

CHAPTER 13: REBELLION

From Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom*

In 1676 civil war came to Virginia. The chain of events that led to it began in 1675 with an Indian conflict on the Potomac. There the big men had always taken the lead in harassing the Indians. Early in 1662 Colonel Gerald Fowke, a representative of Westmoreland in the House of Burgesses, had been convicted, along with Giles Brent, George Mason, and John Lord, of seizing and imprisoning without cause a king of the Potomac Indians. Fowke and Brent were declared "incapable of bearing any office civil or military in this country," and Mason and Lord were suspended from such offices. But somehow their names continued to appear as justices, burgesses, and sheriffs. ¹In 1675, when the county of Westmoreland had grown to 538 tithables and adjacent Stafford County to 436, a new round of Indian troubles began.

This time Susquehannahs, Doegs, and Piscattaways were involved. ²None of them had participated in Berkeley's 1646 Indian treaty. They were, however, on good terms with the government of Maryland, which had given the Piscattaways a fort as a refuge against hostile tribes. They stayed for the most part on the Maryland side of the Potomac; but the Susquehannahs, who lived at the head of Chesapeake Bay, traded north to Manhattan and south behind the Virginia settlements to the Carolinas. In July, 1675, a group of Doegs, who were apparently trading in Stafford County, Virginia, took some hogs belonging to Thomas Mathew, alleging that he had failed to pay for goods he had bought of them. Mathew or his men pursued them, recovered the hogs, and killed or beat several Indians. The Doegs retaliated with a raid in which they killed one of Mathew's servants. ³

Now the Masons and Brents could go into action. Colonel Mason (for he now bore that title) and Captain Brent (son of the first Giles Brent) took the Westmoreland militia across the river. Brent, after asking the Doegs for a parley, killed a king and ten of his men. Mason, by accident or indifference, killed fourteen Susquehannahs before discovering that he had the wrong Indians. ⁴The Susquehannahs had just been driven from their headquarters at the head of the bay by invading Seneca Indians and had taken refuge with their friends the Piscattaways. From the Piscattaways' fort on Matapoint Creek, east of the Potomac, they conducted retaliatory raids on the Virginians. ⁵In response, Berkeley commissioned Colonel John Washington and Major Isaac Allerton of Westmoreland to investigate and punish the raiders. ⁶On September 26, with "neer a thousand" Virginia and Maryland militia, Allerton and Washington laid siege to the fort. Five chiefs who came out to treat for peace were seized and murdered. Although the English greatly outnumbered the Indians, they did not attempt to storm the fort, but conducted a leaky siege of it for several weeks, at the end of which the Indians killed ten of the sentinels and escaped. ⁷

Within a short time the Susquehannahs were across the Potomac filtering through the forests of the upper Rappahannock, avenging themselves wherever they found opportunity. ⁸Up to this point the pattern of conflict was familiar. The Indians were far too few in number to constitute a serious threat to the English. The Susquehannahs in the fort had numbered only 100 warriors, and in 1669 the total number of warriors in all nineteen of Virginia's tributary groups had been only 725. ⁹The English population of Virginia in 1674 included more than 13,000 men fit to bear arms, and they were much better supplied than the Indians could have been with both arms and ammunition. Most Indians, in the long run, depended heavily on their cornfields to stay alive. They could not have sustained a prolonged conflict against an enemy superior in numbers and arms. But the Indians had a few short-run advantages. They were better woodsmen, perhaps better marksmen, better able to live off the land, and at least as ready as the English to offer instruction in terror. Given the straggling mode of English settlement, it was easy for a few warriors to descend on a plantation, slaughter everyone there, and then disappear into the woods. No one could tell where they might strike next. To those who were threatened, it seemed that Indians were everywhere, "so many that none can guess at their number." And as usual the settlers suspected all Indians had joined in a "confederation" to destroy them. ¹⁰As the terror mounted, the people who felt it wanted action.

Berkeley at first appeared willing to give them action. In January, 1676, he commissioned Sir Henry Chichely to raise a force and march against the Susquehannahs, who were reported to be edging southward along the heads of the rivers. But just as the men were ready to set out, Berkeley recalled them. ¹¹It was a costly change of mind. Not that the expedition might have ended the Indian menace. Whether Sir Henry Chichely (whom Lord Culpeper later characterized as "that Lumpe, that Masse of Dulnesse, that worse than nothing") ¹²would have been able to locate a hundred roving Susquehannahs in Virginia's forests is an open question. But Berkeley had apparently decided that a defensive policy was preferable to an assault. In doing so, he forfeited his influence with the restless men whose mutinies over taxes he had been able to suppress a couple of years before.

Those mutinies had taken place in Surry on the Southside and in New Kent, areas in close contact with the local tributary Indians. ¹³Though the tributaries were bound by law ¹⁴to assist the colony against invading tribes, the settlers were reluctant to trust them in any conflict. No one doubted that the invaders were headed south, and no one could be sure that the tributaries would not make common cause with them.

