

“The First of Life Was Made for the Last”

A True Story with Maxims and Meditations

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Dedication

For What, And For Whom?

For the information and improvement of teachers and students of the common schools; for the inspiration and enlargement of the hearts of the members of the Sunday schools, Epworth Leagues and Young Peoples' Unions; for the encouragement of The Woman's Christian Temperance Union; for the promotion of the Cause represented by the Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy; for the edification and broadening of the horizon of the preachers who have come to this Diamond Day, and to stimulate a sense of gratitude, This Story is written and published by The Author.

—Thomson, Ga., McDuffie County, June 2, 1913.

Invocation

May the hand of Him whose eye is on the sparrow guide you and keep you in the way. May His grace prove sufficient for you in each trial of your life. May you never be “baffled and beaten and blown about by the winds of the wilderness of doubt.”

May an arrow from Jehovah's quiver pierce the vitals of every “hawk that hovers in the sky,” that it may fall harmless at your feet; In each event of life may you see the ruling Hand of God; May you, one and all come at last to your desired Haven.¹

Chapter I. Launching the Life Boat

In the mellow, tranquil, evening of life it is natural, and therefore legitimate, for men to judge and ponder, and fix the value of the years gone by, with the events and evolutions which they have seen and observed. Permit me to affirm, that it is neither fair nor philosophical to consign men to oblivion, to underestimate the value of their work because of their disposition to use the scales by which actions are weighed and the merits of events are determined.

The first of life was certainly made for the last² and we can no more escape this truth than we can stop the wheels of time

¹ The imagery of “winds of wilderness” and “hawk that hovers” come from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem “Song” that is quoted in full below (in Chapter I).

² This line, the title of Timmon's memoir, is from the opening stanza

or change the course of the sun. The past is locked up within us and we must reckon with the things dictated by our own minds and written with our own hands. Whether these tracings be beautiful and pleasant or whether they be painful and repulsive, they must inevitably form and color our characters and fix the standard by which we, ourselves, will determine the success or failure of the efforts that we have made. This witness has lived through periods that have been marked by transactions and revolutions unparalleled in their importance and without a precedent for the effects which they have wrought upon the civilization we now behold.

After long and heated discussion concerning existing institutions the people of this vast republic resorted to the arbitrament of the sword to adjudicate the tremendous quarrel. In the luminous and hopeful days of my young manhood I heard my country's call to face the cannon's mouth in defense of her institutions. With an ardor and an enthusiasm peculiar to that period, I responded to that call. After nearly four years of bitter suffering in a bloody and cruel war I found myself once more in the bosom of a quiet home.

I was weary and worn with the struggles of the campaign but with a heart full of gratitude that I had lived to see the dawn of peace. I was as one who had emerged from Noah's Ark with the awful catastrophe of the flood, or as one who had been rescued from the ill-fated Titanic in Life Boat Number Thirteen. Our beautiful cities had been burned with fire and our pleasant places had been laid waste. All over our Southland there were tokens of desolation and relics of ruin and to add to our humiliation we were teased by carpet-baggers and tormented with scalawags.³ It was at such a time

of Robert Browning's poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra” (*Dramatis Personae*, 1864):

Grow old along with me! / The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand / Who said, “A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid.”

³ Although in its Irish and British origins “scalawag” was a derogatory epithet meaning “rascal,” in nineteenth century America it was used to refer to Southern whites who supported Reconstruction after the Civil War. Similarly, the term “carpetbaggers” arose in the South after the Civil War as an epithet used to describe Northerners who moved to the South during Reconstruction to take advantage of speculative and commercial opportunities.

as this that I was called upon to launch my narrow boat upon the wide ocean of the world.

When I left my father's house for the field of carnage I was as one who had turned from his own peaceable calling, to assist his neighbor to put out the fire that was burning down his house and in answer to my father's prayers I expected to return home, and so I did. But the time had come when I must bid farewell to the old home with only the hope of returning occasionally on a visit.

To be a preacher had been the dream of my childhood, and I felt that this was my true and proper calling, but I shrank from the responsibility, and my temptation was to believe that the conviction was only a sentiment and further to select some lucrative avocation and to surround myself with the gay and garish things of the world. My ideal of life was a local habitation and permanent friendships.

Longfellow has a charming poem⁴ that expresses a fine and true sentiment. It runs thus:

Stay, stay at home my heart and rest,
Homekeeping hearts are happiest.
For all who wander they know not where,
Are full of trouble and full of care,
To stay at home is best.

Weary and homesick and distressed—
They wander east, they wander west,
And are baffled and beaten and blown about,
By the winds of the wilderness of doubt.
To stay at home is best.

Then stay at home, my heart, and rest,
The bird is safest in its nest,
For all who flutter their wings and fly
A hawk is hovering in the sky.
To stay at home is best.

So far as I can now remember my mind was unsettled as to the course I would pursue. While attending to my father's business, I one day received a letter from my eldest brother, Rev. Dr. R. A. Timmons,⁵ who was then a member of the Montgomery Conference in Alabama. This conference embraced all of West Florida, save the city of Appalachicola. At this time the law of the church did not require an applicant for membership into the traveling connection to be present when the vote was taken in his case. My brother's letter informed me, that, believing me to be willing to accept an appointment, he had presented my name to the conference, that I had been admitted as a probationary member and

assigned to work in the "Land of Flowers."⁶ His letter described the location of the work as being extremely rich and sickly and morally broken down. It had been a mission but was left without an appropriation and I was expected to go to it willingly, rebuild it and work out my own salvation, so far as the "living" was concerned. From my earliest childhood I had been taught to obey orders. Four years experience in a great, practical military school entitled me to a diploma in the curriculum of obedience. I unhesitatingly set about the work of preparation to go to the post of honor and of duty.

