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A HALF-TOLD STORY OF REAL WHITE SLAVERY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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The history of North Carolina abounds in interesting episodes, but, perhaps, there is none more curious than that in the eighth and ninth decades of the seventeenth century when a man who had been a slave became Governor of Carolina.²

In 1663, "The Merry Monarch," Charles II granted the territory, now North and South Carolina to a number of favorites, amongst them, the Earl of Clarendon, Lord Chancellor, and the Duke of Albemarle. The Proprietary Governors were not, as a rule of very high standing; but we are concerned with only one, Seth Sothel (the name is also spelled, Sothell, Southel, Southal, Southell, Southill and Southall).

Governor Sothel's lineage, birth-place and natal year seem to be equally unknown—about 1680-1, he bought out Clarendon's share and so became Senior Proprietor of Carolina; in September, 1681, he set sail for the Colony as Governor of the settlement of Albemarle which developed into the Colony of North Carolina. The Algerine Pirates³

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²This territory, part of the Spanish Florida, was by the English, after the settlement of Virginia, called South Virginia; but as early as 1619, when Charles I granted it to Sir Robert Heath, it had come to be called Carolana. For example, in *The Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial Series)*, Vol. I, p. 205, is found a complaint of Edward Kingswell, Esqr., "against Samuel Vassall of London, Marchant, and Peter Andrews, his brother-in-law, Master of a Shipp for faileing . . . contrary to Agreements . . . for the making of a Plantation in Carolana." August 6th, 1634. There had been sporadic attempts at settlement previously, but the real settlement of North Carolina began with the grant to Clarendon and his associates in 1663 of the region south of Virginia extending from 31° to 36°, N. L., and westward across the Continent, under the name of Carolina. See Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, Vol. V, p. 286 and Note 1; *The Americana*, Vol. LXIV, *sub voc.* "North Carolina." The last reference to Carolana, I find in *The Acts of the Privy Council*, is August 5th., 1638, where there was an exception in a provision for Virginia of "the Province of Carolana, heretofore granted to Sir Robert Heath and lately with the King's approbation, assigned by the said Sir Robert Heath to the Lord Maltravers." *Do. do.*, Vol. I, p. 240. The name Carolina first appears in the same volume, p. 399, under date April 28th., 1665; the subsequent orthography seems to be uniformly Carolina.

³So far did their assurance extend that they actually formed a settlement on an island west of England; they terrorised mariners of all nations for three hundred years, and did not always confine their operations to shipping, there being no few instances of their attacking villages on the land and even of their

were still infesting the Western Sea, including the waters around Britain: and Sothel had the bad fortune to be taken by them. I find under date June 9th, 1679, an entry—"Whereas Seth Southall, one of his Majesty's Subjects designed by the Proprietors of his Majesty's Colony of Carolina to goe their Governor there was taken by the Pirates of Argier where he yet remains in Slavery. It was this Day Ordered by his Majestie in Councell That the said Seth Southall should be endeavoured to be exchanged for one Hadgamore, late Commander of

carrying off single individuals. It was not till the nineteenth century that this curse was fully got rid of.

As indicating the real peril from Algerine Corsairs and the means provided for the ransom of their captured, I may extract two entries from the Records of the Privy Council.

In *Acts, &c.*, Vol. I, pp. 541-2, under date January 26th., 1670, it is entered: "Robert Bendish, John Clements, Andrew Orgill, Edward Flemming and others, Owners of the Shipp, King David, and her Ladeing. Setting forth, That the said Shipp being Fower Hundred Tons was freighted by the Petitioners with seuerall Manufactures of this Kingdome, and other Commodities to Rochell, from thence to New-Found-Land, where shee Laded seuerall Sorts of Prouisions, as Masts, Plancks, and Victuall, and sayled from thence with her said Prouisions toward her Designed Port of Tangier; That being vpon ger said Voyage to Tangier shee was Mett with off Cape St. Vincent by the Argier Pirate, and there after Three days resistance Boarded by Seventy Moores which they killed and Drowned, after mett with Five Pirats more, when they were forced to Surrender, but some dayes after were retaken by Captaine Kempthorne; but he meeting with Six Piratts more was forced to leaue the Petitioners Shipp, after which shee was retaken by the Turkes, and then retaken againe by Sir Thomas Allen, who sent her into Malaga, and hath given orders to Sell the said Shipp with her Lading; and Praying in regard the said Shipp hath so well defended her selfe The Master Edward Clements being made a Slave, And that the Mariners are still on Board her, both Shipp and Lading may be Restored to the Petitioners or their Order, by Sir Thomas Allen and his Agents . . . the Duke of Yorke . . . is desired and Authorised to favour the Petitioners what he may in order to the Restitution of their said Shipp and Ladeing, and to giue such Directions therein as to his Royall Highness shall seeme fitt and just."

