

Edward Telfair.

ONE of the most accomplished and successful of Georgia's distinguished men was Edward Telfair. A zealous patriot of the Revolution, twice governor of his state, a representative in the national Congress, and a man of wealth, ability and influence, he was one of the most prominent figures of his times. He was born in Scotland in 1735, on the farm of Town Head, the ancestral estate of the Telfairs, and he received his English education at the grammar school of Kirkcudbright. He afterwards received a thorough commercial training, which was the basis of much of his subsequent success in managing the affairs of state entrusted to him, and in the accumulation of a large private fortune. At the age of twenty-three he came to America as the representative of a business house, and for a time he lived in Virginia. From this state, he removed to Halifax, North Carolina, and afterwards, in 1766, he settled in Savannah, Georgia. Here he soon established a successful business, and became well known for his honesty, thrift, and ability.

When the storm of the Revolution began to gather upon the political horizon, Mr. Telfair promptly took sides with the patriots, and became one of the most prominent men in their councils at this critical period. On July 27th, 1774, he was placed upon a committee to draw up resolutions assuring the other colonies of Georgia's determination to resist the unjust acts of Great Britain. He was also on a committee to solicit and forward supplies for the relief of the suffering patriots in Boston during the operation of the infamous Boston Port Bill.

On December 8th, 1774, he was elected as a delegate to the

Provincial Congress, which assembled on the 18th, of the following January.

On the 10th of May, 1775, the news of the battle of Lexington reached Savannah, and created the profoundest excitement. Impressed with the importance of securing at once every means of military defense possible, Edward Telfair, Dr. Noble W. Jones, Joseph Habersham, William Gibbons, Joseph Clay, John Milledge, and some others, most of whom were members of the Council of Safety, on the night of May 11th, broke open the powder magazine in Savannah and took therefrom about six hundred pounds of powder. This powder was concealed till needed, and a tradition states that a portion of it was sent to Massachusetts and used in the battle of Bunker Hill.

Mr. Telfair was elected a member of the Council of Safety June 21st, 1775, and in the Provincial Congress, which met in Savannah, July 4th, 1775, he took his seat as a delegate from the "Town and District of Savannah." He served on important committees of this congress, and on December 11th, he was reelected as a member of the Council of Safety by that body.

In February, 1778, he was chosen as a delegate from Georgia to the Continental Congress, and, with the exception of one leave of absence, he remained a member of this distinguished body until January, 1783. In May, 1785, he was again reelected to this congress, but it is probable that he did not take his seat. His business training rendered his services specially valuable in the domain of finance, and his sound judgment was much respected in the Continental Congress. His name is affixed to the "Articles of Confederation."

On January 9th, 1786, he became Governor of Georgia, and he discharged the duties of the Chief Magistracy with great ability and dignity. The finances of the state at that time were

in an embarrassing condition, and Governor Telfair devoted much of his great business skill to this situation.

He was a prominent member of the State Convention which ratified the Constitution of the United States in 1789.

On November 9th, 1789, Mr. Telfair was again called to the office of Chief Executive of the state, being the first governor elected under the new constitution. It was during his second administration that President George Washington visited Georgia, and in May, 1791, Governor Telfair in the most gracious manner welcomed and entertained this distinguished visitor at his home in Augusta, at that time the capital of the state.

The following letter from General Washington addressed to Governor Telfair upon his departure shows his appreciation for the honors and courtesies bestowed upon him:

"AUGUSTA, 20th May, 1791.

To His Excellency Edward Telfair,

Governor of Georgia:

SIR,—Obeying the impulse of a heartfelt gratitude, I express with particular pleasure my sense of obligations which your Excellency's goodness and the kind regard of your citizens have conferred upon me. I shall always retain a most pleasing remembrance of the polite and hospitable attentions which I have received in my tour through the state of Georgia, and during my stay at the residence of your government.

"The manner in which you are pleased to recognize my public services, and to regard my private felicity, excites my sensibility and claims my grateful acknowledgements. Your Excellency will do justice to the sentiments which influence my wishes by believing that they are sincerely offered for your personal happiness and the prosperity of the state over which you preside.

GEORGE WASHINGTON."

When Governor Telfair retired from his official position in 1793, he returned to Savannah where the remainder of his life was spent in the management of his extensive private business, in works of charity, and in the counsels of public bodies on important occasions. Here on September 19th, 1807, at the age of seventy-two years he died, and was buried with every honor due to his long and useful life. His body was interred in the family vault in the old Colonial Cemetery in Savannah, and many years afterwards the remains were removed to Bonaventure cemetery, where they now repose.

The will of Governor Telfair contains the following clause: "I do hereby require and direct my said executors to cause my remains to be placed in a rough wooden coffin with common nails in it, with black crape only for such as may incline to mourn."

Governor Telfair married on May 18th, 1774, Miss Sallie Gibbons, daughter of William Gibbons, Esq. Their children were Josiah G., Thomas, Alexander, Mary, and Margaret. Thomas was a member of congress from 1813 to 1817. Margaret married W. B. Hodgson, of Savannah.

A large portion of the Telfair estate was finally distributed by Miss Mary Telfair and Mrs. Hodgson in public benefactions. Among these are the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Telfair Hospital, the library building of the Georgia Historical Society now used as a public library, the Mary Telfair Home for aged women, Bethesda Orphan Home, and the Independence Presbyterian Church,—all in Savannah.

By these generous bequests and by the name of a county in Georgia the memory of the Telfair family is fitly perpetuated by the grateful people of the state.

OTIS ASHMORE.