



ZEBULON B. VANCE.

## ***The Great Commoner, Z. B. Vance.***

To ignore the name of Senator Vance in the history of Mecklenburg, is to leave unrecorded a name of a man "who was not born for a day, but for all time." In the year 1866 Gov. Vance became a citizen of this county, and remained a citizen of the county, and always came here to vote, up to the time of his death, which occurred April 14, 1894.

"Zebulon Baird Vance was born in Buncombe county, North Carolina, May 13, 1830; was educated at Washington College, Tenn., and at the University of North Carolina studied law; was admitted to the bar in January, 1852, and was elected county attorney for Buncombe county the same year; was a member of the State House of Commons in 1854; was a Representative from North Carolina in the Thirty-fifth and Thirty-sixth Congresses; entered the Confederate army as captain in May, 1861, and was made colonel in August, 1861; was elected Governor of North Carolina in August, 1862, and re-elected in August, 1864; was elected to the United States Senate in November, 1870, but was refused admission and resigned in January, 1872; was elected Governor of North Carolina for the third time in 1876, and in January, 1878, was elected to the United States Senate; was re-elected in 1885, was again re-elected in 1891, and died at his residence in Washington April 14, 1894."

His paternal and maternal ancestors both were revolutionary patriots. The "Vance Homestead" was a large frame building of the "olden time" with broad stone chimneys, indicative of comfort and hospitality. It stood near the French Broad river and in the midst of the Blue Ridge mountains. Now the house has been taken down and only a few stones remain to mark the site where it once stood. It is a place of beauty.

In front of it the river is smooth and placid as a lake; above and below it dashes and roars into a mountain tor-

rent, and you almost hear the echoes of the ocean. Around it the great mountains tower like giants, and their dark forests are mirrored in the deep, blue bosom of the stream. On this scene, amid sublimity and beauty, Vance first beheld the light of heaven. From this beautiful river, from these sublime mountains, from neighboring scenes, all bristling with heroic and patriotic recollections, he received his first impressions. These were the books from which he learned the lessons that were to be the foundations of his illustrious career. He was the son of the mountains, and I rarely looked on him without being reminded of them.

At the University, Vance remained two years and pursued a selected course of studies, and soon made a name for genius, wit and oratory. He was a special favorite of President Swain, who for so many years had exerted a powerful influence in elevating and directing the youth of the South and made all of us who came under it better citizens and better men. Young Vance was extremely popular with the students and also with the people of the village of Chapel Hill. Even then reports came from the University of his brilliant wit, his striking originality and his high promise.

He served one session in the State Legislature, and there gave unmistakable earnest of the illustrious life before him. He was elected to the House of Representatives in the Thirty-fifth and Thirty-sixth Congresses and took distinguished position in that assembly, which has been the lists of so many statesmen. In 1861, upon the adjournment of Congress, he returned home, and seeing that war was inevitable, raised a company of volunteers, marched to Virginia and soon afterwards was elected colonel of the Twenty-sixth Regiment, North Carolina Infantry, a regiment justly distinguished for the largest loss of killed and wounded during the war of any regiment, either North or South.

He had always been opposed to the secession of the Southern States, did everything possible to avert it, and was one of the very last Southern men to declare his love and devo-

tion to the Union. In the battle of New Bern, N. C., in March, 1862, Col. Vance was conspicuous for courage and coolness, and received the highest commendation for his soldierly conduct on that field. In August of that year he was elected Governor of the State, and received the almost unanimous vote of the soldiers. In 1864 he was re-elected Governor by a very large majority, and held the executive office until the occupation of Raleigh by Gen. Sherman in April, 1865. As the executive of North Carolina his administration was signally distinguished by great ability, vigor and energy, by ardent and constant fidelity to the Southern Cause, and by wise foresight and prudent husbandry of all the resources of the State. He was in every sense governor of the State. From the day on which he entered upon the duties of the office until the hour when he laid it down, his commanding genius asserted his competence for the great responsibilities of the position, and his administration deserved and received the unbounded confidence, support, and approbation of all the patriotic people of North Carolina.

