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VI

A PURITAN COLONY

IN

MARYLAND

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY STUDIES  
IN  
HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

HERBERT B. ADAMS, Editor

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*History in past Politics and Politics present History — Freeman*

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FOURTH SERIES

VI

A PURITAN COLONY  
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BY DANIEL R. RANDALL, A. B.

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## A PURITAN COLONY IN MARYLAND.

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While native and foreign historians have carefully narrated the history of the Puritans of New England, hardly any notice has been taken of another Puritan band that colonized the southern provinces, a band fewer indeed in numbers but no less zealous than their New England brethren. Sufferings and trials the northern colonists doubtless had, but to those of the southern brethren must be added religious persecution, unknown to the Puritans of New England. Popular ignorance of the story of the Southern Puritans may to a degree be explained by the impossibility to most minds of associating severe, stern, blue-law Puritanism, with the loose, high-living qualities ascribed to the average Virginian or Maryland settler. To this incongruity of temperament the historian gladly leaves much of the unexplained history of the Southern Puritans; yet in the very bosom of Virginia a Puritan colony existed and waxed strong, until its very strength necessitated expulsion. The great struggle of English non-conformists for purity in the church seemed, in the early years of James I., a failure. Though spurred on and encouraged by zealous workers like Milton, who could not fail to see the evil that was creeping into the church and society at large, they yearly found their mother-country becoming more oppressive. To them the newly-found land in the west seemed to open her arms and to invite the oppressed to a refuge for religious freedom.

## PURITANS IN VIRGINIA, 1611.

A little band of extreme Dissenters fled from England and took refuge across the channel, while many Puritans, unnoticed, secretly took advantage of the many expeditions to the New World. Years before Pilgrims or Puritans came to the shores of Massachusetts, Puritanism was a living force in Virginia. Among the first comers there were Puritans who, for the time being, hushed religious convictions in their attempts to leave the mother-country unobserved. A small company holding the Puritan belief was undoubtedly settled in Virginia as early as 1611, when, with Sir Thomas Dale, Governor, came the so-called "Apostle," the Rev. Alexander Whittaker, under whose guidance sprang up the first Puritan Church in the New World. Whittaker dying<sup>1</sup> in 1616, was succeeded by the Rev. George Keith, also a non-conformist, and under these divines and the Rev. Hawte Wyatt, brother of the Governor, who came in 1621, the Puritan element was greatly strengthened, especially in Nansemond and other southern counties. In those early days of colonial enterprise, when the exertion of every settler was necessary to protect the colony from Indian marauders on the one hand and starvation on the other, little time was given to religious disputes. Orthodox and non-conformist were equally welcomed by Governor and Council. Doubtless reports from the brethren in Virginia, telling of their fortune in finding a secure retreat, where the English Archbishop's heavy hand could not be felt, came to the ears of the English separatists in Holland. When in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers of New England turned their faces westward from the Old World to the New, their destination was Virginia, the land of peace and good-will.

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<sup>1</sup> He married and baptized Pocahontas in 1614 and was drowned in the James River in 1616.



## SIGNIFICANCE OF PURITAN EMIGRATION.

The Puritan emigration to America marks an important epoch in both religious and political history, securing for Englishmen and their posterity, through the daring of the first settlers, a central vantage-ground in the New World, the commanding position between the rival colonies of French and Spaniard, the Huguenot and the Jesuit. During the years 1618-21, twenty-five hundred persons came to Virginia alone, some enticed by Governor Wyatt's offers and others driven by persecution at home during the last years of Archbishop Bancroft; "and he seeing abundance more were ready to start the same voyage, obtained a proclamation, commanding them not to go without the king's license." It was this order that detained Milton and Pym, already embarked to join their brethren in Virginia, and saved England the loss of two of her noblest men. "The dissolution of the Parliament of 1629 marked the darkest hour of Puritanism, whether in England or the world at large. But it was in this their hour of despair that the Puritans won their noblest triumph. They turned toward the New World to redress the balance of the old" (Green, *Short Hist. of the English People*, chap. viii).

