

## Humphrey Hunter.

But few persons in North Carolina have deserved more of their country than Humphrey Hunter, in his youth or his young manhood, or in his maturer years. No one is more deserving of a page in history, as one who contended for the freedom of his country, or as a preacher of righteousness. He was born on the 14th of May, 1755, in the vicinity of Londonderry, in the North of Ireland, the native place of his father. His paternal grandmother was from Glasgow, Scotland, and his maternal grand-father from Brest, in France. The blood of the Scotch and the Huguenot was blended in Ireland, and the descendant emigrated to America and flourished in the soil of Carolina.

Deprived by death of his father in his fourth year, young Hunter embarked at Londonderry with his widowed mother for Charleston, S. C., on the 3rd of May, 1759, on board the ship *Helena*. Arriving on the 27th of August, the family in a few days proceeded to Mecklenburg county, North Carolina, where the mother purchased land in the Poplar Tent congregation, and remained for life. As the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty was one of the principal causes of his mothers emigration, it is not wonderful that young Hunter grew up with a spirit jealous of encroachment from the English crown.

From the time of his reaching Mecklenburg till his twentieth year, little is known of him. We are left to the conjecture that he grew up familiar with all the labors and privations of a frontier life, by which he became fitted to endure the fatigues and sufferings of a military expedition. He attended the convention in Charlotte May 20, 1775, as one of the numerous crowd of spectators assembled on that exciting occasion. In his account of the meeting prefixed to his copy of the Declaration of Independence, he thus writes concerning the battle of Lexington, which took place on the 19th of April:

"That was a wound of a deepening, gangrenous nature,

not to be healed without amputation. Intelligence of the affair speedily spread abroad, yea flew, as if on the wings of the wind collecting a storm. No sooner had it reached Mecklenburg than an ardent, patriotic fire glowed almost in every breast; it was not to be confined; it burst into a flame; it blazed through every corner of the county. Communications from one to another were made with great facility. Committees were held in various neighborhoods; every man was a politician. Death rather than slavery, was the voice comparatively of all."

Soon after the Declaration of Independence, a regiment was raised in Mecklenburg, under Col. Thomas Polk, and Col. Adam Alexander, to march against some Tories who were embodied in the lower part of the State. Mr. Hunter went as a private in the company of Capt. Charles Polk, nephew of Col. Thomas Polk. The Tories dispersed at the approach of this force, and the regiment speedily returned without bloodshed or violence.

Mr. Hunter then commenced his classical education at Clio Nursery (now Iredell), under the instruction of Rev. James Hall. The following certificates, preserved by Mr. Hunter, show the order of the congregation, and the care with which the morals of the youth were watched over by church officers and instructors in schools. The first appears to have been required for his honorable standing at Clio's Nursery:

"This is to certify that the bearer, Humphrey Hunter, has lived in the bounds of this congregation upwards of four years, and has behaved himself inoffensively, not being guilty of any immoral conduct known to us, exposing him to church censure, and is free from public scandal.

"Given under our hands at Poplar Tent this 18th day of October, 1778.

"JAMES ALEXANDER,

"J. ROSS,

"ROBERT HARRIS,

"Ruling Elders."

When General Rutherford collected a brigade from Mecklenburg, Rowan, and Guilford counties to repel the aggressions of the Cherokee Indians, Mr. Hunter received a commission of lieutenant under Capt. Robt. Mayben, in one of the three companies of cavalry that formed part of the corps. The campaign was successful, the Indian forces were scattered, and their chiefs taken. After this campaign, Mr. Hunter resumed his classical studies at Queen's Museum in Charlotte, under the care of Dr. McWhirter, who had removed from New Jersey to take charge of that institution, with flattering prospects. Of the moral and religious character of the young man, the following certificate in the handwriting of his instructor is testimony, viz.: That the bearer, Humphrey Hunter, has continued a student in Clio's Nursery from August, 1778, till last October; that he applied to his studies with diligence; was admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Bethany congregation; has during the aforesaid time conducted himself as a good member both of religious and civil society, and is hereby well recommended to the regard of any Christian community where Divine Providence may order his lot—is certified by James Hall, V. D. M., Bethany, January 12, 1780.