He called to his councils the wisest, the best, the most trusted men in the State of all shades of patriotic sentiment. He inspired the people with renewed love for the struggle; he united the discordant elements among us; he animated the despondent; he tolerated the conscientious lovers of peace; he rebuked the timid; he brought back to life the spirit of our revolutionary patriots; he gave new hope to the army; he aroused the pride of the State; he strengthened all its means, and prepared for war to the end. Well may he have been designated as the "Great war Governor of the South." These acts of his administration are justly entitled to be ranked as historic. First, the organization of a fleet of vessels to sail from Wilmington, N. C., to Europe, with cargoes of cotton and return with supplies for the soldiers and essential necessities for the people. This supreme enterprise was eminently successful. For months and years the Advance and other vessels, commanded by skillful officers, well manned and adequately equipped, went like sea-



birds across the ocean to Europe, laden with the great staples of the South, and returning with stores of needed supplies, triumphantly eluding the blockading squadron, and sailed with colors flying up the Cape Fear to Wilmington. The soldiers were clothed and fed, cards and spinning wheels, sewing and knitting needles were furnished to our noble women, machinery for looms, surgical instruments, medicines, books and seeds, were all brought home to a suffering people. The history of the war does not present an example of greater wisdom and success.

Second: In 1864 and 1865, when the resources of the South were absolutely exhausted, when our noble armies were reduced and hemmed in on every side, ragged, hungry and almost without ammunition; when starvation and famine confronted every threshold in the South, and a morsel of bread was the daily subsistence of a family; in that dark and dreadful hour Gov. Vance first appealed to the Government at Richmond, and finding it perfectly helpless to give any relief, summoned his Council of State and by almost superhuman efforts prevailed upon the destitute people of North Carolina to divide their last meal and their pitiful clothing with the suffering Union prisoners at Salisbury. Humanity, chivalry, piety, I invoke from you a purer, better, holier example of Christian charity in war.

Third: During his administration as Governor in North Carolina, although war was flagrant, though camps covered the fields, though soldiers were conscripted by thousands, though cold-hearted men of ample means refused supplies to soldiers with bleeding feet, though the whole militia was armed, though thousands of deserters, refugees from duty, were arrested; though the War Department daily called for more men; though every art and artifice and device was practiced to keep the soldiers from the field; though spies and traitors were detected and seized; though traders in contraband of war were consequently caught *flagrante delicto* and captured; though in all counties in time of war civil authority has been compelled to submit to military

necessity and power, yet in North Carolina during the war, the writ of *habeas corpus*, the great writ of liberty, was never for one moment suspended. Immortal history! Worthy of Mecklenburg and the 20th of May, 1775.

In 1876, Gov. Vance was for the third time elected Governor of North Carolina, and his administration was the beginning of a new era for our State. The millions of fraudulent bonds that were passed and recognized by the State Legislature, were promptly scaled down to what they yielded the State. Our legislative hall had been filled with our former slaves, scalawags and men of uncertain places to dwell. All these things of a bad smelling odor, that proved so detrimental to our State were driven away by the great tribunal of our State. From this time onward North Carolina has taken on new life.

In 1878 he was elected to the Senate, and until he died, remained a member of that body, having been elected four times as a Senator. His record in the Senate is part of the Nation's history. He vigilantly defended the rights, honor, and interests of the Southern States, not from sectional passion or prejudice, but because it was his duty as a patriot to every State and to the Union. He was bold, brave, open, candid, and without reserve. He desired all the world to know his opinions and positions, and never hesitated to avow them.

His heart, every moment, was in North Carolina. His devotion to the State and the people was unbounded; his solicitude for her welfare, his deep anxiety in all that concerned her, and his ever readiness to make every sacrifice in her behalf was daily manifested in all his words and actions. Senator Vance was an uncommon orator. He spoke with great power. His style was brief, clear, and strong; his statements were accurate and definite; his arguments compact and forcible; his illustrations unsurpassed in their fitness; his wit and humor were the ever waiting and ready hand-maids to his reasoning, and always subordinated to the higher purposes of his speech. They were torch-bearers,

