

IN MEMORY OF REV. THOS. S. WILLIAMSON, M. D.

I. FROM A SKETCH BY REV. STEPHEN R. RIGGS, D. D., IN THE NEW YORK EVANGELIST, JULY 17, 1879.

Fifty years ago in this month of July, my mother was lying sick unto death in the town of Ripley, Ohio. We were comparatively strangers there, having come down from Steubenville only three months before. There came daily into that sick room, a young physician of a half-dozen years' practice. That was the beginning of my acquaintance with Dr. WILLIAMSON. During the next three or four years, no man in Ripley attended our examinations in Latin and Greek more regularly, or manifested a deeper interest in our progress. This was my boy acquaintance with him. But now for forty and two full years, he and I have been intimately associated in the missionary work in the land of the Dakotas.

THOMAS SMITH WILLIAMSON was born in Union District, South Carolina, in March, 1800. He was the son of Rev. WILLIAM WILLIAMSON and MARY SMITH—a second marriage. At this time the father was pastor of the church at Fair Forest. When only a boy of eighteen he had been drafted into the army, and accompanied GATES in his unfortunate expedition throughout the Carolinas. Afterwards he was graduated at Hampden Sydney College, and became a minister of the Gospel. By both his marriages he had come into the possession of slaves, as well as from his own father, THOMAS WILLIAMSON, whose wife was ANN NEWTON, a distant relative of Sir ISAAC NEWTON. By the will of his father, the slaves so coming to him were to be set free; and to accomplish this object for all in his possession, Rev. WILLIAM WILLIAMSON, in 1805, while THOMAS SMITH WILLIAMSON was a little lad, removed from South Carolina to Adams county, Ohio.

Thus the boy THOMAS had the advantage of growing up in the atmosphere of a free state, and with inherited antipathies to the wrong of slavery. In due time he was sent to Jefferson College, at Cannonsburg, Pa., where he graduated in the autumn of 1820. For the next three or four years he gave himself to the study of medicine, attending lectures, first at Cincinnati, and afterwards in Yale Medical College, where he took his degree of Doctor of Medicine in the spring of 1824. Returning to Ohio, he commenced the practice of his profession in West Union. But the next year he removed to Ripley, where he built up a very fair practice, in which he continued eight years.

In the spring of 1827 he married into one of the first families of Mason county, Ky., MARGARET POAGE, daughter of Col. JAMES POAGE, who was the proprietor of the town of Ripley. Into this new family there came during the next six years three children, but the LORD took them, and the father and mother were left alone. This, more than anything else, induced him to abandon the practice of medicine and seek the Gospel ministry. In these family bereavements he heard the Master's voice saying to him, "Come up higher."

Accordingly in the spring of 1833 he placed himself under the care of the Chillicothe Presbytery, and commenced the study of theology. The winter following, he spent in the Lane Theological Seminary, and was licensed to preach by his Presbytery in the spring of 1834. The change in his profession was made with the intention of devoting himself to missionary work among the aborigines of this country. And now, immediately after his licensure, we find him with an appointment from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions "to proceed on an exploring tour among the Indians of the Upper Mississippi, with special reference to the Sacs and Foxes, but to collect what information he could in reference to the Sioux, Winnebagoes and other Indians."

He went as far as Fort Snelling, and found what appeared to be an open door among the Dakotas or Sioux. There he met the brothers POND, SAMUEL W. and GIDEON H., from Connecticut, who had only gone up the Mississippi a few

weeks before he did, and were now building their log cabin on the margin of Lake Calhoun. So he returned to Ohio, made his report to those who sent him, and on the 18th of September, 1834, was ordained as a missionary by the Presbytery of Chillicothe. A few months later he received his appointment as a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Dakotas; and on the first day of April, 1835, Dr. WILLIAMSON with his family, accompanied by ALEXANDER G. HUGGINS and family, embarked at Ripley, Ohio, on a steamboat; and on the 16th of May they arrived at Fort Snelling. Here they stopped for a few weeks, and participated in a work of grace then going on within the garrison, and assisted in organizing the first Christian church in what is now the state of Minnesota.