It was not in the power of the Council, the Duke of York (Commander of the Fleet) or of the King himself to take away from Sir Thomas Allen his lawful property: but what the Council could do they did. We read, *op. cit.*, pp. 546-7, under date July 15th., 1670:—"The Owners of the Ship King David petitioning that in consideration of the valiant defence of the said Ship, order might be given That the Moores being about Fifty in number on board the said Ship upon the retakong thereof by Sir Thomas Allen might be sold, and the proceed of them employed towards the Redemption of Mr. Edward Clements Master, and Jeremiah Armiger Supracargo and twenty-four Mariners made Slaves by the said Pirates, which wilbe an encouragement to Seamen in generall and a great Reliefe to the Poor men, who not being able to redeeme themselues, must otherwise remaine in Slavery Vpon consideration thereof, his Majesty was pleased to Declare, That the Proceed of all Turkes and Moores, which are or shalbe taken by any of his Majestys Ships of Warr, and haue or shalbe sold, be employed towards the Redemption of such of his Subjects as are Slaues at Algiers, &c., And . . . the Duke of Yorke desired to signify this his Majestys Pleasure to the Commandiers in cheife of his Majestys flectes in the Streights or elsewhere, and to giue Directions, that the Persons above named be the first redeemed out of such Monies, And for the future such as haue made the best and fallantest Defence before they fell into the Enemies Hands haue preference in redemption out of the said Monies before any others."

the Tiger of Argier or one Buffolo Ball And It was further Ordered that Sir John Narborough Admirall of his Majestys Fleet lately in the Streights doe take care to see the said Exchange Effectuated."⁴

The Admiral was not in a position to make an exchange, for we find, July 2nd, him certifying to the Privy Council "That he was then arrived at Plymouth, and had left . . . Hadg omar and Buffolo Ball under the Charge of Vice Admirall Herbert in the Streights": whereupon Herbert was ordered to procure an exchange for either or both of these prisoners or in case they were already disposed of "for the first Prisoner or Prisoners of Note that shall be taken of the Algerines by any of his Majesty's Ships under his Comand."⁵

It is to be always borne in mind that the English as much as any other nation and more than most were actively engaged in the suppression of this Piracy; they suffered probably more from this sea robbery than any other people. The Algerines were notoriously ruthless and it became somewhat common for the sailors to desert the ship when it was pursued by these Pirates. It may be worth noticing that in 1670, it was thought necessary to pass legislation enacting—"That no Master of any . . . English Ship . . . being at Sea, and having discovered any Ship to be a *Turkish* Ship, Pirate or Sea-rover, shall depart out of his Ship upon any Pretence whatsoever, lest by his Detention on Board any such Ship, the Safety of his own Ship be hazarded": Mariners and inferior officers were forbidden to refuse to fight in defence of their Ship or goods, and provision was made for penalties proportionate to the offence; (1670), 22, 23 Charles II, cap. 11, ss. 3, 6, etc.

It will be readily understood that Vice Admiral Herbert's energies were being strained to their utmost in the exercise of his official duties in watching for and combatting the Corsairs who infested the Mediterranean as well as the Atlantic, and in even greater numbers—the

⁴*Do. do.*, Vol. I, p. 838. "Hadgemore" was, of course, "Hadji Omar": we cannot say that "Buffolo Ball" or "Buffalo Ball" was an earlier Buffalo Bill. Sir John Narborough (or Narbrough, as the name is generally spelled) was in 1674, Commander of the Squadron sent against the Corsairs of Tripoli, and in 1677, Commander of the Squadron sent against the Algerine Corsairs. The Algerine prisoners for whom Sir John was expected to arrange an exchange to release Sothel were, no doubt, part of the fruits of the latter of these expeditions, which were, at least, partially successful.

⁵This Vice-Admiral Herbert was Arthur Herbert, afterwards Earl of Torrington, who served against the Algerine Pirates, 1669-1671, and lost an eye in the capture of a Corsair in the Mediterranean in 1678; he, as Admiral of the Straits relieved Tangiers in 1680 and continued in command against the Alger inestill 1683.

The quotation is from *Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial Series)*, Vol. II, p. 3.

designation "Admiral of the Straits" referred to his post as guarding the Straits of Gibraltar, but he was called on to meet and destroy the Pirates wherever he found them, especially in the Mediterranean. It does not astonish us to find that Herbert could not attend successfully to the task set him by the Council: and that, June 2nd, 1680, a Petition from the captive was presented to the Council and acted upon.

