THE FRONTIER CAMP MEETING AS AN EXAMPLE OF EMOTIONAL RELIGION

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PREFACE

The frontier camp meeting, a distinctively American contribution to religious institutions, developed with and partly because of emotional religion that laid great stress on violent physical agitations, which were often called "exercises." Emotional religion was not a creation of the frontier, but people who lived in sparsely settled regions seemed to be more susceptible to its appeal. Before the Second Great Awakening broke out in the West, that region was a land starved for the services and ordinances of religion. Naturally, a religious revival involving unusual bodily exercises and fiery oratory spread, in the words of Barton W. Stone, "like fire in dry stubble."

At first the Presbyterians led the awakening with Baptists and Methodists joining in, but after the great camp meeting at Cane Ridge, a division between those who favored the methods of revivalism and those who opposed them developed among the Presbyterians. As a result the Cumberland Presbyterian Church broke away from the main stream of Presbyterianism; a new denomination, the Christian Church, appeared; and Shakerism was greatly stimulated. Presbyterians dropped the open-air gatherings because they were too emotional and disorderly, but under the Methodists, camp meetings reached maturity and became, according to Francis Asbury, the Methodist Bishop, a device for "fishing with a large net."

I first became interested in camp meetings by attending one, the Bloys Camp Meeting, held annually in the Davis Mountains in West Texas. Although this encampment was not marked by the overt emotionalism found

at the typical Kentucky gathering, it was an example of interdenominational cooperation similar to that in Kentucky during the Great Revival in the West. This firsthand knowledge of a camp meeting has helped me to a better understanding of the Kentucky revival and the frontier camp meeting.

Those who influenced me before I decided to write on this topic are simply too many to list. Once I had decided, my aunt, Miss Lela Weatherby of Fort Davis, Texas gave me both encouragement and helpful hints about material. The members of my committee, Dr. Theodore Agnew, Dr. LeRoy H. Fischer and Dr. James Henderson provided not only guidance and correction but also many valuable suggestions in research and writing. Dr. Homer Knight, Head of the History Department, has given the kind of friendship and assistance that, while it was not directly connected with this study, was invaluable to me. To the staff of the Oklahoma State University Library, and especially to those responsible for Inter-Library Loans go special thanks for patience and helpfulness. I also wish to acknowledge the generous loans of books by the libraries of Ohio State University, Ohio Wesleyan University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, University of Illinois, University of Oklahoma, University of Texas, University of Virginia, and Yale University.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The frontier camp meeting appeared for the first time in the Trans-Appalachian region of the United States around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Such a gathering, often accompanied by violent physical agitations, commonly called "exercises," was a new and vigorous institution born during a tumultuous religious awakening on the western frontier, "a meeting point," in the words of Frederick Jackson Turner, "of savagery and civilization."[1] Known as the "Second Great Awakening" or "The Great Revival in the West," this rekindling of interest in religion spread throughout the states of Kentucky and Tennessee and the region north of the Ohio River.

Gradually the camp meetings came to have some common characteristics. Generally the services were conducted in the open, although some meeting grounds had temporary protection from the elements. Since there was no other means available for housing great numbers of people, encampment sites became "cities" of tents, wagons, and other rude shelters. Worshippers followed three basic patterns in arranging the meeting ground: horseshoe, rectangular, and circular, the latter being the most popular. Tents marked the edge of the meeting ground, while wagons and carriages

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[1]Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, ed. Everett E. Edwards (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 187.

were parked beyond them. At night, fires in front of the tents furnished illumination for the meeting.[2]

As the camp meeting ran its course during the Second Great Awakening, definite patterns of thought and speech, of procedure, fellowship and association emerged, and it became a typical revival group, transitory in nature with a psychologically stimulating atmosphere, and a relative intimacy that was to encourage unusual behavior. Free from the restraint of the meeting house, worshippers in open meetings did not hold their emotions in check, while the preacher or exhorter frequently set a pattern of emotionalism that was calculated to contribute to the excitement and exaltation often found in revival religion.[3]

Many of the meetings during the Great Revival were very large gatherings that behaved like typical crowds and exhibited a number of characteristic behavior patterns which later studies have attempted to explain. A representative work of two sociologists, R. M. MacIver and Charles Page, defines a crowd as "a physically compact aggregation of human beings brought into direct, temporary, unorganized conduct with one another." If some occurrence touches vital concerns of the assembled persons, the crowds may "overthrow the standards and the habits which . . . have built up in its members." Each individual in a crowd functions as an amplifier of a mood, or a feeling, or merely of a verbal expression.[4] An investigation of the physical exercises during the Second Great

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[2]Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting -- Religion's Harvest Time, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 42.

[3]Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 160.

[4]R. M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society: An Introductory Analysis, (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1949), 421, 422.

Awakening by Frederick M. Davenport suggested that "the mind of the crowd is strangely like that of primitive man." He goes on to say that "the crowd is united and governed by emotion rather than by reason. Emotion is the natural bond, for men differ much less in this respect than in intellect."[5] In a crowd there is a loss of the sense of individual responsibility; the "hypnotic quality characteristic of the crowd, and the degree to which the suggestibility of the individual is enhanced when he becomes one of a physically compact group" are revealed.[6] Much of the unusual emotionalism of the Great Revival can be more fully understood in such sociological terms.

Where the aspects of religious conversion and a crowd are found together, the resulting assemblage is a revival, an assembly whose purpose is the stimulation of religious feeling or devotion. Davenport noted that

> . . . the natural result of the assembling of men in crowds especially when skillful speakers engage their attention and play upon the chords of imagination and emotion, seems to be the weakening of the power of inhibition in each individual, and the giving of free rein to feeling and imitation. And when under these circumstances a powerful emotion, especially that of fear is aroused in the consciousness of the assembly, all the phenomena of suggestion are likely to develop.[7]

The phenomena of suggestion might also lead to other manifestations of the highly nervous state in which an individual under such circumstances finds himself. "The unrestrained tendency of the psychological crowd," Davenport says, "is to lay bare in the individual composing it primitive

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[5]Frederick M. Davenport, Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), 26-27.

[6]MacIver and Page, op. cit., 427.

[7]Davenport, op. cit., 10.

and uncontrolled mental and nervous traits."[8] Revivalist preachers depend, in their own way, on their ability to arouse an intense crowd feeling in their hearers, and the techniques they utilize, the means with which they convey vivid visions of hell or salvation, are used to create the hectic crowd atmosphere that they require.[9] Thus they often lead an outbreak of emotional religion.

Edwin Diller Starbuck, whose study of the psychology of religion was a pioneer work in the field, suggested that one of the forces at work in revivals is that of suggestion and hypnotism. He points out that "the series of meetings, with their constant reiteration of the fact of sin and the need of salvation, or of the stimulus of the crowd and force of example. . . tend to subdue the will of the most recalcitrant."[10]

Davenport noted "a high degree of nervous instability and suggestibility--a plastic and susceptible mental and nervous organization," on the part of a population where a revival is held. He went on to say that "there is nothing which has shown itself in history which is capable of creating such powerful emotion as intense and prolonged meditation upon men's relation to God and a world of judgment to come."[11] Thus, a revival meeting is a crowd whose collective feeling is peculiarly intense.

Prior to Davenport, only supernatural and pathological explanations for the revival phenomena so prevalent during the Second Great Awakening--violent spasmodic action, contortions of the body, shouting, trembling, hypnotic rigidity, sinking of muscular energy, trance and vision--had been

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[8] Ibid., 31.

[9] MacIver and Page, op. cit., 428.

[10] Edwin Diller Starbuck, The Psychology of Religion, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 171.

[11] Davenport, op. cit., 216, 217.

attempted. He went further to suggest that the general explanation of such facts lay in individual and social psychology, and developed the thesis that "fear and joy in the human race are naturally accompanied by animal and primitive reflexes, the cruder forms of which disappear only with the growth of power of inhibition in the midst of a wider and less painful experience and environment." Motor and sensory reflexes are correlated with imagination and emotion and are intensified by belief and expectation. There is no gathering where "belief, expectation, imagination and emotion are more powerfully combined than in the revival crowd."[12]

Many writers have commented upon the extraordinary nature of the physical phenomena observed at the Great Revival in the West. The success of a meeting was judged by the number of worshippers who were affected by violent exercises. At first many attributed such happenings to supernatural causes, although there was some disagreement as to whether they had been the work of God or of the Devil. Such outbreaks had been seen before in the history of the Christian religion, but the intensity of the phenomena that accompanied frontier camp meetings evoked the comments of secular and religious observers alike.

Throughout its history the Christian church has seen instances of revivals and characteristic emotional religion. One of the most cataclysmic times in that history was the Protestant Reformation. During the Reformation two major trends could be seen: one group did not break entirely with the past, but preserved those aspects of the pre-Reformation past which were a single religion for a political state and denial of the right of private judgment; the other group rejected formal creeds and

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[12] Ibid., 223.

stressed the view that Christianity was a way of life rather than a body of doctrine. The former has been characterized as the "right wing" of the Reformation, and the latter the "left wing".[13]

The various groups of the "left wing" have been difficult to classify, and so most historians, finding among them at least one common denominator, opposition to infant baptisms, have lumped them together under the term, Anabaptists. They were generally characterized by a concern for the practical application of biblical teachings to everyday life, and by an emphasis on emotional response to religious occurrences.[14] The Anabaptists provide an example of an earlier group that also stressed emotional religion.

Of the "right wing" groups the most important to this study are the Calvinists, whose founder John Calvin did not lead a revival in the strictest sense, but whose influence has grown since his day out of proportion to the impact he made upon his own time. His teachings included the doctrines of predestination, election and total depravity; it was not long before they spread from Geneva to France, England, Scotland, and the New World. In England Calvinism provided the theological basis for the Puritan movement of the English phase of the Reformation. When the Puritans could not succeed in their effort to "purify" the Church of England, they migrated in large numbers to North America.

Typically, Puritanism embraced a heartfelt emotional piety that went hand in hand with strict, doctrinaire morality. The migration of some Puritans to New England was in part a kind of religious pilgrimage whose

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[13]William Warren Sweet, American Culture and Religion (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1951), 34-35, 41.

[14]Harold J. Grimm, The Reformation Era (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), 160-163.

end it was to accomplish in the New World what had not been done in the Old. Worship among New England Puritans was "studiedly non-liturgical," and a certain stress was placed on a conversion experience as proof of being numbered among God's elect. When a New Englander, affiliated with the church in all respects except full membership, experienced the reception of divine grace, he had been "converted." Usually such an event was marked by some kind of vision or involuntary physical reaction.[15]

A problem arose when some of these quasi-church members did not complete their membership by having the anticipated conversion experience. The difficulty became acute when one of these unregenerate would present his children for baptism. A solution was reached with the Half-Way Covenant, by which such children would be baptized. For some the new practice seemed to augur a decline in piety.[16]

Such a decline in piety did result, and in 1679 the clergy and lay elders of Massachusetts met in Boston in formal synod to discuss why the land suffered. Under the leadership of Increase Mather, they published the result of their deliberation, and entitled it The Necessity of Reformation. The report was organized into twelve sections and was, according to Perry Miller, a noted present-day authority on early New England, "a staggering compendium of iniquity." Listed among the sins of the region were ungodliness, pride, heresy, profanity, sleeping during sermons, the decay of family government, the violation of the sabbath, an increase of law suits, sins having to do with sex and alcohol, lying, business

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[15] Edwin S. Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 6-9.

