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Address at the Guilford battle
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Zebulon B. Vance

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As a Memorial
To her Brother
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ADDRESS

BY

HON. ZEBULON B. VANCE,

AT THE

GUILFORD BATTLE GROUND,

MAY 4, 1889.

Reece & Elam, Printers.

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

I congratulate this audience on the pleasant surroundings. I regret that my health has not allowed me to prepare a more elaborate address; but I have never yet failed to respond when called on by the people of North Carolina, and I am here to do what I can to assist in the Celebration of the Battle of Guilford Court House. [Great applause greeted this, after which the Senator proceeded as follows]:

From time immemorial that portion of the human race which has left any record of its actions has indulged the practice of commemorating the notable events of its history. The method by which this was done was a good test of their civilization. In Genesis it is recorded that Jacob took the stone upon which his head had rested, whilst the wondrous vision was displayed to him, of the angels ascending and descending, and erected it as a memorial pillar. Again, when the Lord appeared to Jacob when he came out of the Padan-aram and blessed him and renewed the promises which had been made unto Abraham, Jacob set up a pillar of stone in the place as a memorial, and called it "Bethel." Twelve stones were likewise set up in commemoration of the crossing of the river Jordan by the tribes dry shod. The sacred record is full of this method of perpetuating the memory of noted events by the priests, prophets and people of the Jews. The Assyrians and the Egyptians did likewise—but in a more elaborate manner. In fact, almost the only record by which we trace the history of the East is by deciphering the inscriptions upon their monuments and memorial structures. So enduring as monuments are the great pyramids that mankind has almost forgotten the purpose for which they were erected and by whom.

They have actually outlasted all knowledge or tradition concerning them. The Greeks excelled all others, perhaps, in the number and artistic excellence of their commemorating stones. Not only all great events, but all their great men were thus commended to the attention of posterity, by the erection of temples and statues, which have never yet been surpassed, if, indeed, they have been equalled. The Romans copied their custom and their art in this regard. To this day they remind us of the genius and glory of Greece. In very truth,

"The silent pillar lone and gray
Claims kindred with their sacred clay."

Much of the profoundest learning of modern times has been devoted to these exhibitions of Greek art and the Egyptology of the Nile. Thus the progress of art is traced from the rude unhewn stone of Jacob to the exquisitely chiseled and proportioned column of the Athenian Acropolis, and the wondrous structures of Egypt.

In addition to this method of commemoration, the moderns have adopted what may be called the traditional. Great masses of people meet together on anniversary days, and discourse concerning the events which are the object of the meeting. This we call "celebrating." It is nothing more than the renewing and strengthening the remembrance of the events which we wish to perpetuate. Perhaps of all the western peoples, we in the United States excel in this matter of celebrating events in our history. We are not satisfied with the mere erection of monuments or piles of stone, but we meet together in multitudes; we speak; we march in procession with bands of music, we fire cannon and display banners, so that the deeds which we wish remembered may not only be fastened in the memory by these adjuncts but may serve to excite the emulation of the young, and train them to that degree of perfect citizenship

which leads to the surrender of all things to the common good. It is well that we do so. There is no better school for our youth than this hero-worship, this exalting of great deeds! There is no imagination which can conceive the extent of its influence upon character; and it is always a high and noble influence. A pathetic story is told of a Scotch girl who had been sent to France to be educated. She was asked, as a part of her exercise, to give a description of a Highland regiment. She began to read her piece describing the tall, brawny forms clad in the bonnet and tartan, with the clay-mores at their sides, the proud, free steps with which they marched to the music of the bag-pipes, when the pride of being the countrywomen of such soldiers overcame her, and pausing, she burst into tears. The feeling she excited and the cheers with which her patriotic fervor was appreciated, showed that her education in the school of patriotism and hero-worship was already advanced.

After all that can be done with marble or granite, the truest monument by which the memory of any event can be perpetuated is to be found in the results. It rarely happens that an event in a people's history is worth the perpetuating in stone, which is not already everlastingly embalmed in the hearts of the people. What monument is required to keep alive the memory of the man who invented the mariner's compass, by which the trackless paths of the sea are made as familiar to commerce as our inter-state highways? What stone is necessary to the inventor of the art of printing, when all science and all literature, daily, unconsciously hymn his praise? What shaft is needed by the inventor of the steam engine, when the whole earth is full of the works which magnify him? or to the discoverer of the cotton gin by which the world is clothed? Does the memory of the great physician whose genius has mitigated human suffering depend

