

THE SERVANTS' PLOT OF 1663

[This plot of a number of indentured servants has received but little notice from our historians. An act of Assembly was passed at the September session, 1663, decreeing that the 13th of September should be perpetually kept as a day of thanksgiving for the preservation of the country from a "desperate conspiracy" entered into by "certain mutinous villains" (*Hening II*, 191). On September 16th, the House of Burgesses gave a reward to Birkenhead, the servant who revealed the plot, (*ib.*204). Campbell, in his *History of Virginia*, p 262, gives a brief account of the plot. This attempted insurrection is the subject of Miss Johnston's well-known novel, *The Prisoners of Hope*].

James Citty

The Jurors for our Sovereigne Lord ye King upon their oath pr'sent that John Gunter Late of ye Country of Gloster Laborer, Wm Bell Late of ye same Laborer, Richard Darbi-

shire late of ye same Laborer, John Hayte Late of ye same Laborer, Thomas Jones Late of ye same Laborer, Wm Ball Late of ye same Laborer, Wm Poultney late of ye same Laborer, Wm Bendell Late of ye same Laborer, and Thomas Collins Late of ye same Laborer as false Traytors against his most Excellent Prince, of Sovereigne Lord Charles ye second by ye Grace of God King of England Scotland, ffrence and Ireland and of his Dominions thereunto Belonging defender of ye ffaith &c, The feare of God in their harts not haveing, nor weighing their due Allegiance but seduced by ye Instigacon of the devill, and intending wholly to withdraw, putt out and Extinguish the hearty love and the true, and due obedience w'ch a true, and faith full subject of ye King should beare, and by ye Law is bound to heare towards our said Sovereigne Lord ye King, The sixth day of this instant September in ye fifteenth year of ye Raigne of our said Sovereigne Lord ye King at Newmans Land in ye County of Gloucester aforesaid ffalsly, malitiously, and traterously intended, imagined, went aboute, and Compassed ye said King their Sovereigne, and naturall Leige Lord not onely from his Royall State, Tytle, Power, and Government of this his Ma'ties Country of Virginia utterly to deprive, depose, cast downe, and disherite but also to bring, and put ye Right Hon'orable S'r Wm Berkeley Kn't his said Ma'ties Governo'r and Cap't Genn'II of this Country of Virginia from his Power Authority, and Government if hee ,should oppose, or resist them in their wicked, and Rebellious proceedings, and also sedition in this said Country to rayse up, and warr to Levy , and make and wholly submit and distroy ye State of this Country of Vir'g-being in, and throughout well constituted, and ordered, and to

[] Intent they might fullfill, and bring to passe- those their aforesaid trayterous purposes, Immaginacons, compassions, and intents they the said John Gunter, Wm Bell, Richard Darbshire, John Hayte, Thomas Jones, Wm Ball, Wm Poultney, Wm Bendell and Thomas Collins ye day and year aforesaid at ye place did traterously, meete together, conferr,

and treatie concerning their traterous purposes, immaginacons, compassings and Intents, aforesaid and by what meanes and manner they might bee brought to pass and accomplished, and then and there malitiously, advisedly, and traterously, did agree, designe, intend and. determine the house of one ffrancis Willis in ye County aforesaid Esqr one of his Ma'ties Councellours of State for this Country of Virginia to breake and Enter rend all the Gunns, Weapons, and other armes and amunicons of Warr there found to seise upon and take away and therewith to arme themselves, and Likewise the house of one Katharine Cooke in ye same County Widow in Like manner breake, and Enter, and all Gunns, Weapons and other Armes, and Ammunitiones of Warr to seise upon and take away and therewith to arme certaine other psons to ye number of thirty, by them. and w'th them through their false, malitious and traterous, procurments combyned and Engaged in there said trayterous, and rebellious purposes, immaginacons, compassing, and Intents, and also to kill and murder all and Every Pson and Psons that should in any manner, Or wayes resist, oppose, or hinder them in their wicked and rebellious pcedings, and sedition, to ye utter subvercon of ye state of this his Ma'ties Country, and Contrary to ye statutes in such Cases made to witt ye 25 Ed: 3: ca: 2: 13: Eliz: and against ye peace of ye Soveraigne Lord ye King his Crowne and Dignities &c.

