

**VIRGINIA PRESBYTERIANISM
AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
IN COLONIAL AND
REVOLUTIONARY TIMES; PP. 1-
127**

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Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty in Colonial and Revolutionary Times; pp. 1-127
by Thos. Cary Johnson

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Virginia Presbyterianism

AND

Religious Liberty

IN

Colonial and Revolutionary Times

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PREFACE.

REPEATEDLY asked, during the last seven months, to produce a sketch of *the services of Presbyterians during Colonial and Revolutionary days to the cause of religious liberty*, this little book is the writer's response. It has been his steadfast desire to claim nothing more for Presbyterians than was warranted by objective fact; and, notwithstanding the limits of space fixed by his publishers, to acknowledge, at least in general terms, the highly important services of other forces.

He should acknowledge here the free use he has made, in preparing this paper, of Foote's *Sketches of Virginia*, Brigg's *American Presbyterians*, Rives' *Life and Times of Madison*, William Wirt Henry's *Life, Correspondence, and Speeches of Patrick Henry*, etc., etc. He owes thanks, also, to the librarians of the Virginia State Library, who kindly and courteously gave him access to the rich treasures of that institution, including many original manuscripts, copies of which were verified before their incorporation into this work.

With the hope that it may conserve the interests of truth, he sends this little book forth.

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN VIRGINIA.

July 18, 1907.

Virginia Presbyterianism *and* Religious Liberty.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET.

THE Virginia doctrine of the separation of Church and State has long prevailed throughout all the vast territory of these United States, save where Mormonism has fixed its unholy seat. The old mother of States and statesmen is venerable for nothing more than for this doctrine, and for her exemplification of it. Too little, however, is generally known as to how Virginia came to hold to the separation of Church and State, and as to how she came to put the principle into application.

No attempt shall be made in this booklet even to name all the forces which worked together, under the Providence of God, to these ends. Forces, apparently the most hostile, the advocates of privilege and prerogative, of the establishment, no less than the advocates of toleration and liberty, were used of Providence to achieve this advance. The positive forces working for it were numerous. Individuals from every denomination in the colony helped in the great struggle. Quakers, the Baptists particularly, and other *denominations*, as well as Presbyterians, took a useful part in the struggle. No one denomination can justly claim to have been the sole aggressive agency at any one time in the long contest. Principles which consti-

tuted the common heritage of Protestants, wrought themselves out in their legitimate fruitage in this doctrine of religious liberty. Civil commotions and political revolution, by the opportunities afforded, favored the cause. The Time-Ghost of the America colonies, made for the same thing.

To sketch all these forces would require much space. In this brochure an attempt is made to indicate some of the services of Presbyterians in behalf of religious liberty, during colonial and revolutionary days.

CHAPTER II.

CONDITION OF DISSENTERS IN THE COLONY OF VIRGINIA, 1607-1688.

THE early colonists of Virginia were, in the main, conforming Englishmen, who had come, not for religious reasons, but to advance their temporal fortunes. They, naturally, established the Church of England by law. The Church of England of the period was not a thorough-going Episcopal church till the Act of Uniformity of 1662, passed by the Cavalier Parliament of Charles II., which required thenceforth that all its ministers should have received Episcopal ordination. The Puritan party was strong in the church. The mixed character of the Anglican Church was reproduced in the early colonial church in Virginia.

The percentage of Puritans, and the percentage of Presbyterian Puritans amongst the colonists in this period can only be conjectured. But both the purpose in the founding of the colony and the character of the Virginia Company of London, composed of men, some of whom were amongst the most remarkable of their age for breadth of mind, makes for the view that it was not inconsiderable. The Rev. Robert Hunt, the pious and devoted minister who came with the first body of settlers, may have been a Puritan; he was educated at the University of Cambridge, a Puritan centre at the time. If the Puritanism of Mr. Hunt is incapable of proof, the same cannot be said of Alexander Whitaker, who, in the language of a contemporary, was "a scholar, graduate, preacher, well-

born and friended in England; not in debt nor disgrace, but completely provided for, and liked and beloved where he lived; not in want, but (for a scholar and as these days be) rich in possession, and more in possibilities, of himself without any persuasion (but God's and his own heart), did voluntarily leave his warme nest; and, to the wonder of his kindred and amazement of them that knew him, undertook this hard, but, in my judgment, heroicall resolution to go to Virginia, and helpe to bear the name of God unto the Gentiles."¹ He was a son of the famous Dr. William Whitaker, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, England, and an Independent (Presbyterian) Puritan, as shown in the literature of the time. He writes, June, 1614:

"Every Sabbath-day, we preach in the forenoon and catechise in the afternoon. Every Saturday, at night, I exercise in Sir Thomas Dale's house. Our Church affairs be consulted on by the minister and four of the most religious men. Once every month we have a communion, and once a year we have a solemn fast." He subsequently wrote: "Here neither surplice nor subscription is spoken of."²

Nansemond County seems to have become a centre of Puritanism in the period before us. Encouraged by the state of affairs in England in 1641, Puritan congregations of Nansemond sent to New England for ministers. Three answered the call. After a brief ministry, at least two of

¹ W. Crashaw's Epistle Dedicatorie to the Godnewes from Virginia," quoted in F. L. Hawk's, *A Narrative of Events Connected with the Rise and Progress of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia*, p. 28.

² E. D. Neill, *Notes on the Virginia Colonial Clergy*, Philadelphia, 1877, p. 4; George Bancroft's *History of the United States*, Vol. I., p. 141, quoted in C. A. Briggs, *American Presbyterianism*, p. 87.