[16] Ibid., 9.

immorality, no desire to reform, and no civic spirit.[17]

The synod's findings indicated that religion was losing its dramatic and experimental qualities. According to Jonathan Edwards, "it was a time of extraordinary dullness in religion."[18] But such periods usually precede revivals and Edwards became famous for his part in reviving religious interest in New England during the early part of the eighteenth century. In his words the revival was remarkable and "surprising," as extraordinary for its fervor as the earlier times had been for their dullness.

Edwards had received his education at Yale, leaving there in 1727 to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in the ministry at Northampton, Massachusetts. In his writings on "the surprising work of God," in New England he traces the effects of his grandfather's preaching, noting that during a long ministry there had been five "harvests" of converts. When young Edwards arrived, Northampton seemed to be in need of revival, since among other things, the young people of the town were not well-behaved, and the community was divided into two opposing camps. Soon after Stoddard's death, the spirit of Northampton changed, and by 1734 the whole town had shown an increased anxiety about irreligion.

Following the conversion of a young woman of questionable morality, the tempo of religious activity and interest increased. "There was scarcely a single person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world," Edwards wrote. Under his tutelage the revival spread:

> . . . the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more; souls did as

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[17]Perry Miller, Errand Into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 7-8.

[18]Jonathan Edwards, quoted in Gaustad, op. cit., 15.

> it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvelous light, and delivered out of a horrible pit, and from miry clay, and set upon a rock with a new song of praise of God in their mouths.[19]

From Northampton the revival spread to neighboring communities and then into Connecticut and New Hampshire. Usually this revival is regarded as the precursor or opening phase of the Great Awakening of the 1740's, but it stopped almost as abruptly as it had begun. However, a new interest in religion spread throughout the colonies in the 1740's--four years after Edwards' first revival had subsided.

In the fall of 1740 George Whitefield, the English evangelist, made his tour of New England. To congregations accustomed to sermons read from carefully written manuscripts, the uninhibited eloquence of the young and impassioned orator had much appeal. Benjamin Franklin was much impressed with Whitefield's speaking abilities and recorded his impressions of one of the evangelist's sermons. Whitefield has been regarded by many later writers as the single most important unifying element in the whole of the Great Awakening movement. In the middle colonies a spirit of revivalism had been present since around 1720 largely because of the work of Theodore J. Frelinghuysen. When Whitefield moved through New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, the revival broke out afresh among the Presbyterians, Dutch and German pietists of that area. Just as such increased concern with religious matters came about in the middle colonies and New England, there was also an awakening in the southern states, particularly in Virginia.

A revival among Presbyterians constituted the first phase of the Great Awakening in Virginia. As an important religious force in Virginia,

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[19]Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, etc." Puritan Sage-Collected Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), 169.

Presbyterianism had two sources, the Scotch-Irish migration in the western portions of the colony, and a spontaneous revival in Hanover County in eastern Virginia, where from the earliest times of the Great Awakening a revival spirit generally prevailed. From the Presbyterians leadership in the movement passed to the Baptists, who were now more popular. They aided the movement with their zeal and enthusiasm, and helped to spread the revival since they generally appealed to the plain folk of the colony. By 1776 leadership had passed from the Baptists to the Methodists. Because they had been affiliated with the Church of England, the Methodists were spared the official opposition to which the Baptists and Presbyterians had been subjected, and the fact that Methodism was itself a revival creation added greatly to its influence during the latter half of the Great Awakening. But the connection with the Church of England proved a handicap during and after the American Revolution. The decline of Methodist influence in Virginia and elsewhere paralleled a general decline in religion throughout the newly-formed United States of America.

Religion had seen a series of dramatic changes since the sixteenth century. Out of the chaos of the Protestant Reformation Calvinism had spread to England, Scotland and the New World, gaining strength as it moved. As Calvinism progressed it had been paralleled by a series of revivals and awakenings. Wesley in England had begun a movement aimed at revival, and at about the same time the Great Awakening was taking place in the English colonies of North America. That movement had waned with the coming of the American Revolution, and after the war was over, Methodism had become a separate denomination, still stressing evangelistic methods as means of reaching the vast numbers of the unchurched in America. Presbyterians also sought to bring religion to those in the wilderness who did not have a regular minister, but the most effective means of

meeting the religious needs of the frontier was the Methodist circuit rider. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the frontier people in the Trans-Allegheny West would undergo a revival that equalled if not surpassed the Great Awakening. Characterized by a frenzy of emotional outbreaks and the appearance of a new revival institution, this movement has become known as the Second Great Awakening or the Great Revival in the West.

CHAPTER II

CONDITIONS IN KENTUCKY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CAMP MEETING

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century many people were attracted to Kentucky because of its salubrious climate, fertile soil, and abundant land. Not all of Kentucky was equally fertile, since the country south and west of the Green River was dominated by pine barrens and sandy earth, but the region between the Licking and Kentucky rivers where the Bourbon County revival took place was the part of the state that "rendered Kentucky so celebrated for the excellency of its soil." There the abundance of crops was such that it was "not exceeded, if equalled, by any portion of upland in our country."[1] By 1800 the population of the state had reached 220,000,[2] most of which was concentrated in the regions of the best land. The greatest portion of the settlers had come from Virginia and were of predominantly Scotch-Irish stock.

The people called Scotch-Irish are really neither. Their previous home had been the Scotch Lowlands, and they were mostly a Germanic people. During the seventeenth century they had been resettled in Northern Ireland, but because of the harsh English rule, many emigrated to America in the eighteenth century. Entering mainly through the ports of Pennsylvania, they then moved into the back country, where they found land that no one

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[1] John F. Schermerhorn and Samuel J. Mills, A Correct View of That Part of the United States which lies West of the Allegheny Mountains with Regard to Religion and Morals (Hartford: Peter Gleason and Co., 1814), 19.

[2] U. S., Department of State, Second Census of the United States: 1800 (Washington: Duane, Printer, 1801), 2 P.

was occupying. They settled in the valley of Virginia in the 1740's and later penetrated into other frontier regions including Kentucky. Generally a warlike people, the Scotch-Irish had been surrounded by enemies in both Ulster and Kentucky, and so they continued in a state of anxiety and watchfulness.[3]

But the typical Kentuckian was more than warlike; he was also exuberant, lawless, violent and reckless. "What the pioneer became in Kentucky was to an appreciable extent a result of his expectation of a paradisical situation, that is an unrestrained existence."[4] Consequently there was a lack of the sense of social responsibility or any concern with ideals among a majority of the people in the region. These characteristics were described by a variety of travelers. For example, Harry Toulmin, a young Unitarian minister who investigated social, economic, and political conditions for would-be English immigrants, noted that many Americans had commented on the unsavory character of the natives of Kentucky. "It is said," he wrote, "that they are an idle, dissolute, quarrelsome set of adventurers, who were too vicious or too poor to live where they were born, and have therefore fled from the society of honest, civilized men." But he found Kentuckians not so bad when compared to other Americans:

> As far as my own observations extend, I may say that I have met with no people in America more regular or more thriving. I compare not the body of people with my own circle of selected friends in England, but with Americans in general, and I am confident they will not suffer by the comparison. The most respectable persons are perpetually emigrating to that state. Two thousand persons, it is supposed, have gone through Winchester on their way thither this spring; and many of them

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[3]Arthur K. Moore, The Frontier Mind, A Cultural Analysis of the Kentucky Frontiersman (University of Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 50-53.

[4]Ibid., 66, 67.

> traveled in their own pleasure carriages. But it cannot be wondered at, that these reports have been spread against Kentucky, when it is considered that in Philadelphia it is imagined that one quarter of the Virginians have lost their eyes by gouging, and that, with many persons in Pennsylvania, it is sufficient to overturn the credit of any measure proposed in Congress, to say it originated in Virginia.[5]

In addition to young Toulmin's optimistic appraisal, another view saw life as relatively lawless and immoral in Kentucky.

An example of the uncivilized nature of Kentucky life has been provided by Peter Cartwright, the famous backwoods preacher, who moved to Logan County, Kentucky in 1793 while he was still a boy. At that time the county was known as "Rogues Harbor," and

> here many refugees, from almost all parts of the union fled to escape justice or punishment; for although there was a law, yet it could not be executed, and it was a desperate state of society. Murderers, horse thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters fled here until they combined and actually formed a majority. The honest and civil part of the citizens would prosecute these wretched banditti, but they would swear each other clear; and they really put all law at defiance, and carried on such desperate violence and outrage that the honest part of the citizens seemed to be driven to the necessity of uniting and combining together, and taking the law into their own hands under the name of Regulators.[6]

And there were other competent observers who commented upon the decline of public morality and religion in Kentucky.

One such comment came from the pen of the Methodist Bishop, Francis Asbury, who traveled extensively throughout the United States during the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Asbury recorded in his Journal that in his opinion, "it is as hard or harder for the people of the West to gain religion as any other."

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[5]Harry Toulmin, The Western Country in 1793; Reports on Kentucky and Virginia (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1948), 135.

[6]Peter Cartwright, Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1956), 30.

"Not one in a hundred," he went on to note, "came here to get religion, but rather to get plenty of good land." Concluding, he wrote, "I think it will be well if some or many do not lose their souls."[7]

One of the troubles that beset many Kentuckians was the difficulty of proving the right of property. A Frenchman, François Andre Michaux, who toured the American West in the last year of the eighteenth century, remarked in his journal that, "of all the states in the union, /Kentucky/ is that wherein the rights of an individual are most subject to contest. I did not stop at the house of one inhabitant who was persuaded of the validity of his own right, but what seemed dubious of his neighbors." One result of this incertitude was "a seemingly inexhaustible set of tedious and expensive lawsuits,"[8] which led to increased tension between neighbors and indicated a lack of religious influence.

Still another problem in Kentucky was that of drinking; people on the American frontier consumed prodigious quantities of alcohol. Peter Cartwright noted that from his earliest recollection, "drinking drams in family and social circles was considered harmless and allowable." He went on to say that "it was almost universally the custom for preachers, in common with all others, to take drams; and if a man would not have it in his family, his harvest, his house raisings, log rollings, weddings, and so on, he was considered parsimonious and unsociable."[9]

Many observers noted a decline in religion, or the utter lack of it,

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[7]Francis Asbury, The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 1958), II: The Journal, 1794-1816, 125.

