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RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL TRACTS

NO. 4. *Series 1*

WILLIAM CODDINGTON

IN

RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL AFFAIRS.

BY

Dr. HENRY E. TURNER.



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RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL TRACTS.

NO. 4.



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THE paper here presented to the patrons of this series of Historical Tracts was read by its author before the Rhode Island Historical Society, February 19, 1878. A view more favorable to the memory of Mr. Coddington was presented before the same Society on another occasion by Dr. David King, of Newport, which the publisher expects to incorporate into this series. The conduct of Coddington affords a legitimate subject of historic inquiry for Rhode Island students, and any matters which will tend to lift the shadow from the good name of Coddington will be received with satisfaction by all Rhode Island scholars.

WILLIAM CODDINGTON.

WE cannot too often renew our feelings of admiration for, and gratitude to, that wonderful Providence, which brought to the shores of our beautiful bay, under circumstances which must, at the time, have seemed as far as possible from giving promise of any great fruitfulness, the unlettered and unpretentious men, who, of all the classes of men seeking by diverse ways, the truth, under the stimulus of recent emancipation from feudal power and hierachical tyranny, had alone, apparently, sighted land, and developed the grand fundamental idea, that entire freedom is the substructure on which all truth rests.

Very little appears to have been common to them except a great degree of religious fervor, and an unswerving adhesion to the great central principle of

the inherent right of all men to be governed by their convictions, a doctrine now so entirely settled and accepted by all civilized men, that we are amazed when we reflect that very little more than two hundred years ago, no government and no church had ever been founded recognizing that principle.

Without this common bond of association, the indications are, that Providence, Rhode Island and Warwick would have been, and in fact, for a time were, antagonistic; the elements were exceptionally turbulent; Providence, under its original purely democratic organization, was a scene of confusion, so that good Mr. Williams frequently groaned in spirit, as his correspondence abundantly testifies; Newport was not free from difficulties of a similiar character; Gorton, Holden, Carder, Potter, Shotten and Wicks were expelled and outlawed in March, 1642, and frequent records of suits at law between Coddington, Brenton, Dyer and others, prove that they were not purely saints, but as other men.

Warwick was settled entirely by men who were driven out from Providence and Rhode Island because they could not harmonize with those communi-

ties ; What then caused these discordant bodies politic to coalesce despite their differences and antagonisms ? what except that their common faith in the rights of conscience caused them to crystallize around that sacred principle, and forget their divisions, which were merely personal, when they saw impending the danger of being merged in Massachusetts, and subjected to the ecclesiastical despotism from which they had escaped ? not that they foresaw any momentous consequences to posterity or to mankind, from any action of theirs ; but the debt we owe them is none the less.

Having had the honor to discuss before you, last year, the affairs of the early colonists, particularly as relating to Warwick, I purpose now to pursue the subject, as it relates more especially to Newport, not, of course, in an exhaustive manner, but chiefly with reference to a few individuals.

Governor William Coddington, as the first chief magistrate, has, perhaps, the first claim to attention.

Governor Coddington was born in 1601, in Boston, Lincolnshire, England, whence he is known to have come, and sailed from Southampton on his first com-

ing to America, arriving at Salem, in 1630 ; he died at Newport, January 4th, 1678, aged 77 years ; his first wife was Mary Mosely, daughter of Richard, of Ouseden, County Suffolk, England, who came with him on his first arrival ; by her he had :

1. Michael,² baptized March 8, 1627, died in two weeks.

2. Samuel,² baptized April 17, 1628, buried August 21, 1629.

He returned to England after the death of his first wife ; he married a second, Mary, whose surname is unknown, about 1631 ; she died July 30, 1647, and by her he had three children, viz :

3. a child,² born in England.

4. Mary,² baptized March 2, 1634, at Boston.

5. Benajah,² baptized May 31, 1636, at Boston, and possibly others.

He married, third, Anne Brinley, daughter of Thomas Brinley of Exon, England, Auditor General under Charles 1st, and 2d, her brother, Francis Brinley, came to Newport in 1652, at the age of twenty years, probably influenced by that connexion, and married Hannah Carr ; he became a prominent and wealthy citizen and large land owner, and was the

ancestor of the Brinleys of Massachusetts and Rhode Island; another of his sisters married Nathaniel Sylvester, of Shelter Island, and left a progeny extensive and well known.

The children of Governor Coddington by his wife Anne, were :

6. William,² born in England, January 18, 1651; Assistant, 1680, Governor of Rhode Island, 1683; he died February 4, 1689, unmarried.

7. Major Nathaniel, born at Newport, May 23, 1753; he married Susanna Hutchinson, daughter of Edward Hutchinson, jun., and grand-daughter of the celebrated Anne Hutchinson; he died January, 1724, aged 70 years; he was Town Clerk of Newport.

8. Mary,² born May 16, 1654, married Captain Peleg Sanford, December 1, 1674, and died March, 1692-3, aged 36 years.

9. Thomas,² born November 5, 1655, died March 4, 1693-4, aged 38 years; his first wife, Priscilla, died August 7, 1688, aged 34 years; he married, second, Mary Howard, November 22, 1689; his widow married Anthony Morris, January 18, 1694.

10. John,² born November 24, 1656, died June 1, 1680, probably unmarried.

11. Noah,² born December 12, 1658; nothing further known.

12. Anne,² born June, 1660, died soon after.

13. Anne,² born July 20, 1663; nothing further known.

Of the sons of Governor Coddington; William,² Governor 1683 and 1684, died unmarried. Nathaniel,² married Susannah Hutchinson, of Edward, and had,

1. Anne,³ born December 26, 1677, married second wife Rev. Samuel³ Niles, of Captain Nathaniel,² of Kingstown, of John, in November, 1716.

2. Catharine,³ born February 8, 1678-9.

3. William,³ born July 15, 1680, died, 1755, aged 75 years; married Content Arnold, of Benedict, March 12, 1700; she died May 27, 1721, aged 40 years; he married, second wife, Jean Bernon, daughter of Gabriel Bernon, October 11, 1722.

4. Edward,³ born July 28, 1687, married Elizabeth King, 1724.

5. Col. John,³ born March 23, 1689-90, married August 25, 1726, Elizabeth Rogers; he died, 1743; she died September 23, 1745, aged 40 years; they had a daughter Elizabeth,⁴ baptised April 5, 1741.