When Berkeley heard that the Susquehannahs had been seen at the falls of the James, he called a special session of the assembly. It met on March 7 and adopted measures that added political grievances to the settlers' anxieties over the Indians. The legislators decided to build a fort at the head of each great river and to man the forts with a standing army of 500 soldiers drawn from the lower counties; the tributary Indians were to be enrolled against the enemy and rewarded with trading cloth, but private trade with the Indians was forbidden. ¹⁵To people in New Kent and the Southside, the act that was supposed to end the Indian menace looked like a prescription for profiteering. The frontier forts would contribute more to the wealth of the men who built them than to the security of the people they were supposed to protect. The new ones would doubtless be located on the unoccupied upriver lands of the "great men" who sat in the assembly and would thus help to raise the value of their speculative holdings. ¹⁶The soldiers, recruited in the lower counties, would be paid 1,500 pounds of tobacco apiece, more than a frontier farmer on poor land was likely to make in a year. There would have to be another huge levy to pay for the troops and the forts, and both would be useless against roving Indians who melted into the woods after every attack. It almost seemed that the assembly had wished to guarantee the ineffectiveness of the scheme, because they had included a provision that if the enemy was discovered, he was not to be attacked until the governor was notified and gave his approval, by which time, as every frontiersman knew, the Indians would have vanished. The provision may have arisen from Berkeley's anger at the reckless commanders who had murdered the Susquehannah chiefs at the fort when they came out to a supposed peace parley ("If they had killed my Grandfather and Grandmother, my father and Mother and all my friends, yet if they had come to treat of Peace, they ought to have gone in Peace"), ¹⁷but it would scarcely reassure frontiersmen of the government's ability to handle the Indian danger. ¹⁸

Among those not reassured was Nathaniel Bacon, a young newcomer to the colony, on whom the governor had showered extraordinary favors. Bacon's wife was friendly with Lady Berkeley— their correspondence suggests that they had known each other in England—and Bacon had arrived with enough capital (£1,800) to make a good start in Virginia. ¹⁹He was a kinsman and namesake of one of Virginia's elder statesmen; and though he was only twenty- nine years old, Berkeley nominated him at once to the council. At Berkeley's advice, Bacon settled himself upriver from Jamestown on the north side, apparently with some intention of engaging in the fur trade with the Indians. ²⁰He also set up a plantation still higher at the falls.

Bacon seems to have felt a certain disdain for wealthy Virginians who had reached their position from "vile" beginnings or "whose tottering fortunes have bin repaired and supported at the Publique chardg." ²¹He was no leveler by temperament and perhaps harbored something of the scorn of the wellborn Englishman for the provincial parvenus among whom he found himself. Several of the men who later joined him were also new arrivals of the same kind, such as Giles Bland, who arrived in the colony with a royal appointment as customs collector. Bland's disdain for the local gentry resulted in the council's

barring him from office after he called Secretary Ludwell a "mechanick fellow" (as well as a "puppy" and a "son of a whore"). ²² But if Bacon was no leveler and only a very recent Virginian, he had already acquired one attitude of his upriver neighbors: their contempt for the Indians (with whom he still proposed to trade). In September, 1675, he had taken it upon himself to seize a number of Appomattox Indians for allegedly stealing corn (not his or his neighbors'). Berkeley had rebuked him at the time, mildly but firmly, reminding him that he was not the governor of Virginia, and that attacking friendly Indians was just the way to produce what everyone wanted to avoid, namely, "a Generall Combination of all the Indians against us." ²³ But Bacon had his own ideas about that.

One day in the following April, Bacon and some of his neighbors, James Crews, Henry Isham, and William Byrd, got together for a sociable glass or two. Byrd had lost three servants killed by the Indians. Bacon had lost his overseer at the falls. They were all unimpressed by the measures the March assembly had taken and were "making the Sadnesse of the times their discourse, and the Fear they all lived in, because of the Susquahanocks, who had settled [i.e., encamped] a little above the Falls of James River." ²⁴ They were also uneasy about the tributary Indians who lived close by. It was said that these Indians were not planting corn, which suggested that they intended leaving their towns for the warpath. Bacon in particular believed the country must defend itself "against all Indians in generall for that they were all Enemies." "This," he told Berkeley later, "I have always said and doe maintaine." ²⁵

While Bacon and his friends were telling each other their troubles on the north side of the James, the less prosperous planters on the south side were doing the same. They were even more upset than Bacon about the assembly's measures and also about the assembly itself. The 150 pounds a day plus expenses that the burgesses allowed themselves was as much a grievance as the useless forts that would enrich the great men. And Giles Bland was apparently encouraging them to appeal to the king against the extortionary local magnates. Bland was ready to carry the message himself. ²⁶

The immediate problem, however, was the Indians. The Southsiders were eager to march against them with their own arms and without pay, and had appealed to the governor to commission someone to lead them. ²⁷ When he declined to do so, they lost patience and began to gather on their own in an encampment at Jordan's Point, just below the mouth of the Appomattox. Hearing of the move, Bacon and his friends left their talk and crossed the river to see what was up. Bacon's feelings about Indians were evidently known. He was a friend of the governor, a member of the council; and his appearance in the crowd, doling out a supply of rum like a good politician, gave a semblance of governmental approval to the gathering. "A Bacon! a Bacon! a Bacon!" went the cry. The young man was evidently not displeased, and he agreed to lead them against the Indians, perhaps assuming that Berkeley would not deny a commission to *him*. ²⁸

