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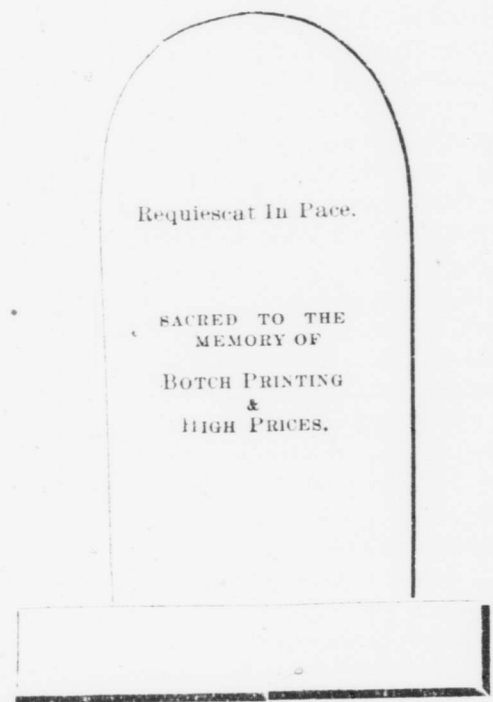
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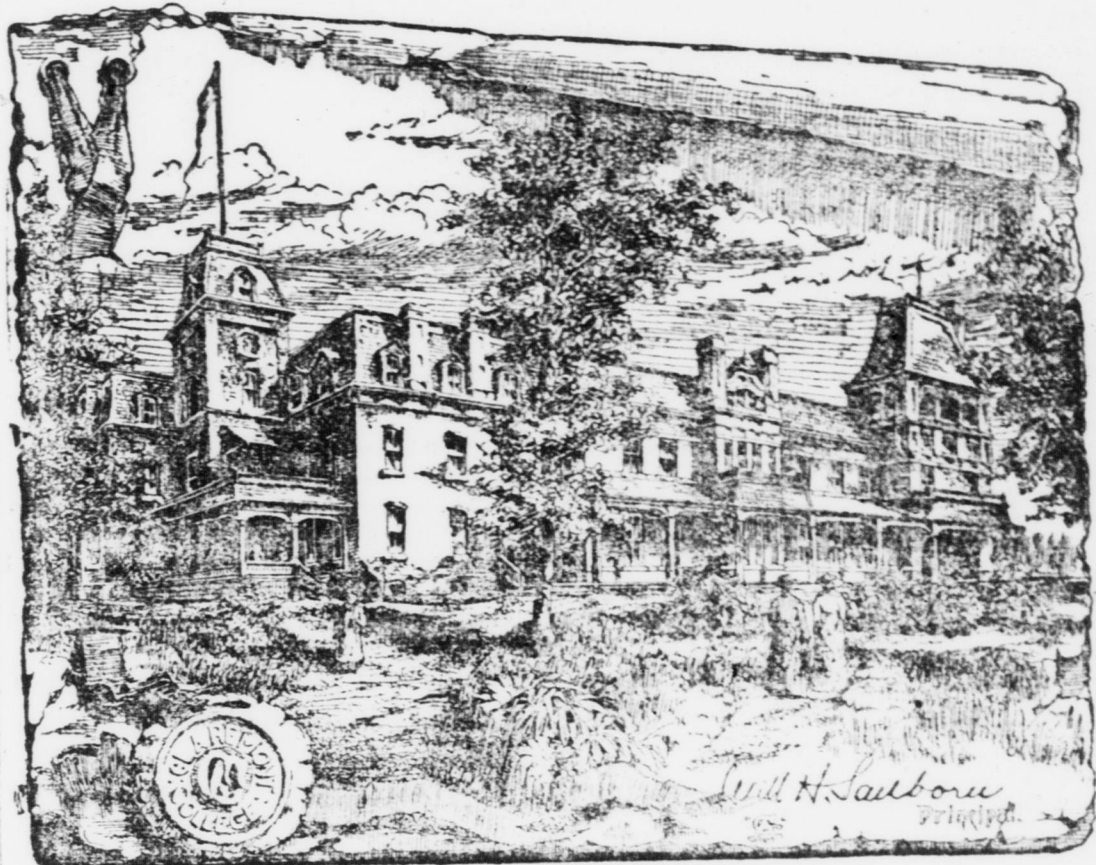
Hickory Printing Company,  
HICKORY, N. C.

BY PHILLIP O'NEILL.

A gentleman wandered carelessly up and down the thronged streets on Christmas eve. To him it was an hour of relaxation from the busy cares that infest the mind of the seeker after wealth. He was a stranger and he walked along unnoticed and unknown, deeply busy with his thoughts. The air was cool and bracing, and fluttered around his feverish brow with invigorating effect. A thousand lights flashed a mellow radiance on the streets, and 10,000 toys hung glittering from countless stands upon the square, while crowds carrying their Christmas purchases passed rapidly on to their homes. The stranger noticed a little boy watching the Christmas trees as they rapidly changed hands. He was evidently a poor man's child. Other little boys greeted him as they passed with their Christmas trees, saying: "Tim have you got a Christmas tree?" To which he would only sigh and say, "Not yet." However, hope was strong in the little heart, and no doubt forces invisible were at work to bring about the realization of his wish. The gentleman marked his eager manner with awakened interest, and at last a kindly wave struck him, and he said: "The little waif seems to have no friends. I think I will buy him a Christmas tree." He approached the little boy and he said, "Tim have you got a Christmas tree?" The little fellow half despondingly, and with a tinge of pathos in his tone, said, "Not yet, sir." The gentleman picked out a real handsome one loaded with confectionery and he handed it to little Tim, saying: "This is yours." For a moment the little fellow was taken by surprise, and the pleased expression on his face rivaled the radiance of the rising sun. Then seizing the tree with a nervous grasp he gave a grateful look at the kind gentleman, and started on a run for his home, saying to every one he met: "I got one, too; I got one, too." Thus he went home and set it up in his mother's dingy and lonesome apartment, and it made the room cheerful and it made his mother smile, and she said from her heart: "God bless the giver." And where was he? As he walked his face was lit by a smile that betokened an inward happiness. He had felt the luxury of doing good. He had learned that it was more blessed to give than to receive, and that evening as his head touched the pillow his soul was as peaceful as an infant's. That night he had a pleasant dream. He saw again the little boy with his Christmas tree, only a wondrous light shone all around, and a glory surrounded the little head and face turned thankfully toward him, and he heard these words that thrilled his very soul with their sweet music: "As ye did it unto one of these my least brethren, you did it unto me." He had given a Christmas tree to the Child Jesus, and from that moment a spirit of peace entered his heart, and, though an old man now, he has the Christmas smile of little Tim upon his face.

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