

Autobiography of Thomas Holmes Timmons

(Written about 1913 for the *McDuffie Progress*.¹ Ellipses are due to indecipherable words in the original; footnotes are added for clarification.)

I have been often requested to write a concise sketch of myself. Now this may be a fine thing to do, but it is also a very delicate task to perform.

To my friends and all whom it may concern I will say once for all, "I count not myself to have attained; neither am I already perfect; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward to the things which are before, I press toward the mark unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."² I have run long in the race, but my hope today is in Almighty goodness as manifested in the Cross of Christ. I believe the Cross to be both a Revolution and an achievement. It is an expiation, but none will be saved simply because Christ died, complete repentance, entire consecration, appropriating faith, practical submission to the Divine Will, a holy life will end at God's right hand and the soul will enter into congenial activity and that will be rest. If I fail to reach the goal it will be the disappointment of life-long hopes and struggles.

My paternal ancestors came from England. My father's mother was Mary S. Turner whose parents came to America from Ireland a few months before her birth and settled on the Eastern shore of Maryland. The family moved to Georgia when it was little more than a wilderness. My father was born in Hancock County. My mother, whose maiden name was Cato, was born in South Carolina.

When my eyes first looked upon this large and beautiful world my parents lived at Grantville, Coweta County, Georgia. This event occurred so long ago that I do not care to speak of it or think about it.

From my earliest recollection I was impressed with a sense of my obligation to love and serve my Creator. My conversion was not as dramatic as is the case with those who have grown cold and hard in sin.

I was brought up in the country and on a farm, and I look back to the freedom, independence, and peace of rural life as a period full of sunshine and joy. I did not enjoy the advantages of the graded school system, but went to school to no less than five different teachers. Some of them were excellent teachers and some were inefficient. I lived in the exciting period of our country when the subject of slavery was being discussed in Congress and in every paper and magazine, and from every college rostrum and around every fireside and from the pulpits of the North.

All my people were intensely Southern in their ideals and traditions. My father was a preacher of righteousness and did not believe in war and carnage, but when it became necessary to inaugurate a formidable debate to settle the controversy between the two great sections, my father said to his five sons, "Go, and stand by your colors and strike till the last armed foe expires, or until you expire," and each ... and to help others solve the problems ... and thereby increase human happiness and bring honor to Him who ... was an active participant in the most cruel war of modern times.

Upon leaving home for the field of action my father assembled the family around the old altar where we had gathered from our childhood and committed us to the care of Almighty God. He said to us, "Not one of you will fall in this war," and every one of us survived the dark struggle.

¹ Serving Thomson, Georgia and the surrounding McDuffie County.

² Phillipians 3:13-14.

I volunteered the latter part of 1861, and was a member of Company C, 56 Georgia regiment. I served in all the Campaigns of Kentucky, and in many of the Campaigns of Tennessee. In the fall of 1862 our command was ordered to Vicksburg, Mississippi. In the battle of Bakers Creek the 26th of May 1863 about six thousand of us were captured on the battle line. I was carried to Fort Delaware and paroled and reached home about the same time that Pemberton's [Confederate] Army surrendered at Vicksburg. At the expiration of five weeks I was properly exchanged and was again on the front line in Tennessee.

I served in all the Campaigns through Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama until the 16th of December 1864 when a very large number of Hood's Army were encompassed in the ditches at Nashville and were forced to surrender. All the officers were carried to Johnsons Island, Ohio and retained as honorable prisoners of war until the surrender of all the Southern Armies.

In the fall of 1865, I was admitted to the Montgomery Conference, M. E. Church South through the influence of my oldest brother Dr. R. A. Timmons, who was a member of that body, and I was appointed to Calhoun, Florida. I remained in the "land of flowers" two years when my health failed, and I was sent to the mountains of North Alabama by Bishop Wightman, but I was so impregnated with malaria that I had to be relieved of my charge, when I returned to my native climate in Western Georgia. For more than a year I was unable to do any kind of work.