And, indeed, if Berkeley had been willing to follow the line of least resistance, he would have been well advised to grant the commission gracefully. In April of 1676, however, the Southsiders' proposed march on the Indians apparently looked more dangerous to the safety of the colony than the depredations of the Susquehannahs. For months Indian tribes up and down the continent had been restive. King Philip's War, a concerted attack on the New England settlers, had broken out at about the same time as the skirmishes on the Potomac, a fact that looked sinister in itself. It was rumored that the Susquehannahs were negotiating for assistance from tribes three hundred miles to the north. All in all, Berkeley was convinced that the Indians were "generally conspired against us in all the western parts of America." ²⁹ With a larger Indian war brewing, Berkeley thought it desirable to keep a firm but friendly grip on Virginia's tributary Indians, not only because they might be useful as spies against hostile tribes but also to prevent them from joining the enemy. Berkeley, knowing the frontiersman's contempt for all Indians and his greed for their lands, would not risk sending out an expeditionary force that might not differentiate between friend and foe any more carefully than the Westmoreland militia who had started the whole conflict with the Susquehannahs. Nor could Berkeley risk creating an armed force of his most disgruntled inhabitants, men who were even more likely to turn against him than those he had led against the Dutch. The assembly may have been swayed by this danger when voting to garrison the new forts with men from the downriver counties.

Although Bacon seriously differed with Berkeley about the way to deal with Indians, he fully appreciated the danger of rebellious freemen. Living in Henrico County, he was in a better position than Berkeley to sense their mood, and he was not likely to underestimate it. As a prosperous government official in an area surrounded by men angry with the government, he could anticipate a rough time if discontent turned to rebellion. By leading the discontented in their proposed expedition against the Indians, which he relished as much as they did, he would gain their good will and at the same time avert their anger from the governor and assembly. According to Bacon, his leadership at Jordan's Point had precisely that effect. "Since my being with the volunteers," he wrote to Berkeley, "the Exclaiming concerning forts and Leavys has beene suppressed and the discourse and earnestness of the people is against the Indians...."³⁰ Bacon was offering Berkeley a way to suppress a mutiny. The Indians would be the scapegoats. Discontent with upper-class leadership would be vented in racial hatred, in a pattern that statesmen and politicians of a later age would have found familiar.

Berkeley did not take the offer. Virginia needed the friendship of the local Indians, and he did not trust the freemen. Furthermore, he did not know whether to trust Bacon. Though it is difficult to establish the sequence of events (many of the documents are undated), Berkeley was apparently convinced that everything had been quiet until Bacon "infused into the People the greate charge and uselessnesse of the forts."³¹ It seems unlikely, however, that the people needed to have these grievances pointed out to them. Apprised of the accusations against him, Bacon sent dispatches of his own to the governor, protesting his loyalty and assuring him that he did not want command over any forces except by Berkeley's order. And he urged Berkeley not to listen to reports conveyed by "unworthy and base fellowes of noe faith or trust."³² Bacon was probably referring to base fellows who had scrambled up the ladder of success. For himself, he was busy among the base fellows who had not made it. In order to enlarge the force he hoped to lead against the Indians, he crossed from the Southside and headed for New Kent.

There, as on the Southside before Bacon appeared on the scene, people had apparently already begun "to mutiny, and complaine of the proceedings of the Assembly."³³ There too he found and reported to Berkeley that "The whole country is much alarmed with the feare of Generall Combinacion [of the Indians] and I thinke not without reason."³⁴ And there too his eminence as a council member contributed to the readiness of the people to follow him.³⁵ According to a later account, "they of New Kent envieing the pamunkeys [the principal tributary tribe] and coveting the good Land on which they were seated, perceiveing the Governours just inclinations to preserve them as Spyes, to finde out the Susquehanoes and other Indian enimies, Mr. Bacon taketh advantage of the discontents he had raised, beateth up drums, lists his tumults in a military posture, and appeareth at the head of them, and then sends to the Governor for a Commission."³⁶ Again Bacon was offering the governor a way to divert a mutiny. But Berkeley and his supporters seem to have been transfixed by the dangerous character of Bacon's following: they were a "Rabble Crue," said the council, "only the Rascallity and meanest of the people ... there being hardly two amongst them that we have heard of who have Estates or are persons of Reputation and indeed very few who can either write or read."³⁷ Virginia's rulers failed to see that it might be more dangerous to withhold government sanction from such men than to grant it.

When Berkeley refused Bacon a commission, Bacon chose to proceed without one, but he issued a conciliatory "Humble Appeale of the Voluntiers to all well minded and Charitable People." The appeal recited the uselessness of the forts, the need for a "moving force," and the willingness of the volunteers to "become both actours and paymasters of this necessary defensive warr" without charge to the colony. It asked "the Enactours themselves of this late Act for forts," to judge in their consciences "whether our proffer be not wholly clear from any dregs of Rebellion, and mutiny, and be not rather to be esteemed an honourable purchase of our Countries quiett and benefitt with our owne hazard and charge." It closed with a denunciation of all Indians and their combination against His Majesty's good subjects, who were the only rightful inhabitants and possessors of Virginia.³⁸ Bacon also wrote a personal letter to the governor as he was about to set out on May 2: "I am just now going out to seeke a more agreeable destiny than you are pleased to designe mee," and he begged Berkeley not to believe evil reports of him.³⁹

Whatever Bacon's intentions may have been in assuming leadership of the self-starting crusade against the Indians, he was guilty of a greater insubordination than Berkeley could tolerate. On May 10, in a public proclamation, Berkeley denounced him and removed him from the council.⁴⁰ On the same day Berkeley offered the colony another way to defuse a mutiny: he called for a new election of burgesses and a new meeting of the assembly; and he invited the voters to present any complaints they might have against him.⁴¹ He was giving Virginians the opportunity to elect men who knew their views and the opportunity to have their views made law.