"Seth Southill, Captive in Algiers, Praying in regard of Vice Admirall Herberts urgent Affaires, that the Release of the Petitioner directed by Order of the 2nd of July last . . . might be negotiated by Merchants"—it was referred to the Commissioners of the Admiralty to effect the release in whatsoever way, it should seem most convenient.⁶

The Commissioners approved of the exchange being negotiated by Merchants; but the Algerines became incensed at the delay, and increased the severity of the slavery of their prisoner: the Commissioners, too, were cautious, and did not intend to risk losing the valuable Algerine captives without the certainty of receiving the Englishman. We, accordingly, find the Commissioners reporting, on September 15th, that they approved of the Merchants dealing with the matter but they "doe require of the Petitioner to give security for the safe returning of the said Prisoners in case he should happen to dye before he be exchanged, which the Petitioner by reason of his captivity is not in a Condition to procure." They also reported "And alsoe that the Petitioner being more severely treated by the Turks than ever who are enraged at the Long delay of the said Prisoners Exchange, therefore make him carry Morter, Brick and stone for the Masons with a heavy Chaine of Nine links, each linke two inches and a half thick upon his legg besides Bolt and Shackle . . ." The Petitioner prayed that the two Algerine Captains might be sent to the English Agent at Leghorn, Thomas Deedham, to keep until the exchange could be effected: and to leave the negotiations in the hands of Messrs. Charles Longland, Charles Harris and John Brookin, English merchants at Leghorn. This the Privy Council ordered to be done.⁷

When it came to negotiation, the Algerines were not satisfied to accept their two Captains as an equivalent, but required their prisoner to give an undertaking to pay 6,000 pieces of eight: for this sum,

⁶*Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial Series)*, Vol. II, p. 3—the name is spelled "Southell" in the marginal note, but "Southill" in the text. The Merchants were the English merchants at Leghorn, Italy, the great clearing-house for Algerine captives at the time—and, incidentally it may be said that all its citizens were not above suspicion of sharing the Corsairs' profits.

⁷*Do. do.*, Vol. II, pp. 3, 4.

some English subjects at Algiers became surety, one of them named Wimbourne taking a bond from the captive for 3,000 pieces of eight, the part of the ransom for which he was bound, and Robert Cole another for the same sum for the like reason. It would seem that this extra extortion was without the knowledge of the English authorities and not included in the agreement made with the Dey of Algiers.

Sothel came home and was sued for the 3,000 pieces of eight which Wimbourne was compelled to pay, and which the ransomed man omitted to repay. Judgment going against him in the Common Bench and he not paying, he was lodged in the Debtors' Prison, the Counter in London. He applied again, July 28th, 1681, to the Council who referred it to the Law Officers of the Crown to see what could be done for him.⁸ The Attorney-General reported, September 6th, 1681, that "the only way for the Petitioners relief will be by Bill in Equity to be brought in the name of his Majesties Attorney Generall and the said Mr. Sothell, and that in the meantime, the actions brought may bee removed into the King's Bench": also that the debtor should be provided with bail.⁹

Bail being provided pending proceedings in the King's Bench, Sothel paid up the judgment for 3,000 pieces of eight but did not pay the other 3,000 pieces of eight for which he was bound to Robert Cole, who had agreed and become bound to pay that sum to the Algerines as part of the ransom.

Instead of providing for this 3,000 pieces of eight like an honest man, he left Cole in the lurch, bound to the Captors for this sum. The Council were informed by the Commission that "The Dey and Government of Algier having writt very earnestly to his Majestie that the said summe may Speedily be satisfied . . . it is to be apprehended that unlesse some effectuall care be taken therein (Cole not being worth the money) they may seize upon his Majesties Counsell upon his Arrivall there, and that possibly worse Consequencyes may attend it."

The Council ordered "that the Attorney General doe forthwith prepare a Bill for his Majestys Signature commanding the said Seth Southell to Repaire into England within three months after notice thereof, and to render himselfe to one of his Majesties Principall Secretaryes of State as he tenders his Allegiance and will Answer the Contrary at his ytmoste perill, unless he hath before notice thereof

⁸*Do. do.*, Vol. II, p. 4.