6. Nathaniel,³ born January 18, 1691-2, married Hope Brown.

Thomas,² married, first, Priscilla, and had,

1. William,³ born 1684, died February 19, 1689, aged 4 years.

2. Thomas,³ born April 17, 1687.

By second wife, Mary Howard, he had :

3. William,³ born March 1, 1690-1.

4. Mary,³ born January 15, 1693.

Except from these two sons, I can trace no descendants from Governor Coddington, and I can follow the descendants of Thomas no further.

Anne,³ of Nathaniel,² who married Samuel Niles, had a son Elisha,⁴ and daughter Susanna.⁴

William,³ by wife Content Arnold, had :

1. Comfort,⁴ married, December 19, 1724, Nathaniel Hatch, (second wife,) and had Jane,⁵ Nathaniel,⁵ Susanna,⁵ Sarah,⁵ William,⁵ and Anne.⁵

2. William,⁴ born 1710, married May 5, 1737, Penelope Goulding, daughter of Roger and Penelope (Arnold) Goulding; she died in 1777; they had :

1. Mary,⁵ baptized November 23, 1740, died young.

2. Thomas,⁵ baptized May 30, 1742.

3. Roger,⁵ baptized February 24, 1745, born 1744.
4. Nathaniel,⁵ baptized November 9, 1746, died young.
5. William,⁵ baptized June 29, 1750, died young.
6. Elizabeth,⁵ baptized July 28, 1751, born 1751.
7. Edward,⁵ baptized August 30, 1752, died young.
3. Edward,⁴ of William,³ born 1712.
4. Thomas,⁴ of William,³ born 1714.
5. Nathaniel,⁴ of William,³ born 1717, died September 26, 1744, aged 27 years.
6. Arnold,⁴ of William,³ born 1718.

William,³ by second wife, Jean Bernon, had :

7. Content,⁴ born April 12, 1724.
8. Esther,⁴ born January 21, 1726-7.
9. John,⁴ born October 23, 1728 ; married January 28, 1759, Mary, daughter of Governor Joseph Wanton ; he was lost at sea in 1762 ; their daughter, Jane,⁵ was the wife of Martin Benson.
10. Jean,⁴ born March 29, 1730.
11. Francis,⁴ born February 2, 1731-2.
12. Anne,⁴ born May 30, 1734.

Nathaniel,³ of Nathaniel,² married Hope Brown and had :

1. Ann,⁴ born 1721, died September 14, 1723.
2. John,⁴ born 1724, gave Bristol Ferry Farm to nephew Nathaniel.
3. Catharine,⁴ born 1726, died January 7, 1798, unmarried.
4. Margaret,⁴ born 1726, died February 6, 1803, unmarried.
5. Nathaniel,⁴ born 1730, died August, 1810, married Mary Oxx, January 2, 1754.
6. Hope,⁴ born 1733, died April 23, 1800.
7. James,⁴ born 1735-6.
8. Susanna,⁴ born 1737, died April 26, 1802.
9. Edward,⁴ born 1739, died March 1, 1816, married Ann Nixon of James, lived north corner of Thames and Coddington streets, was Custom House Officer.
10. Elizabeth,⁴ born April 19, 1739, probably twin to Edward.⁴

The only descendants in Newport, within the memory of any now living were from Nathaniel,³ of Nathaniel,² of William, through his sons Nathaniel,⁴ and Edward,⁴ and the name is no longer known there, and very few indeed are known to be descended by female lines.

A family of the name, living near New York, one of whom was Postmaster of New York not many years ago, are said to be of the stock, but the connexion has not been traced.

Allen's Biographical Dictionary speaks of Gov. Coddington, as, "The Father of Rhode Island", and Francis Drake in a recent work of the same character, calls him, "The Founder of Rhode Island." Without any wish to detract from the importance of his agency in the settlement, I take leave to question the propriety of applying either of those titles to Gov. Coddington. In the sense in which Roger Williams may, with some propriety, be represented to be the Father or Founder of Providence, Coddington has no more claim to those titles than any other of the eighteen associates.

Roger Williams says, in his deposition of June 18, 1682.* "And therefore I declare to posterity, that, were it not for the favour that God gave me with Canonicus, none of these parts, no, not Rhode Island, had been purchased or obtained, for I never got any

* R. I. Col. Rec. Vol. 1, p. 25.

thing out of Canonicus, but by gift," and further on, "And I desire posterity to see the gracious hand of the Most High, in whose hands is all hearts, that when the hearts of my countrymen and friends and bretheren failed me, his infinite wisdom and merits stirred up the barbarous heart of Canonicus to love me as his son, to his last gasp, by which means I had, not only Miantonomi and all the Coweset Sachems my friends, but Ousamequin also, who, because of my great friendship with him at Plymouth, and the authority of Canonicus, consented freely, being also well gratified by me, to the Governor Winthrop's and my enjoyment of Prudence. yea, of Providence itself, and all the other lands I purchased of Canonicus, which were upon the point. and in effect, whatsoever I desired of him. And I never denyed him nor Miantonomi whatever they desired of me, as to goods or gifts, or use of my boats or pinnace, and the travels of my own person, day or night, which though men know not, nor care to know, yet, the all seeing eye hath seen it, and his all powerful hand hath helped me. Blessed be his holy name to eternity."

Again, in his letter to the town of Providence,* after his five years' sojourn in England, in the early part of 1654, censuring them for their internal dissensions and for their differences with the other parts of the Colony, and urging on them more peaceful councils and more conciliatory measures, he says : " Since I set the first step of any English foot into these wild parts, and have maintained a chargeable and hazardous correspondence with the barbarians, and spent almost five years' time with the State of England, to keep off the rage of the English against us, what have I reaped of the root of being stepping-stone of so many families and towns about us, but grief and sorrow and bitterness? I have been charged with folly for that freedom and liberty which I have always stood for, I say liberty and equality both in land and government. I been blamed for parting with Mooshassuck and afterwards Pawtuxet, which were mine owne, as truly as any man's coat upon his back, without reserving a foote of land or an inch of voice in any matter, more than my servants and strangers."

* R. I. Col. Rec., Vol. 1, p. 351-2..

