

ART. IV.—RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN VIRGINIA.*

WE wish, at the very outset, to disclaim what will probably be suggested by the title of this article. It is not our

* *Virginia Baptists.* By Robert B. Sample. Richmond. 1810.

A Narrative of Events Connected with the Rise and Progress of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia. By Thomas L. Hawks, Rector of St. Thomas' Church, New-York. New-York. 1836.

Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers. By James B. Taylor. Richmond. 1838.

A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and other parts of the World. By David Benedict. 1848.

The History of Virginia. By Robert R. Howison. Richmond. 1848.

expectation, by simply raising the cry of *persecution*, to prove, that any denomination which may have been its object, is altogether right, nor, on the other hand, that any which has practised it, must therefore be wrong in all other respects, and worthy of unmeasured denunciation. We acknowledge another and far higher standard of truth and right, to be found in the Holy Scriptures alone. By their light, and by neither the cruelties nor sufferings of sinful men, we must form our estimate of doctrines and practices. While we have our Savior's authority for believing, that the eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were not the only sinners there, we have that of Paul, his inspired apostle, for believing also, that "giving our bodies to be burned" is "nothing without charity." It is in accordance therefore with neither our taste nor principles, to claim excellence for the denomination whose interests we support, merely because it is "the sect every where spoken against," nor to hurl anathemas against others, simply because they so speak.

We intend to glance at the religious history of one of our leading colonies, with a very different purpose, and in a very different spirit. We hope to find, in the process, additional proof, that civil government is powerless to check the progress of enlightened and ardent religious sentiment, and that a people, distinguished by many illustrious qualities and services, may be betrayed, by carelessness, and that ignorance of religion, which is the parent of bigotry, into tyrannous severities, at which their posterity must blush. The ignorance which led the Virginians into these odious measures, short indeed of death, but revolting to every right-minded man of the present day, was, at the settlement of Jamestown, well nigh common to the civilized world.

In that very year, 1607, Bacon, the brightest intellect of that, perhaps of any age, had at last won the long-coveted

Sketches of Virginia. By Rev. William H. Foote, D.D., Pastor of Presbyterian Church, Romney, Va. Philadelphia. 1850.

Second Series. Philadelphia. 1855.

An Address, before the American Baptist Historical Society. By Robert B. C. Howell, D.D., Pastor of Second Baptist Church, Richmond, Va. Philadelphia. 1857.

post of Solicitor-general, not by his real merit, but by mean solicitation, and cringing to the cowardly and pedantic tyrant, James the First. It is a sad thing to reflect, that the sublime genius, which cast its eagle glance over the whole field of human knowledge, and taught his own and coming ages, how truth was to be discovered in every part of that field, yet could not rise to "the height of the great argument" of religious freedom. In his essays, indeed, he denounces "Mahomet's sword or like unto it; that is to propagate religion by wars, or, by sanguinary persecutions, to force consciences," but adds, "except in cases of overt scandal, blasphemy, or intermixture of practice against the State," and, in another place, "for, as the temporal sword is to be drawn with great circumspection in cases of religion, so it is a thing monstrous to put it into the hands of the common people; let that be left unto the *Anabaptists and other furies.*" Not only did Bacon thus advocate the principle of persecution, however qualified, but carried it out himself, at the bidding of James, in a case of aggravated and atrocious tyranny. About the year 1615, a certain Peachum had written, (without preaching or publishing, or intending to preach or publish,) a sermon said to reflect on the King's ministry, then in a sort of interregnum between the infamous Somerset and the rapacious, imperious Buckingham. The base James, at once, set every engine at work, to convict and to destroy a man, who had had the insolence to think justly, and to write what he thought. Lord Bacon, now risen to be Attorney-general, tried to extract a confession from him, by questioning him "before torture, between torture and after torture." His great rival, Lord Coke, who, with all his faults, was "made of sterner stuff" than Bacon, refused to give his opinion of the case before trial, although urged to do so by the King, declaring that he could not "judge in a chamber." We have, however, no evidence, nor is it at all probable, that Coke himself understood and embraced the principles of religious liberty. In this case, he merely acted in the true spirit of his profession, mingled, perchance, with disgust at the pliancy of his illustrious enemy. He afterwards exhibited the