

The Alabama Restoration Journal

An Historical Perspective of
Churches of Christ In Alabama

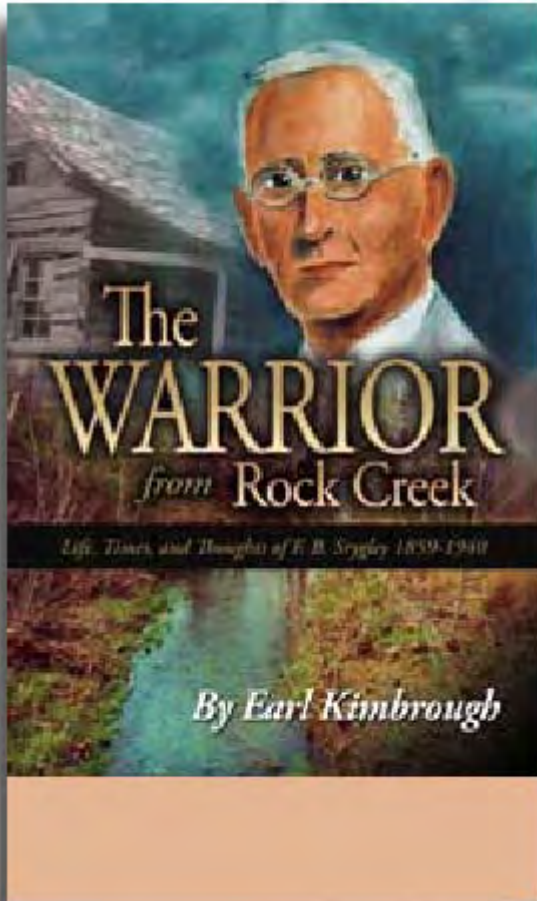


Baptizing In The Sipsey

VOLUME 5

ISSUE 1

APRIL 30, 2011



The Warrior from Rock Creek

Earl Kimbrough

The Warrior from Rock Creek is a long awaited volume. Earl Kimbrough labored in this material from every available source for more than fifty years to produce this history of the life, times, and thoughts of **F. B. Srygley**, 1859–1940. It covers many events and actions among the churches for about a century. Srygley was unique and beloved; a worthy subject for Kimbrough's historiographical labor. The author's critical examination of all materials, and the synthesis of the particulars placed into this volume, make it a veritable history of the church for the time covered. It will be desired by all who have an interest in the history of the churches of Christ.

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"Today I wrote finis to the reading of Earl Kimbrough's magnificent biography of **F. B. Srygley -- *The Warrior from Rock Creek***. I was not ready for it to end! Off and on for two weeks I had lived with F.B.Srygley. I was not ready for him to die and to see his labors come to an end.....the only way to really appreciate "**The Warrior from Rock Creek**" is to read the book. I cannot commend it too highly"
Hugh Fulford

"I have thoroughly enjoyed reading Earl's biography of **F.B. Srygley**, because of my own familiarity with the territory and people of that section. As I have bounded the hills and traversed the valleys in the life of '**The Warrior From Rock Creek**,' I have been energized anew to preach the New Testament gospel without fear or favor.".....**Bobby Graham**

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STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

The object of The Alabama Restoration Journal is to preserve and disseminate an historical record of the Restoration Movement primarily as it functioned in Alabama prior to World War II.

Brotherhood controversies as they unfolded in the years following this period are not included in this history, not because they lack historical validity, but because they do not fall within the frame of our primary time and area of coverage and because our interest is basically in our common roots.

Some articles and items may extend beyond our borders of state and time period, when the editor deems them pertinent to the main objective, when they are reflective of, or connected directly with, earlier history, or when they are purely of a human interest nature.

The Journal is not a "church paper" and is not designed to teach doctrine as such. It will not promote any hobby, controversy, or theological point of view that does not fall within the scope of the Restoration ideal within the time and area of primary interest.

The editor and contributing editors are responsible for keeping the material they submit for publication, whether written by them or selected from other sources, in keeping with the objects of The Journal.

The editor will retain the right to make the final determination of whether an article, or a portion thereof, fits the objective of The Journal.

No editing of material, other than routine editorial work, will be made on any writer's work without his prior knowledge and consent.

All historical material submitted for publication must be verifiable by documentation. Any opinions or conclusions based in part or whole upon supposition, while valid, will be given as such and not as historical facts.

Simple documentation may be supplied within the articles published, but it will be our purpose generally to omit footnotes.

The editors may not agree on all aspects of New Testament Christianity as currently practiced, but they have a common interest in Restoration history that transcends other differences, hold one another as brethren in Christ, and consider each other as committed to and capable of representing the Restoration ideal of speaking where the Bible Speaks and being silent where Bible is silent.

The writing of a particular story or the recording a particular event should be understood as reflecting the editor and associate editors perception of history and not necessarily as reflective of their own personal view.

Every effort will be made by the editor and writers to record history as it is and not to rewrite it as they might like for it to be. Historical revisionism is not the object of The Journal and will be excluded to the extent of our ability.

Source information for all articles will be available for those who request same.

The Editors

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Our Cover

Earl has done his usual beautiful job on this cover. He gave me permission to name it and I named it "Baptizing In The Sipsey." It was the inspiration for my article "Alabama's Jordan River." The back cover is his painting of Joe Holbrook, sans the beard....LEW

The Alabama Restoration Journal

An Historical Perspective of churches of Christ in Alabama

"Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is," Jer 6:16



Editor

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Volume No. 5

Issue No. 1

Date April 30, 2011

SACRIFICE Larry Whitehead

The more I learn about the men and women who pioneered the restoration movement across this country, the more I come to appreciate their sacrifice and dedication. Only the guiding hand of the God of us all, could have led them to cover this primitive state, with very few roads, either walking or riding a horse or mule, in all kinds of weather, driven by a desire to save the souls of a lost and dying generation. The sacrifices that they and their families made is unbelievable. Long absences from home and loved ones, lack of finances, and concern for their families back home. Threats of physical violence from the enemies of truth were common. Persecution by the devil and his disciples was often awaiting the men as they began a new work and tried to reach the lost.

Many times the disappointments were suffered at the hands of their own brethren. Earl tells the story of one such happening. It seems a preacher in north Alabama was called to conduct a gospel meeting at a country church some distance from his home. Leaving early on Saturday morning, he rode some 30-40 miles on horseback, in a driving autumn rainstorm, to keep his appointment. When he arrived there was no one to meet him. Not knowing any of the members, he waited patiently for someone to come and invite him to their home. Finally, when no one showed up and the storm continued, he tied his horse as close to the building as possible and bedded down with his saddle as his pillow. The next morning the members arrived for services. He preached the sermon without anything to eat since the day he left home. After the service, everyone went home without inviting him into their home. He probably was not paid for his services by these rude, I hesitate to call, Christians.

John Taylor suffered persecution and even threats on his life on numerous occasions. His family lived in poverty all his preaching life, sometimes almost destitute. His Godly wife stood by him and encouraged him to press on. The featured preacher of this issue, Joe Holbrook, preached all over northwest Alabama, Tennessee, and as far away as Texas and many times did not make enough to pay his fare home. On one occasion, while holding a two weeks meeting in Texas,

he figured that he netted ten cents per day. Holbrook's wonderful wife, Margaret suffered the deprivation silently and encouraged him to continue his work. Holbrook and Taylor were two of the most effective gospel preachers of their day. Even in the early years of the 20th century, men who proclaimed the gospel were targets of threats and persecution. Earl recently wrote of an incident in Walker County, in which young G.C. Brewer was almost killed for his stand for truth. O.C. Dobbs was arrested in Franklin County by enemies of the truth. Chester Estes wrote of threats he received as late as the 1930s. The sufferings of these men were not in isolated areas of the State. John T. Lewis, in the early days in Birmingham, found himself with no money and minimal support.

Several books have been written about these Godly men and their travails. Two of these, *Raccoon John Smith*, written by John Augustus Williams and *J.D. Tant-Texas Preacher*, written by Tant's son, Yater Tant, are likely the most popular biographies ever written by our brethren. Both are still in print. If you have the opportunity to read one or both, you will laugh and cry all the way thru. Soon to join these marvelous works, is a new book by our own Earl Kimbrough titled *John Taylor-The Life and Times of A Backwoods Preacher*. Earl has written more about these great pioneer preachers and their sufferings as well as their triumphs, than any man living today. No one tells a story better than Earl. He prefers to be referred to as a story teller rather than a historian. I am sure his latest work will take its place among those mentioned.

So, the next time you attend services in a beautiful air-conditioned, heated building, with its soft padded pews, power point projector, carpeted floors and classrooms with all kinds of materials, say a prayer of thanksgiving for the efforts of Smith, Taylor, Tant, Holbrook, Dobbs, Lewis, the Randolphs, B.F. Hall, Abner Hill, the Matthews, James and Mansel and countless others, who without their sacrifices, dedication and commitment and love of the truth and their fellowman, you might not have the beautiful building in which to worship, but may have never heard the truth preached.

News & Notes

We recently attended the *Friends Of The Restoration* lectures at Faulkner University. The Journal staff met for lunch prior to the lectures. Earl Kimbrough and his daughter Katrina, Kenneth Randolph and his wife, Janice, Scott Harp, Wayne Kilpatrick and your editor represented the Journal. In addition, Ancil Jenkins and Lloyd Barker joined us for the lunch and a grand period of fellowship.

The first lecture was by David Hester on the Church and Restoration personalities in Lamar County. David did an excellent job of chronicling the great work done by the pioneers for truth in this section of our State, including the subject of this issue, Joe H. Holbrook. He spoke at length about Lorenzo Dow Randolph, son of the lamented Elisha Randolph and ancestor of our own Ken Randolph. The Randolphs were in the forefront of the cause in this state from the 1820s. Scott Harp followed with a presentation on the life of one who was familiar to all, Gus Nichols. Scott did a wonderful job filling in for Mac Ice, who was called away due to a death in his family. Scott was followed by Mike Baker of Nashville, who gave a marvelous presentation on the life and work of John T. Lewis, who meant so much to the cause in Birmingham. Mike admitted that he was not familiar with this grand old soldier's work until he began his research for the lecture and came to appreciate his great contribution to the cause. The after dinner speaker was David Edwin Harrell. He gave a presentation on the life of Homer Hailey from his recent book on Hailey and the Church in the Twentieth Century. His lecture was the highlight of the evening. Brother Harrell is ranked near the top. If not the top of the best historians the church has produced. It was a delight for your editor to meet and talk with him.

This was the fifth *Friends Of The Restoration* lectures we have attended. The attendance this year was the largest we have seen. The interest in our history and heritage seems to have increased during this time. For this we are thankful as the main purpose of the Journal is to create more interest in our history and thus preserve same for future generations. We believe progress has been made toward this goal. Thanks go to Faulkner University for their sponsorship of this wonderful program each year and thanks also to Ancil and the *Friends* for their work, and above all to those who attended.

We had a table in the display area and gave away some three hundred journals. We have received several new subscriptions as a result. Thanks go to Ken Randolph for his efforts in arranging the display for us. Ken is one of our biggest supporters as well as one of our editors and a great writer as well.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

You will note that this issue is larger than the previous issues. We have decided to increase the size by 25% beginning with this issue. We feel that this will allow us to publish more and longer articles and thus hopefully provide more information about our wonderful history. We considered changing to a monthly, but since all our writers do so on a voluntary basis, we feel a monthly deadline would be too much to deal with.

Because mailing rates have and are increasing and printing cost have increased and because of the increased size, we are increasing our subscription to \$ 20.00 per year effective with the July issue. You will have until July to renew for one, two, or three years at the previous rate. We think that is a real bargain. The current rates are listed on the last page of this issue.

We have assembled some of the finest historical writers in the church today. C. Wayne Kilpatrick is the Professor of History at Heritage Christian University in Florence. He is recognized as one of the best historians in the Church today. Frank Richey is also from Florence and has been preaching the gospel for nearly forty years. He is a gifted writer and excellent historian. Scott Harp is from Haleyville and preaches for the church in Buford, Georgia. Scott has a marvelous website devoted to restoration history and is a fine writer. Earl Kimbrough is from Franklin County and is known far and wide as a great historian, lecturer and above all a, great gospel preacher and author of several books. Kenneth Randolph is from Lamar County and recently retired as Professor of Bible at Faulkner University. He too is a gospel preacher, a very talented writer and historian. Bobby Graham is from Lauderdale County. Bobby is a well known preacher of the gospel and a fine writer and historian. Bennie Johns helps with getting the copy ready for the printer. He is an important part of our team and shows enormous patience with the editor. Hilda Logan handles the subscriptions, book orders and other business matters and Lavaga Logan does the proofing for each issue. Occasionally, we have guest writers such as Hugh Fulford, who writes for *The Spiritual Sword* And *The Gospel Advocate*. Earl Kimbrough, in addition to all his contributions mentioned above, is a wonderful artist and paints all of our covers with an original print. He is truly a multi-talented man.

There is no other journal in our brotherhood like the *ALABAMA RESTORATION JOURNAL*.

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In This Issue

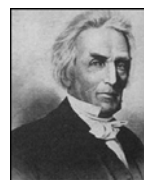
Larry begins with a piece he calls **Sacrifice**, with some examples of the sacrifice of those who went before. *Earl* follows with an article on one of the great preachers of yesteryear, **Joseph H. Holbrook**. *Larry* has a story he calls **Alabama's River Jordan** The story of a river in Northwest Alabama and the churches that were planted along and near its banks. *Ken Randolph* offers the second installment of his series on **James E. Matthews**, one of the earliest pioneer preachers. This is an excellent series and is the most information we have seen on this great man. *Earl* has his second article entitled **MARGARET E. HOLBROOK: "A Good Heart And A Good Stock Of Religion."** This is a wonderful story of one person's influence and how it can have an enormous impact on future generations. *Frank* has a marvelous story of a gospel preacher he has titled '**Parson George Ricks: From Slave To Servant Of God.**' A wonderful story of this noble man and his work in the 1860s and later. *Isaac* makes his usual assessment of the state of affairs "amongst" the brethren in **Uncle Isaac Sez**. *Earl's* third offering is a story of Holbrook's incarceration in a Union prison known as "Eighty **Acres Of Hell.**" *Larry* attempts to clear up some of the myths surrounding a preacher and educator from Fayette County he calls **Hal P. McDonald: The Man Who Dreamed The Impossible Dream**. A reprint from Gospel Advocate in 1906 by *David Adams* on the work in Selma. It is titled **A Missionary Call**. A great article by *Earl Kinbrough* on an episode in Walker County involving a young G.C. Brewer in the early part of last century, he calls **The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death**. *J. David Tant*, grandson of the lamented J.D. Tant, has an article about the favorite hymns of many of the noted gospel preachers of days of yore called **A Bit Of History**. Our **Gathering Home** column this issue is from the Gospel Advocate, written by *F.B. Srygley*, about a grand old soldier of the cross, **John T. Underwood**. Our **Voices From The Past** column is from the Gospel Guardian, February, 1936, and is by the beloved **John T. Lewis**. It is titled **Can We Preach Jesus And Let Other People Alone**, a most timely lesson for today. The **Where The Saints Met** column is about the **Catoma Sreet Church** in Montgomery. The article is from a 1936 issue of Gospel Advocate and was written by *N.L. Walker*, beloved elder at Catoma Street. The saints still meet there today. **Commitment And Providence** is an excerpt from a lecture given at Florida College in 1981 by *Yater Tant*. **Chester Estes**, a biographical sketch by *Scott Harp* of a great warrior in the Lord's cause in North Alabama, follows. **Beyond Our Borders** this issue is by *Earl*, an article about a classic sermon called **The Beginning Corner**. *Hugh* has the **Final Say**. Enjoy.....

NEW MATERIAL FROM BENNIE JOHNS

Bennie has just completed a monumental work scanning the material from four of the most important journals ever published by our brethren. He spent countless hours on this project and has done a magnificent job. Thousands upon thousands of pages of the writings of the great pioneer leaders of the Restoration Movement are now available for our study and enjoyment. His work included not only "cleaning up" these old journals, but changing the fonts to make them easily readable.

Included are: All seven volumes of Campbell's Christian Baptist, All forty one volumes of the Millennial Harbinger plus index, All fourteen volumes of Stone's Christian Messenger and the ten volumes of Scott's Evangelist,

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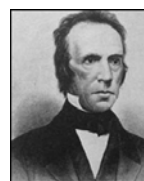
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JOSEPH H. HOLBROOK
Earl Kimbrough

In about 1889, F.D. Srygley said: "J.H. Halbrook ... (also referred to as Holbrook-EK) has preached extensively through Fayette, Lamar, Tuscaloosa, Walker, Marion, Lawrence, Franklin and Colbert counties, in Alabama." (F.D. Srygley, *Smiles and Tears*.) Born in Perry County, Tennessee, in 1841, Holbrook enlisted in the Confederate army in 1862. He was taken prisoner the second day of the great Battle of Nashville, December 16, 1864, and spent the rest of the war in prison at Camp Douglas in Chicago, which has been designated, "Eighty Acres of Hell." He returned home after the war "almost without clothes, seventy-five dollars in debt, and penniless." It was too late to plant a crop, so he borrowed two dollars and married a girl "who had nothing but a pure heart and a good stock of religion." It was through her influence that he became a Christian and soon began to preach.



Joseph H. Holbrook

Through hard work, Holbrook managed to buy a small farm, acquire some property, and became successful enough to live comfortably. He made slow progress in his study of the Bible and realized his need for help. His desire to preach was so great, that, with his wife's encouragement, he sold everything he had, and with the proceeds entered Mars' Hill College to study under T. B. Larimore. He was older than Larimore at the time. While at Mars' Hill, he began preaching among the mountains of Northwest Alabama. He held a meeting in Landersville in Lawrence County, in 1875, that resulted in nineteen baptisms. J. W. Srygley, writing from there, said: "Brother Halbrook is a workman that can cultivate any soil that is capable of producing fruit, and any one that cannot understand the plain truth of God's word, as to how to become a Christian and live as such, God will take care of them." (*Gospel Advocate*, Sept. 2, 1875.) About the same time, Holbrook preached at Prospect, near Landersville with twenty-eight additions.