Before taking my final leave of the old home, I visited almost every familiar object, and felt as if there could be no sweeter place beneath the Heavens than the place and the associations from which I must soon take my departure. I thought of the dimple-faced boys and beautiful girls who had been my associates and who sat with me on the same bench at school, with whom I had roamed over the hills and dales in quest of pleasure, and my heart thrilled with sadness at the thought of the separation. Nearly all those boys have long since gone to their reward, and those winsome girls now, with their soft gray hairs, lie moulding beneath the coffin lid. Covered with the caresses of my father and mother and the younger members of the household and baptised with their love and prayers, I got into the carriage that was to bear me away and moved slowly off from my father's gate. When I had passed down the long and beautiful hill stretching away from his house, and beyond a landmark that bounded his possessions, the feeling of loneliness that crept over me must be akin to that of death. At the end of the second day I arrived at the home of my brother, in Alabama. From him I had purchased a horse with which to travel my circuit. At the home of my brother I was joined by Dr. King, who had himself been admitted into the conference, and had received an appointment as junior preacher of the Union Springs Circuit with Dr. J. W. Shores. Dr. King was an intelligent medical man and a phrenologist.

After two days of rest with my brother, Dr. King and I set our faces to go to our respective works, he to Union Springs and I to "the Land of Flowers." Union Springs lay immediately on my route, so that we had the pleasure of traveling together for several days to that point. My young traveling companion was remarkably fluent and being a pupil of Fowler and Wells, was fond of expatiating on phrenology.⁷ He examined carefully my cranium development that day and told me things about myself that I had never known before. He not only discussed phrenology but he gave me long quotations

⁴ The poem "Song" from *Birds of Passage*, Houghton Mifflin, 1856, p.121.

⁵ Robert Abigah Timmons (1837-1904) was four years older than Thomas Holmes Timmons. In "Ancestral Etchings," Thomas said that he was "a man of conspicuous ability in the pulpit and became one of the strongest leaders of his Conference. His ministry of 43 years was marked with wonderful results."

⁶ A common nickname for Florida, then as now.

⁷ Phrenology, the belief that a person's personality can be derived from the shape of their skull, was very popular in the 19th century. Lorenzo Niles Fowler and Samuel Wells helped lead the movement through their publishing house Fowlers & Wells in New York City.

from Shakespeare, from Milton's "Paradise Lost," and from other celebrated authors.

We were in the last days of December, 1865, and the weather was bitter cold, but we were both young and our blood was rich and warm. Dr. King, also, proved himself to be thoroughly conversant with theological subjects, and did not omit to bring them forward in good form. Prosecuting our day's journey until the lengthening shadows of the evening led us to inquire of some one as to a suitable place to spend the night, we were directed to the house of Dr. E---, who was a medical man and a local Methodist preacher. Upon arriving at this large country home we were met at the gate by Dr. E--- himself, who received us with true Methodist hospitality.

Our host was blessed with a large family and being in the Christmas holidays there were several visitors at the home. After an elaborate and sumptuous evening meal, my traveling companion and I were seated in the large family room, before a blazing fire in company with a number of the family. Dr. King absorbed all attention and regaled and held spellbound his new auditors, as he enlarged upon approbateness, combativeness, inquisitiveness, philoprogenativeness, language and music. He observed sitting by his side in a little chair, a chap who was about three years old, who carried in his hand a large dull knife which was open. Looking intently at the boy, he turned to the father and said, "Dr., you'd better hold the lines on this boy." The father queried, "Why?" Dr. King replied, "He is pugnacious." His father replied, "How do you know?" Dr. King, placing the tips of his finger just behind the boy's ear, said, "that organ is excessively prominent." The boy, from his black burning eye, darted a look of rage at Dr. King, and lifting the knife said, "I'll tut you."

Just at this moment my attention was attracted by loud talking and excitement in the adjoining room. A fight had occurred and one of the young men had struck the other with a piece of pine inflicting a dangerous wound on the side of his head. In a moment the wounded man entered the room where we were sitting and suddenly we all rose up. My nerves had never been seriously affected by the dire sights of a battlefield, but the sight and the scent of the blood flowing from this young man's head turned me deathly sick. Dr. King, seeing my condition, told me to leave the room and go out into the open air. I had scarcely turned to leave the room when I fainted, and fell as if I had been shot, my head striking the hard floor and producing serious contusion. It was well that we had two physicians for they were sorely needed in this Christian home. Longfellow's "hawk" was "hovering in the air," and quickly and effectively he had done his work.

When I came to myself the doctors and friends were holding me in their arms and applying restoratives and I felt as if I were freezing. I spent a sleepless night and suffered constant pain in my head. The following morning I was advised by

both physicians not to continue my journey, but to remain quiet until I recovered from the shock of the injury. All relish for food was lost and I ate no breakfast that morning, but I ordered my horse to be saddled, saying to my friends that the rule taught me from my childhood was to go right on and "turn not aside for any." I suffered much through the day and was a source of great anxiety to my traveling companion. The following night we spent with a most elegant family, and the refined ladies and young people of the home became deeply interested in their phrenological guest, and several hours were spent in the discussion of this problematical science, and having Dr. King examine the undulating bumps on their heads.

In due time we arrived at Union Springs and stopped at the home of Dr. J. V. V. Shores, the senior pastor of the charge. After taking dinner with the family, Dr. King mounted his horse and accompanied me a mile from the town. On going some distance from the road we dismounted, and both knelt on the ground and prayed together. Returning to the road we sat in silence, looking into each others faces for some moments, Dr. King holding my hand, at length said, "God bless you." During these parting ceremonies I uttered not a word. With an aching head and sad heart, I must now prosecute my journey alone.

One of my misfortunes when traveling in a strange country was to get lost, if there was the slightest chance. I had only gone a few miles when I missed my route. I soon realized that I had lost my bearings, but meeting a man who was acquainted with the country, I was directed to continue my course as the road I was traveling would lead into the great thoroughfare running east and west. He said that I would enter the road opposite a large white church and would turn to the right. I asked him the name of the church and he said, "Methodist." I thanked him, saying, "I feel quite safe, for I am in a good community." I followed his directions and had not gone more than half a mile when I observed a magnificent farm house on an eminence to my right. In front there was a beautiful meadow and stately trees, and fat lambs feeding in the meadow. I approached the large outer gate and was met by a stately, intelligent, and kindly looking man. In response to my inquiry he gave me careful directions to the point to which I wished to go.

