THE SOUTH

IN

AMERICAN

HISTORY

SECOND EDITION

HESSELTINE AND SMILEY

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in American History

SECOND EDITION

BY

WILLIAM B. HESSELTINE
Department of History
University of Wisconsin

AND

DAVID L. SMILEY
Department of History
Wake Forest College

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The South in American History
(Formerly *A History of the South*)

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To

Arthur Charles Cole

Preface

ORIGINALLY published as *A History of the South* in 1936, this book —designed as a synthesis of the South's role in American history and as a synopsis of developments in the Southern regions of the United States—was revised in 1943 under the present title. In the present edition, the authors have especially concentrated on reorganizing and expanding the treatment from the end of reconstruction to the middle decade of the Twentieth Century. The theme of the volume remains the same: the South is American, its problems have been the nation's, its social adjustments have been reflections of national society, its politics have found their orientation about the federal government, and its economics has been an integral part of the national economy.

The United States is a congeries of regions, in each of which men of different traditions, outlooks, ways of life, and interests have sometimes vied with each other, sometimes cooperated with one another to control their regions. The story of the Southern regions, and of the differing traditions of the men who have dwelt in them, is a vital part of the American story.

Much of the revision, and much of the drudgery of typing, proofreading, and indexing has fallen upon David L. Smiley, who has consented to appear as co-author and thus to share the responsibility for the errors of fact and interpretation which, despite the advice and admonition of friends and critics, still remain.

The two dozen years which have elapsed since this book first appeared have been marked—as some of the items in the final chapter indicate—by a tremendous resurgence in Southern scholarship and by fresh investigations into aspects of Southern history. The Southern Historical Association, *Journal of Southern History*, new vigor in state historical magazines, and the growth of strong university presses in the South have increased the bibliography of Southern history to unmanageable proportions. Partly because usable guides to Southern writings are readily available, and partly to save space for new matter, we have dispensed with the conventional "selected bibliographies" at the ends of chapters.

Friendly advice and helpful criticism on earlier revisions came from Fred H. Harrington, Kenneth M. Stampp, T. Harry Williams, George Winston Smith, Richard N. Current, E. Bruce Thompson, Frank Freidel, Charlton W. Tebeau, Frank W. Prescott, and Carl Wittke. In addition to these, the authors are indebted to Steven Ambrose, Clement L. Silvestro, Frank N. Byrne, Larry Gara, Horace S. Merrill, Richard D. Younger,

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WILLIAM B. HESSELTINE

DAVID L. SMILEY

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Planting the Southern Colonies

1. THE AMERICAN SOUTH

IN Stephen Vincent Benét's epic poem, "John Brown's Body," a Connecticut boy ponders, in 1860, about the mysterious South. To him it was a languorous land where grinning Topsies and obsequious Uncle Toms stood beneath each honeysuckle vine; where every white man was a gentleman, born to the manor, and every white woman a lady. Fields of cotton covered the land; banjo-strumming darkies made music in the evenings; Spanish moss festooned the great oak trees; the rivers were all named Suwanee; and the sun really shone all the time. The men sipped incessantly at mint juleps, and the girls were paragons of beauty. All of the houses were mansions with white pillars.

Such a picture of the South is a part of American folklore, shared by Northerners and Southerners alike. Writers of fiction, publishers of popular songs, and venders of pancake mixes have combined to keep the picture fresh in the national imagination. The influence of such popular tradition cannot be gainsaid: it has permeated the national consciousness, causing Southerners to model their conduct and their conversation to conform to the traditional pattern, and causing Northerners to approach southern problems as if the South were the unified area which folklore has portrayed.

The existence of the tradition has led to a perennial search for a "central theme" of southern history. Some who have searched have believed that the answer lay in the plantation system, with its slave labor and its devotion to the staple crops. The South, said one writer, was a

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great "fabric of cotton." Commentators of a more mystical trend of thought have contended that the soil and the pastoral life have permeated the southern character. In the Old South, they saw a happy land, peopled by simple, yet extremely wise, men and women. Possessed of souls made great by living close to Mother Earth, the southern people practiced a gracious way of life, cultivated good manners, and radiated individual honor and worth. Still other writers have felt that the unifying principle of southern history has been the Negro, whether slave or free, whose presence bound the whites of the South into a homogeneous whole. The determination of the white race to maintain its dominance united the Old South in the defense of slavery and unites the New South in a complex system which still reserves the land for the whites.

