

The Settlement Of Jamestown - 1607 by Captain John Smith

Part 1

This narrative is taken from the third book of the five volume "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles: Together with The True Travels, Adventures and Observations, and a Sea Grammar" (London, 1624).

It might well be thought, a country so faire (as Virginia is) and a people so tractable, would long ere this have been quietly possessed, to the satisfaction of the adventurers, and the eternizing of the memory of those that effected it. But because all the world do see a failure; this following treatise shall give satisfaction to all indifferent readers, how the business has been carried: where no doubt they will easily understand and answer to their question, how it came to passe there was no better speed and success in those proceedings.

Captain Bartholomew Gosnold, one of the first movers of this plantation, having many years solicited many of his friends, but found small assistance; at last prevailed with some gentlemen, as Captain John Smith, Master Edward-maria Wingfield, Master Robert Hunt, and divers others, who depended a year upon his projects, but nothing could be effected, till by their great charge and industry, it came to be apprehended by certain of the nobility, gentry, and merchants, so that his Majesty by his letters patents, gave commission for establishing councils, to direct here; and to govern, and to execute there. To effect this, was spent another year, and by that, three ships were provided, one of 100 tons, another of 40 and a pinnace of 20. The transportation of the company was committed to Captain Christopher Newport, a mariner well practiced for the western parts of America. But their orders for government were put in a box, not to be opened, nor the governors known until they arrived in Virginia.

On the 19 of December, 1606, we set sail from Blackwall, but by unprosperous winds, were kept six weeks in the sight of England; all which time, Master Hunt our preacher, was so weak and sick, that few expected his recovery. Yet although he were but twenty miles from his habitation (the time we were in the Downes) and notwithstanding the stormy weather, nor the scandalous imputations (of some few, little better than atheists, of the greatest rank among us) suggested against him, all this could never force from him so much as a seeming desire to leave the business, but preferred the service of God, in so good a voyage, before any affection to contest with his godless foes whose disastrous designs (could they have prevailed) had even then overthrown the business, so many discontents did then arise, had he not with the water of patience, and his godly exhortations (but chiefly by his true devoted examples) quenched those flames of envy, and dissension...

The first land they made they called Cape Henry; where thirty of them recreating themselves on shore, were assaulted by five savages, who hurt two of the English very dangerously.

That night was the box opened, and the orders read, in which Bartholomew Gosnol, John Smith, Edward Wingfield, Christopher Newport, John Ratliff, John Martin, and George Kendall, were named to be the council, and to choose a president among them for a year, who with the council should govern. Matters of moment were to be examined by a jury, but determined by the major part of the council, in which the president had two voices.

Until the 13 of May they sought a place to plant in; then the council was sworn, Master Wingfield was chosen president, and an oration made, why Captain Smith was not admitted of the council as the rest.

Now falleth every man to work, the council contrive the fort, the rest cut down trees to make place to pitch their tents; some provide clapboard to relade the ships, some make gardens, some nets, etc. The savages often visited us kindly. The president's overweening jealousy would admit no exercise at arms, or fortification but the boughs of trees cast together in the form of a half moon by the extraordinary pains and diligence of Captain Kendall.

Newport, Smith, and twenty others, were sent to discover the head of the river: by divers small habitations they passed, in six days they arrived at a town called Powhatan, consisting of some twelve houses, pleasantly seated on a hill; before it three fertile isles, about it many of their cornfields, the place is very pleasant, and strong by nature, of this place the Prince is called Powhatan, and his people Powhatans. To this place the river is navigable: but higher within a mile, by reason of the rocks and isles, there is not passage for a small boat, this they call the falls. The people in all parts kindly entreated them, till being returned within twenty miles of Jamestown, they gave just cause of jealousy: but had God not blessed the discoverers otherwise than those at the fort, there had then been an end of that plantation; for at the fort, where they arrived the next day, they found 17 men hurt, and a boy slain by the savages, and had it not chanced a cross bar shot from the ships struck down a bough from a tree among them, that caused them to retire, our men had all been slain, being securely all at work, and their arms in dry fats.

Hereupon the president was contented the fort should be pallsided, the ordnance mounted, his men armed and exercised: for many were the assaults, and ambuscades of the savages, and our men by their disorderly straggling were often hurt, when the savages by the nimbleness of their heels well escaped.

What toil we had, with so small a power to guard our workmen by day, watch all night, resist our enemies, and effect our business, to relade the ships, cut down trees, and prepare the ground to plant our corn, etc., I refer to the reader's consideration.

Six weeks being spent in this manner, Captain Newport (who was hired only for our transportation) was to return with the ships.

