

CHAPTER VI.

STATE OF THE COLONIES AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

BR. III.
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A. D.
1656. NOTWITHSTANDING the many obstacles with which the colonists had to contend, their condition constantly improved. Neither Indian wars, nor religious persecutions, nor grievous commercial restrictions, nor oppression from royal governors, nor contests with the Canadians, nor the hardships attending the new life in the wilderness, prevented a steady and progressive increase, both of population and wealth. The tide of emigration still rolled on towards the West; the colonists found a market for the raw materials they raised, but which they could not manufacture; their habits of industry produced thrift and comfort; their institutions of learning trained them to habits of reflection, and taught them self-respect; their religious education restrained them from vice, and inspired them with elevated sentiments; while their political organization, their town meetings, their provincial assemblies, and their management of public affairs, fitted them for self-government and future freedom.

Progressive improvement of the colonies.

Population. It is difficult to know the exact population of the colonies at the beginning of the eighteenth century, since the accounts of most writers are contradictory. It is probable there were nearly 400,000 inhabitants, of which Virginia and Massachusetts had over 70,000 each, Connecticut 35,000, Rhode Island 10,000, New Hampshire 10,000,

Maryland 35,000, North and South Carolina 10,000, New York 40,000, New Jersey 20,000, and Pennsylvania 40,000. This estimate is not an exact one, but is as near the truth as we can now arrive. Of these colonies, Massachusetts and Virginia were the most powerful and flourishing. In all of them, a more liberal government was exercised than in cotemporaneous French, Spanish, and Portuguese settlements, where the power of royal governors was almost despotic. The English colonists carried with them to America the ideas of freedom and equality, and the government at home was restrained within the circle of constitutional liberty.

During the seventeenth century, the colonies patiently submitted to, if they did not theoretically acquiesce in, the supreme power of Parliament. The revolution which placed William and Mary on the throne, established the submission of America to legislative control. "No taxation of the colonies was practically attempted by the Parliament, except what arose from the regulation of commerce; but the abstract right of indefinite taxation was proclaimed repeatedly, and a power assumed to alter the American charters, or at least to modify the constitutions which those charters had created."

Overawed by the superior strength of the mother country, embarrassed by the movements of the French in Canada, annoyed by the Indians, and not united by any political association, the colonists submitted to English legislation, rather than admitted the rights which England claimed. But this submission was rarely cordial, and popular discontents continually arose, especially in view of the offensive and arbitrary manner in which the royal governors exercised their functions. They were not men of talents and rank, but generally needy dependants and mean sycophants about the court, who sought to

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English claim the right of taxation.

Popular discontents.

Bk. III. recommend themselves to the king by headstrong zeal to
Ch. 6. support his prerogatives.

A. D. 1690. The colonies also were offended by the transportation
Trans-
porta-
tion of
English
felons. of English felons into their midst; a practice in which
the government persisted, until the conquest of Louisburg
by the people of Massachusetts opened the eyes of Par-
liament as to the character and strength of the colonists,
who were heretofore supposed generally to be criminals
and negroes.

Appoint-
ment of
govern-
ors. All the colonies had their Legislative Assemblies, in
which their freemen were represented; but there was a
considerable variety in their civil constitutions, and in the
exercise of executive powers. In Maryland and Penn-
sylvania, the proprietaries had the appointment of govern-
ors. In Carolina and New Jersey, the soil belonged to
the proprietary, and executive power to the king. In
Virginia and New York, both belonged to the crown. In
Massachusetts, the property of the soil was vested in the
people, although the king appointed the governor. In
Connecticut and Rhode Island, the people both owned
the soil and appointed the executive officers. These dis-
tinctions led to disputes respecting boundaries, but
favoured the discussion of political ideas.

