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SMYTH'S TRAVELS IN VIRGINIA, IN 1773.

[We begin here some extracts which we propose to make in this and following numbers from a work entitled 'A Tour in the United States of America, &c., by J. F. D. Smyth, Esq. 2 vols., 8 vo., London, 1784,' and which will be found to contain some lively and agreeable views and sketches of our State as first seen by the author in or about the year 1773, &c. We know nothing of the writer; but the books from which we copy are from the Library of the late John Randolph, of Roanoke, who, we are told, esteemed them as valuable and reliable memorials of the past.]

CHAPTER I.

First Appearance of Land. Capes of Virginia. Chesapeake Bay. Hampton-Roads. Musketoes. Norfolk. James-River. James-Town. Plantation. Williamsburg.

We came in sight of land, on the fourth day of August, in the forenoon, in a fine day, with a clear serene sky. It appears at a distance like the tops of the trees just emerging above the horizon, on the surface of the water; and as the ship approached arose higher, but only the height of the pines, with which all the land on the sea board is covered; for the whole coast is very low, and foundings are found at a great distance from the shore, which gradually decrease as you advance nearer the land.

This regular decrease of the soundings, and the change of colour in the water, are the only preservatives of ships, in the night and hazy weather, from running on this dangerous, shallow, flat coast, without perceiving it until too late; for there is no light-house near the Capes of Virginia: a most laudable intention of erecting one on Cape Charles having been frustrated by a disagreement between the assemblies or parliaments of Virginia and Maryland, at

whose joint expence it was to have been built and supported.

We soon sailed within the Capes of Virginia, Cape Henry and Cape Charles, which last is an island named Smith's. We past Lynhaven Bay on our left, and the opening of the Chesapeake on the right, and in the evening anchored in Hampton Roads, which appears to be very safe.

The distance between the Capes is about twelve miles, but the vast bay of Chesapeak widens after you enter, until it becomes about thirty miles over, near thirty-five English leagues within land; then the breadth decreases from thence to the head of it, and is generally from fifteen to five miles, which is the breadth of it at its extremity, where the Elk and the mighty river Susquahannah fall into it, at about three hundred miles distance from the sea, through the whole of which vast extent the tide ebbs and flows.

The night being calm we were assaulted by great numbers of musketoos, a very noxious fly, which seems to be of the species of gnats, but larger and more poisonous, leaving a hard tumor wherever they bite, with an intolerable and painful itching; they penetrate the skin, fill themselves with blood, and make their principal attacks in the night, accompanied by a small, shrill, disagreeable note, the very sound of which effectually prevents you from sleep, after you have been once bit.

On the day following, the captain of the ship, Mr. R——, and I went up Elizabeth Biver, in the yaul, to Norfolk, about twenty miles, where we dined very agreeably, and returned that evening to the ship in Hampton Roads, so that I had not at this time an opportunity of seeing much of the town. However, it appears to be charmingly situated at the forks of a very pleasant river, the Elizabeth, on the north-east side, Mr. Sprowle's little village of Gosport being on the south, and the pretty town of Portsmouth

On the south-west side, over against Norfolk. at the distance of about eight hundred yards, which is the breadth of the river there; with sufficient depth of water for a ship of the line.

Norfolk is a corporation, with a mayor, aldermen, &c., in a flourishing state of improvement, and increasing daily; it contains about seven thousand inhabitants, of all colours and denominations, of which perhaps more than two thousand are whites. But it was by no means in such a state of increase and improvement as the more inland towns, at or near the falls of the great rivers; these being the chief emporiums of trade and commerce for the large, populous, and extensive back country, west and south of them; and, having also all the advantages of navigation, intercept the inland trade from Norfolk, which renders it, though flourishing, yet only so in an inferior degree.

On the sixth, the ship weighed anchor, and proceeded up James River. As the weather was extremely hot, I preferred going up in her to a journey by land; which, from Norfolk to Richmond, at the falls of James River, is about an hundred and thirty miles.

After passing a great number of most charming situations on each side of this beautiful river, we came to anchor before James Town, now a paltry place, not by any means deserving even the name of a village, although once the metropolis of Virginia, and still possessing several privileges in consequence thereof, one of which is sending a member to the assembly, or parliament; who is now Champion Traverse, esq. the proprietor of the whole town, and almost all the land adjacent, and I believe there are no more voters than himself.

On the seventh, Mr. R——— and I, having been furnished with horses by Mr. Traverse, made an excursion to

Williamsburg, which is but a few miles distant ; perhaps eight or ten.

