

MEMORIAL ADDRESS ON GENERAL SAMUEL CHAPMAN ARMSTRONG

DELIVERED AT HAMPTON, MAY 25, 1893.

A few nights ago while driving in the woods of Alabama I discerned in the distance a large, bright fire. As I came nearer the light I discovered that by its glow several busy hands were at work building a comfortable, tasty, framed-cottage to replace the one room log hovel that had been their abode for a quarter of a century. The fire by which this house was being built was lighted at Hampton by Gen. Armstrong 25 years ago. What matters it that this fire was 25 years in passing through Hampton, through Tuskegee, through the Tuskegee Conference, to this lonely spot in Alabama? It was doing its work nevertheless, surely and effectively--and so it will be through the generations that are to come.

I am asked to perform a serious and embarrassing duty - speak of General Armstrong. It would be comparatively easy for us to speak of him as our teacher, but he was more, to hundreds of us who knew no man that we could call father; he was more and dearer than a father. It would be easy to speak of him as a friend to our race, but he was more, and the term "friend" is cold and barren when applied to him; he was the heart of the race--his great heart held us all so constantly, so strongly, so tenderly, that it gave way at a time when most men begin to live. The power of his personality, his influence over his students, the tenderness, the love, the confidence that existed between them, are, I think, indescribable and unexplainable and so we shall not, I hope, be misunderstood if we seem not only to revere but to worship his memory.

But on this occasion General Armstrong would be the last to wish us to utter mere words of praise. Every atom, every spark of energy in the economy of his great being was consecrated to and concentrated on one purpose -- the lifting up of the unfortunate whether black, red or white. In Virginia, North Carolina and the more Northern states you know how and where his life has penetrated and given light for darkness, hope for des-

pair and success for failure, and showed the world that there is a way to save the most degenerate and most despised.

What is the influence of this great life in the far and darker South. (And in referring to this you will excuse me if I refrain from attempting to explain how and why Tuskegee's work is his work, is his soul marching on, and how the fragrance of his life will carry it on in the future; how without his fatherly advice, his unselfishness, at times when we were surrounded by darkness and doubt, for there were acts of his that to me are too sacred and precious for utterance). The rose which I would place in his grave today is his work at Tuskegee.

Eleven years ago Tuskegee was one of hundreds of similar villages scattered through the Gulf States. Today it is the light-house for that section. Eleven years ago there were 30 students and one teacher; now 600 students and 38 teachers. Then scarcely a dollar and not a foot of land; now 1400 acres of land, 20 buildings, and real and personal property worth \$180,000; then one blind horse, now 260 head of live stock. Then the plantation where the Tuskegee Institute stood had known nought but the labor forced by the lash; today there are 19 industries kept in motion by 600 as happy hearts as can be found in America; then some feared that the Negro youth would be ashamed to work for his education, but these students have made and laid into these buildings with their own hands 2,000,000 bricks and of 20 buildings, 17 have been built and furnished by students themselves.

But our great chief taught us that students, land, buildings, horses and industries are of no value except as they contribute to the elevation of man. How has Tuskegee met this test? First, it had to overcome the indifference or hostility of many of the whites. This has been accomplished to such an extent that in Tuskegee the voices and hands of as many whites as colored are ready to be raised in defense of the Tuskegee Institute. While I knew of the respect in which General Armstrong was held by

the whites of the South, I did not know until his recent visit of three weeks to Tuskegee how deeply he had won his way into their hearts until it was shown by their warm and cordial welcome.