In the summer of 1780, Liberty Hall Academy, or Queen's Museum, as it was originally named, was broken up by the approach of the British army under Lord Cornwallis, after the surrender of Charleston, and the massacre of Buford's regiment on the Waxhaw, and the course of study was never resumed under the direction of Dr. McWhirter, who returned to New Jersey. Upon the breaking up of the college, the young students were commended to their parents and guardians, and the older were urged to take the field in the cause of their country. It is not to be supposed that young Hunter required much urging to take up arms with his fellow citizens of Mecklenburg, who five years before had pledged "their lives and their honor." Upon the orders of Gen. Rutherford to the battalions of the west-

ern counties of the State, a brigade assembled at Salisbury. For the first three weeks Mr. Hunter acted as commissary, and afterwards as lieutenant in the company of Capt. Thomas Givens. Having scoured the Tory settlement on the northeast side of the Yadkin, the forces under Gen. Rutherford joined the army of Gen. Gates at Cheraw. On the morning of the 16th of August, the unfortunate battle of Camden took place by the mutual surprise of the marching armies; and the forces under Gates were completely routed. Gen. Rutherford was wounded and taken prisoner with many of his men. Mr. Hunter, soon after his surrender as prisoner of war, witnessed the death of the Baron de Kalb. He tells us he saw the baron, with suite or aide, and apparently separated from his command, ride facing the enemy. The British soldiers clapping their hands on their shoulders, in reference to his epaulettes, shouted, "A general, a rebel general." Immediately a man on horseback (not Tarleton) met him and demanded his sword. The baron, with apparent reluctance, presented the hilt, but drawing back, said in French, "Are you an officer, sir?" His antagonist, perhaps not understanding his question, with an oath, more sternly demanded his sword. The baron dashed from him, disdaining, as is supposed, to surrender to any but an officer, and rode in front of the British line, with his hand extended. The cry along the line of "A rebel general," was speedily followed by a volley, and after riding some twenty or thirty yards, the baron fell. He was immediately raised to his feet, stripped of his hat, coat, and neck-cloth, and placed with his hands resting on the end of a wagon. His body had been pierced with seven balls. While standing in this situation, the blood streaming through his shirt, Cornwallis, with his suit, rode up, and being told that the wounded man was DeKalb, he addressed him: "I am sorry, sir, to see you; not sorry that you are vanquished, but that you are so severely wounded." Having given orders to an officer to administer to the necessities of the wounded man as far as possible, the British gen-

eral rode on to secure the victory, and in a little time the brave and generous DeKalb, who had seen service in the armies of France, and had embarked in the cause of the American States, breathed his last.

After seven days confinement in a prison yard in Camden, Mr. Hunter was taken, with about fifty officers, to Orangeburg, S. C., where he remained without hat or coat, until Friday, the 13th of November, about three months from the time of his captivity. On that day he went to visit a friendly lady who had promised him a homespun coat. On his way he was met by a horseman of Col. Fisher's command, who accused him of being beyond the lines, and sternly ordered him back to the station, threatening him with confinement and trial for breach of his parole. Hunter explained and apologized, and promised, but all to no purpose. "To the station," "Take the road." Up the road went the rebel Whig, sour and reluctant, and made indignant by the frequent goading with the point of the Tory royalist's sword. Passing a large fallen pine, from which the limbs had been burned, he suddenly leaped the trunk. The horseman fired one of his pistols, missing his aim, and leaped his horse after him. Hunter adroitly leaped the other side the trunk, and began throwing at the horseman the pine knots that lay thick around. The second pistol was discharged, but without effect. By a blow of a well directed pine knot, the horseman was brought to the ground, and disarmed by his prisoner. Hunter returned the Tory his sword on condition that he should never, on any condition, make known that any of the prisoners had crossed the forbidden line, or any way transgressed, promising himself to keep the whole matter of the late encounter an inviolable secret.