Meanwhile Bacon continued to conduct the crusade against Indians—all Indians. He began by marching his men southward to a fort held by the Occaneechees on the Roanoke River near the present Carolina border. The friendly Occaneechees captured a number of Susquehannahs for him. After the prisoners had been killed, Bacon's men turned their guns on the Occaneechees and dispatched most of them too, thus demonstrating their evenhanded determination to exterminate Indians without regard to tribe or tribute. Upon returning, Bacon reiterated his loyalty to the governor. All he wanted, he said, was to make war "against all Indians in generall," neglecting to add that friendly Indians were somewhat easier to catch than hostile ones, and made a satisfactory substitute as far as he and his men were concerned.⁴²

The massacre of the Occaneechees was probably no more than Berkeley had been expecting of the expedition. He evinced neither surprise nor anger, for during Bacon's absence he himself had somehow become convinced that it was no longer feasible to distinguish between friendly and unfriendly Indians. The view that all Indians were enemies had been a self-fulfilling prophecy, an attitude that necessarily turned friend into foe. And Berkeley was now prepared to admit that the transformation had taken place. "I believe all the Indians our neighbours are engaged with the Susquehannoes," he wrote to Colonel Thomas Goodrich on May 15, "and therefore I desire you to spare none that has the name of an Indian for they are now all our Enemies."⁴³

Although he still blamed Bacon for aggravating the Indian troubles, Berkeley seemed willing for the moment to accept the proposition that Bacon's true intention was what Bacon had steadily maintained it to be, Indian fighting rather than rabble-rousing. When Bacon returned from his triumph over the Occaneechees, Berkeley invited him to submit, hinted at a pardon, and offered to let him go to England and state his case before the king if he preferred.⁴⁴ But Bacon preferred to make his case before the people of Virginia. On May 28, still writing in highly respectful terms, he declined to apologize for what he had done "in so Glorious a cause as the Countrys defence," and renewed his request for a commission.⁴⁵ Berkeley interpreted this posture, perhaps correctly, as confirmation of his original view of Bacon's purpose. That view would now fulfill itself just as Bacon's view of the Indians fulfilled itself. Berkeley and his council, upon receipt of Bacon's letter, denounced him and all his "Ayders Assisters and Abettors" as rebels, and called upon all loyal subjects to "Joyne in prosecution of him and them according to the Nature of their Offences."⁴⁶

The nature of those offenses was treason, and the proper punishment death. In order to make that plain, Berkeley issued a "Declaration and Remonstrance" in which he explained that the mightiest subject in the land, even a peer of the realm, would deserve death if he successfully protected the country against an enemy without authorization from the king.⁴⁷ This was an unfortunate line of reasoning to a people who put preservation ahead of loyalty to a governor who was not, after all, quite a king. And among men who as a matter of course believed that all Indians were alike, Berkeley could not at this stage of the game start winning points by stating that he too was now against all Indians, especially when he added that earlier "I would have preservd those Indians that I knew were hourly at our mercy to have been our spies and intelligence to find out the more bloody Ennimies." He also misread the situation in stating that "Mr. Bacon has none aboute him but the lowest of the people."⁴⁸ Those he had in plenty, but there were men of the better sort too who shared Bacon's racist hatred of Indians.

With Berkeley's Declaration not only Bacon but all his followers and supporters became, by definition, rebels. They undoubtedly retained their zeal for killing Indians, but they were now invited to save a share of their hostility for the governor and council, the biggest men in Virginia. In a colony where the level of discontent was already so high and the means of suppressing a rebellion were so scant, it required a degree of foolhardiness in the governing circles to adopt such a position. With the local Indians fleeing out of range, and the Susquehannahs too elusive to lay hands on, the dangerous young men of New Kent and the Southside might well consider attacking their rulers, especially if led by men who could themselves lay claim to high position. As Giles Bland had recognized some weeks earlier, a bona fide rebellion could easily develop out of the existing situation, precisely because the freemen were led "by persons of quality there, which was wanting to them in 1674 when they were suppressed by a Proclamation, and the advice of some discreet persons, that had then an Influence upon them; which is now much otherwise, for they are at this time Conducted by Mr. Nathaniel Bacon, lately Sworne one of the Councill, and many other Gentlemen of good Condition." ⁴⁹

In the last days of May the elections to the new assembly that Berkeley had called for took place. The results of the elections in many counties are unknown. We do not know, for example, who was elected from New Kent. But the voters of Henrico chose Bacon (no longer a councillor) and his friend James Crews. According to Isaac Allerton of Westmoreland, the Southside counties all chose delegates suited "to their factious and Rebellious humours," and Berkeley himself thought that all but eight out of perhaps forty burgesses were sympathetic to Bacon. ⁵⁰ Later a royal investigating commission reported that most were "Free men that had but lately crept out of the condition of Servants." ⁵¹ Of the twenty-three known members, however, none fits that description. ⁵² Most had been members before, and were men of standing in their counties. If the rabble controlled the election, they seem to have demonstrated the same deference to their superiors that they had shown in earlier elections. If the members were sympathetic to Bacon, it was because men of standing were ready to back him.

