, Hakluyt was his chief adviser, which meant that the New World mission-motive should be uppermost in the minds of those concerned with prospective colonization. Hence, the mathematician and astronomer, Thomas Hariot, who accompanied Governor White to Roanoke Island, devoted much of his time and one fifth of his "Brief and True Report" to the matter of converting the savages, to whom Hariot painstakingly expounded the Bible and the principles of the christian faith.

After Hakluyt and Hariot, we find that this idealism reached its climax and fruition in the work of the liberal leaders of the Virginia-London Company. Since investigation has demonstrated that their professions comported with their deeds, we may no longer ignore the nature of their labors on behalf of the first American colony, nor should we cast aside the evidence of the godspeed they gave to the second such settlement. To do so is incompatible with the plain dictates of reason and common sense. In short, the more one examines the credibility of these witnesses, the more one is convinced that the Virginia-London Company included idealists, patriots, and statesmen worthy to rank with the great figures of

any age or epoch; and all Americans should feel a justifiable pride in knowing that to such noble spirits this nation owes its initial impetus.

The membership may be given several classifications, according to character and intent. By no means were they all idealists. It was the idealists who leavened the lump and elevated its collective standards as they came more and more to direct its policies. This powerful leavening process is noticeable in 1609, the year of the drawing up of the first popular charter under the guiding hand of Sir Edwin Sandys, and it was steadily extended until the company was dissolved by James I. In the original group certain members were well characterized by John Chamberlain, who may be called the prize male gossip of the age. In a letter to Sir Guy Carleton, August 1, 1613, he wrote:

> When the business at Virginia was at the highest, in that heat many gentlemen and others were drawn by persuasion and importunity of friends to underwrite their names for adventurers: but when it came to the payment (specially the second or third time), their hands were not so ready to go to their purses as they were to the paper, and in the end flatly refused.

Some of these merely mercenary souls were sued to make good their pledges, while others were expelled from membership—a good riddance; and if the purge had extended to Treasurer-President Sir Thomas Smith, the struggle to establish the colony might well have been far less difficult and its history much less confused.

Two other ill elements remained within the Company. These were represented, in part, by Alderman Robert Johnson, grocer; and Alderman Hugh Hamersley, haberdasher, political figures whose counterparts in current urban affairs immediately come to mind. In fact, Sir Thomas himself had served a term as Alderman in one of the London districts. Finally, on the debit side of the ledger, there was that evil genius of Virginia, Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, whose factotum, Samuel Argall, cheated the Company, robbed the colony, and raided the lands of the Virginia-Indian college.

Although James I finally wrecked the Company and nearly wrecked the colony by a method of taxation which has no parallel even in the unfulfilled proposals of the advisers of George III, the

Stuart monarch deserves credit for one thing. As the official head of the Anglican Church he permitted and even encouraged appeals to the parishes of England for funds to finance the mission-motive represented in the plan to civilize and convert the Indians. When this spirit had reached its height throughout the realm, William Strachey wrote:

> The discourse and visitation of it took up all meetings, times, termes, all degrees, all purses.

We may now be more specific in examining the credibility of that inner group of great spirits, but long forgotten men, who labored for noble objectives which, ever since, should have been associated with the genesis of this republic. By way of introduction to a few of these characters it may be said that Richard Hakluyt, foremost geographer-historian of the Elizabethan epoch; Sir Walter Raleigh, its most romantic figure; and William Shakespeare, the most gifted dramatist of all time, passed within a year or so of each other. Sir Edwin Sandys deserves ranking with these three as the most farsighted statesman of the seventeenth century. Sandys was not only the founder-in-chief of representative government in America but also the sympathetic spokesman for his fellow-countrymen in the Netherlands. He not only extended the invitation of the Virginia-London Company to these Dissenters to repatriate themselves under the English flag in Virginia, but as the son of the Archibishop of York and as a leading layman he must have used his influence with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London in persuading James I to wink at the repatriation of those whom the monarch boasted he had harried out of the realm.