On the following Sabbath a citation was issued by Col. Fisher, directing all militia prisoners to appear at the court house by 12 o'clock on Monday. The affair had been discovered. During the contest the horse galloped off to the station with the saddle and holsters empty, and when the

dismounted rider appeared a little time afterward with the bruises of the pine knots too visible to be denied, the curious inquiries that followed baffled all his efforts to concealment. It was soon noised abroad that one or more of the prisoners had broken parole and attacked an officer. The report reaching the colonel's ears, the order was issued for their appearance at the court house. On Sabbath night Hunter and a few others, expecting close confinement would follow their assembling on Monday noon, seized and disarmed the guard and escaped. He was nine nights in making his way back to Mecklenburg, lying by during the day to avoid the patrols of the British, and sustaining himself upon the greenest of the ears of corn he could gather from the unharvested fields.

In a few days after his return home, he again joined the army, and became a Lieutenant of cavalry under Col. Henry Hampton, and attached to the regiment under Col. Henry Lee, received a wound in the battle at Eutaw Springs, where so much personal bravery was displayed. His military services closed with that campaign, and he returned home with a good name, his bravery unquestioned and his integrity unsullied.

He resumed his classical studies at the school taught by Rev. Robert Archibald, near Poplar Tent, as appears by the following certificate in the irregular hand and crooked lines of his preceptor, which is the only evidence at hand of the classical school in that congregation immediately after the war :

"MECKLENBURG, N. C., \_\_\_\_\_.

"This is to certify that the bearer, Humphrey Hunter, has been some years at this school in the capacity of a student, and during the term has conducted himself in a sober, genteel and Christian manner; and we recommend him as a youth of good character, to any public seminary where Divine Providence may cast his lot. Certified and signed by order of the trustees, this 3d day of November, 1785.

"ROBERT ARCHIBALD, V. B. M."

A college diploma from Mount Zion College, at Winnesboro, S. C., 1785, accredits him with a good preparation to enter upon the study of the ministry, which he had in view for several years, but was more or less interrupted by the war. Having pursued the study of theology about two years under the Presbytery of South Carolina, he received license to preach the Gospel in the following words, viz.:

"The Presbytery having examined Mr. Humphrey Hunter on the Latin and Greek languages, the sciences and divinity, and being well satisfied with his moral and religious character, and his knowledge of the languages, sciences, and divinity, do license him to preach the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ; and affectionately recommend him to our vacancies.

"JAMES EDMUNDS, *Moderator*.

"ROBERT HALL, *Presbt. Clerk*.

"Bullock's Creek, Oct. 15, 1789."

For the first fifteen years of his ministry he preached in a number of places in York District, S. C., also in Lincoln county. In 1805 he settled in Steele Creek, and there he remained till the year of his death, 1827. Here he was buried with the people, among whom he had labored for more than twenty years. His tombstone bears the following inscription:

"Sacred to the memory of Rev. Humphrey Hunter, who departed this life August 27, 1827, in the 73d year of his age. He was a native of Ireland, and emigrated to America at an early period of his life. He was one of those who early promoted the cause of freedom in Mecklenburg county May 20, 1775, and subsequently bore an active part in securing the independence of his country.

"For nearly thirty-eight years he labored as a faithful and assiduous ambassador of Christ, strenuously enforcing the necessity of repentance, and pointing out the terms of salvation. As a parent he was kind and affectionate; as a

friend, warm and sincere, and as a minister, persuasive and convincing. Reared by the people of Steele Creek Church."

He had certainly deserved well of his country, and it not only was proper, but highly creditable to the citizens of Mecklenburg to keep his memory always green for what he did for his country one hundred years ago.

In his preaching he was earnest, unassuming, and often eloquent. Possessing a strong mind with powers of originality, and trained by the discipline of a classical education under men capable of producing scholars, he consecrated all his talents and acquirements to preach the everlasting Gospel, counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. He possessed in a high degree a talent for refined sarcasm; and his answer to trifles with his office or the great truths of religion, and sticklers for unimportant things was a shaft from this quiver that pierced to the marrow. His benevolence as a minister, and his tenderness as a neighbor forbade its use in his social intercourse. Honest objections and difficulties arising from want of knowledge or proper reflection, he would meet kindly with truth and argument; sophistry and cavils he considered as deserving nothing but the lash which he knew how to apply till it stung like a scorpion. He was a just man. The mould in which he was cast, that peculiarly belonged to men of that period, is now obsolete, and we rarely see one who approaches it.