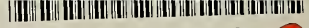


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HIGGINSON, THOMAS W.

ADDRESS - AT THE CELEBRATION
OF THE BATTLE OF THE
COWPENS

1881



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ADDRESS OF
THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE BATTLE OF THE COWPENS AT
SPARTANBURG, S. C., MAY 11, 1881.

From the Charleston (S. C.) News and Courier, May 12, 1881.

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GOVERNOR HAGOOD then introduced Mr. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, of Boston [Cambridge], representing the States of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Connecticut, who came forward and delivered the following oration on behalf of the New England States :

MR. HIGGINSON'S ORATION.

In rising to speak for New England, at this time, I have the generous pleasure of remembering that the battle we celebrate was one in whose honors the New England Colonies had absolutely no direct share. The victory of Cowpens, called by Bancroft "the most extraordinary victory of the war," was won exclusively by the men of the Southern Colonies, if we include Delaware in the classification. New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut were here unrepresented, although it must be remembered that the Southern Department was then under the command of a Rhode Island officer, General Greene. The New England States now aid in celebrating a courage and good fortune which they would gladly have shared, but can merely honor and commemorate. This only increases the sincerity, and perhaps even the value, of their tribute. Men usually have the credit of

more complete impartiality when they compliment the children of their neighbors than when they praise their own.

Yet, in a wider sense, we of New England may claim our share in every event of that great contest which found us a group of scattered colonies and left us a Nation. I have come hither, as it happens, from the original camp-ground of the first Continental army, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. On the edge of that old camp-ground stood my father's house. From its windows my childish eyes looked out upon the spot where Washington first drew his sword as commander-in-chief, and where Morgan and his ninety-six Virginia riflemen pitched their tents. Not far from that spot is the house where Washington was quartered, and where the poet Longfellow now adds the associations of literature to those of war. The day before leaving home I stood upon the doorsteps of that stately mansion, the very steps on which Washington and Morgan may have stood together, debating the dangers of the land, or perchance the homelier gossip of their Virginia neighbors. I bear you greeting from that historic house, from that famous camp-ground, from the Washington Elm, from the Governor of Massachusetts and from the Governors of those New England States now representing that portion of the Old Thirteen.

The battle of Cowpens, although hardly more than a skirmish when tried by modern standards, was in its day, according to the British historian Stedman, "a very principal link in the chain of circumstances which led to the independence of America." Lord Cornwallis himself described it, in a letter quoted in Tarleton's "Campaigns," as being "an unexpected and extraordinary event." It was extraordinary in three ways: It was a victory of a smaller over a larger number; it was to a great extent a victory of militia over regulars; it was a victory won upon a ground so selected as to reverse the ordinary precautions of good strategy. To draw up an inferior force for a pitched battle directly in front of a broad river has always seemed to the military critics very imprudent. But this very act showed the daring and the foresight of Morgan. When blamed he afterwards answered: "I would not have had a swamp in view of my militia on any consideration; they would have made for it, and nothing could

have detained them from it. . . . As to retreat, it was the very thing I wished to cut off all hope of. I would have thanked Tarleton had he surrounded me with his cavalry." Braver and shrewder words never were spoken by a military commander.

In respect to the disparity of numbers we have the authority of the editor of Cornwallis's correspondence, who states the whole number on the British side as 1050, and admits Morgan's force to have been "hardly equal." The contemporary estimate of the American force, by Governor Moultrie, was 1020; but this was undoubtedly exaggerated. Graham has since reduced the number actually engaged on the American side to 850, and Greene to 800. When we consider that the British loss comprised 80 killed (10 being officers), 150 wounded and 600 prisoners, and that the Americans lost but 12 killed and 69 wounded, the result was simply amazing. Few battles, where the advantages of position were so nearly equal, have ever showed such inequality of results. And when we finally remember that every one of Tarleton's men was a veteran soldier, while Morgan's Continentals made but about half his force, we can understand the amazement of Cornwallis when the news came in. We need feel no surprise when Moultrie tells us that he heard the paroled prisoners at Charleston deploring the folly of "entrusting such a command to a boy like Tarleton." Yet, after all, no general is to be blamed for at last encountering a general more brave or more fortunate than himself.

Others have detailed or will detail for you the remoter results of the victory at the Cowpens. How far away seem now the contests of the revolutionary time! Between those days and these has rolled the smoke of a later strife, now happily passed by. To heal the terrible wounds of the later contest; to criticise each other nobly and frankly, as friends, not vindictively, as enemies; to encounter side by side the new social problems of the new age; this should now be the generous rivalry of the descendants of the "Old Thirteen." There are sins enough for all to repent; errors enough for all to correct. It is useless now to distribute the award of praise or blame. There is not a State of the Union which has not its own hard problems to work out, its own ordeals to go through. No State can dare to be permanently



clouded by the ignorance of any class of its people, or to allow any class to oppress any other. The bad effect of a single act of injustice may be felt among children's children. But each generation learns its own lessons, and Time is the great healer. I have seen for myself, since the war, upon Southern soil, the spectacle of two races whose whole relations were utterly wrenched apart, and who are yet learning, year by year, to adapt themselves to the new and changed condition. No people ever had to face a harder problem. We of the North, believe me, are not ignorant of the difficulties, the temptations, the mutual provocations; nor can we forget that the greater responsibility must rest upon the more educated and enlightened race. *Noblesse oblige!* In the words of President Lincoln at Gettysburg: "With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the Nation's wounds."

Mr. Higginson's delivery was very happy and easy, and elicited frequent bursts of applause and good humored laughter.

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At 6 o'clock Governor Hagood gave a reception at the Windsor Hotel. Regular toasts were offered and responded to as follows:

By Governor Hagood: "The Thirteen Original States."

Responded to by Governor Jarvis, of North Carolina.

By Col. H. S. Thompson, of South Carolina: "The Army of the United States." Responded to by Gen. Hunt.

By Ex-Governor Bonham: "The Southern States." Responded to by Judge Christian, of Virginia.

By Capt. James Simons: "The New England States, the Cradle of American Liberty." Responded to by Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, of Massachusetts.

By Col. Gilchrist: "The Descendants of Daniel Morgan." Responded to by Lieut. Taylor, U. S. A.

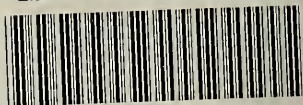
By Gen. Bratton: "The Gentlemen of Spartanburg, the Gate City of South Carolina." Responded to by Mayor Thompson.

By the Hon. J. J. Hemphill: "The Fourth Estate." Responded to by Col. Farrow.



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