

A Baptist Governor for Carolina?

THOMAS WALCOT of Ireland was considered for this post in 1682. It seems worth considering his qualifications, and why he was never appointed. First a word as to the situation.

Charles II. was very liberal in everything that did not affect him personally. He gave a wonderful charter to Rhode Island, presented millions of wooded acres to Penn, who made Pennsylvania a second refuge for the persecuted, and sold to a syndicate another vast tract used by the Indians south of Virginia, with the right to make this a third Dissenters' Home.

The Fundamental Constitutions were drawn up by John Locke, who made certain of religious liberty: but he knew nothing of wild country and the problems of settlers, so that a workable constitution was drawn up by a Baptist immigrant. There was a little friction between the actual colonists and the seven Proprietors, of which a token is that Joseph West was chosen by the Council to be Governor in 1671; then Sir John Yeamans came next year from the Barbados to represent the Proprietors; on his death in 1674, West resumed till 1682. Such facts show that differences were easily adjusted, and that the Proprietors had no rigid policy as against actual planters.

Now, the leading Proprietor was Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, who from 1644 had a most consistent political record, as what an Englishman calls Leader of the Opposition. He always held to Parliament, sat in Cromwell's parliaments and on the Council of State, but opposed Cromwell's autocratic rule from 1656, opposed Richard Cromwell, was a commissioner to invite Charles in 1660, for which he was created Baron Ashley. Opposed Clarendon and the vindictive royalists, backed the first Declaration of Indulgence, and the second in 1672, when he was created Earl of Shaftesbury. Found next year that Charles had behind his back made a secret treaty and become a pensioner of his cousin Louis XIV. Became a virulent opponent of Charles, as a liar like his father. Led a parliamentary opposition, till in sixteen months Charles dissolved four parliaments and never called another. He was imprisoned on a charge of treason, and offered to withdraw to Carolina, where he would have been the Resident Proprietor and Governor. But the grand jury threw out the indictment, saying there was no case against him. Thus in 1681 he was again head of a constitutional opposition in England, and had to look for a Governor to replace Joseph West. His attention was directed to Thomas Walcot.

This man was of a Suffolk family, it would appear; but he had carved out a career for himself. He had been in the army

led by Cromwell to Ireland, and by the end of his drastic campaign was Captain-Lieutenant in Ludlow's horse. Like Ludlow and Shaftesbury, he was a sturdy upholder of parliament. For instance, when Cromwell dismissed a parliament abruptly, stationed major-generals to keep the peace, paid them by confiscating a tenth of all royalist estates, many in the army were shocked at his abandoning the Good Old Cause, and drew up a petition for more legal methods. Ludlow asked Walcot to distribute 300 copies in Ireland. Cromwell countered by paying off the whole regiment, settling it on lands in Wexford confiscated from the Irish under the last Act to which Charles I. assented—a most legal and parliamentary proceeding! Walcot thus became a great landed proprietor, and brought over his family. He must have had plenty of cash also, for an audit of 1656 shows £63,221 11s. 2d. paid to his regiment.

When, however, Sir George Booth led a royalist rising in 1659, Ludlow, as commander-in-chief for Ireland, formed an Irish Brigade, commissioning Walcot, and sent it across. In the cross-currents, he was arrested at Chester as a known republican. He escaped, went to London, and taxed Monk with betraying the Good Old Cause by his lukewarmness. Monk gave him a passport to return to Ireland. When, however, Monk in a few months restored Charles, Walcot was not sure where he stood, and in June 1660 left Dublin for England; a report went to London that he was a dangerous Anabaptist. But the Act of Indemnity and oblivion sufficed, and he returned to his estates.

There he seems to have dwelt quietly for a score of years, not figuring at all in public life. In the voluminous correspondence of the Governor-General the Duke of Ormonde, he does not seem to be mentioned in all this period. Just once he is heard of in English affairs, for when Charles issued his second Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, a licence was secured that his house at Bungay, and that of John Allen in the same town, might be used for Congregational and Baptist worship—a combination quite unparalleled. It does not imply that he was living there, only that the house belonged to him. Of course, it had no permanent result.

Now, this Declaration was dear to Shaftesbury, and the trifle shows the two men had religious freedom in common, as well as political principle. When, therefore, ten years later, Shaftesbury was casting round for a Governor, he sent and asked Walcot to come over and see him.

But Shaftesbury had two irons in the fire, and was considering also whether he should appeal to arms against the proceedings of Charles. Walcot was sounded whether he would take a commission as colonel, and whether he could bring over

good swords from Ireland. Although this was much like the doings of thirty years earlier, long covered by the Act of Indemnity, it was certainly Misprision of Treason to conceal these overtures; and when he was afterwards tried for this, he avowed it.

When Shaftesbury threw up the game in 1682 and retired to Holland, Walcot accompanied him; probably the Carolina iron was again heated as the original plan.

But a few dangerous malcontents who had been in touch with Shaftesbury had evolved a different scheme; that when Charles and James were returning from Newmarket to London, the plan once worked out to assassinate Cromwell should be carried into effect. Thé Guards should be engaged at the Rye House, and in the scuffle the two brothers should be killed.

When Shaftesbury fled, the bad precedent of Titus Oates and other informers was followed; conspirators turned King's Evidence, and arrests were made. Walcot had returned to England, apparently with a rather clear conscience; he took a journey from York to Norwich, thence to London, apparently through the older family estates. He was laid up in town for some weeks with the gout, while his name was given by informers as concerned in both plots, and search was being made for him in Ireland. He seems to have then openly surrendered, and offered to explain all his doings. He certainly was brought before Charles in council, like his compatriot Colonel Blood twelve years before. But he was no informer, and gave evidence that inculpated only one man, Ferguson the Scot, well out of harm's way. This did not mitigate his offence, and he was committed to prison, being the first to be tried, 12th July, 1683, at the Old Bailey.

A very full account was published by the lord mayor, and it shows perfect fairness except in that two things were intertwined, "conspiring the death of the king and raising a rebellion in this kingdom." The former he denied, the latter he admitted. Of the informers, far the most important was a barrister who had been implicated in both schemes, and was saving his neck. As his name was West, it is desirable to find if he was related to Joshua West, Governor of Carolina, who was in danger of being replaced by Walcot. Conviction did not occupy the jury ten minutes, sentence followed, and on 20 July a warrant was issued for his execution.

Glemham Hall is named, near the Alde in Suffolk, twenty miles south of Bungay. Conviction carried the loss of all property, and an undignified scramble followed for the spoils.

However important Walcot appeared to the Government, public opinion was stirred more deeply by the trial of Lord