

Dr. Bateman's Address at Opening of Alexander Memorial Building

Following is the address of Dr. R. J. Bateman, of Asheville, at the dedication exercises of the Alexander Memorial Building, Forest City, Tuesday, March 15.

When John Lord came to the great hour in life when he felt like writing a history of Europe, he said every period in the history of Europe moves around a personality. In every volume of that most interesting history, John Lord summons, to credit or discredit, that dominating individual which created the center around which history and social experiences of every page of European history were of necessity made.

I am not at all sure but that there we have the genius of history—the great, human dynamic, dominating the periods of time, in the making of worlds.

If John Lord had written American history, he would have made one period around Washington—another period, particular section with Alexander Hamilton on one side and a fair-haired Virginian, Thomas Jefferson on another.

In the life of North Carolina, such periods would center around Zebulon Vance and Charles Brantley Aycock who carried the torch of education on as it had never been carried.

So, on and on, history came by those who have made it.

So, this evening, you have invited me back to this spot, which by the association of one individual, makes my memory of Forest City eternal so long as I live. When I first heard of Forest City, it meant nothing to me. One day, one of my deacons brought into my office, a tall, fair-haired, pleasing man, whom he said would bring his own request and whatever he asks you to do, he will see it through, he will back you. This fair-haired man, with the determination of a woman, said, "I have come to ask you to Forest City to held a meeting." I had not heard of Forest City before—that doesn't reflect on you; it was a want of education on my part. So, I began an association with your community, with a personality, which tonight, is more than sacred, a place which occupied the center of the center of his heart. A memory which easily moves my emotion—from that moment until the last breath left his body, in Jake Alexander I never knew a truer friend. He was a man of pure heart—I never knew a finer, more fortunate Christian manhood, than found in him.

So, when the time comes for me to pronounce a word in memory upon an auspicious occasion like this, I stand with humble pride, as a humble friend. It is no moment for eloquence; it is one for honesty and sincerity—that kind that moves from the center of the deepest emotion, in an honest effort to appraise the virtues of those who have won their place by toil and sacrifice. It is not a moment for fulminating praise but the praise of character that is made more beautiful than human tongues can describe. It would be unbecoming language to summons whatever imagery I might to tie praiseful phrases into long and colorful paragraphs and when through, pronounce that the pronouncement of my memorial to Jake Alexander.

You and I knew him—you knew him better than I. Yet, sometimes it seems hard to realize the splendor that rests upon the crest of such a beautiful soul—hard to find the radiance, even by those standing at a greater distance than those nearby.

I venture and presume only to come in the presence of his fellow citizens or brothers, not that you do not have his memory but as a friend, who stands about the bier to add a faded flower, which you might offer the more splendidly. Accept it, not because of its intrinsic value but because of the desire of which it is born.

If I started in here to mention the outstanding characteristics of this man, I would carry you far into the night. Such does not fit the occasion; it would not be pleasing to you nor to me.

I shall only mention a few which suffices the necessity of this occasion.

First, I would remind you having been born within three or four miles of where I now stand, he loved his native country-side. A man who could have lived and adorned any city, chose to live here, beneath these mountains, where he first saw the light—the undulating plains and in the midst of the hills, here, he learned to love the scenes of living. He had a most marvelous devotion for this specific community. When I think of him and of Forest City, I think of Brutus' attack on Caesar. It wasn't that he loved Caesar less, he loved Rome more. That Caesar was ambitious and lived and looked to the day when he would wear the immortal crown and be master of Rome. In answer to that his friend Anthony stood before the dead form and spirit of the lifeless body and summons Rome that three times he offered him a crown and three times did Caesar decline it. He reminds them as he lifts the robe so splendidly woven, calls to them and will have them remember that he wore that first on the day he overcame the Nervi.

When he had overcome, he gathered from their fields their booty—he did it that their coffers might be better filled. He reminds them that he had another ambition, other than that. He reminds them of the weariness of days and points yonder amid the parks, which he would have them remember that they were the gifts of Caesar—call them to remember that when Rome had been in want, Caesar had suffered. When Rome grieved, Caesar had wept and called them to testify that ambition should be made of sterner stuff than that. When the great climatic oration was pronounced over the ashes of Caesar, it brightens with the brilliance of sacrifice, it is the grave of a great servant.

