

THE SCOTCH-IRISH IN AMERICA.

PROCEEDINGS AND ADDRESSES

OF THE

FIFTH CONGRESS,

AT

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ANDREW JACKSON WITHERSPOON.

CONTRIBUTED BY REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, LOUISVILLE, KY.

REV. ANDREW JACKSON WITHERSPOON, D.D., the widely known, universally loved chaplain of the New Orleans Seamen's Bethel, was born in "the Waxhaws," Lancaster District, S. C., July 10, 1824. He was both on his father's and on his mother's side of purest and most honorable Scotch-Irish ancestry. Through his father, Col. James Hervey Witherspoon, he was a lineal descendant of John Witherspoon, one of the pioneers of South Carolina, and an uncle of the illustrious signer of the Declaration of Independence who bore the same name. This patriarch pioneer, ancestor of all the Witherspoods of South Carolina, was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1670, was driven by persecution to Ireland in 1695, and thence emigrated to South Carolina in 1734, at the head of a strong colony consisting largely of his numerous sons and sons-in-law, with their prolific broods. One of the grandsons of this "Scotch John" was Capt. James Witherspoon, a revolutionary hero, captain of the Kingstree Rifles in Gen. Marion's command, one of his descendants having now an autographic letter of Gen. Marion, accompanying his commission, and commending in the highest terms his gallantry and worth. The son of this revolutionary captain was Col. James Hervey Witherspoon, father of the subject of this sketch. He also was a man of prominence and influence in his day, at one time lieutenant governor of the state, for many years colonel of the state military, and at the time of his death candidate for a seat in Congress, his election thwarted only by the stroke of disease that terminated his life.

Jean Donnom, Dr. Witherspoon's gifted mother, was the daughter of Isaac Donnom, a large landholder and influential citizen of Lancaster District. His mother, Sarah Crawford, was the daughter of Maj. Robert Crawford, an Irish patriot and a man of wealth and influence who emigrated to South Carolina in 1760. Espousing with all his heart the cause of the colonies, Maj. Crawford raised a company and equipped it at his own expense, entered the service as captain, and was soon promoted to the rank of major. He enjoyed the personal friendship of Gen. Washington; and in 1791, when the General, then President, made his Southern tour, he was for some

time the guest of Maj. Crawford, holding under his hospitable roof a "big-talk" with the chiefs of the Catawba Nation. Maj. Crawford was also the uncle and guardian of Gen. Andrew Jackson, his house being the home of Jackson's boyhood after his mother's death. Sarah Crawford, Dr. Witherspoon's grandmother, was the favorite cousin of Jackson, and so it came that the boy received the name of the old hero of New Orleans.

The home into which he was born was a favored one, the abode of wealth, piety, and the largest hospitality, in the midst of a community noted for refinement and culture. But a shadow soon fell across the threshold. The mother was taken away by death, leaving a large family of sons and daughters of whom Jackson was the youngest, being then only in his eighth year. Providentially the eldest sister, now coming up to womanhood, inherited the qualities of her mother, became to the boy of eight both sister and mother, and many years afterward, when she had become the wife of the distinguished theologian and professor, Dr. Thornwell, the boy, grown to manhood, still looked to her for advice, and to the close of her long and useful life she was to him the ideal of true and noble womanhood.

His collegiate education, begun at Davidson College, was completed at the South Carolina College. He was graduated from the latter institution in 1844, being then in his twentieth year. The hereditary profession in his family was that of the law, his father and grandfather having been eminent in it. His eldest brother, Hon. Isaac Donnom Witherspoon, of York District, was already rising to prominence at the bar. To his office at Yorkville the young graduate betook himself, to give himself also to the study of the law. But a higher call was upon him. Whilst pursuing his studies he became the subject of renewing grace, and with the surrender of heart and life to Christ came the conviction that he must enter the gospel ministry. In the autumn of 1848 he became a student of the theological seminary in Columbia, S. C., and was graduated with the class of 1851, receiving from the Presbytery of Bethel in April of that year licensure to the ministry. Meanwhile, during the Christmas holidays of his last term in the seminary, he had made a flying visit to Greensboro, Ala., and there on December 24, 1850, had happily consummated a previous engagement by marriage to Mary Way, only daughter of Dr. James Minto Witherspoon, a distant kinsman, and a man whose eminence in his profession, public spirit, and wise administration of various trusts had given him command-

ing influence in the community. This happy union, which continued to the close of Dr. Witherspoon's long and useful life, was the source not only of the purest domestic joy, but of the greatest helpfulness in his life work. Seven children were given to him as the fruit of it, of whom two sons and three daughters still survive as the comfort and stay of their widowed mother.