[8]François Andre Michaux, "Travels West of the Allegheny Mountains," Early Western Travels, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: A. H. Clark Co., 1904), III, 226-228.

[9]Cartwright, op. cit., 145.

which prompted them to speculate on the reasons for such circumstances. A Presbyterian historian, Robert Davidson, listed several causes of "the sad state of religion in Kentucky." Religion's neglect of an overwhelming number of people, "outstripping the means of grace, and fast receding from the influence of religion," he listed as a major cause. Other causes included the neglect of family religion, the natural tendency of war, (hunting as regarded was an image of war), dissensions, and French infidelity. In summary, he said, "We beheld Infidelity and Vice combined, rolling their turbid tide over the land; while the Church, that should have been busily erecting barriers to arrest its progress, is either benumbed by covetousness, or wasting her energies in frivolous disputes."[10]

A significant influence on religion was the American Revolution. It had been hailed by preachers and secular leaders alike as a kind of religious revival and had had the astounding fortune to succeed. Though it had been a victory, a revival that had conquered the enemy, it was a religious failure, and the struggle to revive the waning religious consciousness of Americans had to begin again.[11] A particularly unfortunate aspect of the decline was the exit of the missionary societies connected with the Anglican church, the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge and Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The Methodists, having been affiliated with the Church of England, found themselves, like the Episcopalians, in public disfavor for a while after the war. The Revolution also necessitated a certain amount of social and economic readjustment,

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[10]Robert Davidson, History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 100-103.

[11]Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in Religion in American Life, ed. James W. Smith and A. Leland James (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), I: The Shaping of American Religion, 353.

and as a result, religious interests were relegated to the background.[12] Thus one factor in the religious decline in America in the last ten years of the eighteenth century was the American Revolution.

A Kentucky Presbyterian minister of unusual ability, Richard McNemar, offered convincing proof that a decline of religious influence had taken place in Kentucky. "When anyone prays for a thing," he wrote, "it is a sure and certain evidence that he has not got that thing in possession." "Hence," he went on to note, "the united prayers of hundreds of the warmest professors, entreating Christ to come and visit the churches, loudly proclaimed that he was not already there."[13]

Kentucky was not entirely devoid of regular ministers and church organizations. In 1800 three presbyteries had been organized in the state, and there were 106 Baptist churches with a membership of more than 5,000. The Methodists counted a total membership of over 2,700 in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio. But no church was adequately supplied with ministers, and many areas went for long periods without having the church ordinances administered. There were few meeting houses, and most of those were rude log structures similar to the dwellings. When there was no building, services were often held in the open air or in one of the larger cabins, and when there was no minister, a layman presided over simple services. Generally, the outlying settlements were rarely visited. Presbyterian ministers usually confined their work to specific congregations within a definite area, and the Baptist minister was expected to support himself, so he limited his concern to churches under his immediate

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[12] Catherine Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916) 14.

[13] Richard McNemar, The Kentucky Revival (New York: Edwin O. Jenkins, 1846), 13.

charge. Only the Methodist itinerant preacher ventured into the less settled regions.[14]

That the decline in religion was of national scope was indicated by a pastoral letter sent out by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1798:

> Formidable innovations and convulsions in Europe threaten destruction to morals and religion. Scenes of devastation and bloodshed unexampled in the history of modern nations have convulsed our world, and our country is threatened with similar calamities. We perceive with pain and fearful apprehension a general dereliction of religious principles and practice among our fellow citizens, a visible and prevailing impiety and contempt for the laws and institutions of religion, and an abounding infidelity which, in many instances, tends to atheism itself. The profligacy and corruption of the public morals have advanced with a progress proportioned to our declension in religion.[15]

Clearly, then, there was in the opinion of one of the largest bodies a need for some kind of revival of religious devotion.

The Methodists, always trying to reach those who had no chance to worship, took early notice of Kentucky, and in 1786 James Haw and Benjamin Ogden were assigned as the first traveling preachers of that denomination in the area. Ten years later there were seven circuits in Kentucky and Tennessee, and the Western Conference had been created. Circuit riders alleviated a number of frontier religious disadvantages and, since the population shifted rapidly, the itinerant preacher reached those who had no permanent home, or who seemed to be continually moving to the west. Besides, most of the people in the sparsely settled western regions were too poor to support a regular minister.[16]

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[14]Cleveland, op. cit., 17-23.

[15]Quoted in Frank G. Beardsley, A History of American Revivals (New York: American Tract Society, 1904), 82.

[16]Wesley M. Gewehr, "Some Factors in the Expansion of Frontier Methodism, 1800-1811," Journal of Religion, VIII (1928), 100.

But there had been other efforts to alleviate the poor religious condition of the frontier areas. In 1787 and 1788 there had been a revival at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia that produced some young men, "burning with zeal," who wanted to spread the gospel. Eight of these young men were finally sent to Kentucky as missionaries by the Synod of Virginia. Apparently they were successful in their venture, for all but one of them became ministers in the Presbyterian Church.[17]

For many on the frontier the only connection with religion came at the sacramental and quarterly meetings, which were usually well-attended and furnished, in addition to an opportunity to hear the gospel, a time for meeting friends. Such meetings often lasted for more than one day, and it became common for worshippers to camp in the vicinity of the meeting. People who would stimulate a revival were quick to realize the potential of such large gatherings. The possibility of unusual excitement induced a number of people to attend, and when the larger number tended to stay over for several days the result was a camp meeting, a religious assemblage lasting several days with some of the worshippers camped in temporary shelters on the grounds.[18]

Just when such a gathering became a camp meeting, or when the first such encampment was held, are still matters of question, but there were several precedents. As early as 1794 Rehoboth Methodist Church in Lincoln County, North Carolina, under the care of Daniel Asbury, decided to hold a meeting in the neighboring forest for several days and nights. Among the assisting ministers was William McKendree, later prominent in the

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[17]Davidson, op. cit., 105.

[18]Cleveland, op. cit., 52.

Great Revival in the West.[19] Also among the camp meeting's forerunners were the Grosse Versammlungen of the Germans of Pennsylvania where success was measured in terms of weeping and jubilation. Others have seen the origin of the camp meeting in John McGee's services in Tennessee in 1799. McGee had preached in Guilford County, North Carolina, and might have been impressed with the techniques of Daniel Asbury in Lincoln County.[20] Whatever its origin, the frontier camp meeting derives its greatest importance from its connection with the larger revival in the West.

More than any other single individual, James McGready, a Presbyterian minister, was responsible for the great revival that swept over the Trans-Appalachian West during the fading years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth. Born in Pennsylvania of Scotch-Irish parentage, his family moved while he was still young to Guilford County, North Carolina. Because of his interest in religion, he was sent to Pennsylvania to study for the ministry under John McMillan. He returned to North Carolina and began preaching in a vigorous, revivalistic way. His manner of preaching soon evoked opposition, and at Stony Creek in 1796 McGready's enemies made a bonfire of his pulpit and left him a warning note written in blood. Shortly afterward, he and John McGee left North Carolina and went to Kentucky.[21]

While in Guilford County, McGready had taken part in a revival at Guilford Academy where a young man named Barton W. Stone was studying.

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[19] Ibid., 53.

[20] C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 29-31.

[21] Guion G. Johnson, Ante Bellum North Carolina, A Social History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 379. See also Cleveland, op. cit., 37; and William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), 327-328.

Stone later recorded his impressions of McGready and left this description in his autobiography:

> His person was not prepossessing, nor his appearance interesting, except his remarkable gravity and small, piercing eyes. His coarse, tremulous voice excited in me the idea of something unearthly. His gestures were sui generis, the perfect reverse of elegance. Everything appeared by him forgotten but the salvation of souls. Such earnestness, such zeal, such powerful persuasion, enforced by the joys of heaven and the miseries of hell, I had never witnessed before. My mind was chained by him, and followed him closely in his rounds of heaven, earth and hell with feelings indescribable. His concluding remarks were addressed to the sinner to flee the wrath to come without delay. Never before had I comparatively felt the force of truth.[22]

In 1796 McGready became pastor of three churches in Logan County, Gasper River, Muddy River, and Red River. He began to work for a revival among Logan County residents and drew up a covenant binding those who signed it to offer special prayers for a revival:

> Therefore we bind ourselves to observe the third Saturday of each month for one year, as a day of fasting and prayer, for the conversion of sinners in Logan County, and throughout the world. We also engage to spend one half-hour every Saturday evening, beginning at the setting of the sun, and one-half hour every Sabbath morning, at the rising of the sun in pleading with God to revive his work.[23]

The next three years saw periods of interest followed by a general lack of concern. In 1799 a reawakening began that eventually rose to great heights of excitement. The public services were "animated, and tears flowed freely." In June of 1800 a sacramental meeting was held at the Red River church, and among those attending were John Rankin, William Hodge, and the McGee brothers, John and William. While Mr. Hodge was preaching, a woman in the back of the meeting, "unable to repress the

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[22]Barton W. Stone, "Autobiography," William Rogers, The Cane Ridge Meeting House (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1910), 120, 121.

[23]Quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., n40.

violence of her emotions, gave vent to them in loud cries." After an intermission, John McGee, a Methodist, got up to speak. Too agitated to preach, "he exhorted the people to let the Lord God omnipotent reign in their hearts, and to submit to him, and their souls should live." McGee now moved back and forth among the congregation "shouting and exhorting vehemently." The result was utter chaos: "screams for mercy were mingled with shouts of ecstasy, and a universal agitation pervaded the whole multitude."[24] In their anguish many fell to the floor, and it "was soon covered with the slain."[25]

The next month a meeting was held at Gasper River; it had been widely advertised and a large crowd assembled. Since the church building was too small, the worshippers moved out into the neighboring woods. Most of the people had not planned to remain after nightfall, but the excitement of the meeting held them, and the result was probably the first camp meeting known to fame. The scheme of spending the night out of doors was nothing new to Kentuckians, and it soon became a common practice to stay over at sacramental meetings. This particular meeting was described by John Rankin:

> On Friday morning at an early hour, the people began to assemble in large numbers from every quarter, and by the usual hour for preaching to commence, there was a multitude collected, unprecedented in this or any other country of so sparse a population. The rising ground to the south and west of the meeting house, was literally lined with covered wagons and other appendages--each one furnished with provisions and accommodations, suitable to make them comfortable on the ground during the solemnity. When I came in view of this vast assemblage I was astonished. On the evening of the following Monday inquirers began to fall prostrate on all sides, and their cries became piercing and incessant. Heavy groans were heard, and again in a little

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[24]Davidson, op. cit., 133, 134. See also C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 35-37.

[25]John McGee, letter to Thomas L. Douglass, June 23, 1820, quoted in C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 35.