ever bringing fresh light. He always instructed, always interested, always entertained, and never wearied or fatigued an audience, and knew when to conclude. The Senate always heard him with pleasure, and the galleries hung upon his lips, and with bended bodies and with outstretched necks would catch his every word as it fell. He rarely, if ever, spoke without bringing down applause. His wit was as inexhaustible as it was exquisite. His humor was overflowing, fresh, sparkling like bubbling drops of wine in a goblet; but he husbanded these rare resources of speech with admirable skill, and never displayed them for ostentation. They were weapons of offense and defense, and were always kept sharp and bright and ready for use. He was master of irony and sarcasm, but there was no malice, no hatred in his swift and true arrows. Mortal wounds were often given, but the shafts were never poisoned. It was the strength of the bow and the skill of the archer that sent the steel through the heart of its victim. But strength, force, clearness, brevity, honesty of conviction, truth, passion, good judgment were the qualities that made his speech powerful and effective. He believed what he said. He knew it was true, he felt its force himself, his heart was in his words, he was ready to put place, honor, life itself upon the issue. This was the secret of his popularity, fame and success as a speaker.

He studied his speeches with the greatest care, deliberated, meditated upon them constantly, arranged the order of his topics with consummate discretion, introduced authorities from history, and very often from sacred history, presented some popular faith as an anchor to his ship, and concluded with a sincere appeal to the patriotic impulses of the people. No speaker ever resorted to the bayonet more frequently. He did not skirmish; he marched into the battle, charged the centre of the lines, and never failed to draw blood of the enemy. Sometimes he was supreme in manner, in words, in thought, in pathos. He possessed the thunderbolts, but, like Jove, he never trifled with them; he only invoked them when gigantic perils confronted his cause.

In 1876, upon his third nomination for Governor, speaking to an immense audience in the State House Square at Raleigh, he held up both hands in the light of the sun and, with solemn invocation to Almighty God, declared that they were white and stainless; that not one cent of corrupt money had ever touched their palms. The effect was electric; the statement was conviction and conclusion. The argument was unanswerable. It was great nature's action. It was eloquence, it was truth.

Senator Vance's integrity and uprightness in public and in private life were absolute; they were unimpeached and unimpeachable—he was honest. It was his priceless inheritance which he leaves to his family, his friends, his country. He was an honest man. Calumny fell harmless at his feet; the light dissipated every cloud and he lived continuously in its broad rays; his breast-plate, his shield, his armor was the light, the truth. There was no darkness, no mystery, no shadow upon his bright standard. His compeers will all remember the loss of his eye in the winter of 1889. How touching it was—a sacrifice, an offering on the altar of his country. For no victim was ever more tightly bound to the stake than he was to his duty here. How bravely, how patiently, how cheerfully, how manfully he bore the dreadful loss. But the light, the glorious light of a warm heart, a noble nature, a good conscience, an innocent memory, was never obscured to him.

In his long, tedious illness no complaint, no murmurs escaped his calm and cheerful lips. He was composed, firm, brave, constant, hopeful to the last. His love of country was unabated, his friendship unchanged, his devotion to duty unrelaxed. His philosophy was serene, his brow was cloudless, his spirit, his temper, his great mind, all were superior to his sufferings.

His great soul illuminated the physical wreck and ruin around it, and shone out with clearer lustre amid disease and decay. Truly he was a most wonderful man. His last thoughts, his dying words, his expiring prayers, were for



his country, for liberty and the people. A great patriot, a noble citizen, a good man, it is impossible not to remember, to admire, to love him. No man among the living or the dead ever so possessed and held the hearts of North Carolina's people. In their confidence, their affection, their devotion, and their gratitude he stood unapproachable—without a peer. When he spoke to them they listened to him with faith, with admiration, with rapture and exultant joy. His name was ever upon their lips. His pictures were in almost every household. Their children by hundreds bore his beloved name, and his words of wit and wisdom were repeated by every tongue.

What Tell was to Switzerland, what Bruce was to Scotland, what William of Orange was to Holland—I had almost said what Moses was to Israel—Vance was to North Carolina. I can give you but a faint idea of the deep, fervid, exalted sentiment which our people cherished for their great tribune. His thoughts, his feeling, his words were theirs. He was their shepherd, their champion, their friend, their guide, blood of their blood, great, good, noble, true, human like they were in all respects, no better, but wiser, abler, with higher knowledge and profounder learning. Nor was this unsurpassed devotion unreasonable or without just foundation. For more than the third of a century, for upwards of thirty years, in peace or in war, in prosperity and in adversity, in joy or in sorrow, he had stood by them like a brother—a defender, a preserver, a deliverer. He was their martyr and had suffered for their acts. He was their shield and had protected them from evil and from peril. He had been with them and their sons and brothers on the march—by the campfires, in the burning light of battle; beside the wounded and dying; in their darkest hours amid hunger and cold, and famine and pestilence, with watchful care had brought them comfort and shelter and protection. They remembered the gray jackets, the warm blankets, the good shoes, the timely food, the blessed medicines, which his sympathy and provision had brought them. In defeat, and in