So that, Roger Williams may well be accounted the father of his settlement, inasmuch as, on his sole responsibility, and by instrumentalities which only he could employ, he became, in his own right and in his own name the exclusive owner of the lands of Providence and Pawtuxet. His associates became citizens of Providence, not because they were expelled from Massachusetts, as were the settlers of Rhode Island; but they threw in their fortunes with his, at his invitation; doubtless they were in sympathy with him, and had they remained in Massachusetts may have been subject to the same penalties, which, two years later, were visited upon those who formed the settlement at Portsmouth.

On the other hand, Mr. Coddington was simply one of a community who, being banished from Massachusetts, were necessitated to find a home without their jurisdiction, and he was deputed, by them, to procure, for them, a title to Rhode Island and adjacent islands, at their common cost, and for their common benefit, as is fully and explicitly set forth in Coddington's statement, of date April 14. 1652.*

*R. I. Col. Rec., Vol. 1, p. 50.

That Coddington was a leading spirit in the settlement is not to be gain-said, and the reasons for his being so are not difficult of elucidation. He had been a leading man in the church and in the civil government at Boston ; and when, on the defeat of Governor Sir Henry Vane, he had been displaced from the Board of Assistants, he had sufficient influence to secure an election as Deputy from the town of Boston, and here let me say, that there is great significance in the fact that from 1634 to 1637, a majority of the Deputies to the General Court from Boston, were among the eighteen signers of the compact at Portsmouth, in March 1638, the record is as follows :—

- In 1634, May, Coggeshall, Quincy, Underhill.
- In 1635, May, Coggeshall, Colburn, Hutchinson.
- In 1635, Sept. Brenton, Colburn, Hutchinson.
- In 1636, Mar. Brenton, Colburn, Hutchinson.
- In 1636, May, Brenton, Coggeshall, Hutchinson.
- In 1636, Dec. Brenton, Coggeshall, Colburn.
- In 1637, Apr. Brenton, Coggeshall, Colburn.
- In 1637, May, Vane, Coddington, Hough.
- In 1637, Sept. Coddington, Aspinwall, Hough.

For the Court November 2d, following, Coggeshall, Coddington and Aspinwall were chosen, but the General Court having dismissed Coggeshall and Aspinwall, sent warrant to Boston to elect others in their room; November 6, the town chose Colburn and John Oliver; he, Oliver, was in the same condemnation with the majority of the Boston people, and he was dismissed, but whether the court had too much discretion to insult the town by a warrant for a third election, or whether the town had too much spirit to hold another, is unknown.*

The significance of this record is, in that it shows how little sympathy the majority of the people of Boston had with the colonial authorities in their dealings with their brethren who fled to Rhode Island; and it shows how, also, that those named were personally held in high esteem, and must have been men of some weight and importance.

Coggeshall, Hutchinson, Brenton, Coddington and Aspinwall, were of the eighteen signers; Vane is well known to have been of their party; Oliver was under the same ban, as was Underhill, but they did

*Mass. Hist. Soc. Col. 2d Series, Vol. 10, p 23.

not unite in the settlement at Rhode Island. Colburn and Hough, as they remained in Boston, we may conclude had no active interest in the controversy, and are of no present interest to our subject.

Governor Coddington was undoubtedly a man of large means and superior social positions; the fact that he was appointed an Assistant in England before embarking, sets at rests all question of the latter, and he is spoken of as one of the principal citizens of Boston, and to have built the first brick house in that town. He became one of the largest, if not quite the largest, land-owner on Rhode Island: in fact, as I apprehend, he was very much the wealthiest of the settlers; very naturally, he was given prominence in their councils, and was made their first chief magistrate; and for anything that appears, he showed himself worthy their confidence until his ambition led him to the fatal policy of procuring for himself greater consequence than their wishes and his own qualifications gave warrant for.

The disclaimer, which was drawn from Coddington April 14, 1652,* contains the following:—

* R. I. Col. Rec. Vol. 1, p. 50.

BOSTON, IN MASSACHUSETTS BAY, IN NEW ENGLAND.

“Whereas, there was an agreement of eighteen persons to make a purchase of some place to the southward for a plantation, whither they resolved to remove; for which end, some of them were sent out to view a place for themselves and such others as they should take in to the liberties of freemen and purchasers with them. And upon their view was purchased Rhode Island, with some small neighboring islands, and privileges of grass and wood of the islands in the bay and main adjoining. And whereas, the sale of the said purchase from the Indians hath ever since lain in the hands of William Coddington, Esq., which, being a great trouble to the aforesaid purchasers and freemen. I, the said William Coddington, Esq., do, by this writing, promise to deliver the said deeds to the purchasers, together with what records are in my hands, belonging to the said purchasers and freemen, into the hands of such as the major part of the said purchasers and freemen shall appoint to receive them; and do hereby declare, that I, the said William Coddington, Esq., have no more, in the purchase, of right than any other of the purchasers or freemen received, or shall be received by them, but only for my proportion. In witness hereof, I have put my hand, this 14th, April, 1652.”

Signed,

WILLIAM CODDINGTON.

Signed in the presence of	}	ROBERT KNIGHT,
		GEORGE MUNING.

It will be observed, that the date of this document is precisely coincident with the assumption of the government by Coddington, under his perpetual commission, which he had then recently brought from

England, Nicholas Easton having been President in 1651, and John Sanford in 1653, precisely that period also, of which we have no public record, said record having been most unwisely and unwarrantably destroyed by authority of the General Assembly, as appears by vote of March 6, 1656. In this paper, extorted from his evidently reluctant hand, he implies that great discontent had previously manifested itself, on the part of the freemen, at his withholding from their possession the Indian titles, under which they held their lands, and it is probable that their confidence in him had been seriously impaired by his refusal or neglect to respond to previous demands for their possession. All the deeds are in the name of "William Coddington and his friends united with him." With the very limited documentary history of these transactions which is now obtainable, can we doubt that the inhabitants of Rhode Island had a great jealousy of Coddington, and that the feeling was fostered and promoted by his possession and retention of the primary evidence of their titles to their estates? Would they not, inevitably, be led to believe, that this possession of

those documents fortified him in the assurance with which he had asked and procured, from the parent Government, a commission constituting himself permanently their chief magistrate, and would they not believe, that having been removed from office by them, he had taken unfair advantage of his possession of them, to disguise the true state of the case, and to create impressions adverse to their wishes and interests. In point of fact, so unfortunate was he, in this episode of his life, notwithstanding his pliancy in giving up, to the proper owners, these papers, so essential to them, that in less than a year, according to the testimony of Francis Brinley, the dissatisfaction and disorder became so great, that he was obliged to fly for safety to his life.*

On the 16th of May, 1648, Mr. Coddington was elected Governor, and Mr. William Balston one of the Assistants ; at the same session both were suspended until they should have answered certain charges, of which we have no knowledge ; there is no evidence that they ever made any answer, at any rate, they were not reinstated. May 26th, within ten

*Mass. Hist. Soc. Col. 1st Series, Vol. 10, p —.

days after, Governor Coddington writes Governor Winthrop as follows :*

“ Sir, this bearer, Mr. Balstone and others of this Island are in disgrace with the people of Providence Warwick and Gorton’s adherents on the island, for that, we will not interpose or meddle at all in their quarrels with the Massachusetts, and the rest of the Colonies ; and do much fear that Gorton will be a thorn in their and our sides, if the Lord prevent it not.”

