

**DISCOURSE ON THE LIFE AND
CHARACTER OF GEORGE CALVERT, THE
FIRST LORD BALTIMORE:
MADE BY JOHN P. KENNEDY, BEFORE
THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
DECEMBER 9, 1845**

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JOHN P. KENNEDY

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BEING THE SECOND ANNUAL ADDRESS TO THAT ASSOCIATION.



BALTIMORE:

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MDCCCLV.

ENTERED according to the Act of Congress, in the year eighteen hundred and forty-five,
By JOHN MORRIS,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Maryland.

DISCOURSE.

Mr. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—

Looking to the objects contemplated by this Society and its ability to attain them, and to the earnestness with which it has undertaken its office, I would venture to foretell that Maryland will find frequent occasion to applaud its labors, and to acknowledge much good service done in a good cause.

Its establishment is a timely and most appropriate tribute rendered by the City of Baltimore to the State. The munificence of our City will never find a more honorable object for its outlay, its intelligence a more dignified subject for its application, the patriotism of our City a more dutiful employment than that which is presented to its regard in the purpose and proceeding of this association. Baltimore indeed owed it to that community of which she is the social centre, to the intellectual accomplishment which dwells within her own halls, and owed, too, I think, to the name she bears—a name which has not yet been illustrated as fully as its historic value deserves—to set herself diligently to the task of exploring and preserving, as far as means exist, the past and present materials which belong to the long neglected history of Maryland.

We have now addressed ourselves to this task: taken the lead in it, as it was proper Baltimore should. For two years past this Society has very intelligently,

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and not without some good fruits, pursued the intent of its organization. We mean to persevere; and we now invoke our townsmen to stand by us, to give us countenance and aid, substantial contribution, to help us to rear a monument which shall tell to our own people, to our sister cities in the Union, and to all the world, that in the cause of letters and the elegant arts—the truest witnesses of high civilization and refinement,—we fully understand and perform the obligation which our position has cast upon us. I think I do the citizens of Baltimore no more than justice when I express my conviction that, for the promoting of a purpose so commended to their approbation, appealing so directly to their proper pride in the adornment of this their own homestead, and, above all, so grateful to that sense of duty which finds its gratification in exalting the glory of our country, by making known the virtues of its ancestry—I think I do them no more than justice in believing that their co-operation, support and encouragement will be administered to the objects of this Society with that lavish hand and honorable good will which become the men of an enlightened City, whose estimate of liberal art and science keeps pace with its well-deserved prosperity.

Our State has most worthy and urgent motive to call upon her children that they do not suffer her story to perish. A good story it is, and an honest. Much of it is, to this day, untold: unfortunately, may never be told; the material is beyond our reach. Much is still within our reach, though fast dissolving into dust. This society has come into existence just in time to rescue some of the fragments of our youthful annals from irrecoverable oblivion; too late to save

the whole. Would that some earlier generation had conceived the happy thought of addressing itself to the same task, when full stores of the treasures of our young Antiquity might have been garnered into a magazine safe enough to deliver them unmutilated into our hands! Once secure upon the threshold of this age, so noted for its zeal of inquiry, its love of illustration, and for its multitudinous press, we might have promised these annals of the past a safe transmission to all posterity. Whatsoever relics may now come to us, we may hope to speed them towards that farthest futurity to which the ambition of history aspires: no jot diminished in what they bring to our hands,—enlarged rather, and made more veritable by careful collation and exposition.

This charge, then, these older, maturer days prefer against that unskilled, neglectful Former Time, which had not the wit to see, nor the heart to value the riches of our Maryland birth-day, and of its simple-minded days of infancy: this charge we make against that Former Time, that it suffered precious chronicles to moulder in damp and forgotten crypts, and not less precious legends to die with the brains that nursed them.

Let this arraignment of our thoughtless and scant Antiquity go to the heart of this present time, by way of exhortation to incite it to the labor still of redeeming what is not yet utterly gone.

The history of our American settlement has an interest of a different character from that of all other history. It is not the interest of narrative nor of personal fortune, in any great degree, nor of important or striking combinations of events. It is chiefly, almost exclusively, that which belongs to the study of the development of moral power, the contemplation of great results springing from obscure and apparently feeble causes. It shows us men deliberately planning the foundations of free government; men self-dependent, endowed with the energy of homely good sense, and educated to their task, if not by a wise experience in the arts of good government, at least by a painful knowledge of the evils which flow from the neglect of them; men springing from the lap of a high civilization, and called to their labor at a period when the mind of the nation to which they belonged was stirred by an extraordinary impulse to forward this achievement, and which was able to communicate the loftiest spirit to those who undertook it.

The annals of this settlement are generally clear and authentic. They are, in greater part, preserved in official State papers, or in memoirs scarcely less to be respected. The deeds of the actors are often written in full detail. There is little room for legendary exaggeration. The men who engaged to lead these enterprises were as brave, as wise, as capable as any builders of empire in any past time. More capable, more wise, we may say, than the founders of older dynasties,—being enlightened men of an enlightened age, taught in all that Christianity could teach,—and not less brave and hardy than the hardest and bravest of antiquity.

Still their history supplies no great attraction by its incidents. It falls too much into the character of meagre individual memoir, has too little of that pomp of scenery, decoration, prestige, and grouping which charm in the history of the old nations of the world. The fortunes of a handful of adventurers tempting, for the first time, the vast desert of waters, and flying upon the wings of stormy winds to the unknown haven of an inhospitable coast, and finally planting a home in the wilderness, where no foot-print was seen that was not hostile, may furnish pictures for the painter's study, and warm the poet's fancy,—but they will be found to want the breadth, variety, and significance necessary to render them the most engaging theme for the historian. I confess I weary somewhat over these details of Indian strategy and cunning; these sad shifts to supply the wants of a ship's company seeking for food; these mutinies and miserable dissensions bred by meaner spirits incapable of enduring the griefs of their solitude; these stealthy ambuscades; these murders and treasons which make up so much of the staple of early colonial story. He must be gifted with a happy skill who, with such materials only, can weave a tale which shall make men fond of coming back to its perusal.

Nevertheless, there is a peculiar philosophical interest in the observation of this course of empire; an interest abiding more in the theme than in the particulars of its illustration. Amongst many speculations, we read in it the solution of a problem of high import:—What are the tendencies, longings, instincts of the human family, when committed to the destiny of a new world, and challenged to the task of constructing government:—especially what are these