NATION BUILDERS

BACON-WHEELER

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NATION BUILDERS

A Story

By

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Member of the American Historical Association

AND (THE LATE)
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PREFACE

The plan of writing an appreciation of the itinerant preachers of Methodism, who went out to possess the American frontier a century ago, was suggested by the late Andrew Carpenter Wheeler, well known by his pen name, *J. P. Mowbray*.

Together we had been attracted to this field, which investigation showed to have been generally neglected by historians. Mr. Wheeler, who was the son of Methodist parents, in later life developed a strong impulse of filial veneration for the genius and achievement of his father's church. Unhappily, he did not live to complete the plan that was commenced with a keen literary zest and the ardor of an affectionate impulse; but, fortunately, he prepared a reminiscent chapter relating to Henry Bascom, and some pages that have been incorporated with other material in the present work.

Although not claiming the same close affiliation with the Methodist Church as did my greatly loved associate, I have endeavored, with an earnest and reverent spirit, to carry out alone the purpose which we formed together.

EDGAR MAYHEW BACON.

Tarrytown, New York.

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CHAPTER I

Introductory

The recent practical modification of the itinerancy, that distinctive and unique feature of the Methodist Episcopal Church, has closed a very important chapter of church history. Let it be frankly said that if the chapter had been merely one of denominational record this book would never have taken the form that it has. The magnificent and unexcelled achievements of the Methodist itinerants belong to the broader field of general history. Specifically, they had to do with the social and practical, not less than with the religious, development of an important section of the United States. By keeping alive the consciences of men and developing ideals of life and character in people who would otherwise have been lawless, they made strong and efficient citizens of the republic. They influenced national legislation by moral force, and put their permanent stamp upon the character of states. We submit with all confidence that no institution, no agency, has accomplished more in these directions, and few have done so much, as have the itinerant ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. As a molding and governing influence, working for righteousness in state as well as in church, Methodism stands, historically, in the very first rank.

It would no more be possible to write the history of some of our Southern and Western states fairly, leaving out Methodism, than to write the story of Scotland and omit John Knox, or to eliminate the Reformed Church from the history of Holland. If we would understand the development of the republic from the borders of the original states to the Mississippi, between 1800 and 1830, we must study the influence of the Methodist itinerant.

In glancing at the history of Methodism with the narrative purpose of dealing mainly with its American development, it is not necessary to examine into its doctrinal peculiarities nor to traverse again the much harrowed field of evangelical theology; but it is necessary to the purpose of this book to mark as clearly as is possible one or two of the distinctive features of that movement and to learn if possible to what it owed its remarkable initial vigor and increase. The history of Methodism presents us with a combination of the spiritual and communal impulses that was unique. Those impulses were contributed on the one side by a return to the supernatural element, and on the other side to the democratic spirit which came to its aid. Dissimilar as the motive powers were, and unsuspected as the alliance was by John Wesley himself, there is now no doubt that his practical application of the doctrine of justification by faith and his direct appeal to the common people were the joint factors in the establishment of a new church, to the ultimate success of which his organizing ability and governmental tact were to contribute in an extraordinary degree.

Like other religious movements which owed their origin to a protest against ecclesiastical inertia or endowed wrongs, it grew into an independent and aggressive organization without the lust of power, and wholly without the intention or desire of its great organizer to detach himself from the parent establishment, the Church of England.

History does not record many more brilliant examples of a reformer pushed by overruling events against his own preferences and prejudices into a stupendous task of reconstruction. Intellectually and by choice he was an imperialist, and intensely loyal to his king and church. On his religious side he became in the course of events as stanch a democrat as Saint Paul. Shut out of his own church by the stupidity of institutionalism, he went straight to the common people, not because he for one moment believed that the common people were denied any rights even of opinion or action, but because he thought they ought to be saved from their sins, and it never once occurred to him that in this step he was making an alliance with the democratic spirit which was already stirring and for which a new continent was opening. With an eloquence and logical astuteness which, as Macaulay acknowledges, might have made him eminent in literature, and with a genius for government not inferior to that of Richelieu, he gave himself to the humble and arduous work of saving souls, and abandoned all honors that his genius might have attained. In the words of John Nichols, "Instead of being an ornament to literature he was a blessing to his age, and instead of being the genius of his age he preferred to be the servant of God."

He believed to the last in the sacraments and traditions of the mother church, but in his work he was compelled to modify one and abandon the other. He never outgrew his reverence and affection for the aristocratic prerogatives and the ancient privileges of that church, but events made him contravene both.

There is not the slightest evidence that Wesley at the beginning of his work contemplated even with the eye of imagination the development of a free church in a free state, or a self-supporting Christianity of many folds in independent but friendly relation to the civil government. Nor is there any reason to believe that he ever suspected that his doctrinal utterances or his simplified ritual and popular appeals were powerful adjuncts to that demand for freedom and individual right of judgment and experience which was every day becoming more manifest in English politics.

Doctrinally, the tenets of Wesley furnished nothing absolutely new. That which proved a stumbling-block to the Anglican establishment, namely, "justification by faith" and "the witness of the Spirit," lie more or less conspicuous along the Christian highway from Saint Paul to Anselm and Luther, and proclaim themselves in Wyclif and Jonathan Edwards. But it is very sure that with the exception of Saint Paul not one of these eminent men, or a score of others in both branches of the Christian church, who held at various times that the regeneration of the sinner is a supernatural act of God, often instantaneous and always attested by the consciousness and corroborated by the life, ever made such practical application of it or so caught the attention of the mass of men by a simple and authoritative presentment of it as did John Wesley.

One may sufficiently summarize the whole of Wesley's doctrine in the early and familiar phrases: "original sin," "repentance," "regeneration," "justification by faith," "sanctification," and "the witness of the Spirit." The conflict raged for half a century around the question of instantaneous conversion and regeneration. Wesley stood squarely and invincibly to it, and he did this the more efficaciously because it was not the result of an induction, but the commanding announcement of a fact in his own experience—a fact which he did not hesitate to tell his listeners was an attestation from on high within the reach of the humblest of them. No one put the claim of supernaturalism so insistently and so simply, acknowledging flatly that every man could be in himself the witness of a miracle.

In defense of his teaching he wrote:

"That the conversion of sinners is no miracle is new doctrine indeed. So new to me that I never heard of it before, either among Protestants or Papists. I think a miracle is a work of omnipotence wrought by the supernatural power of God. Now, if the conversion of sinners to holiness is not such a work I cannot tell what it is."

Wesley was thus corroborating what had been said of him with unintentional accuracy by a bitter ecclesiastical opponent—he was popularizing the miraculous; and this charge, filtered through the dense brains of the conforming mobs, early ran into that other charge, that the Methodists were in league with the Papists. But whatever may have been the motive of the first accusation and the ignoble sense in which it was made, the fact remains that Wesley did popularize the miraculous in the sense that he brought the internal evidence and the external fruit of it to the common apprehension.

Of the relation that Wesleyanism bears to its time no estimate can be justly made that overlooks this return to primitive belief. It is of less account to us to know how far the purely human elements and influences of excitement and emotional elation colored and coerced the imagination and judgment of the reformers than it is to know that Wesley planted himself squarely against the first assaults of atheism upon miracles, which assaults were to grow in a later philosophy to be the most powerful and insidious of arguments against Christianity. It was that desideratum which Wesley, more than any other man, met and answered in a singularly apostolic and simple manner. Vital Christianity in England was not saved by its doctors and school men. At a divine command it arose and walked. It survived the assaults of skepticism and the deadening influence of æstheticism not by an intellectual advance, but by an evangelical return to its supernatural character; and this return was not alone obedient, but heroic. Its whole effort was not to furnish disputants, but witnesses, and the sum total of the rejoinder that it made both to the church and to the philosophy of its time, far from being metaphysical or doctrinal, shapes itself into the final and unanswerable reply of the blind man: "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

Whatever may be the later conclusion of a religious philosophy with regard to the mysterious operation of the mind in what the Methodists call a change of heart, there can be no sort of doubt as to what John Wesley thought it was, nor can there be any hesitancy in acknowledging the work it accomplished in reanimating a fossilized religion.

What Wesley tried to do was to lift faith from a merely moral observance to a positive religious experience. Regeneration was an act of God registered in the soul quite independently of ceremonial or decretal; and, as God was no respecter of persons, this experience was as possible in a coal mine as in a cathedral. Old as this declaration may have been to the established church, it was, at close range, a piece of insufferable effrontery when it was not sheer blasphemy. "Sir," said the Bishop of Bristol to John Wesley, "this pretense to extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing, sir. I advise you to go hence." That nearly all the bishops so regarded it, and that some of them did not scruple to avail themselves of the prejudice and ignorance of their followers to incite brutal opposition to Wesley, no one now denies.

With the usual fatuity of institutionalism, the church proceeded to thrust Wesley and his followers into an independent and aggressive organization, which was to bring about the very relations which Wesley deprecated and the church feared. Once organized and moving, it was very evident that Methodism could not exist without either modifying the conditions which opposed it or by finding a new area for its expansion. It did both. A new evangelicanism slowly permeated the English church, and a new continent opened its broad arms to receive it.[1]

The most important and most immediate of the temporal influences that led to the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and to its independence from the Wesleyan connection in England, was the conflict of the colonies with the mother country. The spirit of independence was, as we say, in the air, and must be supposed to have imbued not only political, social, and business circles, but to have influenced the counsels of religious bodies.

From the novel spectacle of a free state the minds

[1] "Was it no boon to you that Charles Wesley, the sweet poet of the Wesleyan movement, accompanied his brother to this country? Thus to you also was communicated, by strange interpositions of Providence, the electric thrill of that awakening which startled the eighteenth century from its torpor of indolence and death."—*Farewell Address of Archdeacon Farrar in America.*

of men advanced, as by a natural sequence, to the contemplation of an independent church—that is, a church not only dissociated from state control, but also released from a restrictive subservience to a foreign ecclesiastical authority. While retaining a close paternal relationship with English Wesleyanism, and abating no jot of reverence and love for its great founder, the Methodist Society in America began to feel the necessity of a separation in church organization. This impulse was greatly strengthened by the departure from America of nearly all the English preachers and exhorters of the society and the assumption of their work by a number of young men of American birth. At one time Francis Asbury seems to have been the only Methodist preacher of English birth in the thirteen states, and Asbury's sympathies were all American.

The Presbyterian, Congregational, Dutch Reformed, and several other churches did not suffer such depletion in the ranks of their ministry, because a larger proportion of their clergy were, either by birth or interest, more closely identified with the fortunes of the states. Next to the Methodists the older branch of the Episcopal Church suffered. The shepherds departed, never to return, and their places could be filled only by extraordinary means.

There was a most serious lack of men who by ordination were authorized to administer any of the rites which conviction and custom prescribe for the church. Nor was it possible, without great difficulty and sacrifice, to supply this deficiency. Only by extraordinary means could the candidate for ordination or appointment accomplish his purpose, for in all the American world there was no bishop. Such aspirants as there were for the Episcopal ministry, whether of the conservative establishment or the Wesleyan connection, were obliged to go to England for ordination. The Archbishop of Canterbury decided that such applicants must take the oath of allegiance to the King of England before being permitted to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. That this objection was not an insuperable one the continuance of the older branch in America has shown; but the Methodists, left almost without ministers, and put to the greatest inconvenience for lack of those who were authorized to administer the sacraments, to marry, baptize, and bury them, resorted to extraordinary measures.

Benjamin Franklin, who affiliated with no church, yet was the friend and adviser of all, was consulted. Two young men who had in vain applied to Canterbury went to Paris to have a talk with Dr. Franklin, and his advice was delightfully characteristic. Let the Episcopalian clergy in America either become Presbyterians, he suggested, or else elect a bishop for themselves. This matter-of-fact, shrewd counsel was, to an English churchman's views, as heretical as it was revolutionary. It met no favor from the clergy of the established English church, and it horrified even so ardent a reformer as Charles Wesley. There were, however, certain men, inspired with a desire to proclaim salvation, who heard the advice of America's foremost philosopher with deep satisfaction. That advice coincided in spirit with the counsel given by John Wesley to his American followers. It is probable that Franklin was not the first to conceive the idea of separation from the English church, but there can be little doubt that his words had weight even with those who deplored what they were accustomed to call his rationalism.

Whatever the relative influence of several counselors, the influence of events was pressing in one direction—toward the separation of the American followers of Wesley from the parent church, to which he still claimed allegiance.

There seems to have been a strong and persistent inclination among the young men who were gathering around Francis Asbury to organize an independent body, but not until Wesley's views upon the subject had been received did Asbury feel satisfied to advance. When first appealed to, Wesley had advised patience, and the veneration of his American co-religionists for his almost apostolic personality kept their impatience in check, and they wisely waited for an initiative that bore the weight of his authority.

As elsewhere noted, Mr. Wesley's final attitude toward the organization of a separate church in America showed how far he had drifted, and how insensibly, from the method and government of the Episcopal Church. His ordination of Dr. Coke to a superintendency that was in all but name a bishopric was accompanied by an avowal of his implicit belief in his own providential calling to perform that act, which might justly at that time have been regarded as a usurpation of episcopal authority. When Francis Asbury was designated by Wesley as Coke's coadjutor the new superintendent was greatly impressed by "the wisdom, consideration, love, meekness, and authority" of his associate.

A "Conference"—the word was not as familiar then as it has since become—was called at Baltimore, when sixty out of the eighty-one American ministers of Wesley's following met, either on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, in 1784, and there established the form of worship and of church government to which, in the main, their successors have adhered for a century. Then a unanimous vote decided the independence of the American church, to which the name Methodist Episcopal was officially and formally given.

Asbury was ordained, first, deacon; then, elder;

and finally—the appointment by Wesley having been popularly sustained—was invested by the laying on of hands with the authority of a bishop, though at first the title "superintendent" was used instead of the older Episcopal name. Before long the word "bishop" was substituted for "superintendent," at first in popular usage and afterward in the printed Minutes and Discipline of the society. So in a few years Wesleyism had already outrun Wesley, and the great initiative was solemnly assumed by the fathers of American Methodism. The government of the new body consisted of superintendents (or bishops), elders, and deacons. Of the elders there were two classes: first, the presiding elders; and, second, the traveling elders, who were also empowered to "administer the ordinances and perform the office of marrying," and who were elected by the Annual Conference and ordained by bishops and elders by a laying on of hands. A bishop, having been elected by the General Conference, must be ordained by the imposition of hands by three bishops, or one bishop and two elders.

The great, vital feature of the new church was its itinerant system. There had been itinerants before in the world's history, and missionaries of nearly every creed, and their labors and devotion have been the subject of an almost endless succession of books, while admiration for their inestimable courage has swayed the hearts of all Christendom; but never before did a church destined to become great and powerful in the family of Christ establish as its main working force a body of men devoted to a perpetual pilgrimage, yet held strictly to the rules and discipline of ecclesiastical government.

This was the strangest anomaly of the times. The man who shook his bishop's hand after Conference and turned his horse's head toward the forest, with no property except the animal he bestrode, the homespun clothes upon his back, and the Bible in his pocket, with no protection from the dangers of the wilderness save in the outreaching arm of an ever-present Providence, with no constraint upon his movements save that imposed by his own conscience, was held to a strict accountability through all his trackless circuit, and at stated intervals returned to render a report to the body—the very democratic and elective body—of which he was a member. Never in the world have the principles and methods of democracy been more triumphantly illustrated than by the Methodist circuit riders, who, having aided to elect an ecclesiastical superior, followed his commands with the obedience of soldiers, even to death.

The first Methodist Conference held in America was in Philadelphia, on July 14, 1773, in Saint

George's (Episcopal) Church. The Episcopal churches and clergymen in America seem to have been at first hospitable to the new body. It should never be forgotten that Methodism was at the outset distinctly a reformation within the church. It was not an effort to found a new church, though circumstances led to that end.

The ten members of the Methodist connection who were present at the Philadelphia Conference were Thomas Rankin, Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmoor, Francis Asbury, Richard Wright, George Shadford, Thomas Webb, John King, Abraham Whitworth, and Joseph Yearbry. The membership then reported was 1,160. By 1775 the membership had grown to 3,148. In 1777 the roll of members showed 6,968 and 38 itinerants. In 1783, shortly after the close of the war for independence, Francis Asbury wrote: "We have about 14,000 members, 80 traveling preachers, and between 30 and 40 circuits. . . . The gospel has taken a universal spread."

Even in colonial days New York city was a refuge for all the creeds of Christendom and for some with which Christendom had no dealings whatever. It was from an early date a very cosmopolis of sects, vying with Rhode Island in this particular, for it is said that it harbored no less than a dozen societies or congregations at a time when the neighboring colonies drew strait lines, and some even advocated the whipping post and the fagot. By the middle of the eighteenth century two Protestant denominations had so far outgrown all others that they probably included more than half of the churchgoing population. The Dutch Reformed Church, by right of priority, might have claimed the honors due to an established form of worship; but the Episcopal service, being more familiar to the high officials from England, became a strong rival. About these twain gathered Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans, Quakers, and every familiar form of ecclesiastical dissent.

Some immigrants, arriving in 1760, brought with them a revitalized conception of an old faith, to add to the already long list of creeds. They were but a handful, a poor company of unfortunate Germans, originally from the Palatinate, but hailing last from Balligarame, in Ireland. They had been twice or thrice banished, but they had found in religion that vitality which the church of the Dutch first families in New York and the church of the British officers were in danger of forgetting save as a vague tradition. The Palatines brought to America the seed for a new planting.

Their novel development of faith bore the impress of John Wesley's character, and was afterward for a while known by his name, though we generally know it as Methodism. Its introduction into New York was so unostentatious that not a dozen people were aware of its arrival. The sermons that were preached from old conservative pulpits were wordy and doctrinal. Men and women were to be saved or damned according to the logic of their creeds. Those who brought a fresh confidence in the vitality of faith came with a mission.

For the first six years the Palatines were without church or chapel, content to live quietly, governed by conscience, avoiding wrangling, and cleaving to their ideals. Then one of them—a woman named Barbara Heck—remonstrated with her co-religionists about their inactivity. How long it was necessary to urge them we do not know, but it is a historic fact that in 1766 Philip Embury, who had been a local preacher in Ireland, opened his house for public worship, and there held the first service of the first Methodist church in America. The important landmark was situated on what is now Park Place, then called Barrack Street. It was somewhat far uptown in that day, and we are told that the congregation that met there numbered six souls.

A year passed, and the vitality which has so distinguished this denomination began to evince itself. The congregation had grown—had outgrown its contracted rooms on Barrack Street, and now worshiped in more commodious quarters. It hired the rigging loft at what is now 120 William Street. The entire denomination ought to own that spot and erect there a memorial worthy of it. The rigging loft stood for nearly a century after the Methodists began to meet there. The most notable figure in this early chapter of church history was Captain Thomas Webb, an officer in the British army, who preached in his scarlet regimentals. Tradition tells us that he was large and imposing in figure and that he was blind in one eye. He was said to be an eloquent exhorter, and did much to draw people to the new religious society.

A year more, and the rigging loft was abandoned for a church—an actual church, built on a lot on John Street. The lot cost about fifteen hundred dollars, which was raised by subscription, the militant preacher heading the list with thirty pounds. It is both interesting and instructive to read the list of the friends that the new movement had won in two years' time. The English clergymen gave "according to their means." Oliver de Lancey put down £6 10s., and James Jarvis gave in all three times as much; while William Lupton equaled Captain Webb's munificent gift. The names of the Livingstons, Rhinelanders, Goelet, Walton, Rutgers, Desbrosses, Van Wyck, Duane, De Peyster, and twenty others that are part of the city's foundation walls are to be found on that subscription list.

The new church was dedicated in 1768. It was a little back from the thoroughfare, probably with a grassy yard in front, and it was flanked by the preacher's house, or parsonage. This first John Street Methodist Church was a stone structure, sixty by forty-two feet, with galleries that were reached by ladders. It was called the Wesleyan Chapel, and it is interesting to know that this was the first use of the name. There were no other rooms than the main auditorium, where the worshipers were divided according to sex. There was no sumptuous ease and no discrimination made for churchgoers of quality. The seats, or benches, had neither cushions nor backs. Mr. Embury was the regular minister until 1770, and it is a tradition that he assisted to build the church and made its uncomfortable furniture, for he was a carpenter and worked at his trade for a livelihood.

When the congregation had grown to a thousand people, which it did in about four years from the start, Mr. Robert Williams, who had from Wesley a commission to preach, took the pastorate. The following extract from the minute book of the church, showing the disbursements on Mr. Williams's account, has been published:

1769				
Sept. 20.	Mr. Jarvis for a hat for Mr. Williams.....	£2	5	0
Sept. 22.	Book for Mr. Williams..................			9
Oct. 9.	Cloak for Mr. Robert Williams..........	3	0	6
1770				
July 26.	Paid Mr. Maloney for shaving preachers...	2	5	6
Nov. 22.	Paid Mr. Boardman for one quarter's clothing..........................	7	10	0
1771				
May 16.	Castor oil for Mr. Pilmoor...............	0	3	0
1772				
July 16.	Cleaning the dwelling-house and house-keeping, washing for the preacher, etc..	5	3	8

The Mr. Boardman, who is mentioned as having received a quarter's clothing—whatever that may mean—and Mr. Pilmoor, were two missionaries that John Wesley sent out at the same time that he gave Mr. Williams his warrant to preach. In fact, Williams was to report to the two missionaries and work under their direction, but he arrived in New York before them, with the result that he was settled in the new church for a while. Mr. Pilmoor afterward became a clergyman of the Church of England. Mr. Boardman returned to England before the War of the Revolution, and died there in 1782. The missionaries who succeeded these two were the great Francis Asbury, the father of the Methodist Church in America, and Richard Wright, his associate.

In 1773 Thomas Rankin became the pastor of the John Street Church, and then, at intervals of one year, George Shadford, James Dempster, Daniel Ruff, and John Mann. The last-named came in troublous times (1778), and simply took up the work which others had somewhat hastily laid down. He was a "local preacher," who was not to be scared away from his post by war's alarms till relief came. He preached with all the power that was in him, and resigned at length to Mr. Samuel Spraggs, who came from Philadelphia and stayed five years, being unable to get away or to procure anyone to take his place.

In war time the Methodists, as a body, did not allow political differences to interfere with church worship any more than absolutely necessary. The Hessians shared the building, their chaplains officiating on Sunday mornings and the regular congregation in the evenings. The fact that many of the ministers had left the city and churches were closed in consequence led to an increase rather than a falling off in the attendance at the Wesleyan Chapel.

As there has never been a recorded instance of a Methodist meeting where a collection was not taken, it will surprise no one to know that the years of the British occupancy of New York, during the war for American independence, were not the least prosperous of all during the first quarter century of the church's history.

