

**VIRGINIA
LITERATURE. A
DISSERTATION**

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Virginia Literature. A dissertation by Carol Montgomery Newman

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CAROL MONTGOMERY NEWMAN

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VIRGINIA LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION


PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA AS
A PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

CAROL MONTGOMERY NEWMAN

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PREFACE.

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The present pamphlet is merely the skeleton of a much larger work, a *Virginia Bibliography*, for which the author has collected nearly all the necessary material. The "Sketch of Virginia Literature" here given was to have formed the Introduction to this larger volume; the present "Check-List of Virginia Writers" is simply an alphabetical enumeration of those authors whose published volumes the fuller work was to have catalogued and described; and no record at all is here made of those books published in Virginia by foreign or anonymous writers, of which a long list has been compiled. But, though the author has found it impossible to publish this complete work at present, he still hopes to do so in the near future. He therefore earnestly requests that inaccuracies, omissions, or errors of any sort found in the present pamphlet by those into whose hands it may fall, will be brought to his notice for correction.

To many friends throughout the State the author owes a debt of gratitude for their encouragement and their suggestions, but above all to Dr. Charles W. Kent, of the University of Virginia, whose practical interest in the work since its inception has done most toward making its completion possible.

I.

A SKETCH OF VIRGINIA LITERATURE.

With peculiar aptitude may a time-worn figure be pressed into service and the course of Virginia literature be likened to the flow of some fair river. It rises among scenes that are wild and rugged, its early progress is impeded by many a forbidding boulder; not yet conscious of its seaward mission, it flows merely because flow it must. Many are the vicissitudes through which it passes before the sea is reached. Now it glides placidly amid pleasant pastures; its motion seems born of immobility. Now it foams down the rapids, and the sunlight glistening upon the flying spray calls from their fairy hiding places all the rare beauties of the rainbow; now it leaps madly roaring over the falls and subsides between vast rocky cliffs by which the sunlight seems forever hidden. At last the level plains extend on every side; the mission of the waters is clear; the river, fed by many a faithful tributary, flows proudly onward with ever increasing volume to mingle with the mighty ocean.

An adequate history of this Virginia literature would be a matter of volumes, and yet involve no undue enlargement of scale or unwarranted liberality of judgment. Nor would such a history possess as little value as the generality of critics would have us believe. In more ways than one the literature of the Old Dominion is worthy of minutest study.

In its development Virginia literature typifies the progress of the still greater body of American literature; it shows the effects of the same general environment, it responds to the same potent influences, it exhibits the same lines of growth. It is, too, the representative literature, as for many years it was the only literature, of that peculiarly interesting section of the American nation called the South. Furthermore, it mirrors a civilization that has ever been unique on the American continent; it tells the

story of a race whose bravery none has impugned, whose noble qualities of head and heart challenge the admiration of the world; it breathes the spirit of a land whose love of liberty inspired the first jury trial, the first representative assembly, the first free-school, the first forcible opposition to foreign tyranny known to the western world. The final and crowning value of Virginia literature, however, is its value not as mirror or type but as literature alone,—as the artistic expression of broadly human interests by men and women of the highest intellectual caste.

Such are the considerations that will justify the future historian of Virginia's literary development in his labors. All the more will they justify the present sketch, which makes no claim to adequacy, but hopes only to outline in a general way the development of Virginia literature, to mark the peculiar social and intellectual conditions influencing that development, and to note the inherent value of a few of the productions themselves. This discussion may be facilitated by dividing Virginia's literary history into periods and considering each in turn. Obviously these are:

THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD, dating from 1607, when Jamestown was founded, to 1676, the year of Bacon's Rebellion.

THE LATER COLONIAL PERIOD, extending from 1676 to 1760, when the spirit of revolt again became rife in the land.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD, 1760-1800, the expiration of which may be considered coincident with the close of the century, since not till then was the new republic firmly established.

THE PERIOD OF UNION, 1800-1850, covering the first half of the nineteenth century and ending among the murmurings of coming storm.

THE PERIOD OF DIVISION, extending from 1850, the date of the adoption of the Clay Compromise, to 1876, a year "signalized by the centennial of our country's existence—by the peaceful decision of the Hayes-Tilden contest, the withdrawal of troops from Louisiana, and Hampton's election in South Carolina."

THE PERIOD OF REUNION, 1876 to the present day.

Let us now proceed to a consideration of these periods, noting in each instance the conditions under which the literature was produced, its general character, and its more specific forms.

THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD.