With my own people the problem was this: Surrounded by a dense, ignorant mass of 30,000 within a radius of 100 miles of Tuskegee, outnumbering the whites in some counties six to one, their schools in session three months, taught as a rule in wrecks of log cabins by teachers of inferior morals and ability. The slavery of the mortgage system like a cancer eating up soul and body, leaving the Negro in debt, landless, homeless and too often with empty stomachs and clotheless body. Their moral and religious condition you can easily understand when it is said the 3/4 lived in one roomed cabins and many of their churches served as cloaks to hide the sin and immorality of minister and congregation. How has Tuskegee tried to penetrate this darkness -- to remedy this condition? Let a single example answer: Six years ago a young girl educated at Tuskegee went into one of those communities where she found the people much as I have described, groaning under a load of debt, with worn and haggard countenances, without hope for themselves or their children. Finding this condition of things this girl took the three months public school as a nucleus for her work. But she was not content with this: She went among the parents, gave instruction in house-keeping, organized a sewing class, advised here and reprimanded there. Soon she organized the older people into a club that met every week. In these meetings she would tell them in a plain, simple, common sense manner how to save, what to buy and not to buy, how to sacrifice, how to live on bread and water, if need be till they could get out of debt and stop mortgaging. Thus by showing them how to use the results of their labor, how to turn their earnings in the direction of their mental, industrial and moral uplifting, the first year she caused many to stop mortgaging and make contracts for the buying of homes. In addition she showed them how by

their own efforts to build and supply with proper apparatus a neat, comfortable school house to replace the wreck of a log cabin. The second year out of their own pockets they added two months to the original three months school; the third year two more months were added, and now every year they have an eight months school, taught in their new school house. Now my friends, I wish you could have the privilege that I have had of going into that community and seeing the complete revolution, yes regeneration, that has been wrought in the mental, industrial and religious life of this community by the efforts of this one girl. Bear in mind that no one gave them a cent of money with which to make any of these changes, they all came about by reason of their having this Christian leader, this object lesson, this guide to show them how to use, to their own profit, the money which had hitherto been scattered to the wind in mortgages, high rents, for whiskey, snuff and cheap jewelry. Gen. Armstrong saw more than 25 years ago that it was to this kind of work - this helping the masses to help themselves - that we must look for the solution of the Negro problem and along this line it is slowly but surely being solved. The greatest injury that slavery did my people was to deprive them of that sense of self-dependence, habit of economy, and executive power which are the glory and distinction of the Anglo-Saxon race and we need not expect what was 250 years going into a race to be gotten out in 25 or 30 years; and Gen. Armstrong early saw that the only way to help these weaknesses was through the teacher educated in head, hand and heart. The work that I have attempted to describe is what he taught Tuskegee to do, and it is the work Tuskegee is doing. To do more or less of the work that I mentioned that young girl is doing, we have had at Tuskegee since the school started over 3000 students, 500 of whom have finished the course or have received enough training to enable them to do good work, and they are now laboring as teachers, ministers,

farmers, mechanics, and merchants, and these have taught not far from 30,000 children mainly in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana and Texas. Besides Tuskegee has been able to aid in starting those excellent schools at Mt. Meigs and Calhoun and to put in motion the Tuskegee Negro Conference which gives an annual opportunity for six or eight hundred Negro farmers to attend college for one day and fill themselves so full of hope, plans and inspiration, as to methods of growth, that it is bursting out all through the year in the shape of better schools, new homes, better ministers and practical religion.

At first Gen. Armstrong's methods and efforts were opposed by many but now the Armstrong fire is spreading all through the South and all acknowledge that from the first he was right. He, at the beginning, recognized the fact that the first 50 or 75 years would be occupied mainly with matters of bread and meat, and that the South was in need of people who could do something, who could put the fire under the pot. Others may excel in philosophy and theory but the Hampton man is always the one who can do something.

And now for what remains. The question still before us especially in the Gulf States - Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana and Florida-- is a large and serious one. The work is far from being done, but Gen. Samuel Chapman Armstrong has found the way which those of us who remain are to follow. There are hundreds of thousands, yea millions, in the far South that are unreached. The problem is one largely of morals and industry, but with Gen. Armstrong's faith in God and faith in man it can be solved. Standing now in the midst of the greatest sorrow that this institution has ever known, is it asking too much of you as students and graduates that out of this sorrow, this disappointment at not being permitted to behold here today our great father and savior who loved us and guided us as tenderly as any earthly parent, is it asking too much that out of this loss, there

shall come a reconsecration to duty, an intensifying of zeal, an increase in the usefulness and unselfishness of our work that shall bring out of his death a blessing to the cause rather than a loss.

Hampton men, ours is a precious heritage. We have been deemed and made what we are by the life blood and death of the greatest man of modern times. We cannot afford to waste in vain.