Writing from Rock Creek that same year, Holbrook reported a meeting with sixteen additions. The church at Rock Creek then numbered about a hundred members. It had just built a new meeting house and was meeting every Lord's day "and so is in good working order." While hurrying to an appointment in 1877, Holbrook's horse stumbled and fell, breaking

the preacher's leg and causing him to be "laid on the shelf" for a while. Larimore, relating the story, told about Margaret Holbrook's comment when she heard about her husband's accident. Larimore said: "It is said that when his wife, who is very much devoted to him, was informed, she said, 'Well that's *mighty* bad, but not half as bad as if it had been his neck.'" *Ibid.*, July, 1877.) But the injury was only a temporary set back. As soon as he was able to travel on horseback again, Holbrook held another meeting at Rock Creek with ten additions. He soon reported fifty-two additions in Walker County and eighty-five in one month.

When his school days ended, Holbrook owned nothing but a horse and buggy. He started south on a preaching tour and stopped at New River in Fayette County. He and Margaret decided to settle there and from there, for sixteen years (1880-1896), he constantly preached in Northwest Alabama, traveling the mountains and valleys by horseback or buggy in search of lost souls. He preached any place a few persons could be assembled: in homes, schools, groves, courthouses, or beside a road. In describing Holbrook's ministry in Northwest Alabama, F. D. Srygley said: "He labored mostly among poor people in rural regions, baptized thousands of persons, and established many congregations of worshipers. He delighted especially to preach in places where there were no churches. He was often denied the use of houses to preach in, and not a few times he preached in the middle of the public road, while his hearers sat on logs and on the fences by the roadside." (F. D. Srygley, *Biographies and Sermons*, 54.)

In 1886, Holbrook held meetings at Russellville and in nearby portions of Franklin County. Of this he wrote: "Am at home this morning, waiting for a brother to come after me to carry me to the valley near Russellville to commence another meeting. Health still bad." (*Gospel Advocate*, Oct. 13, 1886.) The following week, he wrote: "Since my last, five more have made the good confession, one at Russellville, in Franklin County." (*Ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1886.)

Holbrook's preaching brought little financial reward and he spent too much time preaching to make much money farming or otherwise. The nature of his preaching contributed to his meager income. "Much of my time has been spent where the apostle's doctrine had never been heard," he said, in summarizing his work for 1880. A few years later, he wrote: "I desire to preach a good deal to the destitute and the poor and the weak churches." (*Ibid.*, 14, 1888.) On a two month preaching tour to Arkansas in 1888, he spent \$42.75 and received for his efforts \$17.25. On another trip in

1890, he lacked fifteen cents receiving enough to pay railroad expenses. These were not uncommon occurrences. A *Gospel Advocate* writer, commenting on Holbrook's sacrifices for the gospel, said: "These brethren want Bro. H. to get all the good there is out of poverty and have agreed that 'if the Lord will keep him humble, they will keep him poor.'" (Ibid., June 4, 1890.)

When his horse died in 1890, an *Advocate* writer said: "J. H. Holbrook of New River, Alabama, had the misfortune to lose his only horse by death recently. This leaves him entirely without conveyance. He had made all his arrangements to spend this year in evangelistic work in destitute fields, and this misfortune will greatly hinder this good work unless the brethren come speedily to his relief. We know Bro. Holbrook to be a worthy man and a good preacher. He has established many churches. He has spent his life preaching in destitute places, mainly at his own expense and at great sacrifice of the comforts and even of the necessities of life. We trust that he will be able to continue this good work." (Ibid., Jan. 19, 1890.)

This was attended by an appeal for help, evidently made by F.D. Srygley, that went out without Holbrook's knowledge or consent. He immediately wrote to say that, while his loss was almost irreparable and while he appreciated the *Advocate's* kindness, he could get along without making a public appeal for help, "and it is so humiliating to me to ask the brethren to help me, I hope you will make no more mention of me in the *Advocate*." He added that: "Bro. John M. McCaleb has kindly purposed to loan me his mule till I can do better, and I think I can get along some way." (Ibid., Feb. 5, 1890.)

While the *Advocate* agreed to say no more about the matter, some brethren sent him money for a horse. Margaret Holbrook wrote to the *Advocate* expressing their determination to do more for the blessed Lord than they had ever done before. She said: "Mr. Holbrook is off on a trip to Walker county, though not very well." She spoke of the work having been long established at New River, although not faithfully practiced. This was often the story of Northwest Alabama. A week later, she wrote to say they would buy a horse pretty soon, if the Lord willed, adding: "Mr. H. left home last Monday. I don't know when he will return home." (Ibid., Feb. 19, 1890.)

When the Alabama Christian Missionary Cooperation was organized in 1886, an agent wrote Holbrook to ask how much he could raise for missionary purposes in his field. In reply, he wrote: "I do not know how much can be raised in my field for missionary purposes this year. I have planted my field in cotton, and it is too early in the season yet to tell how it will pan out; but all it makes is for missionary purposes." (Srygley, *Smiles*.) F. B. Srygley frequently

spoke of Holbrook and other preachers of Northwest Alabama. He found delight in telling about their sacrificial labors and successes independent of the missionary society. After relating the above incident, the old *Advocate* editor said: "At that time [Holbrook] was perhaps doing more real work in Alabama than the entire bunch that was using this unscriptural institution." (*Gospel Advocate*, May 11, 1939.)

In about 1896, due to failing health in both himself and his wife, Joseph and Margaret Holbrook moved to Levy County, Florida, but he continued to preach as health permitted until his death, October 1, 1905. He was preceded in death a few years by his wife, and they are buried in a peaceful country cemetery near Chiefland, Florida. At the time of his death, Larimore wrote of him: "As he, though older than myself, was my pupil, as well as my friend and brother, I knew him intimately and well. His reputation was never tarnished. His loyalty to the Lord—to Christ and his cause—was never questioned. He lived to do good. He did good as long as he lived." (Ibid., May 17, 1906.)

J.H. Holbrook is typical of several men who labored largely at their own expense to evangelize the counties of Northwest Alabama during the time of crisis that resulted in the division referred to earlier. These men preached without the aid of any missionary society. They denied the scripturalness of such arrangements and demonstrated by their own lives that the gospel can succeed in saving souls and establishing churches by simply following the examples of the apostles in the New Testament. Holbrook's departure from Northwest Alabama left a gap and he was sorely missed, but his influence lived after him and helped carry the churches of that region through the trying times of division and strife, when the forces of liberalism increased in the state. The Alabama Christian Missionary Cooperation never made inroads among the churches of Northwest Alabama within the region where J.M. Pickens, John Taylor, and J.H. Holbrook had labored. The influences that led to the establishment of the first state missionary society in Alabama did not come from the pioneers who labored to establish the cause of Christ in the state, but from liberal influences that invaded the state after the Civil War.

Past, Present, and Future

The following is attributed to Mexican General Santa Anna, who famously declared, "*To know nothing of the past is to understand little of the present and to have no concept of the future.*"

ALABAMA'S JORDAN RIVER Larry Whitehead

The Sipsey River flows southward through Northwest Alabama. One branch makes up the beautiful Smith Lake as a result of a hydroelectric dam, built by Alabama Power. This branch empties into the Black Warrior River, one of Alabama's main waterways. Another, smaller branch, (and the subject of this article) flows due south and spills into the Tombigbee River near Tuscaloosa. This branch flows lazily through the hills, valleys, farms and communities of, as Earl Kimbrough says, "beautiful old Northwest Alabama." Several tributaries flow into this branch and thus it increases in size as it travels on its journey south.

As the stream crosses from Winston County into Marion County on its journey and just a few miles south of the line, it merges with Crooked Creek and passes the site of the old Crooked Creek church. This church was likely planted by the lamented John Taylor in the late 1850s. He was probably assisted in the work by Green Haley. The Dickinson and the Lambert families made up the majority of the membership. Henry G. Lambert, a civil war veteran, and George Weaver, also a civil war veteran, were the preachers for this congregation. The noted O.C. Lambert was of this Lambert family. Doubtless many of these good souls availed themselves of the cool waters of the Sipsey for their baptism into the Lord's church. This church built a more commodious building and relocated a mile or so away, where this faithful group meets today as the Bethel church of Christ.

West of the river two or three miles, as it travels through this area of Marion County, are found the Brock church of Christ, the Piney Grove church, the Goldmine church and two congregations in the town of Brilliant. A short distance too the west is the New Hope church, formerly known as the Scuffle Grit church. It was likely this church where Robert and Jennie Logan attended after moving to this area from the Berea community in 1860. It is also likely that Allen Haley, father of Green Haley and close friend of John Taylor, was an early member of this church. The aforementioned George Weaver is known to have preached for this church on occasion. He was married to Robert Logan's granddaughter. Green Haley likely would have also preached here from time to time. Farther south three or four miles, the river passes within a mile or two of the Central church which came about from a merger of the Rock City and Griggs Place churches.

The river's journey continues, slowing for the dam at Pearce's Grist Mill, where as a young lad this writer would go with his father to have corn ground into meal for his mother to make the world's best cornbread. East of here two or three miles is the church at Eldridge. This good church last year celebrated its one hundredth anniversary of service to the cause. Over the years, Mack Farris and his son, Frank, served this congregation as ministers. They nurtured this work and its lamp has shone brightly in the Eldridge community all these years. Such men as John T. Lewis, G.A.

Dunn and Gus Nichols held gospel meetings here in years gone bye. Today, it is one of the strongest churches in the area. This writer was honored to speak there last year.

West three or four miles is located the East Winfield church. This church was originally the Chapel Hill church started by Lloyd Pemberton in the late 1930s. (*Conversion of A New York Drifter -ARJ Vol 1 - Issue 4*) Still farther west, another two miles, is the Winfield church, started by three pioneer preachers, Joe Holbrook, Jeremiah Randolph and his son Virgil in the late 1800s. It is one of the largest churches of Christ in Marion County. (*ARJ Vol 3 - Issue 1*)

Here at Texas, the river flows under the old Bankhead highway and soon merges with Little New River on its journey through Fayette County, where the locals refer to it as New River or The Sipsey. From here, it is a short distance to the site of the old Hopewell Baptist church, where J.M. Pickens preached the ancient gospel to an "overflow" crowd of Baptists on a Saturday night in 1870. The next day, he began a gospel meeting at Berea. Just west of here a couple of miles is the Glen Allen church, started some twenty nine years ago. Bobby Graham, one of our editors has held meetings for this good church. Still further West two or three miles is the Elm church, started by members of the Anthony family possibly as early as the 1880s. Foy Anthony, a descendant of Robert Logan and the McCaleb family, preaches for this church today.

From near Glen Allen, the river flows towards Bazemore, near where John Taylor likely lived and passes by the Piney Grove church which was started in the early part of the last century by our black brethren. The lamented Marshall Keeble held gospel meetings here and the long time minister was E.B. McCollum. Flowing onward the stream passes the White's Chapel church where Gus Nichols baptized the writer's father in its waters in the 1930s. Where such men as G.A. Dunn, W.A. Black and Gus Nichols preached and where "Boss" Tucker led the singing for many years. Past the cemetery, one of the largest in the area, where so many saints, baptized in its waters through the years, silently sleep awaiting the glorious morn. East of the river at this point a couple of miles is the Tidwell Chapel church, which likely was started in the late 1800s, and is a viable congregation today.

From here, the river soon moves through the farm once owned by David Thornton. It was here that John Taylor preached his first gospel sermon with one response. When he preached his next sermon, thirtynine precious souls responded and were immersed in the chilly waters of the Sipsey; where one of the great chapters in Alabama restoration history had its beginning. This group was the core group that would form the Berea church of Christ. This occurred in 1829. This church has stood for the "faith once delivered to the saints" for 181 years and the Sipsey provided the waters for the entrance of hundreds into the fold in that many years. Berea,

which was almost destroyed during the civil war, but arose from the ashes of destruction to become a beacon of spirituality in the years after the war. Its leaders and members carried the glorious message to the many communities that sprang up after the war and planted the cause among the lost. Here, where Chester Estes described an aged old pioneer preacher, Jim Wade, resting in a chair on the old bridge witnessing the baptisms taking place in the river below during a great gospel meeting in the 1920s. Some of the greatest preachers of the restoration filled its pulpit in those long years. Such men as the Srygley brothers, F.D. and F.B., Matt Hackworth, J.M. Pickens, John Dale, Elisha Randolph and his three sons and of course, the sainted John Taylor, to name a few. The roll call of preachers that have held meetings at Berea reads like a "who's who" of the restoration movement.

The river moves on around a bend or two and passes the Hubbertville church which was started about 1926. This church filled the needs of those Christians in the Hubbertville community and still serves them today.. This community was once known as McCollum Mill and the original old cemetery was known as the McCollum Cemetery. Today it is the Hubbertville Cemetery. Here are buried Andrew and Leah Catherine McCaleb. Andrew served as one of the first elders at Berea and served in that office for fifty years. Newman T. McCollum and his wife are buried here. Newman also served as an elder. Newman's tombstone has the date of his baptism in the Sipsey, engraved on it. Many of their descendants and many other saints are buried here. Descendants of some are current members of both the Berea church and the Hubbertville church.

It was also here, according to legend, Leah's father James K. McCollum, who was the treasurer of the Old Wade Baptist church, stood on the bank of an angry Sipsey and surveyed the ruined cotton and corn fields that were destroyed by the flooding river, and tossing his new hat into the swirling stream, looked to the heavens and called on the Lord to "take the hat. You've taken everything else."

The river moves on southward and passes within a short distance to the site of the Old Wade Baptist Church, where the providential hand of the Almighty led a Baptist preacher to quote Acts 2:38 during a service attended by a distraught John Taylor. Distraught because he had been unable to have the required experience Calvinism taught and therefore assumed that he was doomed to the Devil's hell, without hope. Upon hearing the above scripture quoted, he instantly knew the way of salvation had been revealed to him and his life, and thousands that would hear him over the next half century, was changed forever. It is likely that the Sipsey provided the water for his obedience, with him rising from its waters to become one of the most beloved preachers ever to preach the ancient truths in Northwest Alabama..

On the river flows a couple of miles until it slows for the dam that once provided the water for David Thornton's grist mill, later owned by John Tyler McCaleb and then on to pass

near the New River church of Christ. It was here that young Minnie Belle Hollingsworth made the good confession and was baptized in the waters of the Sipsey. It was also here that Minnie, by this time a young mother, challenged the noted Texas preacher, J.D. Tant on his sermon condemning the use of "snuff."(*ARJ Vol 1- Issue 3*) It was in this meeting in 1922 that young Ruth McCaleb, now nearing her 104th birthday, came forward and was baptized by Tant in the Sipsey. It was at New River that the writer's sainted mother gave young Gus Nichols her hand and confessed her belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and was buried with him in the cool waters of the Sipsey. It is here, in the adjacent cemetery, that five of the great pioneer gospel preachers of days gone bye, and their spouses silently await the call. The New River church grew to become one of the largest and most respected in the area.

The Sipsey rolls on past Ford's Mountain where the ruins of Hal P. McDonald's ill fated Temple of Knowledge overlooks the river from atop the mountain. One of the saddest chapters in the beautiful story of the restoration movement in Alabama. Such a waste of treasure in attempted fulfillment of an impossible dream. Wasted treasure, but not wasted lives, as Hal and Hattie McDonald inspired a generation of young Christians through their years of teaching at Alabama Christian College at Berry and through the preaching of Hal P. and their examples of pious living.

On it flows through the farm once owned by Lum and Minnie Belle Hollingsworth Ehl; passing by the home where their children were born and grew to adulthood, where Minnie Belle locked Lum in the stable after he tried to keep her from attending worship at New River (*ARJ Vol 1 - Issue 1*) and where its angry waters flooded their crops three consecutive years in the 1920s. Facing financial ruin, they sold the farm and moved to Arizona only to return to Alabama in a few years because, as Minnie would say, "Arizona had too little water, too many rattlesnakes and worse yet, far too many Mormons." West of the river from this point, two or three miles is the Housh Chapel church. Started in the 1940s, this congregation has served that community since its beginning and does so today.

And so, the Sipsey flows on, through the edge of the city of Fayette, where are to be found two congregations, and on to its rendezvous with the mighty Tombigbee. How many were baptized in its waters in the last 182 years? No one can know, but many hundreds, yea, likely thousands and the cause of New Testament Christianity is certainly the better for it. From the point where the river crosses into Marion County from Winston County to the outskirts of Fayette where it crosses highway 43, is approximately 30 miles. From its banks twenty five miles, both east and west, there are at least fifty five to sixty congregations of God's people; these in one of the most rural areas of Alabama. No body of water in this State has contributed more to the cause than the thirty miles of the cool waters of the Sipsey. It could truly be called ***The Jordan River of Northwest Alabama.***

James Evans Matthews—Early Alabama Restorer- Part Two

Kenneth L. Randolph

It appears that the early restorers were cautious in forming convictions on primitive truths, even after resolving to take "the Bible alone" as their guide. This was true, not only on the action and purpose of baptism, but on such things as the frequency of the Lord's Supper and the need of elders in each congregation. This caution was no doubt one of the reasons they continued to remain in "fellowship" with the religious groups around them, and to "receive" from those groups men and women into their congregations.

But if B.F. Hall, as a young man of 23, did not first preach baptism for remission of sins in Alabama, he at least popularized it. On the last day of September, 1826, he preached at Cypress Creek, just north of Florence, and when an invitation hymn was sung, Tolbert Fanning responded to be baptized for the remission of sins. He was baptized the following day by Matthews. Fanning had had three men who had been instrumental in teaching him while a lad in Lauderdale County; Ross Houston, E.D. Moore and James E. Matthews. It was Matthews, however, who made the deepest impression upon him. David Lipscomb said that "Mr. Fanning, in his early youth, fell in with James Matthews, and heard the plea for the authority of the Bible as the will of God." ⁴¹ Fanning himself acknowledged that he was mainly indebted to Matthews for his early religious teaching. Fanning wrote, at the death of Matthews, "Perhaps, for no man, since the departure of our own father, did we feel a more tender regard for our deceased brother."

The year of 1822, therefore, was significant in the life of James E. Matthews and in the church in North Alabama. The gospel was being preached with a first century ring, and the hearers were being told in a positive and unambiguous manner what they must do in order to receive salvation. The response was good and the prospects were bright. While, no doubt, the scorn of the enemies of truth was strong, yet 1826 was a year that portended great things for the cause of the Redeemer in North Alabama.

By November of 1828, the church in Lauderdale County had grown to about 130 members. In a report to the Christian Messenger, Matthews said that "the prospect of its increase is flattering." He mentioned attending a meeting of four days in Salem, Franklin County, Tennessee, "where we constituted a church of 7 members." John McDonald is mentioned as "riding" in that area, and as having "planted several churches in the neighborhood of Winchester, and the adjoining settlements."