I thanked him and turned to ride away, had only gone a short distance, when the gentleman said, "Are you not a preacher?" Looking back over my left shoulder, I replied, "I must confess I am a beginner." "Where are you going?" he said. "To the Land of Flowers," I replied. "Yes," said he, "Florida." "Where are you from?" "I am a native of Georgia." "What is your name?" "My name is Timmons." "Are you a son of Uncle Billy Timmons?" "My father is named William." "Did you ever live at Corinth, in Heard County?" "Yes, three years." With a commanding voice he said "Come

back here, sir." With a great broad smile on his face he opened the large gate, saying, "Ride in here, sir." "You will abide with me to-night."

With mingled feelings of surprise and joy, I listened to him as he told me of the early associations of my father and himself. He said they belonged to the same church and were licensed to exhort by the same quarterly conference; that they had laughed and cried and sung and shouted together many a time. Approaching the inner gate he called to his wife and told her whom he had captured. A comely woman with soft gray hair met me at the doorstep. For the first time I opened my mouth and, turning to my father's friend, said, "You know my name but you have not told me your name." "My name is William Guthrie," he replied. "Go in, sir, you look cold and sick." I replied, "I am all of that, I am cold, my head aches and my heart is sick." The splendid lady took hold of my hand with both hands and said, "Is this the son of Aunt Mary!" I said, "My mother is named Mary." The wondrous kindness of this good family to me in my loneliness and suffering is better imagined than told. I have often felt in the review that but for the providential meeting with these whilom⁸ friends of my father, I would have sunk down on the way.

The following day I met with a suspicious man on the road, who attempted to decoy me from the highway. He insisted that I would save several miles by following him over a narrow path. I spurred my horse and loped away, leaving him standing in the road still calling.

Just as the sun went down I stopped at a small house near the roadside and asked to spend the night. A lady pale and sad, and with pathetic voice said, "We are poor, but you are welcome." I entered the house and sat down with the lady and her little children around me. After some moments of silence that was almost ominous, the lady said, "Was you in the wars?" "Yes, ma'am. I was in the wars." "You look mighty young!" "Was you in Bragg's Army?" "Yes ma'am I was in Bragg's Army." The tears leaped to her eyes and her voice grew husky when she said, "I will never forgive them men." This statement sent a strange thrill through my heart, and I said, "Please explain yourself, madam." With great emotion, she replied, "My sixteen year old boy joined Bragg's Army. He wanted to see his mother and asked for a furlough. They would not give it to him, and he came home just to see his mother. Them men that would not go to the army, but went around all over the country, searching for men they called 'deserters,' found my boy here and carried him back to Bragg's Army, and they court-martialed him, and tied him to a stake and shot him to death, and I will never forgive them men." I tried to speak words of consolation to this broken-hearted mother. I prayed with her, but it seemed as if my

paltry words availed nothing. And those sad words, "I will never forgive them men," still ring in my ears.

I was now within less than a day's ride of Marianna, when again I lost my route and I landed at the house of a Methodist steward, near Greenwood. This was an aristocratic family of wealth and culture. During the evening conversation, the gentleman spoke earnestly of his two daughters who were away at college. Of course I was interested in the daughters and made particular enquires concerning their college relations. I said, "They are at Wesleyan Female College?" With unusual emphasis he said, "No sir, not at Wesleyan." I replied, "Wesleyan is a great college, the oldest female college in the world. Bishop Pierce was its first president. Dr. Myers is a great man. My only sister graduated from that college." With a flushed face he said, "I prefer to send my daughters where they will learn something, therefore they are in a Roman Catholic College in Columbus, Georgia." "Ah!" said I, "you propose to make Romanists of your daughters," and he resented it, saying, "My daughters have had the principles and doctrines of the Methodist Church so deeply inbedded in their hearts that they can never be changed." He stated that they would graduate in June and be at home and he would be glad for me to meet them. I replied, it would give me great pleasure to meet them. Later, I attended the quarterly conference at his church and met the cultured ladies. Before leaving the father of these girls said that his heart was broken, that his daughters were thoroughly converted to Romanism, that they used the rosary and prayed with beads, that they made fun of the quarterly conference and of Dr. Walker, and of their mother's church. Then I said to him, "You remember what I told you." "Yes," said he, "too well." Since that time I have set my face like flint against Romanism.

Before parting from my host, I inquired for some eligible place near Marianna where I might rest for a few days before entering upon my work. In the list that he gave me was the name of Joe Bell and I at once recognized this man and his wife as the schoolmates of my youth. Mounting my horse, I hastened to their beautiful home. Many years had passed and many changes had come, since we last met, but these associates of my boyhood recognized me at once. My arrival at their residence seemed to be a very agreeable surprise and they received me with open arms and extended to me the hospitality of their home. My spirit was greatly refreshed, while resting in this lovely Christian home.

One evening about twilight, a man well armed with pistols and with a most formidable appearance, riding a magnificent steed, appeared at the gate, dismounted, and walked familiarly into the house. I observed that he was no stranger to the family and was welcome in the home. He appeared to me as some great adventurous hero, who had come in from some daring exploit. When introduced to me by mine host,

⁸ "Whilom," now archaic, means "former" or "erstwhile."

his penetrating eye seemed to pierce me through and through. I looked at him as steadily as he gazed at me. He asked me many questions and I answered him frankly. Before retiring Mr. Bell in a private conversation, gave me the history of this man, as the civil and political regulator of the country. As I understood, he and his associates were to that section what the Ku Klux Klan were to other portions of the South at a later period. Mr. Bell told me not to be afraid of this man, that he would do me no harm. My reply was, "Joe, I do not know the meaning of the word fear." He said to me, "You will know its meaning, before you have gone half through Calhoun County!"⁹

The following morning, this well armed man accompanied me to Marianna. On our way he said, with peculiar significance, "Mr. Timmons, I want to tender you my services while you are in this country." I thanked him, but did not feel that I would need such service as he was performing. Later, when I fell sick with fever in Marianna, he was the first man to call and tender his services by day and night. I found him to be a most delicate and efficient nurse. The extreme tenderness and unfailing kindness of this man seemed hard to reconcile with the work he was doing to regulate the lawbreakers of the community.

