

Three Thomas Dixon Books Sold 3,000,000 Copies

Tar Heel Author Who Made Fortune Now Is Penniless

Earned, Lived and Lost \$1,250,000 in 27 Years, During
Which He Wrote 21 Novels, Nine Plays, Six Motion
Pictures; First Book a Sensational Suc-

cess, Published by Page.
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"I have written 21 novels, nine plays and six motion pictures in 27 years and have made \$1,250,000 and lived it up and lost it, and find myself penniless at the age of 70 years," declared Thomas Dixon, noted southern writer and native of Cleveland county, North Carolina, in an exclusive interview given me on a recent date.

It was my great pleasure to have Thomas Dixon as a guest in my home as he dipped into the state the other day on a lecture tour. And for a period of more than three hours I sat with him and heard him tell the interesting story of his literary career and his rise to fame.

The white-haired author declared that he had sold over 5,000,000 copies of his books, and that nobody else in the South had ever done that. He believes that the income from those books has been larger than the income of any other American author.

"I wrote a trilogy of books which have averaged a sale of a million copies each," stated Mr. Dixon, "and another book which ran approximately 800,000 copies."

"What was your first book?" I asked of him.

"The Leopard's Spots," he said, "and that book not only made me, but it established the Doubledy-Page publishing company."

But I had better let Mr. Dixon tell this interesting and exciting literary story:

"When I was in the legislature of North Carolina in the year 1886, I met Walter Hines Page. He was the founder of The Chronicle, a Raleigh newspaper, of which he himself was the editor. Mr. Page and I became good friends while in Raleigh.

"In the year 1900 I wrote The Leopard's Spots. That was my first effort. And I had a very unusual experience. That first novel was practically accepted by two publishing houses before I could

get it out of the hands of one of them.

"I sent two copies of the script—one to the Bobbs-Merrill Company, of Indianapolis, and the main copy to Walter Hines Page who, at this time, was with the Doubledy-Page Company in New York. Mr. Page immediately read the script. He was so excited over it that he sat up all night to finish it, and then next morning, he lacked one chapter. It was breakfast time, and he wanted his morning cup of coffee.

"He started across the street, and as he walked along he was so engrossed in that last chapter that he was trying to snatch it up as he moved through the crowded streets.

"At this time a trolley-car approached, and he did not see it. This trolley-car knocked down Walter Hines Page and nearly killed him; and in my library in New York I still have that original manuscript of The Leopard's Spots stained with the blood of Walter Hines Page.

"Mr. Page sent me a wire of acceptance and asked me to come to New York immediately to discuss a contract. Then I at once wrote the Indianapolis company and told them that my novel had already been accepted, and they immediately returned it to me. (I think they would have accepted it too). That book was the result of 20 years' study and of a lifetime which I had lived. And I am glad to say, that from the publishing standpoint, it was Walter Hines Page, a native of my state, who first discovered me.

"That first book paid me \$100,000. This enabled me to stop lecturing and give my whole life to

writing. That book eventually sold more than a million copies."

"At this point, I asked Mr. Dixon this question:

"Mr. Dixon, there is a very interesting story abroad to the effect that you practically wrote out your own scale of royalties in Mr. Page's office. Your readers would like to have that affirmed or denied. If this is true, I am sure it would lend a great deal of color to this interview to have you delineate that account."

"As I just said, Mr. Page wired me to come to New York to discuss the contract with him. Of course, I went up immediately. He made out the contract, and when we came to the question of royalties, I said, 'Page, do you mind giving me a sliding scale of royalties?'"

"He laughed and said, 'What is your idea?'"

"I said, 'This book is going to sell 100,000 copies.'

"He said, 'You hear these stories but they are just stories. Books don't sell 100,000 copies. All these stories that publishers get out are just stories. If his book sells 25,000 copies, you will have an enormous success.'

"I said to Mr. Page, 'You don't mind my making out the sliding scale, do you? We will take 25,000 copies on the basis of 10 per cent.'

"He said, 'All right. That's fine. Just take this blank sheet of paper and make out your slide.'

"I wrote out my own sliding scale of terms. And I wrote out 10 per cent for the first 25,000. That means that I got 10 per cent of the retail price of the first 25,000 books that were sold."

"Then I fixed 12 1-2 per cent for the next 25,000 and 15 per cent for the next 15,000 and 20 per cent for all over 75,000. Twenty per cent was the limit that any publisher had ever paid up to that time."

"Fine," said Mr. Page. And he laughed at me."

"I said, 'All right. I will make you laugh on the other side of your face when you begin to send me those royalties.'