CHAPTER II

Along a Blazed Trail

The course of the circuit rider was a blazed trail. He was a pioneer among the pioneers, swept onward by the impulse of advancing population, in the very forefront of the great race migration that finally peopled the West and that made the wilderness to blossom, if not with the rose, at least with the more prosaic fruits of industry and intelligence.

The earliest chapters of Methodist history in England have been touched upon lightly in the introductory pages of this book; not fully, because, though of themselves interesting, yet they form no direct part of our theme. The revival that commenced within the cloistered walls of Oxford, which drew together the little band of devout youth that won the derisive name of the Pious Club, and which sent John Wesley and his devoted companions out to preach a revitalized religion in the cities and byways of England, may be referred to here only as the genesis of American Methodism. Our study is of the men who went into the wilderness to preach the gospel, of the tragedy, the pathos, the humor, and the heroism of their lives, but more particularly of the meaning and the result of their mission.

It is necessary that we try to understand as fully as possible the religious condition of the United States when the government was in its infancy; that we examine as far as possible the character and causes of the great advance that filled the forests and the plains, that swept over the mountains and followed the course of the Cumberland and the Ohio; and that we scrutinize the sources of the population of the border states, which were the great field in which Bishop Asbury and his brave subordinates sowed the seed for future harvests.

At the founding of the republic there was for the first time in the history of the world a complete divorce between church and state. Before that time the secular arm had always been prompt to interfere with religious dogma and practice. The idea that any state could with safety permit the independence of the church within its domain, or that the church could stand secure without the support of the state, had never been generally considered as sane propositions till advanced in America. The most dissolute monarchs that ever disgraced their crowns were, by virtue of their office, in positions of ecclesiastical authority, and even that aristocracy which is known to history as the Dutch republic clung to the universal theory of a dependent and subsidized church.

It is worth remembering that the conception of a free church in a free state was not only part of the American idea, but that it was second to no feature of that national movement in its originality and importance. Advanced in early colonial days by Roger Williams, it was adopted by the men who signed the Declaration of Independence and is amply guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. American church history, therefore, is the record of free and independent societies. In this respect it differs from any record of similar bodies in the Old World.

The voluntary surrender of all rights of interference by the government of the United States made the natural development of all religious sects possible. Over all the land men prayed or preached as they chose, without priority of rank claimed by one denomination above another. New England Congregationalists, Pennsylvania Presbyterians and Quakers, New York Reformed Dutch, Maryland Catholics, Virginia Episcopalians, or Rhode Island Baptists—all expanded or contracted their spheres of ecclesiastical influence, made differences and settled them—or left them unsettled—established missions, conferences, publication offices, seminaries, and boards without hindrance or assistance from the government.

In such a rivalry there could be but one result: the more virile and competent churches forged to the front, and each society found the field best fitted to its enterprise.

In the North and East the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches were strong and sound. The first named had also a staunch following in the more southern of the seaboard states, particularly among the Scotch-Irish inhabitants. The Baptists, except in Rhode Island, had not reached the importance they afterward attained. The Episcopal Church, especially in Virginia, had been during colonial days ministered to by men whose notoriously lax lives were a reproach to their generation. At the sound of the Lexington fray these fox-hunting, dram-drinking parsons fled to England.

During the same period the more austere and intellectual New England divine was hammering out and attenuating his nugget of truth into long-spun wires of theological webs. The water of life seemed often in danger of being absorbed and dissipated in the dry sands of polemical controversy.

In all the land there had been an awakening to evangelical light when Whitefield made his memorable tour of the colonies; all sects had felt the influence of his preaching, but the vigor of that inspiration was greatly diminished before the outbreak of the Revolution, and in the troubled years that followed that outbreak religion languished in America.

With the rehabilitation of business and social life, the readjustment of old conditions, and the adoption of new ones under the new government, the opportunity for the development of a religious body that could adapt its methods to the exigencies of rapidly expanding national life was phenomenally great. The Methodist Church enjoyed the great advantage of being, like the nation, in its formative stage. In common with other societies, it was relieved from secular control and could pursue its destiny unchecked. There was no preëmpted territory for it to claim as its right, but it proved the potentiality of the grain of mustard seed. Its opportunity, unlike that of the older and more definitely organized bodies, was obviously in newly settled regions, where its Presbyterian, Congregational, or Dutch Reformed neighbors had not the advantage of a century of occupation.

The preachers of the new method were obliged to contend with tremendous difficulties, arising from the unsettled condition of the border states when their greatest work was accomplished. These difficulties were of two sorts, the first grouping all of the material obstacles and physical perils presented by an almost uninhabited wilderness, and the second combining the several impediments to progress that were inseparable from communities scattered loosely over a wide territory and living without common interests or aims.

The first experimental confederation of states lately emerged from the condition of colonial dependence did not embrace a homogeneous population. Except in a few seaboard cities, as we shall have occasion to show, little groups of settlers or scattered individuals upon the frontiers lived isolated lives. The one common bond of sympathy and union had been the war, and after the war there was a tendency toward segregation, especially in farm and frontier life. Even the large cities of the seaboard were but imperfectly informed about each other. New York and Boston were connected by a precarious stage service, and a journey from Providence to Baltimore was almost what a journey from Chicago to Manila would be at the present day. As a startling illustration of the tardiness with which news was conveyed, we may be reminded that George Washington, having closed his eyes upon life at Mount Vernon, was buried before Congress, then sitting at Philadelphia, was informed of his death. Ordinary news did not travel, even slowly. It was too discouraged to move, and stayed at home.

By reviewing such facts as these we receive a just impression of the conditions which the older generation of the Methodist ministers had to face. We know that there are explosive substances whose energy is expended along the line of greatest resistance—so Methodism exerted itself with the greatest vigor where the obstacles were greatest. It displayed an apostolic prescience in discovering in the barred way the way of opportunity.

The Methodist preachers, though not always men of education, were, in the broadest and truest sense, picked men. They went into their field with strong convictions, an overmastering sense of responsibility, the courage of soldiers, and the spirit of martyrs. No man of weak will or faltering resolution could have taken up the life of danger and self-sacrifice demanded of every candidate for this work, and no man who had not a fair physical constitution could possibly have persevered in it. The whole moving frontier of our country, that rolled westward year after year like a resistless tide, covered the graves of hundreds of Methodist itinerants who died heroically at their posts.

A single circuit in the old days might embrace several hundred miles of unbroken wilderness, where the ring of the pioneer's ax had only begun to be heard at remote distances; where the most familiar sounds were the cry of the panther and the yell of the equally savage Indian. If the settler, in partial touch, perhaps, with two or three others of his adventurous kind, provided with firearms and protected by the log walls of his shanty or by a palisade of logs, was in constant danger from wild beasts and marauding savages, what must be thought of the courage and fortitude of the preachers who multiplied tenfold those common dangers by exposing themselves unsheltered, unaccompanied, and unarmed in every lonely valley and desolate mountain, in the vicinity of camps of hostile red men, by fever-haunted swamps, and in the path of the tempest? We read in every story of that heroic day the almost uninterrupted chronicle of pillage, torture, and massacre, but we have no record of any Methodist preacher who ever flinched or turned aside from his circuit for fear of Creek or Cherokee.

Men in all lands read with a thrill of romance the sagas of old heroes, the knightly tales of an outworn chivalry, the adventurous and gilded brigandage of Sir Launcelots and Sir Bediveres and Sir Gawains, who went a-questing in that very misty period that is known as "once upon a time"; but a nobler chivalry, a more exalted bravery, was exhibited almost within our own time by the humble and often forgotten saddlebag men of Methodism.

It is not a forced comparison that places the itinerant preacher on a par with the knight who prances through the pages of Mallory's Arthurian fables. No Galahad ever sought the Holy Grail with purer purpose than did the Axleys and Burkes, the Bigelows and Akens, in Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, in New York, Ohio, and Indiana. What are apocryphal dragons and "orgulous" beasts, strangely misplaced lions, or even knights and vague enchantments, compared with forest fires, congestive fevers, perils of flood and tornado, piercing cold, hungry wild beasts, and almost ubiquitous savages of the American forests? The giants and ogres of fable were invented by men who did not know the Snake and the Blackfeet, the Pawnee and the Sioux. You may search all the pages of romance and recall all that has ever been written in celebration of heroism and yet find nothing to excel the manliness of the men who stood again and again before Asbury, at the close of a Conference, and waited, with the cheerfulness and fortitude of good soldiers, for orders. If any man had an uncommonly good record, was distinguished by health of body, vigor of mind, or peculiar beauty of character—if he was one to whom the heart of the great leader went out with tenderness—that was the man who was apt to find himself assigned to the hardest and most dangerous circuit. The post of danger was considered the post of honor, and the man who died at his station was as one who had been signally favored of God.

The first associates of Bishop Asbury were Thomas Rankin, Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmoor, Richard Wright, George Shadford, Thomas Webb, John King, Abraham Whitworth, and Joseph Yearbry. They were at first missionaries to the older cities and centers of population. Pilmoor, Shadford, Boardman, Webb, and others officiated at different times at the old John Street Church in New York, of which we have already written.

As we have seen, it was not until the famous Christmas Conference in Baltimore, in 1784, that the Methodist Church was organized as a separate body. In the interval of a hundred and twenty years the few thousands of that early communion have increased to millions, the handful of preachers has become an army, and the weight of their influence has been mighty in every important question which has come before the American people. If we would understand the springs of action that have swayed whole sections of country at particular crises in our national life, we must go back to the saddlebag men of Methodism. To the fact that they rooted out the thistle and planted the grape is due that other fact that in our day grapes and not thistles have been the main harvest.

No better illustration can be given of the hardships that beset the itinerant preacher than may be found in the unadorned narrative of the venerable Elder Burke. Speaking of the circumstances attending a Conference at Mastersen's Station, in Kentucky, as early as 1793, he says:

"Previous to the meeting of the Conference we raised a company of twelve persons to proceed to the seat of the Conference, for the purpose of guarding Bishop Asbury through the wilderness. We met a company at the Crab Orchard, the place we usually met, by advertisement circulated for the purpose of collecting a sufficient number for protection against the Indians.

"The company, when assembled, consisted of about sixty, all well armed. We organized that night, and I was appointed commander. In the morning, all things being in readiness for our departure, we proceeded through the wilderness. The day previous there had started a large company, and among the number were four preachers—two Baptists and two Dunkards. The company with whom they traveled treated them in such an ungentlemanly and unchristian manner during the first day and night that in the morning of the second day they all four started in advance, and had not proceeded more than one mile before they were surprised by a party of Indians, and all four killed and scalped, and their horses and all that they had taken off by the Indians. We camped the first night not far from Big Laurel River, and the next morning passed the spot where the dead bodies of the preachers were thrown into a sink hole, and covered in part with some logs, and the wild beasts had torn and mangled them in a most shocking manner.

"That day we crossed the Cumberland River, and passed up the narrows to Turkey Creek, and camped on the bank. I had not slept on any of the two preceding nights, and that night I intended to take a good sleep. Accordingly, after placing out the sentinels and securing my horse, I spread my saddle blankets and, with saddle and saddlebags for my pillow, laid me down close to my horse, and was, in a few minutes, fast asleep. It was not an hour before the company were alarmed. Some said they heard Indians; others affirmed that they heard them cutting cane for their horses and heard their dogs barking at their camp up the creek; and before they awakened me the greater part of the company were on their horses and had left the sentinels at their posts. Such was the panic that I immediately harnessed up my horse and mounted, and had the guards brought in. The night was very dark, and we had to cross the creek immediately. The bank was very steep, and we had to cross in Indian file; and before all had passed the bank became very slippery, and the horses would get nearly to the top and slide back into the creek again. I was in front, and the word passed along the line, 'Halt in front.' At length all got safely over, and proceeded about four miles, to Cannon Creek. The night being very dark, and finding great difficulty in keeping the path, I ordered a halt, and directed every man to turn out to the left and dismount and hold his horse by the bridle. They accordingly did so, and I threw the reins of my bridle over my arm and laid down at the root of a beech tree and was soon asleep. I had previously given orders that we should form one hour before daybreak and be on the road, in order to elude the Indians, should they be in pursuit of us. . . . We crossed the Cumberland Mountains early in the morning, and that night arrived at Bean's Station, near the Holstein River, where we were met by the intelligence that Bishop Asbury, in consequence of ill health, could not attend the Conference in Kentucky."

On the return journey the caravan was increased to about one hundred and twenty by the accession of a large number of immigrants and their pack horses. The guard which had come through to escort the bishop, it was agreed, should bring up the rear of the procession. When they arrived at the Cumberland River they found that stream very much swollen, and upon the opposite bank were a number of hostile Indians. The preacher-captain called for volunteers to ford the river with him, and managed to get eleven companions, who crossed, the savages retiring before them. The whole party then passed the river in safety, and, after a number of alarms and narrow escapes, reached the Crab Orchard in safety, their numbers augmented by several Methodist preachers who, at the imminent risk of their lives, were working their way through the wilds to the Conference.

At that Conference Mr. Burke received his appointment to the Hinckton Circuit, Kentucky. For the sake of a clearer understanding of the labors of a man of his class, let us see how far the circuit extended. Its northern and eastern boundaries consisted of the then frontier settlements—the circuit itself lying beyond the frontier. On the south ran the Kentucky River, and westward was the great Lexington Circuit. It was called a "three weeks' circuit," that meaning that a vigorous traveler could go the rounds of its scattered clearings in that length of time, and it included the three counties of Clarke, Boone, and Montgomery. During the "summer of Wayne's campaign" (against the Indians) "great numbers were out in the service," and Burke was transferred to the Salt River Circuit. That was a four weeks' circuit, between four and five hundred miles around, and included Washington, Nelson, Jefferson, Shelby, and Greene Counties.

Think carefully of all that the distance and the time involved in covering such a circuit implied. Once in four weeks every settler in four counties was visited by the same earnest preacher, who brought, besides his heavenly message, all of the news of the widely scattered members of his parish, and made the lonely individuals of his flock interested participants in the lives of some hundreds of other people. What the preacher on the Salt River Circuit or the Hinckton Circuit was doing every other itinerant in the Methodist connection was doing in his appointed field. Throughout the whole borderland this agency, and this agency alone, was laboring not only for the spread of the gospel, but for the creation and the conservation of unity—unity in thought, in spirit, in interest.

Once in four weeks, twelve times in the year, the itinerant on Salt River made his round, an expected and welcome guest at many a cabin, the friend and counselor of men and women, the instructor of the children. He learned to know the woods and the watercourses, the signs of fair weather or foul, the cry of beast and the note of bird, to avoid danger, to endure hardship, to escape death by the exercise of woodcraft. He learned to travel alone in a region beset often by warring Indians and yet keep his scalp, which was a remarkable feat in those days.

After two years spent amid the fatigue and perils of this Indian-infested, wild-beast-haunted circuit the staunch old warrior could remember only one remarkable hardship. He says: "Nothing worthy of record—except hard times. I was reduced to the last pinch. My clothes were nearly all gone; I had patch upon patch and patch by patch, and I received only money sufficient to buy a waistcoat, and not enough for the making, during the two quarters I remained on the circuit."

During the long struggle of the colonies for independence religion withdrew unto the closet. If it did not languish in the hearts of men it certainly did not declare itself in their stupendous tasks. But when the strife was over, and the young nation found itself face to face with measureless responsibilities and untried duties, a new sense of thankfulness and a new ardor of patriotism began to make themselves known, and gave an exaltant lift to the ambitions for which freedom had opened the way.

Then it was that religion took up her burden again, with unshackled arms and a lighter heart. The war had left its inevitable heritage of poverty and exhaustion. The nation was poor, and the extinction of martial excitement was followed by the usual reaction, in which carelessness and idleness were distressing elements. But over all was the exhilaration of a great work accomplished and the promise of a great future assured.

All at once measureless opportunities were opening to a hardy race that had won its right to govern itself, and a new, clean continental vista unfolded to the energies and the ambition of peace. Vast as the new field was, lying in the unexplored shadows of the wilderness, where lurked the fiercest of human enemies and the most formidable of natural foes, it was nevertheless unstained by any of the iniquities that man had instituted in the train of the Prince of Peace.

Grim as the vista may have looked to the timid eye, there were no memorials of Christian hatred in it. No fagots had been lit in its primeval depths in the name of Christ, and no dungeons erected on its grassy plateaus for the cause of love. Beasts of prey and red-handed savages might dispute every foot of the advance, but there were no chartered regents of the Most High to burn and mangle for the Saviour's cause. The echoing spaces were destitute of all the comforts and refinements which rob life of its hardships and death of many of its terrors, but they were also free from the traditions of a Henry VIII, a Borgia, or a Torquemada, to which unwilling obeisance must be made. The most noxious everglades and the most inhospitable crags were alike ignorant of the precedents of Dort or the intolerance of Westminster, and gave little heed to the claims of Rome or the mistakes of Geneva. The sword had cut the continuity and the authority of religious strife, and, as events proved, the couriers of the faith were to suffer less from cruel nature than they had suffered from an overpious brotherhood of man.

How well the founders of our commonwealth availed themselves of the priceless opportunity we now know, though we do not perhaps give that heed to it which it deserves. They determined not only to open a pathway through the wilderness to life and love, but to close the door to religious strife which lay behind them. They were not only to drive out the enemies of the present, but to put an everlasting curb on the enemies of the past.

In the conventions which met in 1788 to ratify the Constitution we see the religious men all the ardent defenders of that clause which says that Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of speech or of the press. In Massachusetts, where the opposition to the abolishment of religious tests was the strongest, its ablest defenders were clergymen, and it was here that the Rev. Mr. Payson declared that human tribunals for the consciences of men were an impious encroachment on the prerogatives of God.

The Constitution was adopted by seven states before the close of the year 1788, and went into operation in 1789. It was thus that the nineteenth century was greeted with a new guarantee, and religious freedom, like a fresh beacon, shed its invitation over the peaks of the Alleghanies as if a new sunrise were lightening in the west.

The states which under a loose and imperfect confederation had succeeded in defeating Great Britain seemed in that struggle to have exhausted their common stock of vitality, and were like a sick man after a wearing fever has left him. The alliance, for it was hardly more than that, which had brought the thirteen colonies together in a common cause against the crown, was utterly ineffectual to build a political structure which should command reverence at home or respect abroad. The states pulled in various directions, each one for itself, each apparently trying to outvie the other in preposterous legislation to remedy local embarrassments.

If there was little travel, there was less trade between the principal markets of the land. Never was a population of equal size and intelligence poorer. The scarcity of money was so great that the expedient of barter in trade was commonly resorted to; the condition of the little coin in circulation so bad that every merchant kept his coin scales upon the counter. The public treasury was as impoverished as the private purse. At one time the national treasury was absolutely without a dollar. Abroad, it was impossible to raise loans, except from the Jews at exorbitant rates of interest. Robert Morris, who had spent his large private fortune for his country's aid, actually drew upon the American ambassadors abroad for money, sold the drafts for cash with which to run the machinery of the government, and left the luckless ministers in France or Holland to scrape together by hook or crook the loans which would keep them from being dishonored. American credit was the laughingstock of the world. Protection for American citizens abroad was absolutely unknown.

Under such conditions it is not hard to understand that there was little or no union sentiment among the people. A man rarely went outside his own state; knew nothing about the man across the border, except to distrust him. The Union as we know it was not born yet. The war which was ended was a war for liberty, but it was for the liberty of each separate colony, banded together only because not one could have made any effectual struggle alone. The war for the preservation of the Union, in which a population was willing to lay down its life for a loyal idea, was the culminating act of a faith that had only begun to germinate three quarters of a century before.

Among communities which did not travel the Methodist itinerants came and went. To people isolated through vast agricultural regions and scattered in frontier settlements they formed almost the sole cementing bond. To the men who could not see across their hill ranges and over their forests they taught the tenets of a universal brotherhood. They gathered the population of a country in camp meetings and collected a congress of representatives from remote states in Conferences. More than any other agency, more than the political candidate, the officer of the government, or the occasional schoolmaster, the Methodist preachers leavened the lump with democracy. They alone went everywhere, penetrated to every remotest hamlet, every ultimate cabin in the mountains, and, like the wandering pilgrims of mediæval times, were the news carriers, the idea mongers of their day. More than any other class of men in the New World the itinerant preachers of Methodism were propagandists of the democratic idea. The very form of religion which they professed was democratic in its origin and tendency, if not in its form of government. The importance of the individual and the claim of the community were everywhere insisted upon. In practical working the religious government was from the class to the circuit and from the circuit to the Conference.

From the Eastern centers of civilization and thought to the farthest confines of the then Western country, from Baltimore to Canada, from Philadelphia to the extreme frontier hamlets of Ohio and Indiana, it was the tireless Methodist preacher who carried with his message of gospel freedom the latest proclamation of civil liberty. Over many hundreds of miles of the new country he alone kept the men of the Kentucky clearings and the Tennessee mountains, of farm and forest and valley, in touch with the cities of the seaboard. From his Conferences he not only took back to his field of labor the counsels and experiences of his co-religionists, but also the echoes of strenuous words and the acts of a struggling Congress. With the theology of Saint Paul and Saint John went hand in hand the political principles of Hamilton and Madison. The same men who carried the Bible into the wilderness carried the Federalist also.

The only libraries for a large portion of the people of rural America were the books in the packs of the Methodist parsons. The only professors of political economy were the professors of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

An old Methodist minister once preached a Thanksgiving sermon in which he said: "We backwoods people ought to thank God most heartily for two things, namely, the Indians and the Methodist preachers. For in the settlement of this great country the Indians kept the white population from scattering into clans and taking possession of certain districts of country, claiming them and forming governments of their own—thus confining them to the government of the country. While the waves of population rolled out westward, the Indians rolled them back again and kept them together. Then the itinerant Methodist preachers, in the true spirit of their Master, followed up the emigrants from blockhouse to blockhouse and from cabin to cabin."

This is possibly the only occasion on record when one who had been acquainted with the dangers of frontier life found reason to thank his Maker for the Indians, but the argument used is worth consideration. We may be sure that the divine destiny that shaped the ends of the republic bent all agencies to that result which we of to-day sum up in one phrase—the Union.

CHAPTER III

The Field

The latter part of the eighteenth century saw the formation in America of numberless land companies, some of them organized with statesmanlike purpose to people new lands and increase the boundaries of the new republic, others to further the financial fortunes of less patriotic speculators, but all tending toward the same general result—the peopling of the new lands that were then known as the West.

It is hard to realize at this day the diversity of the conditions under which pioneer settlers pushed forward into the wild land beyond the inhabited borders of the thirteen original states. The first to advance—the skirmish line, as it were—consisted of lonely adventurers, generally single men, trappers and hunters, who fulfilled their mission, died, and were forgotten. They were the ephemera of population, leaves fluttering before the breeze, straws floating on the edge of the tide. They sometimes made discoveries and opened new paths. They not infrequently allied themselves with the savages and left a progeny of half-breed children. But they rarely became permanent factors in the problem of settlement. The second class, closely following these forerunners of population, were divided between those who may be called free agents, making choice of a home beyond the borders of civilization, partly no doubt through the influence of an indefinite popular fever for emigration, and those who were persuaded by land agents to a step of which they could not measure the magnitude.

