

A NEGRO PATRIOT.

Along with the emigrants from North Carolina who first settled Wilkes County, there came a man named Aycock. He brought with him a mulatto boy named Austin. This boy passed as Aycock's slave; but when the conflict between the Liberty Boys and the Tories in that part of the country became desperate,—when the patriots were fighting for their lives as well as for the liberties of their country,—Aycock's neighbors called on him to do his part. According to all accounts, Aycock was not much of a warrior. His sympathies were with his liberty-loving neighbors; but his enthusiasm did not invite him to expose himself to the fire of musketry. It is said that he joined the neighbors, and strove to be a faithful militiaman, but he was in a state of constant fear. Governor Gilmer says of Aycock, that, from the time he was required to fight, he saw a terrible Tory constantly pointing a loaded gun at him. His alarm finally became so extreme that he offered as his substitute the mulatto boy Austin, who had then grown to be a stout and serviceable lad.

Objection was made that Austin was a slave, and could not therefore be received as a soldier. At this, Aycock acknowledged that Austin was no slave; that, although he was a mulatto, he had been born free. This fact was made so clear to the patriots, that they willingly received Austin as a soldier, and he was mustered into the service under the name of Austin Dabney. He fought under Elijah Clarke, being under the command of Colonel John Dooly, who was afterwards so foully murdered by the Tories. Of all the brave men that fought under the heroic Clarke, there was none braver than Austin Dabney, none that did better service.

He was in the battle of Kettle Creek, and was foremost among those who followed Clarke. Toward the close of this the bloodiest battle fought in Georgia between the patriots and Tories, Austin Dabney was shot through the thigh, and so dangerously wounded that he became a cripple for life. He was taken by his comrades to the house of a Mr. Harris, where he was carefully nursed until his wound healed. He was not able to do military duty after that, but he devoted himself to Harris and his family more faithfully than any slave could have done. It may be said of him that gratitude became the ruling passion of his heart.

After the Americans had won their independence, and peace with it, Austin Dabney became prosperous. Being a quick-witted man, with an instinct for business, he accumulated property. He finally moved to Madison County, taking with him his benefactor and family, to whose wants and desires he continued to minister with as much devotion as he displayed at the beginning of his service. It was in Madison County that Austin Dabney became noted for his fondness for horse-racing. He attended all the races in the neighboring counties. He was the owner of some of the finest race horses to be found in the country; and such was his popularity, that he always found prominent men to stand for him.

Shortly after he removed to Madison County, he received a pension from the United States Government. He sent Harris's oldest son to school, and afterwards to college. When the young man graduated from Franklin College, now the State University, Austin Dabney supported him while he studied law with Hon. Stephen Upson at Lexington, Oglethorpe County. When young Harris was undergoing his examination for admission to the bar, Austin Dabney stood leaning against the railing undergong his examination for admission to the bar, Austin Dabney stood leaning against the railing that inclosed the court, listening to the proceedings with great anxiety. When the young man was sworn in, and was shaking hands with the members of the bar, Austin, unable to control himself,

burst into a flood of tears, happy that he had been able to make a gentleman of the son of the man who had nursed him so long and patiently while his wound was healing.

When the public lands in Georgia were distributed among the people by lottery, the Legislature gave to Austin Dabney a lot of land in Walton County. The next year the voters of Madison County were in a condition bordering on distraction, being divided into Dabney and anti-Dabney parties. Austin had not been permitted to have a chance in the lottery with other soldiers of the Revolution. Consequently Stephen Upson, one of Georgia's most prominent men at that time, employed his influence with such effect that a law was passed giving Dabney a valuable lot. One of the members of the Legislature from Madison County voted for this law. At the next election the constituents of this member divided themselves into two parties, one faction indorsing the vote, and the other denouncing it. Those who denounced the vote did it on the ground that it was an indignity to white men for a mulatto to be put on an equality with them in the distribution of the public land, though, as Governor Gilmer bluntly puts it, not one of them had served his country so long or so well. Governor Gilmer, from whose writings all facts about Austin Dabney are taken, tells a very interesting anecdote about him. In order to collect the pension which the United States Government allowed on account of his broken thigh, Austin went once a year to Savannah. Once when he was on his way to draw what was due him, he fell in with Colonel Wiley Pope, his neighbor, who was also journeying to Savannah. They were very intimate and social on the road, and until they found themselves in the streets of Savannah. When they reached the fashionable part of the city, Colonel Pope observed to his companion that he was a sensible man, and knew the prejudices that prevented them from associating together in the city. Austin Dabney replied that he understood it very well, and with that he checked his horse and fell in the rear of Colonel Pope after the fashion of a servant following his master. Their way led them in front of the house of General James Jackson, who was at that time governor of the State. The governor was standing in his door at the time. Colonel Pope passed on unrecognized, but, chancing to glance around, he saw Governor Jackson run from the house into the street to greet Austin Dabney. The governor seized the negro's hand, shook it heartily, drew him from his horse, and carried him into the house, where he remained a welcome guest during his stay in the city. Colonel Pope (so Governor Gilmer says) used to tell this story with great glee, but owned that he felt put out when he realized, that, whilst he was a stranger at a tavern, Austin Dabney was the honored guest of the governor of the State. The explanation was, that Governor Jackson had seen Dabney's courage and patriotism tested on the field of battle, and he knew that beneath the tawny skin of the mulatto there beat the heart of a true man.

Austin Dabney was always popular with those who knew of his services in the Revolutionary War. Governor Gilmer says that he was one of the best Chroniclers of the stirring events of that period. His memory was retentive, his understanding good, and he had a gift of description possessed by few. He moved to the land the State had given him, taking with him the family of the man who had nursed him. He continued to serve them while he lived, faithful to the end, and when he died left them the property he had accumulated.