"He said, 'You can't make me laugh too hard, because when I make money for you, I make money for the firm.'

"He said, 'Frankly, I tell you, Dixon, this book will sell 25,000 copies; but you are too late. Thomas Nelson Page has already beat you to it.'

"I said, 'No, Page, he has not. Thomas Nelson Page has written the sentimental view of the South, and I have written the painful, realistic view of things. And I am a better editor of public opinion than you are. This book will sell over 100,000 copies.'

"He laughed again. I said, 'I will laugh when you send me those royalty checks.' And every time he would send me a big royalty check, I would laugh and

ter and say, 'Ha, ha, ha, too! We got just as much as you did.' (For the publisher realized almost as much net profit out of the book as I got from the same book, as its author)."

"Would you mind tracing for us how this urge for literary creation came upon you, and something of its developments,"

"While I was at Wake Forest college," he said, "I was one of two students who established the Wake Forest Student Magazine. I edited it for two years. I wrote stories and editorials also for it during that time."

"I made up my mind that eventually I was going to be a writer, but that it was wisest for me to live first. I decided not to write until I was full of years and experience. I wanted to succeed, fail and fight and have the battles of life. I carried that plan out. I did not write my first novel until I was 40 years old."

"There was one thing I determined to develop and I was working on that for a period of 20 years. That was the story of the crucifixion of the South. The story of the South put to torture—and I lived through it."

"A great many Southerners would be interested, Mr. Dixon, in knowing what determined you in the production of your famous trilogy of books?"

"Well," he said, "the thing that determined me on that was an incident that happened in Boston while I was a pastor there. My whole literary career was shaped by it. Justine D. Fulton, a very distinguished Baptist preacher, went South on a tour of six weeks, and from the Pullman windows and the hotel lobbies saw the South."

"At that time the bloody shirt was constantly waved as a political issue, and I was in the home of William Hoyle Garrison. Fulton went down to study the South, and when he returned he made a speech in Tremont Temple in the city of Boston."

"I was in that temple that evening. In the speech Mr. Fulton said 'Brethren before God, I am telling you something. The only way to save this nation from hell is for Northern mothers to rear more children than Southern mothers.'

"I laughed out loud. He stopped the speech. In a short time he came down and said to me, 'Who are you? What do you mean by breaking up my lecture.' I said, 'I laughed out loud because I thought you were so funny.' I said, 'You were the funniest man I ever saw in all my life. I have never seen a Confederate flag. What has been said is not so, and I will answer it one day.'

"My books are the answer. I began my studies then. It was

most authors had a very difficult time in becoming established. Many of them have written and written for years and years, only to have their manuscripts rejected and their hopes dashed to earth. I recall that many of the leading American writers today worked without encouragement for six, ten or fifteen years. I should like to ask you if you had the usual difficulty of aspiring authors in getting recognition?"

"No, I had a very unusual experience. For while it is true that most writers have to battle and strive and wait for years and years, as I have just told you the very first novel I ever wrote was practically accepted by two publishing houses—and was finally gobbled up by the Doubleday-Page Company which sent me a wire to hurry to New York to sign the contract."

"I have said that the Leopard's Spots was my first novel. That was written in the year 1900. It was published in the year 1901. Then for 27 years, without a break, I was producing and selling constantly, and in that period of time I did enough writing to bring me \$1,250,000."

"That I lived this up and lost the rest of it is beside the question. The point is that I made this money in this time—thus piling up a record for monetary achievement that had never been equalled, I think, by any other American author, North or South."

"So you see I buckled down to real literary effort the first year in this century. At once I began making money. That first book paid me \$100,000, which enabled me to stop lecturing and give my whole life to writing. Up to date over a million copies have been sold of that first book."

"The trilogy of books which made me famous were, as you know, the Leopard's Spots, the Clansman, the Traitor. Those three books averaged about one million copies each—the Clansman slightly out-selling any of the others. The One Woman sold about 90,000 copies and proved to be quite a success when it appeared."

"The Leopard's Spots gave me my first big success. It brought me immediate position. Then I began writing for the stage, and I first dramatized the Clansman."

