



A FAMOUS PREACHER TO BE PUT ON THE STAGE.

Rev. Thomas Dixon Is the Prototype of the Hero in "A Little Sister to the Wilderness," a Novel to Be Dramatised and Produced Next Season.



"How brave of you!"



"Their eyes met"



"Where's your Mammy?"



"God bless you, Crawford -"



"Oh, you sweet woman - soul!"

SOME OF THE EPISODES IN THE NOVEL IN WHICH EVANGELIST THOMAS DIXON IS THE HERO.

DR. DIXON'S STATEMENT.

To the Editor of the Journal:

In answer to your query as to my relation to the hero of Miss Bell's book, "A Little Sister to the Wilderness," I would say that the facts and coincidences of biography set forth in the article are substantially correct. I filled Dr. Lorimer's pulpit one Summer in Chicago. Miss Bell is, I understand, connected with his church, and heard me there first before writing the book. I have written her several letters since and received several from her about it informing me that she had sketched my portrait in her Camden.

THOMAS DIXON, JR.

THOUSANDS upon thousands of New Yorkers have heard the Rev. Thomas Dixon preach. We will all see him soon upon the stage. This does not mean that the celebrated evangelist is to become an actor—it means that the central figure of a powerful drama is to be modelled after him.

This announcement follows one scarcely less startling—the statement confirmed by the famous preacher himself, that he is the prototype of the central figure of one of the most powerful and popular novels of the day, "A Little Sister to the Wilderness."

The darling author who has taken this liberty with the distinguished member of the cloth is Lillian Bell, of Chicago. Miss Bell first came into prominence as the author of a volume, "The Love Affairs of an Old Maid." It was a collection of brilliant sketches, bristling with witty, recognizable pen portraits and brilliant epigrams. It made an instantaneous hit and transformed Miss Bell from an unknown aspirant for literary honors to one from whom much was expected.

In her last novel she has sketched Dr. Dixon for her hero. And so accurately has she portrayed him that his personality and individuality stand out on every page. The book is being dramatized, and is to have a New York production early next season. In thrusting him so prominently into the glare of publicity Miss Bell has furnished New Yorkers with a surprise. The darling, the novelty of it all takes one's breath away.

Miss Bell makes no secret of the fact that Dr. Dixon is her hero. The coincidences of biography in his life and in the career of Camden, Miss Bell's hero, are accurate, says Dr. Dixon. Therefore there can be no doubt of it.

The facts of the case are these. Some years ago Dr. Dixon preached in Chicago for the Rev. Dr. Lorimer, and Miss Bell, youthful, brilliant, sensitive and alert, sat and listened. Listening to Mr. Dixon means something. It means electrified nerves; it means intense physical excitement; it means weak knees and sometimes hysterics. One young girl of his congregation stopped going to his church because she always went home and sobbed three hours. After a stirring sermon another made her way to him the other day through the dense outgoing crowd and assured him with tearful eyes and quivering lips that some day what he said would be in the Bible.

If additional proof be needed it can be found in two letters. One is to a friend, in which she said:

"Thank you very much for your endeavor to provide me with the hero of my book. I appreciate the effort, but you sent the wrong man. It was Dr. Thomas Dixon, of New York, I meant." Again, on the receipt of Mr. Dixon's picture: "Thank you so much for 'Camden's' picture. It is so exactly like him that I shall have it framed and hung in my study. It is so exactly Camden to me!"

"A Little Sister to the Wilderness" is a plaintive, sad story of a daughter of the shiftless, imprudent people who inhabit the lowlands of Tennessee. In the local

nomenclature they are known as "crackers," and the negroes call them "po' white trash," and hold them to be unfit for associates. Rough, uncultured, ignorant of a world outside their own, these people of whom Miss Bell writes are types of a gradual reversion to a primitive, aboriginal state. There is nothing attractive about them as a race. In fact, they are repulsive and uninteresting, save to missionaries and politicians.