Educa-
tion. The colonists early took the interests of education under
their especial care, and expected nothing and received
nothing from the British government. It is not probable
that England was pleased to see this progress of mental cul-
ture, since it naturally led to a spirit of independence. The
colonies were regarded merely as a theatre where the sons
of needy courtiers could exercise authority, or earn for-
tunes—as a market for British manufactures—as a nation
of friends and customers, interested in the glory, and
favourable to the commercial importance of England.
The interest which she as a government took, was purely

selfish—to promote her own prosperity, not that of the Bk. III.
colonies. So long as they would raise abundance of raw Ch. 6.
material, and would receive her manufactures, she was A. D.
content. Schools and educational institutions would not 1675.
obviously increase her commercial importance; therefore,
they were neglected. Nothing was encouraged which was
not of direct service to her. She did give a donation to
found a college in Virginia, that of William and Mary;
but this is the only instance of her bounty in the cause
of literature and science. She shackled the press, and
discouraged the printing of books.

Nevertheless, the walls of Harvard and of Yale were Popular
educa-
tion.
reared without assistance from the government of Great
Britain, and schools were established in the colonies where
young men could prepare themselves for the liberal pro-
fessions. The ministers of religion took them under their
especial patronage. Education was enjoined upon parents
as a duty, and few grew up without the requisite know-
ledge to enjoy those blessings which had been reaped by
industry, and secured by freedom. As early as 1704, a
newspaper was printed in Boston, and printing-presses
were set up in Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut.
But the press was not free from odious restrictions until
1755.

No great improvements were seen in the art of agricul- State of
agricul-
ture.
ture, or agricultural implements. The great abundance
of land, and the ease with which the common crops were
raised, prevented much attention to draining, or manures,
or rotation of crops. Attention was chiefly given to
clearing the land of forests, rather than to making it pro-
ductive. The tools which were used were generally
brought from England, with the exception of the wood-
man's axe, the most necessary of all the implements of
the early colonists. Oxen, horses, and sheep, were ori-

Bk. III.
Ch. 6. ginally imported, as well as bees; none of which the Indians had seen.

A. D.
1673. The unfortunate aborigines declined as the new races advanced, both in character and in numbers. Still, at the commencement of the eighteenth century, there were ten thousand native warriors in New England, and a proportionate number in other colonies, with the exception of Virginia, where they had been nearly exterminated. The Indians, however, disappeared more rapidly in consequence of the vices and diseases they had contracted from the white man, than from war. Ardent spirits and the small-pox carried off more than the sword or the tomahawk.

Decline
of the
Indians. On the other hand, negro slaves increased with more fatal rapidity than the Indians melted away. All that Africa could give to England in exchange for manufactures, was labourers for her colonies. Ships entered every considerable harbour of the colonies, south of Newport, laden with slaves; nor did the merchants of the North scruple to engage in this kind of traffic. The coast of Guinea furnished these slaves in the greatest numbers; and the unhappy victims of European cupidity were crowded into the holds of ships, ill-ventilated and worse-provisioned, where, manacled together, and delirious from fever, large numbers of them died before reaching the American coast.

Negro
slavery. Had the climate of the North been favourable to the physical constitution of the negro, and unfavourable to free white labour, slavery might have been perpetuated in New England, as it was in Virginia, as one of the institutions of the country. But the slave was valuable as he proceeded south; and Providence therefore entrusted chiefly to the southern colonies the guardianship of an unfortunate people.

It is difficult to say how many Africans had been intro-

duced into the colonies at the commencement of the eighteenth century; but probably not less than one hundred and fifty thousand. The English took from Africa, between 1680 and 1700, about three hundred thousand; but these were intended for the West Indies, as well as for the continental colonies, and many of them must have died on the passage.

However convenient it was for the American colonies to make use of slave labour, yet, as a whole, they were opposed to the slave trade; and the first American Congress decreed, in 1776, that no slave should be imported into any of the thirteen united colonies. It was the avarice of British merchants, and the selfishness of the British government, as much as the convenience of southern and West India planters, which caused the constantly increasing traffic in slaves; for, before the declaration of American independence, as many as three millions of Africans were transported from their native shore in British vessels alone, to say nothing of five millions in addition who were consigned to slavery by the Dutch, the Portuguese, the Spaniards, and the French.

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A. D.
1660
to
1688.

The Eng-
lish op-
posed to
colonial
restrictions on
the slave
trade.