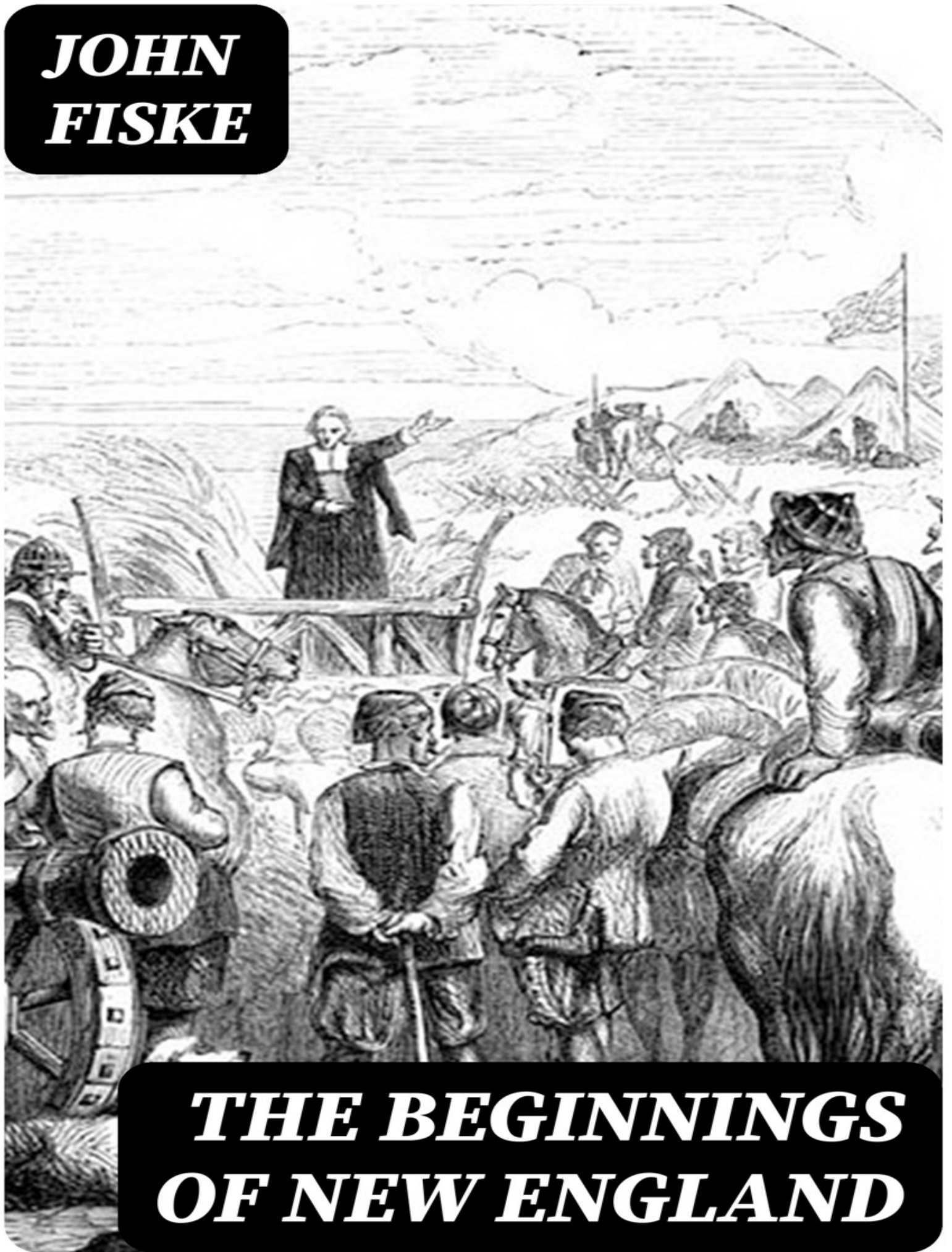


***JOHN
FISKE***



***THE BEGINNINGS
OF NEW ENGLAND***

John Fiske

The Beginnings of New England

Or the Puritan Theocracy in its Relations to Civil and Religious Liberty

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PREFACE.