Already they had left civilization far behind them, but the open door to Dr. WILLIAMSON and his party seemed to be far in the interior. They would fain have stopped at the Dakota village on Lake Calhoun, but their thought was not the LORD's thought. JOSEPH RENVILLE, the fur trader from Lac qui Parle, was there, and invited them to go up with him. Accordingly, on the 23d of June, they embarked on the Fur Company's Mackinaw boat, and ascended the St. Peter's or Minnesota river, as far as Traverse des Sioux, which they reached on the last of the month. From that point they made a land journey over the prairie, of about 125 miles, to Lac qui Parle, which they reached on the 9th of July, 1835. There, on the north side of the Minnesota river, and in sight of "The Lake-that-Speaks" to man, or "The Lake of Echoes," as it was formerly understood, they established themselves as teachers of the religion of JESUS.

Of the "Life and Labors" pressed into the next forty years, only the most meager outline could be given in this article. I prefer, rather, to make some groupings from which the life may be imagined.

There only lacks one year now of two round centuries, since HENNEPIN and DU LUTH met in the camps and villages of the Sioux on the Mississippi. Then, as since, they were recognized as the largest and most warlike tribe of Indians on the continent. Until Dr. WILLIAMSON and his associates went

among them, there does not appear to have been any effort made to civilize and Christianize them. With the exception of a few hundred words gathered by army officers and others, the Dakota language was unwritten. This was to be learned, *mastered*; which was found to be no small undertaking, especially to one who had attained the age of thirty-five years. While men of less energy and pluck would have knocked off, and been content to work as best they could through an interpreter, Dr. WILLIAMSON persevered, and in less than two years was preaching CHRIST to them, in the language in which they were born. He never spoke it easily, nor just like an Indian, but he was readily understood by those who were accustomed to hear him. Many years after, when he and I were traveling among the Tetons of the Missouri, who speak a dialect different from the one we learned, they complained that they could not understand the Doctor's religious talks. I suggested that he speak more slowly; which he did, and with better effect.

When I joined the band of workers at Lac qui Parle, in the Autumn of 1837, I found Dr. WILLIAMSON and Mr. GIDEON H POND engaged in obtaining through the French language and Mr. RENVILLE, some translations of the word of GOD. The Gospel of Mark was the first book completed, and Dr. WILLIAMSON made a visit to Ohio in the fall of 1839, to have it printed. The Gospel of John and some other portions were translated into the Dakota in the same way. As translations these were not very exact, but they were invaluable to us, since they gave us so many moulds, so to speak, of Christian thought. After that we commenced translating from the original Hebrew and Greek; and for these forty years it has been my privilege to work side by side and hand to hand with Dr. WILLIAMSON, in the labor of giving the Bible to the Dakotas.

Not in this part of the work alone, but in other forms of missionary labor as well, I have often admired the indomitable courage and perseverance of Dr. WILLIAMSON. There have been dark days in the history of the Dakota Mission, when my own heart would, I think, have failed me if it had not been for the "hold on and hold out to the end" of my best

earthly friend. And when, the other day, I heard that he was gone, I seemed to feel as I imagine a man in line of battle would, when his comrade standing right in front of him is stricken down; shoved to the front.

It was by a divine guidance that the station of Lac qui Parle was commenced. The Indians there were very poor in this world's goods, not more than half a dozen houses being owned in a village of 400 people. They were far in the interior and received no annuities from government. Thus they were in a condition to be helped in many ways by the mission. Under its influence and by its help, their corn patches were enlarged and their agriculture improved. Dr. WILLIAMSON also found abundant opportunities for the practice of medicine among them. Not that they gave up their pow-wows and conjuring, but many families were found quite willing that the white *Pay-zhe-hoo-ta-we-chash-ta* (GRASS ROOT MAN) should try his skill with the rest. For more than a quarter of a century, his medical aid went hand in hand with the preaching of the Gospel. By the helpfulness of the mission in various ways a certain amount of confidence was secured. Through the influence of Mr. RENVILLE, a few men, but especially the women, gathered to hear the good news of salvation. A native church was organized. Dr. WILLIAMSON writes: "In the year ending May, 1836, three persons had been received on examination; in the following year, four; and in the next year, nine; ten in the year ending May, 1839; in the next year, five; and in that ending in the spring of 1841, nine; making forty in all. In May, 1842, it was recorded: "Within a year, nine full-blooded Dakotas have been received to the church; three men and six women."