> time, cries of penitential and confessional prayer sounded through the assembly. Toward the approach of night, the floor of the meeting house was literally covered with the prostrate bodies of penitents, so that it became necessary to carry a number out of doors and lay them on the grass or garments, if they had them.[26]

In August of 1800 another meeting was held at Muddy River, and by this time the revival had spread into Tennessee and was beginning to reach into other parts of Kentucky.[27]

In Bourbon County, in the northern part of the state, another immigrant from North Carolina, Barton W. Stone, heard of the revival in Logan County, and in the spring of 1801 went to see it for himself. Stone had become a Presbyterian minister, having been licensed to preach by the Orange Presbytery in North Carolina. After a disappointing missionary tour of eastern North Carolina, Stone decided to go to the West,[28] and by 1796 he had become the regular supply minister of Cane Ridge and Concord churches in Bourbon County. In 1798 after a journey to solicit funds to establish a college in Kentucky, he received and accepted a call from the united congregations of Cane Ridge and Concord. A day was set for Stone to be ordained, and although he objected to the doctrine of the trinity as it was taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith, he was ordained. "Things moved on quietly" in Stone's congregations and in the surrounding country generally. "Apathy in religious societies appeared everywhere to an alarming degree." Stone, "having heard of a remarkable religious excitement in the south of Kentucky and Tennessee, under the labors of James

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[26]"An Autobiography of John Rankin," quoted by J. P. MacLean, "The Kentucky Revival and Its Influence on the Miami Valley," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publication, XII (1903), 279-281.

[27]Cleveland, op. cit., 54-56.

[28]Winfred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ, A History (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948), 95-97.

McGready and other Presbyterian ministers," was "very anxious to be among them and early in the spring of 1801 went there to attend a camp meeting."[29]

Peter Cartwright, later a Methodist preacher, who was then living in Logan County, records a sacramental meeting held under the leadership of McGready. McGready had invited the Methodists to join with him in the services, and one of their number, John Page, "preached with great power and success."[30] Stone also left a description of one of these Logan County meetings:

> There on the edge of a prairie in Logan County, Kentucky, the multitudes came together and continued a number of days and nights encamped on the ground during which time worship was carried on in some part of the encampment. The scene to me was new and passing strange. It baffled description.

As before, "many, very many, fell down, as men slain in battle," and lay for hours in an "apparently breathless and motionless state." After a while, the fallen obtained deliverance. "The gloomy cloud, which had covered their faces, seemed gradually to disappear, and hope in smiles brightened into joy." Stone was astonished to hear, "men, women and children declaring the wonderful works of God, and the glorious mysteries of the gospel."[31]

In the meantime a similar revival was taking place among the Baptists in Boone County, Kentucky, and in March of 1801, an unidentified gentleman wrote to a friend in Washington describing that revival. "In short, all the churches near this, that I have heard from, who adhere to primitive Christianity, are in a prosperous state. In some it appears like a fire

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[29]Stone, loc. cit., 147-154.

[30]Cartwright, op. cit., 37.

[31]Stone, loc. cit.

that has been long confined--bursting its barriers and spreading with a rapidity that is indescribable."[32]

Among Methodists, too the revival had been spreading. After John McGee had become so excited at the Red River meeting in 1800, the news traveled through his denomination, and in August of that same year a large number attended the Methodist quarterly meeting held at Edwards chapel.[33] Frontier life drew Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists together; it was not uncommon to find them uniting in larger meetings, though the Baptists mingled less freely.

As the revival spread among the Methodists and Presbyterians in southern Kentucky, and as it sustained its growth in Boone County, another outbreak was occurring. At a sacramental meeting in Flemingsburg, on the last Sunday in April of 1801, the revival broke out. "The power of God was very visible among the people through the whole of the occasion," and there was "much weeping, trembling, and convulsion of soul."[34]

The next Sunday about twenty persons were openly affected by the spirit of revivalism in the congregation of Cabin Creek in Mason County. "Accordingly, a meeting was appointed a few evenings after, to which a crowd of awakened souls flocked, and spent the whole night in singing hymns, praying, and exhorting one another." As the strange exercises continued, greater multitudes were attracted to the various meetings and sacramental services, and "it was found expedient to encamp on the ground,

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[32]Extract of letter from a gentleman to his friend, Lexington, Kentucky, March 8, 1801, quoted in William Warren Sweet, Religion on The American Frontier, I: The Baptists, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931), 609.

[33]Sweet, Story of Religion in America, 328, 329.

[34]McNemar, op. cit., 21.

and continue the meeting day and night." On May 22, 1801, a similar meeting was held at Cabin Creek, which lasted four days. The scene of this encampment has been described by Richard McNemar, a scholarly Presbyterian minister who later became a Shaker:

> The scene was awful beyond description; the falling, crying out, praying, exhorting, singing, shouting, &c., exhibited such new, and striking evidences of a supernatural power, that few, if any could escape without being affected. Such as tried to run from it were frequently struck on the way, or impelled, by some alarming signal to return; and so powerful was the evidence on all sides, that no place was found for the obstinate sinner to shelter himself, but under the protection of prejudiced and bigoted professors. No circumstance at this meeting, appeared more striking, than the great numbers who fell on the third night; and to prevent their being trodden under foot by the multitude, they were collected together and laid out in order, on two squares of the meeting house; which like so many dead corpses, covered a considerable part of the floor.

At this meeting were people from Cane Ridge,[35] Concord, Eagle Creek, and many other neighboring communities. When they left, they took news of the Cabin Creek meeting, and thus helped to spread the revival.[36]

The next general camp meeting was held at Concord in Bourbon County, about the last of May. Before that meeting began Barton W. Stone had returned from observing the Logan County revival, and most of his congregation had turned out to hear the religious news that Stone brought back. After telling of what he had seen, Stone preached a sermon, noting afterwards that "the congregation was affected with awful solemnity, and many returned home weeping." Stone then hurried over to his Concord church to preach that same night. There "two little girls were struck down under the preaching of the Word, and in every respect were exercised as those

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[35]The spelling of Cane Ridge varies from Cane Ridge to Caneridge, to Kain Ridge and Cain Ridge. Since the first form is most common, it will be used.

[36]McNemar, op. cit., 23, 24.

were in the south of Kentucky." Later, an impromptu gathering in front of the home of one of the members of the Concord congregation continued until late at night, "and many found peace in glorification of the Lord." "The effects of this meeting through the country," Stone wrote, "were like fire in dry stubble driven by a strong wind." It seemed that the whole countryside was affected, and soon after, a protracted camp meeting was held at Concord.

Stone commented in his autobiography as he described the Concord encampment that "the whole country appeared to be in motion to the place, and multitudes of all denominations attended." He declined to "give a true description of this meeting," since, "it can not be done; it would border on the marvelous."[37] But Richard McNemar did leave a description of the Concord meeting. The number attending he placed at about 4,000 with seven Presbyterian ministers present, four of whom were opposed to the work, "and spoke against it until the fourth day about noon; the evidence then became so powerful that they all professed to be convinced, that it was the work of God." The meeting continued five days, and "on this occasion, no sex or color, class or description, were exempted from the pervading influence of the spirit; even from the age of eight months to sixty years."[38]

After Concord similar outbreaks, "which equalled if not surpassed any that had been before," took place during services held at Eagle Creek in Ohio, and at Pleasant Point, Kentucky. "From this meeting," McNemar wrote "the work was spread extensively through Bourbon, Fayette, and other neighboring counties; and was carried by a number of its subjects, to the

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[37]Stone, loc. cit., 156, 157.

[38]McNemar, op. cit., 24.

south side of Kentucky, where it found a permanent residence in the hearts of many."[39] One other camp meeting took place in July at Indian Creek in Harrison County, "but there was very little appearance of that power which strikes conviction to the heart of the sinner," until a twelve year old boy began to speak. When he weakened, "and language failed to describe the feelings of his soul, he raised his hand, and dropping his handkerchief, . . . cried out: 'Thus, O sinner! shall you drop into hell, unless you forsake your sins and turn to the Lord.' At that moment some fell, like those who are shot in battle, and the work spread in a manner which language cannot describe."[40]

Such protracted evangelistic and emotional camp meetings began on the Kentucky frontier, and are an example of the ingenuity of the American pioneer. The component parts of such assemblies, an open air setting, revivalistic emotionalism, physical exercises, and overnight camping had all been seen before, but when all were combined under the impetus of the Second Great Awakening in the West, a unique institution was created. Probably no Kentuckian thought the camp meeting unusual; camping out was a familiar part of pioneer experience, and if the revival meetings were extraordinary in their enthusiasm, it can be explained in part by the fact that large gatherings were rare on the frontier.[41] But the tidal wave of the great western revival did not reach its crest until an immense sacramental meeting was held at Cane Ridge in August of 1801.

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[39] Ibid. Apparently McNemar disregarded the influence of the Logan County revival led by McGready and others.

[40] Ibid., 25, 26.

[41] See C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 40, and also see Ernest Lee Carter, "The Early Camp Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley," (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1922), 29-32.

CHAPTER III

THE CANE RIDGE CAMP MEETING

The first Sunday in August, 1801, was appointed for a great sacramental meeting to be held at Cane Ridge in Bourbon County. This was to become the largest of the Kentucky meetings and probably the most chaotic. Peter Cartwright said that it was the first camp meeting, "and here our camp meetings took their rise."[1] At any rate, it is the best reported of the encampments.

The Cane Ridge camp meeting was actually one of a series held in Bourbon and neighboring counties in the spring and summer of 1801. Two separate streams of the great revival came together in Bourbon County; one had been led by Richard McNemar in Madison County in the upper part of the state, and the other by James McGready in Logan County. When Barton W. Stone returned after having observed the revival under McGready's leadership, he told of what he had seen, and the two branches of revivalism in Kentucky merged.

Cane Ridge was extremely well-advertised, and had been published about a month in advance among the Presbyterians as an annual sacramental meeting. Methodists and Baptists also attended, but the Baptists did not take communion with the rest.[2] By this time the excitement of encampments must have been related to a majority of the people in that part of

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[1]Cartwright, op. cit., 33.

[2]Letter from a gentleman to his sister, Lexington, Kentucky, August 10, 1801, quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., 76.

Kentucky, since the earlier camp meetings at Cabin Creek, Pleasant Point, and Concord had surely stimulated the interest of the inhabitants of the region, and this might explain why such a large number of people assembled at Cane Ridge. Nevertheless, almost every observer who left a record remarks that there was an unexpectedly large crowd at Cane Ridge.

The meeting began on August 6, 1801,[3] and Stone recorded the roads as being "literally crowded with wagons, carriages, horsemen and footmen moving to the solemn camp,"[4] while another observer commented that "thither assembled the religious of every denomination, some from 100 miles distant."[5] "Cane Ridge was a beautiful spot, in the vicinity of a country church of the same name." It was then under the care of Barton W. Stone, and was about seven miles from Paris, Kentucky. Robert Davidson, the Presbyterian historian, notes that

> it was finely shaded and watered and admirably adapted to purpose of an encampment. A great central area was cleared and levelled, 200 or 300 yards in length, with the preachers' stand at one end, and a spacious tent, capable of containing a large assembly, and designed as a shelter from heat or rain. The adjoining ground was laid off in regular streets, along which the tents were pitched, while the church building was appropriated for the preachers' lodge.[6]

Surrounding the cleared space was a grove of trees, and paths and roads led away from the meeting ground.

