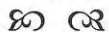


AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION



The Tragical Relation of the
Virginia Assembly,
1624

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INTRODUCTION

THE effort of the faction of Sir Thomas Smith in the Virginia Company to secure a dissolution was heartily reprobated by the Virginia Assembly, and in January, 1624, they drew up a paper denouncing the administration of Sir Thomas Smith and extolling that of Sandys and Southampton. The exact truth cannot be expected of such a paper, but after its perusal there can be but one opinion of the merits of the two parties. The original is in the Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts. The text which follows has been carefully collated with this original. The document was first printed in Neill's *Virginia Company of London*, pp. 407-411.

L. G. T.

THE TRAGICAL RELATION OF THE VIRGINIA ASSEMBLY, 1624

The answeere of the Generall Assembly in Virginia to a Declaration of the state of the Colonie in the 12 yeeres of Sr Thomas Smiths Government, exhibited by Alderman Johnson¹ and others.

HOLDINGE it a sinne against God, and our owne sufferinge, to suffer the World to be abused wth untrue reportes, and to give unto vice the reward of vertue, we in the name of the whole Colonie of Virginia, in our generall assembly, many of us having beene eye witnesses and patients² of those tymes have framed out of our duty to this country, and love unto truth, this Dismaskinge of those prayses w^{ch} are contayned in the foresaide declarationes.

In those 12 yeeres of S^r Tho: Smith his goverment, we averr that the Colony for the most parte remayned in great want and misery under most severe and Crewell lawes sent over in printe,³ and contrary to the expresse Letter of the Kinge in his most gracious Charter, and as mercylessly executed, often times without tryall or Judgment. The allowance in those tymes for a man was only eight ounces of meale and half a pinte of pease

¹ Alderman Robert Johnson of London was one of the leading members of the Smith faction in the company, and had been deputy-treasurer under Smith. He took a leading part in procuring the dissolution of the company.

² Sufferers.

³ These printed laws, entitled *Laws Divine, Morall and Martiall* (London, 1612; reprinted in Force's *Tracts*, Washington, 1844, Vol. III.) were promulgated by Sir Thomas Gates at Jamestown for the first time, May 24, 1610. They were afterwards enlarged by Sir Thomas Dale, who introduced the martial code contained in the thirty-two articles of war of the army of the Netherlands, with the cognizance of Sir Thomas Smith, the treasurer of the company.

for a daye, the one and the other mouldy, rotten, full of Cobwebs and Maggotts loathsome to man and not fytt for beasts, w^{ch} forced many to flee for reliefe to the Savage Enemy, who being taken againe were putt to sundry deaths as by hanginge, shooting and breakinge uppon the wheele and others were forced by famine to filch for their bellies, of whom one for steelinge of 2 or 3 pints of oatemeale had a bodkinge thrust through his tounge and was tyed wth a chaine to a tree untill he starved, yf a man through his sicknes had not been able to worke, he had noe allowance at all, and soe consequently perished. Many through these extremities, being weery of life, digged holes in the earth and there hidd themselves till they famished.

Wee cannott for this our scarsitie blame our Comanders heere, in respect that o^r sustenance was to come from England, for had they at that time given us better allowance we had perished in generall, soe lamentable was our scarsitie that we were constrayned to eate Doggs, Catts, ratts, Snakes, Toadstooles, horse hides and w^t nott, one man out of the mysery that he endured, killinge his wiefe powdered ¹ her upp to eate her, for w^{ch} he was burned. Many besides fedd on the Corps of dead men, and one who had gotten unsatiable, out of custome to that foode could not be restrayned, untill such tyme as he was executed for it, and in deede soe miserable was our estate, that the happyest day that ever some of them hoped to see, was when the Indyans had killed a mare, they ² wishinge whilst she was a boylinge that S^r Tho: Smith were uppon her backe in the kettle.

And wheras it is afirmed that there were very fewe of his Ma^{ties} subjects left in those dayes, and those of the meanest ranke, we answeere that for one that now dyes, there then perished five, many beinge of Auncyent Howses and borne to estates of 1000^{li} by the yeere, some more some lesse, who likewise perished by famine. Those who survived, who had both adventured their estates and personnes, were Constrayned to serve the Colony, as yf they had been slaves, 7 or 8 yeers for

¹ Salted.

² The desperate settlers.

their freedoms, who underwent as harde and servile labor as the basest Fellow that was brought out of Newgate.