Although such explanations of the South contain large measures of truth, they oversimplify the problem by placing too much emphasis on the similarities in southern society and neglecting the differences. The South is a land of diversity. In the vast area between the Chesapeake and the Rio Grande, regions differed widely in cultural and social development, in political philosophy, and in economic activities. The differences between regions of old establishment and frontier regions, between regions of cotton and corn and regions of tobacco, or rice, or sugar, between city and country, between coastal plain and mountain, have been greater in the South than in any other part of the nation. In racial elements, the gap between Anglo-Saxon and African in the South was greater than the gap between the Puritan and the Irish in New England or between the English and the Dutch in colonial New York. In economic status, far less division existed between merchant princes and common laborers in the North than between the great planter and the slave in the South. The tradition that pictured the South as a homogeneous whole represented an ideal rather than a reality.

Yet, amid the diversity, certain characteristics of the South have united the area. The most important of these characteristics has been the predominance of agriculture. Climate, soil, and physical features long combined to make the southern regions centers of agriculture rather than of industry and commerce. The institutions of the South thus became adapted to an agricultural society; and even after commerce and industry came to absorb a large portion of attention, the social patterns of an agricultural world continued to shape the mind and to influence the development of the section. Geography, therefore, was the primary factor in producing the social and economic phenomena of the South.

Comprised in the South are a number of physiographic regions. Along the Atlantic Coast is the low, ofttimes marshy, pine-grown Tidewater. This region extends from 100 to 200 miles back to the fall line of the rivers. Parts of Virginia and Maryland and larger portions of the Carolinas and Georgia are in the Tidewater. Bays break the seacoast of the Tidewater, and harbors are plentiful. The wide rivers that traverse the region flow slowly and are navigable up to the fall line. The

soil, although always thin, was rich when the first settlers came. In this region were planted the first settlements of the English colonies.

The Gulf Coast stretches northward from the Gulf of Mexico and is similar in character to the Tidewater region. Most of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana are in the Gulf Coast region, while Florida, a peninsula dividing the Gulf from the Atlantic Ocean, possesses the same characteristics. The soil cannot compare with the richest soils of the Ohio Valley, but the rainfall and the temperature have especially adapted the region to the production of cotton.

West of the Tidewater region are the southern extensions of the Appalachian highlands. The eastern slope, which borders on the Tidewater, is known as the Piedmont Plateau. Higher than the Tidewater, its contour is more rolling, its numerous rivers and streams less navigable, and its soil much richer. The Piedmont was suited to become a land of diversified farming, where crops of wheat and corn might compete with the staple products that dominated the other areas.

Beyond the Piedmont are the Blue Ridge Mountains, whose peaks in North Carolina reach to 6,000 feet above sea level. Pine covered and comparatively infertile, the Blue Ridge acted as a barrier to cut off the Great Valley from the eastern part of the Atlantic states. The Great Valley lay between the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains. The Valley was, in fact, a series of valleys, known as the Shenandoah Valley, the Valley of Virginia, and the Tennessee Valley. The soil of the valleys was the richest in the South, and their crops of wheat and corn, of cattle and hogs, made them the granaries of the cotton and tobacco areas. West of the valleys were the Allegheny and the Cumberland Mountains, similar to the Blue Ridge but rich in minerals which were scarcely developed before the close of the Civil War. West of the mountains stretched the Cumberland Plateau, a counterpart of the Piedmont, broken only by the fertile basins of the Tennessee and the Kentucky Blue Grass regions. The Valley of the Mississippi lay beyond the plateau and merged with the Ohio Valley on the north and the Gulf Coast on the south.

Although the physical features of the South were diverse, many of the geographical characteristics were common. The soil was not of the best, but soil and climate together made possible the production of cotton, tobacco, rice, and sugar, the staple crops of the South. The annual rainfall was heavy, and the direct rays of the sun spared the whole region from the colder blasts of winter and gave Florida and the Gulf Coast a semitropical climate. Large forests of white and yellow pine produced tar, turpentine, and even masts and spars for ships in the colonial period. Wild game was plentiful, and furs and skins furnished a readily exploited natural resource in the first days of settlement.