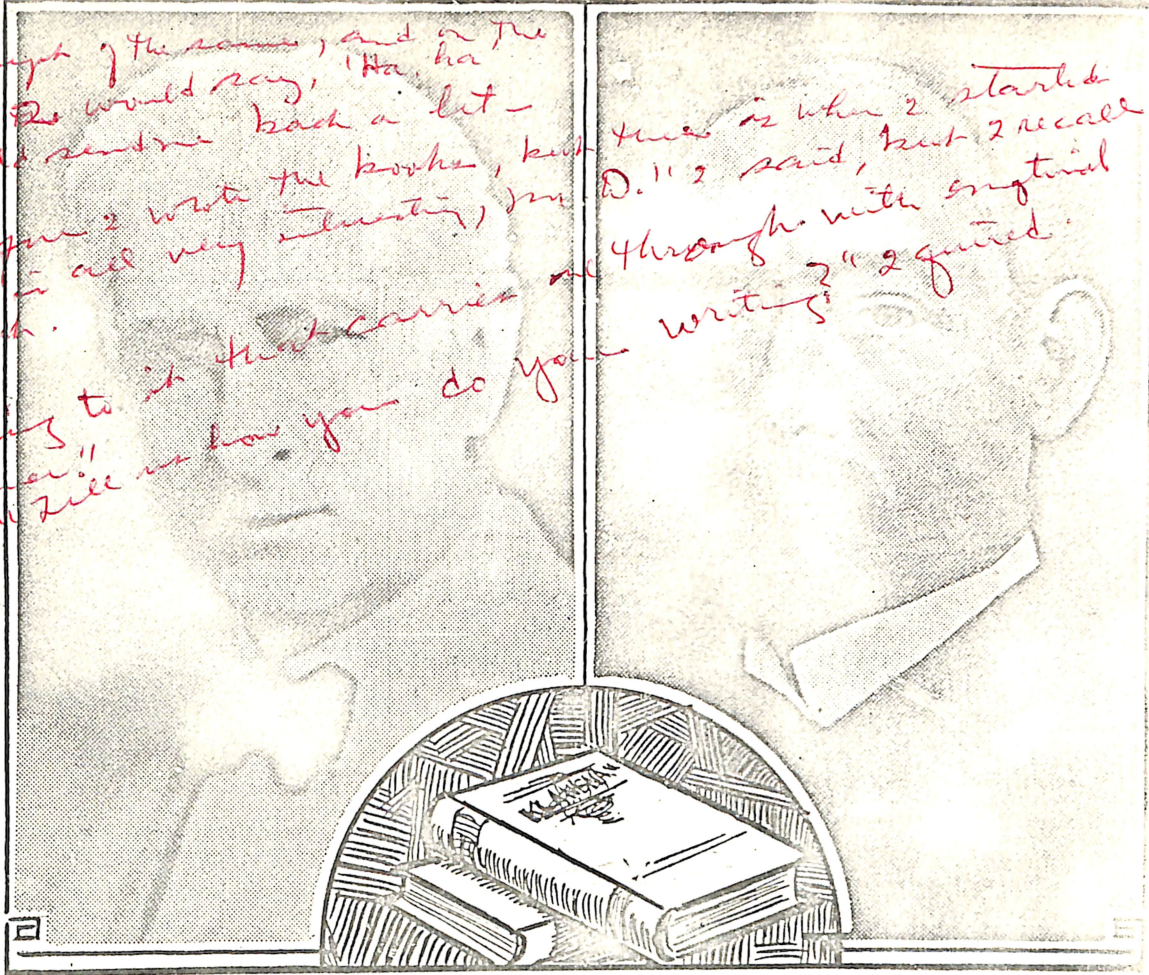
"Mr. Dixon," I questioned, "did you find that writing was a most difficult thing for you to perform or was literary creation a joy to you?"

"It was both," he said, "a joy and a difficulty. I never write until I am so full of the subject that I can't keep my hands off of it, and that always gives a certain

1. I believe I have been my typical thought about all these years and still in. She is here every time I get a message on my autobiography which is to be.
2. Spots, the Lion, the Father, the One Woman, the Traitor, and Robert's love.

edge receipt of the same, and on the
 sitting. He would say, "Ha, ha, ha"
 He would send me back a bit -
 long before I wrote the books, but
 "This is all very interesting," Mr. Dixon?
 "I will see how you do your writing?"
 "I will see how you do your writing?"
 "I will see how you do your writing?"

There are several on the left page.
 3 books, the first copy, and the first page.
 I had your books from those many editions, Mr. Dixon?



Thomas Dixon (shown at left as he appears today), Tar Heel author from Cleveland county, who wrote *The Leopard's Spots* and a score of other novels, gives credit for his "discovery" to Walter Hines Page (shown at right as he appeared when he was head of Doubleday, Page & Company, publishers of Dixon's books.) He accepted for publication Dixon's first novel, of which 100,000 copies were sold. Page also was a Tar Heel. He died while serving as U. S. ambassador to London.