Chapter II. Entering the Field

Although I was advised by my friend Bell not to go to Calhoun, but to go into business with him or to return to my mother in Georgia, and although my head continued to ache and my heart was sick and lonely, I moved on to my charge and arrived at the head of the circuit on Friday evening before the first Sunday in January, 1866.

I stopped at the home of Rev. J. P. Lockey, a local elder of the Calhoun Circuit. Although I was but a novice the people did not despise my youth, but received me as though I had been an apostle. On Sabbath morning, Mr. Lockey accompanied me on horseback to my first appointment. Reaching the place of worship, we saw a very large company of people assembled, not in a house, but in the open air. As we approached the great multitude seated on rough benches, I said to Mr. Lockey, "Where is your church edifice?" Pointing to the debris scattered around he said, "There is a portion of it. A tornado a short time ago, swept our house of worship away, and we worship in the open air." Think of this, you who worship in great temples with your magnificent organs and cushioned pews and carpeted aisles and other appointments. But I stood that day in good company, for I

stood with Paul and Wesley and Whitfield¹⁰ and our Lord Himself, who preached in the open air on the mountain tops, and in the valleys, and on board a barge.

It seems eminently proper, just here, to give some examples of texts and of sacred hymnology as formulating my conception of God and His gospel to men.

First, as to texts:

"The redemption of their soul is precious and it ceaseth forever."

"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; Call ye upon Him while He is near."

"Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, that walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled, This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow."

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"The spirit and the bride say, come and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."¹¹

Second, as to the hymns:

Before Jehovah's awful throne,
Ye nations bow with sacred joy,
Know that the Lord is God alone,
He can create and He destroy.

His sovereign power without our aid,
Made us of clay, and formed us men,
And when like wandering sheep we strayed
He brought us to His fold again.

We'll crowd thy gates with thankful songs,
High as the heavens our voices raise,
And earth, with her ten thousand tongues
Shall fill thy courts with sounding praise.

Wide as the world is thy command,
Vast as eternity thy love.
Firm as a rock thy truth must stand
When rolling years shall cease to move.

¹⁰ George Whitfield (1714–1770) was an itinerant Anglican minister who helped spread Evangelicalism in the British North American colonies by travelling and preaching to large open-air crowds. Consequently, he was one of the most widely recognized public figures in Colonial America. A contemporary of John Wesley, Whitfield carried on very public disputes with Wesley over the Calvinist doctrine of election (or predestination) and the merits of slavery—what Wesley called "that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion." Whitfield, by contrast, was a slave owner and successfully campaigned to overturn a 1749 law that outlawed slavery in the colony of Georgia.

—*New York Times*, 15 June 1879 and *Wikipedia*

¹¹ Verses from Psalm 49:8; Isaiah 55:6; Isaiah 50:11; Matthew 11:28; and Revelation 22:17.

⁹ Calhoun County is on the Florida panhandle just below and slightly west of the southwest corner of Georgia.

Jesus, I love thy charming name
 'Tis music to my ear.
 Fain would I sound it out so loud
 That earth and Heaven should hear.

I'll speak the honors of thy name,
 With my last lab'ring breath!
 Then, speechless, clasp thee in mine arms
 The antidote of death.¹²

For nearly two weeks I was attended by physicians at the home of Rev. J. P. Locky, who treated me for a fever into which I had been thrown by the injury received when I fainted and fell at the house of Dr. E. Upon my recovery I hastened to get acquainted with the people at their homes.

Nearly everywhere I went I was told that it was an unusual thing for the preacher to visit the homes of the people. Many seemed to be broken-hearted and were becoming captious¹³ and cynical. In a simple, earnest way I took their names, and inquired into their spiritual welfare. Whiskey and pistols were more in evidence than hymn books and Bibles.

Everywhere I went, I heard of revenge and awful deeds and awful tragedies. I do not mean to say that these were occurring everywhere, but of these I heard much talk, and they were of frequent occurrence. And I was told that a man who rode as fine a horse as mine, and was so well dressed could not long escape the heart of envy, and the hand of violence. I was frequently asked if I did not go armed. I replied that I was well armed, not with carnal weapons, but with my Bible and a faith that felt no fear. The country was densely populated, and wherever I would stop at night the people would gather in large crowds and beg me to sing, or pray or preach. The people were frank and hospitable and intelligent and noble minded, but the wickedness of many was equal to their frankness and intelligence.

The strain of work and the coming in contact with strangers, superinduced an attack of real homesickness, and I sought a place that I might call home. Far down on the Appalachicola river, I found what was called the Gregory place. This was a palatial residence, with pillars fifteen feet high. The men occupying this building were T. Van Teat and Robert Gregory. Teat had an ideal family. Gregory was a young man who had been educated at Marietta, Ga., at a military school under President John M. Richardson. These gentlemen offered me a home in their house. When I asked them on what terms they would board me, they replied: on condition that I would sing and pray and console them amidst the struggles of life with mules and wagons, and free negroes. I kept the contract. A sweeter home, by nobler people, could

scarcely be found on earth. There were two little girls in this beautiful home, Ada and Della, whom I learned to love as I loved my own life.