1829 finds Matthews still in Lauderdale County, and he writes that the "prospects of the triumph of truth are still flattering here. The church at Republican still continues to increase." In August, he reported a meeting in McNairy County, Tennessee, and added that "four have lately been immersed at Republican in this county, and one Baptist brother, who was under censure for communing with us, joined us." Two letters from Matthews, one dated October 9, and the other October 23, appear together in the 1829 Christian Messenger, and indicate there were then two congregations in that county—Republican, which numbered about 200 members, and "the church here" (subsequent information suggests this was at Bartons, west of Florence), The church at Bartons had been started in the spring, and had grown to forty by October. The two letters carry the following words that are significant in pointing out some of the religious views of Matthews:

The communion on Lord's day evening, exceeded anything of the kind that I have ever seen before. It looked more like Heaven than anything that I have ever seen before. To see the lovers of Jesus of different denominations, in sweet union, filling two rows of seats, at least fifty yards long; to hear bursts of rapture from several souls, and unceasing shouts of praise for some time, ascending from the overflowing hearts of christians, of different names, reminded me of the time when "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad, and the desert shall blossom as the rose." I think that partyism got a deadly stab, and peace and union were greatly promoted. . . .I verily believe that the latter day of glory is at hand. . . .Truth is rapidly gaining ground, and I think that many of the Lord's children of different denominations are beginning to reciprocate the feelings of friendship and affection which we have expressed for them. May the Lord carry on the glorious work, until partyism and sectarian feeling shall be lost in oblivion; and pure, unmixed love, shall reign throughout the earth. Amen.

It is evident from these lines that Matthews (and most of the other restorers, as their writings indicate)

had not drawn the clear line between the church and denominationalism that was to be later drawn. These men moved among their religious neighbors with an unfettered freedom, and Matthews' words seem to reflect the idea that friendship with the denominations was necessary for truth to gain ground. Matthews' words also suggest a view of a coming "latter day of glory," or millennium similar to that of Alexander Campbell—that the millennium would take place as the gospel was accepted to the point that the kingdoms of the world would become the kingdom of Christ.

In 1830, Matthews mentioned for the first time the writings of Alexander Campbell. In June, he said,

The Christian Messenger and Brother Campbell's works are producing a happy influence in this country; yet I think the latter have too much severity attached to them. In this, however, I may be mistaken; for I remember that Christ and his apostles used much severity in reproving the abusers and corrupters of religion in their day. A part of the motto of Christianity is "peace on earth, and good will towards men." And the more I reflect on the genius and tendency of the Christian religion, the more I am disposed to leave dry speculation, and confine myself to proclaiming the simple, yet glorious facts, (not opinions,) on which the christian superstructure rests; and apply those facts to the regulation of the affections and the heart. . . Hence, I conclude, that even those who are contending for truth, in any other spirit than that of peace, have fallen into that fatal mistake which has reared the inquisition, and filled the world with rapine, violence and death.

This letter reflects an independent and discriminating mind, and especially, a soul desirous of peace among men. In subsequent correspondence, the desire to see a return to New Testament Christianity in spirit as well as in doctrine became a dominant theme.

In October of 1830, in addition to the usual report of the numbers added in the various camp meetings in McNairy County, Tennessee, and in Lauderdale, Limestone and Morgan Counties in Alabama, Matthews added that at the conference at Republican, the brethren had discussed, among other things, the subject of elders, He wrote,

It appeared to be the almost unanimous opinion of the brethren, that

if our churches were on apostolic ground, they would have Elders, or men of age and experience &c. set apart in every church as Bishops, or overseers, whose duty it should be to exercise discipline, administer the ordinances, and assemble the church frequently, so that in the absence of the preachers or evangelists, the churches might be kept organized. The conference recommend this subject to the careful consideration of the churches generally.

The report of Matthews about a year later is significant for its estimate of the numerical strength of all the churches, and for a personal item regarding his health. He estimated that Tennessee had 60 churches and 4000 members, and Alabama had 20 churches and about 1500 members. He added,

When I came to this country, something over five years ago, there was one small church, of about 10 members; that church now contains upwards 200 members, and I have planted another church in my immediate vicinity, of about 60 members. Elder Moore and myself have had great opposition by the popular sectaries, but the opposition has comparatively ceased. Our prospects, in one respect, are a little discouraging at present, as brother Moore is about to leave this country, and I am left with a broken constitution, and fast declining health, to attend to almost all of the churches in North Alabama.

It is ascertained from these words that Matthews came into the Florence area sometime in 1826, and that a phenomenal growth had taken place in the churches. The mention of bad health was probably more than a tired complaint from an overworked preacher. In a report to the Christian Magazine some years later, a brother mentions the poor health of Matthews, and in his private letters, he described his malady as a "lung condition," coughing and hemorrhaging. But whatever his condition in 1831, it did not deter him from his work.

In December of 1831, Matthews estimated that from the camp meetings in North Alabama and South Tennessee about 170 persons had been immersed and about 130 added since the meetings. Men listed in addition to Matthews at the Lauderdale conference were: John Mulky, Isaac Mulkey, John Hooten, William Hooten, John McDonald, Elisha Randolph, Ephraim D. Moore, James Anderson, Tolbert Fanning and Mansel W. Matthews. A note regarding the

procedure of the conference was added:

In Conference, we dispensed with the etiquette usually observed. No bishop was called to the chair, nor was any clergyman or lay-member chosen President. We entered no resolves upon our minute book, nor did we take the name of an "Advisory Council." But "with one accord, in one place" we mutually engaged in arranging the appointments for our next annual meetings, so as to best promote the cause of the Redeemer. . .

Matthews' concern for peace and love, and a cultivating of the spirit of Christianity among the churches, again finds expression in his letter of October, 1832. This letter reflects beautifully that desire for the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of his brethren, and it also indicates the point to which brethren were arriving regarding baptism as a test of communion, or fellowship, with their religious neighbors. The letter will be given in two sections in order that the view of Matthews might be put in its proper light. In the first section of the letter he writes,

Our Camp Meeting and Conference terminated about a week since. About 10 were immersed, but prospects were not as flattering as formerly. Some unfortunate excitement was occasioned by immersion being made a test of communion in the preaching of some of the brethren. I am fearful if brethren are not careful, much evil will result. I have long been the advocate of reformation, but I view with extreme regret the spirit which to me seems to prevail among many of those who profess to be reformers. We should certainly proclaim the truth fearlessly, but we should avoid that precipitancy which I fear too much prevails in adopting a new idea. Teachers of the religion of Jesus, should feel so solemnly the responsibility resting upon them, as not lightly to proclaim as truth that which is questionable.

The idea of "immersion" being a test of communion may mean immersion as opposed to sprinkling, or it may mean immersion for remission of sins as opposed to baptism for some other reason. Whether Matthews and others of his co-laborers had yet reached the conclusion of baptism as meaning only immersion is uncertain, as their writings had not been directed to that question. The fact that

Methodists were mentioned as communing with them may give an indication that they had reached no definite conclusions on sprinkling.

Concerning baptism for remission of sins, the views of Matthews, among all his preaching brethren, were most clearly presented. Only three years before, he had written three lengthy articles that appeared on pages 125-129, 150-154, and 211-213 of the 1929 Christian Messenger, entitled "The Gospel Plan of Saving Sinners." The articles advanced simple Bible authority for belief, repentance and baptism for remission of sins as opposed to various sectarian methods. They consisted primarily of a review of the cases of conversion and of the verses that mention baptism in the New Testament. He was careful to emphasize that baptism is "in order to" remission, and that it preceded salvation. He devoted part of the articles to the answer of objections that are raised against baptism for remission. He concluded the articles by saying,

I and others in this country have acted on the above plan, and we have never yet known it fail. If we had but one apostolic example on which to found our practice. . .we would act safely. But we think we have many examples as well as precepts. Should any yet dispute its correctness, we should be glad that they would introduce one precept or example showing from the scriptures that it is wrong. We should be glad also, (if possible) that they would cite us to one authority in the book of God, for requiring "an experience of grace" to be related, antecedent to baptism. Thus I have endeavored to illustrate the simplicity of the gospel plan of saving sinners. It is hoped that all who read these numbers, will candidly consider the subject, and if the doctrine advanced be supported by the scriptures, it is hoped that they will embrace it, however much it may be opposed to their views of propriety.

So clear were these articles that one John O'Kane wrote an article in reply, even suggesting that Matthews had substituted water for the blood of Christ, O'Kane's two page reply was in turn answered by Stone on four pages, who, in effect, agreed with the views presented by Matthews.⁵³

Therefore, it would appear that this section of Matthews' letter is not a repudiation of the restoration stance of "the Bible alone," but rather a reflection of the kind of man he was. He believed in "making haste slowly," and recognized that acceptance of new views

of the truth did not come quickly. He, no doubt, felt that by fellowship and acceptance of the religious people of his community they could be more easily led into a more perfect understanding. He also had a great love for peace and unity. Considering the date of 1831, and that the restoration was but in infancy, his actions were fairly consistent with most of the leading lights of the day. It is difficult to project oneself back into that time and to judge their actions. They were standing in the dawn of the restoration years, while those who contemplate these matters now have basked in the sunlight of over 150 years of a restoration plea.

The second section of the letter evidences a strong desire for restoration in practice as well as in doctrine. It manifest a deep spirituality. With feeling, he writes,

But this is probably not the greatest evil that is obtaining among us; especially our young brethren. It appears to me that there is too much rashness and self confidence with a censorious spirit manifested in their discourses, for them to be profitable. They seem to justify themselves by the plea that they are teaching the truth, not remembering, I fear, that they should "speak the truth in love." I have seen so much of this, as I think, that the cry of reformation from such, has almost become disgusting to me. Many of us have reformed in theory, but there is a greater and more thorough reformation needed. Where is that humility, kindness, forbearance and love—that contempt of show and parade—of popularity and worldly advantage which shone so conspicuously in primitive saints? Where are that love, holy joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, temperance, patience and fidelity, which are the characteristics of genuine piety? The fruits of the spirit? Alas! they appear almost to have fled. And to the disgrace of reformers—yea of those, who call themselves Christians, these things are rarely to be found! Do we complain of the pomp, the pride and persecuting spirit of the popular sectaries? And shall we not blush that we who profess to be Christians are found tracing their steps? A reformation in spirit and practice is what we mostly need and until professors, by their godly walk, and


conversation, become the salt of the earth and the lights of the world, we may vainly flatter ourselves with the belief that the day of millennial glory is opening on the world.

Matthews continued his labors in the Florence area, and in August, 1833 wrote that 8 were added by immersion and that prospects were brightening and churches increasing. A month later, he mentioned that 30 had been added since his last report.⁵⁶ It is two and one-half years later, on March 10, 1836, that Matthews is heard from again. A short letter to the Christian Messenger reflects a disheartened view, "the church, so called, is rotten to the very core. Truth, justice, mercy, and all the lovely attributes of Christian character, are becoming strangers on the earth!!"

To be continued next issue.....

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MARGARET E. HOLBROOK: "A PURE HEART AND A GOOD STOCK OF RELIGION"

Earl Kimbrough

Joseph H. Holbrook had little prospect in early life of ever reaching a place of much usefulness and distinction in the service of his fellow man. Yet, he rose from poverty, poor education, and obscurity to become one of the most successful pioneer preachers of Northwest Alabama during the years following the Civil War. The gospel seed sown by his sacrificial labors bore abundant fruit in his lifetime, and has multiplied many times in the generations to follow. Holbrook began life in Perry County, Tennessee, where he was born December 14, 1841. The family moved to neighboring Hickman County before he could remember and there he was reared amidst the hardships and privations of rural Tennessee southwest of Nashville. His educational opportunities were limited. The schools met in poor houses, with short terms, and poorly qualified teachers. He was rarely able to attend a full session.

Holbrook was fortunate to have respectable parents. His mother was a devout Primitive Baptist and his father was waiting for the "call" that would, according to Calvinist theology, place him among the redeemed. H. Leo Boles said: "Young Holbrook loved his father and knew that he was a good man. He could not understand why his father, who, wanted to go to heaven and who was deeply interested in religion, was not chosen. Much of the preaching that he heard was only the relation of experiences. The preachers always started in relating their experiences with the fact that they were very wicked in their former days, but that God had saved them. Young Holbrook could not understand why the Lord would call to be his children the extremely wicked men, but would not call his father." (H. Leo Boles, *Biographical Sketches of Gospel Preachers*.)

On his twenty-first birthday in 1862, Holbrook enlisted in the Confederate Army. He loyally supported the Southern cause, but was taken prisoner by the Union Army on December 16, 1864, the second day of the Battle of Nashville. He was held in the infamous Camp Douglas prison at Chicago, Illinois, known at the time as "Eighty Acres of Hell." There he remained until the war was over. After being mustered out of the army, he returned to his home near Centerville, Tennessee, "almost without clothes, seventy-five dollars in debt, and penniless." F. D. Srygley describes the occasion: "It was too late in the spring to plant a crop when he got home; so he borrowed two dollars and a coat and married a girl 'who had nothing but a pure heart and a good stock of religion.'"

Margaret, the young woman Holbrook married, was "a sweet girl" that he had courted before enlisting

in the army. During the war she learned the truth and obeyed the gospel. Now being a devout Christian, she began teaching him the way of the Lord and through her godly influence he was baptized by E. A. Land soon after the war. Land was then preaching in Hickman County where he and Margaret then lived. With hard work and good judgment, they managed to buy a small farm and accumulated some property. As a farmer, he provided for himself and Margaret, but he was anxious for his neighbors and relatives to learn the truth and began preaching the gospel as best he could. He had no money for books and there were no well-informed preachers in his neighborhood with whom he could associate or who could provide the kind of help he needed.

Boles says that without other helps, the young preacher "was forced to study the New Testament. He did this, and within a few years no other preacher in that country knew more of the word of God than did J. H. Holbrook." "By hard work and close economy" he reached the place where he could "live comfortably." But "his desire to preach was so great he could not feel satisfied to enjoy the fruit of his labors and live at ease." (F. D. Srygley, *Biographies and Sermons*.) While he grew in knowledge of the Bible, he saw the need of an education. After much prayer and with the consultation and encouragement of his good wife, they sold the farm and all they had gained by hard work so he could enroll at Mars' Hill College under T. B. Larimore. He remained there two years, preaching in North Alabama as he had opportunity. When he finished school in about 1875, he had nothing left in the way of property but a horse and buggy. But his at Larimore's feet were as a pearl of great price for which he gave up "all that he had."

Instead of returning to Tennessee, Holbrook and his wife started south from Florence on a preaching trip through Colbert, Franklin, Marion, and Fayette Counties. It is believed by some that Joe Holbrook had relatives living in the vicinity of New River in Fayette County where they settled and began farming to support themselves as he preached throughout Northwest Alabama. As his reputation grew, he held meetings also in Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. But his main field of labor was in Alabama where he lived for sixteen years.

While Holbrook preached extensively, baptizing and starting churches in nearly every section where he preached, he did so at great sacrifice. He made a trip in 1890 through northern Mississippi that lasted three weeks. During this time he preached in five places "to large and attentive congregations" and met "many

good brothers and sisters.” These fine people showed their appreciation to Holbrook by “rewarding” him enough to pay his expenses plus “twenty cents” a day to take home. This disconcerting turn of events was compounded upon his return to New River to find that his wife “had just fed away the last feed corn.” He wrote a letter to F. D. Srygley describing his condition at the time. The letter was not intended for publication but Srygley printed it in the *Gospel Advocate*, perhaps to shame the “generous” brethren in their support of the gospel.

After telling about his trip and what he found when he returned home, Holbrook said: “Then I sat down and thought, and thought, and thought.... I thought of my family, and about dying and leaving them, and how they would make out after my death. Then I thought of the value of souls and of my duty, and of the shortness of time; and of the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell; and then of the rich man and Lazarus. And I thought of what I saw while I was gone, at the same place where I preached, and where I had preached several times before. While I was there people gave more to see a man wrestle with a bear than I had received for preaching in five months. And then how they insisted on my coming back, and then I thought I would go on and preach the gospel and try to save my soul. Then I wished for a bear so I could make something for my family. Then I thought I would write and tell you what I thought, and what my wife thought, and how she wanted me to go on and preach, and promised never to complain, and how it encouraged me.” (*Gospel Advocate*, May 14, 1890.)

A short time before this, it was reported in the *Gospel Advocate* that J. H. Holbrook of New River, Alabama, had the misfortune of losing his only horse by death. He had made plans to spend the year in evangelistic work in destitute fields. An appeal was made for brethren to “come speedily to his relief.” The writer spoke of Holbrook being “a worthy man and a good preacher” who had spent his life preaching in destitute places mainly at his own expense and “at great sacrifice of the comforts and even the necessities of life. We trust that he will be able to continue this good work.” (*Ibid.*, Jan. 29, 1890.) As soon as Holbrook saw the report in the *Advocate*, he wrote disclaiming any desire for help in replacing his horse. He said the loss was “almost irreparable” and he was grateful “a thousand times” for the kindness shown by the paper. Then he added: “I think I can get along without making a public appeal for help, and it is so humiliating to me to ask the brethren for help. I hope you will make no more mention of me in the *Advocate*.” (*Ibid.*, Feb. 5, 1890.) Holbrook also added that Brother John McCaleb had proposed the loan of a

mule until he could do better.

While the *Advocate* promised to say no more about the Holbrooks’ loss, Margaret Holbrook wrote two subsequent letters to the paper. In the first she said: “I am not going to give up. If the Lord will only bless us with common health, I hope we will be able to do more for our blessed Lord than we have ever done before. It may be for our good to suffer loss. When we see earthly things fast passing away, we draw nearer to God, ever trusting in him. Mr. Holbrook is off on a trip to Walker County, though not very well. It is as you say, We are laboring in a hard place, but the power of the gospel is needed here if anywhere. You know the cause has been long established here, but not faithfully practiced. If we would only go to work in earnest, all of us, the cause of Christ would run and be gloried. Did you ever know of anyone who was in the habit of reading the Bible every day and of carrying everything to God in prayer, ever going astray?” In another letter published the same month in the *Advocate*, Margaret wrote to say that some money had been received. She said: “We will buy a horse pretty soon if the Lord wills.” They did and the Lord’s work continued.

