

Virginia.¹

IF it is designed in "American Commonwealths" to present a series of interesting narratives embodying the principal events in the history of the several

1 "Virginia : A History of the People." By John Esten Cooke. Boston : Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1883. For sale by Billings, Harbourn & Co., S. F.

States, it cannot be denied that Mr. Cooke, in his account of Virginia, has made an exceedingly favorable beginning. As a work written from this point of view, it merits great praise. The writer has arranged his material with more than ordinary skill, and set it forth in an easy and attractive style. His treatment of the early history of the colony is clear,

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straightforward, often brilliant, and evinces a genuine patriotic enthusiasm. He writes with an evident determination to make an agreeable story, and at the same time to hold intact the ancient traditions of his native commonwealth. His zeal in this direction leads him to underestimate the force of recent criticism on his early authorities. This is particularly noticeable in his treatment of the story of John Smith's rescue through the interference of Pocahontas.

With respect to this point, there are but two possible positions: the writer must either accept or reject Smith's "General History" as an authority. Mr. Cooke appears to have found satisfactory evidence in favor of its acceptance. In view of Mr. Deane's inquiries, however, it was to be expected that he would give more weight than he has done to the doubts that have been raised regarding the episode in question. As to the early accounts from which the story is drawn, it has been said that "there are powerful social interests, to say nothing of popular prejudices, greatly concerned in maintaining their credit even at the present day"; and Mr. Cooke, as a Virginian, has doubtless ample reason for participating more or less in the interests as well as in the prejudices; and, moreover, as a writer whose prominent characteristic is skill in narration, he could not be expected to listen willingly to criticism that would take away the most attractive feature in the history of British colonization in America.

The expedition during which Smith became the prisoner of Powhatan was undertaken on the 10th of December, 1607. The next year, his "True Relation of Virginia," containing an account of his capture, release, and return to Jamestown, was published in London. Written while the events were fresh in his mind, it is difficult to account for the failure to mention his rescue through the interference of Pocahontas, if any such event occurred. Not only is Smith silent regarding the celebrated adventure, at a time when the impression of the events of his capture and release were clear in his mind; but it appears, moreover, to have been entirely unknown either at Jamestown or anywhere else for fourteen years after it is reputed to have happened. In the mean time, Pocahontas appeared on the scene. Strachey mentions her: "there is, however, no reference, direct or indirect, to her agency in saving Smith's life; and no trace of the high esteem which such an act would have won for her." "Pocahontas," he says, "a well-featured but wanton young girl, Powhatan's daughter, sometimes resorting to our fort, of the age then of eleven or twelve years, would get the boys forth with her into the market place, and make them wheel, falling on their hands, turning up their heels upwards, whome she would follow and wheel so herself, naked as she was, all the fort over." This was after the time assigned for her heroic exploit in Smith's behalf; but tradition had not as yet glorified the mother of Virginia's ar-

istocracy. Other writers mention her, but still not a word about her having saved Smith's life. Later she was seized and kept as a hostage to secure peace with Powhatan; then she was married to Rolfe; and in 1616, with her husband and child, appeared in England. She immediately became, for the [time being, the most conspicuous figure in English society, and there is no reason to suppose that any important event of her life escaped the curious inquiries of those around her. Had the event ever happened, some hint of it must have found permanent lodgment somewhere, and been revealed in later time; and moreover, at a time when she was received with special favor by the King and the Queen, Smith had every inducement to make known an event so important in his relations to the heroine of the hour. There is, however, no evidence that any one, during her life, had even the faintest notion that she had been involved in any such romantic adventure as that for which she has become famous." Wingfield, Smith himself, Simons, Strachey, Hamor, Rolfe, and Purchas, all the authorities without exception that are known to exist, are equally dumb when questioned as to a circumstance which, since 1624, has become the most famous part of the history of the Virginia Colony."

In 1622 appeared the second edition of "New England's Trials." In this, Smith gives us the first suggestion of the story, in the following mild form: "It is true in our greatest extremities they shot me, slew three of my men, and, by the folly of them that fled, took me prisoner; yet God made Pocahontas, the King's daughter, the means to deliver me." Two years later, in his "General History," the account appears embellished in all the essential details that have been preserved in the tradition. At this time, Pocahontas had been several years in her grave, and there remained no one to confirm or deny Smith's new version of his capture and escape.

It is not claimed that the arguments which may be brought against the authenticity of the story, as it appeared in the "General History" are entirely conclusive; only that there is no ground for inserting the story of Pocahontas' interference in behalf of Smith, in a sober history of Virginia, except as an exceedingly doubtful tale. A comparison of the early editions of Bancroft's "History of the United States" with the author's last revision reveals the fact that his ripper historical criticism has led him to reject entirely the traditionary account. He refers to Pocahontas as "the child to whom, in later days, he (Smith) attributed his rescue from death."

As "a History of the People," it was expected that Mr. Cooke's book would contain a somewhat detailed account of the internal organization of the people in its beginning and history. A history of a people involves an analysis of its political organization, and a consideration of the influences under which it was formed, as well as a tracing of the various steps in the subsequent development or change in this organ-

ization. To this Mr. Cooke has given comparatively little prominence, perhaps on the ground of its lying without the scope of the work as conceived by him. The subject has, however, by no means escaped attention, but the treatment which it has received is scarcely in keeping with its importance as compared with the importance of other topics which have been treated at considerable length. In this we may find a fault to offset some of the excellencies of the work.

The permanent worth of that series of volumes of which this one is the first will depend, ultimately, rather upon their presentation of the various phases of the internal political organization of the people of the several States, than upon the fact that they contain brilliant narratives of the external events in the history of these States.