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THE STORY OF A WORTHY LIFE

A Sketch of Thomas Dixon, Sr., by his son A. C. Dixon

Two weeks before Father's death, I had the pleasure and profit of spending three days with him in Raleigh; and, while we sat together for hours under the great oaks in Capitol Square, I encouraged him to talk of the past, which he was fond of doing. This refreshed my memory with the facts of his early life, which I had heard him relate many times before, and I am certain that I have recorded everything just as he told me.

Thomas Dixon was born on a farm in York County, South Carolina, December 24, 1820. His mother was the daughter of Colonel Hambricht who fought with the colonial forces at the battle of King's Mountain during the Revolution.

At fourteen years of age he one day forgot his coat and left it in the field after the day's work was done. But before retiring he remembered it and went into the field after it. While walking along in the dark there came over his soul such a sense of sin as he never had before. He felt that he was lost forever, because he was so wicked that God could not save him. He knelt down in the dark and tried to pray, but no relief came. So distressed that he could not sleep, he lay awake in bed that night praying and toward morning there came into his soul a flood of peace. Next day the world appeared more beautiful and he was very happy. But it did not occur to him that he had "got religion," as the people of that day phrased it.

Near his humble home was Antioch church, where the plain country people gathered in large numbers once a month to hear their pastor, a Mr. Pearsley, preach sermons full of Scripture and Christian experience. During a revival young Thomas went up to the "mourners' bench" and tried to "get religion" like some of his neighbors. But he got nothing more than he had. So he decided to join the church, if they would receive him, on what experience he had received the night he prayed in the field. He was quite surprised to find that they were not only willing to receive him for baptism, but expressed surprise that he had not joined the church before.

In the Sunday-school he learned to read and devoured the New Testament, reading it through many times. The earnest young plow-boy attracted the attention of Deacon Hardin, the superintendent, who invited him to open the school with prayer every Sunday. His familiarity with the Bible gave him good language, so that his prayers and talks were, for the most part, biblical in thought and word. Some expressed the conviction that he ought to be licensed to preach, while others opposed, saying: "Thomas is a good little boy but he can't preach." Pastor Pearsley, however, believed in him and invited him to "exercise his gifts in public." One day after he had made a brief talk in which there was scarcely anything but quotations from the Bible, good Deacon Hardin gave him a cordial handshake, as he said: "My dear brother. You do right to use much Scripture and my advice is never to make a point that you cannot prove by Scripture. And never talk too long." Deacon Hardin's advice moulded my father's ministerial life. Many of his sermons were two-thirds Scripture and I never knew

him to preach over thirty minutes.

Finally, the brethren were unanimous in their desire to give the boy exhorter a license to preach, when to their surprise he coolly informed them that he did not want it, for he thought he could preach just as well without it. Since they could not find chapter and verse in the Bible authorizing licenses to preach, they let him have his way, while they rather admired his independence. His diligent reading of the Bible filled him with thoughts that burned for expression and the people soon discovered that there was among them a young evangelist with a soul on fire with a passion for truth and souls. When it was announced that young Dixon was to preach, there was a crowd to hear; and, while he preached, sinners sometimes sobbed aloud and cried for mercy.

He was at length "ordained" and became pastor of a little struggling church in the woods near "Catawba" Creek. His remembrance of that church is that one of its best members was a deaf-mute who was devoted to his pastor, though he could not hear a word he said, and the richest member was given to periodical drunks, which greatly distressed pastor and people. Calls to camp-meetings and other work soon drew him from this obscure corner to a large field. Having married Miss Amanda Elizabeth McAfee, daughter of a wealthy planter in South Carolina, he took his young bride to Shelby, N. C., and radiating from this point as center for more than fifty years, he preached in the destitute regions of Cleveland and surrounding counties in homes, school-houses, in groves under bush arbors, organizing fifteen or twenty churches and building as many church houses.