on a pile of stones? Or do the great lawyers to whose acumen we are indebted for the chief liberties of our people need our care? For themselves—no, but for ourselves, to show our gratitude and appreciation, to remind us we, too, can make our lives sublime—yes. Their great achievements are their monuments, for, verily, “their works do follow them;” and any shafts we may erect are rather ours than theirs. They testify, not so much of their deeds, as what lives in our hearts. The philosophy of this is found in the explanation of the wise and witty Cato, the Censor, who said that he had rather have the stranger ask why he had no statue, than to ask why he had one. In the walls of St. Paul is inserted a tablet, on which is written the name of Sir Christopher Wren, its architect, with the words underneath, “*Lector si monumentum requiris circumspice.*” The imposing structure reaching upward with all its lines of beauty and strength, was his monument.

Should the inquiry be made, what was done at this spot in 1781? and where is the monument of results to commemorate it, the answer might well be made in the single word, “*Circumspice.*” Beyond question the foundation of American liberty was laid on this spot on that noted day in March, 1781. A brief and philosophical consideration of the military situation of these colonies, and of the events which immediately preceded and followed the struggle here, will satisfy any one that the importance of that day's work is not over-rated by this statement.

The British armies having failed of success among the northern portion of the colonies, owing to the skill and vigilance of Washington, the attention of their commander was directed to the Southern department. There, it was believed that, owing to the hold which the British already had upon the country, its widely scattered rural

population and the noted loyalty of a considerable portion of it, the prospect of final success was much better than in any other quarter. With a picked and veteran force, therefore, Lord Cornwallis began his celebrated march from Charleston through South Carolina and North Carolina into Virginia. He calculated upon embodying the loyal element wherever he went, and encouraging it to join him and swell his forces. This was reasonable, after the shameful disaster at Camden, and to a great extent this expectation was justified by large numbers of loyalists joining him in South Carolina, whilst quite a number either did, or attempted, the same in North Carolina. But his presence and proclamations were two-edged weapons; they not only called out the tory element, but roused and brought to arms every patriotic Whig in the regions through which he marched. These alone proved more than sufficient to deal with their countrymen who took sides with the British.

The first great serious check which his hitherto triumphant advance had received was at King's Mountain in October, 1780. Preceding his advance into North Carolina, Cornwallis had sent Major Ferguson with a battalion of regular troops to call out and embody all the Tory element of the western part of the two Carolinas. This he did with considerable success, and incorporated with his own forces a large number of volunteers. But the effort to do so had alarmed the Whigs of the mountains of North Carolina and Virginia. These gallant frontiersmen sprang up as by magic, and crossing the great Iron and Yellow Mountains from the valleys of the Holston and Nolichucky, assembled in the valley of the Catawba and made their final arrangements to dispose of Ferguson and his Tories. Advancing by forced marches, receiving recruits at every step, their array became so formidable that Ferguson took the alarm and retreated to King's

Mountain, vainly imagining that the raw militia from the wilderness would not dare to attack him there. But little did he know of the spirit of these men. Like a mountain avalanche they swept onward after their prey, and like an eagle, when found, they seized it, in defiance of all military rules, in its own chosen position of strength. Authors, orators and military critics have dwelt alike exhaustively upon the wondrous feat of arms, its timely importance to the patriotic cause and its unexampled heroism. There is little concerning it which remains to be said.

To me, it appears impossible for language to overestimate its importance or to do adequate justice to the courage, audacity and war-like skill which enabled untrained militia, without artillery, without bayonets, without even discipline, with simply hunting rifles and inadequate ammunition, to assault fortified mountain heights defended by almost equal numbers, a part of whom were trained veteran troops—and carry them by storm. There is no story in the annals of war; there is no incident told of the great Hannibal, or of the retreat of the Tenthousand, or of the Roman legions in any part of the earth, which excels it for pure heroism, grim and sturdy courage, and as an exhibition of the true fire of war-like genius. I know that it is not perhaps in good taste for citizens of a Democratic country to boast of the blood which is in their veins, but I am sure I will be pardoned for indulging in a strain of filial pride by glorying in the fact that my grandfather was one of those who amidst smoke and fire ascended those heights on that day. However, perhaps I need not apologize. If it be proper for us to feel proud of our ancestors in the mass, it cannot be improper to boast of their deeds in the individual. The Chinese proverb well says: "To forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source—a tree without a root."