(1607-1676)

During the first seventy years of Virginia's literary history, environment acted with more than ordinary power. The development of a literary spirit was hampered by various adverse agencies. No wonder the colonists of this period found small time for writing; think of the task of nation-building that lay before them, the many stirring scenes through which they passed in this, the most romantic epoch of American history. There were no "piping times" and could offer but little leisure for the cultivation of literary tastes. The growth of letters was stunted principally, however, by the peculiar intellectual and social conditions obtaining throughout the colony.

The earliest settlers upon the shores of Virginia brought with them the memories of a truly merry England, the Cavalier England of broad fields and solitary castles. It was luxury and wealth, not strenuous freedom, that they hoped to find in the new world; later, as settled colonists, they strove to perpetuate, not the bustling cities of their native land but its manorial estates, rich and independent. They ultimately succeeded in their endeavor, and in their success lies the secret of the literary inactivity of their own and following generations. Despite legislative enactments, the plantation system prevented the growth of towns, and in those days of imperfect communication between isolated districts, reduced to a minimum the contact of man with man. Consequently the most important literary stimulant, the strife of intellectual powers, was largely wanting; there was no mental friction and the electric spark of genius remained unkindled. Another result of social segregation, aided and abetted by governmental opposition to education, was the slow development of a general school system, which, while it perhaps worked no great injury upon the higher classes, who were not dependent upon native schools, prevented the lower strata from

being permeated by any love of learning. Thanks, too, to Governor Berkeley, there was during this period not even a printing-press in Virginia, consequently no local publishing house to offer encouragement to literary activity. Finally, it should be remembered that the early Virginia settlers had no peculiar religions or political tenets, the maintenance of which required the multiplication of aggressive tracts, pamphlets, and sermons.

Such literature, however, as was produced during these early colonial days, notwithstanding obstacles, possesses a unique interest. Without exception the authors are Englishmen transplanted to Virginia soil, and while we may claim them by virtue of adoption, they belong equally to England by right of birth. With but a single exception the literature of this period is unconsciously literature; its object was quite other than to secure literary fame for its composers. The primitive settlers upon the Powhatan found themselves in the midst of "earth's only paradise" surrounded by fair fields and primeval forests, sung to by strange birds and charmed by the fragrance of unwonted flowers, alternately ministered to and menaced by dusky savages of unknown lineage. If the multifold impressions made upon their receptive minds found written expression, it was that their brethren at home might be told of this new world and the journey to it; or that detractors might be silenced and meddlers admonished. Consequently, almost all the writings of this period belong to the same department of literature, namely the historical. Here we have a naive narrative of exploration or travel, there a vigorous description of natives or nature, but the essential historic quality remains. Not ordinary history this, indeed, for it is penned by those who have been actors in the events of which they write, whose knowledge comes at first hand, who do not stop to theorize but deliver a plain unvarnished tale. To be sure, poetry, also, is written in Virginia during these years, but poetry is an exotic transplanted from other shores, soon to wither and die; history is of native growth and possesses all the vigor of the soil from which it springs.

Foremost among the historians in both time and importance stands the redoubtable Captain John Smith, the real father of

American history. Essentially a man of action, he was yet of that many-sided type, the glory of the Elizabethan Age, and not the least of his accomplishments was the power to write virile English. Only two of Smith's many books were written during his eventful career in Virginia, but the "True Relation" and "General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles" are representative as to both merits and demerits. His histories possess many positive charms; vigor and earnestness characterize every statement; felicitous phraseology abounds; the page is adorned now by a flash of quaint humor, now by a touch of rare imaginative beauty. This earliest of our writers, moreover, possessed remarkable powers of observation and reproduction; he paints his vivid pictures with a few deft strokes. What, then, if his literary style be somewhat rude, his sentences misshapen? This style but brings us nearer to the noble soldier as he sits within his tent and pens these pages. His ear alertly listening for the whistle of a death-laden arrow, is not strictly attentive to the requirements of rhetorical melody of phrase; his hand, fresh from grasping the sword-hilt, handles the pen but clumsily. Nor would we have it otherwise, for more correct writing would be less natural. We need feel no shame in pointing back to the rugged literary productions of this equally rugged adventurer, for America could have had no firmer foundation on which to rear a great and permanent literature.

Of other Virginia historians but passing mention need here be made. George Percy, brother of the Earl of Northumberland and secretary of the colony, published in 1607 his "Discourse of Virginia," a collection of "graphic sketches of brightness and gloom," sketches full of life, not vague or softened but distinct in their primitive coloring. Another secretary, William Strachey, wrecked on the Bermudas in company with Sir Thomas Gates, made that misfortune the subject of a narrative which, in all its majestic vigor, was well worthy the honor of suggesting to Shakespeare the shipwreck scene in "The Tempest." Strachey was also the author of a "History of Travaile into Virginia Britannia," and by his collection of "Lawes Divine, Morall, and Martiall," enrolls himself as the first American contributor to

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