"After I have completed my preparations," he went on, "which take a great deal longer than the actual writing, (I worked a year on the notes of the *Leopard's Spots* and wrote that book in sixty days. I worked a year on the notes of the *Clansman*. It was written in thirty days.) . . . After I have completed my preparations, which take a great deal longer than the actual writing, I write 17 hours a day and never open a letter or do anything except that one thing until it is finished.

"I do my best work with that emotional concentration which is characteristic of any artistic effort. I write with a big old pencil. Under the urge of production I write very rapidly.
 "My wife has worn out four

published in the year 1935.

"After I have written my material down with a pencil and revised it and after my wife has put it in form, I revise it again before I submit it to the publishers; and of course I revise it for the press."

"Do you find that your greatest effort is put forth under high emotional pressure?" I wondered.

"Yes, I have written my successful books only in that sort of way."

"Just how much writing, I said, "have you done, Mr. Dixon?"

"I have written 22 novels, nine plays and six motion pictures that have been produced. And I am still writing."

"Will you recall, off-hand," I said, "some of the plays you have written?"
 "The *Clansman*, the *Leopard's*

—the *Clansman* especially having been pictured and known to the public as *The Birth of a Nation*.

"The *Clansman*, as you know, was a great success. The *One Woman* a moderate success. I played, myself, for one whole year in the *Sins of the Father*."

I asked, "and what were the names of the novels you have written?"

"In all," he answered, "I have written 21 novels. Some of these that come quickest to mind are: *The Leopard's Spots*, the *Clansman* (*The Birth of a Nation*); the *Traitor*, *Comrades*, the *Root of Evil*, the *Life Worth Living*, the *Sins of the Father*, the *Southern*, the *Victim*, the *Foolish Virgin*, the *Fall of a Nation*, the *Way of a Man*, *A Man of the People* (to play), the *Man in Gray*, the *Black*

through that was a rather fanciful name.

INHERITED FROM MOTHER.

"My mother used to read The Saturday Evening Post. I do not remember a time when that magazine was not in our home. She read magazines, books, fiction, poetry and everything else that came her way.

"It is my opinion that I got my literary flavor and blend from my mother.

"We moved back to Shelby from the farm, and my recollection begins with an old-fashioned white house on the corner in Shelby. It is not there now. My father lived there for a number of years. I grew to be nine years old, and then we moved to another farm."

As I recall it, A. C. Dixon must have been a great preacher. My own father used to hear him years ago, and he left that impression on him. So it was a natural thing for me to ask Tom Dixon for his appraisal of his brother A. C. And this is what he said:

"I have always thought he was one of the greatest preachers that the country ever produced. I also feel that he was the greatest evangelist of the day. He was my big brother, my ideal and I loved him. And naturally I am prejudiced. But when one considers the churches he held, in this country and in England, together with his great evangelistic impact upon this nation, one would naturally arrive at the conclusion that he must have been a great preacher."

"PASSION FOR WORK."

"I am very sure it would be interesting to your friends," I said, "and your readers, both old and new, if you would tell them how you are spending the afterglow of a life that has been somewhat long and full of unusual achievement and attainment."

"I am spending it," he said, "in an endless passion for work—for new thought and new ideas and new achievement."

I recalled at this point that he had been engaged in a speaking tour through the middle west and south for the NRA. Indeed, it was my pleasure to hear him deliver this lecture, and I recall now the striking manner in which he went about his presentation, and some of the things he said.

For instance, he was talking about President Roosevelt. He went back to the time when he had gone, as a young man from North Carolina, to New York city. There, he said, he became interested in public and civic welfare and, to his amazement, found a young man by the name of Theodore Roosevelt, and a Republican, was interested in the same thing.

The way he told it, facetiously, was that it had never occurred to him that a man could be a Republican and be interested in anything good.

NEVER TOLD FATHER.

He went on to say that he and Theodore Roosevelt formed a close attachment, the one for the other. And that he supported him for the governorship of New York, voted for him for vice president of the United States and voted for him again when he was elected President.

He said that he never told his father, so long as he lived, that he had voted for a Republican. He said he had better sense than to tell his father.

But he did go on to say that he was interested in the Roosevelt family, that when he supported Roosevelt for the governorship, he was throwing himself behind the great movement, that when Theodore was elected President of the United States that one of the greatest men of the age was in that position; but that when Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat, was elected, he knew that the kingdom had come.

He is a great believer in Franklin D. Roosevelt. He does not mince words. He says, frankly, that Mr. Roosevelt is staging a revolution. That behind what Mr. Roosevelt is doing is nothing more nor less than a re-distribution of wealth. He says that it is his opinion that this country is going to snap out of it under that peerless leader.