This shows a successful mission work. In the year 1842, the book of Genesis and a portion of the Psalms, together with about two-thirds of the New Testament, besides a Dakota hymn book and several school books, were printed. But in the meantime the war prophets and the so-called medicine men, were becoming suspicious of the new religion. They began to understand that the religion of CHRIST antagonized their own ancestral faith; and so they organized opposition. The children were forbidden to attend the mission school;

Dakota soldiers were stationed along the paths, and the women's blankets were cut up, when they attempted to go to church. Year after year the mission cattle were killed and eaten. At one time, Dr WILLIAMSON was obliged to hitch up milch cows to haul his wood with; the only animals left him.

Regarding this period, Dr. WILLIAMSON himself, in his sermon before the Synod of Minnesota in 1858, said :

“ But we had other difficulties to contend with, besides those arising from learning a difficult and unwritten language. PAUL, the Apostle of the Gentiles, had to labor, not only in journeying and preaching the Gospel, but even in the rich city of Corinth, the labor of his own hands provided for himself necessary food and clothing; and those who are like him, striving to preach CHRIST where he has not been much known, must not think it strange if they have to imitate him, in laboring with their hands. When the Dakota Mission was commenced we were informed that we must use the strictest economy in our expenses.

About the close of the year 1837 or 1838, we were instructed that our drafts on the treasury of the Board must in no case exceed eleven hundred dollars a year. There were at that time, laboring at the two stations, Lake Harriet and Lac qui Parle, three ordained ministers, two other men as teachers and farmers, six women, two of whom were teachers, and eight or ten children. At that time we had not a house fit to live in at either of the stations, and the best house belonging to the Mission was a year or two after abandoned. This restriction continued for five years, during which time the number of ministers and other laborers continued about the same, and the children increased to fourteen. In these five years the whole amount of money drawn by the Mission from the treasury of the Board, as shown by the annual reports, including four hundred dollars a year, or two thousand dollars in all, paid by the United States government on account of the schools taught by the assistant missionaries, was only four thousand, six hundred and fifty-five dollars and thirty-seven cents—less than one thousand a year for the furnishing of food, clothing and shelter, including also traveling expenses, the publication of books for the schools, as well as books for our own use and contingent expenses, for from twenty to twenty-four persons, besides several Indian children that were kept in our families during a part of the time.

During the whole of this five years, a majority of these persons had their home at Lac qui Parle, where food and clothing were dearer than at any place in the United States, and as dear as at any station sustained by the American Board of Foreign Missions, in any part of the whole world.

We had no smithshop nor post-office nearer than two hundred miles, and no mill till we erected one with our own hands. It is true that at this time we received considerable donations of clothing and some of pro-

visions from friends in Ohio, but after paying several cents a pound for freight and charges on those as well as all our other supplies, we had to haul them one hundred and twenty-five miles over a prairie where no men dwelt, and which, on various occasions we traversed alone without seeing a human being, or a quadruped except our team. In these journeys in which, for the sake of taking home a little more of such things as we needed, or getting home a little sooner, we mostly walked to drive our team by day, often wading through bogs, in which occasionally we became mired so that it was necessary to unhitch, and taking out our load from the wagon, carry it through the swamp on our shoulders.

These labors by day, with watching our team and fighting the mosquitoes by night, caused such lassitude and exhaustion of the physical powers, that on various occasions, for a week after getting home from one these trips, we were unfit for any labor, bodily or mental."

These were dark, discouraging years, very trying to the native church members, as well as missionaries. It is not strange that when in 1846, Dr. WILLIAMSON received an invitation, through the agent at Fort Snelling, to establish a mission at LITTLE CROW'S village, a few miles below where St. Paul has grown up, he at once accepted it, gathering from it that the LORD had a work for him to do there. And indeed He had. During the five or six years he remained there, a small Dakota church was gathered, and an opportunity was afforded him to exert a positive Christian influence on the white people then gathering into the capital of Minnesota. He preached the first sermon there.