Roger Williams, at about the same time, writes from Cawcumsquissick to John Winthrop, jun.†

“ Our poor Colony is in civil dissension, their last meeting, at which I have not been, have fallen into factions, Mr. Coddington and Captain Partridge the heads of one, Captain Clarke and Mr. Easton the heads of the other faction ; I receive letters from both, inviting me &c., but I resolve if the Lord please, not to be engaged, unless with great hopes of peace-making ; the peace-makers are the Sons of God.”

* Hutchinson papers, Vol. 1, p. 253.

† Winthrop papers, Mass. Soc. Hist. Col., Vol. 9, p. 278.

In September, 1648, the following application was made to the Commissioners of the United Colonies:

“Mr. William Coddington and Captain Partridge of Rhode Island, presented this ensuing request to the Commissioners, in writing.”

“Our request and motion is, in behalf of our Island; that we, the Islanders of Rhode Island may be received into combination with all the United Colonies of New England, in a firm and perpetual league of friendship and amity, of offence and defence, mutual advice and succor, upon all just occasions, for our mutual safety and welfare, and for preserving of peace amongst ourselves: and preventing, as much as may be, all occasions of war and difference; and to this, our motion, we have the consent of the major part of the Island,

Signed,

WILLIAM CODDINGTON,
ALEXANDER PARTRIDGE.”

“To which motion, the Commissioners return this answer under all their hands.”

"MR. CODDINGTON AND CAPTAIN PARTRIDGE.

The Commissioners for all the United Colonies have considered what you have propounded, either by speech or writing, and find your present state and condition full of confusion and danger, having much disturbance amongst yourselves, and no security from the Indians; they desire therefore, in several respects, to afford both advice and help, but upon the perusal of the ancient patent granted to New Plymouth, they find Rhode Island, upon which your plantations are settled, to fall within their line and bounds, which the honorable Committee of Parliament think not fit to strighten or infringe, nor may we, if therefore, yourselves and the inhabitants or the most and most considerable part of them, upon a due consideration of Plymouth's Patent and right acknowledge yourselves within that jurisdiction, we shall consider and advise how you may be accepted upon just terms, and with tender respects to your conveniencie: and shall, after, afford you the same advice, protection and help, which other plantations within the United Colonies enjoy, which we hope, in sundry respects, may tend to your comfort and safety."

It is matter for regret, that Roger Williams, in his multifarious correspondence, should not have given something more explicit, as to the state of parties, than the quotation I have made from his letter to Governor Winthrop, jun. He undoubtedly was cognizant of all the circumstances, and a recitation of the facts, by him, and the conclusions of his truthful and logical mind, would be of immense value but we must be content with knowing from him, the existence of dissensions and the names of the chief leaders.

The following reference, however, to the result of the application to the Commissioners of the United Colonies, throws some light upon the subject.

In a letter to John Winthrop, jun., in September, 1648,* Roger Williams says :

“Sir, Our neighbors, Mr. Coddington and Captain Partridge, ten days since, returned from Plymouth with propositions for Rhode Island to subject to Plymouth, to which himself and Portsmouth incline, and Mr. Holden and Mr. Warner of Warwick came from thence also, and they say gave satisfaction why

* Mass. Hist. Soc. Col., 3d Series, Vol. 9, p. 271.

they dare not depart from the Charter. Sir, in this division of our neighbours, I have kept myself unengaged and presented motions of pacification, amongst which, I was bold to propose a reference, your worthy self and some other worthy friend to be chosen; our town yields to it, and Mr. Easton, (though opposite,) and possibly you may have the trouble and labour of a peace-maker."

Here we see our honored friend Roger Williams in his habitual role of peace-maker; happily the Greenes and Holdens and Warners of Warwick, and the Clarkes and Eastons and Cranstons of Newport, were made of sterner stuff and more positive councils prevailed, and Rhode Island was saved to us, and to mankind.

Let us pause here to inquire, who was Captain Alexander Partridge? The figure he makes in our history, seems to be confined, almost entirely to his prominence in this transaction. He appears first as having been elected General Sergeant, May, 1648, the exact time when Coddington was elected Governor and suspended, and he was never after an officer in the Colony. Afterwards, May 18, 1654, it was voted,

“ That Edward Smith, Joseph Torrey and James Rogers have power to examine the disposal of Capt. Partridge’s estate, both the reserve and the disposal by William Lytherland and Richard Knight, and their right in what they either have reserved or disposed of, and what the said three shall do therein, shall be authentic.”

Here we have either a death, or an assignment, or a defalcation ; probably not a death, because the name appears for the third and last time, in 1655, in the list of freemen, then revised and enrolled in full. Probably he was an adventurer whose importance grew wholly out of the patronage of Governor Coddington. who, as appears by a letter of Williams, left his affairs in his charge, when he went to England in January, 1648-9.

In a letter to J. Winthrop, Jun., dated, Coweum-squassick, Jan. 29, 1648,* Williams says: “ Mr. Coddington to the Bay, with his daughter, for England, and left Capt. Partridge in trust withal, the last week, at Newport.”

* Mass. Hist. Soc. Col., 3d Series, Vol. 9, p. 280.

It appears, then, that Providence, Warwick and Newport were opposed to humiliating themselves, by an application for favor from the United Colonies, and Portsmouth only countenanced it, and the only names apparent in it, are Coddington, who had just been repudiated by the Colonial Legislature, Partidge, who appears to have had very little influence or importance, and Balstone, who represented Portsmouth, but had been suspended, and was one of the original eighteen.

