
Early Times in Middle Tennessee

Chapter 14

By John Carr, 1857

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Chapter 14

THERE were some excellent ministers of the gospel with us in early times, whose names should never be forgotten. 'The first that I shall notice is

Benjamin Tucker

He was with us in 1789, as well as my memory serves me. I think he only remained a few months, as young preachers in that day were frequently changed from one circuit to another. I know nothing of his birth or parentage. He was a first-rate young man and well received by the people. An incident occurred at my mother's, while he traveled here, that I shall notice. Her cabin had become a circuit-preaching place. The first time that Brother Tucker came around and preached at her house the congregation was made up principally of men, and in those days men generally carried their rifles on their shoulders when they went to preaching. After sermon Brother Tucker said that he would hold class meeting-there being a small society formed at my mother's. The people were universally ignorant of the nature of class meeting, and not one left the house. He stepped to the door, closed it, and drew a bench against it; and the people were seated all around the house, and the bench against the door was filled up, so there was no getting out of the cabin. He commenced his examination around the house, not missing an individual. A more scared set of men perhaps you never saw. He went on until he came to a Dutchman, by the name of Catron, who spoke broken English. He was a man of good sense; he was an uncle of Judge Catron, of Nashville. He was grossly ignorant on the subject of religion; and although it has been sixty-eight years ago since the occurrence took place, it is still fresh in my memory. Brother Tucker addressed him in this language: "Well, brother, do you think the Lord for Christ's sake has ever pardoned your sins?" The answer was, "Sometimes I does, and sometimes I doesn't." He then asked him a second question: "Do you ever pray?" The answer was, "Sometimes I does, and den I shovels him off again." There was a man, by the name of Thomas Hamilton, as brave a man as ever took a gun or sword in hand: he had fought through the Revolutionary war, and would turn his back upon no man at a pull of fisticuff; he sat near the fireplace; and when the preacher got near him, he became very restless, looking towards the door; but finding he could not get out there, would look up the cabin chimney; then towards the back of the house, where his hat lay. When the preacher was examining one or two nearest him, he sprang to his feet, took up the cabin chimney, went out at the top, mounted his horse, bareheaded, left his gun, if he had one-and I believe he had-and rode five miles home to the ridge station, the most scared man perhaps you ever saw. His wife saw him coming bareheaded, ran out and met him, and said, "Tommy, have the Indians been after you?" His answer was, "Worse than Indians!" Both these men, Catron and Hamilton, afterward professed religion. Catron became the greatest light of his day, and died in the triumphs of a living faith. Hamilton told me afterwards that he had fought the British and Tories throughout North Carolina, and never was so badly scared before. I name these things to show you the gross ignorance of the people of that day. Were we not a green set? I know not

what became of Brother Tucker after he left us. He was an excellent man of God; and I hope, if dead, that he has gone to heaven.

Jesse Walker

About the beginning of the present century, there was an excellent man of God, by the name of Jesse Walker. I think he joined the Conference in 1802. I have mentioned in a former chapter, that I saw Bishop Whatcoat ordain him. He was a man of but little education, but he was a persevering, zealous preacher. His labors were greatly owned and blessed of the Lord wherever he went. He formed the Red River Circuit, which embraced what is now Logan County, Kentucky, Robertson, Montgomery, Dickson, and Stewart counties, in Tennessee; added many to the Church, and labored with great success. He then formed Livingston Circuit, embracing the mouth of Cumberland River, where he was instrumental in getting up a gracious revival. James Axley and Peter Cartwright, men well known, were the fruits of this revival. Soon after, he became itinerant preacher, and traveled extensively. In 1807, he traveled in Illinois, where he was remarkably useful in getting up and carrying on a glorious revival of religion. He was afterwards sent to Missouri to form new circuits; and then was presiding elder on the Illinois district, and was for a long time laboring as a pioneer to the Northwest extremities of the work; and for some years missionary to the Indians in that direction, and stationed on the Chicago mission. Thus did this laborious and useful man of God spend near thirty years in what may be termed itinerant missionary labor, almost entirely in cultivating new ground and forming circuits, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" While the tide of emigration was flowing rapidly West and Northwest, Jesse Walker was ever on the alert; his ardent itinerant soul seemed to grasp the whole Northwestern region, ever ready to say, "Here am I: send me to the poor, to the needy, to the camps or to the woods, to the pathless desert, yea, to the savage tribes, to carry the news of redeeming love, and plant the standard of the cross, and gather into the fold of Christ scattered and perishing souls." This enterprising itinerant pioneer set out in this work in the year 1802 or 1803, from Davidson county. He was a poor man then, having a wife and two or three children, and doubtless continued poor, as Methodist preachers in those days never got rich by preaching. I saw an account of Brother Walker filling some missionary station away up at the head of the Mississippi at the age of seventy. I never saw any account of his death, but no doubt he is gone to reap the reward of his labor, in heaven.