When I see these friends of his come to hear me say in these poor words this memorial, above it all, he loved this physical spot as no spot beneath the stars. He never heard a preacher whose great, marvelous power enraptured his soul, enthralled his spirit's imagination but that he thought of you and laid plans to bring that star out of the galaxy—he thought you were worthy of the best. He never had a great experience, thrill, joy, that he did not wish that it might be shared at home. And, whoever met him, received always a hearty, cheery invitation to come to Forest City, perhaps unknown to the visitor but known and loved by him. Your areas may increase till square miles are included but the mastery and growth of this town can never go beyond this, the head of its ambitions by a plain, calm man, who lived in and was ambitious for the social life of the community in which he

lived and loved above all others. When the fame of wealth and business genius, followed his commercial hand, courageously and sacrificially, he came back to share it in the home he built and maintained and enjoyed in this community and had but one inspiration—that he loved it. I wonder if there are not many flowers blooming in life's hearts appreciation now for the success that would not have been realized but for the kindly man who dreamed of schools and church buildings. You know well how that bare-foot boy on your hillsides, was to you boys who grew up with him, you who are nearer his age, an inspiration, yet could you realize he would grow and pass; that such a character was growing and giving; that he was passing and re-passing without a proper appreciation? Stand in this temple, and remember this man, he who sat just across the way, he who suffered pain and pass without a general appraisal and abounding appreciation, then the tragedy is yours. I say, he loved you as few men ever love their home community. He never outgrew you. There never came a time when he wanted to build a finer palace in another town. He loved the country people—he was one of them. He loved the country churches.

As you plant that memorial, overlooking the highway, proclaiming his name, befittingly in letters large, that even those who read poorly shall read plainly, touched with gold as of his very soul, that may be out of which the spirits of the eternal are made—as you read that memorial, so fitting it is, it represents his talent, his accomplishments, his impulses. If we were to emphasize one of these which meant most to him, it would be what it meant to me—his personal relationship to me. Jake Alexander deserved a memorial built in this place. There may others arise, in other places—monuments—but you have built for him the most perfect one, expressing the genius and joy of the man, whose memory I am proud to stand and call him my friend as I proclaim and pronounce him to be yours.

Second: I would have you remember, his family and associates, could have never contributed a more gloriously fitting monument to his memory than in this way.

One of the last conferences I had with him, was sitting yonder in the sick chambers, with the doors closed, the tears running like streamlets over his emaciated face, as he talked that this building should be built. My visit was about over. I felt it our last talk in this world. There were two or three things, he wanted to have eternally closed in my mind—his idea as to this building program, which was thoroughly centered there in his soul; when its cap-stone should be laid (I do not know if he felt he wouldn't be here) it swept his soul as we talked about it. I felt whether he is in Heaven or on earth, that would go and it has. You, whoever, put one penny in it have in it the significance that that great heart did break in it, that this programme might go on. It was his purpose. There never could have been a more fitting memorial to Jake Alexander. You might have built a bank—and he was a banker of no mean degree. You might have built a mill—for he was a man of a great textile mind. In fact, any commercial building and pronounced it his genius and it wouldn't have been misplaced nor not unfitting; but when you touch the highest thrill, picked for him the ambition dominant, you did it when you put it into a Church, dedicated to the teaching of the Word of God.

Friends, I never knew a more healthy Christian man than Jake Alexander. I have no respect for the pietistic in face only; no respect for pious tears, that go no deeper, dominating human life. I love healthy contact in a virile and dynamic way. I never knew a finer type of real Christian manhood, nor a more natural, honest to God Christian. There wasn't anything that would sicken you, becloud you, but there was radiance—I never knew a more happier man.

The first time Mr. Easom and I were here, the Church was without a pastor. A group met in Roy Blanton's office (I think I could call the names of the men present) and called me to come up. Dr. Bostic, Roy Blanton and several other were there. They said we should have the best pastor we can secure; we want you to tell us where we can get the best. More portended in this one thing than this Church ever imagined. When I called Dr. Ayers and told him it had to be done, called him from New Bern, the Committee was conferring as to whether he was interested in becoming pastor of the most dynamic and aggressive group I ever knew.