After adjusting myself to my temporary home and becoming acquainted with a few of the people of the community, I determined one afternoon to visit the home of Maj. O. P. Fannin, to spend the night at his house and get acquainted with his elegant family. As I approached the outer gate I was met at the gate by a bright, handsome, gentlemanly boy, who I supposed was coming to open the gate and let me in. Without any of the ordinary salutations he simply said; "Mama sent me to tell you that she cannot entertain travelers, that you will have to go to the next house." I said; "Thank you, my little friend, tell your mama that I am the pastor of the Calhoun Circuit, that I shall be glad to see her at Locky's Chapel on next Sunday morning." Wheeling my horse I galloped away, leaving the little messenger standing and looking after me with strange interest.

Maj. Fannin was the founder of the deaf mute asylum at Cave Spring, and his elegant wife was the sister-in-law of the great Bishop Wightman, and was the most intimate friend of my only sister, Mrs. Dr. W.W. Holmes, who died at Cave Spring. She ministered to my sister in her last illness and closed her eyes when she died. Mrs. Fannin had heard that I was the brother of Mrs. Holmes and had expressed a desire to meet me. When I returned to my boarding house, and explained to Mrs. Teat, she said she felt sure that Mrs. Fannin would be grieved, when she heard who the stranger was that she had turned from her door.

On the Saturday following, as I was on my way to keep my appointment at Locky's, two miles above Maj. Fannin's, a gentleman of striking personality rode up by my side. He simply said; "Good morning, sir." I replied; "Good morning." "You're a traveler?" "Yes sir; I am a traveler." "How long have you been in this section?" "Only a few weeks, sir." "On your way to Marianna?" "No, sir." "Greenwood?" "No, sir. I am on my way to keep an appointment with the people out at Locky's Chapel." "Oh," said the gentleman, "I recognize you as Mr. Timmons, the pastor of the Calhoun Circuit, and a gentleman who has given my wife a great deal of concern." I replied; "I recognize you as Maj. Fannin, but I am not acquainted with your wife." "But you remember the evening you called at my gate." "I do, and remember too, that I was turned away." "But had you opened the gate and told my wife that you were her pastor, you would have been as welcome at my house as my brother-in-law, Bishop Wightman." After a few mutual explanations, as we were about to part, the Maj. handed me a roll of money, saying, "This is an earnest of what I will do in the future. Make my house your home." The Major paid me \$50.00 at the end of the year, and kept his pledge. He was a princely gentleman.

¹² John Wesley's adaptation of a hymn composed by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) in *The Psalms of David*, 1719. (During his lifetime, Watts composed over 500 hymns.)

¹³ Capitous: tending to find fault or raise petty objections.

We parted, and after going a short distance I counted the money, and it was \$10.00 in small bills. You remember that this was the first year after the war, and \$10.00 was a large sum to an itinerant Methodist preacher.

On my way to keep an appointment on Chippola river, a man of another style and spirit, joined me in the road. He asked me who I was and what my business was in that country. When I told him that I was a Methodist preacher and was there to serve the Calhoun Circuit he said; "I am a hard-shell Baptist preacher, I am opposed to your sort, and we have no use for you in this country. How came you here?" "I was sent here by the Montgomery conference," I replied. Then lifting his long arm, and making a rather violent gesture, he said; "My advice to you is to go home and stay there." I told him that the appointment was for one year, and I guessed that I would stay the year out. I was informed that this mistaken old man was nearly always under the influence of whiskey. As indicating the moral condition of the country, he could assemble a larger crowd than I could. I was told by one who was present that after preaching to a large congregation at one of my churches, which was a union house, he said to the audience, "I will preach at this place two weeks from now if God is willing, and I am not drunk."

Chapter III. Reconstruction

It seems pertinent, just here, to give in brief outline, the moral and religious status of my own parish. One of the great evils of war is to produce civil bewilderment and moral disintegration. It is true that in Western Florida, notably in Calhoun County, were to be found some of the noblest types of Christian manhood and loyal patriots. On account of its remoteness from the seat and scene of war however, and its geographical seclusion, it seemed to be a favorable place of refuge for many who were a law unto themselves. It was traditionally stated that from its earliest history there had been a lawless element in Calhoun, and in some of the adjacent counties. This element may have served as a magnet to draw deserters from both armies, and those who were fleeing from justice to make this section a "city of refuge."

Without troubling you further with the philosophy of the situation, I will state that my circuit embraced the whole of Calhoun County. There were six houses of worship, and several wayside appointments. As in all other places of our great country, the footprints of Methodism were to be seen everywhere. Therefore, many names were to be found upon the rolls of these churches. While the membership had gone away backward and had seriously declined from the moral requirements of the church, it is fair to state that the religious sentiment was stronger and the standard of piety higher in the Methodist church than in any other communion. It is the business of the Methodist preacher to declare a gospel that is

antagonistic to sin in essence and in action. After careful investigation of the inward piety and outward conduct of the membership, I found that the enforcement of moral discipline in the church had become an extreme necessity. Upon making an effort to secure a committee for preliminary investigation, I found that men were either afraid of each other or that general inconsistency constituted an insuperable barrier to such initial action. As I now recall my state of mind, I must have had a feeling akin to that of the Great Creator, when he determined to drown the antediluvian world. On my third round I gave notice to the congregations that while I had preserved the names of the respective societies on my private records, that I had destroyed all church registers and blotted out the organization. I stated further that I had ordered new church registers from Nashville, and that on my next round I would read and expound the general rules of the church, at the close of the service, [that] I would cause the list of members to be read as I had it, that there would be no specific charges against any member, that no individual would be made morally conspicuous, but that each member who would say from the heart that "God being my helper, I will take a fresh start," and will endeavor to conform my life to the rules of the church, that their names would be placed upon the new church registers.

When the day arrived for this action, so far as I can now recall, every member was present or properly represented, with one exception, throughout the whole circuit, and cordially accepted the proposition. A general awakening and the kindling of revival fires was the result. Dilapidated church houses were repaired, several new houses were built, and there was a great increase of membership. One member who took exceptions to my actions, reported it to the presiding elder, Rev. Dr. F. A. Walker, as autocratic and highhanded. At the ensuing quarterly conference, the presiding elder made a careful investigation of all the facts in the case, and at the end declared that my action was without law or precedent, but that really the facts justified him in saying that I had done the only thing that was left me to do, and that he would sustain me there and before the conference. And here the controversy ended.