The Puritans of Virginia, with but few exceptions, sprang from the sturdy English yeomanry, from whose ranks were recruited statesmen of those days. Warrosquoyacke County, or Isle-of-Wight, finally called Norfolk County, lying on and south of the James river, was the centre of the Puritan district, and here upon broad plantations lived the future rulers of Maryland. A certain wealthy merchant of London, Edward Bennett, had obtained in 1621 a large grant of land on the Nausemond river, south of the James, and on his coming to Virginia, brought with him a considerable band of Puritan followers, who settled upon his lands and formed the nucleus of a Puritan congregation. A perfect system of local government developed under the sway of the patriarchal Bennett, while a relative, the Rev. William Bennett, was

leader in all spiritual matters. Edward's son was destined to play an important rôle in the history of Virginia and Maryland.

#### GROWTH OF PURITAN SETTLEMENT IN VIRGINIA.

The Puritan colony grew so rapidly in population and influence that, in 1629, it was represented by two Burgesses in the Assembly. That same year Governor Harvey arrived in Virginia and immediately began to proclaim those rigorous laws, framed by Archbishop Bancroft against Dissenters, which, though standing upon the statute-books, had hitherto remained a dead letter with Virginia governors. Harvey's action was merely formal. His chief end was to secure the friendship of the all-powerful Bishop and the disenfranchisement of Roman Catholics. Indeed so popular was the Puritan element with the Governor, that about this time a Captain Basse, of that persuasion, was instructed by him to invite any Puritan settlers from Plymouth to come and settle on Delaware Bay, then within the limits of Virginia. This invitation was not accepted, nor have we any trace of permanent settlement among Puritans in Virginia by New England colonists, though many went from Virginia to Massachusetts. By an Act of February 24, 1631, the government of Virginia became for the first time openly intolerant. This Act prescribes: "that there be a uniformity throughout this colony both in substance and circumstances to the canons and constitution of the Church of England." To what extent religious intolerance was carried through this ordinance is unknown, but it doubtless caused the withdrawal, at least from public view, of the Puritan divines then officiating in Virginia. The elders of the churches continued to conduct services in private houses, yet the want of spiritual leaders was sorely felt, and a tendency appeared among the congregations to break up and scatter. At Nansemond, Bennett conducted services, and, though the church was there more compact,

yet it was clearly seen that outside aid was essential to its continued welfare.

#### PURITAN MINISTERS FROM MASSACHUSETTS.

Their only hope lay in their more fortunate brethren in Massachusetts, and, to seek aid from them, Mr. Philip Bennett, one of the Nansemond elders, was sent in May, 1641, bearing letters and a petition signed by seventy-one persons, to Governor Winthrop and the Church in Boston. Bennett arrived in Boston and on lecture day his letters were openly read. A day was set apart "to seek God in it and agree upon those who could be spared from the churches in New England"<sup>1</sup> to preach in such a distant quarter. Those churches which were blessed with two divines, with commendable zeal unhesitatingly offered the one who could be easiest spared to prosecute in Virginia the hallowed work. Of those who were suggested, Mr. Phillips of Watertown, Mr. Thompson of Braintree, and Mr. Miller of Rowley were elected by the assembled magistrates. Mr. Miller, however, declined because of bodily infirmity, and Mr. Phillips deemed it inadvisable that he should make such a change at his age. A Puritan elder and co-laborer with Mr. Phillips at Watertown, Mr. Knowles, took his place, and Mr. James of New Haven was chosen to succeed Mr. Miller. With blessings from the churches upon their labors in Virginia the party, under Bennett's guidance, embarked from Narragansett during the winter of 1642-3. The little vessel with its precious freight was caught in a storm and driven upon Hell Gate rocks and its passengers, though escaping with their lives, were rudely treated by the Dutch. Nothing daunted, the party procured a new ship and arrived in the James River eleven weeks after their original embarkation.

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<sup>1</sup> Winthrop's Journal, Vol. II., pp. 93-4.