Now Captain Smith, who all this time from their departure from the Canaries was restrained as a prisoner upon the scandalous suggestions of some of the chiefs (envying his repute) who fained he intended to usurp the government, murder the council, and make himself king, that his confederates were dispersed in all the three ships, and that divers of his confederates that revealed it, would affirm it; for this he was committed as a prisoner.

Thirteen weeks he remained thus suspected, and by that time the ships should return they pretended out of their commiserations, to refer him to the council in England to receive a check, rather than by particulating his designs make him so odious to the world, as to touch his life, or utterly overthrow his reputation. But he so much scorned their charity, and publicly defied the uttermost of their cruelty; he wisely prevented their policies, though he could not suppress their envy; yet so well he demeaned himself in this business, as all the company did see his innocency, and his adversaries' malice, and those suborned to accuse him, accused his accusers of subornation; many untruths were alleged against him; but being so apparently disproved, begat a general hatred in the hearts of the company against such unjust commanders, that the president was adjudged to give him 2001; so that all he had was seized upon, in part of satisfaction, which Smith presently returned to the store for the general use of the colony.

Many were the mischiefs that daily sprung from their ignorant (yet ambitious) spirits; but the good doctrine and exhortation of our preacher Master Hunt reconciled them, and caused Captain Smith to be admitted of the council.

The next day all received the communion, the day following the savages voluntarily desired peace, and Captain Newport returned for England with news; leaving in Virginia 100 the 15 of June 1607.

Being thus left to our fortunes, it fortun'd that within ten days scarce ten among us could either go, or well stand, such extreme weakness and sickness oppressed us. And thereat none need marvel, if they consider the cause and reason, which was this.

Part II

While the ships stayed, our allowance was somewhat bettered, by a daily proportion of biscuit, which the sailors would pilfer to sell, give, or exchange with us, for money, sassafras, furs, or love. But when they departed, there remained neither tavern, beer house, nor place of relief, but the common kettle. Had we been as free from all sins as gluttony, and drunkenness, we might have been canonized for Saints; but our president would never have been admitted, for ingrossing to his private, oatmeal, sack, oil, aquavitse, beef, eggs, or what not, but the kettle; that indeed he allowed equally to be distributed, and that was half a pint of wheat, and as much barley boiled with water for a man a day, and this having fried some 26 weeks

in the ship's hold, contained as many worms as grains; so that we might truly call it rather so much bran than corn, our drink was water, our lodgings castles in the air.

With this lodging and diet, our extreme toil in bearing and planting pallisades, so strained and bruised us, and our continual labor in the extremity of the heat had so weakened us, as were cause sufficient to have made us as miserable in our native country, or any other place in the world.

From May, to September, those that escaped, lived upon sturgeon, and sea-crabs, fifty in this time we buried, the rest seeing the president's projects to escape these miseries in our pinnace by flight (who all this time had neither felt want nor sickness) so moved our dead spirits, as we deposed him; and established Ratcliff in his place, (Gosnol being dead) Kendall deposed. Smith newly recovered, Martin and Ratcliff was by his care preserved and relieved, and the most of the soldiers recovered with the skillful diligence of Master Thomas Wotton our surgeon general.

But now was all our provision spent, the sturgeon gone, all helps abandoned, each hour expecting the fury of the savages; when God the patron of all good endeavors, in that desperate extremity so changed the hearts of the savages, that they brought such plenty of their fruits, and provision, as no man wanted...

But our comedies never endured long without a tragedy; some idle exceptions being muttered against Captain Smith, for not discovering the head of Chickahamania river, and taxed by the council, to be too slow in so worthy an attempt. The next voyage he proceeded so far that with much labor by cutting of trees insunder he made his passage; but when his barge could pass no farther, he left her in a broad bay out of danger of shot, commanding none should go ashore till his return: himself with two English and two savages went up higher in a canoe; but he was not long absent, but his men went ashore, whose want of government gave both occasion and opportunity to the savages to surprise one George Cassen, whom they slew, and much failed not to have cut off the boat and all the rest.

Smith little dreaming of that accident, being got to the marshes at the river's head, twenty miles in the desert, had his two men slain (as is supposed) sleeping by the canoe, while himself by fowling sought them victual: who finding he was beset with 200 savages, two of them he slew, still defending himself with the aid of a savage his guide whom he bound to his arm with his garters, and used him as a buckler, yet he was shot in his thigh a little, and had many arrows that stuck in his clothes but no great hurt, till at last they took him prisoner.

When this news came to Jamestown, much was their sorrow for his loss, few expecting what ensued.

Six or seven weeks those Barbarians kept him prisoner, many strange triumphs and conjurations they made of him, yet he so demeaned himself among them, as he not only diverted them from surprising the fort, but procured his own liberty, and

got himself and his company such estimation among them, that those savages admired him more than their own Quiyouckosucks...