There are but two characters in Miss Bell's book worthy of consideration. One is her hero, Camden, a clergyman, and the other, the unlettered, untutored child—or, as Miss Bell expresses it in her title—"little sister to the wilderness," who the author has christened Mag.

Camden went into the wilderness to work out his own salvation. The story of the early sin which required the earnest, faithful work of a lifetime to attain forgiveness, Miss Bell makes Camden tell to Jeff Crawford, one of the minor characters of the story. Crawford's wife had eloped and the man's life was embittered. He forbade all reference to her in his presence and swore that he would kill her if she came back. Camden was stopping with Crawford, who lived in the little settlement, where the minister was to conduct a revival. He had ventured to ask his host of his wife. The man resented it and struck at his tormentor.

"Camden's eyes flashed and the color leaped to his face, for the man in him told him to resent the blow. He reached out swiftly and caught Jeff's upraised arm. His voice was hoarse with feeling, and his words poured forth like a torrent, long pent; they rushed out with the fierceness of repressed vehemence, thick and hurried.

The story of Camden is in a sense a biography of Dr. Dixon. Camden was a lawyer and became a preacher. Mr. Dixon left the Bar for the ministry. Camden loved a beautiful young girl in early manhood, and she turned to his frail, faint-hearted, uninteresting brother. Dr. Dixon had a somewhat, although not entirely similar experience.

Camden's first meeting with Mag was during the excitement of a runaway. She stopped his flying horse during a terrific thunder storm.

When asked why he had braved the tempest he said:

"My name is Camden. Addison begged me to stay over night with him, but I felt a call to go forward that very hour, and I came."

"The deep seriousness of his last words thrilled Mag, for she, too, was used to listen to inward voices, and to follow the beckoning of invisible hands."

Later, when Camden comes to the village he again met Mag. At first his interest in her is as for one of a whole; nothing in her personality stands out in sufficient prominence to attract him. Then, as he knows her better, there appears to him the feeling that buried beneath the surface of this unlovely creature of the wilderness is a soul and mind away and above her surroundings and her people.



The Rev. Thomas Dixon in the Pulpit. He Is the Hero of a Popular Novel Which Is to Be Put on the Stage Next Season.

"Camden seemed to comprehend the life Mag led. The evident need of this girl appealed in the strongest way to a nature which was accustomed to give of its bounty to all who drew upon it. It smote him with much pain to imagine vulgarity in so beautiful a creature as Mag. She seemed to him, with his spiritual insight, to be detached from the sordid poverty of her family, and to remain separate, a creature of a different sort."

While musing in the woods he saw Mag approaching. She did not see him, and was amusing herself imitating the cries of the wood birds. So perfect was her imitation that Camden was surprised beyond measure. At length she saw him. She did not continue her bird notes. Evidently the spell was broken. Miss Bell draws another portrait of Dr. Dixon here, when she says: "His tall figure towered even above Mag's superb height. There was something about him, in his magnetism, in the stammering storm of his eyes, in the reserve strength of a character always at war with its own spirit, which was breathlessly overpowering."

"But the fitness of Mag's nature arose to meet it with exultation. The purity of her soul lay calmly in her face. Only the changeful expression in her deep eyes spoke of her longing soul."

He had a book with him. It was a copy of Lorna Doone. He read to her. Here again obviously Miss Bell describes the New York preacher:

"The richness and flexibility of Camden's voice combined to bring out every delicate shade of meaning in a way to make his reading of this single paragraph promise a treat of unusual proportions."

Beyond doubt a tribute to Dr. Dixon.

When the book was read, Miss Bell remembered word for word what had been read. Camden was not surprised. He discovered in it the strugglings of a soul long pent up, the agony of word impotence, the consuming desire of this savage child to express in words what was in her heart. To Camden's inquiry about her remarkable memory, Mag replied:

"Well, I have thought things like that before, only they seemed foolish to me, and I put them out of my mind. But here they sound like something fine I used to know just coming back to me."