The next most serious check which was given to the royal advance was inflicted at the Cowpens in January, 1781. Furious at the destruction of Ferguson's command, Cornwallis hurried forward to retrieve the disaster, with the celebrated and hitherto invincible calvary commander, Colonel Tarlton, with a considerable force of splendid troops. He was met at the Cowpens by General Morgan with a large force of the patriotic militia of North and South Carolina, many who had participated in the victory at King's Mountain, and was signally defeated with the loss of a large number of killed, wounded and prisoners.

Thus, two most important detachments of the royal invading army having been defeated—one being absolutely destroyed—Lord Cornwallis, being justly alarmed for the success of the campaign and smarting from humiliation and defeat, determined upon a prompt and aggressive advance which should subdue all opposition and restore all lost prestige of his army. From this time forward until fate compelled him to retreat from the State it is impossible to withhold from him our admiration at his high military qualities, as evinced by the discipline of his troops and the moderation of his conduct. But it was decreed that he should fail, and on this spot where we now stand; in 1781 the finishing blow was given to all his prospects for subjugating the Southern Colonies, and which drove him to his ships at Wilmington, and finally to the end at Yorktown.

From this day dates the real freedom and independence of North Carolina. Had he not here been successfully resisted—had the army of General Greene been destroyed as Ferguson's had been at King's Mountain, beyond all question the independence of these Colonies would have been indefinitely postponed.

How this battle was fought and substantially won, and

the part which our North Carolina ancestors took therein, I will not attempt to describe to-day. It has been done again and again by our historians and orators, by Hawks, Graham, Swain and Caruthers, but never so well and completely done as by the honorable gentleman, David Schenck, who discoursed to you at your last celebration, and to whose untiring and patriotic exertions we are indebted for these efforts to keep alive the memory of our liberty-loving fore-fathers. For one, I unhesitatingly accept the conclusions of his laborious researches, and believe them to be the truth of history. I believe that the regular and volunteer troops of North Carolina did their duty that day as well as any men upon that field, and that the lines of raw, undisciplined militia did all that was expected of them by their commander, or all that could have reasonably been expected of them by any critic with sufficient military knowledge to judge of the capacity of such forces, so armed, against such trained and disciplined and perfectly armed troops.

What then was their work? What is the monument which they that day erected to themselves as seen in the result? Suppose an intelligent stranger were here and were told to search for that monument by looking around, what would he see? He would behold a free and independent commonwealth, which for more than a hundred years has enjoyed the blessings of liberty, and which has advanced steadily without retrogression or anarchy in all the paths of prosperity and civilization. With fifty thousand square miles of territory, containing thirty-two millions of acres, of which at least twenty-nine millions are arable and two thousand square miles of which are inland seas. This area extends east and west for six hundred miles in length with an average breadth of a hundred and forty. In it is found a general elevation from tide water to the mountain tops of six thousand feet,

giving the varieties of climate which are to be found within twenty degrees of latitude north and south. The variety of productions are abundant and commensurate with these varieties of soil and climate. Her forests have always been remarkable and still are, for their great extent and value, and the treasures within her bosom have barely begun to be explored and exposed. Not to mention smaller streams, this area is traversed by three thousand miles of water-courses of the dignity of rivers, furnishing in their gradual fall from the western highlands into the sea, water-power sufficient to turn all the machinery of the world. This happily located land, at once profitable, pleasant and picturesque, containing all the best gifts of God to his creatures, is the home of the children of the men who made it free and established its institutions and laws with a view to the happiness of its people. So well did they build that after more than a century of trial no flaw has been found in the structure, no weakening, no evidence of decay. Straight forward it has marched, still upward it has grown, in population, in wealth, in intelligence, without pause or delay, save only in the ever memorable and ever damnable days of Reconstruction. In 1790 the number of our people was 393,000; in 1880 it was 1,400,000; if the rate of increase which obtained from 1870 to 1880 be preserved, in 1890 our population will be at least 1,750,000, and whether it may be a matter for boasting or a matter for regret, it is equally the truth this steady and healthful increase has been aided very little by immigration. The statistics show that no American State has been so little indebted to foreigners for either population or wealth. Emphatically our progress is our own; and whatever we may be, THAT we have become by our own efforts. Let us love it accordingly. The Germans say, "One's own straw is better than an enemy's wool," and the Latins "The smoke of our own country is brighter than fire abroad."

