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TERCENTENARY OF DEATH OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH

Raleigh the First and Most Romantic Figure in the History of English Colonization in America.

(By Clarence Poe in South Atlantic Quarterly.)

For more than a year now, sons of the two great English-speaking nations have been battling together to determine whether the world of tomorrow shall be governed by the ideals of liberty and democracy that have long distinguished men of English speech and blood, or ruled by a dynasty which in principles of government looks backward to the Dark Ages and in principles of morality look backward to the cave man.

At such a time it is indeed fitting that both England and America pause to make note of the three-hundredth anniversary of the death of Sir Walter Raleigh, the first and most romantic figure in all the long history of English colonization of the New World. Raleigh was beheaded October 29, 1618, and the tercentenary date was to have been observed both in London where Raleigh once trod the ways of glory, and also by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association meeting in the city named for the great Elizabethan.

The London celebration was in charge of a committee composed of Viscount Bryce, Sir Sidney Lee, Prof. C. H. Firth, of Oxford, and Prof. W. P. Kerr, of University College, London. Inasmuch as it was on North Carolina soil that Raleigh planted his colonies, the London committee had arranged a program after consultation with the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association; and the Virginia Historical Society, and the South Carolina Historical Society, and American Historical Society were expected to co-operate with the North Carolina celebration on the occasion of the celebration in Raleigh. Unfortunately, the nation-wide scourge of influenza prevented the celebration in Raleigh from taking place, but nothing should prevent the people of North Carolina and the nation from paying tribute in less spectacular form to the man to whom not merely our country, but civilization itself, owes so much.

The famous painting of Sir Walter, by Zucchero, which represents the man to the mind's eye of most Americans and Englishmen, shows him as he appeared about 1588 when he was one of the foremost figures in repelling and destroying the Invincible Armada of Spain. Twenty-six years old at that time, he was at the height of his power, the favorite of the English Queen, and altogether the most fascinating and versatile personality in any way connected with the early history of America—statesman, soldier, sailor, scientist, historian, explorer, courtier, poet and hero of adventure. Not even Leonardo da Vinci was a man of more varied talents. In fact, Raleigh has been called "the most universally capable Englishman that ever lived," and Macaulay gives us a sort of motion-picture of his activities by speaking of him as "sometimes reviewing the Queen's Guard, sometimes giving chase to a Spanish galleon, then answering the chief of the country party in the House of Commons, then again murmuring one of his sweet love songs too near the ears of her Highness's maids of honor, and soon after poring over the Talmud, or collating Polybius with Livy." By picturing him at evening in the Mermaid Tavern in quaint converse with Shakespeare and Ben Johnson, Macaulay might have made his picture fairly complete!

It was a wonderful era, and perhaps only in that "purple, rich, Elizabethan time," as Vachel Lindsay calls it, could so full and colorful a life have been lived even by a Walter Raleigh. Through him our North Carolina history is linked, as the history of no other State is linked, with the age of chivalry, the days when knighthood was in flower—the days, too, of explorers and adventurers and sea-rovers, when "the world's great age began anew" as all Europe went aflame with interest in the new-found world beyond the seas, and accepted with almost equal credence the stories of the real Virginia and the fabled El Dorado, the real Father of Waters and the imaginary Fountain of Youth.

Into all this intoxicating enthusiasm, Raleigh entered fully, and his zeal for his North Carolina colony, it is interesting to remember, was at its height when Zucchero's painting was made, and the prospects for the success of that colony were then at their brightest. Four years previously his first expedition had landed at Roanoke Island and but a few months previously, the first Anglo-American had been born in the little colony on the North Carolina coast—Virginia Dare, the wee, mystery-shrouded fore-runner of all the millions who have since spoken the tongue of Shakespeare and Milton on this continent, and of all who are to come after us.

This tercentenary reminds us, too, of Raleigh the Dreamer; the man of vision and courage, the rare man "whose heart alike conceives and dares," the man who had the courage to follow the gleam and gave life and fortune to his great idea of winning both Americas for England and for English civilization. Well does his latest biographer declare that Queen Elizabeth's captains were greater than their sovereign, and that Raleigh and his fellows "would have conquered half the Spanish world and swept the wide waters through their length and breadth had it not been for the vacillating and petticoated occupant of the throne."

We must admit, of course, that many of Raleigh's greatest plans were doomed to failure. But we must also say that the heroes who have dared to become failures as a result of aspiring too greatly, of attempting "The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard"

they are the sublimest figures in human history and the great world ever turns for inspiration to their mighty names—the martyr at the stake, the philosopher with his hemlock, the patriot at the gibbet, the Christ on the cross.

We know, in fact that no such men

have really failed; that the only real failure or success is, within, is in a man's own spirit; and no one can say that Walter Raleigh has failed when in 1602, having spent \$200,000 (an enormous sum in those days) to send five seemingly fruitless expeditions to our North Carolina coast, he prepares for a sixth expedition while his undaunted and unconquerable spirit rings out in the phrase: "I shall yet live to see it an English nation!"

We know, too, that Raleigh, the man, Raleigh as a bulwer of individual character, is not a failure when, despite the enervating and demoralizing influences of court life, and despite all the sorrows that crowded thick and fast upon him in his age, we see him make an end of life with spirit unsoiled and unbroken, a gentleman unafraid, facing death, and facing an unjust fate that was bitterer than death, not with the savage rebelliousness of Henley's "Invictus," nor with the uncaring stoicism of a Persian Omar, but with the serene and truer courage of the ultimate type of man, the Christian gentleman. Not wholly unspotted was he from the vices of his time, but his faults were never those of selfishness or meanness or littleness. He subordinated everything else to the master-purpose of his life—that of winning the New World for England. "He was greedy to get," as Professor Hersey says, "his hand itched for gold, but he lavished his wealth on colonizing expeditions with self-sacrificing patriotism." When he threw his cloak in the mud for the girl-queen of England, it was not merely a tribute to the Queen, but a natural flowering of a fine courtesy that with him was instinctive. Observe his thoughtfulness in spending a part of his last night on earth "giving directions for correcting an injury to a former friend." See him on his way to the scaffold, tossing his cap to a wayside beggar: "Here, my good man, you need this more than I do!"

On the scaffold Raleigh's wit breaks out grimly as he says of the axe: "This is a sharp medicine, but a cure for all diseases." Then having protested his innocence to the world, and commended his spirit to his Maker, his unshaken voice rings out once more, and for the last time on earth, as he calls to the hesitating executioner, "What dost thou fear? Strike, man!—strike!"

If indeed in the faith of the greatest living Poet of Raleigh's tongue—

"Belong to the path of the outmost sun, through utter darkness hurled, Farther than ever comet flared or vagrant star-dust swirled, Sit such as fought and sailed and ruled and loved and made our world!"

then for three centuries now the herospirit of Walter Raleigh has looked down on the great New World which his genius, more than that of any other man, helped win for Anglo-Saxon ideals; and if Heaven, as one might well believe, sent in the earthquake hour of war, a pilot to guide this new world's sons across the seas to Flanders and the Marne, that pilot must have been the spirit of the man who loved England, loved America, and loved the seas between—Sir Walter Raleigh, who because his England had not then become the democracy she is today, gave his own life at last for his Dream!

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