At first his young wife went with him to all his appointments and listened admiringly, though, as I have heard him say, she heard some of his sermons so often that she knew them by heart. She was a woman of keen intellect, and very fond of reading.

Five or six miles from Shelby, near Buffalo Creek, was a high hill covered with a grove of oak and hickory. On this hill the farmers had established their cemetery and built a log-house in which to hold funeral services. A prominent member of the community died, and it was evident that the little log-house could not hold the people who would attend the funeral. Slabs were hauled from a neighbor's saw-mill and rough benches without backs were made and placed in the grove. As the trees did not cover them sufficiently to protect the people from the very warm rays of the sun, a number of forked posts about seven feet high were placed in rows and poles laid in the forks. This frame-work was covered with the boughs of trees in full leaf and underneath was a cool refreshing shade. Such a "brush arbor" was made for this funeral and nearly everybody in the community was there. The people were deeply moved by the sermon which glorified Christ as the Saviour from all sin in time and eternity and dwelt upon the joys of heaven. The young preacher announced that he would preach again the following day and again the next day until the meeting had "protracted" for two weeks, and more than forty converts were ready for baptism.

The forty or more converts were baptized in the nearby stream and a church was organized which they named "New Prospect." The young evangelist was elected pastor, and with the exception of one year when he was in the West, my father remained pastor of New Prospect Church fifty-six years, and during his absence of a year the people still regarded him as their pastor. For nearly two generations he preached in this church salvation by grace through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, magnified the Bible as the very Word of God, deciding all questions by an appeal to its pages, exalting righteous living and cleaving with the sword of the Spirit drunkenness, lying, lust, and every other sin in the calendar. There were many church trials, for if a member got drunk, swore or was discovered in any known sin, he or she was held to account for it in the presence of the whole assembled church. If there was repentance and confession, the church rejoiced and voted to forgive the erring brother or sister; while they pledged themselves to holier living; but, if there was no confession, they sorrowfully voted to withdraw the hand of fellowship until there were proofs of repentance. With all these church trials, if there was ever a church quarrel which resulted in divisions, I never heard of it. As a matter of fact, though the church was Congregational in policy, Father was a sort of loving dictator among his people. He was slow to give his judgment in any case, but when he spoke, his word was usually law. They had such confidence in his knowledge of the Scriptures and his wisdom, that they were willing to follow almost blindly his advice.

A similar process was followed in fifteen or twenty destitute sections. First a meeting in a house, or school-house, then the "brush arbor" with the slab seats for the multitudes, then the organization of a church, the election of the evangelist as pastor, which position he usually held until he had raised the money and erected a plain country meeting-house. Another pastor would then be elected, and Father would pass on to a new field.

It could not be said of Thomas Dixon that he ever discussed or mentioned politics in the pulpit, and yet it is within bounds to say that he elected and defeated many a political candidate. He had only to intimate in private conversation his intention to vote for a certain candidate, and nearly every member of his churches would follow suit. Woe to the candidate with a shady character! He could not count on many votes in the precincts where "Preacher Dixon's" churches were located, and churches that he influenced were in almost every district in the county.

In missionary, temperance and educational movements, Thomas Dixon was a pioneer. While he was a very young Christian, a young traveling preacher came to Antioch church and delivered a strong sermon to Foreign Missions, which opened a new world to his vision. One of the good deacons was so opposed to the new-fangled notions that he could not sit through the sermon. Rising and moving toward the door, he said to his wife in a voice loud enough to be heard by all: "Come, let's get out of here." But the young Bible enthusiast saw at a glance that the points of the sermon had been proved by a Scripture and he became an ardent advocate of Foreign Missions, though the major-

ity of the older brethren were anti-missionary in spirit and utterance. He was one of the few who organized a society within the Association for the promotion of Foreign Missions, while the majority of the older pastors and laymen would not permit a discussion of the subject in the regular sessions of the body.