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This book contains the substance of the lectures originally given at the Washington University, St. Louis, in May, 1887, in the course of my annual visit to that institution as University Professor of American History. The lectures were repeated in the following month of June at Portland, Oregon, and since then either the whole course, or one or more of the lectures, have been given in Boston, Newton, Milton, Chelsea, New Bedford, Lowell, Worcester, Springfield, and Pittsfield, Mass.; Farmington, Middletown, and Stamford, Conn.; New York, Brooklyn, and Tarrytown, N.Y.; Philadelphia and Ogontz, Pa.; Wilmington, Del.; Chicago, Ill.; San Francisco and Oakland, Cal.

In this sketch of the circumstances which attended the settlement of New England, I have purposely omitted many details which in a formal history of that period would need to be included. It has been my aim to give the outline of

such a narrative as to indicate the principles at work in the history of New England down to the Revolution of 1689. When I was writing the lectures I had just been reading, with much interest, the work of my former pupil, Mr. Brooks Adams, entitled "The Emancipation of Massachusetts."

With the specific conclusions set forth in that book I found myself often agreeing, but it seemed to me that the general aspect of the case would be considerably modified and perhaps somewhat more adequately presented by enlarging the field of view. In forming historical judgments a great deal depends upon our perspective. Out of the very imperfect human nature which is so slowly and painfully casting off the original sin of its inheritance from primeval savagery, it is scarcely possible in any age to get a result which will look quite satisfactory to the men of a riper and more enlightened age. Fortunately we can learn something from the stumblings of our forefathers, and a good many things seem quite clear to us to-day which two centuries ago were only beginning to be dimly discerned by a few of the keenest and boldest spirits. The faults of the Puritan theocracy, which found its most complete development in Massachusetts, are so glaring that it is idle to seek to palliate them or to explain them away. But if we would really understand what was going on in the Puritan world of the seventeenth century, and how a better state of things has grown out of it, we must endeavour to distinguish and define the elements of wholesome strength in that theocracy no less than its elements of crudity and weakness.

The first chapter, on "The Roman Idea and the English Idea," contains a somewhat more developed statement of the points briefly indicated in the thirteenth section (pp. 85-95) of "The Destiny of Man." As all of the present book, except the first chapter, was written here under the shadow of the Washington University, I take pleasure in dating it from this charming and hospitable city where I have passed some of the most delightful hours of my life.

St. Louis, April 15, 1889.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF NEW ENGLAND.

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CHAPTER I. — THE ROMAN IDEA AND THE ENGLISH IDEA.

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It used to be the fashion of historians, looking superficially at the facts presented in chronicles and tables of dates, without analyzing and comparing vast groups of facts distributed through centuries, or even suspecting the need for such analysis and comparison, to assign the date 476 A.D. as the moment at which the Roman Empire came to an end. It was in that year that the soldier of fortune, Odovakar, commander of the Herulian mercenaries in Italy, sent the handsome boy Romulus, son of Orestes, better known as "little Augustus," from his imperial throne to the splendid villa of Lucullus near Naples, and gave him a yearly pension of \$35,000 [6,000 solidi] to console him for the loss of a world. As 324 years elapsed before another emperor was crowned at Rome, and as the political headship of Europe after that happy restoration remained upon the German soil to which the events of the eighth century had shifted it, nothing could seem more natural than the habit which historians once had, of saying that the mighty career of Rome had ended, as it had begun, with a Romulus. Sometimes the date 476 was even set up as a great landmark dividing modern from ancient history. For those, however, who took such a view, it was impossible to see the events of the Middle Ages in their true relations to what went before and what came after. It was impossible to understand what went on in Italy in the sixth century, or to explain the position of that great Roman power which had

its centre on the Bosphorus, which in the code of Justinian left us our grandest monument of Roman law, and which for a thousand years was the staunch bulwark of Europe against the successive aggressions of Persian, Saracen, and Turk. It was equally impossible to understand the rise of the Papal power, the all-important politics of the great Saxon and Swabian emperors, the relations of mediaeval England to the Continental powers, or the marvellously interesting growth of the modern European system of nationalities. [[Sidenote: When did the Roman Empire come to an end?]