When Bacon appeared at Jamestown to take his seat in the assembly on June 6, he took the precaution of coming in a sloop on which he was accompanied by fifty armed men. But when it came to the use of armed men, the old governor still knew a few tricks himself. Berkeley not only outwitted the rebel and captured him, but presented him to the House of Burgesses on his knees. At the governor's dictation, Bacon had written a confession of his sins, and once he presented it, Berkeley did an about-face. Having publicly reestablished his authority, he gambled on a move that might conciliate Bacon's followers and again solidify the ruling class of Virginia. He not only pardoned Bacon but restored him to his seat on the council and, astonishingly, promised him the commission he had been seeking. ⁵³ No longer qualified to be a burgess (because he was a councillor), Bacon asked leave to return home to visit his wife. Berkeley granted him permission, but with the humiliating proviso that he stay out of New Kent. And on June 10 Bacon departed, still without the commission that had been promised him. ⁵⁴

In his absence the assembly proceeded with a set of enactments designed to pacify all parties except the Indians. The right to vote was restored to freemen who owned no land and did not keep house for themselves. Representatives were to be chosen in each county to sit with the justices when the county levies were being laid. Vestries of parish churches were to be elected instead of being chosen by cooptation. Councillors were no longer to be exempt from levies. Clerks, secretaries, surveyors, collectors, and sheriffs were forbidden to take fees except for work actually performed. And to spread the perquisites of office more widely among deserving gentlemen, no one was to hold the office of sheriff for more than a year. None of these or of the assembly's other enactments breathes the spirit of rebellion. They provide mainly for the remedy of abuses that had enabled a few men in every county to milk the public for more than their fair share. Though the new laws did nothing to reverse the trend toward a more severe exploitation of servants, they gave the small freeman a degree of protection against corrupt officials, and restored to him a share in the choice of his rulers in both state and church. ⁵⁵

Perhaps more significant than these mild measures were those taken by the assembly to deal with the Indians. Berkeley, recovering his earlier view of the proper strategy, lectured the assembly against rash and unjust assaults on friendly Indians; and the assembly in the preamble to its principal enactment acknowledged that some Indians might not be engaged in the supposed combination against the English. The queen of the Pamunkeys was even invited to an interview, where with great dignity she gave her unanswerable reasons for not trusting English justice and declined to send more than a dozen warriors to aid the English against the Susquehannahs. The assembly then gave its definition of enemy Indians: any who left their towns without English permission. The lands of such Indians were to be forfeited, and this presumably meant private cornfields as well as tribal hunting and gathering lands, for the assembly did not distinguish between the two. In order to carry on the war against them, the assembly abandoned the plan for forts and voted to raise 1,000 troops instead of 500, to be drawn from the several counties in proportion to population, and to be paid for by the counties. Included in the provision was a clause better designed than any other to deflect the growing hostility of the freemen from their governors to the Indians: besides being paid 1,500 pounds of tobacco for foot soldiers and 2,250 for horsemen, the troops were to "have the benefitt of all plunder either Indians or otherwise." By "otherwise" was probably meant furs, guns, corn, and other Indian possessions. By "Indians" was meant Indians; and this was spelled out: "that all Indians taken in warr be held and accounted slaves dureing life." ⁵⁶

Bacon had been in Jamestown long enough to know, before he left, the composition of the new assembly and its intention of redressing the freemen's grievances. He may have realized that once the freemen were satisfied, Berkeley would have nothing more to fear from him and might even revive the charges against him. His best insurance, in that event, would be to gain and keep as large a popular following as possible. Then, if Berkeley did turn on him, Bacon could play the rebel role that Berkeley had been thrusting upon him. Meanwhile the role of Indian crusader still suited him. After all, it was as the suppressor of Indians that Berkeley himself had originally won his popularity in Virginia. Whether for these reasons or others, Bacon kept his focus on the Indians. He was apparently determined to be the leader of the war against them and believed that the freemen would support him in that aim. He disobeyed Berkeley's instructions to stay out of New Kent, and wherever he went he gathered more volunteers.

By June 22 Bacon was back in Jamestown with 500 of the upriver men behind him. Again he demanded a commission, and again Berkeley saw the demand as a rebel's challenge to his authority. As Bacon stood before the statehouse, with his ragged band of armed men around him, the governor strode out and proposed to settle the matter in good knightly fashion by single combat. Baring his breast, he cried, "Here! Shoot me, foregod, fair Mark, shoot." But Bacon continued to insist that he had no rebellious intentions. "No May it please your honor," he said, "We will not hurt a hair of your Head, nor of any other Mans, We are Come for a Commission to save our Lives from the Indians, which you have so often promised, and now We Will have it before we go."