Second to Sandys and, in point of wealth and rank, more influential, was Henry Wriothsley, Earl of Southampton, who has the distinction of being Shakespeare's first patron. Without Southampton's aid there might have been no Shakespeare, as without Southampton's prestige the Virginia Company might have failed.

Then there were the Ferrars: Nicholas, the elder; John Farrar; and Nicholas, the younger. The lifeline of the elder Nicholas spanned all or parts of the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James I. His idealism was illustrated by his bequest of the modern equivalent of sixty thousand dollars "to the college in Virginia", which was to be paid when there shall be "ten Indian youths" entered.

The younger Nicholas was one of the most remarkable men of that remarkable epoch and one of the noblest characters England has ever produced. To him and Southampton we owe the preservation of the company records which King James attempted to destroy and on which we are now able to base an estimate of its proceedings. An excellent summary of his career was prepared for *Virginia Historical Portraiture* by Alexander Wilbourne Weddell.

Because of current events, Sir Walter Cope offers a particularly interesting study. His activities extended from Orient to Occident —to India, Virginia, Russia, Bermuda, and Newfoundland. Even more interesting from the standpoint of current events is the career of Sir Thomas Roe, another idealistically practical member of the Virginia Company. Anticipating what the future appears to have in store was, it may be said that Sir Thomas had a hand in winning the second World War of the twentieth century, for it was he who was foremost in gaining a trade foothold for England in East India. In South America his discoveries came near to attracting the Pilgrim Fathers to Guiana, and but for Sandys' invitation they might have gone there. In a letter to the Earl of Salisbury, a somewhat aloof member of the Company because of his position close to James I, he urged upon that statesman the conversion of the Virginia Indians, which, he declared, would constitute a "conquest of soules above the conquest of kyngdomes"; and a recent observation by a Pennsylvania historian is well worth noting; namely, "If Newport's voyage in the *Sarah Constant* in 1607 may be said to have laid the foundations of the United States, then his voyage with Ambassador Sir Thomas Roe in 1615 may be said to have laid the foundations of British India". One could go on with several score of these founder-projectors; but what of the early Virginia settlers? Were they idealists animated by the spirit of the men who commissioned them?

Concerning the colonists in general I cannot do better than quote the words of the Anglican clergyman who was a principal "welwiller" of the enterprise and withal a frank and honest witness as to the character of these pioneers. This witness, the Reverend William Crashaw, wrote that those "who go to Virginia be like (for ought that I see) to those are left behind". The records bear him

out and show that the settlers varied from the veriest villain to "good Master Hunt, our preacher", the first Anglican minister to give his life to the cause, of whom it was said that, "Upon any alarme he would be as ready for defence as any; and till as long as he could speak, he never ceassed to his utmost to animate us constantly to persist, whose soul questionless is with God".

With respect to the social scale, there was a like variation from the lowest stratum to Captain George Percy, who, as the eighth son of the eighth Earl of Northumberland, represented one of the three oldest families in England. Neither by the English projectors of the colony nor by the Virginia pioneers does he seem to have been accorded special consideration because of his social position. He worked his way to colonial leadership, first by election and twice by appointment. Like Smith, Percy was a soldier of fortune, and he appears to have been uninterested in the conversion ideal, while his attitude towards representative forms of government is undisclosed. We have had a better opportunity of judging him after 1922 when Lyon Gardiner Tyler, after much persistence, triumphantly unearthed the long letter which Percy was known to have written to his brother, the Earl.

Because of the aspersions cast by Smith upon the mission motive, and because of the flat denial of all Virginia idealism by the early Puritan writers, with the consequent channeling of the historical narrative, even the concept of conversion in Company and colony has been generally ignored. At Jamestown the papers of the Reverend Robert Hunt were destroyed by the fire of 1608, together with his "library". He died shortly thereafter, and so we have no record of his labors with the Indians, if he had opportunity for such. Much the same may be said of George Thorpe, trustee of the college property, though we do know that he worked long and earnestly to convert the werowance Opechancanough. Every school child knows something of Pocahontas, but few adults seem to associate her romantic marriage with her wholesouled acceptance of the Christian faith. It is known that the Indian Chanco saved Jamestown in the "General Massacre" of 1622. He was a convert. At the same time, another Indian tried to save that colonial idealist, and first teacher-missionary layman, George Thorpe. And there seems no logical explanation that accounts for the escape or im-

