

BERRYMAN HICKS WITHERS

Berryman Hicks Withers (1818-1875), the subject of this sketch came of a long line of English ancestry. In the latter part of the eighteenth century the branch of the Withers family to which Berryman belonged, settled in Southwest Virginia. Early in the nineteenth century Berryman's father moved to Lincoln County, North Carolina. There Berryman was born in 1818. It would seem that the venture was not a financial success, for Berryman began to support himself when he was very young.

There was in Lincoln County a body of workers who today would be called Contractors and Builders. Berryman did jobs for these men and clearly showed ability and good business sense, for in 1836 the head of the company took him to South Carolina on some building projects, and, before long, letters tell of the young man's being made manager.

The company found work in Fairfield District and were successful there and in adjoining districts for several years. Berryman was a good letter writer, and his comments tell not only of his own experiences but give some insight into the conditions of the districts in which he worked. On March 28, 1841, he wrote that times had been hard and business poor and that they had about decided to return to North Carolina when there was a "turn in the tide." He said, "Just as our last job was about finished, there came a gentleman wanting us to build him a large house. ... We made a calculation and engaged the job at \$3000, we to find all the materials and board ourselves. We expect to do the best business we have ever done. This building is for a boarding house at the independent institution established lately by the Universalists, five miles northeast of Buckhead P. O. When this work is done, we

have the promise of cont acts for two more houses at this same place, worth \$1500 apiece, and the people of the settlement warranted us work for five years to come."

Almost immediately after his arrival in Fairfield District, Berryman joined the Cool Branch Baptist Church. He attended the services regularly and attained prominence in the affairs of the community. He was a leader in the "singings" which seem to have been the chief diversion of the people. He says, "I have invitations from all the neighbors to have night singing in their homes."

In several *letters* to his family the young man disclaimed any intention of marrying. Indeed he openly doubted if he ever would take such a step. But on March 19, 1846, *we find* him writing a brother at Abingdon, Va., that he is to be married on April 30 to Miss Susan Heador, who is "in possession of good character, industry, and economy to a superlative degree - also of a noble disposition." He further states that "Susan has a good piece of land and two very likely young Negroes... and a very good house which we finished working on last fall." In the last sentence we perhaps have an explanation of Berryman's changed views concerning matrimony. Propinquity had done its work.

The young man adds that Susan's sister Elizabeth has the same amount of property and that he has been asked to manage the two estates. By this time he had accrued a little property of his own, and he announces: "After this year I will turn my entire attention to farming." This he did. His remaining years were spent in looking after his farming interests in the Cool Branch section of Fairfield County.

Susan Heador and Berryman Withers were married on April 30, 1846,

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and she became the mother of John Samuel Mobley Feaster Withers. The Meadors are said to have been a long-lived family. In his Statistics, Mills, in speaking of the longevity of the people, says, "Job Meador, who came to the settlement with the Mobleys, died in October, 1822 at the advanced age of 101 years." Although Susan belonged to this long-lived family, she herself died young. Her sister, Elizabeth, who became Berryman's second wife, also died young. Mr. Withers had a third matrimonial venture. This time he married Mrs. Coleman Crosby.

A friend wrote of Berryman Withers, "He had a thirst for knowledge and a taste for good books, and he became a well-informed man noted for his intelligence, sound judgment, and high integrity." Because he possessed these qualities, he wrote many Wills for the people and became executor of several estates. It is said that no will of his was ever broken. Apparently lawsuits were most prevalent in those days. In a letter dated April 23, 1842, Berryman writes, "There has been a woful amount of lawsuits lately among the big fellows. Last week Court convened in the borough with 1000 cases on the docket, all for large amounts."

Berryman Withers was a self-educated man and, feeling keenly the inadequacy of his own education, he determined that his son should be well educated. He, therefore, when the boy was very young, employed Scotch or English tutors. Some of the neighbors who wished their sons to have equal opportunity, arranged with Mr. Withers to establish a small school which all boys in the community might attend. To this school there came the Lyleses, the Mobleys, the Feasters, the Crosbys and others. Since the tutors were always classical scholars, John Withers received a fine classical

education and was prepared to enter South Carolina College when the Confederate War closed its doors.

At the age of nineteen, in the year 1866, John Samuel Withers, who had dropped Mobley and Feaster from his name, married Margaret Mary Walker of Chester. Barryman Withers lived to see five of his grandchildren.

As Mr. Walker was growing old, he persuaded his son-in-law to move to Chester and take charge of his plantations. There John S. Withers lived until his death in 1908.

To John and Margaret Mary Withers were born seven daughters and one son. This son, Harry Hicks Withers, married Mary Grey Neil of Winnsboro in 1916. To them were born two children, Mary Grey and John Samuel, who boast of their Chester and Fairfield ancestry.