Estimates of the size of the crowd that assembled varied. Stone remarks that "it was judged by military men on the ground, that there were between twenty and thirty thousand collected."[7] In a letter to his sister

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[3]Authorities vary as to the date. Stone (p. 157) says "the third sabbath in August," and Cartwright (p. 33) says "somewhere between 1800 and 1801," but both Davidson (p. 137) and McNemar (p. 26) say August 6th.

[4]Stone loc. cit., 157.

[5]Letter quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., 76-78.

[6]Davidson, op. cit., 137.

[7]Stone loc. cit., 157.

in Philadelphia, one observer commented, "I first proceeded to count the waggons containing families, with their provisions, camp equipage, &c., to the number of 147. At 11 o'clock the quantity of ground occupied by horses, waggons, etc., was about the same size as the square between Market, Chestnut, Second and Third streets of Philadelphia."[8] Davidson also cited a military source for his attendance figure, "a revolutionary officer, who was accustomed to estimate encampments," who computed the total present to be not less than 20,000.[9] McNemar agreed with the figure of 20,000, but felt that "a much greater number were there in the course of the meeting."[10] Cartwright put the number at "between twelve and twenty-five thousand."[11] Estimates as to the number of converts also varied. Davidson cites two figures, 1,100 and 800,[12] while James B. Finley, a Methodist minister, listed the number as 828.[13] The consensus would seem to indicate an attendance of about 20,000, out of which around 1,000 were converted.

The revival had originated among Presbyterians, who "had long been praying in words for the outpouring of the spirit."[14] But Cane Ridge had Baptists and Methodists, as well as Presbyterians, among its participants. Apparently ministers from all of the churches shared in the preaching chores, including some who had wandered from the regular church doctrines.

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[8]Letter quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., 76-78.

[9]Davidson, op. cit., 137.

[10]McNemar, op. cit., 26.

[11]Cartwright, op. cit., 33.

[12]Davidson, op. cit., 138.

[13]Finley in Rogers, op. cit., 60.

[14]McNemar, op. cit., 27.

Stone noted that "the Methodist and Baptist preachers aided in the work, and all appeared cordially united in it."[15] And Cartwright commented that "if there had been steady, Christian ministers, settled in Gospel doctrine and church discipline, thousands might have been saved to the church that wandered off in the mazes of vain, speculative divinity."[16]

The two men most prominent in new ideas were Richard McNemar and Barton W. Stone. Commenting on this outbreak of supposedly fresh doctrine, was a Presbyterian minister, John Lyle, who had arrived at Cane Ridge on Saturday, August seventh, and on Sunday evening, after hearing Richard McNemar preach, made the following entry in his diary:

> In the afternoon McNemar preached on Rom I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ--He preached us a discourse unintelligible to myself and others with whom I conversed about it. But it contained the substance of what Mr. Stone and he call the true new gospel which they say none preach but ourselves. He spoke of the Gospel bringing a pardon with it, and talks the design of it is to bring persons to self despair at once. The scheme is antinomian as in Marshall or Sanctification and Armenian /sic/ in some degree about faith.[17]

McNemar, in a later writing eloquently defended his position:

> Those who had labored and travailed, to gain some solid hope of salvation; and had ventured their souls upon the covenant of promise; and had felt the living seal of eternal love; could not, dare not preach, that salvation was restricted to a certain definite number; nor insinuate, that any being which God had made, was, by the Creator, laid under the dire necessity of being damned forever.[18]

Stone had been ordained under unusual circumstances and had never fully accepted Calvinistic theology, of which he wrote:

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[15] Stone, loc. cit., 157.

[16] Cartwright, op. cit., 35.

[17] John Lyle, "Account of the great Cain Ridge Camp Meeting, August, 1801," Appendix V, Cleveland, op. cit., 183. The so-called "new gospel" was probably more concerned with method than doctrine.

[18] McNemar, op. cit., 27.

> Calvinism is among the heaviest clogs on Christianity in the world. It is a dark mountain between heaven and earth, and is amongst the most discouraging hindrances to sinners from seeking the kingdom of God, and engenders bondage and gloominess to the saints.

Stone did admit, however, that "there are thousands of precious saints in this system."[19]

In spite of this theological controversy, or perhaps because of it, the preaching was vigorous, and judging from the number of converts, fruitful. Basically what was offered by the ministers was a "free salvation urged upon all by faith and repentance."[20] For the preacher, "no imagery was too vivid to illustrate the theme."[21] McNemar commented on the "flaming zeal for the destruction of sin,"[22] and Finley "counted seven ministers, all preaching at one time; some on stumps, others in wagons, and one--the Rev. William Burke. . . was standing on a tree which had in falling lodged against another."[23] John Lyle described one of the preachers as, "lively in desultory exhortation and speaks and sings with all his power and address much like a Methodist. He sometimes arises to extatic /sic/ joy--it smiles through his face." Lyle went on to comment on the doctrine of the revivalists, "I expect the conduct of these hot-headed men and the effect of their doctrine will separate the church of Christ and quench the revival."[24] These were prophetic words.

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[19]Stone, loc. cit., 153.

[20]Ibid., 158.

[21]Cleveland, op. cit., 47.

[22]McNemar, op. cit., 26.

[23]Finley in Rogers, op. cit., 60.

[24]Lyle, loc. cit., 183.

One of the most frequent observations in the accounts of the Cane Ridge meeting is that the course of the meeting was accompanied by great chaos. Stone commented that "a particular description of this meeting would fill a large volume, and then the half would not be told."[25] One worshipper gave the following description which illustrates how confusion might result:

> There was at this place a stage erected in the woods about 100 yards from the meeting house, where were a number of Presbyterian and Methodist ministers; one of the former preaching to as many as could get near enough to hear--in the house also was another of the same denomination, preaching to a crowded audience--at the same time another large concourse of people collected about 100 yards in an east direction from the meeting house, hearing a Methodist speaker--and about 150 yards in a fourth course from the house an assembly of black people, hearing the exhortation of the blacks, some of whom appeared deeply convicted and others converted. . . . I believe there was at one time as many as 300 who exhorted on this occasion.[26]

It is interesting to note that Negroes attended at the same time as everyone else, although their services were separate.

The Rev. John Lyle's diary, kept during the course of the meeting, confirms the confusion, but helps to unravel the progress of the encampment. Even a rainstorm failed to halt the services, and as the meeting went on, Lyle moved from place to place, preaching, talking with the fallen, and helping with their care. The following passage illustrates both Lyle's ramblings and the kinds of activities that were going on:

> I rose before day and went to where lawyer-------- had fallen and rose again and was talking to the people. . . . After he had done I spoke on love to God and man on the Christian character as exemplified by our saviour in his life. It rained very hard for some hours. At the tent Mr. Marshall preached the action sermon. . . . I heard a little of it and then went to the meeting house and found it full and then to where Mr. Burke was preaching to a large audience. . . . There was a great shaking of hands and praying and exhorting.

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[25]Stone, loc. cit., 158.

[26]Letter in Cleveland, op. cit., 77.

Lyle then went to where Richard McNemar was preaching and noted that "he seemed much affected." Wading in among a group of rejoicers, he shook hands with some of them and asked one what views he had of Christ. The worshipper said he saw "a fullness for all that come." Lyle then went to communion where he heard a sermon by Samuel Finley. "I heard a part of that," he went on, "and then went to serve tables." That night he wandered among the crowd, "praying and exhorting among them, as did other ministers and continued I suppose near to one or two o'clock."[27]

James B. Finley, later a Methodist minister, attended the Cane Ridge encampment with a group of young men; years afterward, in 1852, he wrote a description:

> On the way to the meeting I said to my companions, 'If I fall, it must be by physical power, and not by singing and praying,' and as I prided myself upon my manhood and courage, I had no fear of being overcome by any nervous excitability or being frightened into religion. We arrived upon the ground, and here a scene presented itself to my mind not only novel and unaccountable, but awful beyond description.

Young Finley went on to comment on the size of the crowd and remarked that "the noise was like the roar of Niagara." He describe the crowd as "a vast sea of human beings. . . agitated as if by a storm." He, too confirms the tremendous confusion and utter disorder prevalent during the meeting:

> Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents, while others were shouting most vociferously. . . . A strange supernatural power seemed to pervade the entire mass of mind there collected. I became so weak and powerless that I found it necessary to sit down. Soon after I left and went into the woods and there I strove to rally and man up my courage.

Finley tried to philosophize over the exhibitions that he had seen, and admitted that his pride had been wounded. Soon he returned to the scene

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[27]Lyle, loc. cit., 183-185.

and stepped up on a log to get a better view:

> The scene that then presented itself to my mind was indescribable. At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down in a moment, as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens.

Finley himself was affected by what he saw: "My hair rose up on my head, my whole frame trembled, the blood ran cold in my veins, and I fled for the woods a second time, and wished I had stayed at home." While in the woods, his feelings became "intense and insupportable," and "a sense of suffocation and blindness seemed to come over me," he continued, "and I thought I was going to die." Finally after a dismal night spent in a barn, the young man set out for home. The next night was spent "in weeping and promising God if he would spare me till morning I would pray and try to mend my life and abandon my wicked courses." The next morning brought with it his conversion, forty miles from Cane Ridge.[28]

Richard McNemar, who had a prominent part in the services and sponsorship, gives Cane Ridge only a brief mention, but he does comment on what kind of people attended. "This immense group," he wrote, "included almost every character that could be named; but amidst them all, the subjects of this new and strange operation were distinguished by their flaming zeal for the destruction of sin and the deliverance of souls from its power."[29] Many dignitaries were present, including the state governor, James Garrard,[30] McNemar also described the general disorder present at a camp meeting: "At first appearance those meetings exhibited nothing to the spectator but a scene of confusion, that could scarce be put into

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[28]Finley, loc. cit., 59-61.

[29]McNemar, op. cit., 26.

[30]Lyle, loc. cit., 187.

human language."[31]

Peter Cartwright confirms other descriptions. He noted that "it was not unusual for one, two, three and four to seven preachers to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from the different stands erected for the purpose." "It was said by truthful witnesses," he continued, "that at times more than one thousand persons broke into loud shouting all at once, and that the shouts could be heard for miles around."[32]

If the imagery used by the preachers was vivid and the scene was one of mass confusion, there was also a great deal of singing. There was no question of inducing people to sing at the meeting, rather it was a matter of letting them sing. Groups often sang hymns, and one eyewitness described the process: "They are commonly collected in small circles of 10 or 12, closely adjoining another circle and all engaged in singing Watt's and Hart's hymns."[33] But too many did not know the words to these hymns, and so a distinctive camp meeting song had been developed during the revival. Called spirituals, these camp meeting songs came about through a process of text simplification from the more sophisticated hymns, with the tunes for such spirituals often coming from secular folk songs.[34] The literary form of the camp meeting hymn is that of a popular ballad or song in everyday language with the refrain or chorus the predominant feature.[35]

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[31]McNemar, op. cit., 23.