⁹*Do. do.*, Vol. II, p. 4.

be given him, satisfied and payd the said three Thousand peeces of eight."¹⁰

It is probable that the offender settled the amount, as it is certain that he did not return to England as ordered, but remained in the Colony as Governor of the Settlement of Albemarle. Out of the twenty Governors sent out by the Proprietors, many were worthless—we are told that the Colonists deposed six of them and sent them back to England. Sothel seems to have been even more unfortunate than the rest of this lot of Governors; when he was taken Prisoner, one Harvey acted as *locum tenens*; Harvey dying, Jenkins was made Governor, but the people deposed him—and one Wilkinson was appointed; when Sothel arrived in 1683, the popular party were in control; and they did not take to him in the least. Things went on from bad to worse, and at length in 1688 the Colonists seized him, intending to ship him home for trial; this was not done, but the matter was referred to the Colonial Assembly who condemned him, awarding as a punishment banishment for twelve months and deposition from authority forever.

That was not the last of him—what is now South Carolina was having trouble with its Governor, Landgrave Colleton, whom they accused of an "illegal, tyrannical and oppressive way of government." Sothel, who it must be remembered had bought out Clarendon's share in this territory as well as in that now North Carolina, arrived at this juncture and took the position of Governor; he is said to have "acted pretty much as he pleased, till he was turned out of his new position by his colleagues in London," when, in 1691, he was succeeded by Ludwell. It should, perhaps, be noted that the Proprietors in England do not seem ever to have approved of his acting as Governor.

The North Carolinians took the high constitutional ground that the King's Charter directed the Proprietors to "govern according to their best discretion by and with the advice assent and approbation of the Free men of said territory, or their deputies or delegates."

Sothel appears to have returned to England, and to have died in 1697.

Surely it is without parallel that one who had been a slave, carrying mortar, brick and stone in chains for his masters, should become Governor in two Colonies in succession. My own reading in history does not enable me to point out any similar case.

¹⁰*Do. do.*, pp. 4, 5. For the subsequent career of Sothel, see Winsor, *op. cit.* pp. 296, 313: *Americana sub voc.* North Carolina, South Carolina: D. N. B., Vol. 53, p. 268, and any history of either Carolina.

It may be worth while to give here a portion of the account of Southel found in Ashe's *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. II, pp. 406, sqq.:

"Southel came from South Carolina to North Carolina about 1683. After remaining a few years, he was charged with all manner of crimes and misdemeanors. Some of the specifications against him in a complaint sent to the Lords Proprietors were as follows: That he seized and imprisoned two persons coming from Barbadoes on the pretense that they were pirates, though they produced dockets from the governor of Barbadoes showing that they were lawful traders; that one of these sea captains, Richard Humphrey, died in captivity of grief and ill usage, leaving a will, with Thomas Pollock as executor; that Southel would not let Pollock qualify as executor, but seized Humphrey's goods and converted them to his own use; that he imprisoned Pollock when that gentleman started to England with complaints against the governor; that he accepted bribes for quashing indictments for felony and treason; that he unlawfully imprisoned Robert Cannon; that he unlawfully withheld from John Stewart one negro and seven pewter dishes, which were his property; that he imprisoned George Durant and appropriated his property; that he seized the plantations of John Tomlin, John Harris, and one Mowberry, and committed other acts of like character. The colonists could stand a good deal; but when one of their governors endeavored to get possession of nearly everything in the colony, from plantations down to negroes and pewter dishes, they rebelled. They finally proceeded to seize the governor, and were about to send him a prisoner to England, when he begged them not to do so, but to submit the whole matter to the Colonial Assembly, whose decision he promised to abide by. The Assembly adjudged that he should leave the colony for one year and renounce the governorship forever. The Lords Proprietors also sent an order about the same time, December 2, 1689, removing him from office and appointing Phillip Ludwell in his stead.

"Being banished from North Carolina for one year, Southel went to South Carolina, and there also claimed the office of governor as his proprietary right. From a recent history of that State by McCrady, entitled *South Carolina under the Proprietary Government, 1670-1719*, we are inclined to think that Southel there enjoyed a good reputation. At least, McCrady says: 'Southel was a man of remarkable, if not good, character and of great ability. He had been sent in 1680 to regulate the distracted affairs in the colony at Albemarle and on his voyage out had been captured by Algerine pirates, three years thus elapsing before his arrival in America. . . . Whatever may have been Southel's private character, however avaricious and disreputable, however tyrannical and oppressive his conduct for personal gain, yet the wisdom and liberality of the laws he enacted, the legislative activity displayed in restoring stability to the colony, and his judicious conduct in promoting the just wishes of the people, throw a doubt, observes Rivers, as to the malignant character that has been ascribed to him as a public officer'."