The request and motion, let it be remembered, was "in behalf of our Island." Not considering the sufferings and struggles which the other towns had already encountered, side by side, with them; not reflecting on the helpless condition in which those two communities would be left, in the conflict with their aggressive neighbors, in which conflict they had theretofore striven, shoulder to shoulder, with them; forgetting that through the influence of Roger Williams, with the Indian sachems, they had obtained and held, at a merely nominal cost, every acre and every inch of their domain, they proposed to throw off all the obligations which should have attached them to

the mainland towns, and to leave them to the tender mercies of their enemies, whom they invited to place their feet upon their own submissive necks.

Fortunately for the credit of human nature, there is nothing to indicate that Newport ever gave any countenance to this application, and the intense unpopularity that followed Coddington to Europe, and met him on his return, gives good ground for the conclusion, that, notwithstanding the difficulties they had already met, and had reason to look forward to, they, the people of Newport, abhorred and resented the position in which they were attempted to be placed, as an imputation upon their honour and their manhood.

In a letter to J. Winthrop, Jun., dated, * Nar. 6. 8, 51, † so-called, Roger Williams says: "Being now bound, resolvedly if the Lord please, for our native country, I am not certain whether by the way of the English, you know the reason, or by the way of the Dutch: My neighbours of Providence and Warwick, whom I also lately denied, with importunities, have overcome me to endeavor the renewing of their

* Narragansett, October 6, 1651.

† Mass. Hist. Soc. Col. Rec., 3d Series, Vol. 9, p. 283.

liberties, upon the occasion of Mr. Coddington's late grant."

Mr. Williams appears, at last, to have been aroused to the magnitude of the crisis. In 1648 he had written to Governor Winthrop, congratulating himself on his having kept out of the dissensions ; after Coddington's application and its contumelious rejection, he had proposed Governor Winthrop, Jun., and some other friends, as arbiters of the differences, and he writes him again, "March 1648-49" so called,* speaking of the Legislature : "I wrote to them about an act of oblivion which, blessed be God, they have passed"; but he now concludes that the exigency requires something more than a temporizing policy, and proceeds to Europe, and in conjunction with Mr. John Clarke, acting for Newport and Portsmouth, procures the revocation of Coddington's Commission, and the restoration of the Charter.

It is curious to observe the contrast between the mild and temperate manner in which Mr. Williams dealt with all practical matters, and the fury and violence which polemical controversy aroused in him.

* Mass. Hist. Soc. Col., 3d Series, Vol. 9, p. 283.

Mr. Coddington's administration, in his Vice-royalty, was a most complete failure ; within eight months from his accession, he was obliged, not only to abandon his government, but to seek safety beyond its bounds.

The letter of Wm. Arnold to Massachusetts General Court,* shows, very distinctly, the peril which awaked Mr. Williams from his dream of peace. Arnold says :

“Whereas, Mr. Coddington have gotten a charter of Rhode Island and Canonicut island, to himself, he have, thereby, broken the force of their charter, that went under the name of Providence, because he have gotten away the greater part of that Colony,” and further on,

“It is a great pity and very unfit, that such a company as these are, they all stand professed enemies against all the United Colonies, that they should get a Charter for so small a quantity of land as lyeth in and about Providence, Shawomet, Patuxet and Coweset, all which, now Rhode island is taken from it, is but a strape of land lying in

*R. I. Col. Rec., Vol. 1, p. 231.

between the Colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth and Connecticut.”

Arnold, besides a good many not flattering strictures on the inhabitants of these parts, very shrewdly, heaps coals on the fire of our Massachusetts friend's animosity in this wise :

“ Some of them of Shawomet, that cryeth out much against them which put people to death for witches ; for say they, there be no other witches on earth, nor devils, but your own pastors and ministers and such as they are, &c.,” which last observation, I must say, has very much of a Samuel Gorton ring about it.

August 31, 1654,* the commissioners of all the four towns agreed on a re-organization of the government, under orders from the honourable Council of State, brought over by Mr. Dyre in 1652. From this time, Mr. Coddington seems to have devoted himself to his private affairs principally, as the Record gives no great indication of active participation in Colonial business.

At a meeting of the Legislature at Warwick, March 11, 1656, Mr. Coddington was returned as

* R. I. Col. Rec., Vol. 1, p. 276.

Commissioner, which shows that he had recovered the confidence of his fellow citizens of Newport in a great degree, The same day he made the following declaration, viz. :

“ I, William Coddington, do freely submit to the authority of his highness, in this Colony, as it is now united, and that with all my heart.”

At the next meeting, March 17th, the Assembly took action, which is so essential to a complete comprehension of the subject, and so creditable to the good feeling and good sense of the mainland towns, that I cannot forbear to present it.

“ That, upon the complaint of Mr. Coddington's sitting in Commission, it is ordered, that there shall be a letter sent to Mr. John Clarke, in England, manifesting his subjection to the present union, and the ground of what is underwritten, being considered by a Committee.

“ We have considered and weighed the matter presented, concerning Mr. William Coddington, concerning his present acting as Commissioner, and concluded, that the town of Newport did, somewhat inconsiderately, impose that service upon Mr. Cod-

dington, wherein the inconveniences to him and the Colony, thereby seeming to be likely to ensue, were not seriously weighed beforehand. But, upon serious debate and clear reason, we do think it not of so convenient consequence, for Mr. Coddington to act, until some clear advice from England and thereabout, having reference to that passage in the Council of State's letter to the Colony, concerning the Dutch designs upon the Colony, which passage did arise from some complaints from hence, against Mr. Coddington in the premises, for aught we can understand, still upon disquisition, or depending, before the authority of England.

“But forasmuch as Mr. Coddington hath and doth give the Colony good encouragement of the truth of his good will and desires for the public good of the Colony, by his owning the union established between the towns, and the present way of transacting the government in the Colony, &c. ; it is conceived, that, for the clearing of all these grievances, or matters of complaint premised, and that we may freely and clearly be justified in acting with Mr. Coddington as before premised. in Commission together, by the

power of the Charter and consent of the towns ; that, to that end, the Court do draw up a letter to Mr. John Clarke in England, declaring our good desires and apprehensions, conceived from Mr. Coddington's demonstrations of good affection to the government, as also, of our own satisfactions generally, in the Colony, in the matters of complaint premised ; and that it would please the honoured Government in England to give something in the way of discharging of these matters from before them, since that the evils that ensued upon the distraction of those troublesome times are removed from us, and breaches amongst us are partly composed, and in a way of composing, to the good and comfort of all parts of the Colony, and the establishment of peace and love amongst us ; which said letter we believe, will be so effectual as to procure from thence, encouragement to the Colony and Mr. Coddington to act together, and to free him from the danger of the penalty that, possibly may seem to impend on the former troubles and complaints.

