

Stoney  
Rev. JAMES S. LAWTON, M.D.



Dr. LAWTON was born at Lawtonville, Beaufort district (now Hampton county), South Carolina, April 4, 1821. His father was Benj. T. D. Lawton, son of Joseph Lawton, who was an officer in the Revolutionary war. His mother, Mrs. Jane Lawton, was a daughter of Dr. George Masse, an Irish physician, who came to this country a young man and married Miss Norton, of St. Helena Island, South Carolina. His grandmother Lawton lived to be 87 years old, and at her death left over one hundred lineal descendants. His paternal and maternal grandparents, and his parents, all lived and died members of the Black Swamp Baptist church, at Robertville, South Carolina. His father and grandfather were both honored deacons. He had four brothers and five sisters, all of whom were members of Baptist churches.

At the time of his birth his mother's life was despaired of, and the father called all of the family into her room and prayed earnestly that God would spare the life of the mother and child, and that the child

might be reared up to be a useful, pious man, and a blessing to the age in which he lived.

When quite a lad, he was sent to what was commonly called an "old field school." The first words which he learned to spell were the "Columbian Star," the title of the paper which is now THE CHRISTIAN INDEX. In 1835 his father sent him with his older brother, Col. W. J. Lawton, to Mercer Institute, at Penfield, Georgia, where he made fair progress in his studies. After his return from Penfield, he was sent to Furman Institute (the earlier name of Furman University), which was then located in Fairfield district, South Carolina, and presided over by Prof. William E. Bailey, one of the most noted educators in the South at that time. Here he was taught Latin and Greek, but did not make as rapid progress in these branches as in mathematics and physical philosophy, for which he had special taste.

When about eighteen years of age, he connected himself with a commercial house in Savannah, where he made quite a reputation as a salesman, and won many friends for himself and his firm. It was his father's desire that he should be a lawyer, but his own choice was for the medical profession, and his father, yielding to his taste, sent him to Cincinnati in the fall of 1839 to attend medical lectures. He was an enthusiastic student, and applied himself diligently to the acquisition of a thorough knowledge of his chosen profession. At this school of medicine he formed a warm friendship for a young classmate named A. M. Pollock, who afterwards became one of the most skillful surgeons in the Northwest, and a resident of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The attachment of these friends has continued till the present time, and they have, on various occasions, exchanged visits, never parting but with sorrow.

During his boyhood and while at college, Dr. Lawton was often seriously impressed on the subject of religion, was always fond of going to church, and was an attentive hearer of the Word. He loved good people from childhood, and preferred the company of older people to that of his own age. On the eve of his departure for the Northwest, he went by way of Savannah to see his mother, who was on a visit to friends in that city. The boat which was to take him to Charleston leaving Savannah at 4 o'clock in the morning, he was obliged to bid her farewell the night previous. The parting kiss was given and both retired, but there was no sleep for either. As the son lay upon his bed, he felt that he could not leave his mother, perhaps forever, without once more having her prayers. He arose from his bed, determined to go to her room and ask her to offer a parting prayer in his behalf. As he opened his room door to seek the mother, she met him and said: "My son, I have tried in vain to sleep—I want to pray for you before we part." His reply was, "My dear mother, I have just started to you to make that request." They then knelt in prayer, and though he had often heard her pray, she never seemed to pray so earnestly and fervently as on that night in the silence of his chamber. She was often heard to say that from that night she felt no apprehensions in regard to the salvation of her son. To-day he blesses God for such a devoted Christian mother! From that time young Lawton earnestly sought the salvation of his soul, and on the night of the following 1st day of February, 1840, he found comfort and joy in the Holy Spirit. He was baptized in the Ohio river the next day, by Rev. W. H. Brisbane, D. D. He received his medical diploma in May, 1841, and commenced the practice of medicine the first of June in Jacksonboro, Screven county, Georgia. The following year he married Miss Sarah C. Baynard, of Beaufort, South Carolina, and took her with him to Screven county, where he continued to practice medicine for a year longer. He then moved to Robertville, South Carolina, where he did a large and successful practice for seven or eight years, at the end of which time we find him in his native place, Lawtonville. Here success and prosperity crowned his efforts abundantly, so that he was able to become the possessor of a large estate of land and negroes. But his heart did not diminish as his property increased. He was liberal in his benefactions, having donated not less than \$6,000.00 to Furman University, while not withholding a cheerful response to other appeals to his benevolence. As a physician he was exceeding popular, and greatly beloved by his patients, among whom he was justly regarded as emi-

nently skillful. He performed some very extraordinary operations in surgery during his practice, an account of which was published in the *Medical Journal* of Charleston.