The scheme of Rufus Putnam and others threw many Revolutionary veterans into Ohio. Private land enterprises decreased the population of Virginia and other states. Political sentiment and discontent stripped North Carolina of her surplus population. New York sent out hordes, so that an Albany correspondent to a New York paper at that time wrote of a constant stream of people, an endless caravan, moving through that city westward. A census taker in Kentucky in 1790 showed a population of over seventy thousand, and numbered in the region between the Ohio and the Great Lakes, west of the Pennsylvania line, about four thousand souls. The next census, taken ten years later, gave forty-five thousand to Ohio alone, and above two hundred and twenty thousand to Kentucky. Between 1790 and 1800 the contagious fever of emigration from the seaboard states became almost a delirium. Men disposed of whatever they owned to raise the money necessary to move with their families westward, into regions that were painted to the imagination with every alluring color, but which lost many supernal attractions upon a closer view. In a single decade, we are told by statisticians, the center of population in the United States moved westward forty-one miles. The majority of the earliest settlers in Tennessee came from North Carolina. There were a few straggling forerunners, whose status can hardly be accounted that of actual settlers, who drifted into the woods in advance of the tide of immigration that was soon to rise.

The cabin that William Bean built upon the Watauga in 1769, where a year later James Watson and others joined him, has been put down as the first *bona fide* settlement. Within the next year another company built a few huts near Rogersville, and about the same time the first store west of the Cumberland Mountains was opened, on the Nollichucky, by Jacob Brown. Following these initial attempts at colonization a number of North Carolinians planted themselves upon what they at first supposed to be Virginia soil, but, finding that the territory belonged to North Carolina, they formed an alliance with the other settlements, under the name of the Watauga Association. It was a confederation for protective purposes, and survived several years.

To Colonel Richard Henderson, who took up land between the Cumberland and Kentucky Rivers in 1775, is due a larger plan of government than any contemplated by the Watauga Association. A number of settlers, induced by Colonel Henderson's representations to follow him, built their cabins in that part of the country, and between them and the companies of James Robertson a compact of government was drawn up. It is needless to say that such a compact was of the crudest and loosest construction. If any measures facilitating the operation of courts of law were contemplated, or any means to secure the administration of justice, the provisions made for their operation generally proved inadequate, in the face of the conditions of backwoods life. In the towns there may have been some slight attempt to enforce them, but for years the very meaning of the terms "law" and "order" were forgotten by the men of the border.

In spite of the dangers to which the frontiersmen were exposed the majority occupied lonely cabins in the woods, though through that section of country which borders the Cumberland River the excessive and pertinacious hostility of the Creek Indians made settlement life much more common than upon some other parts of the frontier. Along the Cumberland bluffs there was a series of small villages, with the cabins of isolated families scattered behind them through the border of the timber land. The death rate from the knives and tomahawks of the savages was frightful. "No man dared to fell a tree, to plant an acre of corn, to pick a berry from a bush, to go to the nearest spring for water, or even to sit in the shade of his own cabin, but his gun and powderhorn were ready beside him. In 1787 thirty-three men were killed by Indians within seven miles of Nashville."

At the close of the eighteenth century Nashville was the largest and most important city in Tennessee, though its claims to rank as a metropolis rested upon a couple of hundred log cabins, many of them floorless, with unglazed windows and clapboarded roofs. Besides these dwellings there were a court house, a jail, and several public houses. Beyond Nashville there was nothing to the west, nothing northward short of the Kentucky border, nothing eastward except a little chain of equally crazy settlements on the Cumberland, or the hamlet of Knoxville, distant about a hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies, but fifteen days away in time. To reach it from Nashville men usually traveled well armed and in bands large enough to make head against the hostile Indians with which the country swarmed.

An advertisement in the North Carolina State Gazette announced in November, 1788, the completion of a road cut through the forest from Camp-bell's Station to Nashville, and the attendance of a guard to escort those who wished to travel to the latter place. It was further announced that the guard would again be in attendance at the same place a year later.

Under the leadership of such men as John Sevier, long known as Nollichucky Jack, the men of the Carolina outposts that subsequently contributed to form the state of Tennessee not only held their own against the Indians, but actually made headway at an astonishing rate. Before there was any established court in that territory, except in one or two of the principal settlements, there began to be disputes concerning property, and Nashville presented a field for lawyers before the mud was dry in the chinks of its log huts. One of the early lights of that frontier was the young Andrew Jackson, who took his first lessons in warcraft from the Indian fighters of the Cumberland.

In 1791 the crushing defeat of Saint Clair by the Indians under Joseph Brent spread terror through the whole Western country. In Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, western Pennsylvania, and wherever in the wilds the foot of a white man had trod, there was panic at the dreadful tale of atrocities, that in some mysterious way was circulated even to the remotest fastnesses of the forest.

To a preacher crossing the Cumberland range to penetrate the promised land lying to the west of them there was always an immediate prospect of hardships and dangers, of some of which we are not ignorant, even at this distance of time. First of all, there was the ever-present peril from the Indians. It was an old saying that the Creeks were always upon the warpath, and, indeed, that statement hardly exceeded the truth. Through the forest to Knoxville, and beyond that embryo city to the more distant Cumberland lands, there was a well-marked trail, emphasized upon more than one occasion by the passage of troops sent to deal with the savages, and traveled almost constantly in the autumn by bands of immigrants. Yet in spite of the fact that the trail was a highway for the annual passage of hundreds of people, it was a lonely and dangerous path, beset by every peril to which travelers in an American wilderness could be subjected. It bordered, if, indeed, it did not trespass upon, the reservation which even at that early day our government guaranteed to the Indians. It led through low lands where there were no streams, and through forests where panthers and wolves abounded. The way was long and arduous, but it was also one of exceeding natural beauty, and even its very ruggedness must have spoken to the awakened mind of a traveling preacher of the sublimity of the Creator's handiwork.

In another chapter of this book reference is made to a rendezvous of preachers at the Crab Orchard, where they united to form an escort for Bishop Asbury, then expected to travel westward. That famous spot has been described in the journal of an English traveler of that day in the following words:

"It is a fine, large plain, or natural meadow, containing many hundred acres, and covered throughout its whole extent with a tall, rich grass, surrounded on every side by the neighboring mountains, and watered with several fine springs, which flow from one end to the other. The scenery of the craggy mountains, covered with trees to their very top, contrasted with the smooth level of the plain, afforded us a view highly picturesque, novel, and enchanting, and one which we could not dwell on but with pleasure. Near one end of it and not far from the road is a very great natural curiosity. It is a subterraneous cavity in a rock under the mountains, down which you descend by some steps cut in the stone into a large, spacious room, through which runs a clear, limpid stream of water, which rises from the rock at one end and flows out at the other through a passage underground, and disgorges itself in the open air not far from the entrance to the cave."

The whole of the way was full of surprises, and to a poetic or imaginative traveler must have afforded no little satisfaction; but its distressing features would prevent a too great absorption in its beauties. Not only were the Indians dangerous, but the newly established white inhabitants, when they could be found, were generally inhospitable and poor. It was no uncommon experience for a preacher to arrive at a cabin tired and hungry, after twenty or thirty miles of travel, or perhaps a night spent without shelter in the woods, and be told that the family had not enough for themselves and could not give to strangers. If hospitality was ever shown it was to a neighbor, whose good will might be worth having, but the wayfarer must not expect favors. Food was seldom given away until the preachers had gained something of a foothold in the country. When one had money or other equivalent to offer he might hope for pork and beans, hominy and bacon, or cornbread; beyond this the larder was usually empty save for what the forest provided. Many a preacher has recorded a repulse at this or that cabin in the wilderness, when he was obliged to lie down, hungry and thirsty, under a tree in the forest, and commit himself to the care of Him whose servant he was.

A lodging in a Tennessee or Kentucky cabin, even when obtained, was not a thing to be coveted by fastidious people. A pile of husks without a bed-stead, in a room occupied by half a dozen other people, on a floor of rough slabs so loosely placed that snakes not infrequently came up between and slept with the family, was all that a traveler usually dared to hope for. At the very rare houses of public entertainment that were by courtesy called inns it was customary to put a number of beds in one room, and if they were all full a newcomer might, according to a custom of the country, bunk with any one of the occupants he might choose, waiving the formality of an introduction. For such a lodging and a breakfast, such as a New England housekeeper would blush to offer to a tramp, a not unusual charge was a dollar. From such accounts as we have it would seem that the people of that region, though brave and persevering, were selfish and sordid, till awakened by a spiritual experience.

The marvelous persistence of the Methodist preachers was exemplified in every clearing in the frontier woods, and the spiritual experience which alone could have worked a reformation in the habits of life and thought of the people and subordinated their sordid anxiety to the splendid reality of a triumphant faith, was due to the ceaseless energy, the tireless patience, with which the itinerants went, almost as mendicants, but full of beneficent purpose, from clearing to clearing, till the gospel was preached to every creature.

Along the Ohio River near the close of the eighteenth century the settlements were as few as upon the Cumberland, and they were in as poor and as dangerous condition. Wheeling, with fifty log cabins, Marietta, with two hundred, and a few smaller groups of humanity, were all that lay beyond Pittsburg, from which point voyagers, well armed, trusted themselves with their families in clumsy boats to the current of the river, and prepared for a running fight with the fierce and crafty foes that at certain points along the shore were very sure to oppose their passage. There were several sorts of craft used by the Ohio River pioneers, the principal ones being flatboats, keel boats, and arks, the latter roofed in a fashion not unlike the popular conception of the ark in which the survivors of the Noachian deluge came safe to land. Such vessels, when laden with the women and children and the property and provisions of immigrants setting out for frontier homes, generally sailed in consort with others of their kind. Provided with strong slab bulwarks, they were practically floating forts, from which the long rifles of their defenders might be used with deadly effect. Their steering apparatus consisted of sweeps projecting astern, and suggesting the steering board of the ancient Norse galleys. These flotillas, long remembered upon the Ohio, were as distinctive as the wagon, called a prairie schooner, which came into use upon the plains of the farther West nearly a generation later.

The woods and marshes that bordered the river abounded with game. The last of the buffalo were disappearing from that part of the country when the first rank of settlers came in. This fact should be noticed as evidence that in at least one instance the decline of the bison was not due to the wasteful energy of white hunters. Everywhere wild turkey, deer, elk, and bear were common, while the waters of the river teemed with palatable fish.

Those voyages in company must have been wonderful, rememberable experiences. The life of almost complete idleness, enjoyed by men to whom tradition attributes wonderful qualities of courage and hardiness, to match their unrivaled stature and strength, but imputes also such vices as laziness and a love for strong drink, was varied by adventures which in another age and country would have been celebrated in heroic stanzas. The women, chatting together, or occupied with those domestic cares that were not to be intermitted even upon such a journey, and the children, living in a real wonder-world of which they could not guess the extent or the value, were making the most of an experience that would probably never be repeated.

Limestone, Columbia, and Newport were started —mere clusters of log huts. Cincinnati was a promise of something metropolitan, Louisville a place for carousals. There it happened that when Samuel S. Forman set up a store opposite the slab tavern, and greatly surprised his neighbors by shutting up shop on Sunday, some one expostulated with him, on the ground that Sunday had not come over the mountains.

"O yes it has," answered Forman, cheerfully, "I brought it."

Near the mouth of the Scioto River the Indians had a cave where they made their rendezvous when preparing for an attack upon a party of immigrants, and the evil fame of this place spread throughout all the frontier.

After the flatboats and arks had reached their several destinations and the voyagers parted to establish their separate homes, the memory of that brief social experience and the moving panorama of the country through which they had passed must have remained long with them, and even brightened by contrast the loneliness of their lives. Into a world to which ideas never came, where news seldom visited them, where the realities of life were nearly all hard, cruel, and exceedingly bitter, a world where terror and calamity were almost the only relief from an appalling monotony, the exiles of a century ago dropped and were lost to sight.

Most of the pioneers came not from the centers of population, where alone at that day the facilities for education could be enjoyed. They had always lived near the border of the world. Finally they went over that border. They were not generally people who had within themselves those resources which might enable a family possessing them to endure a Selkirk existence without repining. They had what was perhaps a much better equipment for the work designed by Providence for them—that is, a store of superabundant physical vitality. Yet we cannot but believe that the lives of the pioneer women of America must have been purgatorial.

The lawlessness of the Kentucky pioneer was so proverbial that the very term "Kentuck" was a synonym for all manner of deviltry. The Kentucky boatmen, we are told, were a class almost as greatly feared as the Indians. Their life was a savage alternation of displays of great physical strength and endurance and the most bestial debaucheries. Modern parallels to their mode of life may be found in the Western mining camps of the forties or among the ranches of a latter day. In those days they were unmatched except by the teamsters of the Tennessee woods. It would be erroneous and wrong to picture the pioneer of that time as devoid of all Christian theory or practice, but it was at least like the leaven hidden in a measure of meal, and its working had not commenced. There were undoubtedly members of different Christian denominations in Knoxville, Nashville, Cincinnati, and other prominent settlements at a very early day. These were mostly Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, their church affiliations depending largely upon the part of the East from which they had come out. These Christian people sometimes formed small congregations and were ministered to by preachers who were animated by a holy zeal. The Methodists alone formed circuits outside of the centers of population and visited for religious purposes with anything like regularity the outlying cabins and plantations that increased by the thousands every twelvemonth.

Kentucky, which had gained the nickname of "Satan's Stronghold," became the object of especial solicitude to the preachers of Methodism. In Kentucky commenced the visible work of revival that soon was to assume a magnitude unparalleled in the history of modern religious movements, and unexcelled for force and potency even in the days when Peter the Hermit carried his enthusiasm like a firebrand through the towns and hamlets of Europe, preaching a crusade for the recovery of the Holy City. Of the Red River revival John Bach McMaster makes this significant note:

"Two young men began the great work in the summer of 1799. They were brothers, preachers, and on their way across the pine barrens to Ohio, but turned aside to be present at a sacramental solemnity on Red River. The people were accustomed to gather at such times on a Friday, and by praying, singing, and hearing sermons prepare themselves for the reception of the sacrament on Sunday. At the Red River meeting the brothers were asked to preach, and one did so with astonishing fervor. As he spoke the people were deeply moved, tears ran streaming down their faces, and one, a woman, far in the rear of the house, broke through order and began to shout. For two hours after the regular preachers had gone the crowd lingered and were loath to depart. While they tarried one of the brothers was irresistibly impelled to speak. He rose and told them that he felt called to preach; that he could not be silent. The words which then fell from his lips roused the people before him to 'a pungent sense of sin.' Again and again the woman shouted, and would not be silent. He started to go to her. The crowd begged him to turn back. Something within him urged him on, and he went through the house shouting and exhorting and praising God. In a moment the floor, to use his own words, 'was covered with the slain.' Their cries for mercy were terrible to hear. Some found forgiveness, but many went away 'spiritually wounded' and suffering unutterable agony of soul. Nothing could allay the excitement. Every settlement along the Green River and the Cumberland was full of religious fervor. Men fitted their wagons with beds and provisions and traveled fifty miles to camp upon the ground and hear him preach. The idea was new. Hundreds adopted it, and camp meetings began. There was now no longer any excuse to stay away from preaching. Neither distance nor lack of houses nor scarcity of food nor daily occupations prevailed."

In a succeeding chapter we will dwell more particularly upon the events here described.

The settlement of Ohio and Indiana differed somewhat from that of the region we have been particularly considering.

During the entire period of national life in the United States few subjects that have claimed the attention of Congress have proved more provocative of discussion than the disposal of undefined, or ill defined, Western territory. From Virginia, that claimed vast tracts of land beyond the Ohio, to Maryland, stoutly refusing to join the first confederation of states till a settlement on that head had been reached, the representatives of the thirteen embryo states represented almost as many shades of political opinion. New York broke the deadlock which was the result of that discussion by a proposition to cede the Western land claimed by her to the federal government, under certain restrictions and subject to certain conditions and reservations. Other states subsequently fell in line. In October, 1780, Congress agreed to dispose of all lands so ceded for the common advantage.

We may be permitted to go back to a still earlier period in order to understand the conditions preceding and partly influencing the occupation of the Northwest by English-speaking immigrants. The first actual settlers of that part of the country that is now Indiana were Frenchmen, whose life was a free, irresponsible, reckless, half-savage existence. Their means of subsistence were such as satisfied their Indian neighbors. There was neither tillage nor manufacture. The few posts or settlements were mainly along the Wabash or its tributaries, at Vincennes, Kaskaskia, Ouitanon, and several other points. The business of the inhabitants being hunting and kindred occupations, their trade staples were hides, pelts, tallow, and beeswax, in which commodities they, through their factors or agents, did quite a thriving business as early as 1735 or 1740. They lived contentedly under commandants, as their governors were called, and looked up to such exalted personages as 'Sieur de Vincennes, or Jean Saint Ange de Belle Rive, as of quite another clay from common mortals.

The first French comers laid claim to all the Mississippi valley and the broad belt of country watered by its tributaries, and their explorers, as well as the more far-seeing of the French statesmen of the day, dreamed of empire—a dream that might have been realized had the territory possessed a seacoast. The lives of the people were under the domination of courtiers and favorites, ambitious adventurers, and self-sacrificing priests of the Romish Church.

English dominion over the region referred to commenced with Wolfe's victory over Montcalm, a victory which the late Professor John Fiske characterizes as "the greatest turning point yet discoverable in modern history." It was the decisive answer to the question whether French or English ideas and institutions should govern the destinies of the North American continent. When Saint Ange evacuated Vincennes he closed the chapter of French imperialism, picturesque indolence, and ignorance, and priestly domination. Admirable in their courage, devotion, and faith as the missionary priests were, it is doubtful if they would ever have stimulated their roving parishioners to clear thinking or effective living.

The English settlers who followed on the heels of the French were harder, coarser in the grain, more practical, less picturesque. The gayeties of the frontier villages gave place somewhat to brutalities. The men who danced and sang, played the fiddle, and appreciated the romantic and dramatic possibilities of the wonderland they inhabited gave place to a race that swung the ax and planted corn in the clearings, fought and hunted for recreation, were content to do without either politeness or religion. Of course, the French settlers did not disappear when the English rule commenced, but they were no longer the dominant race, and new ideas ruled. The development of this frontier from the battle of the Heights of Abraham to the struggle for American independence was gradual and historically uneventful.

The exploit of Colonel George Rogers Clark, who in February, 1779, captured Vincennes, was of tremendous importance to the future of the United States. In view of our great development it is safe to say that no more fruitful victory has ever been achieved within the borders of the United States. It was decisive in this important particular—that it enabled the young nation to maintain her claim to the territory that had once belonged to France, reaching to the line of the Spanish possessions, and, when the credit of the infant government was at its lowest ebb, to base loans upon these lands, then the only available collateral that the nation possessed. Mr. E. A. Bryan, writing for the Magazine of American History in 1889, has justly said: "All who have weighed the difficulties and dangers attending the construction period following the Revolutionary War know that the basis of the marvelous success attending the financial management of the illustrious Hamilton lay in the millions of fertile acres which the genius and the sword of Clark had won."

In the territory so acquired the sale of homestead land and the colonization of veteran soldiers was accomplished by the formation of the Ohio Company, a plan first proposed by General Rufus Putnam and put into effect as soon as titles could be obtained from the Indians and approximate surveys made. The company, in brief, was organized upon the proposal to take all the magnificent country north of the Ohio River and sell it in township lots to impoverished soldiers at a nominal price for each lot. To the individual settler his section was almost a free gift, so small was the price, but the aggregate provided a welcome and necessary addition to the depleted national treasury. A provision for territorial government was also made, and the development into states of the newly settled lands was a part of the far-reaching plan. The work of colonization was done through the Ohio Joint Stock Company, by whose agency lands were purchased and the details of the scheme worked out.

These were the sources of population in Ohio and Indiana and all of the so-called Northwestern Territory. First the French *coureurs des bois,* in scattered trading posts; then the coarser but far more energetic English hunters and frontiersmen; and, last of all, a sudden influx of resolute New Englanders and Virginians, men who had proved their hardiness on the battlefields of the republic from Concord to Yorktown. Into this abounding wilderness thousands of the latter class went and were apparently swallowed up in the shadows of the universal woods. An army poured westward, segregated, and spread like the bursting of a rocket and became the isolated units who in time should form nuclei for villages and towns.

It was upon such a field as this that the traveling preachers entered. In the northern region there was perhaps a greater basis of character, seriousness of mind, and inherited tendency toward religion and morality to work upon than in the south. A large portion of the country was settled by disciplined New Englanders. In the Cumberland and the Kentucky settlements the people seem to have been less self-controlled, more nervous, and more emotional, and perhaps these differences will account for the fact that the flame when once kindled in the south spread like a conflagration in the forest, leaping from hamlet to hamlet with the swiftness and something of the consuming power of flame, while northward the fire crept more slowly and individuals were separately won. Both north and south the preachers had to contend with the same absence of the restraints of a well-organized government or the controlling influences of civilized life.

CHAPTER IV.

Some of the Sowers

At the commencement of the nineteenth century Ohio, as we have seen, was the home of a scattered population of about forty-five thousand souls—that is to say, a handful when compared with the extent of the territory over which they were distributed. John Kobler, a Virginian by birth, is supposed to have been the very first preacher to proclaim the gospel message in that wild country. Sent out by Asbury, he pushed his way as far as the hardiest pioneer had penetrated, and spent eighteen years of his life in unremitting toil, in the face of incredible hardships, and then the overtaxed body gave out, and he was retired from the itinerant field, to be shortly afterward put upon the superannuated list.

It will perhaps best serve the purpose of this work to give a part of John Kobler's experiences in his own words, as he wrote them in 1841 for the Western Historical Society:

"In the year 1798 the writer of this article was sent by Bishop Asbury as a missionary to this region of country, then called the Northwest Territory, now Ohio State, to form a new circuit and to plant the first principles of the gospel.

"In passing through the country I found it almost in its native, rude, and uncultivated state. The inhabitants were settled in small neighborhoods, few and far between, and little or no improvement about them. No sound of the everlasting gospel had yet broken upon their ears. The site where Cincinnati now stands was nearly a dense and uncultivated forest. No improvement was to be seen but Fort Washington, which was built on the brow of the hill and extended down to the margin of the river; around which was built a number of cabins, in which resided the settlers of the place. This fortress was then under the command of General Harrison, and was the great place of rendezvous for the federal troops which were sent by the government to guard the frontiers or to go forth to war with the Indians."

Kobler is described as a man of more than ordinary strength and endurance, with mental endowments above the average. He was the first of that devoted band of missionary preachers who stood at the threshold of new destinies, to guide the population of the Ohio frontier into the ways of order, law, and religion. What incalculable influence he and his colaborers wielded can only be guessed. The first communion table spread in Ohio by John Kobler drew together from all quarters between twenty-five and thirty communicants. Forty years later the Methodist Church had enrolled there a hundred thousand members.

