

**HALF-FORGOTTEN
ROMANCES OF
AMERICAN HISTORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649738939

Half-Forgotten Romances of American History by Elisabeth Ellicott Poe

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Half-Forgotten Romances
of
American History

By
ELISABETH ELLICOTT POE

PRIVATELY PRINTED
WASHINGTON, D. C.
December, 1922

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AMERICAN TOY
ELIZABETH POE
YEAR

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NATIONAL CAPITAL PRESS, INC., WASHINGTON, D. C.

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To Mrs. Clarence Crittenden Calhoun.

*This little sheaf of tales from the treasure house
of American History I inscribe to you as the earnest
of my friendship.*

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CHAPTER I

The Lady Pocahontas and Captain John Smith

IT WAS winter in Virginia, A. D. 1607. Gone were the Italian blue skies of the spring and summer which had charmed the Jamestown settlers when the ships *God-speed*, *Susan Constant* and the *Discovery* sailed up the Powhatan River, rechristened by the voyagers the "James" in honor of the King of England. The dog-wood, wild cherry, crab apple, mulberry and persimmon trees had lost their blooms, but here and there through grim, white woods gleamed the red of the holly tree. On giant oaks clustered the white berry of the mistletoe, a strange reminder to the Englishmen of the Druid faith of their forefathers.

In the Indian village, Werowocomoco, on the York River, lived the mighty Powhatan, chief of the region. The village was situated about three miles above the present Yorktown, where the lion of England surrendered in later years to the lion's cub, America. It was one of three capital villages of the Powhatan confederation of Indians. The others were Orapakes, on the Chickahominy River, near Powhatan, and Powhatan, near the present site of the city of Richmond.

Werowocomoco was composed of 25 or 30 wigwams or houses built of saplings. These were planted at regular distances like posts, then bent over and tied together in the middle. The houses were built up by skillful application of barks and grasses adroitly interwoven. Their shape was either oblong or circular. Sixty stalwart warriors guarded the sacred person of Powhatan. Powhatan's domestic relations are quaintly put: "He had a multiplicity of women." It is apparent that Powhatan, in common with other royalties, followed King Solomon's practical advice and brought upon himself marital trouble by adding rather than reducing possibilities in the number of wives. Powhatan, however, had one kingly prerogative lesser mortals lack in these more progressive days. If he tired of a wife, he gave her away to a friend as a token of royal favor. Such an improvement on the modern divorce court!

T. R. would have rejoiced in Powhatan's family. He had twenty sons and twelve daughters. The light of his eyes was the Princess Matoaka, his twelve-year-old

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daughter, in the vernacular "Pocahontas." This name meant "a bright stream between two hills."

With his long feather quill, a Jamestown author quaintly describes the Lady Pocahontas: "A little girl wrapped in a robe of doeskin, lined and edged with pigeon down, a white heron feather in her black hair, a forest maid truly, but royal every inch of her."

Pocahontas was a merry child, the playmate of her numerous brothers, most unusual in Indian households. She was fond of boyish sports—a Nimrod unsurpassed. Acquainted with every inch of the deep forests, which surrounded the capital villages, she roamed carefree through them. She passed the months going from one capital to another with her father. Powhatan was regal in the extreme, and believed in keeping up all the trappings of royalty, so these migrations of the forest courts were pageants to her childish eyes.

As yet romance had passed her by. She was content with childish games. She dreamed not of a world beyond the seas nor that in years to come she was to write her name imperishably on the pages of American history as the "Savior of Jamestown." No hint of this high destiny came to her as she played with her brothers in the royal courtyards of mighty Powhatan's "palaces." Her horizon was bordered by the edges of the mighty forests peopled by enemy tribesmen and the imps and devils of her crude religion. To her primitive mind, all men and women were copper hued like the stalwarts of her race.

Only dimly did she visualize a world that lay beyond the great waters. A few months before, a tale had come of a strange race of seafarers, storm driven into one of the lower islands on the Powhatan River. These wanderers had set up strange altars. They were palefaced, "whiter than the winter's snow," according to the tales. All the Indian world was agog with news of them and filled with a vague uneasiness and fear.

Powhatan had not been idle. His scouts had investigated the invasion of his territory. He consulted many anxious hours with his medicine men and other advisers. Undecided as to what course to pursue, he was biding his time. The gossip of the villages reached the royal wigwams and Pocahontas was fired with the vivid tales of the scouts anent the wonders of the white strangers.

While peacefully playing with her boy chums one day, a shout rang through the village. A tribal canoe was coming up the river. Its warriors had a captive "pale-face." The Indian boys and Pocahontas ran to the

water's edge, as eager children will the world over to see a curious sight or person. As the canoe was beached, Pocahontas looked across the intervening waters into the face of Capt. John Smith. She became a woman at the sight of this gallant soldier of fortune—yea, doomed to love and to love in vain and at last to die broken-hearted in a strange land because her love was not returned.

The pale face at whom she looked was one of the brave, pioneer spirits of the island kingdom engaging in extending the boundaries of King James I, then on the throne of England, and incidentally winning fame, renown and riches for themselves—if all went well. Smith had had a romantic career; he had adventured in many lands and under many captains, fought with the Germans against the Turks, was captured by them and held as a slave in Constantinople. On his return to England he heard the tales of the wondrous virgin country overseas and followed the footsteps of Raleigh and Gilbert. The English flag had been planted in America by the intrepid Raleigh and other members of the Roanoke colony—that famed lost settlement that preceded Jamestown and whose brief existence was signalized by the birth of Virginia Dare, the first white child born here.

Smith stood upright in the canoe with hands bound behind him. He was in the thirtieth year of his life, attractive enough to interest any woman—Indian or otherwise. He wore, besides a dashing cavalier mustache, a full beard, his dark hair was long and curly and the high cavalier ruff of Elizabethan days and the soldier's waistcoat of chained steel and dark but rich courtier dress set off his manly beauty to great advantage. His brown eyes gleamed with courage and fearlessness and he looked with deep interest on the group of savage children and the king's bodyguard watching his approach.

History doth not record it and even romantic imagination cannot picture Pocahontas as attracting his attention particularly at that time. The natives were all alike to him. In the months the Jamestown colony had been established Smith had gained some insight into Indian nature. His thoughts at this juncture were probably those of escape. Women were far from his thoughts. His experiences in what is now called the Near East had given him preconceived views of "pagans." The forest people were simply pawns in the game of empire Smith was playing for his king. The human side of the savages meant little or nothing to him.

John Smith was not particularly well educated. Yet his