[32]Cartwright, op. cit., 33. Cartwright was nearly sixteen when the Cane Ridge meeting took place, and apparently did not attend.

[33]John E. Finley, letter quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., 80.

[34]George P. Jackson, Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1937), 7-9.

[35]Louis Benson, The English Hymn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915), 292.

Services continued day and night without intermission or break in their progress, not even for eating and sleeping. Since the crowd moved about almost constantly, people probably drifted away from the services to eat and sleep, returning in the same manner. The most dramatic time was at night, for the services often continued until quite late. Lyle noted in his diary that he continued praying and exhorting, "near to one or two o'clock," and John Finley wrote of Sunday night: "I saw above 100 candles burning at once, and I saw, I suppose, 100 persons at once on the ground crying for mercy, of all ages from 8 to 60 years."[36] Davidson's summary of the night scene at Cane Ridge is perhaps the most vivid:

> Here were collected all the elements calculated to affect the imagination. The spectacle presented at night was one of the wildest grandeur. The glare of the blazing camp-fires falling on a dense assemblage of heads simultaneously bowed in adoration, and reflected back from long ranges of tents upon every side; hundreds of candles and lamps suspended among the trees together with numerous torches flashing to and fro, throwing an uncertain light upon the tremulous foliage, and giving an appearance of dim and indefinite extent to the depth of the forest; the solemn chanting of hymns swelling and falling on the night wind; the impassioned exhortations; the earnest prayers; the sobs, shrieks, or shouts, bursting from persons under intense agitation of mind; the sudden spasms which seized upon scores, and unexpectedly dashed them to the ground;--all conspired to invest the scene with terrific interest, and to work up the feelings to the highest pitch of excitement.

To this Davidson added the lateness of the hour; curiosity that had been stimulated over a long time; a reverent enthusiasm, "which ascribed the strange contortions witnessed to the mysterious agency of God;" plus the fervency of some of the preachers; and lastly, "the boiling zeal of the Methodists, who could not refrain from shouting aloud during sermon." He concluded, "it will abate our surprise very much when informed that the number of persons who fell was computed by the Rev. James Crawford, who

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[36] J. E. Finley, loc. cit., 79.

endeavored to keep an accurate count, at the astonishing number of about 3,000."[37]

The meeting ended on Thursday, August 12, and probably would have continued longer, "but provisions for such a multitude failed in the neighborhood."[38] As each of the worshippers returned home, he took with him the news of what he had seen and heard. McNemar wrote, "the numbers who received light, on this occasion, and went forth in every direction to spread it render it impossible to pursue any further the particular track of its progress." He went on to add that after a few weeks, "the same work broke out in North Carolina, by the instrumentality of some who went from Caneridge to bear the testimony."[39]

The letters of Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church confirm the revival's spread. While traveling through Maryland and Virginia, he seems to have heard of Cane Ridge, since he wrote in September of 1801 that "the work of God is running like fire in Kentucky. It is reported that near fifteen if not twenty thousand were present at one sacramental occasion of the Presbyterians; and one thousand if not fifteen hundred fell and felt the power of grace."[40]

An unfortunate aspect of the meeting was the number of sexual irregularities uncovered. The excitement, the confusion, the late hours and the fact that so large a mixed gathering had assembled make such instances less than surprising. One observer later wrote of the earlier camp meetings: "They were doubtless attended for improper purposes by a

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[37]Davidson, op. cit., 138.

[38]Stone, loc. cit., 158.

[39]McNemar, op. cit., 27.

[40]Asbury, op. cit., III, 247-251.

few licentious persons and by others with a view of obtaining a handle to ridicule all religion."[41] After the Saturday worship six men were found by the Rev. John Lyle, lying under a preaching stand with a woman of easy virtue. Lyle remarked either naively or sarcastically, "I supposed they had gone there to see the work."[42]

The unusual excitement that characterized the Great Revival in the West reached its height at Cane Ridge. Since it had been planned as a union service between Methodists and Presbyterians a large crowd was expected, but the throng that assembled was larger than anyone had predicted. Adequate provisions were not available, but the hardy people of Kentucky were accustomed to camping out. Tents, rude shelters, and wagons became temporary dwelling places for people too excited to get a great deal of sleep. Aside from the novelty of the reactions, of so vast a number in such a dramatic way to the emotional frenzy of Cane Ridge, the most notable thing about that encampment was the rampant confusion. There seemed to be no regulation or order to the sequence of events; everything was impromptu.

It is impossible to judge just what effect the Cane Ridge meeting had on those who attended. A great many were probably profoundly impressed, but there were some like John Lyle who came away opposed to such overt emotionalism. Indeed the Presbyterians, who had been instrumental in the initiation of the movement, soon found themselves divided over the issue. The Methodists, who had a tradition of revivalism in their religion, took up the camp meeting as a device of their own. Bishop Asbury wrote of the spread of the camp meetings to the south, commenting that

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[41]David Ramsey, quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., 149.

[42]Lyle, loc. cit., 185. See also C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 65.

"the camp meetings are as extraordinary in North and South Carolina, and Georgia, as they have been in Cumberland and Kentucky." He went on to suggest to Thornton Fleming, "I wish you would also hold camp meetings; they have never been tried without success. To collect such a number of God's people together to pray and the ministers to preach, and the longer they stay, generally, the better--this is field fighting, this is fishing with a large net."[43]

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[43] Asbury, op. cit., III, 251.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHYSICAL EXERCISES OF THE REVIVAL

One of the remarkable aspects of the Great Revival in the West was the frequency of unusual bodily exercises at camp meetings and other gatherings. These exercises occasioned much comment in their own time and form a fundamental part of the whole evangelistic movement on the Trans-Allegheny frontier. So prominent was the part played by these phenomena that a study of muscular movements themselves and the mental condition which induced them will aid an understanding of the success of camp meetings and underline the emotional nature of the whole movement.

The most common of these phenomena was the falling exercise. Davidson wrote that the earliest instances of the falling exercise in Kentucky took place in James McGready's congregations in the Green river country, "whence it was rapidly propagated through Tennessee, Upper Kentucky and even as far as the Carolinas."[1] McNemar recorded the falling exercise as most common at Cane Ridge, as did several other sources.[2]

No sex or age was exempt, nor were any occupations or classes of people. Stone commented that "the falling exercise was very common among all classes, the saints and sinners of every age and of every grade, from the philosopher to the clown."[3] Another observer wrote that "people of

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[1]Davidson, op. cit., 143.

[2]McNemar, op. cit., 26. See also Stone, loc. cit., 158-162, and Lyle, loc. cit., 183-189.

[3]Stone, loc. cit., 159.

every description lay prostrate on the ground. There you might see the learned Pastor, the steady patriot and the obedient son."[4] Even Governor Garrard had been affected at Cane Ridge, for Lyle wrote, "I was sent for and met the governor who said he was gone distracted, that his head was weak."[5]

Of the many descriptions of the falling exercises, that of Stone is perhaps the most valuable:

> The subject of this exercise would, generally, with a piercing scream, fall like a log on the floor, earth or mud, and appear as dead. Of thousands of similar cases I will mention one. At a meeting two gay young ladies, sisters, were standing together attending to the exercises and preaching at the time. Instantly they both fell with a shriek of distress, and lay for more than an hour apparently in a lifeless state. Their mother, a pious Baptist, was in great distress, fearing they would not revive. At length they began to exhibit symptoms of life, by crying fervently for mercy, and then relapsed into the same deathlike state, with an awful gloom on their countenances. After awhile the gloom on the face of one was succeeded by a heavenly smile, and she cried out, "Precious Jesus!" and rose up and spoke of the love of God, the preciousness of Jesus, and of the glory of the gospel, to the surrounding crowd in language almost superhuman, and pathetically exhorted all to repentance. In a little while after the other sister was similarly exercised.

Stone regarded the exercises as evidence of Divine action, feeling that "nothing common could have arrested the attention of the world; therefore McNemar agreed with Stone that these occurrences were indeed of divine origin, writing: "Is nature wont to assume such apparent changes, as for tens, and fifties, moved at the same time, by the same instinct, to forget the use of every limb, and prostrate fall, no matter where, and yawn and gasp, and expire, in a cold sweat?"[7]

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[4]Letter quoted in Cleveland, op. cit., 93, 94.

[5]Lyle, loc. cit., 187.

[6]Stone, loc. cit., 158, 159.

[7]McNemar, op. cit., 33.

Davidson's analysis depended less on the supernatural for an explanation:

> After exhortations of a stimulating and rousing character, especially if tender and pathetic, calculated to enlist deeply the feelings; or during spirited and lively singing, and when the body was exhausted by copious weeping; one and another in the audience, sometimes to the number of scores, would suddenly fall prostrate on the ground and swoon away. . . .
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> Some fell suddenly, as if struck with lightning, while others were seized with a universal tremor the moment before and fell shrieking. Piercing shrieks were uttered by many during the whole period of prostration, intermingled with groans, cries for mercy and exclamations of "Glory! glory to God!" If the assembly were languid, a few shrieks, and instances of falling quickly roused them, and others would begin to fall in every direction. Many were admonished of the coming attack by a pricking as of needles in the extremities, such as one experiences when the circulation of blood is impeded, or a limb is benumbed.

Some also complained of "a deadness or numbness of body" and found that they were unable to move. But in general there was no complaint of pain, but only of great weakness, and it was observed that a person who had fallen once, "was predisposed to fall again, and that under circumstances, and exercises of mind, by no means extraordinary."[8]

Another observer included the characteristics of the body after the falling, noting that "the feet and hands become cold but the pulse generally /remains/ regular the/y/ ceace /sic/ breathing hard and /breath/ becomes easye /sic/ before the/y/ can speake /sic/."[9] And John E. Finley recorded what usually happened when a worshipper was stricken:

> When a person is struck down he is carried by others out of the congregation, when some minister converses with and prays for him; afterwards a few gather around and sing a hymn suitable to his case. At Cane Ridge the whole number brought to the ground,

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[8]Davidson, op. cit., 143, 144.

[9]Col. Robert Patterson, "An Account of the revival of religion which began in the Eastern part of the state of Kentucky in May, 1801," Appendix VII in Cleveland, op. cit., 199.