When, after the treaty of 1851, the Indians of the Mississippi and lower Minnesota were removed, Dr. WILLIAMSON removed with them, or, rather, he went before them, and commenced his last station at *Pay-zhe-hoo-ta-zee* (the Yellow Medicine). There he and his family had further opportunity to "glory in tribulations." The first winter was one of unusual severity, and they came near starving. But here the LORD blessed them and permitted them to see a native church grow up, as well as at Hazlewood, the other mission station near by. It was during the next ten years that the seeds of civilization and Christianity took root, and grew into a fruitage, which in some good manner sustained the storm of the outbreak in 1862, and resulted in a great harvest afterwards.

Twenty-seven years of labor among the Dakotas were past.

The results had been encouraging, gratifying. Dr. WILLIAMSON's oldest son, Rev. JOHN P. WILLIAMSON, born in the missionary kingdom, had recently come from Lane Seminary, and joined our missionary forces. But suddenly our work seemed to be dashed into pieces. The whirlwind of the outbreak swept over our mission. Our houses and churches were burned with fire. The members of our native churches; where were they? Would there ever be a gathering again? It required just such a physical and moral revolution as that to break the bonds of heathenism in which these Dakotas were. It seems also to have required the manifest endurance of privations and the unselfish devotion of Dr. WILLIAMSON and others to them in this time of trouble, to fully satisfy their suspicious hearts that we did not seek *theirs*, but *them*. The winter of 1862-3, Dr. WILLIAMSON having located his family at St. Peter, usually walked up every Saturday to Mankato, to preach the Gospel to the 400 Dakota men in prison. "That," said a young man, "satisfied us that you were really our friends." Sometimes it seems strange that it required so much to convince them.

History scarcely furnishes a more remarkable instance of divine power on human hearts, than was witnessed in that prison. On the first day of February, 1863, Rev. GIDEON H. POND was standing with Dr. WILLIAMSON, when they "baptized into the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST, *three hundred in a day.*"

Ever since the outbreak, Dr. WILLIAMSON had had a home for his family in the town of St. Peter and its vicinity. For two years of the three in which the condemned Dakotas were imprisoned at Davenport, Iowa, he gave his time and strength chiefly to ministering to their spiritual needs. Education never progressed more rapidly among them than during these years. They almost all learned to read and write their own language. They spent much of their time in singing hymns of praise, in prayer, and reading the Bible. They were enrolled in classes, and each class was placed under the special supervision of an elder. This gave them something like a Methodist organization; but it was found essential to a proper watch and care.

This experience in the prison and elsewhere, made it more and more manifest that to carry forward the work of evangelization among this people, we must make large use of our native talent. Our first licentiate was JOHN BAPTISTE RENVILLE, the youngest son of the JOSEPH RENVILLE under whose auspices the mission had been commenced at Lac qui Parle. In the spring of 1865, the Dakota Presbytery, which was the first organization within the bounds of Minnesota, held its meeting in the town of Mankato. Dr. WILLIAMSON preached the opening sermon on "Our Christian Duty to the Inferior Races, the African and the Indian." The doctrines he advanced, and the statements he made, were not popular then and there. But probably no disturbance would have been made, if hostile Sioux had not been in the neighborhood and killed the JEWETT family. This was unknown to us till the next day. But the unreasoning populace said it was because Dr. WILLIAMSON had come to town and preached that sermon. And so while we were examining JOHN B. RENVILLE, the chief men of the town came in and demanded the retirement of the Doctor.

Probably no white man ever doubted that Dr. WILLIAMSON was the honest and hearty friend of the Indian. With a class of men it was the head and front of his offending, that, in their judgment, he could see only one side, that he was always the apologist of the red man, that in the massacre of the border in 1862, when others believed and asserted that a thousand or fifteen hundred whites were killed, Dr. WILLIAMSON could only count three or four hundred. He was honest in his beliefs, and honest in his apologies. He felt that necessity was laid upon him to "open his mouth for the dumb." They could not defend themselves; they have had very few defenders among white people.