Probably because Mr. Dixon, himself, had written so many books—I asked him, at this point, what he thought of modern-day literature—such as is coming from the presses of the country each day of the year. And this is what he said:

MODERN LITERATURE.

"I think that a lot of it is unspeakably filthy. I cannot understand how the publishers print it, and I don't understand why people buy it."

"The world, as you have known it," I said, "is it a better, a happier and a saner world today than when you first knew it?"

"Yes, I think it is."

"Tell us," I encouraged him, "something of your home today."

"I have had a wonderful home in New York city for 25 years on Riverside Drive.

"I have my library there, in which I spend endless hours of study and work. My son lives with us. My daughter is on the road lecturing most of the time. She has a lovely home in Switzerland."

At this point, I remembered that a Major Dixon is running for the governorship of Alabama on the New Deal platform. And so I asked Mr. Dixon if this young man was related to him.

"Yes, he is my nephew."

HIS NEXT BOOK.

"And speaking of your autobiography, I believe you told me that you were working on that

now and you plan to release it for publication in the year 1935?"

"Yes. I think it will be my most important book. I can hardly keep my hands off it. I have been working on it for six months. I am going to make it cover the period from slavery into which I was born. Any man who has lived as long and as fully as I have should certainly be able to say something that would interest a wide range of human beings.

"The title of that book is to be: The Story of a Minister's Son, dedicated to the black sheep of the flock, by one of them."

The other day, sometime after Mr. Dixon had returned to New York city, I had a piece of fan mail in which the writer asked me for Mr. Dixon's New York address.

That brings up an interesting little bit of coincidence: For instance, while I was talking to Mr. Dixon, he made the remark that during certain months of the late lamented depression he had been without carfare in the city of New York.

Mr. Dixon went on from my home to Durham where he delivered a lecture. It so happened that I was in Durham a few days later. It further so happened that I talked with a man who had talked with Thomas Dixon while Mr. Dixon was in that city.

HAS CHANGED ADDRESS.

Thomas Dixon should have told this man that unless he got a financial break, he was going to either lose his New York home, or be compelled to sub-let it and seek more modest quarters.

Now, it so happened, that when I returned home from that weekend trip, I had a letter on my desk from Mr. Dixon, with a brand new address on it—written in ink.

The surmise, then, is this: that since I have had two letters from Mr. Dixon from this new address, he did not get the financial break he was so sorely in need of, and, consequently, is out of his New York home—at least temporarily.

One who knows Mr. Dixon, either through his books or personally, will wish that the great southerner may get some good financial breaks yet. And anyone who knows him would be disposed to believe that if he lived long enough to see his autobiography on the market, he will recoup his fortune again.

For Mr. Dixon does not think in terms of age. He says he has no consciousness of age. He moves about, yet, with the agility of a young man. The old-time fire still sparkles in his eyes. He has lived—is still living and to use his own phraseology:

"If I should die tomorrow, I should wave a happy farewell to this world, and say, 'I have lived; I shall live again.'"

...er a million each."

In reply to a question Mr. Dixon said six of his books are still selling and available to the public, these being The Leopard's Spots, his first novel; The Clansman, The Southerner, The Man in Gray, The Sun Virgin, and The Harding Tragedy.

The grand total of sales of all the Thomas Dixon books is above five million copies, he said.

"Would you release some little foreward about your autobiography which is now in the state of production?" I suggested.

"I think I will make it my most important book. As I see it now I can hardly keep my hands off of it while I am on this lecture tour. I have already been working on it for six months.

"I keep saying to myself, 'You can't do it yet. You must do some more work.' I am going to make it over the period from, in which I was born, up to the present time. Three million and five hundred thousand slaves were in the South when I was born. None of them were ever hungry or without clothes or shelter; but I have lived to see 17,000,000 of people hungry, friendless and houseless and many of them starving to death.

"This is the period of my life I am going to cover, I am going to make it, of course, an intimate revelation of my own soul. I expect to make the history of the development of the human soul the basis of the story. I have, in my last years, become again most interested in the study of the Bible. I made a new study of the book from a spiritual point of view, and I am going to embody that into the history of the development of religion in the United States."

"You think then, Mr. Dixon," I went on, "that your autobiography, which you think will be your best effort, will reach the public in 1935?"

"That is my plan as of today. And my fingers are itching and burning and tingling to be working on the manuscript right now."

asked.
"Yes - many editions, The L.S. ran thru 20 editions of both of them sold over a million each."