While much could be written about the life and work of J. H. Holbrook, the focus here is on his wife Margaret. What would, or could, he have done without her? She brought him to the Savior, encouraged him to preach the gospel, agreed to sell their farm and property for his education at Mars’ Hill, stood by him during the hardships of his pioneer preaching in Northwest Alabama, and only left him when her body was worn out in the Lord’s service. She died in 1891 soon after they moved to Levy County, Florida, because of their failing health. Her tombstone reads: “Margaret E., wife of J. H. Holbrook, Born Nov. 13, 1841, Died Sept. 22, 1891, ‘Asleep in Jesus, blessed sleep, From which none ever wake to weep.’” It may very well have read: “A girl who had nothing but a pure heart and a good stock of religion.” In writing about Margaret Holbrook’s influence, Flavil Nichols said: “Only eternity can reveal the total results of the conversion of that one girl nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. The results are not yet all in! But this shows that TWENTY-ONE THOUSAND people have become Christians through this single thread in the fabric of her influence.” (Flavil Nichols, *The Newsletter*, c. 2004.) *Winfield*

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“PARSON” GEORGE RICKS—From Slave to Servant of God

Frank Richey

The story of “Parson” George Ricks is one of a man overcoming almost insurmountable odds. George Ricks was born a slave and died a landowner, respected citizen and admired gospel preacher. George was born in 1825, about the time his master, Abraham Ricks, moved into what is now Colbert County, Alabama and began construction on his plantation in the Spring Valley community known as “The Oaks.”

Abraham Ricks was born October 16, 1791 in Halifax County, North Carolina. He married his first cousin, Charlotte B. Forte. Abraham and Charlotte Ricks moved to Alabama about 1820 with thirty other families, bringing all their possessions including slaves. They lived on property they purchased in Lawrence County, Alabama for a while and then moved to Colbert County in 1825. At this time the Ricks’ began construction of “The Oaks”. The house was completed in 1832 and still stands today as an example of an early plantation home. Abraham Ricks owned about 10,000 acres of land and 300 slaves. He was also the principal owner of a new investment at that time—a railroad. The Tuscumbia, Courtland & Decatur Railroad was the first railroad in the south. Stretching about forty miles from Tuscumbia to Decatur, this railroad served the need of transportation between the communities where river traffic on the Tennessee River was impossible due to the shoals in the Tennessee River between Elk River and Cypress Creek.

Abraham Ricks was a Christian, having obeyed the gospel before coming to Alabama. Evidently interested in spiritual matters, Abraham provided for the slaves on his plantation an opportunity to develop spiritually and to worship God without hindrance from outsiders. His son, Abraham Ricks Jr., was sent to be educated by Alexander Campbell and the outstanding faculty of Bethany College in Bethany, Virginia. He graduated “First Class of Merit” in 1848. He was a classmate of the famous gospel preacher, J. W. McGarvey.

Ricks was concerned about the treatment of slaves on his property. His granddaughter, Miss Bertie Ricks reminisced about her family at “The Oaks” in an article published in 1936, written by Shartie Lane. She lived at “The Oaks” until her death in 1960. She stated that her grandfather “was a kind man and a level headed practical business man.” She said he was “a lenient master and his servants were devoted to him. He had overseers about the plantation but he never allowed them to whip the slaves.” She said her grandfather did whip one slave for brutally beating his wife and another who threatened his (Abraham Ricks) wife, Charlotte. She said “my grandfather never separated a man and his wife and my father never sold any of his slaves.”

Bertie Ricks also stated that the slaves “were all well fed, clothed and housed. The old plantation used to ring with their laughter and their songs. And they were happy for many of them have told me so. Indeed one old man cried when freedom came and begged my father not to free him.” She also said that Abraham Ricks gave each of the slaves “an acre of ground to make a crop of their own and to do with the proceeds as they pleased.” This is said not to justify slavery, but to point out that slaves at “The Oaks” fared much better than the slaves at most other plantations.

Charlotte Ricks was a special lady. She was described as an unusually lovable character, and an angel of mercy. Her obituary which appeared in the March 26, 1874 issue of the North Alabamian newspaper (whose editor was Captain A. H. Keller, father of Helen Keller), and was one of the longest obituaries ever printed by the paper. The article spoke extensively for her love for and ability to grow flowers. The obituary went on to say, “She was truly a ministering angel to her family and friends. Possessing a mind unusually bright, a clear judgment, and a heart that knew not evil. Every virtue found a home in her heart, and made her loved and lovely.” The obituary extolled her virtues in many areas, including hospitality, stating, “For two generations her name has been the synonym of hospitality in this community. And where has such hospitality ever been excelled?”

Charlotte Rick’s concern for others extended to the slaves on the plantation. Her granddaughter said, “Many of our servants were taught to read and write, and my grandmother would teach the little house Negroes the Catechism on Sundays after she had sent them home for their mothers to bathe and dress them.”

It was probably in these Bible classes that a young George Ricks developed a love for the Word of God and determined to become a gospel preacher. Later, as a man, George Ricks would become a leader in the black community, loved and respected by both races. It was probably at the feet of Charlotte Ricks that George learned to read and write.

It is not known when the church on “The Oaks” began. The sign in front of the present building states 1832. If this is the case, the Christian Home Church of Christ is the oldest Church of Christ in Colbert and Franklin County. (Franklin County was divided into Colbert and Franklin after the Civil War.) This would also be one of oldest churches of Christ built by and owned by black brethren anywhere in the country. There is evidence that the slaves were meeting on the plantation in the years prior to the Civil War. However, the first known meetinghouse was a log building built

by Abraham Ricks, Jr. This building would have probably been built after the death of Abraham Ricks, Sr. in 1852.

George Ricks was a hard worker. A marker at the Ricks Cemetery where George is buried states that he was “a slave to Abraham Ricks (and) he became the first black land owner in North Alabama by planting cotton on Saturday evenings and picking it by the moon light.” He sold his cotton and with the proceeds bought fifty-three acres of land. His landholding would increase by another seventy acres. He was the first African-American to pay property taxes in Franklin County, Alabama.

George Ricks’ love for the truth motivated him to preach the gospel. Brother Ricks traveled extensively to preach, riding on a bay mule to preaching appointments. Some of his preaching appointments were over one hundred miles away. The History of the Tuscumbia Church of Christ states that “Parson” George Ricks, in 1880, preached for the Rock Creek Church of Christ, near Tuscumbia, Alabama. This is the church that had its beginning in 1868 under the influence of James Srygley, the father of F. B. and F. D. Srygley, famous preachers after the Civil War. This would have been highly unusual for a black man to preach in a “white” church. Evidently, Ricks was so respected among the white brethren, that he was allowed to speak.

“Parson” George was usually accompanied by Albert Eggleston on his many preaching trips. When asked why he went with Brother Ricks, Eggleston said that George was a plain spoken man and feared that George might be attacked by his hearers. Eggleston said, “I went along to do his fighting for him!” Although Eggleston heard the gospel preached many times, he never obeyed it. He did request that Marshall Keeble, well-known black preacher in Churches of Christ, speak at this funeral. Brother Keeble honored his request, coming to the CME church in Tuscumbia, Alabama to speak at his funeral. Mr. Eggleston died in 1950 at about the age of 100 years.

“Parson” George began preaching about 1867 or 1868. At this time, the church meeting on “The Oaks” was undergoing a financial crisis. Even though Miss Bertie Ricks reported that her father, Abraham Ricks, Jr., had built the building, there must have been indebtedness for the building materials owed by the members of the Christian Home Church of Christ. The Rick’s family experienced economic devastation from the war. Mrs. Charlotte Ricks told how the Yankees had taken off all her mules and horses. She said Abe (Abraham, Jr.) was plowing with steers but she had nothing to plow with, but intended to put her cows to the plow as soon as she could get them broke. Charlotte Ricks said she might as well laugh as cry

over her troubles. The slave labor was gone and also the work animals. A once profitable plantation of 10,000 acres was reduced to what could be plowed by family members without animals broken to the plow. In these hard economic times, cash was hard to come by.

This scarcity of cash and probable “call of debt” prompted “Parson” George to take the leadership in securing money to pay off the debt on the church building. On December 20, 1867, he wrote a letter to the Gospel Advocate soliciting help to pay for the newly constructed house of worship on the old plantation. Evidently, he asked the help of a Christian, Dr. Edmund Chisholm of Tuscumbia, brother of Dr. L. C. Chisholm (who had recently moved to Nashville, Tennessee) to construct the letter or write it for him in Ricks’ name. The letter printed in the January 2, 1868 issue of the Gospel Advocate is as follows:

Letter from a Colored Brother—Help Wanted.
Tuscumbia, Ala., Dec. 20, 1867.

“Dr Chisholm: —After saying howdy to you, I will state that I am doing very well, preaching at my old mistress Ricks’, and have about fifty members, and at my last baptising (sic), which was this day three weeks ago, I baptised (sic) three members into the church of Christ. So you see we are well with the excepting of need of money. We have not yet paid for our church-house. Supposing that a there may be some colored brethren in the vicinity in which you live belonging to the Christian ranks, who are not so poor as we are, and who are willing to devote a small amount, be it ever so little, I write to give you the fact that we are in need of money to pay the amount we are behind on our church-house. Will you please show this also to the white brethren—Brother Fanning and others, and ask their aid in the matter? If you can do anything for us, we will be thankful. Howbeit, let me hear immediately, say by Christmas, what you have done for us.”

“Direct your letter to me in care of your brother, Dr. Ed. Chisholm, at Tuscumbia. We are obliged to raise as much as twenty or twenty-five dollars by Christmas, if we possibly can. I hope and trust you will be successful enough to do it.

Yours in Christ, George Ricks”

David Lipscomb immediately responded by saying:

“We have the assurance from Brother Chisholm and others that Brother Geo. Ricks is a most worthy, unassuming brother, and is doing a good and faithful work for the Lord and his people. We learn the Church at Franklin College has furnished Brother George with the amount he asks for immediately, but other small remittances, as above, to Dr. E. Chisholm would be most worthily appropriated. We are very anxious to aid

all efforts to Christianize and elevate the negro and prepare him for living usefully here and hereafter.”

“Parson” George is mentioned again in the Gospel Advocate, this time in the April 29, 1885 issue. He was visiting or preaching in the Nashville area and came by the Gospel Advocate office. Brother Lipscomb wrote:

“Eld. Joe (sic, evidently meant Geo.) Ricks, (colored) of Spring Valley, Ala., gave us a call last week. He has been preaching about seventeen years during which time he has baptized about 300 hundred (sic) persons. His home congregation, Christian Home, Colbert county (sic), Ala., numbers 96 members and besides him there are six preachers. There is also a church at Fayetteville, Talladaga county (sic), with 49 members that Bro. Ricks has been mainly instrumental in building up.”

From humble beginnings, the little church on “The Oaks” plantation grew from Bible classes taught by Charlotte Ricks to the point of having a building in which to meet. George Ricks gave an acre of his property to the church for the construction of the building. The Christian Home Church of Christ now had a place to meet. Miss Bertie Ricks said, “Later, sometime before the Civil War, my father built a little log church for his Negroes and as it was the first church of that kind established among the Negroes they named it the ‘Mother church’ and those that have been established since are called the ‘Branches’. My father let his servants hold their services to suit themselves. They could preach, shout and sing as much as they wished so long as they conducted themselves with decorum and no one was allowed to molest them or to go there in derision. The land was donated by a slave of my father’s who accumulated quite a bit of property nearby after the war. Taught by my father as best he knew, this Negro was the preacher until his death and was much revered among his own people and highly respected among the white.”

This “much revered and highly respected negro preacher was “Parson” George Ricks. A man, who by hard work, secured his own property, gained an education, and became a gospel preacher.

The building of the Christian Home Church of Christ was also used as a gathering place for the residents of the community and as a schoolhouse for many years, where grades kindergarten through the ninth grade had classes. Ms. Opheia Coffee served as teacher before 1931. In that year, Ms. Beatrice Sykes became the teacher. After a couple of years, Virginia Mayes became the teacher. In 1934, Lizzie Steele came and taught for one year. Lastly, Joe Griffins’ mother taught until 1937 when the school closed. Some of the

students of the Rick’s School were Sadie Cobb, Abie Sledge, Frankie Mullins Davis, Alfred Mullins, Gladys Mullins, Marvin Ricks, Susan McClam, J. B. and Ellis Marvin, George D. Sledge, Rosie Vinson, Emma Jean King-White, Mattie Crawley-Gunn, and Otelia Long.

In the 1940’s, the old log cabin where the saints met at Christian Home Church of Christ was showing signs of age. The floors rotted, and time, termites, and weather took its toll on the old building. Brother Fred Ricks Sr., with the help of his son, Fred Jr., and his daughters, Mildred Ricks Smith, and Lois Ricks King, began to gather rocks and stones from nearby fields to raise the floor, and then concrete was laid for a more permanent foundation. Percy Ricks, Fred Ricks Sr., Fred Ricks, Jr., John Lee Ricks, and Rave Randolph worked to build the block structure that stands today. The old building’s roof and ceiling were retained in the new structure.

Brother T. W. Rucks (1896-1984) carried on services every 4th Sunday after leaving High Street church of Christ in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Brother Rucks was born in Wilson County, Tennessee and attended public school in Lebanon, Tennessee. He attended Nashville Christian Institute and later attended International Bible College. He began his preaching career in Nashville in 1920. He moved to Florence, Alabama in 1933 and became the minister of the East Alabama Street Church of Christ which is now the Westside Church of Christ. Brother Rucks also served as minister at High Street, Christian Home, Cherokee Church of Christ, and Reedtown Church of Christ. He continued to preach at Christian Home until his death. He would catch the bus from Tuscumbia to the old store on Highway 20, and brother Fred Ricks, Sr. would meet him in a wagon pulled by a team of mules, and bring him to the building at Christian Home.

When brother Rucks died, the services at Christian Home Church of Christ ceased. However, the church has begun to meet again in recent years with Brother John Smalley as the preacher. Brother Smalley’s wife, Delores Long Smalley, is a direct descendant of “Parson” George Ricks. Another descendant of George Ricks, Percy Ricks, helped this writer with research for this article.

From his labors in establishing and building up the Christian Home Church of Christ in the Spring Valley community of Colbert County, Alabama, on what is known as “The Oaks” plantation, several churches of Christ have been established in North Alabama. So many churches came from the Christian Home Church of Christ, that Christian Home became known as The Mother Church. The Mother Church gave birth to several congregations. These include High Street Church of Christ in Tuscumbia, Cherokee Church of Christ in Cherokee, Sterling Boulevard Church of Christ

in Sheffield, Westside Church of Christ in Leighton, Reedtown Church of Christ in Russellville, and a church at Fayetteville in Talladega, Alabama.

When "Parson" George died, an obituary appeared in The Leighton News, Friday, January 1, 1909. The obituary said:

Rev. George Ricks

A Tribute to a Faithful Colored Man.

"Rev. George Ricks, colored, seventy-three years of age, died December 25, 1908. As the angels of God sang out on the Christmas air, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men,' the summons came to him—"Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"He laid down his cross and took up his crown."

"Parson George, as he was familiarly known, like Joshua, was a good fighter for the right. His characteristics were honesty, truthfulness, generosity, freedom of religious thought, and faith in the eternal God. Early in life, he began work in his Master's vineyard. He was never happier than on the Sabbath days when he could gather his people together to sing the songs of Zion and tell of Jesus and His love."

"He has sung his last doxology, but to his flock and large family of sons and daughters, weep not, but walk in his footsteps, so on the other shore you may clasp hands and sing hallelujah."

"Parson" George Ricks was a great servant of God. From humble beginnings to highly respected community and church leader, George Ricks is a man to whom honor is due.

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CARRYING THE MAIL FOR CHRIST

EARL KIMBROUGH

No, Christ did not authorize the apostles to oversee any mail routes, nor is his church involved in delivering the mail. Nevertheless, Joseph H. Holbrook of New River, Alabama, might for a time, have been justly called "a mail carrier for Christ." After studying the Bible under T.B. Larimore at Mars' Hill College, Holbrook bought a farm at New River and farmed there to support his family, while he preached the gospel throughout the counties of Northwest Alabama, as he had opportunity.

This was in the 1870s and 1880s, when there was bitter enmity against those who pleaded for the Bible alone. Every device of the devil was employed by opponents of the truth to prevent those like Holbrook from teaching the people. He, like his brethren, had to be resourceful in finding some means to overcome such strong opposition. One method gospel preachers sometimes used to reach the people was to get into a religious discussion with someone on a busy street corner in a small town, usually on a Saturday. Very soon others would gather around them until there was a crowd of perhaps two or three dozen persons listening as the preacher taught the word of God. By this means some would learn the truth that might not be reached by any other manner.

Holbrook told F.B. Srygley that once, during the winter, he took the contract to carry the mail from New River to Fayette Court House, a distance of about ten miles, just so he could teach the gospel there. Srygley said: "He made one trip a week, and started early Saturday morning, and was enabled to spend several hours in Fayette. He told me that he had tried to get a chance to preach there, but they would not let him have the use of any meetinghouse; so he took the job that he might teach the truth on the streets and in the stores in private conversations." Saturday, in those days, was the time when farmers and others came to town in large numbers with little to do after tending to any business they might have to transact. These idle souls provided Holbrook with a reservoir of prospects for the gospel. Srygley did not say, but it would be interesting to know, how many of the early Christians in Fayette County learned the way of salvation because J. H. Holbrook contracted with Uncle Sam to "carry the mail for Christ."

Be Sure To Check Your Renewal Date

Uncle Isaac Sez

Earl I. West passed from this life to his eternal reward a few weeks ago. Brother West was one of our best historians and writers of restoration history. Among his several books are his monumental volumes titled "The Search For The Ancient Order." These works, especially the first two volumes, are classics and should



be read by every new testament Christian. One cannot help but be thrilled as West tells of the struggles against the entrenched foes of biblical truth and the great battles that were fought for and won by the pioneers as they fought against these enemies of the divine plan. The reader of these great works, comes away

realizing that while the battles were won, the war continues and these same battles must be fought again and again and by every generation or else the enemies will overwhelm the forces of truth.

In closing his second volume, West observes, "But there has never been a time when the church did not have problems. After the present generation is dead, there will still be others. But, whatever their nature, these are principles that will guide the church on safe ground if the church but remembers them. In light of this we can think of no words to serve as a more fitting close for this volume than those spoken by F.G. Allen a few years before his death. `While we remain true to the principles on which we started out, there is no earthly power that can impede our progress. But the day we leave these walls and go out to take counsel with the world, will mark the day of our decline. We have nothing to fear from without. Our only danger lies in the direction of indifference and compromise. While we are true to God in the maintenance of these principles, the divine blessing will be upon our work. But should they ever be surrendered, ruin will as certainly follow as that the Bible is true'" (II:462-463).Amen, and amen!