On a Friday when I was on my route to fill an appointment in the extreme southwestern portion of the charge, I determined to visit a family far down on the Chippola river, in a wild and obscure portion of the community. A heavy rain had fallen and the creeks were swollen, and dangerous to cross. Upon approaching one of these streams I saw a negro, who told me that it was barely safe to cross on horseback. Also, he said it was more than five miles to the house of which I had made inquiry. It was then growing dark, and with great difficulty I succeeded in crossing the stream. Over narrow paths and obscure roads I wended my way along until nine o'clock at night. My horse was safe, sagacious and swift, and carried me over perilous places.

At this late hour of the night I at length approached a large farm house in a field. When I hailed, a lad about 14 responded. When he approached me and informed me as to who dwelt there, I found that it was the place I was seeking. He took hold of the reins of my horse's bridle, and said; "Git down, sir! Git down! I'll take the hoss! I'll take the hoss!" He continued to urge, but I did not dismount until his father and two other men came out. When I told the father who I was, he said, "We're glad to see you, sir. My wife and two of the gals are members of your church. Git down; come in!" I found a large family of men, women and children, and while their manners were uncouth, they received me with the warmest hospitality. They asked me many questions, and said that they were glad that the conference had sent them a preacher who was not above coming to their house.

After partaking of a hearty supper at a late hour, I called for a Bible, and proposed to have prayer. The mother of the home said to her husband: "Johnnie, go and git that old Bible out of the chist." After rummaging through the "chist," Johnnie said, "I can't find it Sallie. It makes no difference, it is only a piece of a Bible." I then told them that I had a Bible in my saddle-bags, and if they would excuse me, I would read from that. I turned to the 91st Psalm, and read, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," etc.¹⁴ We then sang an old hymn, the family joined in the singing with their strong voices, and it had the true Methodist ring.

After the evening devotions, I was placed to sleep in a small room on the end of a long veranda. The door of the room had no fastenings. I had heard of stories of crime and murder since coming into the country. I was a little nervous after the long ride, especially after my experience after nightfall, in crossing deep waters and dangerous places, but I had said many times "I do not know the meaning of the word fear."

I was just falling asleep, when I heard what seemed to be muffled footsteps along the veranda. Sleep glided from my eyelids, and glided from my nerves, and vanished I know not where. I had placed a small chair against the door. The

¹⁴ The beginning of Psalm 91, which continues (vs. 2-8):

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.
Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.
He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.
Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;
Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.
A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.
Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

ominous sound came nearer and nearer. I heard the door opening and the chair scraping the floor, and the invisible entity was in my room, and under my bed. I was at once seized with apprehension. The heavy being went out on the veranda, and after some minutes returned. I then folded my hands and said, "My time has come. I shall not live to see the morning light." I then heard scratching and growling. I think I must have felt at that moment as Livingstone did when the lion caught him and was crushing his arm. I was only concerned about which part of me the beast would eat first. I did not close my eyes to sleep that night. My hostess said to me the next morning, "I forgot to tell you that you were sleeping in Tige's room, and that he would be in after awhile." I told her that I was afraid that "Tige" would eat me. She said, "Tige wouldn't let anybody hurt you." Tige was a very large dog, and had a deep and ominous growl, and looked to be "monarch of all he surveyed."

On a hot August day, after partaking of a hearty breakfast at my boarding house, I mounted my faithful horse and started to an appointment. The sand was dry, and deep, and hot, and the sun was pouring its blistering rays down upon me. Suddenly I was seized by a chilly sensation, from head to foot. The fact is, I felt as if I were in the grip of a blizzard. I shrugged my shoulders and my teeth chattered. Even my horse seemed to detect that something had gone wrong with the rider. After going some miles, the opposite sensation came over me, and then I said to myself, "What sort of a climate am I in? Back yonder, I felt as if I had struck an iceberg, and now I feel as if I were in the grasp of a simoon."¹⁵

I stopped at the house of one of my stewards, whose name was B. L. Sellman: Leaving my horse at the gate, I walked in, and was met by Mrs. Sellman at the door, who said, "Brother Timmons, what is the matter!" I told her that I did not know, that part of the time that morning I felt as if I was freezing, and now I felt as if I was being fried. She said, "You have had a chill, and now you have a hot fever." She guided me to a pleasant room and told me to lie down and be quiet. Presently she came with a tea cup nearly full of something that resembled wine, and she said, "Drink this, and you will get quiet." I said, "What is it?" She replied, "It is a sedative." I said, "Is it bitter?" She replied, "Brother Timmons, don't be a child, drink this." I drank it, and turning to my hostess said, "You told me it was not bitter. It is as bitter as gall." "Oh!" she said, "it is just your taste, it is not bitter." And she left me to attend to her domestic affairs. I soon became quiet, and then felt a strange sensation at my temples, and a tingling

¹⁵ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Third Edition), a "simoon" is an "alien or not naturalized" word of Arabic origin referring to "a hot dry suffocating sand-wind which sweeps across the African and Asiatic deserts at intervals during the spring and summer."

sensation in my nerves. I then felt as if I was swooning, and I said, "If that is a sedative, I have got enough of it."

About this time Mrs. Sellman came running to my room, with the whiteness of death on her face, and with both hands raised. With an excited voice she said, "Brother Timmons, I have given you laudanum! I have given you laudanum!"¹⁶ I had heard the roar of cannon, I had heard the rattle of musketry, I had heard the clang of swords. The fact is, I had been scared and almost demoralized, when I heard the bones of men cracking on the battlefield, but I must confess that this was the most articulate scare I have ever experienced. Instantly I sprang from the bed, and reeled into the large family room, looking for all the world like an Episcopal minister. In a minute Mr. Sellman had me by one arm and a negro by the other, and they were dragging me back and forth across the floor. Just then Mrs. Sellman came with the lobelia,¹⁷ and they made me drink it freely. I soon felt as if the whole world had turned inside out, and then I cast my bread upon the floor and did not care for its return.