So much do we already see of the results of their wisdom and valor. But what of the things in the future which we do not see? What poetic vision, though reaching "far as angel's ken" can picture the future which awaits this people, or point out where the influence of the deeds done on this spot in 1781 shall cease to affect their destinies? One of the most curious questions of metaphysics is that of the dependence of one event upon another. The casuists and theologians of the world have in all time disputed concerning its effects upon the free will of man and the decrees of God. The cause and effect can be more obviously traced in the material than in the moral world; and yet without refining too much, we can reasonably trace moral effects from great events over vast stretches of time. In 1883 the island of Krakatoa in the straits of Sunda was literally ejected from its place in the seas and blown into space. The effect was recognized in tidal disturbances upon every shore, more or less, where observations were made throughout the earth. You all remember the red skies which gave even additional beauty and glory to our celestial scenery at the settings of the sun in 1883-'84? The men of science have now determined without dissent, that those red skies were directly the results of that great volcanic eruption which had shattered masses of obsidian of which the island was composed, into impalpable dust. The force of the explosion had hurled the obsidian dust into those regions of the upper air which are far beyond the influence of the circulation near the surface; and by the operation of those lofty currents of which we know little, it had been diffused throughout the world, causing the beauteous phenomena at which we so much wondered and upon which we gazed with so much rapture. Who can say then what commonwealths, a thousand years from now, may not be inspired by our example, as our

prosperity and happiness were secured by these same deeds of our ancestors? Who can say that the unseen and lofty currents of human affection may not waft and diffuse the ennobling lessons and inspirations emanating from Guilford Court House in 1781, to the remotest quarters of the earth and to the most distant times, brightening the skies with crimson glory for many faint-hearted and struggling people?

I have said that the fruit of their labors constituted the true monument of our ancestors; that for themselves no other was needed, but that others were needed for us. That for our own sakes we should celebrate and erect shafts in order to demonstrate what was in our own hearts. It has long been a matter of reproach that North Carolina has done so little to perpetuate in stone her love for her sages and heroes. The day when the foot of the first Anglo-Saxon was placed on American soil is known historically, but the spot where the colony of the great and splendid Raleigh landed is unmarked by a single memento. This genesis of the mightiest revelation in the history of nations, was upon North Carolina soil, yet we have left neglected both the time and place. The men of Mecklenburg Declaration have as yet no monument. Until the patriotic impulse inspired one man, whose enthusiasm inspired you, this sacred spot had no commemoration. Cross Creek and Moore Creek are yet without a stone.* The battle of the Regulators, where the first blood was shed for real liberty in America is unmarked and unsigned to the traveller. Davie and Davidson and Shelby, Sevier, Cleveland, McDowell, Lillington, Harnett, Moore, all sleep in graves hallowed by patriotism, but unknown save only to private affection. We do not even sufficiently guard the traditions of their reputation, but leave incompetent or partial historians to

*This is incorrect, There is a monument at Moore's Creek,

slur their deeds or scandalize their memories. This criminal negligence continues to this day. Some of the stories and misrepresentations concerning North Carolina troops in the late civil war are sufficiently scandalous to make the blood of every truth-loving man in the State boil with indignant heat. We should not, in silence, permit those misrepresentations. The honor of those who died for North Carolina should be as sacred to us as the virtue of our mothers. The thanks of our people are due to all those who have come forward to defend our countrymen and secure for them justice in history. Notable among those who have thus earned our gratitude I am glad to mention Judge David Schenck, Capt. W. R. Bond and Col. W. L. Sanders. The research and labor of these patriotic gentlemen have already visibly affected the tone of contemporary authors; and I beg to assure them of the appreciation of our countrymen. Of our abundance we should everywhere erect those lasting testimonials of our appreciation of all of our great and patriotic citizens. I repeat, it is due not so much to them as to ourselves.

But there is hope for North Carolina worthies yet. Sixteen years before the birth of our Saviour there was born in the forests of Germany a child who was called Arminius; or as the German peasant loved to term him, Herman, Prince of the Cherusci. He conceived the idea of delivering his country from the dominion of the Romans, then in the zenith of their power. Not far from the time when our Saviour was teaching upon the shores of Galilee, and healing the sick, this patriotic German decoyed a Roman army into the morasses of his native country, and slaughtered it with such an overwhelming slaughter as rendered it impossible for the great Augustus ever again to conquer his country. Nineteen hundred years thereafter the German people erected a statue

in his honor. His example demonstrates that there is gratitude in mankind, though the proof was undoubtedly slow in coming. I trust that the people of North Carolina will not wait so long to do honor to those who served them and died for them in the hour of need.

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