Benjamin Lakin was another of the early preachers in Ohio. He followed Kobler closely, and was appointed to the Southern Miami District, as it was called; and, what makes his case somewhat unique for that place and time, he took his young wife with him. A personal account given by J. B. Finley of his first meeting with this courageous preacher refers to the year 1802: "It was during this year we became acquainted with this pioneer. We met him as he was moving from Kentucky to the field of his labor. The point where we met him was on the eastern side of the Little Miami, the track of the railroad now (1855) occupying the spot. Then there was nothing which deserved the name of a road—*a kind of a trace.* We were surprised to see a man and a woman in a cart drawn by one horse; surprised, because this was a superior way of traveling, not known to the settlers, who traveled and carried their movables on pack horses. As we came up we halted to look at his vehicle."

There is something very naive and charming in the picture here suggested, the horseman looking with more admiration and curiosity on the luxury of a springless, rough, two-wheeled cart than we would bestow upon the latest triumph from the shops of fashionable manufacturers.

"As we stopped, he inquired how far it was to the next house. This we were unable to tell, for the road was uninhabited. We then had the curiosity to ask him who he was, where he was going, and what was his business. He quickly replied: 'My name is Lakin; I am a Methodist preacher, and am going to preach the gospel to lost sinners in the Miami and Scioto country.'"

Sixteen years Lakin stood it; then he went back and was put on the superannuated list. It was a hard life, that might superannuate a man of thirty-five or forty. How gloriously they spent themselves, those great, brave fellows of a heroic time! They did not go blindfold, but with open eyes faced the conditions that meant a shortened life for most of them. Some of them got no pay, and none of them ever received much. They would not beg for themselves, being proud and self-reliant men, and they were often hungry and cold—a long procession of them, four thousand ordained by Bishop Asbury alone; old young men, prematurely worn out, victims of fever, of starvation, of exhaustion; but no record has ever reached us of any complaint from a man of them, save this, that they could not spend their lives faster in their barter for souls.

There have been other martyrs in the world's story, and will doubtless be many more as long as the path of duty starts away at right angles from "the primrose path of dalliance." The unique feature in the martyrdom we have been contemplating was the fact that the martyrs of the frontier circuits were not only cheerful but often jovial men. They delighted in innocent mirth, could tell a good story, and laugh at even their own mishaps. Theirs was courage of the highest order, that could make light of dangers and turn difficulties into a jest.

There was at one time in the Northwest a sturdy preacher by the name of Jesse Walker, and his exploits have become familiar traditions in the field where he labored. He went in his youth from North Carolina into Tennessee and Kentucky, and for ten years he ranged the forest and kept just ahead of the foremost of his brethren. It was said that he could not be tired out, but would travel without rest or food, with an almost superhuman patience and endurance. He had the woodsman's ability to locate the place he wanted to reach and travel to it in a straight line, as the bee or the pigeon does, without map or guide. He could not get lost either in the mountains or the canebrake, and he traveled with a delightful disregard of such small conveniences as roads or trails.

Walker's ruling passion was to convert souls, and it was a matter of pride with him to be always first on the ground. In 1806 he was appointed to the Illinois Circuit, and set out in company with Mc-

Kendree, who was presiding elder of the Cumberland District, of which the Illinois Circuit was a part. They carried all their belongings in their saddlebags, and camped by the way, as the country over which they passed was entirely unsettled and unbroken. It must have been an exciting and pleasurable journey to two such adventurous pilgrims, for they had rain, river floods, wild beasts, and other untoward things to combat. They swam the rivers and climbed the hills with the zest of boys out for a holiday. After forming a new circuit McKendree went toward Missouri, and Walker began to hunt out the scattered members of his appointed parish and see that not one was neglected. A man could not bury himself so deep in the wilderness that Walker did not find him and talk to him about his sins and the way of salvation. To those who did not want to hear him he must have seemed a perfect pest. It is told of him that once a new settler had just selected a site for his cabin and was looking for timber to build with when the preacher appeared, equipped with his Bible and full of zeal for the newcomer's spiritual welfare. He was greeted emphatically, if not cordially, by the latter, who explained, with considerable warmth, that he had moved from his last place to get rid of the Methodist preachers, who were worrying him to death.

On another occasion a brother preacher made up his mind that if it was possible he would steal a march on Walker, as he never visited a new family that he did not find the other had been ahead of him and had already preached to them. Hearing that a new family had located at Root River (Racine), he hurried to visit them. On his way he stopped at Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) and met Walker, who owned to being a little tired, *as he had just come back from a call on that new family at Root River.* Elder John Sinclair told the story, and added that after that experience he owned defeat and left the old pioneer to the unquestioned enjoyment of his laurels.

Preëminent among American Methodists was Francis Asbury. Though an Englishman by birth, he had begun to be accustomed to the New World and its ways when at the Christmas Conference in 1784 he was chosen and consecrated a bishop, and he became the natural leader of the great movement that has influenced national life to an extent that few movements have equaled and few historians have recognized.

It appears that Mr. Asbury refused the investment upon authority delegated by Mr. Wesley till the choice had been confirmed and urged by the Conference, when he yielded to what must have seemed, even with such a backing, a very startling innovation. Never had a bishop been so democratically indorsed, and it may be said that no consecration of a similar character ever met with a greater outburst of disapproval from the Church of England. Charles Wesley was particularly vehement in his protest against a measure which he regarded not only as a dangerous but a wicked innovation.

One of the first official acts of the new bishop was the signing of a memorial to Washington, setting forth the loyalty of the Methodist clergy to the infant government. The Methodists were the first to offer to Washington congratulations upon his election to the Presidency, and the Methodists were his firm and loyal supporters always.

What might have been the history of Methodism, and how modified the history of the United States might have been, had it not been for the pronounced Americanism of Francis Asbury, of Staffordshire, it is impossible to say; but it is not too much to affirm that the influence he wielded has seldom been surpassed by that of any single man in America, and that its great weight was always in the balance with whatever measure conserved the union of the American states and the unity of the American people.

The Englishmen sent as preachers to the American colonies before the war by the Wesleyan Conference nearly all returned to the mother country when hostilities commenced. The two exceptions to that exodus from the chosen field were said to be Shadford and Asbury. Bishop Simpson is authority for the statement that Asbury alone remained at his post.

An early evidence of the new bishop's zeal was displayed in his effort to found a much needed college in the neighborhood of Baltimore. This subject was broached during the first meeting between Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury, and so energetically did they work that when the Conference met they had succeeded in raising about a thousand pounds by subscription.

Francis Asbury was forty-two years younger than Wesley, to whom alone he has been second in influence in the society they served. The wisdom and humanity of the younger man, his high faith and noble courage, made him a fit leader of men, and his untiring zeal and industry enabled him to impress upon his generation so deep a mark that there seems to be no immediate danger of its effacement. Asbury commenced his education at an English village school, but his schooldays were brief, coming to an end when he had reached the age of fourteen years, when he was apprenticed to a trade, as was customary at that day. Two years later he became a local preacher, and was received by Wesley into the itinerant ministry at twenty-two. When twenty-six years of age he came to America as a missionary.

Unused to woods and woodcraft, to the hardships and makeshifts of pioneer settlements and the perils of the almost unbroken frontier, he made himself master of this new art of semi-savage living, learned to follow a blazed trail, and to camp far from the habitations of men, and, indeed, in all things to conform to the usages of the people among whom his lot was cast.

When he came to America there was but one Methodist society having a stated place of worship—that in New York city—and in all the land the followers of John Wesley numbered not more than six hundred souls, scattered over two states. He lived to see the little handful increase to a multitude. As the first Methodist bishop to wear that title in America, he was at the head of every movement, either educational or ecclesiastical. He traveled—at a day when to travel meant unbroken roads and saddlebags—over two hundred and seventy thousand miles, visiting every part of the country where the foot of a white man had strayed, braving forest, mountain, and swamp with dauntless courage, preaching above sixteen thousand sermons, and converting an unnumbered host. In the ranks of the workers of all the ages there are few who can claim a right to stand beside Bishop Asbury.

We have but commenced the story of his labors. He ordained during the successive years of his ministry four thousand preachers, each one of whom was as a torch lighted in a dark place. He presided at two hundred and twenty-four Conferences. He laid the foundation of the first Methodist college, and worked with all his great strength for the establishment of a comprehensive educational system, to be extended to every district throughout the land. There was often a Pauline cast to his adventures, and certainly a strong suggestion of the great apostle to the Gentiles in his character. To the end of his long life he remained single, being of the opinion that a wife might distract his attention from his work. He was a mighty organizer, a general, the man most needed for the American branch of Wesley's following.

While Asbury may have lacked the almost perilous sublimation of Wesley's more exalted moods, which were at times too mystical for popular comprehension, and while he certainly did not follow him into those awful depths of doubt and despondency into which the great leader was prone to plunge, yet one may question if his more normally balanced temperament and wisely controlled intellect did not make him a better and safer leader for the men of the new country. American Methodism, that great system, solid to withstand the world and sufficiently elastic to embrace Christendom, fine in its conception and magnificent in its results, was largely the work, under Providence, of Bishop Asbury, or at least was planned under the immediate direction of his genius. If success is to be measured by the extent to which a man accomplishes the object that lies nearest to his heart, then Francis Asbury must be accounted one of the most successful men that America has ever known, though, like his Master, he was poor in purse and often had not where to lay his head. He died at Spottsylvania, Virginia, March 31, 1816.

Bishop Asbury's views on the itinerancy were strong, his expression of them unequivocal. Soon after his landing in America he wrote: "At present I am dissatisfied. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities (that is, in the winter season), but I think I shall show them the way. . . . I am in trouble, and more trouble is at hand, for I am determined to make a stand against all partiality. I have nothing to seek but the glory of God, nothing to fear but his displeasure."

The bishop's way of making appointments showed that inexorable, soldierly bent of character that was one of his strong qualifications for leadership. He first studied the characters and temperaments of the men to be appointed. Next, he made as careful a survey of the ground as possible, traveling annually thousands of miles to accomplish this end. Finally, having fitted the laborer to his field according to his own best judgment, he made the matter the subject of earnest prayer for guidance. His resolve once formed, nothing of an ordinary character was suffered to interfere with it. He made his list of appointments with almost despotic power, but with a conscientious regard for the great work of the church. All recognized that he was but the servant of the work, at one in that regard with the youngest and most obscure man in the ranks.

He showed the highest confidence in the preachers, his beloved brethren, by treating them exactly as he treated himself—without consideration. At the end of a Conference the bishop read without comment or interruption the list of appointments, the preparation of which had cost him labor and thought, tears and prayers without limit or number. Sometimes with trembling voice he read, knowing the hardships and dangers to which his word would commit these dear laborers, but always inexorably. When the last name was read, it has been told, he turned at once to the door, where his horse stood saddled, and rode away to avoid possible discussion or appeal.

It is a matter of history that Asbury found the itinerant feature of the Wesleyan work in America already disappearing when he arrived, and that he revivified it. Dr. Daniels says: "Beyond all doubt this young Englishman, by his sagacious management of this very question, saved the cause of Methodism in America from early and inglorious death. . . . Colonial Methodism and a settled ministry were entirely incompatible." The Methodist preachers got to be known as the saddlebag men. The two requisites to a clerical equipment were a horse and a Bible. Some one has said that after asking if a candidate had the grace of God in his heart, and the ability to preach or exhort, the very next question always was, "Has he a horse?" Without the latter it would have been next to impossible to traverse the wilderness. For half a century after Asbury's advent the gospel was on horseback in America.

One reads with amazement some of the records of the hardships and dangers of the early circuit riders. Like a page from some old saga comes the account of Burke's ride, from appointment to appointment, through a country swarming with hostile red men, when the settlers gathered in blockhouses or behind palisades, rifle in hand. During the Cherokee War the preacher was near the French Broad River and was warned that it would probably mean death to him to sally forth on his circuit. At his first appointment he found the people gathered with direful accounts of a large force of savages within the limits of the settlement. Nevertheless, having got what hearing he could at the first and not losing his life, he set out for the second appointment, on the south bank of the Little River. Two men were found who offered to pilot him through the woods; but the evidences of danger multiplied till they were driven back to protect their families, and the preacher went on alone.

The next settlement was also alarmed, and Burke was met by a crowd of eager men and women engaged in strengthening the defenses of their houses. They were too busy to listen to preaching. The tales of Indian atrocities, which are merely literature to most of us, were terrible realities to the people of the frontier of that day. With almost frantic haste they gathered material for defense as long as the light lasted, and when night came sat down in the darkness, not daring to make a light, each man with his rifle in his hand.

Finding this frightened flock unable to comprehend the words he spoke to them, Burke set out again, traveling by night so as to avoid the savages, and leading his horse over a great part of the way. Stealing through the forest in the dark, on foot and alone, from danger to danger, this intrepid member of a heroic band followed the path of duty without question, though to say that he was without fear would indicate an almost insensible mind.

At length, still under cover of the darkness, he succeeded in reaching the settlement he sought, and there found himself face to face with a new danger, as the inhabitants thought him an Indian, trying to decoy them, and prepared to "fill him full of lead." Finally a woman recognized the preacher's voice, and he was admitted. After the natural expressions of amazement at the risks that a Methodist preacher would take to fill his appointments, the people listened attentively while he preached and prayed with them. The next day, in spite of their protests, he proceeded upon his circuit. On his next round the brave itinerant found to his deep sorrow that all of the people at that place had been murdered by the savages, though he had escaped, through a country swarming with them, without the slightest injury.

Bishop Asbury was frequently exposed to the same dangers which at this distance of time add a romantic charm to the story of his colaborers. Upon one occasion, having reason to fear an Indian attack while upon his way to a Conference, he and a few companions stretched a rope around their temporary stopping place, with the idea of tripping any stealthy foe who might try to approach under cover of darkness. Each man, except those on sentinel duty, slept with the bridle of his horse around his arm, and so a night in the forest was passed, but without attack. Despite the fact that they were disturbed and harrassed by the way, the bishop and his little cortege reached the Conference in safety, though the country was alive with hostile foes and every week brought its record of atrocities.

The discouragements that beset the preacher were not always in the way of physical obstacles or dangers. It took peculiar force and nerve to compel the attention of an indifferent or even hostile audience. Some of the younger and more diffident preachers must have gone through a purgatorial experience on some of the wilder circuits. It is told of the great McKendree, afterward a bishop, that when upon his first circuit he made so unfavorable a first impression that a brother who was to be his host openly expressed his disgust. "What will they send us next?" he burst out. The young preacher heard him, and was quite ready to share the unfavorable opinion. He preached in fear and trembling, and without much edification. As he did not afterward appear at the house, his host went to hunt him up, and found him at the scene of his defeat, sitting dejectedly, with his head in his hands. He wanted nothing to eat, he said. He felt that he was a failure, and he could not summon courage to face the people. After some persuasion he followed his host home, and there agreed with him that he would better make arrangements to leave the field to some better man. However, while going to cancel his appointments he was persuaded, by some people who were more hungry for preaching than critical as to its quality, to try again. The result was exactly the reverse of what he anticipated. McKendree stayed in his circuit, and the Methodist Church was fortunate in this preservation of one of her strongest and most useful men.

Among the preachers whom Asbury ordained, or who were his colaborers at the meeting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were not a few who were his very antithesis in personality and method. Among these was one who combined much native shrewdness and a ready if rough eloquence with consuming zeal.

Benjamin Abbott was a Pennsylvanian, uneducated, but zealous, who preached in a sort of phrensy that was communicated to his hearers. He carried the sword of fire, and, with the stern demeanor of an avenging spirit, wielded it till he had driven his audience to the smoking edge of the bottomless pit before extending to them the olive branch of divine mercy. He proclaimed that "God without Christ is a consuming fire," and that fire was to him so real and overwhelming that it was no unusual thing for the hearers to be thrown into convulsions or for the preacher to faint from the excess of his emotion.

One of the incidents of his preaching has been related somewhat as follows: A young man standing near a blazing wood fire fell in a fit as Abbott depicted the torments of the lost, and he narrowly missed being burned, his companions with difficulty rescuing him. A young Quaker girl was singled out for reprobation because she did not show any sign of penitence. At a funeral the preacher took advantage of the awe and fear occasioned by a terrific thunderstorm to set before his trembling hearers the awful coming of the Lord. Sudden streams of lightning illuminated the house, and the incessant thunder shook it to its foundations. "Who knows," cried the vehement evangelist, "but that the Lord may descend with the next clap of thunder!" With that, his journal tells us, the people began to cry and scream and fell all around the house. Fourteen years afterward he found in that place twelve active Christians who dated their conversion from that time and occasion.

Robert Southey says of him: "Abbott seems to have been a sincere and well-meaning enthusiast, on the verge of madness himself," which seems almost as fanatical as the rough-and-ready methods that he reprobates; but presently this note is added: "The fermentation of Methodism will cease in America as it has ceased in England, and even during its effervescence the good which it has produced is greater than the evil." Perhaps it was difficult for Southey to entertain a just view of revival methods as foreign as those of Abbott to his cultivated, æsthetic taste, but he testified again and again to the tangible results of the work and the unselfish zeal of the workers in that early awakening.

Abbott was once rebuked by a broad-brimmed listener, who objected to his realistic portrayal of avenging justice on the ground that the Lord was not in the earthquake nor the whirlwind, but in the still small voice. The preacher retorted: "Do you know that the earthquake is the mighty thunder of God's voice from Mount Sinai? It is the divine law to drive us to Christ. And the whirlwind is the power of conviction, like the rushing of a mighty wind, tearing away every false hope and stripping us of every plea." Commenting on this reply, Samuel Taylor Coleridge commends it, but adds that it would have been still better if he had told his Quaker critic that it was by God's ordinance that the earthquake and the whirlwind should go before the still small voice.

Certain it is that in the early days of Methodism the penitent stood, as he was expected to stand, as in the cave of Horeb, and felt the very foundations of his soul shaken, before receiving the word of peace. The violence of Abbott and his companions had an effect upon untaught, unreflecting, unregenerate men that we cannot conceive would have been accomplished by milder methods. The robust, uncompromising insistence that the natural heart is at enmity with God, and that such enmity is a necessarily fatal struggle against just and irresistible wrath, led to results that all the milder preachments of modern pulpits never could have attained. To criticize the primitive methods of Abbott and those like him upon the ground that their treatment was heroic invites the retort that they believed the disease to be violent, and that a church which accepts the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for sin and does not treat sin as the greatest imaginable calamity belittles its own creed. The evangelists reached all classes of people, from the small city or town of the older state to the lonely dwellers in the depths of the forest. We read that "the fine, the gay, threw off their ruffles, their rings, their earrings, their feathers." The first years of civil liberty were marked by an astonishing renaissance of spiritual life, which has produced a marked effect upon the character of the American people and the stability of the American government.

Among what might now appear the humors of that early day of frontier work and sacrifice, though certainly the actors and narrators saw nothing humorous in the situation, was the capture of a Presbyterian meeting by a couple of Methodist preachers and the conversion of a quiet and reposeful session, "where there had been some show of interest," into a tempestuous revival scene. Not that the Methodist preachers were intruders or imagined themselves to be so. On the contrary, the Presbyterian brothers seemed to have insisted upon one of the visitors preaching a sermon. But, once started, they did not stop for a moment to consider the customs or prejudices of the church family whose guests they were.

William Burke, who was the foremost on that occasion, said afterward: "I took for my text, 'To you is the word of this salvation sent,' and before I concluded there was a great trembling among the dry bones. Great numbers fell to the ground and cried for mercy, old and young. Brother Lakin followed with one of his then powerful exhortations, and the work increased. The Presbyterian ministers stood astonished, not knowing what to make of such a tumult. Brother Lakin and myself proceeded to exhort and pray with them. Some obtained peace with God before the meeting broke up. This was the first appearance of the revival in the Presbyterian Church."

The Presbyterian ministers who "stood astonished" at such an exhibition of good Methodist fervor and zeal form a picture which the mind contemplates with keen enjoyment. We would gladly know just what they might have said about the event if they had left any record of it.

Among the strongest and most useful men in the Methodist connection there seemed at the outset little inclination to take up the cudgels on doctrinal points unless forced to do so by direct attack. Indeed, we may readily understand that men whose preparation for the ministry did not ever include the curriculum of a theological school and seldom got beyond the great fundamental truths of Christian belief were not particularly anxious to meet antagonists shotted to the muzzle with the tenets of Geneva and Westminster. For the most part we think there is every evidence that the first generation or two of the Methodist preachers had all that they could attend to without courting theological dissensions. But when the occasion came they could draw the lines close and stand up with grim courage and determination to do battle for their views.

When some Presbyterians demanded how certain doctrines were held by their Methodist friends, on the eve of a communion service which was to have been a union one, the challenge was accepted with a fine Old Testament emphasis. The cry rang out over the Methodist host: "Every man to his tent, O Israel." And every man was required to give a public declaration of his belief in certain doctrines. At a later day polemical discourses were in vogue, and bitter denunciations of other members of the family of Christ became the fashion—a fashion which nearly all Protestant churches followed in a not very distant past.

There seemed to be no limit to the activity of some of the sturdy men who built the foundation walls of our social institutions. The specializing tendency of the present day makes it more likely that a man shall know part of one trade or profession than that he shall profess a mastery of several; but at the commencement of the century of which we have seen the final years it was not so. We read of men who were farmers, soldiers, legislators, and merchants, with what the commercial slang of to-day would designate as a "side line" of teaching, surveying, or preaching. Yet even among his contemporaries William Beauchamp must have passed as a man of unusual activity, if we are to credit the list of his vocations that has been transmitted to us. He was, we are told, a physician, lawyer, surveyor, man of letters, schoolmaster, mechanic, and Methodist preacher—besides incidentally running a farm. After his first years in the itinerant ranks he retired with broken health to his farm, but afterward recuperated sufficiently to return to the harness, and after a year in Saint Louis was made presiding elder of the Illinois Circuit. Here he remained till overwork again mastered a feeble constitution, and he sank under his labors.

Reserved toward strangers, deliberate in manner till aroused by the pressure of emotion or the demands of his calling, thin, with pleasing though not remarkable features and auburn hair, Beauchamp was not as impressive a figure as some of his associates in the ministry. Cartwright, for example, by his homeliness and brawn attracted attention, as Asbury did by his almost apostolic presence, and Bascom, a little later, by his personal charm. But Beauchamp had two very important physical qualifications for his work: his eyes, hazel in color, became keen and piercing when his mind was aroused by the presence of an audience or an opponent, and his voice was capable of great expression. It trembled in tenderness and rang in argument or denunciation. Yet with the power of the orator he always exhibited the intellectual control of the scholar. Beauchamp's manner of preaching, we are told, was not ornate, but rather distinguished on ordinary occasions by simplicity. His discourses were not calculated to rouse the transient emotions of an audience so much as to produce a lasting impression. "There was seldom a shout raised in the assembly under his preaching, but always strict attention paid to his discourses, with every eye fixed upon the speaker and frequently the people all bathed in tears," says one biographer.