There were no telephones in this country, there were no automobiles, there was not even a bicycle, and all this time a lad was riding my horse, at the top of its speed, ten miles away, for a physician. In less than three hours, with flushed face, covered with sweat and dust, the doctor was by my side. He said to me, "Mr. Timmons, I think you are now sufficiently relaxed." I replied "I think so too." He said, "What you need now is strong coffee," and they brought me "Methodist coffee." It is legitimate to say Mrs. Sellman sat by my side all night long, and they told me that her fingers were frequently on my pulse. No man knows the portals before which he will be called to stand; no man knows the perils that he will be called to face, therefore he should not boast of the strength of faith, nor of the absence of fear.

As illustrating the degeneracy of the times, and the moral lapse of many of the citizens, I will now relate a few instances of violence, which were authentically reported to me.

¹⁶ Laudanum, also known as opium tincture, is an alcoholic herbal preparation containing approximately 10% opium and 1% morphine. It is extremely bitter to the taste. Made by combining ethanol with opium latex or powder, Laudanum is a potent narcotic with high morphine concentration. Until the early 20th century, laudanum was sold without a prescription to treat a variety of ailments and was a constituent of many patent medicines.

— *Wikipedia*

¹⁷ Lobelia is a perennial herb found in the eastern US. American Indians smoked the leaves as tobacco and used them medicinally for respiratory ailments. It was used as a folk remedy for asthma, bronchitis, whooping cough, cholera, and many other conditions. Lobelia's emetic properties were well known in the 19th century.

— *Drugs.com*

One man was shot by the light of his own fire, in the presence of his family, his enemy placing the muzzle of his gun in the open doorway.

Another, who was a prominent member of another church, and an officer of that church, waylaid his own brother-in-law at noonday, and shot him from ambush.

I was spending the night with an elegant family when a young man, a member of the household came in, from the place where they had been holding justice court, and reported that three men had been killed in less than a minute, and that Rev. Mr. Grantham, who was a Missionary Baptist minister, had been shot through the hips by a stray bullet and was thought to be fatally wounded. He went for a long time on crutches, but recovered from the wound. He was one of my most intimate friends during my stay in the "Land of Flowers, and ---."

There were many instances of violence and lawbreaking of lesser grade, and others of equal turpitude, but I never heard of any legal action taken by the Grand Juries. Notwithstanding the lax state of morals, and the absence of law enforcement, I do not recall an instance of interruption when I was conducting a religious service.

I remember with deep appreciation the uniform kindness and open hospitality of the people everywhere I went. Towards the close of the year I received an invitation from my presiding elder, Dr. Walker and pastor of Marianna, Rev. Thomas W. Lane to join them in a Sabbath evening service, at their last quarterly conference. On that Sabbath I had two appointments to preach, one in the forenoon, eight miles from Marianna, the other in the afternoon, twelve miles from that town. There was no indecorous hurry at either service. It was my rule not to slur my work, nor in any wise disparage its interest. The forenoon service was largely attended and the interest manifested was profound. At the afternoon service the house was filled to overflowing, and the response of the people was enthusiastic.

To this distant day I remember with feeling how the people urged me to remain among them. With my mind in a whirl of excitement and my nerves tingling from the heavy work of the day, I mounted my horse and rode twelve miles to Marianna, arriving only a few minutes before the service opened at the church. I stopped at the magnificent home of Washington Chapmore, where I found Dr. Walker, the presiding elder, and Dr. Lane, the pastor. We walked together to the sanctuary, and found a great multitude of people assembled in their beautiful temple of worship.

The concluding part of the service in that day was considered the essential part, and the man who delivered the sermon, was followed by another, who read an appropriate hymn, delivered an exhortation, and made a definite proposition, calling for decision. Spiritually, the people were urged not to

go out at the same door through which they entered. On this occasion, I was the exhorter. Dr. Walker had finished a strong and impressive sermon, when I arose and announced a Sabbath evening hymn, as follows:¹⁸

Oh, blessed, blessed sounds of grace,
Still echoing in my ear!
Glad is the hour, and loved the place,
But whence my sudden fear?

What if a sternly righteous doom
Has sealed this call my last?
Before me sickness, death, a tomb;
Behind, the unpardoned past.

My Sabbath suns may all have set,
My Sabbath scenes be o'er;
The place, at least, where we are met,
May know my steps no more.

The prophet of the cross may ne'er
Again preach peace to me;
The voice of interceding prayer
A farewell voice may be.

But, Saviour, can't thou say, Farewell?
Or, Holy Spirit, thou?
Or must I leave thy house for hell?
Oh save me, save me now!

While yet the life-proclaiming word
Doth through my conscience thrill,
Breathe life; and lo! divinely stirred,
I can repent, I will.

Placing the hymn book on the Bible, I proceeded to deliver an impetuous exhortation. Some one compared my exhortation to a contest at corn shucking. With this comparison I was quite familiar, for men in this contest are not careful to know whether the corn falls in the crib, or beyond or rebounds from its side. They are not careful to know where the shucks fall or who is struck in the eye and "see stars," for they had an end in view, and their energies were fixed upon a purpose. So the purpose of this exhortation was to urge immediate repentance and the turning of the face to God.

When the invitation was extended to penitents to approach the altar, the chancel rail was soon crowded. Doctors Walker and Lane, who had appeared embarrassed by the manner of the concluding service, raised their reverend heads and with becoming earnestness proceeded to advise the seekers at the altar. The service concluded, and the three preachers walked away together. Dr. Lane said, "Timmons, where did you find that hymn?" I replied, "In our hymn book." Said he, "I did not know there was such a hymn in all literature. It will ring in my ears to my last day." He then said, "How came you to

deliver that exhortation and call for penitents?" I said, "Was not that the purpose of the concluding service?" He replied, "We are not engaged in a revival meeting here, now." He then said to Dr. Walker, "Timmons is learning his first lessons. He will soon 'catch the step' and learn to make careful preparation and conclude his service in a decorous manner."