Within these physiographic regions, southern society developed— a society that took its form from the geographic character of the land. Just as the good harbors and the barren soil of New England invited men to seek the sea, so the climate, the soil and the contours of the land invited those who settled the South into agriculture. Land ownership

became the active force which divided southern society into classes, making "planter aristocrats" of those who possessed large tracts of the better lands and "yeomen farmers" and "poor whites" of those who owned or rented smaller portions of less productive soil. In a society where land was the criterion of social status, it was inevitable that the non-owning, laboring class should be dependent upon the owners. Social stratification in the South, from Jamestown to the Industrial Revolution, was based upon the ownership of land. By law the slave was excluded from possessing property; by definition the great planters were those who owned much land. In between were the masses of the yeomen and the poor whites whose position in society was primarily determined by the acreage they owned and tilled.

Southern society first assumed its basic characteristics along the Tidewater. By the close of the seventeenth century, the division of society into clearly defined classes had taken form. Thereafter, as the western movement pushed men out into the Piedmont, the Valley, the Cumberland Plateau, the Mississippi Delta, and even to the edge of the Texas plains, each new region recreated the social pattern of the old. In the end, the South was a series of physiographic regions, given over to agriculture, and occupied by a population stratified by land ownership.

2. THE GENESIS OF VIRGINIA

Southern society was the product of English traditions modified by American conditions. Although both Spaniards and French explored and planted settlements in the South, it was the English who eventually established their type of civilization in the southern regions. For a century after John Cabot sailed along the shores of North America and claimed the land, England gave little attention to the profits to be drained from colonies. Meanwhile, the Spaniards gathered to themselves the accumulated riches of the Incas and the Aztecs and flooded the Iberian peninsula with gold and silver from the Americas. Eventually English cupidity, properly cloaked in political and religious zeal, turned to the almost holy task of plundering the precious caravels of the Spanish Main. Captain John Hawkins, patriot and Protestant, varied the usual procedure by flaunting the Spanish trade laws and carrying cargoes of Guinea Negroes to sell in the Spanish colonies. Equally religious, equally unscrupulous, and even more patriotic was Sir Francis Drake, who plundered Spanish settlements as well as ships.

First interested in the possibilities of exploiting the New World by the adventures of these daring sea dogs, Englishmen soon turned their attention to less dangerous and more certain schemes of commercial development. Drake had envisioned the settlement of English colonies in America as rivals of the Spanish colonies, and the publication in England of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* popularized the idea. In 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert made an unsuccessful effort to establish a colony on the coast

of Newfoundland, and the next year Sir Walter Raleigh obtained letters patent from Queen Elizabeth to establish colonies in the land already named Virginia. Discouraged by hardships and the failure to find treasure, Raleigh's first colony, which had settled on Roanoke Island, returned to England. In 1587 the undismayed Raleigh sent out another colony of 150 settlers to take up the work at Roanoke. The next year Spain, through its Invincible Armada, attempted an invasion of England and diverted the attention of all Englishmen. Roanoke was neglected until 1591, when another expedition, landing on the island, discovered that the settlers had disappeared without a trace. The single word "Croatan," the name of a neighboring tribe of Indians, carved into the bark of a tree, was the only clue to their end. Generations of romantic antiquarians have bemused themselves in futile speculations on the mysterious fate of the settlers.

Despite the failure of Raleigh's experiment, the dream of a colony in the New World soon reappeared among Englishmen. Conditions within the island kingdom contributed to colonial expansion. From the time of John Cabot to that of the Jamestown settlement, the basis of England's economic life had slowly shifted from feudalism to commercialism. The War of the Roses, followed by the semi-parliamentary rule of the Tudors, definitely broke the political hold of the feudal nobleman. In his place, as the controlling force of British politics, the the businessman of the middle class rose to power. The breakup of the monasteries under Henry VIII, the plundering of the Spanish under Elizabeth, and the policy of aiding the commercial classes pursued by all of the Tudors resulted in the accumulation of more fluid wealth. In Parliament, representatives of the merchant classes legislated for the benefit of commerce. In the towns, an increase of handmade goods supplied a surplus for an overseas market and inspired the merchants to carry British goods to the corners of the earth. In the country, the shift from the self-sufficient manor of medieval feudalism to the enclosure of great tracts of land for wool production marked an agricultural and social revolution. Capitalistic landlords supplanted the lords of the manor, and bleating sheep grazed over the fields once tilled by sturdy yeomen and serfs. Victims of the transition from feudal establishment to commercial chaos, these erstwhile tillers of the soil crowded into the cities, where they sank into a poverty cursed by vice and disease. The merchants, who were looking for new economic worlds to conquer, did not overlook this potential labor supply for their colonies. The promoters of American colonies were men of wealth who expected commercial monopolies and feudal estates to increase their wealth. They transferred to the New World their own aristocratic concepts and continued in America the class distinctions and much of the social strife of old England.