Clifton Allen

Clifton Allen emigrated to Middle Tennessee, Sumner county, in the year 1796 or 1797, and settled on the Breshy Fork of Bledsoe's Creek, on the same survey of land that I am now living on. He was a Baptist preacher, and emigrated from North Carolina to this country. I believe he was raised in the State of Virginia. He possessed fair preaching talents for that day, was a man of fine sense, and appeared as though he had been well raised and pretty well educated. He had considerably passed the meridian of life; in fact, he was of far advanced that the people generally called him "Father Allen." He preached about among the people, and soon became a great favorite. The Methodists and Presbyterians would flock out to hear Father Allen. He preached sound experimental doctrine repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and that a sinner must know his sins forgiven. He was remarkably open and free in his spirit, and seemed to possess none of that close sectarian feeling that the Baptists do in this our day, as I do not recollect that I ever heard him press the subject of immersion in my life in his preaching. The Baptists at that day had a church called Elbethel, about one and a half mile from where Gallatin now stands. Father Allen attached himself to that church when he came to the country; and when the great revival broke out in 1800, he fell in with it and labored with us faithfully. In 1801, he went to a great sacramental meeting held at Shiloh, and when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered the preacher gave a general invitation for all the lovers of Jesus to come and partake. Father Allen went forward and communed, and it was soon spread abroad throughout the country that Clifton Allen, a Baptist preacher, had communed with the Presbyterians and Methodists. In a very short time he was cited to appear before his church. I was not present at the trial, but old Father Allen

told me all about it. He was a man that possessed a good deal of originality and shrewdness. He told me that the clerk read the charge against him, and it was this: "For communing with other denominations." They then asked him if he did. His answer was, "Brethren, am I to be both plaintiff and defendant in this case? If I did, prove it." The old soldier said he then sat still and never opened his mouth; he saw that he had them in a close place. The question was then put to the church: "Brother, did you see him?". The answer was, "No." And so the question went around the whole church, and not one present had seen him commune. The old soldier, in telling me about it, observed that if they had gone to Shiloh hill, they could have proved it by five hundred witnesses. He observed, that he saw he had them in a close place. At length they asked him the second time: "Brother Allen, did you commune?" His answer was, "I did." They then asked him how he came to do it; he answered, "The preacher invited me to come to my Lord and Master's table, and in doing it the Lord blessed my soul and made me happy." They then asked him if it were to do again would he do it, and he answered. "I would." He was so venerable a man that they hated to give him up; and if they turned him out for the charge they had brought against him, they would be disgraced as a Church professing Christianity. They then asked him if he wished to withdraw from them; he answered. he did, unless they would suffer him to commune with the Lord's people when and where he pleased. So the old soldier got clear of the Baptists. He went on preaching as he had done before. for a short time, perhaps something like a year, belonging to no Church. He then joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, and was regarded as one of the most laborious and useful local preachers we had among us; and I very little doubt that if he had not been so far advanced in years, he would have joined the traveling connection. He fully embraced the doctrines held by the Methodist Church; his sole object seemed to be to induce the people to become religious. He would administer the ordinance of baptism in any way that the subject wished it-either by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. He was a member of our Quarterly Conference in Sumner county, for, I think, about twenty years, and was a faithful attendant at Quarterly meetings. He was grandfather to the Rev. Dr. Allen Browning, who died a few years ago in Missouri, and great-grandfather of the Rev. William Browning, now presiding elder in the Tennessee Conference. Although far advanced in years, he was out on a preaching tour when taken sick; was brought home, and died in a short time. It can be truly said of Father Allen, "He died at his post." He selected his own burying-ground, a few hundred yards from where my present residence now is, and was buried there in his family grave-yard. Thus passed away one amongst the best men that I ever knew, whose name should go down to future generations.

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