William Beauchamp was the author of several books that had a wide circulation in their day, and his scholarly attainments were recognized by a large circle of his contemporaries. He missed an election to the episcopacy by but a few votes, but, as it turned out, he could not have served in that capacity, as the fatigue of attending the Conference brought on an attack of illness from which he died in a few weeks.

This man, who was accounted an able and successful Methodist preacher, presents an antithesis to the popular idea of the uncouth, uneducated, rough-and-ready shouter who used to be the stock subject of newspaper and almanac wit. It is a great mistake to suppose that all of the men who spent their lives in this cause were rough timber, fit only for rough purposes. From the first, when the Wesleys and Whitefield came out of Oxford with the message of the cross, there have been men of signal ability and liberal culture in the ranks.

One of the most marked examples of a union of the qualities which attract people of all classes was to be found in Jesse Lee, a Virginian who was ambitious to evangelize the people of Boston. More than a hundred years ago, in the spring of 1790, Bishop Asbury listened to his importunity, and dispatched him for his self-chosen field of labor. He was then thirty-two years old, and was converted when fifteen years old under one of the few evangelical Episcopal ministers that his native state could boast at that time. Previous to his invasion of Boston young Lee had accompanied Bishop Asbury on a tour in the South, and there won the respect as well as the regard of the great bishop, who realized that there was in his companion a capacity for extraordinary success.

The idea of a missionary from Virginia to Boston! In the opinion of the men of Boston it was monstrous or absurd; they were not quite sure whether they should be indignant or amused at such impudence.

It has been happily said of Lee that his education was not so large as the uses which he made of it. He was a man of much more than the ordinary height, one who towered above other men physically, and his mental stature seemed to correspond with his bodily presence. In manner he had the polish which was once thought hardly attainable by a man born outside of the Old Dominion, and his ready wit saved him from discomfiture in many a novel situation. An old lady asked him if he had had a liberal education. That was in Connecticut. "Tolerably liberal," was the reply; "enough, I think, to carry me through the country." A minister of another denomination had been applied to by Lee for permission to preach in his church. But was he a man of college training? Of course it would not do for the pulpit of a New England church to open its doors to one who lacked the hall-mark of scholarship. So the resident minister slyly tried the applicant with a question in Greek. Now, it happened that Lee did not know any Greek; but he was fortunately acquainted with some North Carolina Dutch that he had picked up while in the South, and he gravely replied in that. His interlocutor was not inclined to press his investigation further, for he concluded that the language he listened to was Hebrew, in which he himself was deficient.

In Connecticut, according to the historians of the church, Lee was frequently treated with rudeness, sometimes amounting to violence. The clergymen were inimical to him, and he had difficulty in finding any church to receive him; but he finally managed, in spite of the opposition, to establish a circuit which in the following year he left in the hands of Jacob Brush, George Roberts, and Daniel Smith.

Before proceeding to Boston he explored Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire, where to his great delight he fell in with another of the rare spirits of that day, Freeborn Garrettson. Finally arriving in Boston, Lee found it impossible to obtain a house to preach in. The pulpits with one accord closed their doors against him, and he had no means with which to procure a place for himself. In this emergency he availed himself of the liberty afforded by Boston Common, and on that famous green, under the shade of a hospitable elm, standing upon a table that he succeeded in borrowing, he preached his first sermon to a Boston audience. The audience was there. A few gathered at first, drawn by curiosity to hear this big, handsome man, whose voice rang like a cornet. Then a crowd assembled. One who was present on the first occasion said afterward that it was a common opinion that no such man had visited New England since the days of Whitefield. Two or three thousand people heard him at that commencement of his Boston ministry, and the audiences continued to flock to the old elm throughout the summer. Finally he built in Boston a Methodist meetinghouse with money which came, in part at least, from Virginia.

Lee preached at Lynn and established there the first regular Methodist society in Massachusetts, which from February to May, 1791, grew to seventy members. In 1791 he was appointed elder of the New England District and assigned to Litchfield. With him were eleven circuit preachers, covering one district and six circuits, all established in the short time since Lee had been sent by Asbury into the Eastern states. The following year the first Conference in New England was held at Lynn. Shortly after that extensive revivals were reported throughout the region in which Elder Lee had labored. Rainor had a good story to tell of awakenings on the Hartford Circuit, and the work spread as far as Albany, in New York State. That year showed a gain of about nine hundred souls for the new Conference, the total membership being one thousand three hundred and fifty-eight.

Let no one pass the preceding paragraph over as a dry statement of uninteresting figures. To read between the lines of such meager data as Conference reports often give us will show by what untiring zeal, what almost superhuman energy, the Methodist Church pushed forward to occupy the land. The evangelist was a sort of flying wedge, and no sooner had he made the slightest impression upon the district assigned him than the reënforcements were flung in to his support with an energy and generalship that were admirable. Had Bishop Asbury been a military leader instead of head shepherd in the Methodist Church, his genius would have won him a high place among the famous commanders of history.

CHAPTER V

From Cabin to Camp Meeting

The American pioneer of 1800 was a poorer man in all things that we consider essential to life than is the meanest "tarheel" that drags out his existence in a slab shanty in the Carolina pine belt to-day. The least prosperous American of the twentieth century can sometimes at least command the use of matches, the sight of a newspaper, the care of a physician, the service of the postal system, or the protection of a court of law, not one of which advantages came within the reach or the knowledge of any of those who broke a path into the wilderness toward the Mississippi ten decades ago. The barrenness of the lives of the pioneers can hardly be conceived by the reader of this generation. The home of the frontiersman was a rough shack of logs, daubed with clay, and often roofed with bark till shingles, laboriously made by hand, could be prepared. No cave man's den nor bushman's hut could be more barren of ornament than such a cabin. The path that led to its door was a trail seldom trodden by other feet than those of its occupants, and the wind that whistled through the chinks of the walls or drove the snow through the unglazed windows commonly brought no other sounds than the howl of the wolves or the wail of the panther.

Let us imagine a state of society in which each household must depend upon its own members for all the advantages commonly belonging to communal life. It is true, as will be noticed elsewhere in these pages, that the frontier settlers were frequently driven to cluster in small groups of two or three or even half a dozen shanties, which became the nuclei of future settlements, but it is also true that even in these embryo hamlets there was rarely an attempt to infringe upon absolute personal liberty of action by any form or pretense of social law.

The frontiersman expected to defend himself and his family from aggression, to avenge real or imagined injuries, and to fight out his own quarrels without recourse to any organized system of social protection. It is not necessary for us to go back a century for illustrations of the evil results of this mode of life. Its survival in the wilder regions of the Southwest is still marked by the blood feud, or vendetta, by which the settlement of fierce animosities is left by popular consent to the members of the families concerned. The pioneer was in all matters that affected his own safety, or even his own convenience, judge, jury, and police in one person. If he acted in concert with his neighbors it was under the pressure of some immediate and extraordinary emergency, and such associations seldom became permanent. If it chanced that several cabins were clustered together for greater protection against Indian foes they were sometimes surrounded by a palisade or other defense of logs, and under the stress of a common danger the long rifles cracked side by side.

Education under those circumstances meant at best the barest rudiments of book knowledge, imparted at the mother's knee. Schools were absolutely unknown upon the frontier, and even the larger settlements were frequently innocent of any attempt to instruct the young. What material things a man possessed were the products of his own or his wife's skill in manufacture. The house, furniture, utensils, clothing, food—all they had or used were of their own making, raising, or killing. If a man wanted clothing he killed a beast and prepared its fur or its hide for his use. To realize what such clothing meant let anyone take even the softest buckskin, dressed without mechanical appliances, and wear it next the skin after it has once or twice been wet by rain or snow and dried in hard creases and ridges. Such garments could only be used by people whose bodies were inured to the hardening processes of a life of constant exposure. As in the case of savage tribes, the weak died young, and the survivors were the progenitors of a race of uncommon stature and physical hardness. The women spun and wove wool or flax into coarse fabrics to fashion their rude garments, and when occasion required they could aid their husbands or brothers with ax and rifle. The pioneer settlers fought with savages for a foothold on their land; fought the forest and the soil for a bare subsistence; fought their fellows for such advantages as they could hope to gain; and, generally, did not know enough to comprehend that they were ignorant and poor.

The cotton gin was not introduced; the butcher and the grocer had not arrived upon the scene; the art of lighting a fire had not passed the elementary stage of flint and steel, and if a man lacked these necessary adjuncts to cabin life he toiled for a potful of fire to his nearest neighbor, or, lacking a neighbor, he shivered and starved. Sometimes faint echoes reached the frontiersman of a world somewhere beyond his mountains and forests. He knew that there were in the world larger affairs than those that employed him, something greater than his meager and soul-starving routine of border life, and that there were larger men who managed those more important matters; but it did not occur to him that he had any interests in common with those far-distant men or that their rise or fall could matter to him.

The pioneer settlers formed the raw material for the making of new states, but they were not in any true sense state builders till an influence came to them and an idea was planted and cultivated among them by men whose thought, whose standards of conscience, whose conceptions of duty and responsibility, of law and morality, of life in all its wonderful meaning, were absolutely new to them. It was this new influence that moved from cabin to cabin, that was carried like an endless cord through all the intricate ways of forest and mountain, of valley and river, till it bound into one sympathetic body the widely segregated units of that strangely hidden population.

A quarter of a century earlier the settler had himself perhaps seen something of the conflict that at its close had left thirteen worn and impoverished colonies free from British control, but not yet conscious of the meaning or the potentiality of the liberty they had achieved. Through the anteroom of a loose and imperfect confederation the people of the land were to go forward, like wondering, irresolute children, into a union of sovereign states. The concept of a federal government had not become habitual to more than a respectable minority of the people, even in the larger cities and towns. The settlements, far removed from the seaboard and from one another, were without means of communication, were out of touch with the world and its thought; and the pioneer, fighting his lonely battle for existence at the very borders of Christendom, stood much nearer in knowledge to his savage *vis-a-vis* than to the associates of Hamilton and Jefferson.

It was just at that point that the great though unrealized danger to the future of the Southern and Western states lay. Not the men of the seaboard cities, where law and order were recognized, where education was fostered and religion had won its converts, but the untaught, lawless, primitive men of the settlements were to leave their impress upon western Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and the vast continent beyond.

Never was isolation more complete. By the year 1800 a population of over three hundred thousand souls had drifted with the tributaries of the Ohio or sifted through the ravines of the Cumberland Mountains on the trail of Boone into the forests and the fertile valleys of Tennessee and Kentucky, and had dropped out of sight for the most part as completely as though they had marched into the sea. To the majority of them no post rider ever brought tidings of the outer world or carried their messages. No news sheet ever reached them. No public speaker ever drew them together except for the rare occasions of worship.

It is so necessary to understand the completeness of that isolation from the world's great interests and the growing sentiment of national life in order to appreciate the vast service performed by any intelligent agent who should at more or less regular intervals visit and instruct those outlying units of population, that we have been somewhat particular and minute in our description of earlier frontier life. A committee of Congress, reporting in 1800 upon the Northwest Territory, which it was then proposed to divide into three prospective states, made the astounding statement that "in the three Western countries there has been but one court having cognizance of crimes for five years, and the immunity which offenders experience attracts, as to an asylum, the most vile and abandoned criminals, and at the same time deters useful and virtuous citizens from making settlement in such a society."

Peter Cartwright, from whom we quote more at length in another place, described his father's home in Logan County, Kentucky, as a haunt for refugees from justice, so that the place was called "Rogues' Harbor." He enumerates a delightful society of "murderers, horse thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters." Two missionaries, traveling the country from western Pennsylvania westward to the

Mississippi and southward to New Orleans, in 1813, reported groups of population scattered over large areas of land, but no church nor any preacher.

Elsewhere we have discussed the sources of population that led to the building of the country that up to 1830 was the West. For many years before the great areas under consideration were of the slightest importance as states the people—such people as we have described—were pouring into them. It is not necessary to point out that the population of a country does not of itself affect its political or social standing. The then frontier settlements of America were merely unworked lumps of humanity, waiting for the leaven that was in an incredibly short time to permeate them with life.

In many sections of the Western country, as already noticed, a number of pioneers built near together, for protection against the attacks of savage foes. Sometimes a common fort, palisade, or blockhouse added to the security of such a community. The Indian was certainly the most active agent in forcing the solitary pioneers into communities, but there his services as a benefactor ceased. The community simply multiplied the vice and the ignorance of the individuals that composed it, if they chanced to be vicious and ignorant. Drunkenness increased under the influence of conviviality, and crimes followed drunkenness.

That is not a pleasing picture of the early settler of the American frontier, but it is the only kind of a picture that observant men have left of him. His manners were as uncouth as his morals were unwholesome, and altogether, divested of the softening tints of time and distance, he must have been as unattractive as the average squatter on the outskirts of civilization. Nevertheless there was good seed in that planting; good qualities that lay dormant under the weight of untoward circumstances, good faculties that belonged with the splendid physique of the men and the robust health of the women, waited only for an awakening touch.

Into some such typical exposition of squalor and poverty a lone rider on a jaded nag rode one day. His dress was that of any other frontiersman, partly homespun and partly leather or fur; his hair hung long from the edge of a coonskin cap, and his flapping saddlebags carried all his worldly possessions. In the place of a rifle he carried a Bible, and he came singing a song.

Never in any page of history was there a more complete antithesis than that between the circuit rider, on fire with zeal, alive with a new, unfathomable life, and jubilant in the possession of a great secret that it was his mission to impart, and the ignorant, brawny, inquisitive people that mingled with their often suspicious greeting a furtive suspicion of his errand, and were not infrequently eager to try physical conclusions with him before they would listen to the message he brought. There were three things that the Methodist circuit rider never omitted. He prayed with his host or hostess, sang a hymn, and, if possible, added a word of exhortation; he unfolded his little stock of tracts and hymn books and tried to dispose of some of them; and he carefully inquired about the nearest neighbors and acquainted himself with all there was to know concerning them. Added to these essential features of the programme were the always welcome news of the outside world.

Seated by the open hearth with the family of his host gathered around him and eagerly drinking in his words, he told of the marvelous things he had seen with his own eyes in that great city of Philadelphia where he had attended a General Conference. He described the leaders of the church—Francis Asbury foremost—and spoke reverently of the work they were doing, unconsciously, perhaps, bringing the far-distant bounds of the country together within such a comprehensive circle as his hearers had never before imagined. From such themes he probably drifted to more secular ones, telling who knows what startling items of recent intelligence. They knew the name of Washington even in the remotest cabin in the deepest wilderness, and they were moved by something like grief to learn that he had breathed his last at his beautiful Mount Vernon; nor did they lose a word of the tale of his obsequies.

The differences of Hamilton and Adams with Jefferson and his party opened another world of ideas, brought the lands over-seas nearer, and defined America as a land with individual life, as opposed or contrasted with the life of other lands. The common interests of the people of America was a new and absorbing story.

When the budget of strange tidings disclosed such marvels as the voyage of Fulton's Clermont down the Hudson, breathing fire and smoke, or the sad tragedy at Weehawken, when the great federal leader fell before the pistol of Aaron Burr, who can picture the deep absorption of listeners to whom the horizon of life was being widened for perhaps the first time. What the men of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, or New York were, what they strove for and stood for, was novel refreshment for starved minds. What the men of the nearest settlement, fifty miles away, were doing was almost as strange.

Candles were an unknown luxury, the place of which was filled by a light-wood knot stuck in the chimney flank; and such a torch must have lighted many a strange group, of which the traveling preacher was the center.

In imagination we go back six centuries to picture amid different surroundings and under different skies a similarly ignorant company. Lord and lady, thrall and franklin, gathering close to hear the marvelous tales of some palmer who had seen strange countries, or a minstrel who could recount strange tales in rhythm, to the accompaniment of a harp. The itinerant preacher was the palmer and the minstrel in one. He was the teacher, the newsmonger, the living epistle calling men to a higher and more satisfying life, the link between scattered settlements and isolated cabins, and the bringer and singer of songs that were learned and remembered and sung long after the recollection of spoken words was indistinct. The songs learned in Cane Ridge were the same that were repeated in Boone; they swelled from the clearings on the Licking and rolled along the bluffs of the Cumberland. When the people assembled, under the influence and the impetus of a new faith, to praise God for the hope of salvation they all sang the same songs. In another chapter we will speak somewhat more fully of those songs of Zion, that had an incalculable influence in shaping the destinies of a people.

The great camp meetings that early became a part of the religious life of the backwoods were a necessary outgrowth of the itinerancy. To a congregation covering twenty-five hundred square miles, and possessing no church building, the open aisles of the forest were the only recourse. Every family in which an itinerant Methodist preacher gained a foothold became at once an important part of his flock, never afterward to be neglected or forgotten, and never suffered to be neglectful or to forget. When, having made the rounds and the acquaintance of every settler within his circuit, the preacher announced meetings at the most central points, he insisted that every member of his flock within a specified radius should be present, and he made it clear to them from the outset that the society was theirs and claimed their support. There was never a hint that any brother or sister was to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. No drone was encouraged in those hives.

Leaving aside for the moment the spiritual aspect of meetings at central places and camp meetings to which a larger neighborhood was summoned, we are brought face to face with the only less important social side of such gatherings. For the first time in their lives the backwoodsmen met a congregation of strangers, and met them upon a common ground, that induced sympathy and interest in their lives, their ideas, and their prospects.

As strangers they came from long distances to clasp one another's hands and depart as brothers, and ever afterward to follow with interest the unfolding of fortunes, the happiness or the grief of men and women who had till then been alien to them.

The camp meeting, which in some sections of the country, in a scarcely modified form, has lasted to the present day, bore about the same relation to a stated appointment to preach that the mobilization of a state militia used to hold to a village train band. After families had been visited and societies formed and meetings held to clinch the work of private exhortation, a great concourse of people from an area often covering parts of several states were summoned by word of mouth to attend a general muster. The place chosen for such a meeting was often in the great level wood spaces, clear from underbrush or obstruction, which were once a feature of the Southwestern land. Toward such a rendezvous, as the advertised day drew near, the settlers approached by twos and threes, by companies, by platoons and regiments. Like rivulets in the mountains that flow into brooks and these again form rivers, so the drops of those great floods of population came together. Concentrating toward one point, it sometimes happened that whole counties in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio were depopulated, the inhabitants moving steadily toward the center, where, upon arrival, each man should build what shelter he could for his family, and swell a multitude such as few had ever seen or imagined. Out of the woods, across the clearings, by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, on foot, on horseback, or in rude carts, singing as they came, the newly enlisted cohorts of Methodism brought their individual experiences to cast them into the treasury of a great common faith. Never before in the history of the world had such congregations been gathered. Never before had they been possible. It is not safe to say that no other agency could have brought them together, but it is a historic fact that no other cause ever did. Not one of the great political demonstrations for which America has been famous, not even the great meetings that marked the controversial triumphs of Lincoln and Douglas, ever did in this one respect what many of the great camp meetings of a century ago accomplished. Twenty thousand men and women of the frontier gathered in some of those assemblies. Some of them had taken days or even weeks to reach the ground. They had traveled over lands that were strange to them, had slipped down rivers that were new, had journeyed in company with chance companions whose faces and ways were alike unfamiliar. They gathered as settlers from the Kanawha or the Muskingum; they returned home citizens of the Union.

Among the formative influences which students of national history must measure there has been none more prompt and far-reaching in its effect upon the character of the republic than the Methodist camp meeting.

James McGready, whose name should receive perpetual honor among Christians of all denominations, was a devoted Presbyterian minister, who had come out from the East with a little handful of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from Pennsylvania and settled in Logan County, Kentucky. To his zeal has been attributed the first signs of the religious awakening in Kentucky. In 1799 the brothers McGee, William and John, one a Methodist and the other a Presbyterian, came together preaching the gospel in that country, and soon were followed by great congregations who gathered from far and near to listen to their preaching. The camp meetings that thus began in Logan County and in that part of the state were soon talked of throughout the border wherever men came together. The best account of the Logan County revival is that given by Barton Warren Stone, preacher at Cane Ridge, who was moved by the astonishing news to go and see for himself what was transpiring. His account is in part as follows:

"There on the edge of a prairie in Logan County, Kentucky, the multitudes came together, and continued for a number of days and nights encamped on the ground, during which time worship was carried on in some part of the encampment. The scene was new to me and passing strange. It baffled description. Many, very many, fell down as men slain in battle, and continued for hours together in an apparently breathless and motionless state, sometimes for a few minutes reviving and exhibiting symptoms of life by a deep groan or a piercing shriek or a prayer for mercy fervently uttered. After lying there for hours they obtained deliverance. The gloomy cloud that had covered their faces seemed gradually and visibly to disappear, and hope, in smiles, brightened into joy. They would rise, shouting deliverance, and would then address the surrounding multitude in language truly eloquent and impressive. With astonishment did I hear men, women, and children declaring the wonderful works of God and the glorious mysteries of the gospel."

The recital of the scenes in Logan County deeply affected all of the Western people who heard of it, but the course of the emotional storm center, cyclonic as it was in swiftness and power, moved eastward, toward Cane Ridge, in Bourbon County. The people who listened to Mr. Stone with rapt and sometimes tearful interest soon found themselves in the midst of a scene even more thrilling and rememberable. The greatest religious revival of modern times, greatest not only in its immediate religious effect, but in the scope and vitality of its after influence, had fairly commenced and was daily gaining headway. Stone again has left us a graphic record of the occurrences at Cane Ridge:

"The roads were crowded with wagons, carriages, horses, and footmen, moving to the solemn camp. It was judged by military men on the ground that between twenty and thirty thousand persons were assembled. Four or five preachers spoke at the same time in different parts of the encampment without confusion. . . . We all engaged in singing the same songs, all united in prayer, all preached the same things. . . . The numbers converted will be known only in eternity. Many things transpired at the meeting which were so much like miracles that they had the same effect as miracles upon unbelievers. By them many were convinced that Jesus was the Christ and were persuaded to submit to him. This meeting continued six or seven days and nights, and would have continued longer, but food for the sustenance of such a multitude failed. To this meeting had come many from Ohio and other distant parts. They returned home and diffused the same spirit in their respective neighborhoods."