This time there was iron in the demand. At gunpoint Bacon got his commission and also a vote by the assembly empowering him to raise whatever volunteers he could, and, if he saw fit, to suspend the levying of the 1,000 troops previously voted. He was thus officially authorized not only to raise men but to lead them in enslaving Indians and collecting plunder, and he could legitimately transform the men he had brought with him from rebels to government troops. ⁵⁷

These men, according to Philip Ludwell, the acting secretary of the colony, were "a Rabble of the basest sort of People, whose Condiçion was such, as by a change could not admitt of worse." There were not twenty among them, he said, "but what were Idle and will not worke, or such whose Debaucherie or Ill Husbandry has brought in Debt beyond hopes or thought of payment." ⁵⁸ But if Bacon's followers were rabble, they were evidently tax-paying rabble, that is, freemen rather than servants, for their cry outside the statehouse was "noe Levies, noe Levies." ⁵⁹ And Ludwell himself explained the willingness of the burgesses to accede to Bacon's demands by their fear that if they did not the servants of the country would be drawn into the act and "carry all beyond remedy to

Destruction." ⁶⁰ Bacon's men demonstrated that they had something to lose (servants would not have) when news arrived on June 25 that eight persons had been killed by Indians in New Kent. Off they went the next day to protect their houses or families. ⁶¹

As troops led by a commissioned officer, Bacon's men could think themselves entitled to military supplies. Two of Berkeley's supporters, Laurence Smith and Thomas Hawkins, had been raising horses, arms, and ammunition in nearby Gloucester County for a march of their own against the Indians. Bacon and his men accordingly helped themselves to what had been raised and hurried on to New Kent. In this move Berkeley and his friends thought they saw at last an opportunity to crush the rebel.

Gloucester was at this time probably the richest county in Virginia. The prosperous householders there would surely resent the commandeering of their horses and arms by Bacon's New Kent rabble. Apparently with Sir Henry Chichely's encouragement, Robert Beverley and Philip Ludwell ⁶² concocted a petition in the name of the inhabitants of Gloucester, asking for protection against Bacon. The governor responded with a declaration that Bacon's commission, obtained by force, was void. He marched to the county and summoned the people to join him. One account says that Berkeley succeeded in getting 1,200 men. But all accounts agree that when the Gloucestermen learned that Berkeley wanted to use them against Bacon, they quickly departed. They were willing to fight Indians under Berkeley's leadership, but they were not willing to fight Bacon and their fellow Virginians. ⁶³ Bacon, at this point on the verge of a march against the Pamunkeys (who had disappeared into the interior), turned back to deal with the governor; and Berkeley with a handful of supporters fled by ship to the Eastern Shore, pausing only to issue a new proclamation declaring Bacon a rebel. ⁶⁴

By this time Bacon himself was ready to believe the proclamation. If Berkeley could not see the merits of his crusade against the Indians, if Berkeley and his friends wished to make it a contest for superiority among white Virginians, Bacon was finally ready to oblige them. Arriving at Middle Plantation (the present site of Williamsburg) on July 30, he issued a "Declaration of the People" that combined a denunciation of Berkeley's crowd of placeholders with a statement of his own intention "not only to ruine and extirpate all Indians in generall but all Manner of Trade and Commerce with them." It was no leveling manifesto. Though it condemned the levying of taxes "upon specious pretences of Publick works for the advancement of private Favourites and other sinister ends," it attacked those same favorites on the grounds that they were socially unworthy of their riches. "Let us observe," it said, "the sudden Rise of their Estates compared with the Quality in which they first entered this Country ... and lett us see wither their extractions and Education have not bin vile." ⁶⁵ Bacon was not suggesting that true gentlemen should forgo the profits that belonged to social distinction. What was intolerable was that upstarts like the Ludwells and the Beverleys should have been able to collect so large a share of the winnings. It was time to redistribute some of their illgotten wealth, time to plunder the estates of a few upstart grandees as well as time to plunder the Indians.

In a society where success had always depended on exploitation that fell little short of plunder, it was an appealing formula to men of every class. Bacon had earlier complained that "Things have been carried by the men at the helme as if it were but to play a booty game, or divide a spoyle." ⁶⁶ Now he would give everyone a chance to play the booty game and redivide the spoils. As was only proper, gentlemen would come first. He invited them to attend him at Middle Plantation on August 3 and there presented them with an oath denouncing Berkeley for starting a civil war and agreeing to support Bacon even if royal forces should be sent to suppress him. The principal gentlemen and officers of the militia in the several counties had already agreed to serve under Bacon at the time when he extracted his commission from the governor. They had feared, as one related later, that if they refused, he might appoint some of his New Kent rabble in their places. ⁶⁷ There was now even more to be lost by not joining him. If there was to be civil war, it seemed clear that Berkeley would be the loser. And so the gentlemen, led in fact by Colonel Thomas Swann of Surry (still no mere man), put their names to the oath. ⁶⁸ Even those who had opposed Bacon stepped forward to enroll. George Jordan of Surry, for example, had privately complained of the rebels' "false and base complaints against the government," but nevertheless signed. Jordan had also observed that "every magestrat that hath loyally declared his

descent [dissent] against these late monstrous proceedings is threatened with plundering and pulling down their houses." ⁶⁹ Better to plunder than be plundered.