How thoroughly the young licentiate and his bride gave themselves to the Lord appears from the fact that soon after his marriage Dr. Witherspoon asked and received appointment as missionary to Panama, though in consequence of his infirm health the engagement had to be canceled. The same feebleness of health continued for many years. Flattering calls from various Churches had to be declined. As a result of a severe attack of typhoid fever his throat was left in such a condition that it seemed doubtful if he would ever be able to do regular ministerial work. After several years of suffering, he removed in 1856 to Marengo County, Ala., to try the effect of a milder climate. There, taking charge of a group of churches from five to fifteen miles apart, putting himself in the saddle, keeping for the most part in the open air, preaching as his throat would permit, and visiting from house to house, he soon recovered his health permanently, and enjoyed unusual physical strength and vigor to the close of his life.

In this retired sphere, useful, beloved, happy, the opening of the Confederate struggle found him. Throwing himself with all the ardor of his nature into the Southern cause, he raised a company called in his honor the "Witherspoon Guards." Declining office in it, he accompanied it and became chaplain of the Twenty-first Alabama Regiment, in which it was incorporated, devoting himself with most unswerving assiduity to the religious instruction of the soldiers and the care of the sick and wounded. At the battle of Shiloh he was captured whilst ministering to the wounded of both armies. He could have escaped easily, but concern for the suffering and dying made him forgetful of his own interest. He was taken prisoner, and confined for five months on Johnson's Island. Broken down in health by the rigor of imprisonment, he was obliged to give up his position and return home; but after a few months of recruiting he obtained a new commission as chaplain, and continued in the service till the close of the war.

It would be interesting, if we had time, to follow him as he returned to his humble evangelistic work, where throngs attended his ministry at every service; or as he afterwards labored in the Frank-

lin Street Mission in Mobile, to which he was called in 1871, and where his labors were so wonderfully blessed that in eighteen months the mission had developed into the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church. But we must hurry on to that which was to be Dr. Witherspoon's great life work: his work among the ships and seamen of the port of New Orleans.

In the year 1873 the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans (Dr. Palmer's) invited Dr. Witherspoon to take charge of the work of a city mission which they were conducting under the auspices of the "Christian Brotherhood," a benevolent organization of that Church. Dr. Witherspoon came, expecting to do a work similar to that which he had done in Mobile and at other points. But it so occurred that his mission chapel was near the wharves of the city. The occasional presence of a few sailors at his services awakened his interest in the men of the sea. He began to visit them on their ships, saw how they were neglected by Christian workers, and preyed upon by the "land sharks" that waited for them in port. His heart was profoundly stirred. He sought and obtained permission to devote his labors exclusively to them. With that singleness of purpose, concentration of energy, and sublime faith in God which were characteristic of him he took hold of the work of the "New Orleans Seamen's Home Association," which was maintaining a weak and struggling mission at the corner of Peters and Erato Streets. Seeing that the first necessity was a more eligible location, he secured the removal of the mission to a suitable lot on Fulton Street, near Jackson. Here, through indomitable energy and persevering effort, he succeeded, with the aid of a faithful Board of Directors and many other helpers, in erecting what is perhaps the most complete and admirable Seamen's Bethel and Home to be found anywhere in the world. It contains not only the chapel and reading room usually found in institutions of this kind, but also a concert hall and art gallery, decorated with the flags of all nations whose seamen enter the port, and hung with the portraits of the sovereigns of these nations; also a home with dormitories, dining rooms, etc., in which the seamen may obtain board at reasonable rates; an infirmary, in which they are skillfully nursed and tenderly cared for when sick; entertainments of various characters for almost every night in the week, so as to keep them from seeking amusement in haunts of vice—indeed, everything necessary to make the seamen comfortable, afford them rational entertainment, and keep them out of the way of temptation while they are on shore.

The success of his work has been wonderful. The institution and the chaplain soon came to be the objects to which the seamen looked forward with the most interest as they entered the port. Testimonials from sea captains, mayors, police officers, and others competent to judge, bear testimony to the great revolution in the character and habits of the seamen in the port wrought by the Bethel. And all this, under God, is largely due to the consuming zeal and untiring efforts of him whose chief delight it was during the last eighteen years of his life to be known as the "Seamen's Friend." Going from house to house, and from counting room to counting room, pleading the cause of the neglected seamen, making long and fatiguing journeys through the land, pleading before General Assemblies, Synods, and crowded mass meetings the cause so dear to his heart, he was to the end "in labors more abundant" until, at Moss Point, Miss., on Saturday night, October 24, 1891, having breathed his usual prayer for his dear seamen, he lay down to sleep, and somewhere toward the dawning of the Sabbath morning, with no human eye to witness it, his vessel crossed the silent sea and anchored in the port of heaven. On Tuesday, October 27, with all the vessels of the harbor holding their flags at half-mast, and a whole city in mourning, he was laid to rest in Metairie Cemetery. There, in a grave that will always be honored, and with a memory that will ever be hallowed, he sleeps until the morning of the resurrection.