The roads are excellent, the face of the country is level, the soil rather sandy, but the whole land appears to be one continued immense forest, interspersed with openings where the trees have been cut down, and the ground is cultivated, of larger or less dimensions : these are called plantations, and are generally from one to four or five miles distant from each other, having a dwelling-house in the middle, with kitchens and out-houses all detached ; at some little distance there are always large peach and apple orchards, &c. ; and scattered over the plantations are the tobacco houses, large wooden edifices, for the cure of that grand staple produce.

We dined very agreeably at the Raleigh tavern, where we had exceeding good Madeira, and afterwards walked out to view the town, which is now the seat of government, and metropolis of Virginia.

CHAPTER II.

Williamsburg. Races. Breed of Running-Horses.

Williamsburg is an inland town on the highest land about the middle between the rivers of York, on the north, and James, on the south, at the distance of seven miles from the nearest ; and is healthy for the climate.

There is one handsome street in it, just a mile in length, where the view is terminated by a commanding object each way ; the Capitol, an elegant public building, in which the assembly, or senate, and courts of justice are held, at one end of the street ; and the college of William and Mary, an old monastic structure, at the other end. About the middle between them, on the north side, a little distance

retired from the street, stands the palace, the residence of the governor; a large, commodious, and handsome building.

All the public edifices are built of brick, but the generality of the houses are of wood, chiefly painted white, and are every one detached from each other; which, with the street deep with sand, (not being paved) makes a singular appearance to an European; and is very disagreeable to walk in, especially in summer, when the rays of the sun are intensely hot, and not a little increased by the reflection of the white sand, wherein every step is almost above the shoe, and where there is no shade or shelter to walk under, unless you carry an umbrella.

There is a whimsical circumstance attends Williamsburg, which is, a part of the town (that has been added to it since it was first built) having the streets laid out in the form of a W.

Williamsburg is also the county-town of James-city county; where the courts of common pleas are held monthly, as they are also in every county in the colony; which amount to sixty-eight in number. The quarter sessions are also held quarterly in each county. Besides these, there are two courts of oyer and terminer held annually at Williamsburg; and likewise two general courts in April and October, which receive and determine appeals from every county, and all the inferior courts, as well as try original causes for sums above twenty pounds.

These, as also the courts of chancery, courts of admiralty, and assemblies or parliaments, besides the college, occasion a great resort and concourse of people to Williamsburg; and are indeed the chief, if not the whole, support of the place: for her share of commerce is very inconsiderable, and she does not possess a single manufacture.

There are races at Williamsburg twice a year; that is, every spring and fall, or autumn. Adjoining to the town is a very excellent course, for either two, three or four mile heats. Their purses are generally raised by subscription, and are gained by the horse that wins two four-mile heats out of three; they amount to an hundred pounds each for the first day's running, and fifty pounds each every day after; the races commonly continuing for a week. There are also matches and sweepstakes very often, for considerable sums. Besides these at Williamsburg, there are races established annually, almost at every town and considerable place in Virginia; and frequent matches, on which large sums of money depend; the inhabitants, almost to a man, being quite devoted to the diversion of horse-racing.

Very capital horses are started here, such as would make no despicable figure at Newmarket; nor is their speed, bottom, or blood inferior to their appearance; the gentlemen of Virginia sparing no pains, trouble, or expence in importing the best stock, and improving the excellence of the breed by proper and judicious crossing.

Indeed nothing can be more elegant and beautiful than the horses bred here, either for the turf, the field, the road, or the coach; and they have always fine long, full, flowing tails; but their carriage horses seldom are possessed of that weight and power, which distinguish those of the same kind in England.

Their stock is from old Cade, old Crab, old Partner, Regulus, Babraham, Bosphorus, Devonshire Childers, the Cullen Arabian, the Cumberland Arabian, &c. in England; and a horse from Arabia, named the Bellsizes, which was imported into America, and is now in existence.

In the southern part of the colony, and in North Carolina, they are much attached to *quarter-racing*, which is always a match between two horses, to run one quarter of a

mile straight out; being merely an excursion of speed; and they have a breed that perform it with astonishing velocity, beating every other, for that distance, with great ease; but they have no bottom. However, I am confident that there is not a horse in England, nor perhaps the whole world, that can excel them in rapid speed: and these likewise make excellent saddle horses for the road.

