

ADDRESS
OF
JOS. B. CUMMING
ON
THE OCCASION OF THE ERECTION
OF A MONUMENT ON THE SITE
OF FORT AUGUSTA. (ST.
PAUL'S CHURCHYARD)
NOVEMBER 22, 1901.

CHRONICLE JOB PRINT,
AUGUSTA, GA.

All countries of this planet are equally old—yet we speak of old countries and new countries. When we speak of the new we mean a country newly opened to civilized man.

A new country addresses the sentimental or spiritual side of humanity only through the manifestations of external nature. Such food as this part of man's organism requires, he must find in such a country in the solemnity of the unbroken forest, the grandeur of the lofty mountain, the majesty of the brimming river; or in the less obtrusive beauties of foliage and wild flower, vale and rivulet, and the thousand other appeals of unmarred and unscarred nature to man's spiritual part.

But the nature stage of a country passes. In the thirteen original states of this Union—in which fair sisterhood Georgia is the youngest—the duration of that stage was short, as we count time in the lives of countries. Then enters a country into the history stage. In this stage, that less gross and material part of man, which "cannot live by bread alone", and which, in the country's nature stage, fed upon the food, which nature's grandeur and beauty provided, finds at least some of its pabulum in the contemplation of the trials and achievements of humanity.

Let me give a concrete illustration of these abstract deliverances. I find it on this very spot. Oglethorpe, when he first came to the site of our city, which was to be, a century and two-thirds ago, found himself in the midst of primitive nature. If, outside of his subjective resources, he craved refreshment for the spiritual part of him, he could find it only in that encompassing nature. What had she to offer him on this spot? Doubtless all the charms of the forest—magnificent umbrageous oaks of every variety of that noble tree and wide-spreading elms and hickories, interspersed with the bay and the magnolia, and intertwined by vines, floriferous and many-colored. To the north and west he looked upon an amphitheatre of the everlasting hills, also crowned with the glories of the primeval forest. He saw debouching from those hills and flowing under this bluff a majestic river, greater in length and breadth than many another famed in song and story—more beautiful, too; for then crystal were its waters and emerald its shores. But this spot had no other interest than those unchanging features of nature. It had no history. The country was devoid of memories to stir the blood and quicken the pulse. It held no spot hallowed and glorified by

a noble life or an heroic death. It possessed no locality where one might stand and say: "This is holy ground. This place is baptized in patriot blood. This spot witnessed brave deeds done in a sacred cause." There was no field on which memory aided by imagination could marshal the spirits of the illustrious dead.

This same Oglethorpe, who stood on the wooded banks of the Savannah, had many times trod the aisles of Westminster Abbey. These two extremes present the idea I am seeking to express. The spirit here on the Savannah finding its refreshment in the beauty and majesty of nature. The spirit in Westminster Abbey feasting on the quickened memories of a glorious history. Which appeals strongest to humanity? Nature or history? The everlasting hills, the perennial river, the primeval forest? Or the ancient Abbey, the tombs and the effigies of those immortal "other living whom we call the dead?" Each will answer this question for himself.

This spot has passed beyond the nature condition and entered not a little way into the history stage. I fear its departure from the former has been proportionately greater than has its entrance into the latter. "What man could do man hath well done" to mar "the changeless things"—the hills, the river. The noble forests have fallen. The axe has denuded the hills. The plough has stained forever the limpid river with the color of the upturned soil. One must find interest in this spot in other features than those which characterized it in Oglethorpe's time. While in fancy we picture its then natural beauty, and while we lament its disappearance, we are largely consoled by reflecting on its present interest, deeper than forest or hill or river ever inspired. Since that time it has become the site of a temple of the living God, to which generations have brought their prayers and praise, their children to be baptized, their parents to be buried, and their lovers to be wedded. But its special interest, which has brought us here today, is the first fact in what I have ventured to call the history stage of this spot. We are here under the auspices of that noble band of patriotic women, the Colonial Dames, whose motto is "*Virtutes majorum filiae conservant.*" to take part in the ceremonies, intended to perpetuate the memory of the fact that this is the site of the little colonial fort which Oglethorpe builded one hundred and sixty-six years ago. In those far off days this outpost of civilization, which has grown into our fair city, was known not as the town of Augusta, but as "Fort Augusta". To this place traders resorted both for its commercial advantage and for the protection which this

little fortification afforded from the denizens of the neighboring boundless forest.

But everything passes—colonial days went by, and states struggled for independence. Then a more dramatic interest gathered about this spot. Within the compass of these walls, above these graves, in the sight of yon onlooking hills, in hearing of the murmurs of the near by river, men fought and bled and died in and around a larger fort—each in the cause he espoused, each under the flag he cherished. Here men fighting loyally for their king, and men fighting unselfishly for their country have hallowed the spot and given it an interest, which it could never have derived from the mere beauties of nature, were they ever so great.

In response to that sentiment of our nature which distinguishes and consecrates localities where critical parts of the historic drama have been acted, we come to this place after the lapse of one hundred and sixty-six years since the planting of the little colonial fort to commemorate that event, and that one, too, of larger interest—the siege and capture of the Revolutionary fort, within whose lines we are now standing, sometime British and sometime American, changing its name with its shifting fortunes, now “Cornwallis” and then again and lastly “Augusta”. Henceforth while granite and bronze endure, this monument will keep these historic memories from perishing from the earth.

With all reverence for the teachings imparted for generations in this nearby sacred edifice, I say it: How little we know of that other world in which we all believe! How far is it? How near? How thick the veil which hides it from our mortal vision? How thin? While “across the narrow night they fling us not some token”, are those on the other side better endowed than we, so that while we cannot penetrate the veil they may see and know what passes here? If that be true and there be among those lookers and listeners from the other side any who tasted here the double bitterness of death and defeat, they will know that we erect this monument not in triumph but simply in memoriam—in memory of the little fort, in this region the first bulwark of commerce and civilization; in memory of the Revolutionary fort, the goal and prize of disciplined battalions; and in memory of victor and vanquished alike. Success is an ignoble shrine at which to worship. Courage and devotion to duty, these be worthy of monuments. We are a people who have not hesitated to erect memorials to failure. Witness our noble Confederate monuments, all of them recording a magnificent failure frankly and

proudly, because filled with brave and noble self-sacrifice. We have imparted a new meaning to battle monuments. The theme of our monuments is not victory—perhaps unmerited: but courage and devotion to duty—though defeated. Let this monument, which we unveil to-day, stand on that high moral plane—a monument to duty done, an equal memorial to the victor and the vanquished, the successful and the unsuccessful brave, the men who found their duty in fighting for their country, and the men who saw theirs in upholding the standard of their king.



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