Exploration and Settlement

ORIGIN OF THE NAME CAPE FEAR.

By George Davis.

The origin of the name Cape Fear and its confusion in some of our early maps with Cape Fair led, many years ago, to a discussion by the Historical and Scientific Society of Wilmington, of which this writer was the secretary. A prominent Wilmingtonian of his day, Mr. Henry Nutt, to whose indefatigable, intelligent efforts and public spirit the closure of New Inlet was largely due, stoutly maintained in a forceful address before that body that the name was originally Fair and not Fear.

Mr. George Davis subsequently took the opposite view in his valuable contribution entitled *An Episode in Cape Fear History*, published in the *South Atlantic Magazine*, January, 1879, which I here reprint under the above title.

Is it Cape Fair? Or Cape Fear? Adjective or noun? "Under which king, Bezonian?" This old familiar name under which our noble river rolls its waters to the sea, is it the true prince of the ancient line, or a base pretender, usurping the seat of the rightful heir, and, after the fashion of usurpers, giving us terror for beauty, storm for sunshine?

There are some among our most intelligent citizens who maintain that the true name was, and ought to be now, Cape Fair; and that it was originally so given because the first adventurers, seeing with the eye of enthusiasm, found everything here to be fair, attractive, and charming. And it has even been said very lately that it was never called by its present name until after 1750, and never officially until 1780. (Address of H. Nutt before H. and S. Society.) Unfortunately, in the mists which envelop some portions of our early history, it is sometimes very difficult to guard against being betrayed into erroneous conjectures by what appear to be very plausible reasons; and the materials for accurate investigation are not of easy access. It is not surprising, therefore, that this opinion should have existed for some time, not generally, but to a limited extent. Beyond all doubt it is erroneous, and the proofs are conclusive that our people have been right in finally rejecting the Beautiful theory, and accepting the Fearful. I know of no authority for this opinion except the occasional spelling of the word. The strength of the argument seems to be this: Captain