In the summer of 1866, after the release of the Dakota prisoners at Davenport, Iowa, Dr. WILLIAMSON and I took with us Rev. JOHN B. RENVILLE, and journeyed up through Minnesota and across through Dakota to the Missouri river, and into the eastern corner of Nebraska. On our way we spent some time at the head of the Coteau, preaching and administering the ordinances of the Gospel to our old church

members, and gathering in a multitude of new converts, which we organized into churches, ordaining elders over them, and licensing two of the best qualified to preach the Gospel. When we reached the Niobrara, we found the Christians of the prison at Davenport and the Christians of the Camp at Crow Creek, now united, and they desired to be consolidated into one church, of more than 400 members. We helped them to select their religious teachers, which they did from the men who had been in prison. So mightily has the Word of God prevailed among them, that almost the entire community professed to be Christians. For four consecutive summers, it was our privilege to travel together in this work of visiting and reconstructing these Dakota Christian communities. We also extended our visits to the villages of wild Tetonians along the Missouri river. Dr. WILLIAMSON claimed that the Indians must be more honest than white men; for he always took with him an old trunk without a lock, and in all their journeys he had not lost from a thread to a shoestring.

For nearly thirty-six years, Dr. WILLIAMSON was a missionary of the American Board. But after the union of the Assemblies and the transfer of the funds contributed by the New School supporters of that Board to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, the question of a change of our relations was thoughtfully considered and fully discussed. The Doctor was too strong a Presbyterian not to have decided convictions on that matter. But there were, as we considered it, substantial reasons why we could not go over as an entire mission. And so we agreed to divide, Dr. WILLIAMSON and his son, Rev. JOHN P. WILLIAMSON, transferring themselves to the Presbyterian Board, while my boys and myself remained as we were. The division made no disturbance in our mutual confidence, and no change in the methods of our common work. Rather have the bonds of our union been drawn more closely together, during the past eight years, by an annual conference of all our Dakota pastors and elders and Sabbath school workers. This has gathered and again distributed the enthusiasm of the churches; and has become the director of the native missionary forces. With one exception

Dr. WILLIAMSON has been able to attend all these annual convocations, and has added very much to their interest.

His great life work, that of translating the Bible into the language of the Sioux nation, was continued through more than two score years, and was only completed last Autumn. In this, as in most things, he worked slowly and carefully. He commenced with Genesis, as has been already stated, and worked onwards. The exception to this was that, many years ago, he made a translation of the book of Proverbs. But he closed his work with the books of Chronicles. He lived to read the plate proofs of all, and to realize that the entire Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were in the language of the Dakotas, though he did not live to see the book complete.

While the Synod of Minnesota was holding its session in St. Paul, in October, 1877, Dr. WILLIAMSON was lying at the point of death, as was supposed, with pneumonia. Farewell words passed between him and the Synod. But his work was not then done, and the LORD raised him up to complete it. Now when the Bible was finished, there seemed to be no further object that he should live for, and he declined almost from that day onward.

On my way up to the land of the Dakotas, in the middle of May, I stopped over a day with my old friend. He was very feeble, but still able to walk out and sit up a good part of the day. Of this visit I made this memorandum :

“He is now in his eightieth year, and is really quite feeble. He has been hoping that as the warm weather comes on, he may rally as he has done in former years. But his feeling seemed to be that as the great work of giving the Bible to the Dakotas was completed, there was not much left for him to do here. He remarked that he had during the last forty-four years, built several houses; one at Lac qui Parle, one at Kaposia, one at Yellow Medicine, and one near St. Peter. The two on the upper Minnesota had fallen to pieces or been destroyed, and the others were looking old, and would not remain long after he was gone. But the building up of human souls that he had been permitted to work for, and which, by the grace of GOD, he had seen coming up into new life, through the influence of the word and the power of the Holy Ghost, he confidently believed would *remain*.

