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VOLUME I.

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HISTORY
OF
THE UNITED STATES,

FROM

THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT TO
THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

BY GEORGE BANCROFT,

FORMERLY AMBASSADOR AT THE COURT OF ST. JAMES'S.

IN SEVEN VOLUMES.

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P R E F A C E.



I HAVE formed the design of writing a History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent to the present time. As the moment arrives for publishing a portion of the work, I am impressed more strongly than ever with a sense of the grandeur and vastness of the subject; and am ready to charge myself with presumption for venturing on so bold an enterprise. I can find for myself no excuse but in the sincerity with which I have sought to collect truth from trust-worthy documents and testimony. I have desired to give to the work the interest of authenticity. I have applied, as I have proceeded, the principles of historical scepticism; and, not allowing myself to grow weary in comparing witnesses, or consulting codes of laws, I have endeavoured to impart originality to my narrative, by deriving it from writings and sources which were the contemporaries of the events that are described. Where different nations or different parties have been engaged in the same scenes, I have not failed to examine their respective reports. Such an investigation on any country would be laborious; I need not say how much the labour is increased by the

extent of our republic, the differences in the origin and early government of its component parts, and the multiplicity of topics which require to be discussed and arranged.

Much error had become incorporated with American history. Many of the early writers in Europe were only careful to explain the physical qualities of the country; and the political institutions of dependent colonies were not thought worthy of exact inquiry. The early history was often written with a carelessness which seized on rumours and vague recollections as sufficient authority for an assertion which satisfied prejudice by wanton perversions, and which, where materials were not at hand, substituted the inferences of the writer for authenticated facts. These early books have ever since been cited as authorities, and the errors, sometimes repeated even by considerate writers, whose distrust was not excited, have almost acquired a prescriptive right to a place in the annals of America. This state of things has increased the difficulty of my undertaking, and, I believe, also, its utility; and I cannot regret the labour which has enabled me to present, under a somewhat new aspect, the early love of liberty in Virginia; the causes and nature of its loyalty; its commercial freedom; the colonial policy of Cromwell; the independent spirit of Maryland; the early institutions of Rhode Island; and the stern independence of the New England Puritans. On these and other points, on which I have differed from received accounts, I appeal with confidence to the judgment of those who are critically acquainted with the sources of our early history.