At last they brought him to Meronocomoco, where was Powhatan their emperor. Here more than two hundred of those grim courtiers stood wondering at him, as he had been a monster; till Powhatan and his train had put themselves in their greatest braveries. Before a fire upon a seat like a bedstead, he sat covered with a great robe, made of Rarowcun (raccoon?) skins, and all the tails hanging by. On either hand did sit a young wench of 16 or 18 years, and along on each side the house, two rows of men, and behind them as many women, with all their heads and shoulders painted red: many of their heads bedecked with the white down of birds; but every one with something: and a great chain of white beads about their necks.

At his entrance before the king, all the people gave a great shout. The queen of Appamatuck was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, instead of a towel to dry them: having feasted him after their best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs, to beat out his brains, Pocahontas the king's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death: whereat the Emperor was contented he should live to make him hatchets, and her bells, beads, and copper; for they thought him as well of all occupations as themselves. For the king himself will make his own robes, shoes, bowes, arrows, pots; plant, hunt, or do anything so well as the rest.

They say he bore a pleasant show,

But sure his heart was sad.

For who can pleasant be, and rest,

That lives in fear and dread:

And having life suspected, doth

It still suspected lead.

Two days after, Powhatan having disguised himself in the most fearful manner he could, caused Captain Smith to be brought forth to a great house in the woods, and thereupon a mat by the fire to be left alone. Not long after from behind a mat that divided the house, was made the most doleful noise he ever heard; then Powhatan more like a devil than a man, with some two hundred more as black as himself, came unto him and told him now they were friends, and presently he should go to Jamestown, to send him two great guns, and a grindstone, for which he would give him the country of Capahowosick, and forever esteem him as his son Nantaquoud.

So to Jamestown with 12 guides Powhatan sent him. That night they quartered in the woods, he still expecting (as he had done all this long time of his imprisonment) every hour to be put to one death or other: for all their feasting. But almighty God (by his divine providence) had mollified the hearts of those stern barbarians with compassion. The next morning betimes they came to the fort, where Smith having used the savages with what kindness he could, he showed Rawhunt, Powhatan's trusty servant, two demi-culverins and a millstone to carry Powhatan: they found them somewhat too heavy; but when they did see him discharge them, being loaded with stones, among the boughs of a great tree loaded with icicles the ice and branches came so tumbling down, that the poor savages ran away half dead with fear. But at last we regained some conference with them, and gave them such toys; and sent to Powhatan, his women, and children such presents, as gave them in general full content.

Now in Jamestown they were all in combustion, the strongest preparing once more to run away with the pinnace; which with the hazard of his life, with Sakre falcon and musket shot, Smith forced now the third time to stay or sink.

Some no better than they should be, had plotted with the president, the next day to have put him to death by the Levitical law, for the lives of Robinson and Emry; pretending the fault was his that had led them to their ends: but he quickly took such order with such lawyers, that he laid them by the heels till he sent some of them prisoners for England.

Now every once in four or five days, Pocahontas with her attendants, brought him so much provision, that saved many of their lives, that else for all this had starved with hunger.

Thus from numb death our good God sent relief,

The sweet assuager of all other grief.

His relation of the plenty he had seen, especially at Werawocomoco, and of the state and bounty of Powhatan, (which till that time was unknown) so revived their dead spirits (especially the love of Pocahontas) as all men's fear was abandoned.

Thus you may see what difficulties still crossed any good endeavor; and the good success of the business being thus often brought to the very period of destruction; yet you see by what strange means God has still delivered it.

As for the insufficiency of them admitted in commission, that error could not be prevented by the electors; there being no other choice, and all strangers to each other's education, qualities, or disposition.

And if any deem it a shame to our Nation to have any mention made of those enormities, let him peruse the Histories of the Spaniard's Discoveries and Plantations, where they may see how many mutinies, disorders, and dissensions have accompanied them, and crossed their attempts: which being known to be

particular men's offenses; does take away the general scorn and contempt, which malice, presumption, covetousness, or ignorance might produce; to the scandal and reproach of those, whose actions and valiant resolutions deserve a more worthy respect.

Now whether it had been better for Captain Smith, to have concluded with any of those several projects, to have abandoned the country, with some ten or twelve of them, who were called the better sort, and have left Master Hunt our preacher, Master Anthony Gosnol, a most honest, worthy, and industrious gentleman, Master Thomas Wotton, and some 27 others of his countrymen to the fury of the savages, famine, and all manner of mischiefs, and inconveniences, (for they were but forty in all to keep possession of this large country;) or starve himself with them for company, for want of lodging: or but adventuring abroad to make them provision, or by his opposition to preserve the action, and save all their lives; I leave to the censure of all honest men to consider....