

## Button Gwinnett.

**T**HE public career of Button Gwinnett furnishes a notable example of the power one man can exert over the life and destiny of another.

Dr. Lyman Hall, who was Gwinnett's closest friend, was largely, if not entirely, responsible for the attitude taken by Gwinnett towards the colonies in the struggle for independence. Whilst Gwinnett was a man of convictions and moved at times by strong prejudices, he had great respect for the opinions and character of Dr. Hall. Some time after the beginning of the Revolution, Gwinnett was in doubt as to the course he would take, whether to ally himself with the colonies or take position against them.

Dr. Hall convinced him of the justice of the American cause, and, in 1775, he began taking an active part in public affairs, and from that time forward became prominent, pronounced, and aggressive in his defence of the political fortunes of the Province then on the eve of a mighty struggle.

Button Gwinnett was born in England in 1732, about the time Oglethorpe was settling the colony in Georgia. He had splendid physique and handsome face. He was quite well educated and a gentleman of polite address.

He began life as a merchant in Bristol, England. He had come to America in 1772, settling at Charleston, S. C. Here he resumed his business as a merchant, but being attracted by the steadily growing Province of Georgia, he moved his property and his business to Savannah. In 1768 he converted his property into money and bought a large part of St. Catharine's Island. He at once established a plantation and gave his attention to agriculture.

This purchase put him in easy access to the home of Dr. Lyman Hall, in the Midway District. Dr. Hall was the leading physician of the community. There sprang up between the two a strong personal and political friendship that resulted, as stated, in changing Gwinnett's views on public questions, making him a strong and helpful adherent to the cause of the colonies.

Gwinnett's first public service was rendered as a delegate from the parish of St. John to the Provincial Congress, which convened in Savannah January 20, 1776. By this Congress he was selected a delegate to the Continental Congress, his associate delegates being Archibald Bulloch, John Houstoun, Lyman Hall, and George Walton. He attended the session of that national assembly on the 20th of the following May. It was at that session, as one of the members, together with Lyman Hall, and George Walton, he affixed his signature to the Declaration, proclaiming the independence of the United Colonies, July 4, 1776. About two months later, August 30, 1776, he presented to the Council of Safety certified resolutions by the Continental Congress, authorizing the enlistment of a regiment of rangers, horse, and foot—two battalions, two companies of artillery to garrison the forts at Savannah and Sunbury, to be erected at the expense of Georgia, and the construction of four galleys, to be built at the charge of the general government and under the supervision of the Governor of Georgia,—all intended for the defence of the Province. Gwinnett was largely instrumental in securing the passage of these resolutions.

Still retaining his position as a delegate to the Continental Congress, on October 7, of the same year, he became a member of the Council of Safety.

He had much to do with the framing and the enactment

of the Constitution of 1777, which for twelve years defined and supported Georgia as an independent State. Many of the provisions of that constitution withstood the changes of more than a century, and their beneficial influences are felt to this day.

In February, 1777, Archibald Bulloch, the first President and Commander-in-Chief of Georgia, suddenly died.

On the 4th of March following Button Gwinnett was elected to succeed him. He was to serve until such time as a Governor could be duly elected under existing constitutional provisions.

Gwinnett was unduly ambitious for preferment, and upon the day of his election as President, at his urgent solicitation, the Council of Safety passed an order, "requesting President Gwinnett to march into Florida with a competent force of militia and volunteers, erecting the American standard as he went, and proclaiming protection and security of person and property to all who would take the oath of allegiance to the United States."

The troops had been increased to a brigade. Colonel Lachlan McIntosh had been promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General and assigned to the command of these forces. Gwinnett had been a candidate for this position and he became intensely embittered by McIntosh's success. Because of a spirit of revenge, Gwinnett intervened in military matters to such an extent as seriously to impair the discipline of the troops and create insubordination toward the commanding general. All this was humiliating and mortifying to General McIntosh and caused great demoralization in the army.

Ambitious to signalize his administration by a feat at arms, Gwinnett planned the expedition against Florida. Instead of entrusting its command to General McIntosh, who

was the ranking military officer of the State, Gwinnett, heaping affront upon affront, set him aside and took command in person. The expedition failed most signally.

At the session of the Legislature in 1777, John Adam Treutlen was a candidate for the office of Governor against Gwinnett, and he was elected. McIntosh became a warm partisan of Treutlen against Gwinnett and had much to do with Treutlen's election. McIntosh was open and violent in his abuse of Gwinnett, having publicly pronounced him a scoundrel. This was more than Gwinnett could endure, and the quarrel resulted in a challenge from Gwinnett, which McIntosh promptly accepted. The two met and a duel was fought on the morning of the 16th of May within the present limits of the city of Savannah.

At the first shot both were struck, Gwinnett's thigh was broken and he fell to the ground. He was asked if he cared to exchange another shot. He replied, "Yes, if I should be helped up." To this the seconds would not consent, and Gwinnett was taken from the field.

The weather was very warm for the season and the wound proved fatal a few days later. McIntosh was confined to his bed for some time, but finally recovered. Gwinnett's death created great excitement and the threats of his friends foreboded trouble.

Dr. Lyman Hall brought the matter to the attention of the Legislature and charged the officers with great remissness in not arresting McIntosh and bringing him to trial for murder. As soon as his condition would permit, McIntosh surrendered to the officer of the law and gave bond for his appearance. He was tried and acquitted. This settlement did not satisfy the people nor allay the animosity of the friends of Gwinnett. McIntosh finally surrendered his military command in Geor-

gia and, securing an order from the Continental Congress, he took with him his deputy adjutant-general, his son, Captain Lachlan McIntosh, and his brigade major, Captain John Berrien, and reported at Washington's headquarters for assignment to another field for service.

Gwinnett was an able, patriotic citizen, devoted to American institutions, but he was over-ambitious and intense in his prejudices. An implacable enemy and intolerant of opposition, his career was brief but brilliant. He died May 27, 1777. In front of the City Hall in Augusta a monument has been erected 150 feet high in honor of Gwinnett and the two other signers of the Declaration of Independence. No one knows where his remains were deposited.