

The Making of American Citizens

A Comprehensive Review of America's History and Political Institutions, of Particular Interest and Help to Those Who are Studying for Naturalization and to Those Who Have Become American Citizens and Are Anxious to Learn How They May Become Better Qualified to Protect and Defend the Country of Their Adoption.

By A. C. Strange, Oregon State Director of Americanization Schools

V.

THE BEGINNING OF GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

IN THIS LETTER, I shall go back to the beginning of government in America 300 years ago and tell of the beginning of three of the most important of the fundamental principles of the institutions of government which we now enjoy. It is interesting to note that two of these rights was first made a part of colonial government within 100 miles of Washington, the capital of our country. Virginia has been called the "Mother of Presidents" because several of the early presidents came from that state; we might just as appropriately call her the mother of America's greatest principles of government, for in the original Virginia country they were born. Let us briefly recite how this came to pass.

No attempt was made to settle America for almost one hundred years after its discovery. Daring seamen sailed along its coasts and landed here and there, thus giving to England her claim to the Atlantic coast of America north of Florida, but none of them tried to establish a colony. It is true that the Spanish had a fort in Florida early in the sixteenth century but, as no attempt was made to settle the country, this could hardly be called a colony.

The first real attempt at a colony was made in the latter part of the 16th century over 80 years after the death of Columbus, when Sir Walter Raleigh, a politician and business man of London, sent a party of men and women over to the country of Virginia with the hope that they might find in America certain products needed in the London markets. If they could do this, Raleigh naturally would increase his own wealth through their sale. These people made a settlement on the coast of what is now called North Carolina, where they lived for a few months, but, being unable to defend themselves from the Indians, gave up the effort. What became of these people we do not know. It is probable that they were either killed by the savages or joined themselves with them.

Raleigh failed in this attempt to form a colony because the undertaking was too big for one man. Hence a few years later a company was formed to settle the new country and to find and send to England its wealth. This company was made up of business men of England who were willing to invest their money in what was to them merely a speculation in which they hoped that gold, precious stones, furs and other things of value might be found. The company was formed in exactly the same way in which companies are formed today to open new mines or irrigate desert lands. This new company was given the right by the King to make settlements in Virginia and to form rules for governing these settlements. Very soon, however, they found that the country was too large for them, so they asked that it might be divided. This the King consented to do, so the

northern part was turned over to a company of Plymouth business men which was called the Plymouth Company, while the original company, called the London Company, retained the south.

The first expedition was sent out by the London Company in 1607. It was made up of one hundred and five men of whom none was interested in staying permanently in America. On the contrary, they were looking for the wealth in gold and silver which the Spanish had found in the South. They made their first settlement on the James River in Virginia. Then, not expecting to remain in the country, they made no effort to keep the camp in sanitary condition, to build substantial houses and to grow gardens. Instead they scattered in search of gold, and, as a consequence, they were soon without food and the colony on the point of failure. Following this brief period of starving, food ships arrived with other settlers and needed supplies and the colony was saved.

Much credit for the saving of the colony must be given to one of the original party, John Rolfe. While the others were mostly wandering over the country in search of gold, Rolfe was experimenting in the growing of a peculiar weed which the Indians smoked and which Raleigh had taken to England thirty years before. This weed the Indians called tobacco. Having raised a small crop of it, he shipped it to London where the smoking of it soon became a fad. This greatly increased its value and other men went into the business of raising it. Thus Virginia found a source of wealth which not only held her settlers but attracted many more; hence, within a very few years, there were over 4000 people engaged in the growing of tobacco along the James River. This, however, does not interest us so much as their experiments in government.

You will remember that I said that the company was given the right to establish a government. This they did first by giving to thirteen men of the original colony the right to look after the local affairs. Within a few years though, the colony became too large for this form of government and it was decided to send out a governor. The first appointed was Sir George Yeardley, a wise and good man, who was willing to give to the settlers a large measure of self government. This he did by dividing the colony into eleven districts and allowing each district to elect two men to go to the capital at Jamestown to make needed laws. These twenty-two men formed America's first representative government and, in their meeting, laid the first foundation stone of our system of government.

A second long step forward was taken in 1634 when the territory across the Potomac River from the Virginia colony was settled by Lord Baltimore. Among the laws governing this colony, we find the first laws in America allowing religious toleration,

(Continued on Page Seventeen)