tumult, amid ruin, humiliation and the loss of all they had, he had been their adviser, he had guided them through the wilderness of their woes and brought them safely back to their right and all their hopes. He had been to them like the north star to the storm-tossed and despairing mariner. He had been greater than Ulysses to the Greeks. He had preserved their priceless honor, and saved their homes, and was the defender of their liberties. He was their benefactor. Every object around them reminded them of his care, every memory recalled, every thought suggested his usefulness and their gratitude.

The light from their school house spoke of his services to their education. The very sight of their graves brought back to their hearts his tender devotion to their sons; and the papers and the wires with the rising of almost every sun bore to their pure bosoms the news of his success, his triumphs and his honors. They were proud of him; they admired him—they loved him. These, these were the foundations, the solid foundations of his place in their minds and in their hearts. From the wind-beaten and storm-bleached Cape Hatteras to the dark blue mountain tops that divide North Carolina and Tennessee, there is not a spot from which the name of Vance is not echoed with honor and love. But his influence and his fame were not confined within State lines.

In New England the sons of the brave Puritans admired his love of liberty, his independence of thought, his freedom of speech, his contempt for pretensions and his abhorrence of deceit. The hardy miners in the far West and on the Pacific hills felt his friendship and were grateful for his services. Virginia loved him as the vindicator of her imperiled rights and honor. From the farms and fields and firesides of the husbandmen of the republic there came to him the greeting of friends, for he was always the advocate of low taxes and equal rights and privileges to all men. From all the South he was looked upon as the representative of their sorrow and the example of their honor; and all over the civ-

ilized world the people of Israel—"the scattered nation"—everywhere bowed with uncovered heads to the brave man who had rendered his noble testimony and tribute to the virtues of their race. Even the officers, the sentinels and watchmen over him in the old capitol prison, in which he was confined on the alleged and wrongful charge that he had violated the laws of war, were spell-bound by his genial spirit and became his devoted friends up to the hour of his death. His genius, his ability, his humanity, his long continued public service, his great physical suffering, a martyrdom to his duty, the sorcery of his wit, the magic of his humor and the courage of his convictions had attracted the universal sympathy and admiration of the American people.

In this brief summary is embraced a great life. County attorney, member of the State House of Commons, Representative in two Congresses, Captain and Colonel in the Southern army; three times elected Governor of his State, and four times elected to the Senate of the United States. What a record and what a combination. A great statesman, a good soldier, a rare scholar, a successful lawyer, an orator of surpassing power and eloquence, a man popular and beloved as few men have ever been. Great in peace and great in war, equal to every fortune, superior to adversity and greater still, superior in prosperity. Successful in everything which he attempted, eminent in every field in which he appeared, and fitted for every effort which he undertook. He was master of political science, and distinguished in scholarship and literature. His political speeches were models of popular oratory and his literary addresses were compositions of chaste excellence. He wrote an electric editorial and drafted a legislative bill with equal clearness and brevity. His pen and his tongue were of equal quality. He used both with equal power. He wrote much; he spoke more. Everything emanating from him wore his own likeness. He borrowed from no man. He imitated no man and no man could imitate. He was unique, original, won-

derful, incomprehensible unless he was a genius with faculties and powers of extraordinary and exceptional character. His temper was admirable, calm, well-balanced, serene. He cared less for trifles than any man I ever knew. He brushed them away as a lion shakes the dust from his mane. In this respect he was a giant. He was like Sampson, breaking the frail withes that bound his limbs. He was never confused, rarely impatient, seldom nervous, never weak. He was merciful in the extreme. Suffering touched him to the quick. He was compassion itself to distress. He was as tender as a gentle woman to the young, the weak, the feeble. He was full of charity to all men, charitable to human frailty in every shape and form and phase. He had deep, powerful impulses, strong and passionate resentments—in the heat of conflict he was inexorable, but his generosity, his magnanimity, his sense of justice was deeper and stronger and better than the few passing passions of his proud nature. To his family and friends he was all tenderness and indulgence. His great heart always beat in duty, with sympathy, with the highest chivalry to woman.