When I recovered my health and strength I entered a splendid institution of learning where I was in training with an expert teacher for one year. My intention was then to complete a college course at Emory and make thorough preparation for my life work, but all my hopes and plans were thwarted when Dr. G. W. Yarbrough who was then a Presiding Elder placed me in charge of a circuit where the preacher's health had broken down and he had given up the work. In December 1869 I was admitted into the North Georgia Conference at Rome, Georgia. As an itinerant Methodist preacher, I have tried to serve my times and generation to the best of my ability. I am painfully sensible of the imperfection of the work I have done. I have seen many people turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. I have never been a money hunter and but little of this world's goods have come into my hands. But while I have been poor, my high ambition has been to make many rich in faith and good works and hope and love. Providence has so ordered that I am called to spend the remainder of my days among a people whom I have served in other years, and a people I love very tenderly.

Two things I wish to emphasize before I close this brief and imperfect sketch. The first is the privilege accorded me of visiting your schools and of contributing "the mite my willing hands can give"³ to encourage teachers I have not given myself to the ... to annihilate time, for I could employ my knowledge and strength to make a little money to meet the demands of my life, but I delight to render a service of love, and I hope in these last days of my life on earth to say and do some voluntary work to honor Him Who gave me being. I have tried to give my best thought and best service to your children in school, and when my head shall be resting beneath the "daisies and the dew" I hope that the seed I have thus humbly sown will spring up and produce a rich and golden harvest.

The second thing to which I wish to make special reference is that of leading a class in Sunday school. It is an honor and a privilege to be permitted to teach God's word in this important department of church work. These two occasions are a stimulant to my own heart and mind. To look upon the young life of the community prevents the backward look which is sometimes depressing. I love to feel that I still belong to the future and can say and do something to shape and color the fortunes and destinies of those who will

³ From a hymn attributed to the nonconformist English preacher Philip Doddridge (1702-1751):
*The mite my willing hands can give, / At Jesus' feet I lay;
 Grace shall the humble gift receive, / And heaven at large repay.*

live when I am elsewhere. When I mingle with my friends in the active walks of life where there is perplexity and conflict I do so to hearten my fellows. I would point them to objects that will endure forever. I would urge them not to sacrifice eternity for time.

The way of life has sometimes been dark and rough, but I have never been so absorbed with the difficulties of life that I could not rejoice at the greetings of friends and the laughter of children. In my father's family there were seven brothers and one sister. I have lived to see all the old panel decay and fall save one. Dr. Hamill Cato Timmons of Atlanta and I are the only ones that remain. I sometimes feel like one who treads alone in some banquet hall deserted.

The night is fast falling upon my day of life, but "an eternal morn gleams afar." The dews of the evening are gathering and the atmosphere is growing chilly, but just beyond the valley of the shadow there are streets of shining gold which I do not merit but which I hope through the grace of Christ Jesus to exchange my helmet for a crown in "the land that is fairer than day."⁴

In the language of another⁵ I will close this personal sketch for which I hope to be forgiven by every generous reader.

Give me a word of approval. I've tried to be good and true.
I am weary and sick at heart at the way my critics do.
I've given my life for others, have always opposed the wrong;
I've tried to lift up the fallen, I have cheered the jostling throng.

Give me a word of approval, ere the setting of the sun.
I have a sort of misgiving that my race is nearly run;
Have felt the spirit of kindness and the thrill of glowing truth
And love the good old honest way as I loved it in my youth.

Give me a word of approval as my mother used to give
When I was a bit of a boy just leaning the way to live;
My soul responds as readily to sweet words in kindness said
As in my early childhood days to the prayer beside my bed.

Give me a word of approval, for my eyes are growing dim;
For my way is much rougher now, and I'm not so fleet of limb
As in my hopeful boyhood days, when I cleared the vaulting pole,
For I am in the final race, with my eye upon the goal.

Give me a word of approval, it may be the last to me,
For the winter days are coming, the frost is stripping the tree;
Strong the chilly winds are blowing, the corn is ripe on the ear;
I am in the house of quiet, and the crossing must be near.

⁴ Opening line of "In the Sweet By and By," the popular gospel hymn written in 1868 by Sanford F. Bennett with music composed by Joseph P. Webster.

⁵ "The Aged Man's Plaint" in *The Trail to Boyhood: Swimmin' Hole and Melno Patch* by Dessis Alonzo Watters, Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1910, p. 65-66.