

ANN PAMELA CUNINGHAM (From The State.)

In The Interlude, which was the woman's edition of the Charleston News and Courier published during the Charleston exposition, one of the most interesting of the many worthy and valuable articles and communications by leading women of this State and of the South was an appreciation of Ann Pamela Cunningham and an account of her achievement in preserving Mount Vernon to America, written by the late Miss Isabella D. Martin of Columbia.

One of the literary clubs of Columbia, in devoting an afternoon recently to a study of Miss Cunningham, discovered that less is known here in her native State of the little South Carolina woman of ideas and energy than in other parts of the country. This is brought out by Miss Martin in her article, which is reprinted here.

I have often asked a class of Southern young women to tell me something of "The Southern Matron," or of Miss Ann Pamela Cunningham, and invariably the question has been met by a chilling silence. Yet, once sitting where the waters of the Potomac lap the turf of Mount Vernon, a Chicago girl at my side gave glory to the name of the South Carolina woman who saved the home of Washington for his countrywomen.

Therefore it is that it gives me a very great pleasure to be able to throw together a few facts which I have been able to glean concerning a life whose self-abnegation, grand patriotism and high purpose may, I trust, prove an incentive to the generation in whose hands lies the future of our well-beloved State.

I wish just here to acknowledge my indebtedness to Miss Mary Miller of Winthrop college, class of 1893, to whose admirable sketch of Miss Cunningham I owe many of the facts in the following article.

When I was a very young girl I used to see among my mother's papers certificates stating that she and I were members of the Mount Vernon association, for the purchase of the home and tomb of Washington.

The surest test of Washington's greatness, it has always seemed to me, is that it stood the close scrutiny of his own and succeeding generations. There was no mist between him and them, which, like the vapors of the Brecken, could magnify his proportions. He stood face to face with his people, and was recognized by his own contemporaries high among the immortals.

So to the young people of my day the sight of those certificates was an enthusiasm and an inspiration. Then when we heard Mr. Everett's grand oration, and knew all this was due to the efforts of a feeble young South Carolina woman, it well may be imagined to what heights our admiration for that young woman rose.

Few of us have not been touched as we sailed down the Potomac and heard the tolling of the bell and saw every hat lifted as we passed Mount Vernon. Like the calling of the name of La Tour d'Auvergne, when the roll call of the French grenadiers was sounded, it is a monument more lasting than marble, more durable than brass and more touching than any tribute of prose or verse. It was this incident, we are told, which directed the life purpose of Ann Pamela Cunningham. As they passed the venerated spot her mother said to her: "What a beautiful thing it would be if the women of the country could organize and purchase Mount Vernon and hold it always for the nation." The young woman instantly took up the idea and carried it out with such zeal and perseverance that its success was soon assured.

When it became known that congress had virtually declined to purchase and preserve Mount Vernon in December, 1853, Miss Cunningham began her work. The Washington heirs felt obliged to sell and offered the estate for \$200,000. Her stirring series of articles, signed "A Southern Matron", aroused the country and in 1854 the women of the United States, under her guidance, formed the Mount Vernon association. It was incorporated, a charter secured and negotiations entered into for the purchase of the house and its environs and 200 acres surrounding the estate.

The inspiration was caught by the Hon. Edward Everett, then considered the greatest orator in America. His grand oration on Washington was delivered by him in many towns and cities and brought into the treasury of the association about \$70,000. Private suggestions in large amounts poured in, beautiful entertainments were given, and in 1860 the work was done, and Ann Pamela Cunningham saw the sacred spot in the custody of her countrywomen.

Then came the struggle of the South for independence, and during the war for State rights the work which had been begun of restoring the place came to a stop. When the war was over not only was the work of rehabilitating the house and grounds to be done, but it was found that there was a debt on the estate.

And so it seemed as if the life work of Ann Pamela Cunningham had to be done over.

Woman of Resources.

She was equal to the emergency. The council of Mount Vernon, formed of vice regents, representing the 13 original States, with Miss Cunningham as regent, in spite of the desolation which reigned around, set to work again. In 1868 the undaunted regent, ill almost to death, went to Washington and by efforts which may well be called superhuman succeeded in securing from congress a bill granting \$7,000 to repair the home of tomb of the father of his country! It was her last victory, and then the tired flesh gave way and the heroic woman went back to South Carolina, to her ancestral home at Rose Mount, to die.

With the freedom and privileges enjoyed by the women of the present day it is hard to count the cost of the work of Miss Cunningham in her circumstances. Indeed, like most great undertakings, it seems to have grown. Her first idea appears to have been to call upon the women of the South alone. But as the idea widened and spread, she gladly embraced as her coadjutors women from all parts of the United States. When one considers the obstacles she surmounted, the difficulties against which she struggled, the prejudices she fought and overcome, her success seems little short of a miracle. But she came from sturdy stock, men and women who had conquered the forest, tamed the wilderness and trained the streams of the new world, and "blood will tell."

Those who remember her, tell of the vivid personality and wonderful magnetism which, from the couch to which for years she was for the most part confined, controlled and inspired thousands; of the magnificent development of brain and lustrous eye which told of the mighty spirit within.

When Rest Came. Truly it was a marvelous force which could influence such men as Edward Everett, George Riggs Frelinghuysen, Reverdy Johnson and even from South Carolina enlist the aid of Charles Sumner and Garret Davis. It was my privilege to be present at the funeral of Miss Cunningham. By her own request her body was brought to Columbia and laid to rest in the capital of the State she loved so well.

A deputation of citizens met the honored corpse at the train and formed an escort to the churchyard of the First Presbyterian church, where, with solemn religious rites, it was committed to the earth until the resurrection. A handsome granite sarcophagus marks the sacred spot. But standing on the porch of the mansion at Mount Vernon, gazing over the beautiful prospect and noting the loving car with which every memento of Washington is preserved, and remembering that all this is owing to the loyalty and patriotism of Ann Pamela Cunningham, one involuntarily exclaims: "Si monumentum requiris circumspecte."

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A. C. Gilpin, Notary Public.

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