We see by this account, through the controlled and measured terms of which the enthusiasm of the narrator breaks in spite of himself, the impression made by the Logan County and the Bourbon

County gatherings upon the mind of a Presbyterian. Kentucky has been from its early days a stronghold of the Presbyterians in America, and no clearer proof is needed of the vigor and fervor of their ministry than the evidence we have of their agency in commencing the revival of 1800 and contributing to the establishment of camp meetings. It is a fact that the Presbyterian and other ministers, with the exception of the Methodists, soon withdrew from any active part in the great open-air gatherings that have since become so closely associated with Methodism and were for years one of the principal agencies in its upbuilding. William Burke's narrative of the great Cane Ridge revival gives still another point of view and must not be omitted:

"Our next quarterly meeting was for Lexington Circuit, at Jesse Griffiths, Scott County. On Saturday we had some indications of a good work. On Saturday night we had preaching in different parts of the circuit, which at that time was the custom. . . . On Sunday morning they came in companies, singing and shouting on the road. . . . The work spread now into the several circuits. Salt River and Shelby were visited, and Danville shared the blessing. The Presbyterian Church caught the fire. Congregations were universally wakened up: McNamer's congregation on Cabin Creek, Barton Stone's at Cane Ridge, Reynolds's near Ruddells Station and Paris, Rev. Mr. Lisle's at Salem, Mr. Rankin's at Walnut Hill," etc.

He tells how the work extended into other counties, to Ohio, to remote posts on the frontier. A meeting was "published" at Cane Ridge, and a whole population turned out to attend:

"On Sunday morning, when I came on the ground, . . . I fixed my stand in the open sun, with an umbrella affixed to a long pole and held over my head by Brother Hugh Barnes. I commenced reading a hymn with an audible voice, and by the time we concluded we had around us, by a fair calculation, ten thousand people. . . . Toward evening I *pitched the only tent on the ground.* Having been accustomed to travel in the wilderness, I soon had a tent constructed out of poles and pawpaw bushes. Here I remained Sunday night and Monday night, and during the time there was not a single moment's cessation, but the work went on, and old and young, men, women, and children, were converted to God. It was estimated that on Sunday and Sunday night there were twenty thousand people on the ground. They had come from far and near, from all parts of Kentucky, some from Tennessee and from north of the Ohio River, so that tidings of the Cane Ridge meeting were carried to almost every corner of the country, and the holy fire spread in all directions."

Even William Burke seems not to have seen the great significance of this work in any other than a religious light. Was he oblivious to the fact that he was recording a process of state building? or did that fact to his zealous mind seem small beside the other? Twenty thousand people gathered from the four quarters of the compass at the call of the voice. Twenty thousand people went again to their wilderness homes with a new conception of their relationship to other men. Twenty thousand units of population had mastered the idea of Union.

This work, repeated again and again, was as unexampled in its effect as it has been unrecognized. Even if the labor of the preachers had achieved no higher result than this it would not have been wasted. Viewed from a purely political standpoint, it would have been a tremendous success; but, as we have had occasion to point out, the conversion of lawless people into law-abiding citizens was a constant corollary of the camp meeting and the revival service.

To the making of the Union the men in whose piety, zeal, and discretion Francis Asbury trusted, who followed Burke into Ohio and penetrated the wilderness with Kobler and Poythress, Axley and Blackman and Cummins, contributed very largely —as broadly and effectually as any single agency, because their influence alone in their day could draw or did draw the people to a common center in a common interest. If we seem to reiterate this truth unnecessarily let it be said in reply that we conceive it to be one of the most important historical facts of which American annals afford us any knowledge. The Methodist itinerants went among the people with a bond that drew strangers together into a close fellowship, and created sympathy between individuals remote from each other in a geographical sense; they also afforded a reason why people of different neighborhoods, counties, or even states, should meet with a common purpose and depart fired by a common enthusiasm. We have not found that any other agency in the early days of the republic performed this or any similar service.

CHAPTER VI

Frontier Women and Preachers' Wives

When the saga of the old Methodist circuits is fully written, which is not likely to be possible till "the leaves of the judgment book unfold," perhaps the tenderest and finest pages of that record will be devoted to the women who lived their unobtrusive lives and performed their unrecognized labors on the raw edge of the world.

Leaving aside the obvious suggestion that without the pioneer women no frontier state could have been permanently established, aside from the necessary consideration of maternity, the wives of the woodsmen of the border states were the ready and efficient coadjutors of the saddlebag preachers, and, indeed, made their success possible. It was generally a woman who bade the itinerant welcome, who prepared a meal and a bed for him, who first listened to his preaching, and who most readily learned the songs that he sang. The women, then as now, were the great auxiliary force without whose aid the preacher would often find the accomplishment of his task impossible.

How can we picture the woman of the backwoods more than a century ago? We know that even in the larger towns and cities—even in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, or Boston—the richest dames in the most fashionable social circles could not command many of the luxuries that have grown to be necessaries of life to people of the poorer sort in our day. The wife of the President or the ladies of her republican court knew nothing of a thousand little appliances for comfort that seem essential to people of very moderate means nowadays. Such matters of luxury as stationary bathtubs, hot and cold water, evenly heated houses, proper sanitary appliances, effectual lighting apparatus, and various labor-saving devices were undreamed of by Martha Washington or Dolly Madison, to say nothing of the less fortunate hosts of their fellow countrywomen. Candles lighted—or failed to light—the great echoing rooms; warming pans made the stately four-poster a less dangerous and more comfortable place to repose than the lee side of a barn in January; a portable tin tub did duty at the usual Saturday night ablutions; and the spit in the kitchen turned before a fire of crackling and smoking wood.

The loom and the distaff were still domestic properties, and the best-born damsel in the land would have thought it shame if she could not have at least lent a hand in the preparation of her own store of household linen and wedding finery. A wealthy woman of to-day will not uncommonly spend more in a single hour than her prototype of Washington's time dared to squander in a whole season. It is safe to say that the wives and daughters of Boston's richest merchants and Philadelphia's most eminent lawgivers could never command as much of actual comfort in living as is now within the reach of the wife and daughter of any mechanic in those cities. Books were so rare that dame or damsel who had read half a hundred might be looked upon as a prodigious scholar. Our circulating libraries, our multiplying presses and ubiquitous publishing houses have changed all that. A century ago the printers and the editors clamored for rags with which the paper mills might be fed, and women were appealed to to save the rags for that purpose. The entire product of the paper mills in New England would not now print a single day's output of the Methodist Book Concern.

If the great dames lived under conditions that none of their granddaughters would consider luxurious, what a lot of deprivations must have fallen to the women of less fortunate families, and what absolute barrenness of softness and comfort without question confronted the woman of the frontier! To such meagerness the great emotional uplift that attended the preaching of the message of salvation must have resembled translation into a more beneficent world. Day by day the old grinding routine of life: the piling of logs, the hauling of water, the preparation of new-killed meat, the grinding of corn between rough stones, and the droning of the spinning wheel—only these few things, over and over, daily, monthly, yearly, without cessation. Over the cabin the same woods that sheltered hundreds of bloodthirsty foes. Sometimes an arrow quivered between the chinks of the logs; sometimes the rifle was taken from its pegs over the fireplace for instant service; sometimes the flame of a neighbor's burning house could be seen through the trees, or a band of fugitives, survivors from some dreadful massacre, would stop to recruit their ranks.

In this life, if the husband and the sons were brutal or recreant, the desolateness must have been unspeakable. At the best it was bad. When the preachers found such women, starved mentally, starved spiritually, possessing only that physical endurance for which they have been famous, they unfolded to them the greatest of all stories, delighted their ears with songs the like of which they had never heard in all their secluded, hopeless lives, and pictured for them a heaven to whose joys and triumphs immediate possession was assured.

A man, whose soul hunger was less keen, whose nature had not yet refused the daily diet of husks, might reject the kingdom of heaven, with its inestimable riches; but few women could hold out against the wonder, the beauty, and the glory of the alluring prospect. Yesterday one might have stood dumb and weary by her cabin door, looking off into that never-changing prospect of somber trunks and inevitable shadows, listless and hopeless; but to-day she has learned a new song and lives in a new world. Her eyes are lifted above the treetops; her mind is lifted above the weary round of petty duties. She hears the soughing of the wind above the cabin as a challenge, and lilts back the major refrain:

> "My soul mounteth higher
> In a chariot of fire,
> And the moon it is under my feet."

Everywhere, from the days of Dorcas, women have been the helpers of those who have had a mission to preach, and they have been the efficient co-workers of the minister and the missionary. The more sluggish or more wary intelligence of the average man follows the initiative of the woman in most religious movements.

It needs no argument to show the value of the position occupied by the pioneer women of the Methodist societies, nor will anyone who knows them or their work venture to suggest that they have surrendered aught of that initiative or that influence in a hundred years.

The first rank of the preachers were frequently single men, though before long not a few of those who were in the field added to their personal responsibilities and cares by taking to themselves wives. The example set by Francis Asbury was one of celibacy, though whether he ever intended to make his own position in this respect a model for the younger men under his leadership is very doubtful. Certain it is that the tendency toward a married ministry increased greatly even during the great bishop's lifetime, and it has long been the rule in the Methodist Church.

"The noble army of martyrs!"—was there ever a body of human beings who better deserved that name than the wives of numberless itinerant preachers who have moved, moved, moved up and down the land, from post to post, yearning for an abiding place and never finding one, longing vainly for the home security so dear to every woman's heart, and forever pulled away from the circle of friends to whom her heart was beginning to cling with the attachment of love?

"The noble army of martyrs praise Thee." From every quarter of the land, East, West, North, and South, their lives are a sweet sacrifice, accompanied by the gratitude and the love of thousands to whom they have ministered. In estimating the influence of Methodism upon the religious thought and the moral advancement of the world the story of the wives of the preachers forms an important equation.

CHAPTER VII

Another Company of the Sowers

A little later than Abbott, one of Asbury's most reliable and valued assistants and afterward himself a leader among American Methodists, Nathan Bangs challenges attention. It is possible that he should rank next to the pioneer bishop as a molding influence, closely identified as he was with the history of his church for half a century.

Nathan Bangs was born in Stratford, Connecticut, on the second of May, 1778. While still a boy he removed to Stamford, New York, in company with an older brother. As he grew to manhood he became a surveyor and schoolmaster, but hardly had he reached maturity when the appeal of an itinerant Methodist preacher, whose name is unfortunately lost to us, roused his dormant religious nature and disturbed his satisfaction with himself and his life. He was not converted at this time, though greatly troubled in conscience. His impulse seems to have been to escape from all reminders of a subject he would willingly have forgotten. Stamford was then almost upon the frontier. He resolved to go farther away, into still more uncivilized regions, where he believed the traveling preacher would be unlikely to penetrate. He removed to Canada, and lived for a while in one of the lawless settlements that so often mark the outposts of civilization. Unsatisfied, restless, troubled at heart, we may believe that he did not hold aloof from the rude life around him.

One day the inevitable itinerant preacher arrived. The Rev. Joseph Sawyer got hold of young Bangs, and the result was a new and powerful convert to Christianity and Methodism. There had evidently been strong opposition to the preacher and his message, for while we do not know the details of Mr. Sawyer's adventures, there is credible information to the effect that a bitter spirit of persecution assailed young Bangs at the very outset. He was an object of dislike to those among whom he had lived on terms of good feeling if not of good fellowship. He was boycotted, his means of earning a livelihood withdrawn, and violent opposition met all his efforts. Finally he was threatened with expulsion from the settlement. Under these conditions Nathan Bangs joined the ranks of the Methodist itinerants, and within a year received a license to exhort. Taking little provision and less anxiety for the perils of the way, he rode into the wilderness to carry the torch that he felt had been committed to him.

There was something finer, deeper, and more abiding than picturesque knight-errantry in such a life, enlisted for such a quest. No one who loved a soft life or valued ease and safety could join the brotherhood of the itinerants. To its dangers and privations Bangs devoted himself with an enthusiasm that outlived all deprivation and suffering. For many years he was part of that voice in the wilderness that proclaimed the kingdom of heaven at hand.

More than once mobs of enraged men, whose practices he sternly rebuked, sought his life. His enemies laid wait for him in the woods to murder him, but he escaped from them. Frequently he went hungering to his sleep upon the moss under the trees in the forest. He fairly fought his way through icy storms from one settlement to another, consumed by a desire to deliver his message. Like many another of his brethren, before he had been a dozen years in the harness he could have equaled Saint Paul's list of casualties. He was a member of the New York Conference, which at the time of his admission included most of the settled portion of New York State, western Connecticut, Vermont, and Canada from Quebec to the settlements opposite Detroit.

Ordained by Francis Asbury in 1804, three years after the great Cane Ridge revival, Bangs was appointed to a Canadian circuit, at Thames River. The region was sparsely settled, infested with Indians, and a stamping ground for fur traders, trappers, half-breeds, and all the semicivilized classes that add so much to the pages of romance and detract in an equal ratio from the pleasures and safety of real life. In 1808 he returned to the states, being appointed to the Delaware Circuit. From there he was ordered to the Albany Circuit, then to New York city, and in 1812 to Montreal, but was prevented from filling the latter appointment by the war that was then in progress. In 1813 Bangs was made presiding elder of the Rhinebeck District, which extended from Rhinebeck, on the Hudson River, to Pittsfield, Vermont, and through Connecticut to Long Island Sound. That district is now divided into six. At that time there were three chapels in the whole territory.

To relate the successive steps of Nathan Bangs's promotion can only serve to indicate his growing strength in the church and the confidence reposed in him by his colaborers. He was successively appointed by the General Conference as Book Agent, editor of the Christian Advocate, and editor of the Methodist Quarterly, among his associates being the learned and eminent Bishop Emory. In 1836 he was appointed missionary secretary. In 1841 the presidency of the Wesleyan University was tendered to him and accepted. And when, in 1852, he retired, after fifty-one years of continuous service, he was regarded as one of the wisest and purest of the many men whose lives have been spent in the same high service.

James Axley was one of the prominent men of the second generation of Methodist preachers, who dated their conversion from the great spiritual regeneration at the beginning of the century. Peter Cartwright and Samuel Parker were among those who, with Axley, presented themselves before the 1804 Conference. A natural genius, eccentric and earnest, self-sacrificing and brusque, loved and feared, Axley made a notable place for himself in the Methodist van. Bishop Morris tells of his first meeting with him:

"The following salutations were exchanged:

" 'How are you, Brother Axley?'

" 'Who are you?'

" 'My name is Thomas Morris.'

"Then, surveying me from head to foot, he replied, 'Upon my word, I think they were hard pushed for bishop timber when they got hold of you.' "

Yet those two became fast friends, and the bishop records that "every hour that I could redeem from Conference and council business was enlivened by his quaint but thrilling narratives of his early travels, labors, and difficulties. Unaccustomed to the free use of the pen, he kept all his records in his tenacious memory, much strengthened by use, and narrated with uncommon precision as to names, dates, and the order in which facts transpired. This he did leisurely and with perfect self-possession, but spiced the whole with such apt remarks and consummate good humor that the attention of the company never faltered. Never was I better entertained or more instructed with the conversation of a fellow sojourner in one week than with his. It was decidedly rich."

As a singer James Axley was peculiarly acceptable to people who had neither choirs nor organs and to whom a good leading voice was a great boon. On at least one occasion his voice gained him a much-desired night's lodging after one had been refused. The preacher had ridden a long distance, and near nightfall came to a house in which were two women, a mother and daughter, and their servants. Beyond the plantation he must plunge again into the woods and spend the night under the trees if he failed to find a welcome at the house. He rode up and made known his request, which was no strange one in that part of the country at that day. The women, either misjudging Axley's exterior, which was rough and uncouth, or lacking the common hospitality of their region, refused his request. He was allowed to rest himself for a little while and warm himself before the fire, for it was cold weather. As he stood there, thinking of the prospect before him and somewhat downcast in consequence, he began to sing one of the Methodist hymns that seemed to fit so naturally into all the experiences of life, and before he had finished his hostess ordered the servant to take the stranger's horse around to the barn and feed him well.

A sermon which Axley preached in Baltimore in 1820 was remembered and spoken of up to the time of the civil war; but the effort which was noted as the greatest triumph of his career was a sermon preached to peach-brandy distillers in East Tennessee, from the text, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Tim. 4. 14). It was a temperance discourse, and ran something as follows:

"Paul was a traveling preacher and a bishop, I presume, or a presiding elder at least, for he traveled extensively and had much to do not only in organizing the societies but in sending preachers here, there, and all over. He would not build on another man's foundations, but formed new circuits where Christ was not named, so that from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum he had fully preached the gospel of Christ. One new place that he visited was very wicked—Sabbath-breaking, dancing, drinking, quarreling, fighting, swearing, etc., abounded; but the word of the Lord took effect, there was a powerful stir among the people, and many were converted. Among the subjects of that work there was a certain noted character named Alexander, a still-maker by trade; also one Hymenæus, who was his partner in that business. Paul formed a new society and appointed Brother Alexander class leader. There was a great change in the place: the people left off their drinking, fighting, swearing, horse racing, and all their wicked practices. The stills were worked up into bells and stew kettles, and thus applied to useful purposes. The settlement was orderly, the meetings were prosperous, and things went well with them for some time. But one year they had a pleasant spring; there was no late frost, and the peach crop hit exactly. I do suppose, my brethren, that such a crop of peaches was never known before. The old folks ate all they could eat, the children ate all they could eat, the pigs ate all they could eat, and the sisters preserved all they could preserve, and still the limbs were bending and breaking. One Sunday, when the brethren met for worship, they gathered round outside of the meetinghouse and got to talking about their worldly business—as you know people sometimes do, and it is a mighty bad practice—and one said to another, 'Brother, how's the peach crop with you this year?'

"'O,' said he, 'I never saw the like; they are rotting on the ground under the trees. I don't know what to do with them.'

"'How would it do to still them? The peaches will go to waste, but the brandy will keep, and it is very good in certain cases if not used to excess.'

"'I should like to know,' asked a cute brother, 'how you can make brandy without stills?'

"'That's nothing,' replied one, 'for our class leader, Brother Alexander, is as good a stillmaker as can be, and Brother Hymenæus is another, and rather than see the fruit wasted they, no doubt, would make us a few.'

"The next thing heard on the subject was a hammering in the class leader's shop, and soon the stills in every brother's orchard were smoking and the liquid poison streaming. When one called on another the bottle was brought out with the remark, 'I want you to taste my new peach brandy; I think it is pretty good.' The guest, after tasting it once, was urged to repeat, when, smacking his lips, he would reply, 'Well, it's tolerable; but I wish you would come over and taste mine.' So they tasted and tasted, till many of them got about half drunk and I don't know but three quarters. Then the very devil was raised among them; the society was in an uproar, and Paul was sent for to come and try and settle the difficulty. At first it was difficult to find sober, disinterested ones enough to try the guilty; but finally he got his committee formed, and the first one he brought to account was Alexander the coppersmith, who pleaded not guilty. He declared that he had not tasted, bought, sold, or distilled a drop of brandy. 'But,' said Paul, 'you made the stills, and if you hadn't made the stills there could have been no liquor made, and if no liquor no one could have been intoxicated.' So they expelled him first and Hymenæus next, and went on for complement, till the society was relieved of all stillmakers, distillers, dram sellers, and dram drinkers, and peace was once more restored. Paul says: 'Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.' Of course, they flew off the handle and joined the schismatics."

To fully appreciate the force of the foregoing discourse it is necessary, of course, that one should put himself in the place of a peach-growing, stillmaking, brandy-selling community and try to read into the cold lines of type as presented here the splendid voice and vehement delivery of the eccentric preacher.

On one occasion it is told of him that, having preached upon the necessity of nonconformity to worldly fashions if people would be sincere Christians, he affected to hold a dialogue with some imaginary disputant in the audience, skillfully changing his voice as he took the alternate characters in the debate, and walked up and down the platform, upon which, behind him, several other preachers were seated. After appearing to demolish his opponent at every point in the argument the latter was made to say: "But, sir, some of your Methodist preachers themselves dress fashionably and play the dandy."

"O no, my friend; that cannot be. Methodist ministers know better. They are men of more sense than that, and would not stoop so low as to disgrace themselves and the sacred office they hold by such gross inconsistency of character."

"Well, sir, if you won't take my word for it just look at those young preachers on the platform behind you."

Mr. Axley at this swung around, looked his shrinking colaborers over for a moment in seeming astonishment, and then said, in a dejected tone, facing the audience again, *"If you please we will drop that subject."*

William Henry Milburn, the blind preacher, has left a description of Peter Cartwright that is so graphic and at the same time so picturesque that we are tempted to quote it at length. It was during Milburn's boyhood, just after the removal of his parents from their Philadelphia home to the West, that he first saw the famous backwoods preacher. It was the first Sunday in an unfamiliar church, among strange people, a bright June day, but clouded to the stranger's eye by homesickness.

"Our attention was arrested by a strange apparition striding up the aisle. All seemed whispering to their neighbors, 'There he goes,' and all eyes were riveted upon a man of medium height, thickset, with enormous bone and muscle, and although his iron-gray hair and wrinkled brow told of the advance of years his step was still vigorous and firm. His face was bronzed by exposure to the weather; he carried a white Quaker hat in his hand, and his upper garment was a furniture-calico dressing gown without wadding. The truant breeze seemed to seize this garment by its skirt, and, lifting it to a level with his armpits, disclosed to the gazing congregation a full view of the copperas-colored pantaloons and shirt of the divine—for he was a divine, and one worth a day's journey to see and hear.

"He had then been a backwoods preacher for nearly forty years, ranging the country from the Lakes to the Gulf and from the Alleghanies to the Mississippi. He was inured to every form of hardship and had looked calmly at peril of every kind—the tomahawk of the Indian, the spring of the panther, the hug of the bear, the sweep of the tornado, the rush of swollen torrents, and the fearful chasm of the earthquake. He had lain in the canebrake and made his bed upon the snow of the prairie and on the oozy soil of the swamp, and had wandered, hunger-bitten, among the solitudes of the mountains. He had been in jeopardy among robbers and in danger from desperadoes who had sworn to take his life. He had preached in the cabin of the slave and the mansion of the master, to the Indians and to the men of the border. He had taken his life in his hand and had ridden in the path of whizzing bullets, that he might proclaim peace. He had stood on the outskirts of civilization and welcomed the first comers to the woods and prairies. At the command of Him who said, 'Go into all the world,' he had roamed through the wilderness; as a disciple of the man who said, 'The world is my parish,' his travels had equaled the limits of an empire.

"Many a son of Anak has been leveled in the dust by his sledgelike fist, and when the blind fury of his assailants urged them headlong into personal conflict with him his agility, strength, and resolution gave them cause for bitter repentance. Another Gideon, more than once has he led a handful of the faithful against the armies of the aliens who were desecrating the place of worship and threatening to abolish religious services, and put them to inglorious flight. But he only girded on his strength thus and used the weapons that nature gave him when necessity and the law of self-defense seemed to admit of no escape. To breathe the word of hope into the ear of the dying and to minister solace to the survivors, to take little children in his arms and bless them, to lead the flock over which God had made him overseer, and to warn the ungodly of the error of their ways, entreating them to be reconciled to God by the cross of Christ, was the business of his life. Learning he had none, but the keenest perception and the truest instincts enabled him to read human nature as men read a book . . . a workman that needed not to be ashamed.