The Examinacon of Thomas Collins of ye County of Gloucester Laborer being Examined sayth

That upon ye first day of this pr'sent September the said Collins went to acquaint Bell that one Richard Darbshire aboute three dayes before did bid him ye said Bell w'th ye said Collins meete him and other at Mr Knights Little house in ye woods aboute a designe for their freedom where ye said Collins and Bell did meete other Eight men, and there they did Contrive,. and agree that upon ye Sunday night following aboute 12 of ye Clock to meete at a place called ye poplar spring, and to bring armes w'th them ye said Collins intend-

ing to bring one of His Mast'r Coll Walkers Gunns and other ammunicon, and from thence to march to ye Right Hono'ble ye Governo'r and there to desire to bee released of one year of their tyme w'ch they had to serve, and for their Cap't they would have Either Gunter, or Bell, and in case ye Governo'r should deny to release them ye said years service that then they would goe forth of ye Land if they Could to an Island w'ch ye said Collins doth not remember ye name off, and further sayth not.

THOMAS COLLINS.

Taken by mee ye 13th of Sept' 1663
Bul: Mitford his Ma'ties A,ttor'y

The Examinacon of Wiliiam Budell taken ye 8th of. September 1663 before us Leift Coll Willis, m'r Abraham Iverson and maj: John Smith who sayth that being at a little house of m'r Peter Knights in ye woods neere unto m'rs Cooks quarter where were pr'sent Eight servants, and my selfe, namly W'm Bell, one Collins, W'm Poultney, Richard Darbshire, one Gunter servant to m'r Pate, there wee did move that an oath of secresie should pass for lye unconcealment of our designe w'ch was as followith, first that wee all should meete at poplars spring on Sunday night next, and to bring w'th us what Company, armes, and ammunicon wee could gett, and in ye first place to gett to ye dwelling house of Leift C Willis, and to seise on his armes and drum. and. soe to march from house to house, and wee did intend to goe to ye Governor, and demand our freedome, and in Case that ye Governor should refuse, to march out of ye Country, and further that if case any Pson then pr'sent should not condescend, and yield, and keepe secret our intended designe then wee resolved to be ye death of him, and further sayth not as witness my hand

WILLIAM BUDELL.

The Examination of William Bell. then Examined doth averr and Confirme all ye pr'misses aforesayd, and further sayth that Richa~d Darbshire came unto mee, and acquainted

mee of ye aforesaid designe above a month agoe, and further sayth not as witness my hand this 8th of September 1663

WILLIAM BELL.

The Examinacon of Thomas Collins taken ye 8th of September 1663 Sayth that ye persons above menconed were all resolved to meet' one Sunday night next at poplar spring, and that the Company within menconed did propose and offer unto Wm Bell that ye said Wm Belt should bee their Leader in the aforesaid designe, but hee would not accept of the offer, and further sayth that hee the said Collins was on Saturday night last sent unto ye sayd Bell by one Richard Darbishire that hee the said Bell should come to m'rs Cooks Quarters, and Speake w'th ye said Darbishire, and further sayth not

THOMAS COLLINS.

The Examinacon of W m Poultney taken ye 8th of September 1663 Sayth that he was pr'sent at a Little house of Mr Knights on Saturday Last, and there were pr'sent ye persons in ye aforemenconed Examinacon specified, and there was agreed amoungst them to make a Rysing, and to march to Leift. con Willis his house, and to seise on his armes and Drum, and to Endeavor to secource [?] their freedomes, and further sayth that Richard Darbishire first acquainted him ye ye designe and further sayth not

the marke of

WILLIAM W POULTNEY.

The Examinacon of John Gunter taken ye, 9th of September 1663 who sayth that on Last Sunday bee was at a Little house in the woods where was foure more besides himselfe, but w't they did he will not Confesse onely hee sayth that thay were intended to go to ye Governor aboute their freedome, and further sayth not

JNO. GUNTER.

The Examinacion of Thomas Jones taken ye 9th of September 1663 Who sayth that on Sunday Last Jno Gunter desired him to goe to Maj'r Smiths house, and desire Maj'r Smiths Drummer to meete him at James his House, and soe to goe to m'r Knights little house in ye woods, and wee three went, and mett Six more nine in all whose names I know not, and that on Sunday next wee were to meete at Poplare spring, and there Gunter pmised to bring what of m'r Pates servants hee Could, and from poplar spring wee were resolved to march to Coll Willis house, and seise on his armes, and ammunition, and drume, and soe to march from house to house to house, and seise on what armes wee could gett and that Last Sunday was seaventh day at night, Gunter revealed it to us, and then they shooke hands, and swore surely to their Designes; and after all was don amongst us, then Bell, Gunter, and Darbshire had private Conference amoungst themselves, what it was I know not, and further sayth not as witness my hand

THOMAS ONES.

The Examinacion of Wm Ball taken ye 9th Septemb'r 1663 who sayth that Jones told him Last friday night that sunday they were to meete at m'r Knights house in ye Woods, and desired mee to goe, and sonday I went w'th them, and there wee mett 9 in all but what was their designe I know not, but onely ye next sunday night wee were to meete at ye poplar spring, and further sayth not as witnese my hand

the marke of

WILLIAM X BALL.