munity of sundry isolated settlers except through the good offices of other Chancos. Then there were the arguments with the werowance Japazeus over the story of the Creation—arguments aroused by a woodcut or other such design in an illustrated edition of the Bible. In short, there is a deal of evidence, if you look for it, to show that at least some of the early settlers were attempting to put in practice the principles of the projectors. Even after sundry bitter experiences with Indian treachery we find Sir Thomas Dale, in Asian waters, but fresh from Jamestown, holding earnest counsel with the Reverend Patrick Copeland about the mission motive in Virginia, with the result that while rounding the Cape of Good Hope—an omen of the future Union of South Africa—Copeland raised funds on board the *Royal James* to forward this worthy purpose. Only the slaying of Thorpe and the General Massacre prevented Copeland from actively serving as the first American college president, to which office he was later appointed by the Virginia Company. True, the evidence shows that to some of the more experienced settlers this labor of love seemed more likely to encourage an implacable foe to further attacks as the toll of English victims mounted; and recently Robert Ralston Cawley has suggested that Shakespeare's Caliban symbolized the American savages, while Prospero represented the idealists who tried to civilize them.

Yet assuming that some of the "ancient" settlers were opposed to the attempts at conversion, the fact remains that the first two laws enacted by the General Assembly in 1619 concerned Anglo-Indian relations. The first law was designed to protect the natives from aggression of any kind; and the second faithfully and fully reflected the conversion-and-"civilitie" concept of the Virginia-London Company. It reads:

> Be it enacted by this present Assembly that for laying a surer, foundation of the conversion of the Indians to the Christian Religion, each towne, citty, Borrough, and particular plantation do obtaine unto themselves by just means a certine number of the natives children to be educated by them in true religion and civile course—of which children the most towardly boyes in witt and graces of nature to be brought up by them in the first elements of litterature, so as to be fitted for the Colledge intended for them that from thence they may be sent to that worke of conversion.

At Jamestown, as in England in the seventeenth century, some proportion of the rank and file lacked education. There was the same range from illiteracy to literature. Gabriel Archer, first proponent of a colonial parliament, was a highly creditable chronicler. In fact, he was the first American historian to write his story and rest in American soil. Captain Smith wrote at greatest length, unless, as he himself remarked, he got his narrative largely from others; and even a gunner at Jamestown addressed a letter to his Highness, Prince Henry, sending it back by the *Sarah Constant* on her return voyage. But the first contribution of high literary merit was composed by Secretary William Strachey, who, in a letter to an "excellent Lady", described the Bermudian hurricane that wrecked the *Sea Venture*. It is, I believe, the most vivid account in the English language of a storm at sea, and from that letter Shakespeare undoubtedly borrowed certain terms and the concept or inspiration for his fantasy, *The Tempest*.

Sundry other writers may be mentioned, such as Captain Peter Wynne, whose interesting letter to Sir John Egerton was not brought to light until 1934; or that of Captain Martin, whose letter to Charles I was first published in 1937. Most gifted of these writers was George Sandys, the first colonial treasurer, who translated Ovid's *Metamorphoses* while Opechancanough was planning his Pearl Harbor, even to setting a zero hour for the attack. In that "General Massacre", George Thorpe, scholar, philanthropist, and missionary-teacher, was slain and his body horribly mutilated; but George Sandys, residing at Jamestown, was saved by Chanco. It may not be too much to say that the conversion of Chanco saved the colony, as it has been said that the conversion of Matoaka saved it at an earlier date. So, to that degree, the religious ideals of the projectors were justified, much as their ideals of personal liberty and representative institutions were transplanted in the New World when they were threatened with eclipse or extinction in the Old.

Daniel, of ancient Hebrew history, was not the only prophet of that name. The English historian, Samuel Daniel, bore the names of two Hebrew prophets. Like every author of the Elizabethan epoch, in so far as I know them, Samuel Daniel wrote about Virginia; but Daniel set forth a vision of the future which, in its ful-