When the "Sons of Temperance" appeared, the popular young preacher was among the first to enlist under the banner of total abstinence, though the movement was very unpopular in pulpit and pew. In some churches were deacons who were distillers and the decanter with sugar bowl and glasses beside it was on almost every sideboard. To be a teetotaler was to be branded a hair-brained fanatic. The young preacher, however, had learned in childhood the evil of strong drink and he determined to make no compromise. A "Union Meeting" composed of delegates from several churches met in the "Little Bethel" Church a few miles from Shelby. Thomas Dixon was among the early arrivals on Sunday morning. A deacon met him and invited him to walk with him to the spring. As they walked along, the deacon said: "Brother Dixon, is it true that you have joined the Sons of Temperance?" "Yes," was the prompt reply, "it is true." "I am sorry to hear it," said this father in Israel, "for many people here have declared that they will not hear a Son of Temperance preach." "Well, I cannot help it," answered the young man. As they returned from the spring, the pastor of "Little Bethel" Church met them and took Thomas aside to learn of him whether this report of his having joined the Sons of Temperance was true, saying that he could hardly believe it. When assured that it was literally true, and that he meant to stand by his principles, the pastor expressed his great sorrow, saying that the people certainly would not hear him preach. "All right," said the intrepid teetotaler, "I am willing for you to put it to a vote, and if the majority vote against my preaching, I shall keep silence; but if the majority vote for me to preach, I shall do so." The pastor went into the pulpit and said: "All who are opposed to Brother Dixon's preaching here to-day, will please stand up." Just one man rose, and he was a bloated drunkard. "The people don't understand you, sir," exclaimed the solitary voter. "Put the question again: The pastor rose and repeated in a loud voice: "All who are opposed to Brother Dixon's preaching here to-day, will please rise to their feet." One other man rose, making only two opposed to the proposition. The majority were evidently in favor of hearing the young preacher who preached to them an earnest Gospel sermon without referring to the subject of temperance at all thus deeply impressing them with the fact that the great issue was not total abstinence, important as that is, but salvation.

His lack of educational advantages Thomas Dixon always lamented, and he resolved to help so far as possible every enterprise for Christian education. I shall never forget the evening when Mr. Gouger, Principal of the Shelby High School, was sitting on our front porch talking with Father, whom I overheard saying to the teacher: "It is my purpose to send my children to college, and give them the best education possible." The vision of going to college thrilled my boyish soul, and I resolved to study harder, that I might be well prepared for the great event. Father economized in everything except the education of his children. For that, no expenditure was too great.

The man who influenced Thomas Dixon more than any other man in his early years was Rev. Drury Dobbins, whom he regarded as the greatest preacher he ever heard. Mr. Dobbins was a white-haired, dignified, venerable man who wore two eye-glasses and deeply impressed the younger men with his wisdom and eloquence. The old preacher was evidently fond of his younger brother, for they often went on preaching tours together and when they entered the pulpit Mr. Dobbins would say to the young man, "Now go ahead with one of your inch-and-a-half sermons," then he would follow with an elaborate discourse. Father raised the money and erected a marble monument in his honor which now stands in front of "Sandy Run" Church, where Mr. Dobbins preached for many years.

Another preacher father admired and loved was Rev. James Webb, whom he regarded as a truly great preacher. Mr. Webb preached the funeral sermon of Rev. Drury Dobbins, and the text was "The chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," and father was fond of referring to that sermon as the most melting sermon he ever heard. "If there was a dry eye in the house," he said, "I did not see it."

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Bids to Trap Muskrats.
Philadelphia Record.

A new departure was made in the United States engineers' department yesterday when Major Deakne opened bids for the right to hunt and trap muskrats on an artificial island in Delaware bay near Reedy Island. Muskrats have increased so fast and the demand for their hides for fur for collars and cuffs has also increased so that muskrat hunters on both sides of the bay have been in continuous warfare over the right to catch the animals. It becomes necessary for the government to take a hand in the matter and let the right to the highest bidder as the only means of getting rid of the fighting.