Since the middle of the nineteenth century the study of history has undergone changes no less sweeping than those which have in the same time affected the study of the physical sciences. Vast groups of facts distributed through various ages and countries have been subjected to comparison and analysis, with the result that they have not only thrown fresh light upon one another, but have in many cases enabled us to recover historic points of view that had long been buried in oblivion. Such an instance was furnished about twenty-five years ago by Dr. Bryce's epoch-making work on the Holy Roman Empire. Since then historians still recognize the importance of the date 476 as that which left the Bishop of Rome the dominant personage in Italy, and marked the shifting of the political centre of gravity from the Palatine to the Lateran. This was one of those subtle changes which escape notice until after some of their effects have attracted attention. The most important effect, in this instance, realized after three centuries, was not the overthrow of Roman power in the West, but its indefinite extension and expansion. The men of 476 not only had no

idea that they were entering upon a new era, but least of all did they dream that the Roman Empire had come to an end, or was ever likely to. Its cities might be pillaged, its provinces overrun, but the supreme imperial power itself was something without which the men of those days could not imagine the world as existing. It must have its divinely ordained representative in one place if not in another. If the throne in Italy was vacant, it was no more than had happened before; there was still a throne at Constantinople, and to its occupant Zeno the Roman Senate sent a message, saying that one emperor was enough for both ends of the earth, and begging him to confer upon the gallant Odovakar the title of patrician, and entrust the affairs of Italy to his care. So when Sicambrian Chlodwig set up his Merovingian kingdom in northern Gaul, he was glad to array himself in the robe of a Roman consul, and obtain from the eastern emperor a formal ratification of his rule.

[Transcriber's note: page missing in original.] still survives in political methods and habits of thought that will yet be long in dying out. With great political systems, as with typical forms of organic life, the processes of development and of extinction are exceedingly slow, and it is seldom that the stages can be sharply marked by dates. The processes which have gradually shifted the seat of empire until the prominent part played nineteen centuries ago by Rome and Alexandria, on opposite sides of the Mediterranean, has been at length assumed by London and New York, on opposite sides of the Atlantic, form a most interesting subject of study. But to understand them, one must do much more than merely catalogue the facts of

political history; one must acquire a knowledge of the drifts and tendencies of human thought and feeling and action from the earliest ages to the times in which we live. In covering so wide a field we cannot of course expect to obtain anything like complete results. In order to make a statement simple enough to be generally intelligible, it is necessary to pass over many circumstances and many considerations that might in one way and another qualify what we have to say. Nevertheless it is quite possible for us to discern, in their bold general outlines, some historic truths of supreme importance. In contemplating the salient features of the change which has now for a long time been making the world more English and less Roman, we shall find not only intellectual pleasure and profit but practical guidance. For in order to understand this slow but mighty change, we must look a little into that process of nation-making which has been going on since prehistoric ages and is going on here among us to-day, and from the recorded experience of men in times long past we may gather lessons of infinite value for ourselves and for our children's children. As in all the achievements of mankind it is only after much weary experiment and many a heart-sickening failure that success is attained, so has it been especially with nation-making. Skill in the political art is the fruit of ages of intellectual and moral discipline; and just as picture-writing had to come before printing and canoes before steamboats, so the cruder political methods had to be tried and found wanting, amid the tears and groans of unnumbered generations, before methods less crude could be put into operation. In the historic survey upon which we are now to