And for the next three months Virginians of all ranks vied with one another in plundering. In England Thomas Ludwell concluded that Bacon intended to collect as much booty as possible and then make off with it by sea. ⁷⁰ But Bacon, true to his declared priorities, made the Indians his first object. While other gentlemen went about the task of protecting their own estates and dismantling those of the few who had placed their bets on Berkeley, Bacon marched through the back country looking for Indians. Before setting off, he had dispatched two of his lieutenants, Giles Bland and William Carver, to the Eastern Shore to capture the governor. But Philip Ludwell turned the tables and captured Bland and Carver. ⁷¹ Encouraged by this success and by Bacon's absence in the wilderness, Berkeley tried for a comeback. To do so, he appealed for support in such a way as to risk a graver civil war than Bacon had yet threatened.

Hitherto, while worrying about the rabble of New Kent and the Southside, Virginia gentlemen had taken pains to offer no opportunities for rebellion to the country's most oppressed groups, the servants and slaves. In the previous Dutch and Indian wars, fear of a servile insurrection had troubled the planters more than fear of invasion. And Thomas Ludwell, in England, assured the Privy Council that Bacon was unlikely to try to gain support by offering freedom to servants who joined him. If he did, Ludwell explained, "I verely beleive it will in a short time ruine him, since by it he will make all masters his Enimies." ⁷² But Berkeley was willing to take the risk, or so at least the word went. As he prepared to return to Jamestown, he not only promised the people of the Eastern Shore the plunder of the estates of those who had signed Bacon's oath, but it was said he offered freedom to the servants of the signers in return for support. ⁷³ The two proposals were not wholly consistent, since servants were the principal form of wealth worth plundering, but Berkeley was desperate. Too desperate. Evidently even servants felt that he was unlikely to win. He did reach Jamestown by ship on September 7, but neither freemen nor servants rallied to his cause.

Bacon, in the meantime, had located the peaceful Pamunkeys in the Great Dragon Swamp between the Mattapony and the Pianketank rivers in New Kent. He captured forty-five, along with most of the tribe's worldly goods, consisting of furs, wampum, and English trading cloth. He had only to march on Jamestown, parading his captive Indians as he went, to win supporters. And he now emulated Berkeley by offering freedom to the servants and slaves of loyalists. His forces quickly outnumbered Berkeley's; and after a brief siege Berkeley and his remaining friends left on the ships that had brought them. Bacon burned Jamestown to the ground on September 19. ⁷⁴

From there, accompanied by William Byrd, he returned to Gloucester County to gather loot from loyalists. Witnesses later gave a graphic description of Byrd handing out goods from the stores of Augustine Warner, at Warner Hall: "... whensoever he mett with any fine goods, as silks fine Hollands, or other fine Linnings, silke stockings, Ribbond, or the like he sent them into Bacons roome, where he was often called in and was very conversant." Byrd finally passed out from drinking too much of Colonel Warner's cider and Malaga wine, but "the soldiers then with him, lifted him up, and removed him soe asleep from place to place, and from chest to chest [Byrd apparently had the keys firmly fastened to himself] and tooke such goods as best liked them." ⁷⁵

Such was the sordid culmination of Bacon's Rebellion. During September and October the scene at Colonel Warner's was repeated at the houses of other loyalists. ⁷⁶ But when Bacon died of the "bloody flux" (probably a form of dysentery) on October 26, the rebellious mood of the Virginians ran out. Shortly thereafter armed vessels from England arrived. One of them, operating in James River, produced conversions to loyalty in the Southside counties as she moved up and down the riverbank there. Another in York River obtained the surrender of the New Kent men who had marched with Bacon. Most of them switched their allegiance back to Berkeley and were allowed to go home. By January Berkeley was back at his Green Spring plantation, ready to hang the unrepentant and to recoup his and his friends' property losses by more legal methods of plunder.

Given its extent, the rebellion had caused little bloodshed among white Virginians. Beginning as a crusade against the Indians, who proved elusive targets, it ended as a series of plundering forays against those who had stuck with Berkeley. At the end there were eighty slaves and twenty English servants who refused to surrender, but these were easily captured and returned to their owners.⁷⁷ It was a rebellion with abundant causes but without a cause: it produced no real program of reform, no revolutionary manifesto, not even any revolutionary slogans. Bacon had probably never intended it to turn into a rebellion. Considering the grievances of Virginia's impoverished freemen, it is surprising that he was able to direct their anger for so long against the Indians. Berkeley either did not perceive or chose not to exploit the opportunity presented by the hatred of white Virginians against Indians. But for those with eyes to see, there was an obvious lesson in the rebellion. Resentment of an alien race might be more powerful than resentment of an upper class. For men bent on the maximum exploitation of labor the implication should have been clear. But Virginians did not immediately grasp it. It would sink in as time went on; but with the rebellion over, those who had been profiting from tobacco thought at first only of recovering what they had lost—and maybe a bit more.