Dr. Lawton was a member of the South Carolina Legislature during 1851, 1852 and 1853, and could have remained in this position longer if he had desired. His neighbors and fellow-citizens delighted to honor him. While he was thus honored and loved by his friends, and while prosperity followed him, he was not exempt from trials and sorrows. Of the six children borne to him by his first wife, four were taken from him. Only the eldest and youngest daughters remain. And in November, 1856, his devoted wife, a pious Christian woman, was transplanted from earth to heaven. She was baptized by Rev. Richard Fuller, D. D., and lived and died a consistent, useful and happy Christian.

Previous to the death of his wife, his church had licensed him to preach, and after her death he decided to go to Princeton, New Jersey, to attend theological lectures, that he might be better fitted for the work of the ministry. After the close of the session of the Seminary, Dr. Lawton made an extensive tour of the United States, adding much to his stock of knowledge by his close observation of men and things. In October he returned to South Carolina, and on the 20th of May, 1858, was married to his second wife, Mrs. Mildred A. Royston, who then resided in Alabama.

In October of the same year, at the earnest solicitation of his brethren, he was ordained to the full work of the ministry, the Presbytery consisting of W. B. Carson, H. D. Duncan, Joseph A. Lawton (his double first cousin), W. A. Lawton (his uncle), Jas. Sweat and W. A. Morecock. Early in the year 1859 he settled at Allendale, South Carolina, having purchased an elegant country mansion, on which he afterwards spent some \$5,000.00 in improvements and out-buildings. With large possessions and a beautiful and comfortable home, and surrounded by a happy family, he felt settled for life. With a true spirit of magnanimity he gave up the Smyrna church, to which he had been preaching, that a brother minister of limited means might be called and thereby secure a support for his family, and devoted himself to the weaker country churches. For a while he preached to four of these churches, but finally confined his labors to two, Bethlehem and Arnon, each about six miles from his home. God abundantly blessed his labors as a minister, and many were added to his churches. In the midst of his success, happiness and usefulness, the war between the States began, and, with true patriotic ardor, he volunteered as a private and went with his company to the coast of South Carolina. Here, though denied the privilege of preaching, he would read the Bible, exhort his comrades and pray with them as opportunity offered. On account of his skill as a physician, he was soon made surgeon of the regiment, and continued in this position till a change was made in the organization, when he was urged by his old neighbors to return and practice medicine for those who were compelled to remain at home.

The last year of the war, 1865, he refuged to Oglethorpe county, Georgia, to escape the ravages of Sherman's army. In the fall, he returned to South Carolina, with his family and freedmen, to behold the wreck and ruin of his once beautiful home and splendid possessions. But with a brave heart and determined will, he at once set to work to gather up the fragments of his fortune, and, as far as possible, repair his losses and, also, to preach to his two churches. Gathering up some eight or ten thousand dollars, he commenced to plant his lands and work them with freedmen, and at the end of two years his money was all gone. Being satisfied with this experience, he determined to find some place where he could educate his daughters, two stepdaughters and adopted son (a son of his brother William). He sold his lands in South Carolina for a mere song and moved to Forsyth, Georgia. He remained here until his daughters were educated and married. Of his own daughters, the older, Martha B., married Capt. E. S. Riley, and the younger, Juliana, married J. R. Kendrick. Of his stepdaughters, the older, Sallie Royston, married H. H. Cabaniss, and the younger, Mamie, married J. T. White. His adopted son (whose father, William, died of yellow fever in Charleston in 1858), was educated at Mercer, and after-