> under convictions were about 1,000, not less. The sensible, the weak, etc., learned and unlearned, the rich and poor are the subjects of it.[10]

Davidson cited an example that illustrates the involuntary nature of the exercises. A lady and a gentleman "of some note in the fashionable world" had gone to Cane Ridge to satisfy their curiosity about the happenings at these revival meetings. On the way to the meeting they talked of the "poor deluded creatures," at the encampments and made jokes about the services and the people who participated in them. They agreed that if either of them should fall, the other would remain and render suitable protection and assistance. They had not been on the meeting grounds very long until, "to the consternation of the gentleman, his gay companion suddenly dropped; whereupon, instead of fulfilling his promise, he fled at full speed." This, however, did not save him from suffering the same fortune, "for he had not gone 200 yards before he was seized in the same way, and measured his length on the ground; while a crowd flocked around him to witness his mortification and offer prayers in his behalf."[11]

The experience of young James Finley was another case where the attempt to get away from the scene of the excitement did not prevent an individual from being afflicted.[12] Davidson wrote that some would be struck while walking to and from services, engaged in narrating past experiences, or even "without any uncommon emotion, and to drop from their horses on the road."[13] The subject would lie from fifteen minutes to three hours. "Some were more or less convulsed, and wrought hard, in

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[10] J. E. Finley, loc. cit., 79, 80.

[11] Davidson, op. cit., 149.

[12] See above, pp. 35, 36.

[13] Davidson, op. cit., 144.

frightful nervous agonies, the eyes rolling wildly; but the greatest number were quite motionless, as if dead, or about to expire in a few moments." Some could talk with the surrounding people; others could not.

Most subjects exhibited similar physical characteristics, and Davidson left the following description of a person undergoing a seizure:

> The hands were cold, accompanied generally with a weak low pulse. Sometimes the pulse was higher and quicker than usual . . . .The face was sometimes pale, sometimes flushed pale red, sometimes it was pale yellow, or of a corpse like hue. The breathing was hard and quick, even to gasping. The nerves were weakened and tremulous, so much so as to render it difficult to feel the pulse; the sinews were generally corded, as in nervous complaints, and after heat and relaxation; rarely cramped.[14]

Sometimes the fallen were collected in one place to avoid their being trampled, and at other times they were left where they had been stricken. Generally, a small group collected around the one who had fallen, as in the example above, praying and singing hymns. It was common for the stricken to speak to the crowd around them, once they had arisen.[15] According to Lyle, "their orations consist of the plain and esential /sic/ truths of the gospel that they themselves have been powerfully convinced of." "But," he adds, "they speak them with all the feeling and pathos that human nature affected with the most important objects is capable of. They speak much of the fullness of Christ, his willingness to save &c." One man had been so affected "that you might have heard his feet strike the floor for many yards. He when carried out appeared joyful but weak. He would say Bless the Lord, but nothing else."[16]

When those who fell and remained unconscious for any length of time

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[14] Ibid.

[15] For example, see Lyle, loc. cit., 183-189, or see J. E. Finley, loc. cit., 79.

[16] Lyle, loc. cit., 187.

were aroused, they spoke of wonderful visions and would sometimes describe them, or would sing in what were termed the "strains of heaven," in an elevated style far beyond what was supposed to be their ordinary ability. Most religious people of that day attributed such happenings to divine inspiration.[17]

Another common exercise was "the jerks", which according to Stone, "cannot be so easily described." Sometimes the subject of the jerks would be affected in one part of his body and sometimes in the whole system. "When the head alone was affected," Stone wrote, "it would be jerked backward and forward, or from side to side, so quickly that the features of the face could not be distinguished." "When the system was affected," he went on, "I have seen the person stand in one place and jerk backward and forward in quick succession, their head nearly touching the floor behind and before." Stone talked with some who had been affected and was told "that those were among the happiest seasons of their lives." Apparently "the jerks" were just as involuntary as the falling exercise had been; though despite the violence of some of the people afflicted, Stone had never seen anyone injured: "I do not remember that any one of the thousands I have seen ever sustained any injury in body. This was as strange as the exercise itself."[18]

In Richard McNemar's words, "nothing in nature could better represent this strange and unaccountable operation, than for one to goad another, alternately on every side with a piece of red hot iron." The exercise usually began with the head, "which would fly backward and

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[17]Davidson, op. cit., 152.

[18]Stone, loc. cit., 160.

forward, and from side to side, with a quick jolt." It did no good to make an effort to stop the jerks; "the more any one labored to stay himself, and be sober, the more he staggered, and the more rapidly his twitches increased." All one so stricken could do was "go as he was stimulated, whether with a violent dash on the ground and bounce from place to place like a football, or hop round with head, limbs, and trunk, twitching and jolting in every direction, as if they must inevitable fly asunder." Not even spectators could restrain anyone so afflicted. McNemar wrote that "it was dangerous to attempt confining them, or touching them in any manner, to whatever danger they might be exposed; yet few were hurt, except it were such as rebelled against the operation, through wilful and deliberate enmity, and refused to comply with the injunctions which it came to enforce."[19]

Peter Cartwright confirmed McNemar's comment about the involuntary nature of the jerks. "The more they resisted," he wrote of those subject to the exercise, "the more they jerked." He had encountered the jerks many times during his ministry, and at one of his appointment in 1804 a large crowd had turned out to hear the "Kentucky Boy". Among the group were "two finely dressed, fashionable young ladies, attended by two brothers with loaded horsewhips." The two young ladies sat in front near where Cartwright was standing. Cartwright was not feeling well and had been carrying a phial of peppermint in his pocket. "Before I commenced preaching," he wrote, "I took out my phial and swallowed a little of the peppermint." His preaching moved the congregation to tears, and the young ladies took the jerks and "were greatly mortified about it." Cartwright noted "a great stir in the congregation; some wept, some shouted, and

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[19]McNemar, op. cit., 65.

before our meeting closed several were converted." Cartwright was then warned to be on his guard, as the two brothers were going to horsewhip him for having given the jerks to their sisters. But Cartwright escaped his whipping by seeming to threaten to give one of them the jerks. "Before the year was out," he went on, "I had the pleasure of seeing all four soundly converted to God, and I took them into the church."[20]

Cartwright also recorded what was apparently the only fatality from the exercises. The incident took place during a camp meeting held at "The Ridge," in William McGee's congregation. The jerks were very prevalent at this encampment, and a company of drunken rowdies had come to interrupt the meeting. One of them, a large man who was carrying a bottle of whiskey in his pocket, became offensive, cursing the jerks and all religion. "Shortly afterward he took the jerks," Cartwright reported, "and he started to run, but he jerked so powerfully he could not get away." He stopped among some saplings and attempted to rid himself of the exercise by means of his whiskey, swearing "he would drink the damned jerks to death." But he could not hold the bottle and spilled the contents on the ground. "At length he fetched a violent jerk, snapped his neck, fell, and soon expired, with his mouth full of cursing and bitterness."[21]

Besides the falling exercise and the jerks, other variations were listed. Stone described a dancing exercise that generally began with the jerks and was peculiar to professors of religion. The subject, after awhile, "began to dance and then the jerks would cease." The spectators regarded such dancing as heavenly, and "there was nothing in it like

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[20]Cartwright, op. cit., 45, 46.

[21]Ibid., 46. No date was given by Cartwright for this occurrence, but this death might have taken place during the large meeting held at "the Ridge" in the summer of 1800. (See Cleveland, op. cit., 67.)

levity, nor calculated to excite levity in the beholders." Sometimes they moved fast and sometimes more slowly; "they continued to move forward and backward in the same track or alley till nature seemed exhausted, and they would fall prostrate on the floor or earth, unless caught by those standing by."[22] Davidson remarked that this was not one of the early exercises, listing the first appearance as having taken place at a New Light meeting at Turtle Creek in 1804. "Sometimes it was so ludicrous as to excite a smile," he wrote,[23] but Stone referred to "the smile of heaven," and said that the whole person "appeared assimilated to angels."[24]

Davidson listed a barking exercise, and called it "a piece of extravagance yet reserved to complete the degradation of human nature."[25] McNemar referred to this exercise as "the last possible grade of mortification." Both McNemar and Davidson agreed that the barks frequently accompanied the jerks, though Davidson pointed out that they were of later origin. Stone did not agree that the barks were an exercise distinct from the jerks. "The barking exercise," he wrote, "(as opposers contemptuously called it) was nothing but the jerks. A person affected with the jerks, especially in his head, would often make a grunt or a bark, if you please, from the suddeness of the jerk."[26] As in the other exercises, cultural refinement did not make one immune. McNemar wrote that "persons who considered themselves in the foremost rank, and possessed of the

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[22]Stone, loc. cit., 160, 161.

[23]Davidson, op. cit., 151.

[24]Stone, loc. cit., 161.

[25]Davidson, op. cit., 152.

[26]Stone, loc. cit., 161.

highest improvements of human nature," would find themselves subject to this affliction. "The quickest method to find releasement from the jerks and barks," wrote McNemar, "was to engage in the voluntary dance."[27]

Stone listed also a running exercise that was "nothing more than persons, feeling something of these bodily agitations, through fear, attempted to run away and thus escape from them; but it commonly happened that they ran not far before they fell, or became so greatly agitated that they could proceed no further."[28] Davidson commented that the person so affected was "impelled to run with amazing swiftness. . . . leaping over every obstacle in his way with preternatural agility."[29] Stone also wrote of a laughing exercise that, although frequent, was confined to the religious. The singing exercise, with which Stone concluded his account, was "more unaccountable than anything else. . . . .The subject in a very happy state of mind would sing most melodiously, not from the mouth or nose, but entirely in the breast, the sounds issuing thence."[30]

Listed as exercises by Davidson were visions and trances. "Not only did these persons profess, while in a rapture quite out of the body," Davidson commented, "to have had interviews with the spirits of their departed friends, and to learn of their different allotments in the invisible world, but they even aspired to somewhat of the prophetic character, announcing what would be the result of the meeting in progress."[31] McNemar, too, wrote of prophecy, deeming it "particularly worthy of notice."[32]

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[27]McNemar, op. cit., 66.

[28]Stone, loc. cit., 161.

[29]Davidson, op. cit., 150.

[30]Stone, loc. cit., 161, 162.

[31]Davidson, op. cit., 153.

[32]McNemar, op. cit., 67.

Not all of the observers regarded the bodily agitations in the same light; some saw them as being of divine origin, while others agreed that they were supernatural, but perhaps not caused by God. A third group felt that the exercises had natural explanations. Most modern scholarship has preferred the latter position.[33]

Peter Cartwright expressed doubt that all who were afflicted with the exercises had done so involuntarily. "I always looked on the jerks as a judgment sent from God," he wrote, "first to bring sinners to repentance; and secondly, to show professors that God could work with or without means." "There is no doubt in my mind," he went on, "that, with weak-minded, ignorant, and superstitious persons, there was a great deal of sympathetic feeling with many that claimed to be under the influence of the jerking exercise." As a remedy Cartwright recommended "fervent prayer" which "almost universally proved an effectual antidote."[34] Some people on the other hand felt that the exercises were evidence that "the millenium had now commenced."[35] It will be recalled that Stone regarded the exercises as being of divine origin, because they had arrested the decline of religion in this part of the country.[36] But Stone did admit that there had been eccentricities and fanaticism, although he concludes with a discussion of the good effects, which "were seen and acknowledged in every neighborhood, . . . these blessed effects would have continued had not men put forth their unhallowed hands to hold up their tottering ark, mistaking it

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[33]For example see C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 41-67 and F. M. Davenport, op. cit.