Fluid capital, brought into service by the new device of the joint-stock company, enabled the British merchants to expand. Building upon the foundation of the Merchant Adventurers, who had co-operated in trading expeditions, a number of joint-stock companies arose. The Mus-

covy Company, the Prussian Company, and the East India Company were prominent examples of trading companies that combined the advantages of limited liabilities and great profits. To encourage such companies, the government granted them extensive monopolies, trading privileges, and the power of local government over the non-Christian areas in which they traded.

3. Virginia under the London Company

Such a company was the London Company, licensed by James I in 1606, "to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People into that Part of *America,* commonly called VIRGINIA. . . ." To the knights, gentlemen, merchants "and other Adventurers" of the company was given the right to establish a plantation between the thirty-fourth and forty-first parallels of north latitude, together with "all the Lands, Woods, Soil, Grounds, Havens, Ports, Rivers, Mines, Minerals, Marshes, Waters, Fishings, Commodities and Hereditaments . . . directly into the main land by the space of one hundred like English miles." Rights of government, however, were reserved by the crown, which set up in England a Council for Virginia with power to appoint local councils in the colony. To this local council the charter gave almost complete control over the settlers, a control limited solely by the provision that laws might not endanger life or limb or be contrary to the laws of England.

Although the founders of the London Company never formulated their full intentions, and although they talked much of building outposts of England to combat the Spaniards or to convert the Indians, neither the company nor the settlers of Jamestown contemplated a colony in the modern sense. Instead, all had in mind a trading post which, though it would be partly self-sufficient, would trade for the benefit of the company. Certainly the settlers themselves could have had little intention of making permanent homes in the Virginia wilderness. In the popular literature of the day, Virginia was a land "where gold and silver is more plentiful than copper is with us," where the sands of the shores were precious jewels and the mountains were of bright stones. Jealously his royal majesty, James I, reserved to himself his feudal right to one fifth of the precious metals that might be discovered. With the legends of the Spanish *conquistadores* in mind, the settlers at Jamestown did not expect to linger long at the fountainhead of their riches.

The company's instructions to the governors of the Jamestown plantation show that the company itself had little except riches in mind. The 120 colonists who left England in December, 1606, bore instructions to establish a single fortified post near the coast to be used as a base for expeditions to trade with the natives, to search for gold, and to find a northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean. In the meantime, the company expected the settlers to cultivate the soil and provide themselves with a

livelihood. The absence of women in the first settlement indicated that the "colony" was no more than a trading post.

From the very beginning, the emigrants to Virginia suffered hardships. The long and dangerous ocean voyage took the lives of 16 of the original company, and only 104 men and boys landed in Virginia. Among the arrivals, one third bore the technical denomination "gentlemen," and the others were artisans and laborers. Of the leading men, no one had had experience with the management of far-off enterprises of a similar nature. However physically fit they may have been, ignorance and inexperience made them unprepared for an adventure in pioneering. Long before the three ships landed their passengers in the New World, violent factional quarrels had broken out between Captain John Smith and Edward Maria Wingfield.

HERE, AT JAMESTOWN, THEY LANDED. The land which lay before the settlers charmed them with its beauty. It was the spring of the year, and the flower-strewn forest was alive with color. "Heaven and earth," exclaimed Captain John Smith, "never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation."

On April 26, 1607, four months after leaving England, Captain Christopher Newport's three ships arrived in Virginia. After they landed, Newport opened sealed instructions from the council in England which revealed that seven of the colonists were designated the "Council in Virginia." Responsible to the council in England for the government of the colony and to the London Company for the expected profits, the Virginia council's task was rendered no easier by the factional dissensions among them. A vote of the councilors made Wingfield president of the council, and John Smith, released from the irons in which he had been placed, took a seat among the governors of the plantation.

The land which lay before the settlers charmed them with its beauty. It was the spring of the year, and the flower-strewn forest was alive with color. Berries glistened invitingly from the bushes, and the streams ran crystal clear. "Heaven and earth," exclaimed Captain John Smith, "never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation."

Deluded by the natural beauty of their surroundings, the council ignored the sound advice given by the London Company. The company had instructed the colonists to select some point upon a navigable river,