“Dated, at Warwick, at the General Assembly, March the 17th, 1655-6.”

It argues favourably of the good temper and good sense of Mr. Coddington, that he should, in less than three years, have overcome the violent prejudices entertained against him in Newport, in 1652, so far as to be returned by them as Commissioner, and to prevail with the other towns to accept him on such kindly terms. The latter part of the enactment shows that they had preferred very serious charges against him, and a less conciliatory spirit on either part might, and probably would, have led to disastrous complications. All the forces of all the colonists combined were absolutely essential to success in resisting the future encroachments of their astute and powerful neighbors.

On the subject of the proposed submission to the United Colonies, Arnold, in *History of Rhode Island*, Vol. 1, p. 223, says :

“ This appears almost like an act of treason against the Colony.” And again—

“ That the islanders intended nothing more than a defensive alliance, which would not compromise their position as members of the Colony under the Charter.” And again—

“ Had they submitted, J. E. to Plymouth, as proposed by the Commissioners, the Charter would have been virtually annulled by the Act of its holders ; the schemes of the surrounding Colonies to appropriate the rest of the State, might have proved successful ; Rhode Island would soon have been absorbed by Massachusetts and Connecticut.”

I agree with the first clause I have quoted, leaving out the qualifying word, almost. It was treason, and not treason only, it was double treason ; not only treason against the mainland towns associated with them, whom they proposed to desert, in a most treacherous manner, but treason against all the inhabitants of Newport and Portsmouth, who did not unite in it, and there is no evidence and no indication that any considerable number, in Newport especially, favored it ; on the other hand, the unanimity with which they repudiated and resisted Coddington's authority, under his surreptitiously obtained Commission, and their sending Mr. Clarke to procure its revocation, gives the strength almost of certainty to the conclusion, that the application at Plymouth was not only without their warrant, but was without

their privity and against their wishes. The records of the Commissioners of the United Colonies do not recite any commission under which Messrs. Coddington and Partridge claimed to act, or that they asked them for any. All that appears is their own word, that they represented "the major part of the inhabitants of the island."

As to the second clause quoted from Arnold, Roger Williams says, "Mr. Coddington and Capt. Partridge returned with propositions for Rhode Island to subject to Plymouth, to which himself, meaning Coddington, and Portsmouth incline." What can be plainer? What other proposal could he have contemplated? and certainly he could not have expected the mainland towns to accede willingly to an arrangement leaving them out in the cold. I cannot find any ground for looking on this transaction as, under any aspect, of a venial character.

The third quotation from Arnold sums up tersely and conclusively, the result which must have followed on the success of Coddington's application; no man can demur to his conclusion. It would have defeated the establishment of Rhode Island. No man

can suppose that, with only "that little strape of land," of which Wm. Arnold speaks, even the indomitable pertinacity of Warwick would have sufficed to secure the King's Province to Providence Plantations.

To show the style of procedure which Coddington adopted to secure his Commission, I interject the following quotations from the printed catalogue of British State papers on Colonial affairs, hoping that at some time, not far distant, complete copies of all these papers may be procured for the benefit of this Society.

"Order of Council of State, referring petition of Wm. Coddington to the consideration of the Committee of the Admiralty, for their report."*

"Order to same effect, upon petition of Edward Winslow, agent for New England."†

"Order of Committee of Admiralty, upon petition of Wm. Coddington, praying for a grant of two Islands, viz. : Aquethnet als. Rhode Island and Quinunagate island, lying in Narraganset Bay, which

* Interregnum entry book, Vol. 92, p. 64, March 6, 1651.

† Ibidem, Vol. 92, p. 68, March 7, 1651.

he purchased of the Indians ; and Edward Winslow alledging, that he has a right thereto, on behalf of New Plymouth, granted to them by Patent from King James ; it is directed, that the business be resumed on the 27th instant, when both parties are to bring evidence and witnesses, for proving their title to those islands, with counsel, if they think fit.”*

“Order of Council of State. Draft, Commission for Wm. Coddington, to be referred to the Committee for examinations, who are desired to peruse it, and report to the Council.”†

“Order of Committee of the Admiralty. Upon petition of Wm. Coddington, for a grant of two islands, therein mentioned ; Edward Winslow having been heard, on behalf of New Plymouth, which he alledges, has a right to one of the islands, viz. : Quinunagate, as granted by Patent from the King, to that Colony ; it is thought, that nothing has been produced by Winslow, why the desires of Coddington should not be granted, but, in case Winslow has

* Interregnum entry book, Vol. 116, p. 137, March 20, 1651.

† Ibidem, Vol. 93, p. 166-7, March 26, 1651.

anything further to offer, the business again to be considered on 3d April.”*

“Order of Committee of Admiralty. At the request of Wm. Coddington, the business between himself and Edward Winslow to be heard on the 8th instant.”†

“The business between Coddington and Winslow to be heard on the 11th instant, when they are both directed to attend.”‡

“Order of the Committee of the Admiralty. Edward Winslow having attended to produce further evidence against the petition of Wm. Coddington, and nothing appearing to alter the former resolution of the Committee, it is directed, that the matter, as presented by both parties and their counsel, be reported to the Council of State.”§

“Order of Committee of Admiralty. Upon the petition of Wm. Coddington, setting forth that he was one of the first planters in New England, and

* Interregnum entry book, Vol. 146, p. 142, March 27, 1651.

† Ibidem, Vol. 146, p. 145, April 3, 1651.

‡ Ibidem, Vol. 146, p. 148, April 9, 1651.