That great Christian had that thing first. Do you remember what he did? Mrs. Alexander will remember, he said I will not permit any engagement to take me out of the city during the meeting—tell them my Church is having a meeting and I cannot go. He said, I am going to stay with you boys until this is over. I baptized 65 right there, in a short while I would go and I turned the Church loose and have seen it come to magnitude, to the marvelous things taking place, under this virile Bible man who has lead you. The Lord guides that type of Christians. He said, the Church,—I believe we ought to have the best. He thought that. He was virile to the center.

He loved a good fox hunt as well as any man I ever saw. There was something in the ring over the hills when the red fox was going from hill-top to hill-top,—good hounds found great cheer in following that group. He was as hilarious in his seat in the grand stand at the ball park. Of course, it mattered not what side—he was for Asheville, as a courtesy to his guest—for I was always his guest where there was anything to pay. There he was in full zest. When the High School teams were here, his best interest was always in his own home group. He could come back from a fox hunt and aid in a meeting without even changing clothes. Religion was natural—I never saw it more becomingly or effectually worn than he wore it. There wasn't a bit of "can't" in him. He had a marvelous spirit. I never knew a more finely spirited man. I didn't know there was any difference in our ages. He was the same age with any group. When with a group of boys, he immediately became thrilled with interest, and they caught fire on the altar of his own spirit. He as always dynamically interested in whatever was on. Christianity blends in manhood, in the social instinct—harmonizes with ideals of friendship—Christianity harmonizes with ideals of brotherhood and fellowship. He was a normal Christian. No man ever turned back from the Cross by a soul, a life, like J. F. Alexander's. Never! I never saw a pietism there, hypocrisy there. He had steel—iron in his personality. You wouldn't love him if he didn't. I loved him for his fire, virility—the strength in his make-up. He was a Christian not only in a distant country but more effectually where better known.

There is a scene in my memory—out at Golden Valley. We were meeting a group of mountain boys and girls. We drove out. This big, busy man, taking time to go out for an interview in these hills, in a little way-side house. It was an evidence, that he might stand and aid me as I preached the cause of Christ to those boys, young men. I stood to do the best I could. When I gave the invitation to those interested, I shall never forget that scene, that man went from boy to boy, young man to young man and gave him personally the message that was made personal. I do not know how many were converted that morning but in the quiet hush of that morning, locked away from the world, with nothing but the Spirit and the contact of a great heart, I never saw a man in greater Christian contact than I saw, there in that mountain school. He was most effectual right here. I said you did not have a pastor when I held this meeting but you had a friend. Mr. Easom, with me, and he himself an effectual worker—together they went from office to office, plant to plant, wherever men were found, talked to them, until, some one hundred men came and dedicated their lives to the service of the Son of God. I say, more real serious credit for whatever happened in those days, more than any other thing was his laboring during those days. I believe more prayer, more love, came from his heart than from mine or Mr. Easom's or any other.

So, tonight, I want to explain that a man can be a man and at the same time be a great Christian. When Harold Bell Wright wrote the first lines to one of his books, he said "There is a land, where for man to live, he must be a man." So, tonight, this is the hour and this has been exemplified in a man that to be verily a Christian, he has to be a man and if he is going to be truly a man and realize the biggest and best, he must also be a Christian. It work the same—aggressively—on one side and on the other. Lest, I detain you, and I shouldn't allow sentiment to lead me on, yet not because much more might not be said, for immortality cannot be exhausted, the essence of character cannot be over extolled, I mention the last thing. The great silent voices are those that speak