Never has there been a time when these words are more appropriate than today. We are seeing the Lord's Church literally swallowed up in a cesspool of denominationalism as many of our leaders stand by and watch the disaster unfold, often with their blessings. The rush by many to embrace every denominational concept and new idea and some that have plagued us for centuries, is appalling. Respect for and regard for the authority found in holy writ and for a "thus saith the Lord" for everything we do, seems to be an idea whose time has passed.. If brethren continue down this road, as bro, Allen says, ruin will certainly follow.

I am reminded of the quotation, by whom I know not, that implores that "If we don't know our history, we

are doomed to repeat it." Every battle that faithful Christians face today has been fought and dealt with before. Every single one. If we only know our history we can avoid these pitfalls. It is clear that many Christians have not read West's volumes and sadly and more importantly, it is even more apparent that they have not studied and are not familiar with God's inspired history of his people through the ages. For the unlearned, that book is known as the Bible....

A recent article in a Texas newspaper pointed out that a biology professor at one of "our Christian universities" was teaching that evolution did not conflict with the Holy Scriptures. I sent the article to a preacher friend and the following was part of his response."The only evolution that I know of that certainly exists is that many churches of Christ and most of their schools of higher learning are evolving into something unknown in the Word of God. Many so-called Christians don't have a clue as to what New Testament Christianity is about. These religious liberals have made dance classes, entertainment, fun and recreation their god. Jehovah must surely feel left out of worship. Worship has evolved from the adoration of Deity, to the fulfillment of man's desire for a good time. The cry of the hedonists, "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die" seems to be the new mantra of many members of churches of Christ. The number of those denying the authority of the Holy Scriptures is becoming legion. They teach that there are no absolutes—no right or wrong as related to worship and practice of religion.

We now see many of these churches of Christ abandoning the teaching of baptism for remission of sins and a cappella worship services. Replacing these biblical teachings are the new teachings—God loves all mankind and you can come to God without being baptized for remission of sins and that God doesn't care if we use instrumental music or not in worship. The argument is "God didn't say not too." This kind of argumentation is a guarantee of digression from the truth."

How far will it go? Dear Lord, I never dreamed Your Church would be in such a mess."

Former U.S. Senator Fred Thompson of Tennessee was born in Florence, Alabama. His new book, "Teaching A Pig To Dance" was recently reviewed by Wilson Adams in Biblical Insights magazine. The following excerpt from the review, taken from the chapter--"Gimme That Ole-Time Religion" tells of Thompson's growing up in Lawrenceburg, TN and attending the First Street Church of Christ in the fifties and early sixties, and how the church helped shape his conservative views. The following is from the book as quoted by Adams:

"I guess I was a strict [constitutional] constructionist at an early age. In the Church of Christ, we wholeheartedly agreed with this concept. Except it was the Bible that was to be strictly construed...It was pretty simple really.

You did what the Bible told you, and you followed the example of early Christians. The scriptures told us to believe, repent, and be baptized. As a kid, while I had considerable difficulties with the English language in school, I learned at least one word of Greek--baptizo--which means 'immersion...'. The scriptures definitely did not refer to being 'sprinkled...'. So at age 13, I walked down the isle (sic) one Wednesday night and was baptized...

"By the same token, the early Christians were told to sing and make melody in their hearts. There was no mention of instrumental music. So we had none. Neither did we have a choir...."

"Every Church of Christ was self-sufficient and independent. The elders of each church elected the preacher and supervised the flock. We had fellowship with other congregations but no centralized authority, regional council, or conference to answer to..."

"At the First Street Church of Christ, the message from the pulpit was not subtle. For years I had no idea what the preacher was talking about, but I knew that it was serious business...There was a Heaven and there was a Hell, and the preacher could explain in excruciating detail why Hell was not the better choice."

Adams quotes Thompson as noting that for the most part the preachers in his growing up years had to "move their families from pillar to post," and were good men who were dedicated to preaching the gospel. "Many of them were exceptional orators...and several had a good sense of humor." Thompson mentions that two gospel preachers with which his family had especially close ties were Rufus Clifford and Weldon Warnock.

"As I look back on those early Lawrenceburg years growing up in what some might call a fundamentalist church, I am struck by how much has stayed with me and become a part of the way that I view life, even after my sojourns in Washington, Hollywood, and New York..."

I don't know Thompson's relationship with the Lord's Church today, but from his statements, he knows more about the church and its work and organization than many active church members today. Sad, sad.....

I note where one of our local churches of Christ is having a "Community outreach health & wellness symposium." Boy, is that a mouthful. Whoever "thunk" that one up must have had a copy of Noah Webster's latest nearby. Probably one of our Drs. Of Divinity. I can't figure what this is all about, but I'd almost be willing to wager that this congregation hasn't had a gospel meeting in a while. No time or interest in preaching the gospel, but will probably "pack'em in for the wellness tomfoolery. My, my....."

This may be the same crowd that recently advertised their Sunday morning worship service as

"Praise in the park." Your old every Sunday morning worship service ain't jazzy enough, I guess. Nothing like celebrating the Lord's death, burial and resurrection with a rousing softball game and an old fashion barbecue in the park.....Remember, God wants us to be happy.....

See where one of the churches in Montgomery has a "Church of Christ Band that performs for the good brethren from time to time. They are also available to perform for various denominational groups. Plays hymns and gospel songs. Sort of a "Have Church of Christ Band, Will Travel" concept. It appears that one of the "shepherds" travels with them, I suppose to make sure everything is done according to the Holy Writ. Must be scriptural, don't you know....."

A Definition of Gender Justice

" In general, gender justice means recognizing that men and women are created by God, redeemed by Christ, and gifted by the Spirit truly without distinction or partiality. In Christian community, gender justice means encouraging both men and women to exercise their Spirit-given gifts in the church's work, worship, and leadership, and celebrating the truth that the Spirit grants such gifts without respect to gender. Concretely, gender justice in the Church of Christ includes opening traditionally masculine leadership roles and activities (deacon, elder, minister, worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc.) to women, and encouraging men to discover and cultivate their gifts for activities traditionally performed by women."

Folks, if this don't crank your tractor, the same shall go uncranked. These misguided souls want to jump off the cliff and they want to take us all with them. They wouldn't be happy building their own sandbox to play in, they want to destroy the work of generations of Godly men and women and the Lord's precious body in the process. It is the ultimate in selfishness. All of this without regard to God's Holy Word.....Oh me!

Meanwhile, a congregation in New Jerusalem, Tennessee, is really into the pagan holidays. For instance, the good folks all gather at the church building on Ash Wednesday and participate in the celebration of this "Holy day" by singing praises "cantoring" style, prayer and smearing their foreheads with ashes, after which one of the "shepherds" blesses the one being smeared. Wonder if the "shepherd" wears a "beanie" and if any "ring kissing" goes on. If this catches on, Josh says he is going to apply for the job of "Ash Smearer." Says he has some in mind that he will really enjoy "smearing up," if he can find a "beanie." Come to think of it, I know a few I'd like to dump a few ashes on. I'm still pondering this "cantoring" business. I always thought the cantor had ro be a "Rabbi." I guess it'd be ok as long as he's a Jew.....

Lord, please come quickly.....Isaac.....

“EIGHTY ACRES OF HELL”

Earl Kimbrough

Joseph H. Halbrook was one of the heroic pioneer preachers of Northwest Alabama after the Civil War. In about 1889, F.D. Srygley said: “J.H. Halbrook ... has preached extensively through Fayette, Lamar, Tuscaloosa, Walker, Marion, Lawrence, Franklin and Colbert counties, in Alabama.” (F.D. Srygley, *Smiles and Tears*.) Born in Perry County, Tennessee, December 14, 1841, Halbrook enlisted in the Confederate army in 1862, the day he turned twenty-one. He was engaged in the Battle of Nashville, a two-day battle fought in Middle Tennessee, December 15 and 16, 1864. Gen. John Bell Hood, even after suffering great losses in the Battle of Franklin proceeded to Nashville where he encountered the union army under Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, and suffered more terrible losses (4,462 casualties to the Union’s 2,140.) Hood was severely beaten and retreated to Tupelo, Mississippi, where he resigned his commission.

Halbrook was taken prisoner by Union forces on December 16, 1864, the second day of the Battle of Nashville, and was sent north as a prisoner of war. He spent the last months of the war incarcerated in the infamous federal prison at Camp Douglas in Chicago. The camp was on the estate of the late Sen. Stephen A. Douglas, which the government took after the senator’s death in 1861. Built as a training camp, the facility very soon became a prison, where Confederates were housed and tortured for their part in the rebellion. During the last three years of the war, 18,000 Southern soldiers were held at Camp Douglas, including Sam Houston, Jr. and Henry M. Stanley, the African explorer.

Almost from the beginning of Camp Douglas as a prison, there was overcrowding, starvation, scurvy, and a lack of medical attention. This, along with the premeditated abuse, made it a place of living torment. The death toll for the camp during the last three years of the war has been estimated to have been as many as 6,129 men, about a third of the entire prison population. The prison was as bad as notorious Andersonville, the Confederate prison in Georgia, but only in recent years has the truth about it come to light. There was such great fear of insurrection the prisoners were not only closely guarded by 450 union soldiers, but they were deliberately kept in a weakened and miserable state. The Southerners were so badly treated that the camp soon earned what many considered a fitting sobriquet, “Eighty Acres of Hell.”

Today the site of Camp Douglas is covered by the Lake Meadows condominiums with no indication that the place had once been a Federal camp that bore what many believed was a resemblance to the devil’s final abode. The only reminder of the camp’s connection with the Civil War is

the nearby monument of Stephen A. Douglas. Richard Linberg, in his book, *Return to the Scene of the Crime*, says, “the monument is the last visible reminder of Chicago’s hidden role in the War Between the States.”

Little is known of Halbrook’s experience in Camp Douglas, but he was fortunate in that he was held there for only a few months. He returned home after his release at the war’s end “almost without clothes, seventy-five dollars in debt, and penniless.” (Ibid.) But, as we know, neither his biographers, nor Halbrook himself, made reference in print to his experience in the disgraceful prison. Like many who suffered in the war, he perhaps learned to overcome its ghastly memories by not discussing what happened. But he survived imprisonment to become perhaps one of the most successful and sacrificing gospel preachers of Northwest Alabama during the latter third of the nineteenth century. Some time after the war, he enrolled in T.B. Larimore’s Mars’ Hill College and sitting at the feet of that great and pious man of God not only helped prepare him to preach the word, but, perhaps, helped to heal any emotional wounds that lingered from his prison ordeal. Halbrook spent the last years of his life in Florida where he died and is buried.

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HAL P. McDONALD- The Man Who Dreamed The Impossible Dream Larry Whitehead

Hallie Peyton McDonald was born in Bell County, Texas, on November 13, 1879. He was baptized in 1893 and determined while a teenager, to become a gospel preacher. In 1905, he entered Southwestern Christian College in Denton, Texas where he attended for two years. He married Hattie Belle Rainwater on December 31, 1902. He later said that he "selected" Hattie when she was ten and married her when she was twenty. He preached on a regular basis in Texas and supported himself and his wife by teaching in the public schools of Texas. After several years, both McDonald and his wife enrolled in Georgie Robertson (Freed-Hardeman) College where they both graduated.



Hal P. McDonald - 1906 In 1914, he moved to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania where he taught, it is believed, at a college in Pittsburg. While living in Pittsburg, he was hired, on the recommendation of Gus Dunn, to become the second President of Alabama Christian College of Berry, Alabama. He accepted and began his duties in June 1916. He served the school as president until it closed in 1922. Thus began his long relationship with the people of Fayette County, Alabama. He spent the rest of his life in the county.

Early on, it was apparent that McDonald was an excellent teacher, liked and respected by the students. Though somewhat eccentric, he was a stern disciplinarian and an organizational genius. He was ahead of his time as a school administrator. He introduced the lectureship concept at Alabama Christian College before the idea was accepted at other schools operated by the brethren. He would bring to the campus at Berry, well known preachers from around the country for a week or two each year. These lectures would last all day each day of the period. Such men as C.M. Pullias, J.W. Shepherd, E.A. Elam, John T. Lewis, J.D. Tant and J.C. Mcquiddy were invited each year. These names were household names to members of the church in that day. The lectures were open to the public and were well received, both by the student body as well as the general public. Brother Asa Plyler related an occurrence while he was a student at the school. During one of the lectureships, brother J.C. McQuiddy was scheduled to speak at an afternoon session. He sent a telegram that morning, informing

McDonald that he would not be able to make the trip from Nashville. McDonald called young Asa into his office and informed him that he (Asa) would be speaking in the place of the noted J.C. McQuiddy. This was heady stuff for a 16 or 17 year-old. McDonald obviously had confidence in the young man and knew that his selection of him would instill self-confidence in the lad. His psychology paid dividends as Plyler became a great preacher. Under McDonald's leadership, the school gained an excellent reputation among the brethren for its high academic standards.

McDonald believed that young women should also prepare themselves for careers outside the home if they so desired. Consequently he introduced business courses for the young ladies as well as the young men. Young women could also train to become teachers. This was a new concept in that day as it was the custom that women would marry, raise a family and become homemakers. The idea of a career outside the home was almost unheard of.



Hal P. and Students-1920 There are a number of reasons, mostly economic, that Alabama Christian College of Berry closed its doors at the end of the 1922 session. World War I had an impact, as many of the young men left for the army. Another factor was the failure of the community to provide suitable accommodations for the male students. The young ladies had a dormitory but the young men had to find room and board among the populace. J.D. Tant worked to get a men's dormitory built but finally wrote in the *Gospel Advocate-October, 1922*, that he was not successful in his efforts.

McDonald evidently was bitterly disappointed that the school closed. He must have decided at that time to build another school in the area.

The Temple Of Knowledge

After the school at Berry closed, McDonald was without a job. He soon began to preach for the churches in the area. The church at Eldridge hired him to be an "outside evangelist." They purchased a tent and he began to hold protracted "tent" meetings around the County. He was successful in this endeavor and reported his successes in the *Gospel*

Advocate. The church at Cordova in Walker County did the same in following years with much the same result. Brother Leo Plyler remembers one of these tent meetings in his father's front yard in Walker County, when Leo was a child. All indications are that Hal P. was a hard working preacher as well as teacher. This was clearly evident by his success in his work among the people of the area. Clarence McCaleb, longtime elder at Berea, told this writer that he sat in McDonald's Bible classes and that he (McDonald) was an excellent Bible scholar and teacher. Others have made similar comments. In fact doing research for this article, I spoke to several who knew McDonald and all said that he was a man of tremendous ability, both as a gospel preacher and as a teacher.

The following announcement was made in the Gospel Advocate in early 1928. "*Hal P. McDonald, 81 Church Street, Pratt City, Ala., December 26: "I am now temporarily located in Birmingham and will be glad to work with congregations near here that need my services either for meetings or week-end appointments. I have a tent and can go any place that needs a meeting. I have just closed about twenty-two months' mission work with the congregations in Walker County, Ala., in which I held forty-one mission meetings, besides doing about nine months' local work among the churches. Several brethren who are ambitious to render Christian service by taking the leadership in mission places and who are starving for practical development in some congested center may find some good openings and opportunities in this territory. The sentiment for New Testament Christianity is growing and land is cheap, with good climate, water, and health."* GA - JANUARY 5, 1928. It is clear from the last two sentences, that he was promoting the area in northwest Alabama where he eventually settled.

Ford's Mountain is the only mountain in Fayette County. It rises over 500 ft. above the Sipsey River valley in the north central part of the county. The mountain is named for the writer's ancestor, Daniel Ford, who acquired the land in 1819. It is, even today, largely unsettled and wilderness. In the 1930s, the mountain was covered in dense forests of virgin timber. The writer's grandfather, Lum Ehl, who was born and raised on adjacent land and owned a part of the mountain, would regale me with stories of panthers screaming in the night and all kinds of wild animals roaming the wilderness mountain. He was born in 1876 and lived at the base of the mountain for over 60 years. It was into this setting that Hal P. McDonald made the decision that was the greatest mistake of his life.

It has been speculated that McDonald's wife inherited some land in Texas on which oil was

discovered in the late 1920s and that she received, for that time, sizable royalties. Hal P. & Hattie used some of her inheritance to purchase a thousand acres of mostly woodlands on top of Ford's mountain for the purpose of building a college on the property. The timber that was available likely played a part in McDonald's decision to locate the school there. Against all advice, he determined to move ahead with the project and he hired Asa Plyler's brother, Eli Plyler, to clear the land and build a sawmill to saw the timber with which to build the school. Henry Ehl, who now lives in Tampa, Florida, but was raised on a farm at the foot of Ford's mountain, worked at the sawmill in the summer and thus helped pay his way through Harding College.

When the first phase of the building was completed, an announcement was sent to several brotherhood papers and local newspapers. The following is a short excerpt from the announcement; *The school as proposed, seeks cooperation by ambitious thinkers of families, widows, orphans, boys and girls everywhere, also a New Home in a strategic location where appreciative citizens and students abound who not only like us, as well as we, like them, but delight to show an inviting welcome to the world's best from everywhere. DONATIONS OR GIFTS-WE ASK NOT.* (One gets the idea from this and other writings from McDonald, that he would seem to be more at home among the elite academicians in places such as New York and Chicago rather than a rural mountaintop in Fayette County, Alabama. His command of the King's English was impeccable.)

Thomas Perry, a descendant of the lamented Elisha Randolph, in his book "A Walk Across The Stage," a book about growing up in rural Fayette County, describes McDonald as an impressive speaker and a brilliant teacher. Perry continues,

"Hal P. McDonald, purchased 1,000 acres of land on top of Ford Mountain. He stated that he planned to build a college on the very top of the mountain. He built a small three-room house for his wife and himself He then began construction of a large three-story building to house the college. The building contained an auditorium, classrooms, a library, and on the top floor, a lookout room. From this room you could view almost the entire county in every direction.

Once the building was completed, Mr. McDonald set out to recruit students for the college. For the next twenty years he tried every possible way to recruit students.

He had pamphlets printed, he made hundreds of speeches, traveled far and near in an effort to enroll students in the college. Yet, in spite of all this effort, he never recruited a single student! No lesson of any

sort was ever taught inside the large building. Most folks considered Mr. McDonald to be eccentric or somewhat odd. He often walked the ten miles from the mountain to Fayette and back carrying pamphlets for distribution. Summer or winter he always wore a lightweight, or seersucker suit, and a wide tie. His long, white hair added to his distinguished look.