And for discovery we saye that nought was discovered in those 12 yeers, and in these 4 or 5 last yeers much more then formerly.¹

For o^r howses and churches in those tymes they were soe meane and poore by resone of those calamities that they could not stand above one or two yeers, the people never goinge to woorke but out of the bitterness of their spiritts threatninge execrable curses upon Sr: Thomas Smith, nether could a blessinge from god be hoped for in those buildings w^{ch} were founded upon the bloud of soe many Christians.²

The Townes were only James Cyttie, Henryco, Charles hundred, West and Sherley hundred, and Kicoughtan, all w^{ch} in those tymes were ruined alsoe, unlesse some 10 or 12 howses in the Corporation of James Cyttie. At this present tyme are 4 for every one that were then, and forty times exceedinge in goodnesse.³ Fortifications there were non at all against the foraigne enemy, and those that were against the domestick very few and contemptible. Bridges there was only one w^{ch} also decayde in that tyme.⁴ Yf through the forsaid calamities many had not perished we doupt not but there might have been many more than 1000 people in the lande when Sr Thomas Smith left the Government.

But we conceive that when Sr George Yardly arrived Govno^r hee founde not above 400,⁵ most of those in want of

¹ "Discoveries" (*i.e.*, explorations) were made in both periods. Long before Sir Thomas Smith's term expired, all of eastern Virginia was well known to the settlers; Delaware Bay had been visited, and the Bermuda Islands settled. The discoveries made in the four or five last years were probably those of John Pory.

² The houses were made of green wood, which soon decayed.

³ The houses at this time were made of seasoned timbers.

⁴ In 1611 Sir Thomas Dale made a bridge, *i.e.*, a wharf, above where the church tower now stands at Jamestown, on which to land goods from the ships. This was the "bridge" referred to.

⁵ This was the number on the public plantations, but the private settlements had 600 more, making 1000 in all. *Abstract of Proceedings of the Virginia Company of London*, I. 65.

corne, nearly destitute of cattle, swyne, poultreys and other necessary provisions to nourishe them. Ministers to instruct the people there were some whose sufficiency and abilitie we will not tax, yet divers of them had no Orders.

We knowe not at any time that we exceeded in Armes, Powder and munitions, yet that in qualitie almost altogether uselesse. We acknowledg in those times there was a tryall made of divers staple Commodities, the Colony as then not havinge meanes to proceede therin, we hope in tyme there may be some better progressions be made, and had it not beene for the Massacre, many by this had beene brought to perfectione. As for boats in the tyme of that Governmte, there was only one left that was servicable in the Colonie, for w^{ch} one besides 4 or 5 shipps and pynnaçes, there are now not soe fewe as 40, the barques and barges that then were built in number fewe, so unwillinglie and weakly by the people effected, that in the same time they also perished.

We never perceaved that the natives of the Countrey did voluntarily yeeld them selves subjects to our gracyous Sovereigne, nether that they took any pride in that title, nor paide at any tyme any contrybutione of corne for sustentation of the Colony, nor could we at any tyme keepe them in such good respect of correspondency as we became mutually helpful each to the other but contrarily what at any was done proceeded from feare and not love, and their corne procured by trade or the sworde.

To w^t growth of perfectione the Colony hath attayned at the end of those 12 yeers wee conceive may easily be judged by w^t we have formerly saide. And rather then to be reduced to live under the like Govment we desire his Ma^{tie} that Commissioners may be sent over, wth authoritie to hange us.

Alderman Johnson, one of the Authors of this Declaratione, hath reasone to comend him ¹ to whose offences and infamies he is so inseparably chained.

By the generall report of the Country w^{ch} we never hard contradicted, we affirme this to be true wherof all or the most

¹ *I.e.*, Sir Thomas Smith.

parte were eye witnesses or resident in the Country when every particular within written were effected.

Francis Wyatt
George Sandis
John Pott
John Powntis
Roger Smith
Raphe Hamor
Wm. Tucker
Wm. Peerce
Rawley Croshaw
Samuel Mathews
Jabez Whittaker
John Willcox
Nicholas Marten
Edward Blany
Isack Madisone

Clement Dilke
Luke Boyse
John Utie
John Chew
Richard Stephens
John Southerne
Samuel Sharpe
Henry Watkins
Nathanell Causey
Richard Bigge
Richard Kingswell
John Pollington
Robert Addams
Gabriell Holland
Thomas Marlott