The island is about midway between Salem, N. J., and Delaware City, Del. It is enclosed by a bulkhead and is about three miles long and one and one-half miles wide. The thousands of muskrats which have taken possession of the island have been undermining the bulkheads, and it was decided by Major Deakne that something must be done to get rid of the pests.

Mothers—Have you tried Hollister's Rocky Mountain Tea? It's a great blessing to the little ones, keeps away summer troubles. Makes them sleep and grow. 35 cents, Tea or Tablets. Ashcraft Drug Co. and Taylor Drug Co.

Has Killed 90 Bears.
Wilmington Star.

An interesting visitor, Mr. A. G. Wilson, son of the late "Big Tom" Wilson, of Murchison, Yancey county, the latter being known as the most daring mountaineer of his time in this State, has been spending a few days here and like his father has made a phenomenal record as a trapper and bear hunter in the Black Mountain, where he has spent practically his whole life and has killed 90 grizzlies in his time.

Mr. Wilson lives within five and a quarter miles of Mr. Mitchell the highest peak east of the Rockies and his father, it will be recalled, found the body of Dr. Mitchell, who lost his life while exploring on the mountain, which now bears his name. "Big Tom" died about two years ago with the unprecedented record of 114 bears, which he killed in the Black Mountains. His son is fast climbing up to that fine record, and as it is, has no equal in this State. Mr. Wilson killed his last bear last Fall and since he arrived in Wilmington had word from home that another big one which he had been after for some time, had been killed by one of his relatives. In his travels in the mountains, he has had fine success, and strange to say he has always been fortunate enough to keep out of reach of these dangerous beasts. He can well be called the "king" of the western trappers and bear hunters.

For a number of years he has been in charge of the Murchison timber land, or Green Pond land, which contains 13,000 acres and is owned by Eastern North Carolina capitalists, a number of whom live in Wilmington. This giant forest is a reserve and contains unusually large specimens of trees, one of which Mr. Wilson says measures 33 feet and 3 inches in circumference.

THE WEARY WAY.
Daily Becoming Less Wearisome to Many in Mt. Airy.

With a back that aches all day. With rest disturbed at night. Annoying urinary disorders. 'Tis a weary way, indeed. Doan's Kidney Pills drives weariness away. Are endorsed by Mt. Airy people.

A. W. Dean, merchant, Main St., Mt. Airy, N. C., says: "I suffered for some time from a dull pain across the small of my back, due to disordered kidneys. The kidney secretions were irregular in passage and unnatural and caused so much annoyance. When I was advised to try Doan's Kidney Pills, I got a box at the Ashcraft Drug Co. and the results of a short use were surprising and entirely satisfactory. The pain in my back disappeared my kidneys were strengthened and the other symptoms of my trouble were disposed of and I am glad to add my name to the list of advocates of Doan's Kidney Pills."

For sale by all dealers. Price 50 cents. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, New York, sole agents for the United States. Remember the name—Doan's—and take no other.

Everyone would be benefited by taking Foley's Orino Laxative for constipation, stomach and liver trouble, as it sweetens the stomach and breath, gently stimulates the liver and regulates the bowels and is much superior to pills and ordinary laxatives. Sold by All Druggists.

Guernsey Bull 14 months old Sire Pride of North Carolina No. 11237, Dam Heroine of Haddon No. 14927. This cow gave 5 gallons of milk testing 5 1-2 per ct. butter fat, which is much above the average. This is the best bred Guernsey in the South. He is a large strong gentle animal ready for service. Price \$100. Registered and transferred.
JOHN A. YOUNG,
Greensboro, N. C.

Looking One's Best.
It's a woman's delight to look her best but pimples, skin eruptions, sores and boils rob life of joy. Listen! Bucklen's Arnica Salve cures them; makes the skin soft and velvety. It glorifies the face. Cures Pimples, Sore Eyes, Cold Sores, Cracked Lips, Chapped Hands. Try it. Infallible for Fleas. 25c at Ashcraft Drug Co.