

**A GLANCE AT
CURRENT
AMERICAN HISTORY**

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A Glance at Current American History by John Cussons

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BY

AN EX-CONFEDERATE,

GLEN ALLEN, VA.

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A GLANCE AT

CURRENT AMERICAN HISTORY

On the general merits, or rather demerits, of THE SOUTH it is quite evident that the outside world has made up its mind.

The "accepted fable" or "distillation of rumors" which we call History, has fully crystallized, and there is not the least ground for supposing that there will be any revision of the judgment already pronounced.

For two-and-thirty years our Northern friends have deprecated any allusion on our part to the causes or character of the war, assuring us that every impulse of manhood and every throb of patriotism demanded that we should bury the past, with all its illusive hopes and unavailing griefs, and bend our undivided energies to the upbuilding of a common country. And that is precisely the thing which we have been doing.

Meantime, during those same two-and-thirty years, those Northern friends of ours have been diligent in a systematic distortion of the leading facts of American history — inventing, suppressing, perverting, without scruple or shame—until our Southland stands to-day pilloried to the scorn of all the world and bearing on her front the brand of every infamy.

This has been accomplished not alone nor chiefly by historic narrative or formal record but rather by the

persistent use, at all times and on all occasions, of every form and mode of unfriendly expression—in pulpit and on platform, at lyceum and on the hustings, by picture and story, by essay and song, by sedate disquisition and airy romance, and in a general way by the unwearied false coloring of all past and current events. And thus it has come to pass that in the popular mind her very name has become an embodiment of folly, a symbol of meanness, a proverb of utter and incurable inefficiency. The economist with a principle to illustrate, the moralist full of his Nemesian philosophy, the dramatist in quest of poetic justice—in short every craftsman of tongue or pen with a moral to point or a tale to adorn turns instinctively to this mythical, this fiction-created South, and finds the thing he seeks.

The world has decided against us, and there remains to us now but a single hope—the hope of winning and holding something better than a dishonored place in the hearts of our own children. And even this hope, modest yet none the less precious, is fading away as the days go by. A wise and philosophical historian has justly said that “a people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of a remote ancestry will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered by remote descendants.” Truer words were never spoken. And yet our grandchildren, trained in the public schools, often mingle with their affection an indefinable pity, a pathetic sorrow—soothing us with their caresses while vainly striving to forget “our crimes.” A bright little girl climbs into the old veteran’s lap, and hugging him hard and kissing his gray hairs, exclaims: “I don’t care, grandpa, if you were an old rebel! I love you! I love you!”

But there is to be an end of this. The Grand Army of the Republic has spoken. And ever since the war ended that army has been a potential force. Nothing

more is to be said in palliation of the rebels or the rebellion—no word of comfort, no plea of sympathy. Confederates are always to be described as "insurrectionists" who sought to destroy the Government. The existing histories are to be expurgated. Every tribute to Southern heroism is to be blotted out, and the sum total of martial glory is to be transferred to the Grand Army of the Republic by virtue of its own decree.

This plan has doubtless many advantages. It seems to settle hard questions so easily. Military fame is illusive, and if it comes not by gage of battle there is really nothing more natural than to invoke it by other means. And our Northern friends have chosen wisely. If the three tailors of Tooley street could achieve undying renown by putting forth a mere preamble, what may not the Grand Army of the Republic accomplish by writing down a solid column of resolutions? They have labored long and arduously, but have at last hit the mark. We admire their perseverance, their versatility, and most of all we felicitate them on their success in giving a new meaning to the old aphorism that "the pen is mightier than the sword."

The United States History which to-day enjoys the widest circulation and the highest fame is the recent work of GOLDWIN SMITH, Doctor of Canon Law and Professor of the Humanities, Toronto, Canada.

The learned author has gathered his inspiration, and what he calls his facts, from many sources, enumerating by title no less than twenty-two authorities, and adding that a complete list would be out of proportion to the size of the book itself. And yet there is absolutely nothing to indicate that he has troubled himself with more than one side of his subject. He makes no allusion of any kind to any writer who has extended his investigations in the faintest degree be-

yond the beaten paths of Northern historical orthodoxy. There is not a fragment of reference to Sage's colossal work, or the scholarly monograph of Curry, or the vivid picturings of Maury, or the comprehensive exposition of Stephens, or the philosophical review of Ropes, or indeed any citation whatever which can inspire a reasonable hope of the slightest tendency toward impartial treatment.

Mr. Goldwin Smith however is something more than a mere Doctor of Canon Law and Professor of the Humanities. He takes high rank among the masters of political economy, and surely not without abundant reason, for the skill with which he has adapted his wares to his market is beyond all praise.

His book is published both at New York and London and is intended, he informs us, "for English rather than American readers;" nevertheless it has become amazingly popular with our brethren throughout the North.

The general plan of his work is an unsparing vilification of the South. This wins for him Northern plaudits, and amid the gleeful tumult he weaves in his sneers and gibes on America at large, and thus opens a second market for his books among his own class of delighted Britishers.

South Carolina, he says, made her start by combining "buccaneering with slave owning" and utilized her ports by making them a shelter for pirates and corsairs "such as Captain Kidd and Blackbeard."

Georgia he deals with more leniently. Her people were not distinctly criminal but just languidly and lazily vicious—shiftless, drunken and beggarly. She became "the refuge of the pauper and the bankrupt." Her first settlers were "good-for-nothings who had failed in trade"—a "shiftless and lazy set" who "called for rum;" but later on "better elements came in, High-

landers, Moravians, and some of the persecuted protestants of Salzburg."

But Virginia seems to be his especial aversion. From the very beginning it has been her misfortune to awaken within him the most distressing emotions. He says she was not started right; that her first settlers were an unpromising lot—lackeys, beggars, broken-down gentlemen, tapsters out of a job. And things went from bad to worse. "To the crew of vagabonds were afterwards added jail-birds." * * * "Convicts were offered their choice between the gallows and Virginia, and some were wise enough to choose the gallows." They were not nice. Their aims were low, their motives sordid, their very place of settlement has long been a desolation, and only fragments of ruin mark its site.'

Such is the forbidding background of Mr. Goldwin Smith's historical picture when he begins to light it up with the luminous glories of the Plymouth settlement. The Pilgrims, he assures us, were an altogether different kind of people. There was nothing sordid about them, nothing grovelling, nothing base. Their pure hearts were too full of simple faith and holy zeal to afford room for corrupting influences or worldly desires. "Some sustaining motive higher than gain was necessary to give them victory in their death-struggle with nature, to enable them to make a new home for themselves in the wilderness, and to found a nation."

It was not only during the early period of colonization that the New Englanders were superior to the Virginians. The distinction seems to have widened as time went on. "Though no longer gold seekers, the men of Virginia were not such colonists as the Puritans. They were more akin in character to the Spaniard on the south of them, who made the Indian work