enter, we shall see that the Roman Empire represented a crude method of nation-making which began with a masterful career of triumph over earlier and cruder methods, but has now for several centuries been giving way before a more potent and satisfactory method. And just as the merest glance at the history of Europe shows us Germanic peoples wresting the supremacy from Rome, so in this deeper study we shall discover a grand and far-reaching Teutonic Idea of political life overthrowing and supplanting the Roman Idea. Our attention will be drawn toward England as the battle-ground and the seventeenth century as the critical moment of the struggle; we shall see in Puritanism the tremendous militant force that determined the issue; and when our perspective has thus become properly adjusted, we shall begin to realize for the first time how truly wonderful was the age that witnessed the Beginnings of New England. We have long had before our minds the colossal figure of Roman Julius as "the foremost man of all this world," but as the seventeenth century recedes into the past the figure of English Oliver begins to loom up as perhaps even more colossal. In order to see these world-events in their true perspective, and to make perfectly clear the manner in which we are to estimate them, we must go a long distance away from them. We must even go back, as nearly as may be, to the beginning of things. [[Sidenote: Gradual shifting of primacy from the men who spoke Latin, and their descendants, to the men who speak English]]

If we look back for a moment to the primitive stages of society, we may picture to ourselves the surface of the earth sparsely and scantily covered with wandering tribes of

savages, rude in morals and manners, narrow and monotonous in experience, sustaining life very much as lower animals sustain it, by gathering wild fruits or slaying wild game, and waging chronic warfare alike with powerful beasts and with rival tribes of men. [[Sidenote: Political history is the history of nation-making]

In the widest sense the subject of political history is the description of the processes by which, under favourable circumstances, innumerable such primitive tribes have become welded together into mighty nations, with elevated standards of morals and manners, with wide and varied experience, sustaining life and ministering to human happiness by elaborate arts and sciences, and putting a curb upon warfare by limiting its scope, diminishing its cruelty, and interrupting it by intervals of peace. The story, as laid before us in the records of three thousand years, is fascinating and absorbing in its human interest for those who content themselves with the study of its countless personal incidents, and neglect its profound philosophical lessons. But for those who study it in the scientific spirit, the human interest of its details becomes still more intensely fascinating and absorbing. Battles and coronations, poems and inventions, migrations and martyrdoms, acquire new meanings and awaken new emotions as we begin to discern their bearings upon the solemn work of ages that is slowly winning for humanity a richer and more perfect life. By such meditation upon men's thoughts and deeds is the understanding purified, till we become better able to comprehend our relations to the world and the duty that lies upon each of us to shape his conduct rightly.

In the welding together of primitive shifting tribes into stable and powerful nations, we can seem to discern three different methods that have been followed at different times and places, with widely different results. In all cases the fusion has been effected by war, but it has gone on in three broadly contrasted ways. The first of these methods, which has been followed from time immemorial in the Oriental world, may be roughly described as *conquest without incorporation*. A tribe grows to national dimensions by conquering and annexing its neighbours, without admitting them to a share in its political life. Probably there is always at first some incorporation, or even perhaps some crude germ of federative alliance; but this goes very little way,—only far enough to fuse together a few closely related tribes, agreeing in speech and habits, into a single great tribe that can overwhelm its neighbours. In early society this sort of incorporation cannot go far without being stopped by some impassable barrier of language or religion. After reaching that point, the conquering tribe simply annexes its neighbours and makes them its slaves. It becomes a superior caste, ruling over vanquished peoples, whom it oppresses with frightful cruelty, while living on the fruits of their toil in what has been aptly termed Oriental luxury. Such has been the origin of many eastern despotisms, in the valleys of the Nile and Euphrates, and elsewhere. Such a political structure admits of a very considerable development of material civilization, in which gorgeous palaces and artistic temples may be built, and perhaps even literature and scholarship rewarded, with money wrung from millions of toiling wretches. There is that sort of brutal