"A voice which, in his prime, was capable of almost every modulation, the earnest force and homely directness of his speech, and his power over the passions of the human heart made him an orator to win and command the suffrages of a Western audience. And ever through the discourse came and went and came again a humor that was resistless, now broadening the features into a merry smile, and then softening the heart until tears stood in the eyes of all. His figures and illustrations were often grand, sometimes fantastical. Like all natives of a new country, he spoke in metaphors, and his were borrowed from the magnificent realm in which he lived. All forms of nature were familiar to him. . . . You might hear, in a single discourse, the thunder tread of a frightened herd of buffaloes as they rushed wildly across the prairie, the crash of the windrow as it fell smitten by the breath of the tempest, the piercing scream of the wildcat as it scared the midnight forest, the majestic rhythm of the Mississippi as it harmonized the distant East and West and, united, bore their tributes to the far-off ocean, the silvery flow of a mountain rivulet, the whisper of groves, and the jocund laughter of unnumbered prairie flowers as they toyed in dalliance with the evening breeze. . . . Another of the poet's attributes was his—the impulse and power to create his own language, and he was the best lexicon of Western words, phrases, and idioms that I have ever heard.

"Such was the man that now stood before us in the desk, the famous presiding elder of Illinois—the renowned Peter Cartwright."

The anecdotes of Cartwright's eccentric humor were almost numberless. They were as familiar at the firesides of an older generation of Methodists as the tales of the Cid were to the people of Spain in the olden times. Not Mr. Travers or David Crockett nor hardly even President Lincoln was the subject of more anecdotes than this much-beloved itinerant preacher.

With great gusto an appreciative parishioner on the frontier would recount how Cartwright first licked and then converted the bully who attempted to bar his way to a preaching appointment. He was said to have been the original of the story told by

Edward Eggleston in The Circuit Rider, of the minister who worked a turbulent audience to a pitch of fury by his fearless denunciations of their wickedness, and then, just at the moment when they were making a rush toward him, extinguished the candles in the desk and made his exit unhurt.

On one occasion, at a Conference presided over by a bishop whose physical infirmity made him a foe to mirth, the bubbling humor of Cartwright was regarded with marked disfavor. The superior officer called him sternly to account, and something like the following dialogue took place:

"I read in my Bible, 'Be angry and sin not,' but I nowhere read, 'Laugh and sin not.' We will ask divine pardon for this levity. Brother Cartwright will lead in prayer."

Cartwright led in repeating the Lord's Prayer, and then jumped to his feet to take up the cudgels: "Look here, Mr. Bishop, when I dig potatoes I dig potatoes, when I hoe corn I hoe corn, when I pray I pray, and when I attend to business I want to attend to business. I wish you did, too, and I don't want you to take such a snap judgment on me again."

"Brother, do you think you are growing in grace?"

"Yes, bishop, I think I am—in spots."

The bishop did not pursue the subject any further.

Another anecdote of the Illinois preacher relates to his first visit to New York, where he put up at the Astor House and was given a room as near the roof as could be found. A sleepy night clerk, not greatly prepossessed with the appearance of the backwoodsman, whom he took for a regular hayseed, was not a little bothered when the bell began to ring from the distant apartment, and the servant who had conducted the guest to his eyrie commenced a series of journeys up the interminable stairs. It was ages before the day of elevators, and the waiter was getting tired. He reported that the guest was crazy. "The first time he called me up to ask how we were all getting on down here," he told the clerk. "And the next time he was bothered by the bell on the City Hall and wanted to know where the fire was, and the last time he asked for an ax."

"An ax?"

"Yes, sir, an ax."

"What in creation does he want with an ax."

"I don't know, sir. He insisted that he must have one."

Then the clerk climbed to the distant room and asked somewhat impatiently what an ax was wanted for.

"Well," said the guest, "in my state when a man has a distance to go in a strange country he blazes his way with an ax, so that he may know how to get back. I want to leave my room, and I want to blaze my way so that I can find it again."

"Who are you, anyway?" gasped the astonished clerk.

"My name is Peter Cartwright," answered the old man, amiably.

Apologies were instantly forthcoming; the clerk did not know, had not been able to read the name on the register, etc. Certainly he had reserved a room on the second floor, the very best in the house, for the distinguished guest, and the satisfied preacher descended to more agreeable quarters.

"How is it," once asked a New Englander of another church, "that your denomination has no Doctors of Divinity?"

Peter's answer was instant: "Our divinity has never been sick, and, consequently, doesn't need doctoring."

Now, when Cartwright was in company with General Jackson (for he once preached on a circuit that included the Hermitage) he abated nothing of his sturdy independence of speech and character, and the Democratic leader admired him greatly. One of their first encounters was upon an occasion when Cartwright was preaching and the general entered the meetinghouse. Some one whispered, "Brother Cartwright, you must be careful how you preach to-night; General Jackson has just come in."

In an instant the preacher's uncompromising answer was heard in every corner of the building: "What do you suppose I care for General Jackson? If he don't repent of his sins and ask pardon and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ he will be damned as quick as any other sinner."

Jackson met him the next morning, shook hands cordially, and said: "Sir, you are a preacher after my own heart. If I had a regiment of such men as you I'd conquer the earth."

A flippant youth, a guest at General Jackson's table, thought that it would be noble sport to bait the preacher, who was also present. "Mr. Cartwright," he began, "do you really believe in hell? Of course you preach about it, but I want your private opinion. Can any intelligent man believe any nonsense of that sort?"

Before the preacher had time to answer the general had taken up the cudgels for him: "Mr. Jones, I believe in hell!"

"You, General Jackson?" stammered the confused guest. "Why, what possible use can there be for such a place?"

"To put infernal fools like you in, sir," vociferated the general, whose practice was not at that time quite on a par with his theology, but who did not propose to countenance any disrespect to religion at his board.

Cartwright was not a stickler for social observances, but he did demand and insist upon deference to religious forms and a certain respect to the ministers of the gospel. He more than once refused to eat at a table where he was not permitted to first ask a blessing on the food. Though hungry and weary after a long journey, he would shake the dust from his feet and prolong his fast indefinitely rather than give way in such a matter.

One of the most characteristic stories told of Cartwright (on his own authority) is that once when in the mountains he was the means of turning a dance into a prayer meeting. The people were good-natured pioneers, not used to ministers and their ways, but ready to give the stranger their best and a welcome. After the dance commenced the belle of the occasion, thinking it a pity that so stalwart a young man should be left to sit out the festivities alone, and no doubt attributing his inactivity to bashfulness, held out her hand to him, and invited him to dance with her. On the spur of the moment Cartwright rose, took the girl's hand, and led her into the middle of the room; then, to the astonishment of all, he announced that he never did anything without asking God's blessing upon it, and proceeded to kneel and pray, still holding the hand of his somewhat frightened partner. He prayed with "great liberty," as the old-fashioned Methodist phrase was, and in a little while he had a revival in full swing.

Cartwright went to Boston in later life for a visit, and the crowds who flocked to hear him were disappointed. They had heard much about the wild eloquence of this backwoodsman, and failed to find it. The fact seems to be that Cartwright was trying his best to adapt himself to the cultivated people of the Hub, and, as a consequence, they did not hear the real Cartwright at all at first. But after the second or third sermon he abandoned the attempt to be anything other than his natural self, and the result was that the favor of his hearers increased mightily.

One of the men of Cartwright's generation, accustomed to the sights and sounds and signs of the woods and the waters, used to note of bird and cry of beast, well versed in woodlore and cabin customs, heard the music of a piano for the first time with rapture. At last his musical soul was satisfied with something approaching the heavenly strains he had dreamed of, but there was nothing in his experience with which to compare it except—could imagination build upon a slighter foundation?—sheep bells! "Did anyone ever hear such a set of sheep bells?" he cried.

A pendant to the above is an incident narrated of another preacher who knocked loudly on a door beside which was a silver-plated bell handle, of the use of which he had not the slightest idea.

Mr. Milburn tells how he went into the work of the ministry with a very small musical equipment. He had three tunes, learned with great pains: a long meter, short meter, and common meter, that should have fitted any ordinary occasion. But he records with considerable *naiveté* that he frequently met with disaster by trying to fit long-meter words to his common-meter tune. One of the preachers, with a capacity for music about equal to Milburn's—that is to say, far below the average—used to ask if some brother would "raise" the tune, averring that he could "tote" it afterward. But the plan did not always work well.

We once asked a preacher who was familiar with frontier work what he considered the most necessary accomplishment for the Methodist itinerant, and he promptly replied: "The ability to sing. Music, next to the Bible, is the thing to be relied upon. If not one of the questions formally asked when a candidate comes up before Conference, it is at least put to him in some form: 'Can you sing?' The ability to sing means the ability to gather a congregation almost anywhere. I find it of the utmost importance, and since I learned to strum a few chords on a guitar I can always get a crowd to listen to me in an Indian village, a logging camp, or a mining town."

Nearly all of the older preachers could at least "raise the tune." Many could "tote it" with considerable power and energy, if not with the finished grace of a De Reszke, and not a few were famous for the possession of rich, flexible, sweet voices which, like their hearts, were "tuned to praise."

Another man of Cartwright's day, an abler man as a theologian, though not readier in defense of the things he was persuaded were true, was Elder Peter Ackers. He was so rapt in his subject that he frequently forgot time and place, and is said to have preached on occasions sermons four or five hours long. To the praise of his earnestness be it said that his audience would not have had the discourse a minute shorter. Perhaps something should be said to the praise of the audience, too, for it took certain sturdiness of physique as well as spiritual hunger to stand such an outpouring of eloquence.

Henry Biddleman Bascom was born in May, 1796, and died at Louisville, Kentucky, on September 8, 1850. He was elected a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in May, 1850, having for eight years previously been president of the Transylvania University. By a comparison of dates it will be seen that when his work was finished he was not an old man, yet he was one of those who served to connect the earlier and later periods of Methodist history in America. At the time of the great revival which distinguished the opening years of the nineteenth century he was but a child, yet he was an important factor in the work of building and developing the superstructure placed upon the foundations he helped to lay.

A gentleman whose recollections go back to the early middle period of Methodist history told how Bascom took the people of New York by storm. In the old Greene Street Church he drew such crowds that people climbed up to the windows and stood outside the doors in breathless attention, while the congregation within were swayed by his words as ripe grain is moved by the wind that passes over it. Men sat with mouths agape, or with tears running over their cheeks, utterly oblivious of their surroundings, intent only upon the persuasive, eloquent, mastering voice and keen eyes and vehement gestures of the greatest of American pulpit orators.

Those who tell of his preaching recollect always the effect and forget the sermon. They relate their impressions as one would describe a picture. There was the tall, spare, eagle-eyed, magnetic man on his feet; the graceful swing and sweep of his arms; the fierce, passionate denunciation, and the musical, convincing sweetness of his voice. There were the rows upon rows of crowded humanity in the pews, the packed aisles, the faces of self-forgetful, entranced listeners convulsed with emotion. But the words?

They were not reported. Like the tones of sweet singers and the skill of bygone players upon instruments, the music of that voice and the skill of that performer upon the human heart must remain forever a matter of tradition. The few bits and snatches that are attributed to him are denuded and cold.

CHAPTER VIII

A Recollection of Bascom

[This narrative of a Sabbath morning's journey to see and hear Henry Bascom, and the following estimate of the great orator's relation to the religious life of the people of his generation, are a personal note, written by the late Andrew C. Wheeler. His associate in the authorship of this book has not abridged nor in any way changed this most graphic and valuable record:]

A Dream of Childhood's Dream

One of the earliest and deepest of impressions was made upon my child mind when I was about six years old. It was in Indiana, where my father had then been living for several years. He set out early one Sabbath morning in summer with my mother and myself in a buggy to go fifteen miles to church. This in itself was an extraordinary proceeding even to me, for we had our own church convenient, and my father, as I well knew, being a rigid member of it, was opposed in principle to what was then called "buggy riding" on Sunday. A journey of fifteen miles at that time in a wild country was a much more arduous undertaking than we can conceive of at this day. The roads were uncertain and frequently impassable. They led through primeval forests and across treacherous fords and skirted uncertain sloughs, and they were beset with other perils of man and beast in a wilderness. But to the quickened sensibilities of the child the journey wore the ineradicable delight of a new experience. It was the first time that I had seen the external world lit with the benison of sunrise, and to me the majesty of nature in all her unkempt glory wore the sparkle and sang the song of a new existence.

We must have toiled laboriously over that primeval track, beset with difficulties and obstructions of which I took no heed. I was sensible of an eagerness and a zest in the undertaking that invested it with some kind of inscrutable interest, but mainly I exulted in the glory of the way. The precious alchemy of a child mind transmuted those rude elements into the sharp ecstasy of surprises. The musky scents of the forest were strangely acute and delightful, and the morning tumult of the birds choired us on our journey with ineffable joyousness.

As we neared the end of our journey we encountered at the crossroads other mire-bespattered vehicles, evidently upon the same errand as ourselves. From the salutations that passed I understood only that some common purpose was animating our little community, and that not only our neighbors but the inhabitants of other and to me unknown communities were converging upon some central destination with eagerness and with determination. As this consciousness of some important and common purpose lying at the end of our journey gradually displaced the child's enjoyment of the senses I must have made inquiries of my mother, for she informed me, with a solemnity that was meant to be comprehensive, that we were going "to hear Bascom."

I repeated it over in my mind with a mimetic echo of her seriousness: "We are going to hear Bascom." To go and hear Bascom was then one of the most important events in one's life. All that I knew of life was hurrying forward to the accomplishment of that great feat. To go and hear him was at least for me to pass through a strangely beautiful and exultant experience.

Presently we approached a village, and as we did so the broader roadway became choked with vehicles of all kinds carrying heavy freights of human beings, some of them devout and sensible of the weight of the occasion, others vociferous and reckless—as if to hear Bascom were as much of an event as going to the circus. Finally we came to a green area with the old-fashioned white "meetinghouse" in the center, and then we were swallowed up in a great multitude.

All the particulars of that unusual spectacle were deeply impressed upon my plastic mind. The vast concourse of people, crowding up at the church entrance, the great circles of wagons, and somewhere the faint, protesting clang of a distant bell, sharp and melodious to my ear, that must have been urgently reminding many of these people that their own church should not be neglected to hear Bascom.

I remember the exclamation of disappointment made by my father when, standing up in the buggy, he saw that he had arrived too late to get into the church. I recall as from a dream an effort of his to find the home of an acquaintance, where my mother could rest before starting back, and how when it was found it was deserted—everybody had gone to hear Bascom. Then it was that in wandering back to the central point of attraction, and working his way up to one of the open church windows he lifted me up in his arms to look in. It was that momentary glimpse, caught by a child's sensitive eye and photographed forever on his brain, that I now try to reproduce. I saw a dense and eager assemblage held spellbound by a majestic figure in the pulpit, that to me wore an almost supernatural air of authority and grandeur. In that transient glimpse were all the ingredients of an after speculation and wonder. The wet faces, the strained and still attention—broken only by the measured cadences of one voice—the contrast of the homespun assemblage with the inspired air of the speaker, and, above all, the strange words that my ear caught and retained without knowing their meaning—"that ye might have life and have it more abundantly"—all these things in one flash, as it were, made a revelation of power wholly inexplicable that got hold of my imagination. In the Bible stories that my mother told me afterward, of the prophets and warriors, my infantile fancy filled in the descriptive outlines with that majestic figure, as I had seen it with arm uplifted and head erect, uttering mysterious words at which men were appalled. David, Moses, Elisha, and Saint Paul for a long time afterward took on the dimensions and authority of that form and face thus shot in an instant across the vision of a child.

That was the only glimpse I ever caught of Henry B. Bascom, the great preacher. But afterward my mother told me that my father had held me up to that church window so that I could say in after life that I had seen the greatest preacher in the world. In her dear old scale of values that was an inestimable privilege. And now, after all these years, I am trying to make good her words, and if

I go a little beyond them and try to see the great preacher as others saw him it is the best one can do who had the misfortune to be born a few years too late to enter fully into the popular enthusiasm that attended his career.

CHAPTER IX

THE SONGS OF ZION

WE have spoken of the ability to sing as part of the Methodist preacher's equipment. It would hardly be possible to overestimate the power of music in drawing and holding audiences of the plain people, to use Mr. Lincoln's descriptive phrase for the large majority of his fellow countrymen.

Nowadays great organs, responding to the touch of skillful players, trained choirs and star singers that make a profession of "tuneful words of praise," take the place in many Methodist churches of the simple, sincere, swelling outburst of congregational song. The times have changed, and the preacher no longer is obliged to be chorister and precentor. But in the earlier days he sang almost as many souls to everlasting bliss as he preached into the ways of righteousness.

In the woods, across some forlorn clearing, through the rich river bottoms, and on the mountain side the clarion notes of sacred song sounded like the bugle that announces the advance of a squadron. The woodsman, the Indian, the river boatman drew near to hear who this vociferous entertainer was and what his outburst signified.

In a country where one old fiddle to a dozen clearings was a liberal allowance in the matter of musical entertainment and new songs were as scarce as new dollars, where the people, physically strong and active, were mentally starved, the coming of a man whose repertoire contained a dozen or twenty of Charles Wesley's hymns meant more than an opera company that should promise everything from Tannhauser to Carmen would mean to us.

We, who are satiated with entertainment, can scarcely realize what that one voice uplifted in song meant to the frontiersman. If you have seen a band in the streets of a small country town you have something of the impression produced. That was the first important function of the spiritual songs —they drew the people together.

Then they made the worship general when otherwise it would have been individual. The first requisite of a good song is that it shall flow from the lips without effort—"words that sing themselves," we are wont to talk about. When the preacher led the whole congregation joined in, learned the words, caught the tune in a jiffy, and immediately became participators in the service of praise or supplication. The value of such gentle craft as that, well understood as it used to be, is almost forgotten and often entirely disregarded now. Wherever you can get a whole congregation heartly singing songs that are not too difficult, and not too inane, you may be sure that they are in a frame of mind to make the most of the sermon.

What melodies they were, those songs of Zion, in which Wesley had crystallized the longing and the hope, the penitence and the aspiration of the human race! Hardly more admirable, perhaps, from a musical standpoint, than the later productions that are commonly associated with Mr. Sankey's name, they had a lilt and a swing to them that aroused the sluggish nature and awakened the spiritual longing of many a rough pioneer.

With what unction the voice in the wilderness was lifted up in words whose admonition and encouragement were understood to be part of a divine commission!

> "Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
> And publish abroad his wonderful name;
> The name all-victorious of Jesus extol;
> His kingdom is glorious, and rules over all."

What an urgent, triumphant major strain! Fear and doubt and creeping compromise had nothing to do with it. As it rang out under green leaf canopies and between aisles of oak and pine it must have attracted all that was highest and best in those that heard it and repelled whatever was base and cowardly. There was a no-compromise quality about Wesley's songs that made them apt auxiliaries to men who preached without reservation that all sinners must be damned except by the grace of God they repent and believe in the Lord Christ.

There was a great old hymn, a favorite in the settlements, that we can hardly see the beauty of till we have put ourselves in the circumstances and amid the surroundings of those who lived on the ragged edge of the world:

> "Come on, my partners in distress,
> My comrades through the wilderness."

And the short-meter hymn called "Peace" seemed to take a strong hold on the minds of people whose suffering and distress were very frequent and very real:

> "Thou very-present Aid
> In suffering and distress,
> The mind which still on thee is stayed,
> Is kept in perfect peace."

But chief among all the songs that roused the spirits and taxed the lungs of the oldest believer and the newest convert, that one which satisfied the desire for expression of hearts overburdened with love and longing, that was sung to all the accompaniments of amens and tears and the various expressions of rapture that an honest but unsophisticated being may give way to, was:

"O for a thousand tongues, to sing
My great Redeemer's praise;
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace!"

It was a great hymn for sacramental seasons, when those who spread the Lord's table in the wilderness looked with lively faith for a pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit.

Then there was one that was suited to sterner occasions, that had a dreadfully Calvinistic foundation to it despite its Methodist re-creation. Isaac Watts wrote the core of it, and Charles Wesley rewrote or varied it. It is this:

"Before Jehovah's awful throne,
Ye nations bow with sacred joy;
Know that the Lord is God alone,
He can create, and he destroy."

Well do we remember the effect of the music to which these words were sung as we heard them for the first time. It had a distinctly martial and clangorous quality, as though an orchestra of brass should have accompanied it.

In marked antithesis the very expression of happy surrender was the hymn commencing:

"Jesus, thou art my righteousness,
For all my sins were thine;
Thy death hath bought of God my place,
Thy life hath made him mine."

It was something to be sung at the close of the day, before candle lighting, or when the logs were crackling on the hearth—a hymn for family worship and the quiet hour.

The final and lasting advantage of the itinerant's equipment of the songs of Zion was that when the preacher went away the songs did not. Every one of those old sacred ditties preached its sermons over and over to the man who could perhaps get the preacher's words out of his mind, but could not manage to forget the words of song that were indissolubly wrapped up with the tunes that he and all his kin and neighbors hummed and whistled as they went about their work. They were not only pertinacious, but they seemed to fit every occasion of joy or sorrow. Instead of coon songs and ragtime inanities, the man of the Kentucky or Ohio or Indiana frontier had for his popular songs the songs of Zion.

CHAPTER X

From Small Beginnings

For many years those who were ignorant of the real activities of the Methodist Church, as well as its active foes, persistently circulated grave misstatements about its attitude toward education.

As all men know, the work of preaching the gospel was of necessity often committed into the hands of preachers who knew more about the plan of salvation than they did about the construction of English grammar. The story of the exhorter who got hopelessly involved in the mazes of a sentence that refused to end properly, and who finally gave it up and shouted, "My brethren, my verb and nominative have failed to connect, but I'm bound for the kingdom of heaven," may be apocryphal, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility. The men who won the wilderness were frequently unlearned; their value to the world lay in the fact that they were never content to remain so.

The wisest thinkers and investigators in the world have a habit of regarding the scholarship of all time as relative ignorance, the standard being the unattained heights of perfect knowledge. Those who have just sufficient learning to make them vain and censorious are less enviable than the unlearned man who strives after more knowledge.

The term "ignorant fanatic" was frequently applied to men who daily risked their lives to impart their little store of knowledge to those less favored than themselves, and who at the same time were using every effort to increase that store.

It is true that the first generation of Methodist preachers were not, for the most part, men of intellectual culture. They were probably not greatly superior in that respect to the immediate circle of our Lord's disciples. Let us admit without argument that Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury could not find a sufficient number of men possessing a high degree of education to carry the gospel message, like a torch, into the wilderness, to fire the consciences of a great and scattered congregation. Frankly accepting the statement that the pioneers of Methodism, except in rare instances, had seldom even seen the inside of a college, we ask, What of it? Those men, had they been furnished with exhaustless stores of Greek and Hebrew, of philosophy, science, or *belles-lettres,* would have found absolutely no use for such wares among the frontier cabins of a primitive people. They carried a full stock of convictions, a plentiful supply of the most refreshing and invigorating moral truths that ever revived the perishing souls of men, and they found for this merchandise an astonishing market.