The college which he chose to call "The Temple of Knowledge" contained hundreds of books. They lined the shelves of the library. Thousands of visitors visited the college, mostly out of curiosity. Some came to see the man himself, and some to gain a glimpse of the view from the mountain.

Mr. McDonald died about 1960, I'm sure a sorely disappointed man that his lifelong dream of a Temple of Knowledge atop Ford Mountain never came into being. The buildings are now falling apart and wild animals and birds scamper about in the building of unfulfilled dreams.

I saw the man many times, heard him preach, and heard him make speeches. I truly am sorry that all his labor and his dreams came to naught."

Several years ago, I published Perry's comments in a genealogy journal and shortly thereafter I received a letter from Karen Manasco of Winfield, Alabama, informing me that her mother and her Uncle were both graduates of the school. She sent me copies of their diplomas, signed by Hal P. and Hattie McDonald. The story, that not a single student attended the school, is one of the myths surrounding the Temple of Knowledge, as at least two students graduated. Two students, however, do not a successful college make and the venture ultimately failed.

Adding to his woes, McDonald fell out of favor with some of the brethren in the late 1930s over an incident that occurred at the Parrish church in Walker County. It seems that the elders withdrew fellowship from a brother who had created serious problems in the church. The brother refused to accept the discipline and continued to attend the services and disrupt the meetings at each service. When some of the brethren attempted to eject him from the building, the situation became violent. The result was a lawsuit by the elders against the erring brother. Not being aware of the Biblical instructions governing such, the Judge asked John T. Lewis, Gus Nichols and Asa Plyler to be witnesses in support of the Parrish brethren. These brethren were stunned when they arrived in court, to find that Hal P. McDonald was supporting, as a witness, the erring brother. This created a breach between these men, who were three of the most influential preachers in North Alabama, and McDonald, that as far as this writer can determine, was never completely healed. The

prestige and respect that McDonald had enjoyed from his days as President of Alabama Christian College of Berry was damaged severely. Brethren Nichols and Plyler had been students of his at the school and had held him in high esteem. Their disassociation with him added to the problems he already faced in trying to get the Temple of Knowledge up and going as he lost their support and it would be difficult to make a success of the venture without their support.

When it became apparent that the school would not be the success he and Hattie hoped for, they began to conduct business classes in various towns in northwest Alabama. Places, such as Winfield, Hamilton, Jasper and others. This provided a meager living for the couple. Later, they opened a small business school in Fayette and a short time later, opened one in Jasper. The Jasper school was several miles from their home, so they rented an apartment and would stay there several nights a month. These schools offered courses in business, accounting, typing and stenography. Most of the students were young ladies seeking the necessary skills to fill jobs in the area. These ventures were somewhat successful, at least for a time.

There were times when Hal and Hattie found themselves penniless. Bess Bagwell, whose parents were friends of the McDonalds, told this writer that she could remember several times when her mother would give them food that they had grown on their farm near the Bankston community, located several miles south of Ford's Mountain. She has checks that her father wrote to McDonald, evidently to help the couple through a hard time.

During this time, McDonald became close friends with Marion Davis, a publisher of a monthly paper called "Truth In Love." McDonald would write an occasional article and in this way kept his name before the brethren, as the paper had a wide circulation. Davis was a well known song leader and hymnal publisher. He would serve as the Executor of McDonald's estate at his death. Hal P. edited the last two hymnals that Davis published.

He continued to preach whenever the opportunity arose and conducted Bible classes often. He likely considered the Hubbertville church as his home congregation. He had been involved in its beginning. Later, he attended the church in Fayette.

Hal P. considered himself somewhat of a chemist. On the property he had purchased, was a section of red clay that was unique to the area. He developed a process of chemically treating the clay, making it hard and brittle. Using this process, he made tiles for the floors in their home and the school. His plans were to commercialize the process and

talked of “making bricks without the expensive kiln baking process that was, and still is being used. Over time the tiles deteriorated and returned to their natural state. Thus, this venture was not successful.

He then decided to turn the buildings into a commercial sewing factory. Norma Nabors visited the McDonalds with her parents and saw the many sewing machines on the premises. Evidently this venture was also unsuccessful. Norma’s father was in the insurance business and suggested to Hal that he “was getting on in years” and should purchase a burial policy. Hal refused and flippantly remarked that “the blackbirds would take care of him.” Hattie secretly bought policies on both.

Hattie’s health began to deteriorate in the late 1940s and she passed away in 1953, leaving Hal P. alone to continue his work. She had been his partner in life and shared his dreams for 50 years. The two had labored side by side to try and make their dream of a “Christian” school a reality for the people of northwest Alabama. Sadly, it was not to be. Hal would live another 5 years. One must wonder at the strength of the man, living a lonely existence on the mountain in the home he and Hattie shared for so many years. He continued to operate the business school in Jasper and it was one of the nights when he was returning, that he was involved in an automobile accident that cost him his life. His body was shipped to Texas where he rests beside Hattie as they await the great day. I was told by several people, who knew the parties involved, that Snow and Eunice Hamner, members of the Fayette church, paid for both bodies to be shipped home to Texas for burial.

This is one of the saddest stories that I have come across in my research of Restoration history in North Alabama. To relate the story of a dream that failed so completely, is difficult. The disappointment and heart break they felt must have been almost unbearable. The treasure that was poured into the project must have been enormous for that day and time.. It could be said that, they were guilty of some bad business judgments, but heir lives, Hal P. and Hattie, were not failures. Both were faithful to their God and that faith was what sustained them through the pain they suffered. One would think that both would be depressed over such a colossal failure, however, those who knew them best, assured me that was not the case. They went about their work with a seemingly positive attitude. Also, the wonderful influence they had on a generation of young people in the area, and in north Alabama, continues through children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of those young students at Alabama Christian College of Berry to this very day. The legacy of the school and Hal and Hattie lives on. Of all the stories that have been written and published in the ARJ over

the last three years, the stories we have published about the small school at Berry has generated as much response among our readers in North Alabama, as any other. Such was the impact that was made by ***the man who dared to dream the impossible dream...***



Hattie Belle McDonald ca. 1930s



The Temple Of Knowledge atop the mountain several years after it was abandoned, probably mid 1960s

Many thanks to Leo Plyler, Bess Bagwell, Norma Nabors, Clarence McCaleb, Henry Ehl and others mentioned in the article for their assistance.....LEW

**A subscription to the Journal
Makes a great gift....**

I want to reach through the Gospel Advocate a class of the brotherhood that I feel that I could scarcely reach so well by any other source.

A few earnest brethren in Selma, Ala., want to purchase the old Christian Church house there for a place of worship and a nucleus around which to gather the faithful in Christ who want to stand with the apostles on the Bible, and the Bible only; to add nothing to it and take nothing from it; but whatsoever they "do in word or deed, do all in the name [by the authority] of the Lord Jesus." They want help; they need it, and, in my judgment, deserve it. I believe an opportunity is now offered whereby a little money properly invested may do more for pure, primitive Christianity in South Alabama than has been done in years.

I hope the brotherhood will take this matter in hand and help these struggling brethren in Selma, set them on their feet and start them off. I feel quite sure this is the Lord's work, and that the Lord's people cannot afford to neglect it. They are offered the house and lot for four thousand dollars. The lot itself, it is said, in a little while will be worth the money, without the house. The brethren in Selma are poor and but few in number, but they say they can raise two or three hundred dollars in Selma. They want to raise enough to make one payment, so they can borrow the balance on ten years' time at a low rate of interest, and the property will make it secure. I appeal earnestly to the brotherhood to help these brethren. The house they want to buy is a good, substantial brick building; will seat, I suppose, comfortably, about three hundred people; right in the midst of the city—desirably located.

We have had a hard struggle in South Alabama to hold our ground. I came here more than fifty years ago and settled where Pineapple now is. There was no town here when I came, no "Christian Church" (as it is now sometimes called), and no members of such a church known to me, or Christians who called themselves simply Christians. I lived here perhaps five or six years before I found half a dozen persons who called themselves simply Christians. I had some knowledge, however, of this way. I heard of Brother P. B. Lawson, of Marion, Perry County, Ala., about seventy-five miles from Pineapple. I wrote for him. He came and preached a few discourses, which resulted in getting six members, planted on the Bible, and the Bible only, at a little meetinghouse about four miles from Pineapple. The following fall Brother of W. H. Goodloe began to preach for us once a month; and in the face of strong prejudice of the sects, by a hard struggle, in a few years we had built a congregation of a hundred and forty or fifty members. In the meantime I began preaching, but not *till* after I became acquainted with J. M. Barnes, who was then quite a young man. I was about six years his senior. He was a very zealous Christian, but not a preacher. It was probably more through his influence and that of his mother than any other that I began preaching as soon as I did. After I began

preaching, however, he soon joined *me* in the work. We both did our best; we preached over large portions of five or six counties in South Alabama, almost without money and without price. Soon we were joined by Brother Samuel Jordan, who was not long in developing into a tower of strength. A little later Dr. A. C. Henry fell in line, strong, fearless, and eloquent. Our success for a time was phenomenal. Brother Cy. Reeves helped us a while, and some others.

But we began to have some serious backsets. Brother G. W. Neely came among us and became one of our best defenders of the faith, and I still think he was a good man. He thought the negro was being neglected by our Christian people. I thought so, too. He turned his attention to them, to help to educate and Christianize them. He went North to enlist the brotherhood there in behalf of the negro. I warned him not to touch politics, and he promised he would not. I did not know as much about how serious the division of our brethren then on the society question was, and where it would lead to, as I do now. That was a stumbling-block for Brother Neely. We lost our influence with him. He turned politician, and was very successful for a time in enlisting help for the negro among the Northern people, which gave him almost perfect control of the negro element in Lowndes County. Though his colony was a failure, he came home, entered actively into politics, and for a number of years, through the negro vote in Lowndes County, could hold any office in that county he chose. His influence as a preacher was gone and the church injured.

A new source of trouble then soon cropped out. Young men just out of college began to come among us, brilliant and attractive, of whom we at first hoped much (perhaps I can here speak only for myself); but—alas!—their influence soon brought division and strife among us.

Then our trouble began along a new line. In Montgomery we have had a hard struggle to avoid being split into factions. Selma was lost to our original purpose to stand by "the Bible, and the Bible only." The society split us, and all its train of unscriptural worship was introduced, with the organ and other musical instruments, fairs, suppers, festivals, etc. Many of these, I doubt not, were good, honest, conscientious brethren; but we could not walk together.

Still we have a few names even in Selma who are trying hard, and have been for some years, worshiping from house to house because they have nowhere else to worship. They are trying hard to lift the old Jerusalem banner, long since trailing in the dust, that they may breathe afresh their native air. They want help, brethren. Can they get it? I write this to call your attention to this most important work. I expect to visit Selma in a few days. The Lord willing, you may then hear from me again.

DAVID ADAMS.

Pineapple, Al.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Earl Kimbrough

When G.C. Brewer began preaching not long after the Spanish American War, the fruits of industry, science, and invention were coming to Alabama. But the state had been set back so far by the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the lack of capital, skilled labor,



G.C. Brewer

and general education that its citizens trailed far behind the nation as a whole. In the hills and valleys of Northwest Alabama, where Brewer's ministry began, pioneer conditions and attitudes were still prevalent. Although his ministry belongs to the first half of the "enlightened" twentieth century, his early experiences as an evangelist were very similar to the pioneer preachers of the state who preceded him by decades. In many ways, Brewer's early ministry might very well qualify him to be ranked among the pioneer preachers of Northwest Alabama.

Asa M. Plyler has preserved a few of Brewer's early experiences in that part of the state, such as might have been lifted entirely from pioneer times. Not excluded from this is the violence that prevailed in the region, which no doubt was in part a hangover from the hostility aroused during and after the Civil War, when the sentiments of the region were almost evenly divided between the North and South. Bitterness, hatred, brutality, and atrocities of all kinds were not uncommon in those dark and troubling times. Plyler relates from Brewer's own words, as he remembered them, a close brush that the preacher once had with death at Zion near Parrish in Walker County.

Brewer held several meetings at Zion when he was a young man and many became obedient to the gospel under his preaching. Plyler said: "One night among the number that came forward and made the good confession was a married lady. The next day someone came and told the preacher that this lady's husband had said that if he baptized his wife he would kill him. Brewer replied, 'Well she made the confession and asked me to baptize her and if she comes to the baptizing, I will baptize her.' When the hour for baptizing arrived, she came with the group and was baptized." So the event passed without incident. But there is more to the story.

In or near the 1930s, Brewer was called back to Zion to conduct a funeral. Plyler said they were standing in the cemetery waiting for the men who were digging the grave to finish, when Brewer turned and looked down the hill in the way the road used to go and pointed to a large hickory tree. He then said to Plyler: "Yonder by that tree, I one time barely escaped death, I suppose." Explaining, he said: "My tent was pitched yonder in front of the church house.

One night several made the confession and were to be baptized the next evening. The next morning I heard that the husband of one of the ladies who were to be baptized was mad and had said that if I baptized her he would kill me. I really did not think much about it, and she came with the others and was baptized."

Brewer said: "After the baptism, I returned to my room—I was staying at Brother Godfrey's home—and changed my clothes. It was late in the afternoon; the sun was slowly sinking behind the western hills. I took my Bible and hat and began an evening stroll. I walked slowly up the road toward the tent, studying and meditating on my sermon for that night. It was about sunset and there among all that timber on each side of the road it had begun to get a little dark or dusk. As I approached near that hickory tree, I noticed a man standing there with a shot gun, and yes a big pistol hanging on his side. I first thought he was maybe a revenue officer, but no, I said to myself, he is a coal miner. He had on work clothes and they were smutty and his face was black with coal dust."

About the time he drew even or nearly so with the armed man, Brewer said he spoke him, saying, "Good evening, sir," but the man did not speak. Brewer said: "I passed on by and wondered why he did not speak. Something came to my mind that seemed to tell me to say something else to him, or at least invite him up to church. I stopped and turned around facing him and as I turned, I noticed that he had raised that shot gun, with it pointed directly at me. But as he saw me turn facing him, he gradually lowered the muzzle of the gun pointing it to the ground. I said, 'Say, come and go up to the church with me.' He did not speak. I continued, 'I am holding a meeting right up here. Have you been up to hear me preach any?' I was then walking back toward him; he was still silent. I wondered if he could not hear. I walked on up to about ten feet from him. I said, 'You are not deaf and dumb are you?' I looked straight at him in the eyes and said, 'No, you are not deaf. You are hearing every word I am saying. I know you are

the man that said you were going to kill me. I don't believe you will. I will tell you this much; if you do, I will be in Heaven before you can get home.' At that point he turned slowly around and began walking down a path through woods. By that time I was afraid to turn my back to him for fear that he might turn on me with my back to him and shoot me as I walked away."

Brewer said he then stood and looked straight at the man until he got out of his sight in the woods. "I then turned around," he continued, "and started on up the hill toward the tent and suddenly I heard somebody coming down the hill toward me in a very big hurry. I saw who it was; three brethren, Jim Plyler, Will Hendrix and Dr. Jones. They said, 'We are looking for a fellow that said he was going to kill you. Have you seen anything of him?' I said, 'Yes, I saw a man right down there with two guns, but he did not kill me.' 'That is him,' they said, 'where did he go?' I told them the way he went. They soon overtook him, arrested him, and carried him to jail." (Asa M. Plyler, *Historical Sketches of the Churches of Christ in Alabama: Walker County.*)

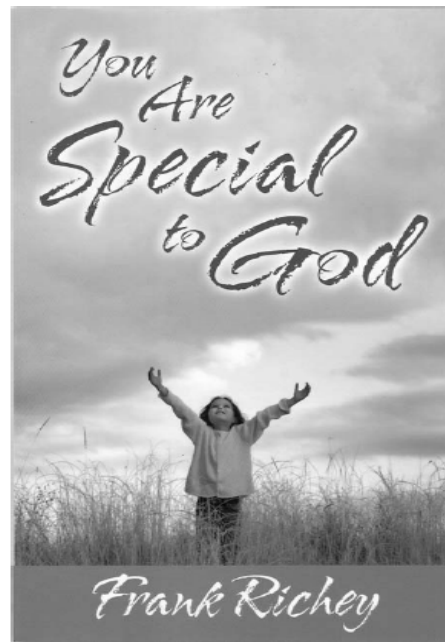
Brewer's brush with death in Walker County was far more than the idle treat of an angry man. The man was not there to threaten or frighten an unarmed preacher. His behavior shows that he was lying in wait to murder Brewer in cold-blooded murder for obeying a divine command. But for some reason, in the overshadowing providence of God, Brewer turned to face the man who was already taking aim to shoot him in the back. Yet, something at that moment caused the man to lose his will to murder a man who had done him no harm. Plyler does not say what happened to the man after his arrest or what became of the man's wife. And who knows what would have happened, if Brewer had not turned at a critical second to invite the man to church?

Blessed is the man who walks with God even "through the valley of the shadow of death."

Porter Answered

D. N. Jackson asked W. Curtis Porter in debate if a man was a Christian who was "on the way to the creek" when a limb fell on him and killed him. Porter, in turn, asked Jackson if a man was on the way to the church to get married, and a limb fell on him and killed him, were they married?

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A BIT OF HISTORY

J. David Tant

While looking through an old paperback songbook, I found a page written by Austin Taylor, a song leader who often traveled with my grandfather (J. D. Tant) and other gospel preachers to lead singing during gospel meetings. He mentioned favorite songs of several preachers. I do not know when the list was compiled, but obviously many years ago. This little book, "*Christian Voices*," was given to my grandmother, Nannie Yater Tant, by brother Taylor, as he has autographed it.

- R. M. Gano, a General in the Civil War, shed tears as I sang, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" He baptized 7,000 people, some of them while he was a General.
- T. B. Larimore, an unusual gospel preacher, baptized 12,000 people with his own hands. "Rescue the Perishing" was a favorite of his.
- "Weeping" Joe Harding, a man of much courage and zeal, suggested to me to sing "Work for the Night is Coming."
- A.B. Barrett, the founder of Abilene Christian College, loved to sing "Be Strong in the Faith, My Brother."
- A. J. "Jack" McCarty was happy to sing, "I'll Be Satisfied Then."
- J. D. Tant's emotions were stirred by the singing of "I'll Be a Friend to Jesus."
- Joe S. Warlick, who engaged in 401 public debates, seemed happy to sing "Look Away From the Cross to the Glittering Crown."
- W. A. Schultz had a favorite, "Not Made With Hands."
- F. L. Young rejoiced in singing, "Let Us Pass Over the River and Rest Under the Shade."
- Isaac Tacket loved, "I Need Thee Every Hour."
- G.H.P. Showalter loved to sing, "I'm a Child of the King, What a Wonderful Thing."
- H. W. Busby, who has baptized 18,000 people and is still preaching, has witnessed thousands of people surrender to Christ while, "Lord, I'm Coming Home" was being sung.