§ Ibidem, Vol. 146, p. 148, April 11, 1651.

about thirteen years past, discovered two small islands, called Aquetnet, als Rhode island, and Quinunagate, lying within Narragansett Bay, which he purchased of the Indians, and has quietly enjoyed ever since ; but being desirous to govern by English laws, and to have dependence on the Commonwealth, he prays for a grant of those islands from Parliament, with such immunities as have been granted to others in like cases. Edward Winslow having been heard, on behalf of New Plymouth, alledged that Aquiedneck island was within the grant to New Plymouth, by Patent of November 3d, 1620, and an order of June 14th, 1649, of the Commissioners for foreign plantations, appointed by Parliament, upon his petition, wherein he desires the enjoyment of the ancient liberties to the utmost extent of their grant, having been considered, referring it to the Government of New Enlgand, not claiming interest in the land in question, to summon a jury of twelve men to inquire into the business, and in case the land had been granted to the government of New Plymouth and Connecticut, directing that the Charter should be absolutely void, and the inhabitants

subject to the government under which their respective residences fall, and nothing appearing, by anything Winslow produced, why the desire of Coddington should not be presented to the Council of State, to be granted, if they see fit, it is directed, that the matter of fact, as herein stated, be reported to the Council of State.”*

The first deduction to be made from these extracts is, that the Council of State, having, by the Committee of the Admiralty as their deputies, examined thoroughly the claims of Plymouth to the islands, presented and advocated by a man so able and so earnest, and so familiar with the subject as Edward Winslow, and having decided that they were without foundation, that question may be regarded as finally and definitively put at rest, and for this consummation, let us not forget, we are indebted to the agency of Governor Coddington.

The next thing fairly to be deduced from this record is, that Coddington asked for a grant of this territory in his own name, and without reference to his associates, each of whom, according to his decla-

* Interregnum entry book, Vol. 146, p. 155, April 17, 1651.

ration of April 14th, 1652, was, equally with himself, interested in the purchase; that he presented no credentials of authority from any organization or any individuals, but claimed that he had discovered the islands, that he had purchased them from the Indians, and that he had enjoyed them for the past thirteen years, which seems to have possessed the minds of the Colonists with the conviction, that he had wilfully misled the Council of State into a belief of his paramount right, and that their title deeds were not safe in his possession. And was that conviction justified by the record? and was not their rebellion against his authority the natural sequence of such conviction?

There is nothing in this record which indicates any recognition of the connexion previously existing with the inland towns, under the Charter of Providence Plantations; it seems impossible that the Council should have been ignorant of it, or that, if so, it should not afterwards transpire, and reflect on Governor Coddington; the fact remains for future explanation, but the facility with which the revocation of his Commission, and the restoration of the

Charter, in its full force, was procured by Messrs. Williams and Clarke, seems to warrant the doubt whether the Council of State did not act in the premises under some misconception.

If a more complete publication of documents relating to these events shall take off any part of the shadow which now rests on Governor Coddington's fame, no man will rejoice more than myself; and one of my principal motives in presenting my views, is a hope of eliciting a response, which may, in any degree, controvert them.

The faults of Coddington seem to me, those growing out of a weakness of character, rather than of wrong intent. He grew up probably in a position of wealth and importance under a strong government, and imbibed those sentiments of respect for authority which are natural to his class. He came to Massachusetts already alleged as an important member of the Council of Government, and so remained until his last year in Massachusetts, and, as he undoubtedly expected, was immediately acknowledged as the leading member of the settlement at Rhode Island. As the recognized head of that community, then

in perfect accord with common objects and common interests, with no particular reason to anticipate differences which eventually arose, he very naturally looked at the very republican form of the institution they adopted, himself being the leading spirit, through a rose colored medium. But when the selfishness of human nature had had time to mature its never failing crop of differences and animosities, and his own superior consequence and influence began to decline, he began, as most men do, to lose his faith in the capacity of men to govern themselves, and could see no way to secure the young settlement from destruction, but the restoration of his own authority, under a form which should make it independent of the caprice of the people. Almost any man would be in favor of monarchy if he could be king. But, fortunately, most of the settlers had not been favorites of fortune, and had different objects and different views ; of humble pretensions, they had no ambition for prominence, or if they had, saw a better prospect of gratifying it by the favor of their fellows than by the favor of the Court ; and so, probably without very much philosophizing, they

proceeded to work out, not without much tribulation, the problem of self-government.

Coddington's executive ability must be doubted; he had been Chief from 1638 to 1647, when, on the union, Coggeshall had been elected; the suspension of Coddington in 1648, and various other evidence, shows a great deal of discontent to have existed, which he had lost all power to control; his personal government was a failure entirely, and his election in 1674, '76, '78, was probably a mark of restored good will and respect, rather than faith in his administrative capacity, since he was then in advanced life. He died in the year 1678.

Mr. Coddington, in the original allotment of lands at Newport, was assigned seven hundred and thirty acres, in three parcels, the largest of which was the Coddington Point estate, which comprised, as well as I can judge, almost all the tract known afterwards as the Rotch Farms, excluding the Dyer Farm; these were Malbone's Garden, Tammany Hill, Buffum's and the Point Farms. These are all now subdivided. Another parcel was north of the town, thirty-six acres, south of Wm. Dyer's farm; a third parcel of

meadows, on the south of the town, beyond the rocks, probably part of what has since been known as Rocky Farm ; four acres for a home-lot, and a grant afterwards of six acres for an orchard ; these ten acres extended from Marlboro street northward, along the east side of the Cove ; he also owned the north point of Conanicut, five hundred acres or more. He gave great attention to the introduction and breeding of fine varieties of sheep, and probably of cattle. His letters show that he prided himself on his sheep farming, and was instrumental in distributing fine stocks of those useful animals. In the then rough condition of the land, no other farming than grazing could have been prosecuted on a large scale. Probably not an inch of his extensive possessions is now held by any descendant of his.

After 1652, his name does not appear as an active participant in any great measure in Colonial affairs, though there can be no doubt that his potential influence was felt in his private capacity, against the liberal party, which had caused his compulsory retirement ; and this conclusion is strengthened by the fact, that his son-in-law, Peleg Sanford, was the first

Admiralty Judge appointed by the Crown, and his son Nathaniel was the first clerk in Admiralty, whose induction into those offices was resisted with all their power by the Clarkes and their friends, as an encroachment by the Crown on their rights under the Charter ; the name of his son Thomas also appears with theirs appended to a paper, which shows that his sentiments were coincident with theirs.