with greatest importance. When Eugene Thyran painted the picture of the Maid of Orleans, who you remember, when France was longing for a leader, led France back to life and victory. England was driving against her, you recall, when this marvelous picture was made by that wonderful Franchman, Eugene Thyrand. He draws the picture, down yonder by the Spring, sitting, spinning always, as the peasant maiden, she was. He makes her great, marvelous eyes look away. Yonder, the messengers seem compelling upon her a flood of messages in glory, hidden in the clouds, pointing to the fields of France, telling Joan of Arc, that men had lost their position; soldiers had lost their courage; statesmen had lost their leadership—must France die? and she listens to the voices—O, the voices, she could never get away from them. Friends, I remove my hat and take off my shoes for those who listen to the voices that sing higher than I. Whether peasant or royalty, here are the voices for higher and more glorious appeal. Eugene Thyran paints the picture—history starts there. A girl arises, finds her way over a thousand barriers, until in armour white as snow, the Maid of Orleans, leads France to victory. That explains the immortal one reason—she learned to listen to and interpret the voices—the thousand silent voices. She couldn't get France to hear. If her army had heard, France would have dominated Europe and never lost it. Thank God for those who hear the voices, those whose lives are dominated under God. It can be done; it should be done. Such voices moved Jake Alexander. He recognized, I've got to meet this money, face to face with God. I tell you the days a man is marching through when he is making his will, in those terrible hours, if they could be known, would have been a benediction to any business man. I have got to meet this money before God. A man whose life was dominated by a great conviction, that I've got to stand before God and give an account. Those voices.

One more thing—Mrs. Alexander will pardon my liberty with the intimacies of that home. The last great sacrifice that man made for God, the day he died, believed it would happen, that God would take that baby boy of his and make him a preacher of the Gospel of Christ. He said, I do not want him to make money—I want him to preach the Gospel. With tears speaking pages as if penned by a great writer—I want that boy to preach the Gospel! When a man lays his flesh and blood on the altar, I say the voice everlasting has spoken. It make life worthwhile, hereafter. You have followed through—you have built a living building that shall never die. When stones, brick, cover, turn to dust, if time lasts so long, yet in these days and actions, you bring these dynamic words into reality into the lives of thousands, ten thousands and ten times ten thousands. You have done it well, properly. I feel he is mighty close to us tonight, knows what we are doing. I do not believe we need

to use a long instrument of speech as you might think. If he could walk those halls, he would walk them with pride, stand with head uncovered, with reverent love, and presently stand about that altar. If he were here, you would know what he would be doing—sitting over there, somewhere, tears flowing down his cheek, thanking God, that He had so gloriously blessed in giving that building to this community for the teaching of God's Word.

So, tonight, you have done well, with becoming friendship, built accurately, more fittingly than you might truly realize. When I came, I chose to walk alone. As I entered the vestibule, I saw the speaking likeness of the kindest man you ever knew. It is fitting that you hung his picture in that building, dedicated to the teaching of the Word of God. He wouldn't take one word out of it for Christ, but it is fitting that you did it. I began in the Social Hall—he loved the social life—you have built a place where social contacts can be enjoyed. I saw how the Bible Class could be assembled there. I went on through, saw how the children would grow to manhood and womanhood. As I came out to the care-taker and stood only to say, if they could have spent without stint and modeled after the artists of the land, stone from the greatest quarry of the earth, some splendid mausoleum, if Jake Alexander chose between such a memorial tonight, left only to speak to him, without a mission, I believe the man would come again and place his life against that great offering (Pointing to Educational Building) and say—that is my soul's ideal.

So, my message is done tonight. I wish I could do better, do more. So, with all my soul, I congratulate you—more, I rejoice with you in this great, glorious day. Forest City has never seen such a day in her history, all past gifts had their part. I congratulate your pastor who has stood by through these months, years, until this has yielded to the dearest offering of his hand. So, the lay members of the Church, whom Jake Alexander knew from childhood—his old associates. I express my appreciation to the city wide, which shows such earnest religious feeling and appreciation to the beautiful tribute on this highway, your main street. God carry you to greater service as the beckoning years may come. May you rise to service with unstinted passion; lead to Christ, those who cross your path.

The last time we rode together, until coming to the train at Spartanburg, the last ride in his machine, I drove, returning to a filling station, he said "Doctor, turn in here a minute—I don't believe these boys are Christians." He called them to the car with voice already weak and tremulous and urged them to come to the meeting, give their hearts to Christ—one promised to come, the other might. I drove the car away, because the ministering spirit was too weak. I would that another would rise in your world and that you might claim him in such glorious sacrificial service as this. God bless you."

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