When I reported to his Dakota friends the near prospect of his dissolution, there arose in all the churches a *great prayer-cry* for his recovery. This was reported to him, but he sent back, by the hand of his son ANDREW, this message: "Tell the Indians that father thanks them very much for their prayers, and hopes they will be blessed both to his good and theirs. But he does not wish them to pray that his life here may be prolonged, for he longs to depart and be with CHRIST."

And so his longing was answered. He died on Tuesday, June 24, 1879, at 2 a. m.

On the further shore he has joined the multitude that have gone before. Of his own family, there are the three who went in infancy. Next, SMITH BURGESS, a manly Christian boy, was taken away very suddenly. Then LIZZIE HUNTER went in the prime of womanhood. The mother followed, a woman of a quiet and a beautiful life. And the sainted NANNIE went up to put on white robes. Besides these of his family, a multitude of Dakotas are there who will call him father. I think they have gathered around him and sung, under the trees by the river, one of his Dakota hymns:

Jehowa Mayoooha, nimayakiye,
Nitowashte iwadowan.
Jehovah, my LORD, Thou hast saved me,
I sing of Thy goodness.

Of his last days on earth, JOHN P. WILLIAMSON writes thus: "Father seemed to be tired out in body and mind, with as much disinclination to talk as to move, and apparently as much from the labor of collecting his mind, as the difficulty of articulation. We had thought that perhaps at the last, when the bodily pains ceased, there might be a little lingering sunshine from the inner man; but such was not the case; and perhaps it was most fitting that he should die as he lived, with no exalted imagery of the future, but a stern faith which gives hope and peace in the deepest waters." My life-long friend—my fellow-worker in the Gospel of JESUS among the Dakotas—he needs no eulogy from me! His works do follow him!

II. FROM A MEMOIR IN THE *HERALD AND PRESBYTER*, JULY, 1879. WRITTEN BY HIS SON, A. W. WILLIAMSON.

From 1864 to his death, he made his home at St. Peter, superintending the work of native laborers by means of very extensive correspondence, and by missionary tours occupying the greater part of his summers; and in conjunction with Dr. RIGGS, revising and completing a very careful translation of the Holy Scriptures into the Dakota. He finished revising the last proofs about three months before his death. So long as he was able to sit up, which was to within about three weeks of his death, he continued to keep up his work by correspondence, spending the remainder of his time on an article proving by their tradition, mythology, and especially from their language, that the Dakotas originally came from Europe, and that it is probable that the Poncas, Omahas, Mandans, and some other tribes kindred by language to the Dakotas, were the mound builders of the Ohio Valley.¹ He suffered much for several months before his death, but bore it with patient resignation, only asking of his friends that they should not pray that he might be detained longer from going to be with JESUS.

Never brilliant, he was yet, by his capacity for long-continued, severe exertion, and by systematic, persevering industry, enabled to accomplish an almost incredible amount of labor. Needing a knowledge of French as a stepping-stone to a knowledge of Dakota, he studied it diligently during his tedious trip out, and while driving his team over the prairie for supplies, and learned it so thoroughly that ever after, he was able to read French as readily as English. He professed equal facility in Latin, in Attic and New Testament Greek, and in the Hebrew Scriptures. In all his works he was distinguished by conscientious thoroughness. Often would he study many hours with the aid of the best help he

1. His last visit to the rooms of the Historical Society, but a few weeks prior to his death, was to consult authorities regarding this question, and he labored diligently on it several hours each day while in the city, though suffering much bodily pain at the time.

could secure, both English and Latin, to settle in his mind the exact force of a Hebrew or Greek expression before attempting to render it into Dakota.

In his family he was a kind and affectionate husband and father, not permitting any pressure of other duties to cause him to neglect the training of his children. All of his sons graduated from college with honorable standing, one becoming a foreign missionary, one a teacher, one a lawyer. He was not at all eloquent in speech, yet thorough knowledge of GOD's word, practical good sense, and his lucid explanations, gave him considerable power in the pulpit; but his chief power as a messenger of GOD lay in his example, in his making himself a true, devoted and trusted friend for those for whom he labored, and in a Christian conversation which often seemed as if dictated by GOD's spirit.

In his last days his mind as well as his body, was weak and weary.