AN EXTRAORDINARY INDIAN TOWN
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AN EXTRAORDINARY INDIAN TOWN

EDITOR OF THE MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY:

The student of American colonial history finds many a difficulty which he cannot resolve. At one time there are conflicting statements of authors, and the novice is unable to decide which is right. Anachronisms crop out of which no account is taken, and how shall he determine the truth when modern collators agree in the incidents? The time is changed, or the agents do not coöperate, and there is a reasonable doubt if the original record is not apocryphal and the writer “a fraud.”

Such thoughts arise on reading a “Journey to the Cherokee Mountains,” recorded in The Natural History of North Carolina, by John Brickell, M.D., Dublin, 1737. He says: “The latter end of February, Anno Domini 1730, we set out on our intended journey, being in number ten white men and two Indians, for our huntsmen and interpreters.” They took the usual outfit of horses, implements, and provisions. “They met with no human specie all the way,” or incident worthy of record, except “sleeping on beds of moss under the shade of a tree, near the fire,” till fifteen days out, at six o’clock, they discovered a large party of Iroquois Indians, in a town with a State-House, war-captains, and councilors. “The King asked him how his brother (the governor) did?” They lodged two days in one of the King’s houses, near the centre of the town, and on benches covered with skins. The rest of the buildings were in a confused order—no regular streets nor shops, or even handycraft trade among them. There was a great number of men and women “and boys and girls stark-naked.” Brickell “asked of the King to see his Quiogozon or Charnel House. It was the largest one we ever beheld.” They traveled four days further west, over two ridges of mountains, and saw one Indian, who fled, and, “in thirty-two days arrived among Christians.” There is no place of departure or destination given; no notice of the origin or purpose of the expedition; no responsibility or report to any public authority or appointing power—solely a private enterprise, with no valuable results.

How vastly superior in all particulars were the bold marches of Lederer into the same regions. Yet this expedition stands forth as an important event in the early history of the Province, and is thus noticed by Governor Martin in his History of North Carolina,” vol. ii., pp. 1-8. “Dr. John Brickell was sent by Governor Burrington to the Western Indians, and set off from Edenton the latter part of February, 1731, with ten white men and two Indians.” He tells the story of the journey as recorded by Brickell, and their return, and “in thirty-two days reached the settlements of white people.” This record is accepted and fully
indorsed in the recently published, comprehensive, and exhaustive "Narrative and Critical History of America, vol. V., chap. v., p. 301, by Professor Wm. I. Rivers," as conferring especial distinction on the times. He says: "One service, however, he (Governor Burrington) rendered, in conciliating the Indians on the Western border. To this end he sent Dr. John Brickell with a party of ten men, and two Indians to assist them. The account (Brickell's) of the expedition adds to our knowledge of the condition of that remote section of the province as the interesting work of Lawson (I.) does with respect to other sections."

The amount of "conciliation of the Indians," and of "increased knowledge of the country," appears in the record, and is very meagre. By a collation of dates we will assume that Brickell set out the 25th of February, 1730. The outward journey occupied twenty-one days, and the return thirty-two days—the sum, fifty-three days, extending to April 18, 1730. We are sure in regard to the year, as he says, p. 108: "There were two Buffalo calves taken in the year 1730 by some of the planters on the New river; whether transported to Europe or not, I know not, as I left the country very soon after." New River is a small stream in Onslow County, on the coast, where the presence of an historical buffalo is not known. It is well, also, to note the dates given by Governor Martin, vol. II., p. 1.

Burrington was appointed governor in England, April 29, 1730. He reached North Carolina in the middle of February, 1731; qualified as governor February 25, 1731, which was the earliest date he could issue a commission; called the legislature to meet April 13, 1731, and needed authority from it to do such an act.

It seems, then, Brickell had accomplished his journey eleven days (between the 18th and 29th of April, 1730), before the governor was appointed in England, near ten months before he arrived in North Carolina; and, more, Brickell left the country the year before the governor came.

We look in vain for proof that these two dignitaries had any official relations, were in North Carolina together, or that they ever met or heard of each other.

The records of Governor Burrington's administration of some three years contain no mention of Brickell or his expedition, or they would have been quoted by Martin or Rivers. On the contrary, the evidence of the only competent witness, Brickell, proves an alibi for himself, and an absolute negative in each particular. It seems difficult to account for the confused statements of Governor Martin, and, more so, for their adoption by Professor Rivers. If the latter has ever carefully read and compared Lawson and Brickell, we cannot account for his literary judgment in placing them so nearly on a level. Other American writers have done the same, and it is not too much to say that Brickell has been a stumbling-block to historians for just one hundred and fifty years.

Now that Professor Rivers, most conspicuously of all, stands forth as his champion, he has indirectly become responsible for the existence of this permanent and populous town of Iroquois, some five hundred miles from their native seat, in 1730! The "Sinnegars," or Senecas, were known in these parts, before the treaty of 1751,
only when on the warpath against the Catawbas, Saponas, and other southern tribes, or stimulating the Tuscaroras, as in 1711, to indiscriminate murder of the whites.

We find no mention by any one of the numerous writers on the Six Nations of such a distant migration and peaceful residence of a large town of the Iroquois, at this or any other period of their history.

Oliver P. Hubbard

New York, September 9, 1887.