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In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

July 30 - 1953

Continuing the story of the illustrious Dixon family:

Ninety-nine years ago this month, in the little village of Shelby, in a white house on West Warren Street where Penney's department store now stands, there was born a little boy who was to become one of the greatest Baptist preachers of his generation and whose preachings and writings were so widely heard and read that they influenced thinking in religious circles all around the world.

He preached in famous pulpits here in America, and in London, in China, in France, in Norway, in Sweden, in Scotland, in Wales and in other foreign pulpits through interpreters. He was the author of 13 religious books and many pamphlets. The baby was named Amzi Clarence, and was the son of Rev. Thomas Dixon, senior, pioneer Baptist preacher of whom I recently wrote.

As a growing boy Clarence did not plan to be a preacher. When he finished Shelby Academy and entered Wake Forest Baptist college, he planned to be a lawyer like his mother's brother, Col. LeRoy McAfee. (Locally the name LeRoy McAfee brings recollections of his leadership of the Ku Klux Klan in Reconstruction days, when the Klan was necessary for our physical and material preservation.)

A DETAINING HAND

One Sunday morning in mid-summer 1873, while the Dixon family was living on the 1000-acre farm bordering Buffalo Creek, Elder Dixon asked Clarence to go to New Prospect Church and tell the assembled congregation he would be unable to keep his preaching appointment that day because he was engaged in a revival at another church.

The young man made the trip on horseback, and as he entered the churchyard he approached a group of men standing in front of the meetinghouse, and gave them his father's message. As he was about to turn to ride home, one of the men touched him on the knee and said: "My young brother, won't you come in and lead the meeting for us. It is a pity to let these folks go home without some kind of a religious service."

Clarence had never led a church service though he had probably led sudden prayer-meetings at college, and had read a great many of Spurgeon's sermons. He was only 19 and was embarrassed. But he was ashamed to refuse. They all went into the church, and after Bible reading and songs and prayer, he talked informally. He spoke of sin and of salvation through Christ. He must have given a very earn-

est message, for several in the congregation were convicted of sin, and the deacons asked him to return for a meeting next day. These services continued for two weeks, and there were forty converts to be baptized. After this experience Clarence determined to make saving souls his life work.

The next year he was graduated from Wake Forest at the head of his class, and that fall accepted, temporarily, the pastorates of two Baptist churches, Mt. Olive and Bear Marsh, in the country near Raleigh.

ONE HUNDRED BAPTISMS

Shortly after he took up his work at these two churches he began to pray that he might have 100 baptisms during the nine months he planned to serve as pastor before entering the Baptist Seminary at Greenville, S. C.

When he preached his last sermon at Bear Marsh on Sunday morning, he was disappointed because he had baptized only 94 converts. But at the close of the service that day there were five candidates for baptism. At the millpond that afternoon, after services had begun a man came up asked to be baptized with his wife regardless of the fact that he would have to walk two miles home in his wet clothing. Clarence had his hundred baptisms!

After finishing Seminary Clarence held eight pastorates, which included two of the famous pulpits of the world. His first pastorate was a combination of Chapel Hill and Asheville Baptist churches. He went to Baltimore next, then to Brooklyn, then to Boston. From 1906 to 1911 he was pastor of the Dwight L. Moody church in Chicago. This was a non-denominational church. He also taught in the Bible Institute operated in connection with that church. In 1911, he was called to the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. This was the pulpit that Charles Spurgeon had occupied for so long. He was there during the war years, and in 1919 came back to America.

In 1880, Clarence Dixon was married to Miss Mollie Faison, of Warsaw, N. C., a young woman of aristocratic background. She died in China in 1922, while he was on a preaching mission there. In 1924, he was married to Mrs. Helen Alexander, an Englishwoman, widow of Charles Alexander, the revival singer, whom the Dixons had known pleasantly through the years.

Mrs. Helen Dixon wrote a book, "The Romance Of Preaching," the story of A. C. Dixon's life. It is from this book that I have gotten much of the information in this story.

In later life, after he became

famous, Dr. Dixon discontinued using the name Clarence, and used only his initials "A.C."

A CLARION-TONGUED EVANGEL

In appearance A. C. Dixon was a picturesque and forceful figure, vigorous and magnetic, very tall (about six feet, two inches) and very thin. He was referred to as a spiritual firebrand, a clarion-tongued evangel. Dr. Richard Vann said of him: "His ministry was to him a divine commission. He entered into it whole heartedly with every power of his heart and mind and soul. Religion became his life, and concern for souls his passion. His religious faith was like that of an ancient mystic, a sacred thing for which he was ready to face the flames."

At the time of his death in 1925, he was pastor of the University Baptist Church in Baltimore. The Baltimore Sun which had been openly hostile to almost everything Dr. Dixon had stood for, said editorially:

"Internationally, he was as broad as the map of the world. He was one of the most aggressive leaders of the church militant. The dictionary contained for him no such word as compromise. He asked and gave no quarter to those whom he considered as enemies of Christianity or of morality in whatever guise they came, whether as modernists, evolutionists, spiritualists, or emsaries of alcohol.

"A curious complex of breadth and narrowness, of pacifism and belligerency, he had a magnificent moral courage that nothing could appall or weaken, a splendid sincerity that even the devils must have respected. We stand uncovered in reverent admiration for his brave and unflinching faith."

All five of the Dixons (the name was Dickson until 1885) were outstanding in appearance, tall and distinguished looking. Each of them had a remarkable gift for public speaking, and each of them had an exceptionally fine mentality which, in my opinion, they inherited largely from their Scotch-Irish mother, Amanda McAfee.

DR. DELIA DIXON-CARROLL

Delia, the elder of the Dixon daughters, was graduated in 1895 from Woman's Medical College with highest honors. She later set up practice in Raleigh, and became one of the pioneer women physicians in North Carolina, though she was not the first woman doctor in the State.

She and her younger sister, Addie May, after finishing Shelby Schools, entered college at Bethlehem, Penn. She was a gifted painter, and planned to study art. I recall her mother called me in-