“The man that lays his hand upon a woman,  
Save in the way of kindness, is a wretch,  
Whom 't were great flattery to name a coward,”

was always upon his lips.

He was ambitious, very ambitious, but with him ambition was a virtue. He aspired to be great that he might be useful, to do good, to improve and to benefit and to help mankind. His was not the ambition of pride and arrogance and of power. It was the ambition of benevolence and philanthropy, the ambition to elevate, to lift up, to bless humanity.

From early manhood he has possessed a respectable competence. At no time did he ever suffer penury. He husbanded with great care his resources and was prudent, frugal, thoughtful in his expenditures, but he never turned a deaf ear to pity or to sorrow. He was not avoricious; he had no love for money, and was never rich in gold, silver,



and precious stones or lands, but he was opulent in the confidence and affections of the people. His great wealth was invested in the attachments, the friendships, the faith, the devotions of his fellow men; that priceless wealth of love of the heart, of the soul, which no money can purchase. In many respects he was very remarkable. In one he was singularly so. He never affected superiority to human frailty. He claimed no immunity from our imperfection. He realized that all of us were subject to the same conditions, and he regarded and practiced humanity as a cardinal virtue and duty.

Senator Vance was happy in his married life. In his early manhood he was married to Miss Harriet Newell Espey, of North Carolina. She was a woman of high intellectual endowments, of uncommon moral force, of exemplary piety and exercised a great influence for good over her devoted husband, which lasted during his life. Their union was blessed with four sons, who survived their parents. His second wife was Mrs. Florence Steel Martin, of Kentucky, a lady of brilliant intellect, of rare grace and refinement, who adorned his life and shed lustre and joy on his home; and after his course was finished, he fell asleep in her arms. He loved the Bible as he loved no other book. All of his reverence was for his God. He lived a patriot and philanthropist, and he died a Christian. This is the sum of duty and honor. He has gone. His massive and majestic form, his full, flowing white locks, his playful, twinkling eye, his calm home-like face, his indescribable voice have left us forever. He still lives in our hearts. The great Mirabeau, in his dying moments, asked for music and for flowers, and for perfumes to cheer and brighten his mortal eclipse. Vance died blessed with the fragrance of sweetest affections, consecrated by the holiest love, embalmed in the tears and sorrows of a noble people. The last sounds that struck his ear were the echoes of their applauses and gratitude, and his eyes closed with the light of Christian promise beaming upon his soul.

On the night of the 16th of April, his remains were borne towards the mountains of the State he loved so well. The night was beautiful; the white stars shed forth their hallowed radiance upon earth and sky. The serenity was lovely. The whole heavens almost seem a happy reunion of the constellations. With the first light of day the people, singly, in groups, in companies, in crowds, in multitudes, met us everywhere along the way—both sexes, all ages, all races, all classes and all conditions. Their sorrow was like the gathering clouds in morning, ready to drop every moment in showers. We carried him to the State House in Raleigh, the scene of his greatest trials and grandest triumphs; the heart of the State melted over her dead son. Her brightest jewel had been taken away. We left Raleigh in the evening, and passing over the Neuse, over the Yadkin, over the Catawba, up to the summit of the Blue Ridge, we placed the urn with its noble dust on the brow of his own mountain, the mountain he loved so well. There he sleeps in peace and honor. On that exalted spot the willow and the cypress, emblems of sorrow and mourning, cannot grow, but the bay and the laurel, the trees of fame, will there flourish and bloom in perpetual beauty and glory. There will his great spirit like an eternal sentinel of liberty and truth keep watch over his people. It would have been one of the supreme joys of my life to have done justice to the life and the character of this great and good man, to have enshrined his memory in eloquence like his own. But whatever may have been the faults of these words, I have spoken from a heart full of sorrow for his death, and throbbing with admiration and pride for his virtues.”—*Eulogy by Senator Ransom, the colleague of Senator Vance in the United States Senate.*