

The Georgia Colony

Georgia was the last of the thirteen original colonies to be settled, and, though it long remained the weakest of them all, its history is very interesting. It, too, was a country of refuge for those suffering persecution, but their affliction was different in its nature from those of whom we have made record.

One of the remarkable facts connected with the government of nations claiming the highest civilization, hardly more than a century ago, was the brutality of their laws. Many crimes, comparatively trifling in their nature, were punishable with death. One of the most cruel of these oppressive laws was that which permitted a man to throw into prison a neighbor who was unable to pay the money he owed. If a poor tenant fell ill, and could not pay his landlord, the latter could have him flung into jail and kept there until the debt was paid. Since the debtor was unable to earn a penny while in prison, and probably his wife and children were equally helpless, the landlord thus deprived himself of all possibility of getting his money, while the wretched debtor literally "rotted" in prison. Thousands died in dreadful misery, merely because they were poor.

This system of allowing imprisonment for debt prevailed in our own country until within the memory of men still living. It makes one's cheeks tingle with shame and indignation to recall that Robert Morris, who devoted all his wealth and energies to raising money for the patriots during the Revolution, who furnished Washington with thousands of dollars, and but for whose help the war must have failed, became poor after independence was gained and was imprisoned for debt.

The system caused-such horrible suffering in England that the pity

of all good men was stirred. Among these was James Edward Oglethorpe, one of the most admirable characters in modern history. He was a brave and skillful soldier, eminently just, of the highest social position and a member of the Parliament. He determined to do something practical for the perishing debtors in English jails. He, therefore, asked George II to give him a grant of land in America to which the imprisoned debtors could be sent, and the king, whose heart also seemed to be touched, promptly did so. It was said of Oglethorpe that the universal respect felt for him made certain that any favor he asked of his own associates or friends would be willingly granted.

The king not only presented him with valuable equipments, but Parliament granted him a liberal sum, to which wealthy citizens added. He had the best wishes of his entire country when he sailed for America with one hundred and fourteen persons. He named the new colony Georgia in honor of the king, and began the settlement of Savannah in 1733, Darien and Augusta being founded three years later. It need hardly be said of such a man, that, like Penn and Baltimore, he bought the lands anew of the Indians and retained their friendship from the start. On one of his visits to England he took a party of red men with him, entertained them at his country place and presented them at court.

The Spaniards claimed Georgia as their own territory, and raised a large force with which to expel Oglethorpe, whose colony had been increased by the arrival of other immigrants, but the English officer handled his men with such extraordinary skill that the Spaniards were utterly routed.

1. Why did people go to Georgia?

2. What does it mean to be in debt?

4. What happened to debtors who could not come up with money to pay their bills?

5. Who is credited with founding Georgia?

6. Who was Georgia named after?