- 1 Hening, II, 150-51. Lord and Mason were justices of Westmoreland at the time of the first records that give the composition of the court in 1662/3, a year after the assembly's decree. Fowke was the county's representative in the assembly in September, 1663. (Westmoreland III, 6, II, 13, 16, 18, 24, 25, 30, 38, 39; Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1659/60-1693, 21.) Lord was still justice of Westmoreland in 1676. In 1669 Mason was sheriff of Stafford County, formed from Westmoreland in 1664. Warren M. Billings, "Virginia's Deplored Condition 1660-1676: The Coming of Bacon's Rebellion" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1968), 245.
- 2 Doeg may have been a generic term for Maryland Indians, including the Piscattaway and several other tribes. Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment," 42.
3. The sequence of events that make up what is called "Bacon's Rebellion" must be pieced together from a variety of accounts, many of which have been gathered in Charles M. Andrews, ed., *Narratives of the Insurrections* (New York, 1915), 15-141, and in Force, *Tracts*, I, Nos. 8-II. The two most thorough secondary accounts are T. J. Wertebaker, *Torchbearer of the Revolution* (Princeton, 1940), which is highly favorable to Bacon, and Wilcomb Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1957), which is equally favorable to Berkeley. For the Doeg episode, Andrews, *Narratives*, 16, 105-6.
4. *Ibid.*, 17, 106.
5. Fairfax Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William* (Richmond, 1924), I, 75.
6. *WMQ*, 1st ser., IV (1895-96), 86.
- 7 Washburn, *Governor and Rebel*, 21-24; Andrews, *Narratives*, 19, 47- 48, 106; *WMQ*, 1st ser., II (1893-94), 38-43; IV (1895-96), 86; Force, *Tracts*, I, No. 9, p. 3.
- 8 Berkeley to Thomas Ludwell, April 1, 1676. C.O. I/36, ff.67-68; Andrews, *Narratives*, 19-20.
- 9 *Archives of Maryland*, V, (Baltimore, 1887), 134; Hening, II, 275.
- 10 *WMQ*, 1st ser., IX (1900-1901), 8; *Coventry Papers*, LXXVII, 66-67, 73.
- 11 Andrews, *Narratives*, 107.
- 12 Culpeper to William Blathwayt, March 20, 1682/3. *Blathwayt Papers*, XVII, Colonial Williamsburg.
- 13 *Minutes of Council*, 515; *WMQ*, 1st ser., III (1894-95), 123-25; *Surry II*, ff.40-43.
- 14 The treaty of 1646 said nothing on this point, but it did make the tributary Indians subjects of the English. The assembly had interpreted this to mean that their assistance could be required against any foreign Indians "as being part of the articles of peace concluded with

- us." Hening, I, 403.
- 15 Hening, II, 326-38.
- 16 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 445; C.O. I/2I, ff.157-58 (this paper is misdated as 1667, it is obviously from 1676); C.O. I/39, ff.205, 223-28, 234, 238, 245, 246, 250; Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1659/60-1693, 101, 103.
- 17 Andrews, Narratives, 23.
- 18 Ibid., 112.
- 19 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 8, 41; Washburn, Governor and Rebel, 18.
- 20 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 6, 100.
- 21 VMHB, I (1893-94), 56-57.
- 22 C.O. I/3I, ff.179, 228; Minutes of Council, 390, 399.
- 23 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 3.
- 24 Andrews, Narratives, 110.
- 25 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 89, 101.
- 26 C.O. I/36, ff.109-13; C.O. I/37, ff.84-86; cf. Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 156.
- 27 C.O. I/36, f.139.
- 28 Andrews, Narratives, 109-II.
- 29 C.O. I/36, ff.67-68; Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 66-67.
- 30 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 99. On the dating of this statement, see Washburn, Governor and Rebel, 189-90.
- 31 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 103.
- 32 Ibid., 99, 100.
- 33 "Aspinwall Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 4th ser., IX (1871), 165.
- 34 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 73.
- 35 "Aspinwall Papers," 166.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 95-96.

- 38 Ibid., 445.
- 39 Ibid., 76.
- 40 C.O. I/37, f.2.
- 41 C.O. I/36, f.137.
- 42 Washburn, Governor and Rebel, 40-46; Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 89.
- 43 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 85.
- 44 Ibid., 90, 91.
- 45 Ibid., 93.
- 46 Ibid., 94.
- 47 Ibid., 157-58.
- 48 Ibid.; "Aspinwall Papers," 178-81.
- 49 C.O. I/36, f.III.
- 50 Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 102, 160-61, 352.
- 51 Andrews, Narratives, 113.
- 52 Billings, "Virginia's Deplored Condition," 109-12, 264. Billings identifies 21 out of the possible 41 members and observes that all but four were justices of the peace. In addition to these 21 .it is possible to identify several others. The representatives from Lancaster were Thomas Haynes and Colonel John Carter (Lancaster IV, 394). Carter was the wealthiest man in Lancaster, listed for 37 tithables in 1675 and 44 in 1677. Haynes was far from poor, listed for 8 in 1675 and 11 in 1677. Richard Lawrence, who was probably one of the representatives from James City, was a graduate of Oxford (Andrews, Narratives, 96). Thomas Mathew, whose dispute with the Indians had started the troubles, was a member, and he tells us that the two commanders at the siege of the Indian fort, Isaac Allerton and John Washington, were members (ibid., 23). Both were men of high standing. Mathew also identifies Colonel Edward Hill, perhaps the biggest man in Charles City County, as present (ibid., 26). Allerton and Hill were later members of the council but do not seem to have been so at this time and so must have been burgesses.
- 53 Andrews, Narratives, 21-23, 54, 114-15.
- 54 Force, Tracts, I, No. 9, p. 5; Coventry Papers, LXXVII, 160-61.