"Mag made quite an effort for Camden's sake, in the teeth of his praise of her, to express herself connectedly and to make him know just what she meant."

Camden appreciated her efforts and drew her out. He praised her for her insight and power of observation, but Mag shook her head and spread out her hands with a gesture of despair.

"It is of no use to me. There is no one to tell it to, who could understand, and if there was, I couldn't make them feel as I. It is all locked up inside, and there it stays going round and round and only hurting me because it can't get out. It almost makes me sick sometimes, wanting to talk to people and ask them what they think and hear what they have to say." Mag's voice had a little ring of desperation in it, but she had given him the key to the mystery in her face.

Camden met her often, and gradually she learned a way to express partly the thoughts that she conceived. The preacher was interested in her, and that interest developed into love. He told her of his love, to which she replied that she was unworthy. Then he told her that his heart was burdened with a secret sorrow and that he was trying to buy forgiveness by saving souls. Then it is that for the first time Mag, or Margaret, as he now calls her, breaks down completely the barriers of her word impotence.

"What are you saying," she exclaimed,

"You, trying to buy what is only meant to be given away? You, who can make others receive without money and without price—and then weigh out souls to pay for your own salvation? No matter how you are sinned you can be forgiven. That is what you preach. Can't you believe it? Don't you see your mistake?"

He did and he acknowledged, and then came the end. There could be but one conclusion.

"Margaret do you love me? Answer me."

"And in Mag's answer her soul found its voice."

And this Camden is Rev. Dr. Dixon beyond a doubt. Could a better description be written of him than the following:

"In the pulpit Camden was most impressive. Although of a keenly nervous temperament, his manner was dignified and slow, but hinted of such repressed power and possible vehemence that these qualities subtly communicated themselves to the people, as the sensitive can feel electricity in the air."

"He was of unusual height, with square, lean jaws and high cheek bones, where vivid spots of color concentrated under excitement. His hair was black and abundant, and he had a leonine fashion of tossing it from his forehead with a backward movement of his head. The gestures of his long arms and strong, sinewy fingers were powerful. They remained in his heavy mind as a part of the point borne up. After once seeing him it was impossible to forget him. He thrilled upon the very like a shock. His lips moved a moment in silent prayer, and the so quiet made itself felt upon the people as a benediction. Then his voice was heard."

"The words of his petition doubtless faded from the minds of his hearers, but the breathless hush, his earnestness, the voice which melted and trembled and all but broke with feeling, which penetrated the depths of their callous hearts, which seared and quivered along their nerves with a force men vainly call magnetism for lack of a better name."

"The richness and flexibility of Camden's voice combined to bring out every delicate shade of meaning in a way to make his reading of this simple paragraph promise a treat of unusual proportions."

"He owed his power and popularity to the fact that his finger was always on the pulse of his people."

"There was an electric silence in the air which drew the people together involuntarily. Camden's uplifted face was radiant."

Miss Bell makes one mighty big mistake in her book. It could be solemnly sworn that when the big Jeff springs at Camden like a tiger, giving him a stinging blow between the eyes, Mr. Dixon would have done more than grab the big man's wrist and talk to him. It might be assumed that he would have caught him under the chin with his fist, knocked him down, sat on him, and then reasoned. But after all Miss Bell's method is the best. He has shown that he belongs to the church militant."

The Camden of the book will have to wake up a bit when he gets on the stage. People aren't going to have such a good-good Dixon. They aren't used to that kind of a Dixon, and Miss Bell says that Camden is Dixon, and of course Miss Bell knows. If Mr. Dixon simply walks around like that and nurses a baby named "Lasses" (cause she's so sweet) and don't do anything to make anybody mad, how can the papers criticize him, and in spite of Miss Bell, would it be Mr. Dixon if they didn't?

It may be that the dramatist will put force in the situations and give Mr. Dixon a show. The evangelist's friends hope so, and await the play with impatience.