- Foy E. Wallace, Jr., who goes from coast to coast preaching the gospel in his unbiased, masterly manner, loves such songs as "The Sheltering Rock," with the expression, "When the sheltering rock is so nearby, Oh, why will you die?"

The bit about Austin Taylor and the favorite songs of preachers has brought a few responses. The following response from Keith Sharp gives some more insight into brother Taylor's life. For many years the Texas Normal Singing School trained many a young man to lead singing. My own son, Jeff, went twice when he was in his middle teens, and became an excellent song leader through the training. Edgar Furr was conducting the school then. The school no longer operates, and the campus has been sold.

The last time I was in Sabinal was for the funeral of Jerry Angelo in 1989. Jerry grew up in that area, and knew brother Taylor. He said that in his later years, he might be walking in the business district and someone would recognize him and say, "Brother Taylor, sing us a song." So Taylor would stop right there and sing a gospel song with his great voice. My uncle, Austin Taylor Tant, was named for him, and I have a grandson who is also named Austin Taylor Tant (but better known as "Shack," after my wife's father, Shack Hartsell).

I miss the days of the great meetings, when there would be many responses to the gospel. In my grandfather's day, it would not be unusual to have 50 or 75 baptisms. There are many things that make it different now, including TVs, air conditioned homes, movie theaters everywhere, etc. Back in those days, there was nothing else to do, and meetings were social events as well as preaching. But people would come, and many learned and obeyed the truth. If a two-week meeting was going well, they might extend it to three weeks. And now many churches only have three-day meetings.

Oh well. We can't live in the past, but must make the most of the opportunities we have now. Following is what Keith Sharp wrote. His father was Harold Sharp, a well-known Arkansas preacher.

David,

This just about brought a tear to my eye. I was a student of Austin Taylor at the Texas Normal Singing School when I was 14. He was approaching 80 then. He led "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," clearly hit every note from lowest to highest, and sang louder than all 90 students combined. My mother grew up with his son in

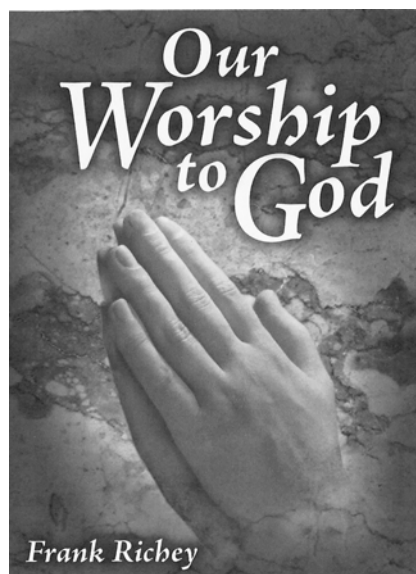
Uvalde, TX, where she was born. He wrote "On the Banks of the River" after his son was killed in the crash of a biplane traveling through so people could take brief thrill and curiosity rides. Brother Taylor was away from Uvalde leading singing at the time and had forbidden his son to go up in the plane. When traveling through Uvalde on my way to Del Rio in 1979 I stopped and visited Brother Taylor. I think he was in his 90s then. He told me how he wrote "Do All in the Name of the Lord" in 1916 at the request of Foy E. Wallace, Sr. Brother Wallace had preached on Colossians 3:17 in a meeting in which Brother Taylor led the singing, and there was no song in the book to accompany that passage. I requested that song at my dad's funeral in 1987.

Brotherly,

Keith Sharp

LOOKING BACK

Hanceville, September 2-1 have conducted and helped. to conduct a number of meetings this summer. The first was at Bethesda, in Cullman County. Brother J. H. Horton and I labored with this congregation one week. Brother Horton did the preaching and I led the singing. There were three additions to the church there. The church seemed to take on new life. The brethren supported the meeting well. From this place we went to Hanceville, my home congregation. Brother Horton did all the preaching here, except one sermon by Brother Pride E. Hinton. Brother Hinton is a young man who has a bright future. There were eleven additions to the church here. Brother Horton then went to Albany; while I went to Hopeful, in Talladega County, where I spent a pleasant week, preaching and warning everyone night and day. No additions. I made my home with Brother B. F. Camp and family while at Hopeful. The church there has learned how to support a meeting. There is a very good congregation at Munford which grew out of the congregation at Hopeful. I went from Hopeful to Hebron, in Morgan County. Hebron is the largest country congregation of which I know. This congregation is rich in this world's goods, in my judgment, and should support a man in the field all of his time. And, too they have the man in their midst in the person of B. F. Moody. Brother Moody is a man of ability, one of the most forceful preachers I have everheard. He lives, loves, and labors with the Hebron congregation. As a visible result of my effort with the church there, three souls were added to the one body. From Hebron I went to Pleasant Grove, in Clay County. The meeting here was well attended. Seven persons were added to the church, all by primary obedience. I enjoyed my stay with the congregation here. From Pleasant Grove I went to Campbell's Cross Roads for a short meeting. I preached nine sermons and baptized one young lady. I am now at home for a short time. I shall go to Blessing, in Marshall County, for my next meeting.-M. A. Creel.GA-9/16/1920



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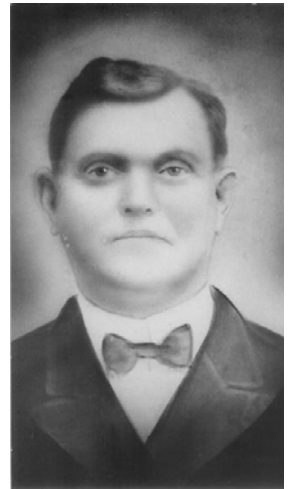
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**GOOD MAN HAS GONE FROM US (John T. Underwood)
F. B. SRYGLEY**

On January 21, 1925, at his home in Franklin County, near Russellville, Ala., our brother, John T. Underwood, passed, by death, into the eternal state of the kingdom. The body of our friend and brother was buried at Spruce Pine, Ala. Funeral services were conducted by Brethren Jones, of Russellville; J. H. Horton, of Tusculmbia; and J. F. Chambers, of Florence. Brother Underwood was about seventy-three years old, and had been a preacher of the ancient gospel about fortyfive years. He was a humble, good man, who was entirely satisfied with what he could read in the Bible. He preached the conditions of salvation from past sins which are found in the commission of the Lord and that were preached by his chosen apostles. He was also satisfied with the simple worship which the apostles approved in the days 0" inspiration. Brother Underwood was a student of Mars' Hill Academy, as I remember, in 1880, his last year there being my first year. While Mars' Hill was not established with any view of opposing innovations upon the worship of God, such as instrumental music and human organizations for the spread of the gospel for these things were not discussed at that time, as they had spread but little-yet I believe that fewer pupils of that school have gone into these un scriptural things than any other school I know. Brother Larimore had a way of impressing upon young men the importance of the Bible, and the Bible alone, which had a wonderful influence in holding them to the truth, There was never any question about the ownership or control of this school. It was owned by Brother Larimore and controlled by the principles of New Testament teaching. Christian men and women taught in it, arid it was, in a very important sense, a Christian school; but it was not owned by the churches, nor was it thrust upon them for their support.' When Brother Larimore saw proper to quit teaching the school at Mars' Hill, it ceased to be, and, therefore, could never depart from the f'nith and become a menace to New Testament teaching. After Brother Underwood left Mars' Hill, he settled at Marietta, Miss., and supplemented his support from the churches by the labor of his hands. He never had a business or an occupation that prevented him from contending earnestly for the faith. While he Jived at Martetta, I was called there to defend the teaching of the New Testament on the subject, action, and design of baptism, in a public discussion. It was through his influence and effort that this discussion was arranged and carried through. The bold stand he made against what he believed to be error may have injured his business with some of his influential neighbors, but he loved what he believed to be the truth better than he did his business,

From Marietta he moved back to Alabama and settled on a good farm in what we used to call" Russellville Valley," where he made his home till his death. Though Brother Underwood was a preacher of no mean ability, he was never a care upon the churches, as he labored with his hands for his support and for the support of others who were dependent upon him. Like the apostle Paul in his memorable speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus, he could have said: "

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20: 34, 35.) No doubt he received financial help from churches and individual Christians; but most of those who loved the apostolic way in North Mississippi and North Alabama were poor in this world's goods, and he, therefore, chose not to be a burden on them. I believe that men can consistently receive a support for themselves and



families while they do nothing but **John T. Underwood** preach the word, yet it would have been impossible to have permanently planted the truth in the field where he labored had it not been for men like him who could preach often at their own charges. It will be an evil day for the truth when all such men are crowded out by a lot of young men who may make preaching a profession and godliness a way of gain. As I understand the matter, Brother Underwood spent the last few years of his life as an invalid, with little opportunity to teach people how to live, but with a good chance to teach them how to suffer affliction and how to die. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight

of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4: 17, 18.) A few moments in the glory world will pay for all the suffering which our brother endured. He had an opportunity to show his neighbors, his family, and his brethren how to submit to the will of God even in death and die like a man of faith, like a righteous man. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23: 10.) Brother Underwood has gone to join the great number of Mars' Hill pupils who have preceded him to the glory world. Our teacher and faithful brother and a few of his pupils remain on this side, but I was surprised when I could count more who have passed over the river than I could of those who yet remain. This fact has greatly impressed me with the brevity of human life and with the importance of being prepared for the summons which must shortly come to us all. John T. Underwood was a good, faithful man, and his place will not be easily filled. His family will miss him more than all of us; and may 'the Lord deal gently with them, and may they be prepared to meet him in that city where afflictions and death can never come.

"THINK ON THESE THINGS."

Can We Preach Jesus and Let Other People Alone?

John T. Lewis

Anything that sounds like religious controversy in pulpits or papers gives a certain class of men spiritual meningitis. But the first martyr in the church was its first debater. The Bible was taken from the people by compromise, but can never be restored by that method.

The question that forms the heading for this article is based on the stereotyped phrase heard by every gospel preacher in every "neck of the woods." Its twin sister is "preach the gospel in love," which is used to mean, preach nothing antagonistic to anybody. Of course, that kind of preaching will never save any one, not even the one that does the preaching. "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). By deceptive phrases the gospel too often suffers in the house of its friends. The First Challenge

God created man an intelligent being, and recognized his intelligence by speaking to him and giving him a law, in the keeping of which the welfare of man was involved.

But no sooner had God spoken than his Satanic majesty appeared on the scene and challenged God's word through the best medium at his command in that early age - the Serpent. God has spoken to man; the devil has challenged his word. This is the issue - the battleground. Around this fact the war has raged for six thousand years, with the defenders of God's word on one side and the challengers on the other side. Therefore, ever since the creation of man these two great powers have been engaged in a life and death struggle for the mastery of man's soul. It is well, therefore, to study their methods of approach. God approaches man only through his understanding, or reasoning faculties. The devil uses different methods of approach; his is through the emotional and baser appeals to the lusts, passions, and weaknesses of man. The devil, therefore, has the advantage in the struggle in that he offers man anything he wants, whereas God offers only what is for man's eternal good.

The Spirit of Compromise

The most deadly weapon the devil has ever used in this warfare has been the spirit of compromise, his last resort when all other methods have failed. There is a species of fish in the ocean which emits an inky substance that colors the water and conceals the movements of this fish whenever an enemy approaches. Just so the enemies of the

Truth have saturated the church with the spirit of compromise, which conceals their purposes from thousands of good conscientious people whose emotional nature predominates their reasoning faculties. Therefore, anything which smacks of religious controversy either in the pulpit or the papers gives that class of men spiritual meningitis, which so impairs their mental equilibrium on spiritual questions that they will blatantly declare and contend that the defenders of the truth are the "troublers in Israel."

The First Debater

Just as the devil challenged God's word as soon as he had spoken, so he assaulted the church as soon as it was established. The first efforts of the devil's cohorts in religious discussion are recorded in Acts 6:8-10. "And Stephen full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. But there arose certain of them that were of the synagogue called the synagogue of the Libertines, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke." Their defeat was so crushing and humiliating in this controversy that the devil never has believed in debating since. His emissaries were so enraged over their defeat that they suborned, or hired, witnesses to swear away Stephen's life. So Stephen, the first debater in the church became the first martyr in the church.

But because this is a fact, shall we selfishly agree with the devil that religious controversy is wrong, and that Stephen was the "trouble in Israel?" Around the first altar was committed the first murder, but does this prove that religion is wrong?

The death of Stephen was the signal for the most determined and merciless persecution against the church that was ever waged against any institution on earth; but the persecution "fell out rather to the progress of the gospel." The church was never hindered in its spiritual growth and development as long as the devil assumed the role of a lion and fought in the open. But it was an evil day for the church when the devil fled from the field of persecution and open controversy, and like a chameleon transformed himself into an angel of light,



John T. Lewis

and fashioned his ministers into ministers of righteousness, draped in robes of humility and piety, and sent them down the corridors of time scattering his compromising propaganda. By this method he convinced the church that departure from God's word was not an issue until he got the situation completely in hand. He then substituted for the elders of the church the Roman hierarchy, and for the church itself he substituted Roman Catholicism, which hung as a pall over a duped and deluded people for a thousand years.

It took the blood of martyrs to give the word of God back to the people. During this period of restoring the Bible to the people, we have the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, in which "more than five thousand Protestants were murdered in cold blood, in the city of Paris alone, and about thirty thousand in all were killed. The news was received at Rome with joy, and a medal was struck having a picture of the pope on one side and on the other a rude representation of the massacre." We also have the burning of Mrs. Elizabeth Gaunt, Anne Askew, John Bradley, James Bantam, and others at Smithfield. The bones of John Wickliffe, the morning star of the restoration, were dug up by orders of Pope Martin V, after they had rested in the dust of the dead for more than forty years, and scattered to the four winds of the earth. Thus, through blood, fire, and desecration of the dead, the Bible was restored to the people.

In this warfare I can only speak for "me and my house." So long as God blesses me with health, strength, and vigor of mind, I shall make an issue of, and fight everything that detracts from the glory of the church, or challenges the present kingship of the Messiah. It makes no difference whether I am in the city or in the woods where the owls hoot at noon, the devil shall not gum up my weapon of warfare with his compromising glue. - *Adapted from Gospel Guardian, February, 1936.*

Words Of Wisdom

Stephen Grellet, French/American religious leader (1773-1855) said, "I expect to pass through the world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness I can show to any creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it, for I shall not pass this way again."

ESSAYS ON THE CHURCH



HUGH FULFORD

"A most timely and needed work as the Ship of Zion sails on the troubled seas of today....Excellent....LEW

About the Book

How is an undenominational church supposed to thrive in a denominational world? This is a question that Christians ask themselves today when others reject the teachings of God in order to follow a more 'convenient' or 'fulfilling' path. Throughout his fifty years of preaching, Hugh Fulford has seen the Lord's church face

many of these same oppositions and questions. This volume of essays deals specifically with the identity of the church as God planned it, Laying aside all modern opinions, expectations, and prejudices, Fulford goes to our one and only true source for the answers we need. Using the Bible as a guide, we can find out what it really means to be an undenominational Christian.

About the Author

Hugh Fulford began preaching the gospel when he was 15 years old, beginning full-time work in 1958. He has preached for over fifty years, serving churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Texas. Since July 2000, Fulford has preached in gospel meetings, spoken in lecture ships, preached by appointment, and worked with congregations on an interim, or part-time, basis. He continues his active work of writing.

Fulford was educated at Freed-Hardeman University, the University of Tennessee, and Austin Peay State University. He has written numerous articles over the years, and he continues to write regularly for the Gospel Advocate and The Spiritual Sword. He has published three books: *Christianity Pure and Simple* (2005), *The Kind of Preaching Needed Today* (2006), and *The Lord Has Been Mindful Me* (2007), all of which may be ordered online from hesterpublications.com. Hugh and his wife Jan make their home in Gallatin, Tennessee.

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HISTORY OF CATOMA STREET CHURCH

N. L. Walker

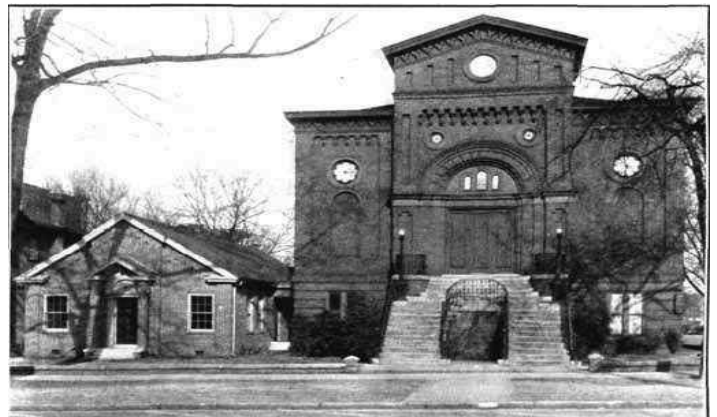
Jan. 23, 1936 – *Gospel Advocate*

"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

Preaching of the gospel, though in a desultory sort of way, began to be done in Montgomery as far back as the sixties. Some of the ablest preachers of the church of Christ pioneered in this field. Alexander Campbell once visited and preached here. At a meeting in the late seventies, in the county courthouse, the work began to crystallize, and regular worship was started. This very small beginning was the embryo from which has come the present Catoma Street Church, with a membership of three hundred fifty, and six other congregations aggregating approximately one thousand members. That meeting of nearly sixty years ago was held by J. M. Barnes, noted educator, religious journalist, and able preacher of the gospel, then living at Highland Home, Ala. Other names of record attending the meeting were: C. A. Allen, Annie J. Smith, Mattie Butler, John Peacher, and Eliza Peacher. These few set faithfully to work; and the ultimate result, as may be seen today, is that the city of Montgomery is fairly well sprinkled with churches of Christ.