By processes which it would be hard to define, we have come to a kingdom of which our fathers dreamed and of which they prophesied. As one who has observed the trend of religious education, and who has observed with a degree of care the construction of the platform of culture, I desire to say, that the effort is not to abolish the religion of our fathers, but rather to increase the attraction of religion. But the church, in making concessions, is in grave peril of making compromises. There are two principles in the universe that have no limitation. One is Sin and the other is Holiness. The culminating depth of "Sin" is the elimination of all the potentialities of goodness from the soul. The culminating height of Holiness is the elimination of all taint of evil and bringing the soul in perfect harmony with God and the holy angels.

The age is one of outstanding opportunities and the most glorious possibilities. To one who has eyes to see the significance of God's rainbow, there is no cause for discouragement or alarm. That good will triumph over evil, there can be no doubt. The tumult of frivolity and the shoutings of worldliness will die. The captains of error and the kings of iniquity will depart. As in former times, a humble and contrite heart still constitute the sacrifice of the Almighty. The Lord God of Hosts will not allow us to forget. The sun of victory is rising, and its light will break o'er all the earth. The triumphant church of Jesus Christ in Heaven and earth are one, and is only divided by the narrow stream of death. Some day they will join hands in the City of God.¹⁹

There shall we muse amid the starry glow
Or hear the fiery stream of glory flow,
Or on the living cars of lightning driven
Triumphant wheel about the plains of Heaven.²⁰

¹⁸ A hymn by the English Wesleyan minister William Maclardie Bunting (1805-1866) that was included (No. 799) in the 1889 edition of John Wesley's *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*.

¹⁹ *The City of God* was written by St. Augustine after the fall of Rome in 410 in part to refute charges that Christians were to blame but also to develop a Christian interpretation of history in which human society finds completion in the realm (or "city") of God.

²⁰ From Part III of *The Omnipresence of the Deity*, a wildly popular book-length poem published in 1828 by the English poet Robert Montgomery (1807-1855). By 1858 *Omnipresence of the Deity* reached its 28th edition.

Chapter IV. Maxims and Meditations

*In Life's earnest battle they only prevail
Who daily march onward and never say 'FAIL'.²¹*

1. Be industrious. "It is better to be sick than to be idle." Profitable employment is not only essential to a livelihood, but to health and happiness "The hand of the diligent maketh fat."²²
2. Be cautious. Life is based upon watchfulness. "The prudent man foreseeeth evil and hideth himself."²³ "Ponder the paths of thy feet, that thy goings may be established."²⁴
3. Trace out errors and correct them. We may be startled some day by an "old account."²⁵
4. Be frugal of your time. Our richest inheritance and most valuable treasure is "Time." He that squanders his time is as one who shoes his horses with gold.
5. Practice economy in the home. "It is not what we make, but what we save that makes us rich."²⁶ "Dividends" has been the "Watchword" of the American people long enough. "Economy" should be the watchword for half a century to come.
6. Treat everyone with respect and civility. A genial smile or cheerful word may dispel the shadows from a troubled brow or roll the burden from an aching heart. "Be ye Courteous."
7. Use philosophy and religion to alleviate trouble. To resort to earthly excitements or to wine or strong drink to get "surcease from sorrow,"²⁷ is as one who jumps into the sea to escape a shower of rain.
8. Be generous to the poor and unfortunate. "The poor shall never cease out of the land,"²⁸ and there will never be

²¹ From the 1901 poem "Never Say Fail" by Charles Swain, which was set to music by Frederic Woodman Root.

²² Proverbs 10:4 which reads "...the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

²³ Proverbs 27:12.

²⁴ Proverbs 4:26.

²⁵ Probably a reference to "The Old Account Was Settled," a hymn composed in 1902 by Frank Monford Graham a minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church who served served as district superintendent in northern Georgia from about 1895-1915.

²⁶ "It's not what we eat but what we digest that makes us strong; not what we gain but what we save that makes us rich; not what we read but what we remember that makes us learned; and not what we profess but what we practice that gives us integrity."

—Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

²⁷ From line 10 of Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven*.

²⁸ "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." —Deuteronomy 15:11.

wanting in society, those who have been pierced by the devil's iron teeth. Even kings are born poor and have at last descended to the grave. Color-bearers have been wounded and have been borne on litters from the fields of battle. "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."²⁹

9. Read the 13th chapter of first Corinthians which is the "Society Chapter" and chain your tongue where you cannot praise. The tongue has slain more than the sword.
10. Sleep 8 hours in every 24. Sleep is a simple thing and a common thing, but so necessary and important that diamonds and rubies are not to be compared with it. Good health and a clean conscience are the best promoters of sleep.
11. Cultivate the aesthetic nature by reading poetry, looking at works of art, playing music or singing and making melody one hour each day.
12. Remember that this is Your "Golden Age." It is neither in the past, nor in the future, but "Now" is Your "Golden Age." Therefore avoid all evil as you would the pestilence and follow that which is pure and true and noble and abiding.

Result

You will find rest for the soul. Your life will be a blessing on your generation, and you will be a worthy contributor to the enterprise, the aim of which is to establish universal righteousness and peace. As we enter the New Year we should thank God and take courage. We are on the winning side as sure as the stars shine above us! That good will triumph over evil, there can be no doubt.

The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart,
Still stands the ancient sacrifice,
A humble and contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.³⁰

²⁹ Hebrews 13:16.

³⁰ Second stanza of Rudyard Kipling's poem "Recessional" which was published in *The Times* on July 17, 1897 and subsequently republished in many other periodicals. It was written as a comment or "afterword" near the end of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. In 1906 it was included as No. 558 in the English Hymnal.