It appears that the itinerant preachers met the prevailing condition of ignorance with a persistent effort to dispel it, and they fitly commenced this Herculean labor with elementary methods. They carried a few simple books or tracts, compiled with a direct purpose of moral instruction; simple stories, not above the comprehension of simple readers, but often composed with a degree of literary skill that has not been generally appreciated by literary critics. Many of these tracts were written by Wesley or his immediate coadjutors, who did a great work at the beginning of the Methodist movement in England by means of such popular literature. We are reminded in this connection of the popular tales of Maria Edgeworth, which had in their day a great vogue. Born in Oxfordshire in 1767, Miss Edgeworth evidently came under the Wesleyan influence, and the stories wherewith she sought to "point a moral and adorn a tale" were in line with many less famous Methodist tracts.

In the same category may be classed those astonishing short tales that broadened and perpetuated the fame of Hannah More. Encouraged by the Rev. John Newton and others, the already widely popular authoress commenced a series of short stories that were particularly designed to undersell and supplant the ocean of cheap trash, largely of French inspiration, with which the English market was flooded. The prosecution of this great labor, which was commenced about the year 1793, almost exhausted the vitality of the brave and gifted woman, and obliged her to call to her assistance several of her friends. The first series of tracts, known as the Cheap Repository Tracts, had during the first year the enormous sale of two million copies, and are said to have had an incalculable influence upon the poorer classes in England and America. Their literary merit was so great that they overran the field for which they were intended and invaded the parlors and libraries of the more fastidious reading public. Such masterpieces as the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain and Parley the Porter, with perhaps half a score others, may be counted as permanent contributions to literature.

If the question is asked, What have Hannah More's tracts to do with Methodism more than with any other Christian sect? the answer is that the revival of evangelical Christianity in England at the day that they were written was Methodist. The Christian renaissance of the eighteenth century commenced at Oxford in the Pious Club, and John Wesley was its apostle. On this point Miss More herself gives certain testimony in a letter written to the Rev. John Newton in 1794: "My great and worldly friends are terribly afraid I shall be too Methodistical—*a term now applied to all vital Christianity*—and watch me so closely that it will require more prudence than some of my religious friends would think it right to employ."

It has been claimed, and I believe without refutation, that the series of tracts that bear Hannah More's name were an important factor in the establishment of the Religious Tract Society, formed in London in 1799. The parent tract society of all was formed by John Wesley and Thomas Coke in 1782, and its publications were largely dependent upon the personal labors of Wesley, who wrote many books and abridged and edited others for the moral culture of the people.

No greater fallacy has ever been circulated than that which has undervalued the moral tract of a century ago. The names of Edgeworth, More, and Wesley might be supplemented by many others of commanding rank in the world of letters, and the result of their most earnest work should afford a subject for serious investigation to the student of literary history.

The inception of Methodism was one of instruction. Whitefield, whose magnificent campaign for Christ resulted in the establishment in America of more institutions of learning than have ever been credited to the initiative of any other one man, was a Methodist in every essential, drawing his inspiration in company with Wesley from the same font, and keeping his Calvinism rigidly in the background in all his American work. The establishment of a number of free schools for the poor in England was directly due to Wesley, and his influence upon the public school system of America is immeasurable.

We are wont to reverence Robert Raikes as the father of Sunday schools in the world, but the Rev. Warren A. Chandler in his recent book on Great Revivals and the Great Republic has pointed out that "the Sunday school movement, inaugurated by Robert Raikes, was suggested to him by a Methodist woman, Sophia Cook, who marched with him at the head of his troop of ragged children the first Sunday they were taken to the parish church. Another Methodist woman, Hannah Ball, really had at High Wycombe a Sunday school fourteen years in advance of Raikes's first school in Gloucester, and Wesley, in his parish of Christ Church, Savannah, Georgia, had a Sunday school fifty years before the work of Raikes began. Francis Asbury organized a Sunday school in Hanover County, Virginia, in 1786."

We cannot estimate the value of such a distribution of tracts as that which we have been considering unless we can imagine a community almost destitute of books or newspapers, to whom every scrap of printed matter was a precious boon, to be read and reread, loaned and treasured as long as it held together. Not infrequently an American frontier cabin was without a scrap of a printed page of any sort; sometimes an almanac, brown with smoke, dust-bespecked and thumb-marked, hung for years in a chimney corner, the sole literary treasure of a family.

At a day that already belongs to the historic past of the nation the boy Lincoln found a neighbor with a little store of books that was a greater affair for that time and place than the Astor Library was in New York. His biographers tell how he borrowed the volumes and mastered them, reveling in the prospect they opened to him of a life beyond his familiar horizon of timber and farm land, of rail-splitting and flat-boating. Lincoln's experience with the books was an unusual one. The great majority of American frontier families never owned a book and rarely saw one till the Methodist preachers brought them.

The traveling preachers were distributers of a wholesome literature of a type admirably suited to the mental capacity of those who received it and tending to perpetuate the impression made upon the minds and consciences of men by the spoken word. With the tracts were often carried hymn books, which were in great demand.

These distributions of reading matter were not free, except in cases where the people were absolutely destitute of the means to purchase. Probably they were not often paid for in money, which was a commodity almost as rare as literature; but lodging, horse gear, provisions, or some other equivalent was readily accepted in exchange. The store of books with which a "saddlebag preacher" set out was always contributory to his support and sometimes his only available asset.

There is no fairness in making a comparison between the newly commissioned member of Asbury's field force and a college-bred New England divine, so far as relative advancement in book knowledge is concerned. Rather measure each man in the field where he worked, and by the value, the breadth, and the permanent results of the work performed.

Not only did the field force of the Methodist Church act as distributers of the sort of literature best adapted to the comprehension and the needs of the scattered inland population of the new country; but at the same time the whole church, through its governing bodies, was using every means to increase the efficiency of its preachers and enlarge the capacity of its membership by establishing schools and publication offices.

As previously stated, Dr. Coke's work, commenced at the very outset of Methodist labor in

America, was largely educational. Such facilities as the Methodist Church could control were offered to those who were persuaded that they had a call to preach, and with each generation these facilities increased, till at length the denomination that was poorest in material wealth and richest in the yearly interest of conversions to Christ became the most important and powerful of Christian sects in America, and depends to-day for the bulk of its work upon an educated ministry.

This high ground, to be sure, was not reached at a step. There were many years—intermediate years between the generation of the founders of Methodism and our modern era—when the feelings and prejudices of a very large proportion of Methodist laymen and not a few of its leaders were engaged in opposition to a ministry specially educated for their work. The theory that the inspiration of the Spirit of God would be in all cases superior to a formal course of theological study was based upon certain Scripture texts and perhaps was fostered by the very genius of the Methodist Church. At the outset its teachings were not doctrinal; its appeals were always experiential. It was rather an evangelical society than a church built upon a theological foundation. The experience came first, and around this kernel grew the necessary shell of protective theology. It was hard for an old-line

Methodist to understand why any man who could read the Bible and hope for the inspiration of the Spirit to interpret it should require educational preparation for his work. The ministry were naturally the first to appreciate the need for such training.

In 1833 Dickinson College, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, passed into Methodist control, though originally Presbyterian. It is worthy of note that the revivifying of this almost dead institution by the infusion of Methodist blood occurred during the very period when the reaction noticed in this chapter was at its height. It was a protest, by the best and most progressive spirits in the Methodist Church, against that reaction.

Associated with the history of Dickinson are the imperishable names of McClintock and Crooks and many others who have honored the profession to which they gave their lives. It is especially gratifying to the surviving author of this book to pay here a tribute of loving remembrance and reverent admiration to the memory of George Richard Crooks, whose maturity may be said to have begun at Dickinson College, where he graduated in 1840, and whose life of broad usefulness was withdrawn from the sight of men at Drew half a century later.

It is not possible in a limited space to add to or improve upon Dr. William F. Anderson's admirable monograph upon Dr. Crooks. It is a pamphlet that should be read by everyone who would comprehend an important phase of Methodist history. One quotation may be permitted here:

"The Philadelphia Conference never did itself greater honor nor served the church more truly than when it sent Dr. Crooks as one of its delegates to the General Conference in 1856. He was a member of the Committee on Education, and through his instrumentality an action was secured that was most vital to the interest of the church. . . . The friends of the higher ministerial qualifications were rallied; public meetings were held; able advocates of the movement were enlisted. Dr. Crooks was its ardent and successful leader. With the coöperation of Dr. Edward Thomson, Dr. John Dempster, and others he secured the adoption of a resolution sanctioning the establishment of theological seminaries in our church. Thus the sentiment was turned which with the advance of the years has crystallized in a well-nigh universal demand for an educated ministry. . . . In 1866, as a member of the special Centennial Committee on Education, he originated a plan to establish a permanent fund for the education of the youth of Methodism, which fund should receive the offerings of the children of the church and be repeated in all coming years. His associates on the committee were John McClintock, Daniel

Curry, Oliver Hoyt, James Bishop, and C. C. North. The outcome was Children's Day."

Drew Theological Seminary did not come into existence till 1866, and from the outset its aim was to afford the broadest intellectual culture as well as a thorough training for the work of the ministry. It belongs to the immediate past and present, and has only an incidental connection with the subjects of this work.

It is not enough to say that Methodism has done much for the cause of education in the United States. Let the old stigma, implied in faint praise when not more viciously or ignorantly affirmed, be forever removed. The Methodist Church has done her full share in establishing and supporting educational institutions, has built and conducted schools and colleges, besides upholding with all her giant strength the public school system of America. Her full share has been a mighty proportion of the work accomplished in this continent, a proportion far greater than that of any other one denomination, because she is the strongest of all denominations in America to-day.

Eighteen per cent of all the colleges and universities reporting to the United States Commissioner of Education are under Methodist control, and twelve per cent of all the denominational schools in the country are Methodist establishments, though the support of the church has always been given by preference to public rather than to parochial schools.

From Cokesbury College, in Maryland, instituted in 1785, the corner stone being laid by Bishop Asbury, to Drew, the lines both of effort and accomplishment steadily widened. In the West for many years the only educational influence was that fostered by the Methodist Church. McKendree College, in Illinois, was the first college in the rich country that is now the teeming middle land of the republic.

Taking the possible adult population of the United States as sixty millions—though that figure is probably somewhat in excess of the reality—we are brought face to face with the astounding reflection that more than one tenth of that number are actually Methodist communicants. No comment can add to the impressiveness of that fact.

Following the great Methodist Book Concern in New York, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Nashville, Tennessee, have each a similar publishing house. From these fountains have gone out a broad and ever-increasing stream of wholesome literature, and no estimate of their influence is apt to be commensurate with the fact.

In a history of the Methodist Church in America the Methodist Book Concern would naturally fill an important chapter, and even in the discussion of the influence of the early Methodist preachers upon the genius and growth of the republic we must give more than a passing glance to an agency so indissolubly connected with the very life of the Methodist Church. The Book Concern was the first expression of a conviction that the permanence of the work of the pioneers of Methodism must depend largely upon the distribution of wholesome literature. This earliest auxiliary agency of the church came into existence at the famous Christmas Conference in 1784. In pursuance of a plan to establish a publishing house, to serve as an adjunct to the church, the Rev. John Dickins was appointed in 1789 to act as book steward, and with six hundred dollars of borrowed capital he commenced operations at No. 50 North Second Street, near Arch Street, in Philadelphia.

In a list of the books published by John Dickins were several biographies, the first volume of Francis Asbury's Journal, several of John Fletcher's works, several sets of sermons, as many more volumes of serious books for the young, the experiences and travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson, Thomas à Kempis, and Baxter's Saints' Rest. Some of these books are classical; one or two may still be found upon booksellers' shelves, and all were of a lofty and elevating tone. For general literary character it is probable that John Dickins's book list would bear comparison with most modern publishers' catalogues.

From such a small beginning the Methodist Book Concern, the largest and probably the oldest active publishing house in America, has sprung. Dickins's advertisement contained this clause: "As the profits of these books are for the general benefit of the Methodist societies, it is humbly recommended that they will purchase no books which we publish of any other person than the aforesaid John Dickins, or the Methodist ministers and preachers in the several circuits, or such persons as sell them by their consent."

The acorn planted by John Dickins has grown into a mighty oak, but the character of the mature plant is the same that was shown in the embryo. The few dollars eked out of the profits of the Philadelphia house have grown to more than a hundred thousand annually, and the little book list has stretched into the thousands. Hundreds of worn-out Methodist preachers are passing the evening of consecrated lives in serenity and safety because of the magnificent success of their great publishing house. The contribution of the Book Concern for the support of superannuated ministers carries with it no taint or suspicion of charity. It is part of the great institution to which every Methodist preacher gives his life without question and without reserve, and its assistance is his right when his hands are feeble and the twilight of his life is drawing near.

The number of tracts, pamphlets, leaflets, and periodicals of all sorts that have been issued by the Book Concern in its career of more than a century is almost beyond computation. The value of the distribution of this vast material, in the formation of character and the reclaiming of men from carelessness and immorality to higher standards of thought and action, can never be expressed in finite terms.

CHAPTER XI

The Methodist Church and the Union

The close bond that has always existed between the Methodist Church in America and the Federal Union was not only illustrated, however unconsciously, by the ministers and laymen of that church during the formative period of our national life, but at a later day was exemplified by millions of Methodists when the Union was threatened with disruption.

Greatest of all the momentous questions that have moved both church and state to their foundations, the political differences that in 1861 finally led to civil war roused to enthusiasm the minds of a great host of citizens whose consciences were already trained to obedience to the demands of duty. Nowhere in the world could be found so large a body of men similarly trained as in the Methodist Church, and it is with no surprise that we discover that no body of men, in the North or in the South, contributed so largely to the strength of their respective armies as did the Methodists.

The casting vote for or against the Union lay at that time in several of the border states with the

Methodist societies. Had the membership of this church decided against the Union, they were numerically strong enough to have swung their states in line with the secession. That they did not do so was due in great part, we believe, to the efforts of certain leaders whose words and works embody both the enthusiasm and the conservatism of patriotism.

We have already spoken in another chapter of Dr. George Richard Crooks. As editor of the Methodist he supported the Union cause with such effect that, to quote again from Dr. William F. Anderson, "the church owes him a large debt of gratitude for the influence he exerted upon the Methodists of the border states. He really saved that portion of the country to the church and to the Union."

With the unfortunate split between the Methodist Church South and North we have nothing to do. Happily many old differences, born of sectional prejudice, have long since healed, and the matters that a generation ago were of preëminent importance to the citizen have now only a historic interest. This we know, that the whole body of Methodists, in all the land, threw their whole strength heartily into whichever cause they espoused, for conscience' sake.

The weight of Methodist influence has generally been exerted in opposition to slavery. From a very early time this disposition on the part of the church has been apparent.

"In 1784," says McMaster, "the cause of the negro for a time was popular. *The Methodists took it up* and bade every member of the society, where the law would permit, emancipate his slaves within a twelvemonth. Before a decade had gone by abolition societies had sprung up in Rhode Island, in Connecticut, in New Jersey, at New York, in Baltimore, in Virginia, at Washington, Pennsylvania, and even on Maryland's Eastern Shore."

"The Methodists took it up." Can any statement be made which will more forcibly indicate the strength of Methodist influence even at that early day?

John Wesley was a firm and consistent opponent of slavery, in marked contrast to the theory and practice of Whitefield. With the views of Wesley the great Methodist leaders of America, with Dr. Coke at their head, heartily agreed. It is worthy of note that Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury, charged with the presentation of a petition to Congress for the emancipation of all the slaves in America, went to George Washington, then at Mount Vernon, with the hope of obtaining his signature. Washington did not find it expedient to accede to the request of his reverend visitors, because he believed that such an exertion of his influence upon legislation was not compatible with his official position, but he expressed his sympathy with their object, and told them that if Congress would take their petition into consideration he would then write a letter which would strengthen their hands. That the great object was not accomplished the country knows to its sorrow; but it is worth while to recollect that the first emancipation agitation began almost as soon as the government did, that it commenced in the South, and that the earliest agitators were the Methodist leaders.

Marked was the contrast between Wesley and his followers in their ideal of human liberty and that of Whitefield, who argued for slavery in Georgia at a time when that pestilential institution was prohibited by the charter of the colony. Georgia was not originally a slave state, nor did its founders contemplate any such imposition upon its vitality.

The contrast between Whitefield and Wesley, it may here be said, was the difference between a rocket and an arc light. Whitefield was a Calvinist whose Calvinism did not appear in his pyrotechnic progress through the American colonies. A very youthful, very earnest, and phenomenally eloquent preacher, he set the continent afire, and is universally credited as the source of a mighty revival of religion which permeated all churches and led to the establishment of educational and other beneficent institutions. The result of Whitefield's work was far greater and stronger than his personality seemed to promise. He did not leave any new social or religious order as a monument to his genius or his faith. He was, essentially, a voice crying in the wilderness, and the voice, but for its immediate influence, might have been absolutely impersonal. The attitude of Whitefield toward slavery is a blight upon his reputation.

The persistence of Wesley's character, on the contrary, is shown in the great society that bears his name and in the force and extension of his principles even down to the present day.

Dr. Coke preached emancipation till the neighboring population was up in arms. He was persecuted, forbidden to preach, even put in danger of assassination. Men who listened with indignation to his vehement demands that they should free their slaves met to waylay him, to put a summary end to such pernicious doctrines. Like all brave men, the pioneer abolitionist was never bolder or more decided than when he met with opposition. To know that an enemy was following him through the woods with a gun only drove him to more vehement and eloquent outbursts against slaveholding. Incidentally, it is a pleasure to note that one particularly violent foe was afterward converted and became a good Methodist.

A woman slave owner offered fifty pounds to any-one who would catch the Methodist leader and give him a hundred lashes. Again he was indicted by the grand jury and chased by several score men, who would have made short work of him if they had found him.

The personality of Dr. Coke was displayed in many ways, in his long and arduous labors in Ireland and in his impulsive offer to resign from the Methodist connection and accept the post of missionary bishop for Ceylon in the established church, if by so doing he could carry the gospel into India; but in none of the acts of his eventful life were his humanity and his heroism more characteristically displayed than in his efforts for the abolition of slavery in America.

The strength of the Methodist Church at various times has been vigorously directed against the "peculiar institution," and at the outbreak of the civil war the majority of its communicants were opposed to its continuance.

It is not too much to say that the influence of the Methodist connection has always been among the foremost factors that have worked for the maintenance of those ideals and those standards that we call American. In all great movements the attitude of a great, conservative, conscientious body such as this is of vital importance to the nation and to mankind.

Another view of the value of Methodism to the English-speaking nations has been presented by W. T. Stead, who, in regarding American Methodism from an Englishman's standpoint, sees in it the promise of more perfect and continuous unity between Great Britain and the United States. He says:

"From the standpoint of those who, like ourselves, regard the unity of the English-speaking people as one of the supreme ends of modern politics, it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of John Wesley and his work. In the most energetic denomination in the United States he created a new tie between the empire and the republic. Millions upon millions of Americans regard Epworth and Fetter Lane, the Foundry and City Road, as the Mecca and Medina of their faith. Carlyle said that Shakespeare, by his genius, had unified the English-speaking world. We are all united, he said, in allegiance to King Shakespeare. But that which Shakespeare could not do, in that millions never read or see his plays, John Wesley has done with much effect. Among the influences which create a sense of unity among our English folk, that of John Wesley stands very nearly in the first rank.

Neither Knox nor Cromwell affects the lives of so many men and women who are toiling and working all around us to-day as does John Wesley. There are nigh upon thirty millions of English-speaking men who view the next life through Wesley's spectacles and whose round of daily duty is directly affected by the rules and regulations of the great Methodist saint—the Ignatius Loyola of the English church."

This utterance, though somewhat apart from the main argument of this book, is yet in line with it. It points to an influence so great as to take rank with the most stupendous movements of history, an influence transcending that of John Knox and commensurate with that of Luther and Paul. These are bold claims, but they need no defense, since the proof of them is spread wide upon the pages of history, and he who runs may read.

CHAPTER XII

The After-Word

In the foregoing pages we have tried to note the proem of American Methodism. The materials for it have frequently been hidden away in outworn and neglected biographies or merely notched in the calendars of the Conferences, but the traditions and legends linger yet along the valleys of the Ohio, among the Cumberland hills, beside the banks of the Wabash and the Tennessee, like the fragments of a great epic, and the chronicler who catches the dying echoes is thrilled by the militant sound of the American crusade.

The saddlebag men of the wilderness were not pastors to lead their flocks beside still waters. They were heroes and witnesses. Without the learning that we commonly associate with the clerical profession, without any academic bias or scholastic bent, they were nevertheless filled with understanding and fired by an enthusiasm that fused and illumined.

We know that in singleness of purpose they strove for the advancement of that faith which they believed to be the one essential to true living. If we study their records with minds open to the significance of historic truth we know what they never comprehended, that they were working no less truly and no less effectively in the providence of the Creator for the establishment of the Union which has grown to be the synonym for all that is best in the social and political fabric of their country.

The life of the Methodist Church as a power in the world has not depended primarily upon its splendid organization nor upon the ability and faithfulness of its great leaders, but upon its vital, unswerving faith in a divine power working for the salvation of man. Without this sublime confidence in the miraculous initiative the lives of the Methodist itinerants would have been impossible. It seems as though he who runs must read in their unconscious achievement no less than in their conscious labor the guidance of Omnipotent Power.

We are giving the record of the toilers of the frontier Methodist Church—the simple, single-hearted zealous body of primitive Christians who struggled and wept, suffered and sang on their journey to the celestial city—as a suggestion for study in a field of American history that has been little regarded. To Theodore Roosevelt alone among authors of general works relating to American history we may give the credit for recognition of the work of the Methodist itinerants as pioneers of the republic.

The record is one of a generation that has passed away. We call the roll of great men, great in humanity, courage, zeal, eloquence, and faith. What unfaltering voices answer from the depths of the forest where they laid down their lives! From canebrake and mountain and morass they answer: Asbury, Coke, Burke, Bascom, Lee, Bangs, Bigelow, Cartwright, Taylor—by tens, by hundreds, by thousands they gather, a great multitude of heroes, who manfully played their part and sacrificed their lives for the sake of the faith that was in them.

They laid broad the foundations of the social order in regions where without them all would have been anarchy. They stood shoulder to shoulder through long years of privation, danger, fatigue, and suffering, never falling back, never refusing the odds of battle, fighting manfully, like good soldiers of the cross. The roughness, the minor faults, the eccentricities that marked them kin to the humanity around them, have been rounded off and smoothed away by the hand of time, and their virtues stand out resplendent. As Americans, whatever creed we profess, we must honor among our greatest and our best those grand Americans of the earlier day—the pioneer preachers of Methodism.