Within a short time this first congregation set up on Herron Street and began there with a membership of fourteen. Their meetinghouse was a loan from J. M. Barnes, and remained in their use for about twenty years. By the end of that period they numbered nearly two hundred, and they purchased the present commodious Catoma Street building. The Herron Street structure was given by Brother Barnes to the congregation at West End, whence it was removed and enlarged. It continues to be their church home. The main building of the Catoma Street Church, shown in the above picture, was secured largely through the instrumentality of C. A. Allen, one of the elders at the time. The property was paid for in the course of a few years, and then in turn the congregation began to help establish other congregations in the city, sharing with them its members and giving help financially. The services of Brother Barnes to the church, which were rendered largely gratis, continued throughout its thirty-odd-year period of upward struggle. He was liberally assisted by the late brethren, Samuel Jordan, of Highland Home, and W. J. Haynes, of Grady, both of whom resided within a radius of thirty miles of Montgomery, and who were stalwarts in God's kingdom. Other ministers who have served the congregation during its thirty-five years' sojourn at the present location are: John E. Dunn, C. E. Holt, C. M. Stubblefield, Fred M. Little, T. B. Thompson, and D. Ellis Walker, incumbent. The average terms of services rendered by these ministers have ranged around six years. The church has for several years been in process of purchasing the substantial home which its minister now occupies, and during the past year built a six-thousand-dollar Bible-school annex, shown in the photograph. A little more than half the purchase cost of the new building has been paid.

The Sunday Bible school has an enrollment of approximately three hundred fifty members, with an attendance averaging about two hundred seventy-five. There are sixteen classrooms, with as many classes, and a quota of splendid teachers, several of whom are exceptionally competent. Much good work is being done in teaching "the way of the Lord more perfectly." Contributions of the church for all purposes, and it has only one treasury, total a little under six thousand dollars annually. However, last year, due to an enlarged building program, a bit more was received. Monthly disbursement is made for part support of foreign-field workers—S. K. Dong, of Korea, and Sister Sarah Andrews, of Japan. Sums are expended intermittently for preaching the gospel in various sections of Alabama. A part of the church's income goes for support of the local preacher, a part for charity among its members, a part for upkeep of the church property, and a part for sundry expenses incident to the weekly worship. Catoma Street Church works harmoniously with the other congregations of the city, an occasional exchange of ministers being made. All seem to be of the same mind in matters of faith and doctrine, and particularly in the purpose of planting churches in territory contiguous to Montgomery. No infestation of premillennialism or other Scripture departures may be found among them.



large contingent of young people who "have a mind to work." Fine future leadership from this profusion of promising material is in early prospect. It is the chief burden of concern to the eldership that this new material may be thoroughly indoctrinated and inured against fads, fancies, pollutions, and innovations in the work and worship. No effort is being spared to make sure that the future loyalty of the church is made secure.

While this congregation is by no means doing what it can do or rightfully should do, yet withal it is said to be about as scripturally directed, as frictionlessly operated, and as effectively working as almost any church anywhere to be found in the brotherhood. May this people faithfully continue planting and watering. God in his righteousness will accord greater and greater increase.

The Poet's Corner

The Sweetest Sound

The sweetest sound in all the world to me
Is unaccompanied song in harmony,
As hymned in worship from the lips of men,
Whose hearts are filled with love and praise for Him,
Ascending as of incense to the throne
Of God, in sweet refrain to Him alone.
Oh, how can man destroy this lovely thing
With instruments of music, when to sing
Accompanied by the strings of one's own heart
Is true and simple worship set apart,
And reaches down into the soul of man
To lift him up to God as none else can."

—Leta M. Cox

Truism

Once we decide that our faith and practices are no longer binding based on the Bible, then every man becomes a law unto himself....*Lavelle Layfield*

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Commitment And Providence

Yater Tant

Excerpt from a lecture at Florida College-1981

I do not know what your belief is as to the Providence of God, but I do know that the leaders of the Restoration Movement believed in it so firmly, and so fully, that they lived their whole lives in the full conviction that God was directing, guiding, and overruling in all their decisions and actions. Because they believed this, and acted on the basis of that belief, they were able to overcome prodigious obstacles and difficulties, and blaze the trail for a great host to follow them into the sunlight of a pure gospel and a truly New Testament church

While this idea of a total commitment was present in the lives of all the leaders, perhaps no one epitomized it more fully than Jacob Creath, Jr. His absolute integrity and honesty of heart led him early in life to move away from the Baptist Church, and to seek with great earnestness to find the way of truth. He was married to two widows (not at the same time), and the life he led with each of them was one of deep devotion and tenderness. He was a large man, and by nature had a rather irascible temper. David Lipscomb once wrote of him, "He would rebuke and scold an audience on slight provocation, with severity, but present to them the gospel of the Son of God with the simplicity, and tenderness of childlike faith in the Savior."

Creath was known wherever he went for the fervor and beautiful faith of his prayers. He talked as a child might talk to his father, with no pretense, no show, but utter simplicity and trust. In 1884, when John F. Rowe was on a trip to the west, he stopped one night at Palmyra, Missouri, to visit with Creath. The two men talked for several hours, even though this was the first time they had ever met. Rowe later wrote of this meeting: Brother Creath has about finished his course, he has fought the good fight, and, with his beloved companion, he soon expects to pass the shores of mortality, and receive his crown of righteousness. He fully comprehends the present crisis of the churches, many of which he was instrumental in bringing into life; and though cheered by the prospect of a home in heaven, he mourned over the desolation of Zion, as Jesus lamented the desolation of Jerusalem."

When Rowe stood up to leave, both he and Creath recognized that this was probably their last meeting together on earth. Creath stood up and walked to the doorway with Rowe. Suddenly the older man smothered the younger man in his arms, and lifting his wrinkled face to the starry skies of Missouri stood for long minutes pouring out his heart to God, and praying for the younger man that God would guide and bless him as the heavy burdens of a divided church fell on his shoulders. Creath was facing death, which came to him only a short time later, but even death could not lessen or divert his intense interest in the Kingdom of God. He had given his life to it, and as death approached, this was still the most important thing in his heart. Nothing else mattered, or could matter. In life or in death, the cause of Christ came first.

CHESTER R. ESTES – 1903-1992

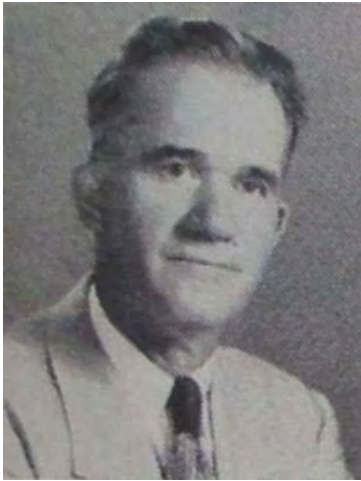
Scott Harp

www.therestorationmovement.com

Chester Riley Estes was born northwest of Haleyville, Alabama July 1, 1903. He was baptized by A.D. Dies in 1920. He married his wife Gladys Mae Chastain on August 21, 1921. To this union was born, Evelyn Estelle, born in 1931, and a set of twin boys, Charles Robert and Edward William, September 4, 1936.

He attended David Lipscomb College, the University of Alabama and the Alabama State Teacher's College.

He began preaching in Marion County, Alabama.



Chester Estes

The family lived in the Shoals area the remainder of his life.

Chester enjoyed writing. He wrote a number of books. His first book, *Titus Goes Modern*, was his first work in 1940. He followed with other titles including, *A Handbook on Biblical Interpretation*, *Cold Waters For Thirsty Souls*, *What Is Truth?*, *A Study of the Holy Spirit*, *A Study on the Sermon on the Mount*, and others. Through the years of his preaching he continued to send reports to the *Gospel Advocate* of his efforts. He was called upon to preach in many meetings. Most of his meeting work was in Northwest Alabama, however he did make preaching trips to Texas and California. He held on debate. He held one debate. In 1925, while a student at David Lipscomb College, he debated C.C. Clark, a Primitive Baptist. The discussion took place at the Wiley Branch church near his Marion County home. The topics of the discussion included Baptism, Holy Spirit, Apostasy, and the Establishment of the Church.

Chester Estes was one of the first men in the Shoals area to begin a daily radio broadcast. He preached on WJOI in Florence, and WLAY in Sheffield, at 6:30 each morning, and at 7am on

Sundays. When away for meetings, other preachers filled in for him.



Chester And Gladys Estes

When thinking of the "big names" in the brotherhood, like H. Leo Boles, B.C. Goodpasture, Willard Collins, etc., the name of Chester Estes seldom arises. They all knew one another and worked together on many occasions. However, depending on where you were in the 1930s through the 1950s, the names could change. In Northwest Alabama and Northeast Mississippi, the name Chester Estes was about as big as they came. Through editing the journal, *The Evangelist*, a number of years, knowledge of him continued to be strong among those in the Lord's church.

The last years of the life of Chester Estes saw him spending time writing. Included in his works was an autobiography, *Faith That Overcomes*, *The Story of My Life*. It has been scanned and is available here.

Gladys Estes passed from this life November 20, 1986. Her body was laid to rest in the old cemetery in Sheffield, Alabama. Chester continued a few more years. In his eighty-ninth year he passed on November 17, 1992. He was laid to rest beside his wife, united in death. The location of their grave is near the entrance of the cemetery, at perhaps the highest point in the Shoals area. From their grave there is a good view of the region around.

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“THE BEGINNING CORNER”
Earl Kimbrough

John R. Howard was a well known gospel preacher in West Tennessee in the 1830s and 1840s. His home was at Paris, Tennessee, where he edited the *Bible Advocate* (1842-1849), one of the first papers in the state to advocate the restoration of the primitive order. Through this publication, Howard helped define the churches of Christ as conforming to the “one true church” of the New Testament. He did this largely through his writings, but also in an historic sermon that appeared in several editions. Richard T. Hughes, in writing of this sermon, says the earliest version was entitled, “Identification of the Church of Christ,” published in *Christian Magazine*, 1848. “It was then expanded and republished under the title “The Beginning Corner; or. The Church of Christ Identified.” This was in the *American Christian Review* in 1856. The sermon was also published “under its second title in *Biographical Sketch and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John F. Rowe and G.W. Rice.” (Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*.)

In describing Howard’s classic sermon, Hughes tells about the pioneer custom in “the western country” of establish-ing claim to a tract of land. The custom was for the claimant to find a tree at the corner of the land he wanted. “He would then make three marks on that tree, each mark facing one of the other three corners of the tract. In this fashion, he could line out his entire claim from the beginning corner.” The sermon was based on this pioneer custom of identifying one’s property.

“Howard told of an old revolutionary soldier in Virginia who had claimed a tract of land in the western country in this way and then returned to Virginia. After several years, he went back to the western country to settle on his land only to find that in the meantime vines and undergrowth had covered up his ‘beginning corner’ so that he could not locate it. Even worse, others had settled on and around his tract of land. The old soldier was about to despair until he found a man who knew the location of the original ‘beginning corner.’ This man located the tree, cleared the underbrush, and found the three marks the old soldier had made many years ago. The later settlers fought the old soldier’s attempts to take possession of the land, but in the end the courts upheld the validity of his original claims.” (Ibid.)

In applying the story, Howard said the old soldier’s “beginning corner” was “the old Jerusalem gospel.” Later, as this old “Jerusalem trunk” was obscured by manmade laws and human traditions,

the denominational churches—Catholics, Protestants, and others—staked out claims to the property. Howard named Alexander Campbell as the man that found the “beginning corner” and cleared away the human names, creeds, and organizations, so the one true church could be identified and restored to its primitive purity.

After telling the story of how the old Revolutionary War veteran located the “beginning corner” of is property and ran his lines to clearly identify it, Howard set forth seven identifying marks by which the one true church could be identified. 1. It originated in the days of the apostles. 2. It is known in the New Testament by descriptive names. 3. It has no creed but the Bible. 4. It is universal in scope. 5. The terms of admission are “Faith, Repentance, Confession, and Baptism.” 6. In organization, it is congregationally independent. 7. It met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord’s Supper.

Others later refined the identifying features of the one true church and used other illustrations to designate what Howard called “the beginning corner.” But the concept laid down in his sermon of returning to the original ground to restore the New Testament church has survived the ages and is alive and well today among those who yet are trying to cling to “the old paths.” Howard named Alexander Campbell as the man on whom he had depended, first and foremost, for his discovery of the one true church. However, he passed over many others who made the same discovery both before the Restoration work of Campbell and independent of it. Nevertheless, Campbell’s monumental work in clearing away the sectarian vines and underbrush that long obscured the “beginning corner” of apostolic Christianity and unfolding salient features of “the ancient order” helped to make the identifying features of the church more distinct and absolute in the minds of the brethren.

Looking Back

Creath In North Alabama

“1870: On the 14th of March, I left home for Corinth, Mississippi, and preached there one week, and one in Baldwyn, and then proceeded to Marion, Alabama, and preached there several weeks. I then went to Chattanooga, Tennessee; then to Huntsville, Mooresville, Athens, Mountain Home, Moulton, and Danville, and returned home in June,

Memoir of Jacob Creath. Jr. –pg 205

The Final Say

Our Young People

About eight or so yrs ago I wrote an article that Neil Anderson saw fit to publish in the Gospel Advocate. It was titled "Why Are Our Young People Leaving The Church?" It was not based on scientific research, but rather on observations over many yrs of preaching and serving congs. as a full-time minister. But for whatever they may be worth, here are the four "reasons" I listed as to why young people leave.

1. Parents fail to teach their children. (This, of course, is where it all begins).
2. Too many congregations put little emphasis upon actual, direct Bible study. The Word itself gets pushed aside by "methods" or by the discussion of others matters. How many minutes of a Bible class are actually devoted to genuine Bible study?
3. In many churches of Christ and universities associated with churches of Christ there is a growing ecumenical, inclusive spirit that communicates the notion that "one church is just as good as another." It was this that precipitated more than one set of parents to say to me they had sacrificed to send their children to a Christian college, only for them to graduate and become involved in the life of a denomination. (I know this reflects what some will call my being an old hard-line "Church of Christ." So be it. I have to remain true to my convictions until convinced otherwise).
4. The pressures of the world. In spite of the best teaching at home, at church, or at a Christian school some will still leave. Jesus did not keep everybody (Jno. 6:66). The first century church had those who left. We ought not to be surprised that people today leave. The pressures of the world are ever with us. It grieves us when people leave (for whatever reason), and we should do all we can within the realm of what is right (as right is determined by the Word of God) to keep people. But we cannot make retention of members or accommodation to the culture more important than adherence to the scriptures.

Hugh Fulford

To The Point

Someone in the Advocate office once asked F. B. Srygley if he spelled "occur" with one "c" or two "c's." Brother Srygley said he spelled it with one "c." The person said, "Webster spells it with two 'c's." Srygley replied, "You didn't ask me how Webster spells it; you asked me how I spell it."*Hugh Fulford*

Scriptural Authority

Brother Hugh Fulford, in a recent discussion about how to establish scriptural authority, made the following explanation...I believe he lays it out as plain as it can be laid out.....LEW

Can or will someone please advise how we learn in any discipline other than by various kinds of statements (including commands), examples, and necessary inferences? Are these not the avenues by which any teaching, instruction, or imparting of information of any kind is communicated?

For example, in teaching English, the rules (precepts/"commands") are set forth by various kinds of statements. Next, examples of the precepts are given. Then the students are provided with worksheets and/or tests and are expected to use necessary inference and see the outworking/conclusion of the rules, precepts, and examples.

How is gun safety taught? How are people taught to do various jobs? Are not statements made, examples given, and implications made (from which inferences are to be drawn)?

In the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), Jesus gave a command (v. 27), provided an example (v. 30-35), and then asked the lawyer to make a necessary inference (to reach a forced conclusion) (v. 36), after which He gave another command (v. 37). That is how teaching and learning take place.

The Bible is a literary document using statements of various kinds (including commands), employing examples, and making various implications (from which inferences are to be drawn). These statements, examples, and implications are the means by which information is imparted to the readers of the Bible. Then the readers must use a valid hermeneutic to determine which statements, examples, and inferences apply today. None of us believes that we are to build an ark or offer our son as a sacrifice to God, though both of these matters are clear commands given in the Bible. But by a valid hermeneutic, we recognize that those commands are not for us.

Hugh Fulford

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Below is a partial listing of some of the great books of The Restoration Movement. Brother Bennie Johns has spent countless hours scanning this material and making it available to the public.

We have ordered several of these works and have no reservation about recommending them to you. This is a way to build a tremendous library without the cost. Many of, if not all of these wonderful works, are out of print... ..LEW

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Space does not permit a full listing of all materials on the CDs. If you would like further information, contact Bennie Johns at bjohns@hiwaay.net, or phone at 256-796-2680. He will be happy to provide any needed information.

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11. Life and Works of Walter Scott: Contains: LIFE OF ELDER WALTER SCOTT (A good resource for Restoration Reading.) WALTER SCOTT, VOICE OF THE GOLDEN ORACLE, The Biography of Elder J. T. Johnson, History of the Christian Church at Maysville, KY, Disciples of Christ at Mays Lick, KY, as well as the following works by Scott: The Messiahship, or Great Demonstration, Commentary on the Revelation, The Gospel Restored THE EVANGELIST — A monthly publication Devoted to Original Christianity -- 11 (years) Volumes -- \$14.95.

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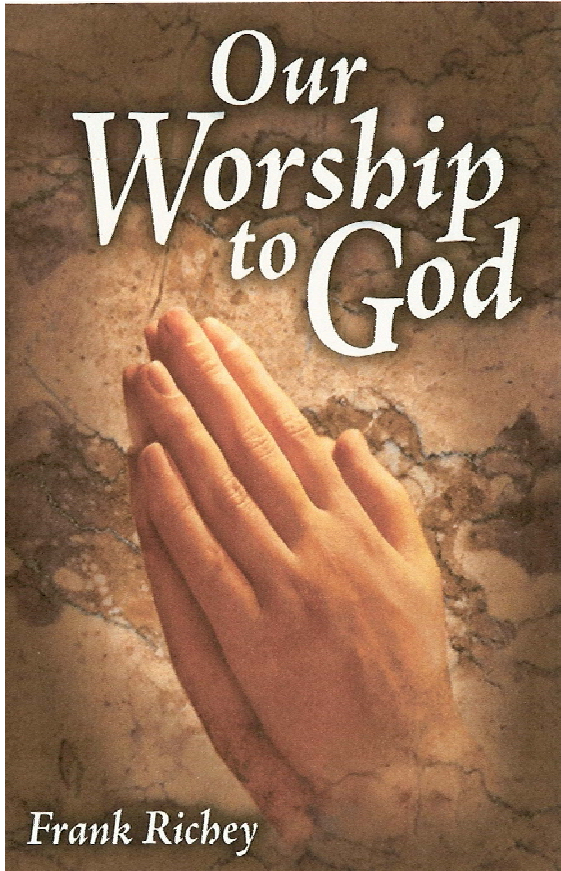
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