

The following is a transcription of a paper held at the Dorman Museum in Middlesbrough.

OLD MIDDLESBRO'

BY GEORGE DIXON, SEN., GREAT AYTON

Thinking that a paper which I wrote for a Temperance Bazaar a few years ago, would prove interesting to the rising generation of Middlesboro', I have had it reprinted, altering the dates, and making a few additions, to bring it up to the present time. I was born in 1812, and entered my 87th year the 10th of February 1898. Few towns can show such a change in one man's lifetime.

MY FIRST VISIT TO MIDDLESBORO'

Sixty-nine years ago, when I was a boy, I first visited what is now Middlesborough with over 90,000 inhabitants, there was but one building; a large farm house, formerly the remains of an old monastery, situated on the South bank of the River Tees. Subsequently a tract of land in that vicinity was purchased by the late Thomas Richardson, Edward Pease (the father of the railways), and others, who made a harbour opposite this farm house for shipping coal. I have vivid recollections of a visit to that solitary house. It was on a bright Sabbath morning, in summer, about 69 years ago, that another boy and I, just entering our teens, hired a little sailing boat at Stockton, intending to go to Seaton Carew, get our dinners there, and return in the evening. Perhaps there was some excuse for making such an excursion on the Sabbath then, as there were no half-holidays through the week in those days. The river at Stockton was full of vessels awaiting their turn for coal, brought down the "Stockton and Darlington Railway" by horses. We rowed our boat a little way down the river opposite "Jannie's Island," then hoisted sail, when to our great disappointment there was a head wind which compelled us to tack across the river, whereby we made but little progress, and after spending two or three hours in this way, our keel struck a sandbank. Unable to push it off with our oars, we put off our shoes and stockings, took out the stones used for ballast, and tried to get into deeper water, but found our way cut off by banks of sand drifted by the wind, and there was no alternative but waiting six hours for the returning tide to float our little craft again. We had taken no food with us, and the prospect of a six hours' fast was rather disheartening. Turning our eyes to land, we saw a house, apparently the residence of some farmer. It was agreed that I should go to the house and try if I could buy something to eat. On reaching it I knocked at the door, but no one came; so I tried the latch, but the door was fast! I resumed my knocking, and soon heard the voice of an old woman from above asking what I wanted.

I told her our misfortune, and asked if she would sell us some food, she replied that the family had gone to Acklam to church, and that I must come again after their return. I continued pleading, and because of my importunity she came down and gave me bountifully of brown bread crusts, and a generous piece of cheese. I hastened back to my companion, who rejoiced at my success, and we shared our crusts and cheese thankfully. Finally, after several hours' delay, wind and tide being favourable, we succeeded in getting back to Stockton.

It was doubtless by the overruling of a kind Providence that we struck on the sandbank; had we been permitted to get out to sea we should have lost our lives. But I was spared to do the work which I never contemplated - in my native country, in the United States of North America, and the West Indies; and now at home, in my old age, by precept and example to those around me.

These pictures of 69 years ago came vividly before me; particularly our fruitless efforts to push off the boat; the old farm house by the river side; Mrs. Parrington's figure at the chamber window; her expressions of sympathy with us in our distress; and her kindness to us, two strange boys, I shall never forget.

On enquiry for my companion of 69 years ago, I learn that he has gone to the "undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns." I have not a comrade left who used glass or pipe in his boyhood; and here let me say, that I believe I should not have been living to give this account of Middlesborough 69 years ago, had I not been an abstainer, not only from all intoxicating drinks, but from the use of tobacco in all its forms - the curse of civilisation, the destroyer of youthful life, and the shortener of days of manhood; rendering the body susceptible to infectious and contagious diseases, and the power to rally when attacked.

There were no Temperance Societies or bands of Hope in my youthful days. When I was about 21 years old I started a Temperance Society in Staindrop, my native village, and a few of my companions joined it. Our pledge was to abstain from spirituous liquors only, allowing the use of wine, ale, and porter, of which some of our members partook too freely. Afterwards, when Thos. Whittaker came with his rattle, calling meetings, at which he showed us the folly of abstaining from spirituous liquors and getting intoxicated by drinking those fermented; the Total Abstinence Pledge was substituted in place of the Temperance Pledge, which I signed at one of those meetings. I

have been a total abstainer 61 years, and never formed the pernicious habit of smoking. During my long life I have been exposed to a variety of climates and situations, both by sea and land, from Newfoundland to the Isthmus of Panama (only 10° from the Equator), and I fully believe that, under God's blessing, I have kept my health by careful living, and good moral habits. Endeavouring by precept and example to keep our young people from using the pipe, cigar, or the cheap cigarette, that is often seen in the mouths of ragged and barefoot children in our streets; imitating older persons.

The promise of long life is to those who have their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water; looking to Jesus for strength to resist their soul's enemies - "the world, the flesh, and the devil."