The Virginians, of all ranks and denominations, are excessively fond of horses, and especially those of the race breed. The gentlemen of fortune expend great sums on their studs, generally keeping handsome carriages, and several elegant sets of horses, as well as others for the race and road: even the most indigent person has his saddle-horse, which he rides to every place, and on every occasion; for in this country nobody walks on foot the smallest distance, except when hunting: indeed a man will frequently go five miles to catch a horse, to ride only one mile upon afterwards. In short, their horses are their pleasure, and their pride.

CHAPTER III.

The different beautiful Situations, and Gentlemen's Seats, on James River.

In the evening, Mr. R—— and I were unfortunately separated, occasioned by a very ridiculous and singular accident; the effect of which had like to have been tragical enough to him. Just when we were ready to return to the ship, by some mistake, wrong horses were brought to the door; and not observing it, we mounted them: these horses being very spirited, and Mr. R——, having bid adieu to the gentlemen with whom we dined, suddenly clapped both his spurs in his horse's sides, inadvertently, with great

force; the horse instantly reared up, and sprung forwards, leaving poor R—— upon the ground, at the door, flat on his back, with his skull almost fractured. By this means the mistake in the change of our horses was discovered and rectified; but Mr. R—— was so much hurt, that he was obliged to be blooded, and carried into the Raleigh again, where I left him; and was thereby reduced to the necessity of returning alone to the ship.

On the ninth of August the ship got under weigh, and proceeded up the river, passing the delightful situations of Sandy-Point, Cabin-Point, Brandon, Flower de Hundred, Maycox, &c. on the south side; and Swine-Yards, belonging to Mr. Cole, Colonel Byrd's beautiful seat of Westover, Colonel Harrison's of Barclay, &c. on the north side: we anchored opposite to City-Point, at the confluence of the Appamatox River and the James, and about an hundred and thirty miles within land, from the capes of Virginia.

Here the second mate was carried on shore to the house of a Mrs. Brown, having been for a considerable time languishing, and in great pain, occasioned by a violent contusion he received by a fall on the deck from the main-yard-arm, reefing the main-sail in a gale of wind; and soon after he ended his days there.

As the ship was not to go much farther up, and was to receive great part of her cargo at this place, I hired a boat and four negroes, for one dollar and a half per day (about six shillings and ninepence sterling); and on the tenth I left the ship moored, and proceeded up the river in the boat; proposing to land at every place, whose beauty of perspective, or singular appearance of any kind, might strike the attention, or excite my curiosity.

I had almost omitted to mention an unfortunate accident that happened at this place, before I left the ship. A young

sailor, having killed and cut up a fine large sturgeon, that had leaped out of the water and fallen into the boat, along side of the ship, which happens frequently here; bringing in the last piece himself, in his hand, his foot slipped off the gunwale of the boat, between which and the ship he fell into the river, and was never seen or heard of more.

The principal situations that commanded my notice and admiration, were Shirley Hundred, a seat of Charles Carter, esq. at present in occupation of Mr. Bowler Cock: this is indeed a charming place; the buildings are of brick, large, convenient, and expensive, but now falling to decay; they were erected at a great charge, by Mr. Carter's father, who was secretary of the colony, and this was his favourite seat of residence. The present proprietor has a most opulent fortune, and possesses such a variety of seats, in situations so exceedingly delightful, that he overlooks this sweet one of Shirley, and suffers it to fall to ruin, although the buildings must have cost an immense sum in constructing; and would certainly be expensive to keep in repair, which expence, however, must be greatly increased by this neglect.

Varina, the seat of Ryland Randolph, esq. a most lovely and delightful spot: an elegant building, but unfinished, occasioned by the owner's versatility of taste, and perpetual alterations.

Chatsworth, the seat of William Randolph, esq. whose father was surveyor-general of the southern district of North-America, &c., is a very good house, with an agreeable perspective.

A Mr. Mayho's; a very pretty place also.—All on the north side of the James.

On the south side are the beautiful little towns of Bermuda Hundred, Osborn's, and Warwick: and a seat belonging to a Mr. Cary, a lovely situation, who has also

erected some extremely valuable mills, iron-works, &c. of equal emolument and importance to himself and the community. They are situated near the town of Warwick, about five miles below Richmond, and the falls of James-River.

I slept on board the boat; and on the eleventh, in the forenoon, landed at the town of Shokoes, at the falls of James-River, and immediately discharged the boat.

I then waited on Mr. ———, a merchant, at that place, on whom I had been furnished with letters of credit, &c. He was at home, and received me with kindness, attention, and friendship. He offered me apartments in his house, which I accepted, and he seemed studious to serve and amuse me.