wards graduated at the Macon Law School. During Dr. Lawton's stay in Forsyth, he had, for a while, the charge of a country church, preaching to it once a month. He also carried on farming interests at this time near Forsyth and in southwest Georgia. His success as a planter secured for him the reputation of being one of the best farmers in South Carolina and Georgia. For ten years he was a member of the Executive Committee of the State Agricultural Society of Georgia, and on several occasions acted as general superintendent of the fairs held under the auspices of that society during the presidency of Governor A. H. Colquitt. Though not now engaged in agricultural pursuits, he feels and manifests a lively interest in all that pertains to the development and improvement of the resources of his adopted State.

In 1876, he was appointed by Governor Smith inspector of fertilizers for the Atlanta district, and at once moved to that city, where he now resides, and is in the faithful discharge of his duties. Not being in a position to give himself fully to the ministry, and feeling that it was his duty to support his family, he accepted the office tendered him by the Governor, but his hand, head and heart are ever at the command of his Master.

When the Georgia Baptist State Convention met at Rome in 1873, brother J. J. Toon, proprietor of THE CHRISTIAN INDEX, proposed to sell the paper and printing house to such brethren as might desire to purchase. Dr. Lawton, being recognized by his brethren as a man of great energy and business capacity, was earnestly urged to form a company and purchase the establishment. After several meetings and much consultation among our wisest brethren, negotiations were entered into with Mr. Toon, by which Dr. Lawton, D. E. Butler, J. P. Harrison and others became the purchasers of THE INDEX and Franklin Printing House. Dr. Lawton's connection with THE INDEX as one of its managers, has vindicated the wisdom of the brethren in selecting him as one of the leading spirits in the transaction.

While Dr. Lawton had much reason to be grateful and gratified at this action of his brethren, the position assigned him has imposed on him much labor and responsibility, and no little sacrifice of time and money. Our brother has often been honored by his denomination and his services have been highly appreciated. He has been several times elected Moderator of his Association, the Rehoboth, and he has been a member of the State Board of Missions nearly ever since its organization. He was President of the Board of Trustees of Monroe Female College, and a member of the Executive Committee of the State Convention for a number of years. He is regarded as a wise and safe counsellor among his brethren and friends, and his words of advice always carry weight and influence. As a preacher, he is earnest, forcible and logical, and at times really eloquent, impressing his hearers with the strength of his convictions and the power of divine truth on his own heart. His appeals in behalf of the grand old INDEX often thrill the souls of his brethren, and excite in them a warm enthusiasm for this faithful standard-bearer of Gospel truth. The writer of this sketch heard him on one occasion, when his spirit was so stirred by the subject he was presenting, that he rose to a point of fervid declamation that he has rarely known surpassed. As a friend, Dr. Lawton is warm-hearted, true and devoted, and his personal attachments are strong and lasting. He is ever ready with a hand to help his friends in need, and with a heart to sympathize with them in affliction. The generosity of his nature often prompts him to bestow favors to a point beyond what his friends regard as prudence. But he knows that "the Lord loves a cheerful giver," and is willing to trust his Heavenly Father to provide for the wants of his family.

Dr. Lawton's perceptive faculties are remarkable, and these, combined with his indomitable energy, have contributed largely to his success in life. He is a very close observer of the words and actions of the men with whom he is thrown in contact. In person, he is quite commanding; about six feet in height, weighs 200 pounds, and has dark hair and complexion, with heavy beard, now sprinkled with gray. He is said to bear a strong resemblance to Gen. R. E. Lee. He is not yet an old man, and one would judge from his sprightliness of manner and elasticity of movement, that he has before him many years of usefulness.

He now performs the functions of a minister only as opportunity offers, and while he, doubtless, would be delighted to be wholly devoted to that work, he feels that God calls His servants to do special work in His vineyard, and for a limited time, and that his work as a minister of the Gospel has ceased, at least for the present. He still feels determined, however, to do all he can for the Master through THE INDEX, by giving of his means as the Lord shall prosper him, and in such other ways as may present themselves.