Another incident which preceded the application, in behalf of the island, to the Commissioners of the United Colonies, is brought to light as follows :*

“ It is ordered, that the letter lately sent to the Governor by Mr. Eaton, Mr. Hopkins, Mr. Haynes, Mr. Coddington and Mr. Brenton, but concerning, also, the General Court, shall be thus answered, by the Governour, that the Court doth assent to all the propositions laid down, in the aforesaid letter, but, that the answer shall be directed to Mr. Eaton, Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Haynes, only, excluding Mr. Coddington and Mr. Brenton, as men not to be capitulated withal by us, either for themselves or the people of the island, where they inhabit, as their case standeth.”

* Mass. Col. Rec., Vol. 1. p. 305.

Mr. Eaton represented New Haven Colony.

Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Haynes Connecticut.

The letter here alluded to was one proposing the union of the Colonies, which union was effected in 1643, excluding, as this vote proposes, Rhode Island from any participation in it, or any benefit from it. It shows, with great distinctness, the spirit entertained by Massachusetts toward the colonists of Rhode Island; but it shows, quite as distinctly, a positive contempt for Coddington and Brenton, and a willingness to visit them with personal indignity. It does not appear that Brenton ever after burned his fingers in the same fire, and it seems almost incredible that Coddington should have subjected himself to a repetition of the same contumely, and even to have been willing and anxious to accept the humiliating terms finally conceded.

In advanced life, Coddington associated himself with the Society of Friends, by whom he seems to have been held in high esteem. This connexion may explain his comparative abstraction from political activity; but Walter Clarke, Nicholas Easton and Henry Bull, were also of that persuasion, and did

not seem to be precluded thereby, from earnest prominence.

In a letter from Governor Coddington to Governor Winthrop, January, 1645,* he says:

“ For Gorton, as he came to be of the island, before I knew of it, and is here against my mind, so shall he not, by me, be protected ; here is a party which adhere unto Gorton and his company, in both the plantations, (meaning Newport and Portsmouth), and judge them so much strength to the place, which be neither friends to you nor us.”

I have not been disposed to lay much stress on Roger Williams's charges of hardness and worldliness in his letter to Coddington, lately brought to light, considering the atmosphere of polemical acrimony in which that missive was engendered ; but the kind and degree of sympathy which those charges suggest, as shown to the refugees from Providence and Warwick, at the period of the Indian dangers in 1675-6, seem very accurately foreshadowed, in the very few cases in which his spirit has come down to us, in the authoritative evidence of his own hand :

* Massachusetts Archives.

these poor exiles, driven from Massachusetts, and from their own possessions in Warwick, precluded at the same time, in terms, from seeking shelter at Providence, and, if they had dared to trust to the humanity of the people of Connecticut or Plymouth, knowing that they dared not offend Massachusetts, had choice of no succor but Rhode Island on the one hand, and on the other, the wilderness and its savage inhabitants. I am proud to say, that in this emergency Newport opened its arms, and these unfortunate people were welcomed and ministered unto; and need I say, that as a citizen of Newport, I feel profound regret and humiliation, that his own statement puts beyond question the fact, that this appeal was responded too on the part of Newport, in spite of all the power and all the influence that Governor Coddington could bring to bear,

November 11, 1646,* he writes Gov. Winthrop :

“For Gorton and his company, they are to me, as they have ever been, their freedom of the island is denied, and was when I accepted the place I now bear. The Commissioners have joined them in the

* N. E. Hist. and General Reg., 1st Series, Vol. 4., p. 221.

same Charter, tho' we maintain the government as before. To further that end you wrote of, I sent to Mr. Cotton, to be directed to Mr. Elliott that requested it, what was entered upon record, under the Secretary's hand, which, I do think, you may do well to make use of, because I hear it sinks most with the Earl, where they had liberty of conscience. Mr. Peters writes, in that you sent your son, p'secute, and so, in haste, not doubting, as occasion serves, to approve myself, yours ever,

WM. CODDINGTON."

These two passages from letters to Governor Winthrop, gives the key note to Governor Coddington's relation to the Colony of Providence Plantations, and to the distractions which prevented the union of all the towns, under the Charter of 1643, until 1647. He is the instrument employed by Massachusetts to defeat the union of the four towns, by which alone they could hope to secure independence of her. He is employed by her agent to procure from the public records, such extracts as might most easily be made to appear objectionable to the honourable Board of Commissioners for foreign

plantations, and how superserviceable he desired to be in this capacity, he shows by insidiously calling particular attention to the Act relating to liberty of conscience, as likely "to sink most with the Earl." What Earl? Warwick, the President of the Board; not Warwick, the maker of kings, but Warwick, the maker of states

Is it fair that he, who was diametrically opposed to the great organic principle to which Rhode Island owes all her vitality and all her historic prestige, should be treated as the chief promoter of that principle, and receive the homage of posterity, rather than John Clarke, and Jeremiah Clarke, and Nicholas Easton, and Henry Bull, and a host of others, who consistently pursued those measures, which finally triumphed, despite his machinations?

He says, speaking of Gorton and his company, and a sneer is plainly perceptible in this expression, so often repeated, "which be neither friends to you, nor to us." In this, we see how much more closely his sympathies and associations allied him with Massachusetts than with the refugees, among whom his lot was cast, for a majority of the islanders, as well

as the people of Providence, finally affiliated with these Gortonists, and with their potential aid wrought out the success which his policy would have rendered impossible.

Again, I say, I am not disposed to impeach the sincerity of Governor Coddington. I believe his errors grew out of weakness rather than evil intention. In the establishment of the Colonists at Portsmouth, as he was the chosen chief, and the first signer to the compact, we are led irresistably to the conclusion, that the principles promulgated in that instrument had his full and cordial approval ; but the iron in his construction was not proof. He was of that class, very numerous at this day, whose confidence in popular institutions cannot endure the smallest cloud that threatens the serenity of the elements.

This compact recognizes no authority intervening between themselves and their God. Six years after, we find Coddington became a tory, striving to defeat his associates in their aspiration for personal and political freedom, and intriguing to bring them into subjection to the religious oligarchy which shaped the policy of the United Colonies.

I am aware that the positions I have taken are not consonant with the traditional ideas which prevail among my own fellow townsmen ; but the day is passed in which prejudice should be allowed to usurp the province of reason, or declamatory platitudes to supersede logical induction. Whether or not I am justified in my views, they are offered as a tribute to truth, and I trust may induce enquiries leading to its triumph. Let us teach our posterity to enquire on what ground they stand, before lending their voices to swell the pæan of "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

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