[34]Cartwright, op. cit., 46.

[35]R. Stuart, "Reminiscenses," in Maurice W. Armstrong, Compiler, The Presbyterian Enterprise (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 112.

[36]Stone, loc. cit., 158.

for the ark of God."[37]

Davidson was definitely opposed to the work, calling it "the undue excitement of animal feeling." He went on to express the opinion that "an undue importance was early attached to the bodily exercises, and animal excitement was exalted into an evidence of grace." "All well-meant attempts to relieve, moderate, or check the bodily affections by physical or moral means," he continued, "were regarded by the devout but ignorant multitude, as an invasion of the Divine prerogative, and an impious thwarting of the Spirit's operations."[38]

Enthusiasm without restraint was listed by Davidson as a primary cause of the unusual agitations. Late hours no doubt aided the tendency to "a morbid excitement of the nervous system". He dismissed the idea that the exercises had been caused by an evil spirit because there was no reasonable ground to suppose it had, and because there had been numerous instances of genuine conversion. He rejected the contention that attributed the contortions to the special agency of the spirit of God, noting that "persons who made no pretensions to piety were affected in this manner, not excepting the deist and blasphemer, who cursed the spasm that exposed them to ridicule." He also rejected the inspiration of visions and trances, commenting that they "establish nothing but the vivid and excited fancy of the individual." Finally he denied the contention of some that the agitations had been caused by deception and imposture, citing numerous examples of involuntary seizure.

"The only correct and satisfactory solution," he concluded, "is found in the influence of the imagination on the nervous system." He

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[37]Stone, loc. cit., 162.

[38]Davidson, op. cit., 142, 154, 155.

went on to show how the mind and body influence each other:

> Fear blanches the cheek; shame suffuses it with a blush. Joy sparkles in the eyes; Sorrow bedews them with tears. Cheerfulness relaxes the muscles; Anger contracts them. Horror changes the raven locks into grey in the course of a single night. Intense anxiety causes palpitation of the heart and trembling of the limbs. Depression of Spirits retards the circulation of the blood; while on the contrary, the circulation, the respiration, the digestion, the bilious secretions, are accelerated by strong and vigorous emotions.

An influence of great importance in precipitating bodily exercises was the style of preaching. It was not the vigorous and fulsome style that was most effective; "it was such sermons as were delivered with tenderness and tears that elicited the deepest emotions among the audience." The exhortations given by those who had already been afflicted had similar influences.[39]

"Who wants a miracle to arouse his faith and fix it on the sacred truths recorded in Scriptures;" McNemar wrote, "let him recognize the camp meeting, let him find the man or woman, whose immortal part, for hours, and days, traversed the regions of eternity while the breathless body lay as a spectacle of terror to surrounding friends." McNemar, who later became a Shaker, claimed that the falling exercise had baffled those who would reduce it to a natural cause.[40] Thus, there remained a controversy over the exercises. It is interesting to note that one opposed to a supernatural interpretation of the agitations, as Davidson was, still admitted that there had been "numerous genuine conversions."[41]

Of later studies of such agitations as occurred at Cane Ridge and elsewhere, that of Frederick M. Davenport is perhaps the most useful. He

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[39] Ibid., 159, 170-172, 176.

[40] McNemar, op. cit., 34.

[41] Davidson, op. cit., 185.

suggests that a religious camp meeting "would be a very hot bed of disorder and mental disorganization." "When the frenzy was at its height," he wrote of the waves of agitation, "these revival crowds were subject to a set of nervous and muscular manifestations probably as varied and terrible as ever affected a population in this world." He went on to note that "motor and sensory reflexes are always correlated with strong imagination and emotion." These reflexes are intensified by belief and expectation, but there is no gathering where belief, expectation, imagination and emotion are more powerfully combined than in the revival crowd. He concludes that these influences plus a great deal of fear "produced such excitation of the cerebro-spinal system that the freed nervous energy has expended itself in motor and sensory automatisms of varying kinds and degrees."[42] It would seem, then, that there is a psychological explanation for the phenomena, just as Davidson had suspected.

Besides the psychological explanation, Davidson had submitted both epilepsy and hypnotism as important factors in the falling.[43] Some modern scholarship has found pathological influences at work,[44] and Edwin D. Starbuck has confirmed Davidson's contention that the forces of hypnotism were probably present during the Great Revival in the West.[45] "Whatever be the explanation of the phenomena," Starbuck also wrote, "they are sufficiently striking to emphasize both the strength and danger of religious excitement."[46]

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[42]Davenport, op. cit., 21, 77, 223.

[43]Davidson, op. cit., 177.

[44]See, for example, Davenport, op. cit., 227.

[45]Starbuck, op. cit., 171.

[46]Ibid., 169.

Davidson emphasized an unending controversy, a controversy that grew very warm during the course of the revival and resulted in several schisms among the Presbyterians. That strong psychological influences were present during the revival cannot be denied, but many who had fallen thought the experience through which they had passed was of Divine origin. It also cannot be denied that many who had had no church connection before had been converted into church members, but it should be remembered that a great many conversions had not lasted.[47] It is significant also to recall the fact that many who had once fallen were often victims again.[48] Whether or not the physical demonstrations were genuine is a relevant question, but one to which no single satisfactory answer will be provided. More important is the question of the results of such agitations. Undoubtedly they influenced other agitations and contributed to the chaos already present,[49] and they also evoked some organized opposition led by men like John Lyle. In that they lent an element of excitement, they also helped to attract people to the meeting and served as a stimulus to the growth and spread of the revival.

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[47]See McNemar, op. cit., 36 and also Davidson, op. cit., 171.

[48]Davidson, op. cit., 143, 144.

[49]See, for example, Armstrong, op. cit., 112 and Davenport, op. cit., 77, 223.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REVIVAL AFTER CANE RIDGE

After the zenith reached at Cane Ridge, the revival continued to spread throughout the Trans-Allegheny West, and it became in the words of Richard McNemar, "impossible to pursue any further the particular track of its progress."[1] Quite naturally, the revival spread to the Carolinas, the former home of many leaders of the Kentucky movement, and in Pennsylvania a similar awakening had appeared among the Presbyterians by the fall of 1802. Earlier, the excitement had crossed the Ohio river from Kentucky and spread throughout that region, with camp meetings playing an important role in the advance of religious enthusiasm. By 1803 the enthusiasm had reached the Western Reserve, where the Presbyterians and Congregationalists had agreed to cooperate through the Plan of Union of 1801. The revival did not confine itself to the West and South, but soon spread throughout the country.[2] Bishop Asbury for example noted the spread of the revival in his Journal on May 23, 1802: "I have a variety of letters, conveying the pleasing intelligence of the work of God in every State, district, and in most of the circuits in the Union."[3] Until 1803 the revival had continued with undiminished fervor, but interest had begun to decline, and by 1805 the excitement had fallen off.[4]

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[1]McNemar, op. cit., 27.

[2]Cleveland, op. cit., 84, 85.

[3]Asbury, op. cit., II, 340.

[4]Cleveland, op. cit., 86.

The Presbyterians, among whom the camp meeting had first appeared, and the Congregationalists, working together under the Plan of Union of 1801, would sanction only "rational" religious activity, suppressing the "commotion of animal feelings." Thus the young camp meetings had been ruled out by the Presbyterians, so that by 1805 the Methodists had taken over the open-air gatherings almost completely, except for a few schismatic Presbyterian elements which continued to use such encampments.[5]

After the great Cane Ridge camp meeting, Presbyterians split into two groups, one of which, led by men like Barton W. Stone and Richard McNemar, favored the emotional and physical characteristics of the Second Great Awakening. The other group, whose leaders included John Lyle and David Rice, remained opposed to the violent emotional and physical outbreaks of the revival and insisted upon the regular practice of traditional church forms. Eventually the revival group developed into three distinct cleavages: the Cumberland Presbyterians, the New Lights, and the Shakers.

Thus for a while bitter doctrinal controversy raged among the Presbyterians.[6] Richard McNemar wrote of the criticism of the new revival doctrine:

> The people among whom the revival began, were generally Calvinists; and although they had long been praying in words, for the outpouring of the Spirit; and believed that God had 'foreordained whatsoever comes to pass;' yet, when it came to pass that their prayer was answered, and the Spirit began to flow like many waters, from a cloud of witnesses; and souls were convicted of sin, and cried from mercy, and found hope and comfort in the news of a Savior; they rose up and

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[5]C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 70.

[6]William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), II: The Presbyterians, 90. See also Cleveland, op. cit., 133-135, and C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 71-74.

> quarreled with the work, because it did not come to pass that the subjects of it were willing to adopt their soul-stupefying creed.[7]

The Presbyterian historian, Robert Davidson, warmly supported the traditional view and criticized the theology of the revivalists:

> While error was widely spreading in the lower sections of the state under fostering warmth of extraneous influence, the upper section became the prey of similar calamities. A mongrel mixture of Antinomianism and Arminianism began to be broached by Marshall, Stone, and McNemar, as early as the great camp meeting at Cane Ridge in August, 1801. They called it the true new gospel, which they said none preached but themselves. It blended high pretensions to sanctification with equally high exaltation of human agency in believing, and a studious silence upon the subject of the Holy Spirit and his operations. These errors prevailed among the advocates of the bodily exercises and other extravagances, and ripened into the New Light schism.[8]

The New Light schism developed from a controversy that began in northern Kentucky, centering on the emergence of a definitely anti-Calvinistic emphasis. At the second meeting of the Synod of Kentucky in 1803, it was proposed that Richard McNemar and John Dunlavy, having been already condemned by the Presbytery of Washington for holding unorthodox views, be examined and tried. Five of the revival ministers objected to such a procedure and withdrew from the jurisdiction of the Synod.[9] Richard McNemar recorded the revivalists' version of the circumstances:

> But that those who were destined to excommunication on account of their faithful zeal, might not be wholly left without the usual claim of congenital descent, from Leo the Great, the dissenting members voluntarily withdrew from under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church, and according to their own history, 'constituted themselves into a presbytery. . . .We the above named Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, Richard M'Nemar, Bartwon W. Stone and John Thompson, having entered the above

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[7] McNemar, op. cit., 27.

[8] Davidson, op. cit., 166.

[9] Sweet, The Presbyterians, 94.

> protest, and withdrawn from under the jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky, and of the presbyteries to which we belonged do now formally unite in a body as a presbytery, known by the name of Springfield.'[10]

The Synod attempted to reconcile the five seceders, and failing in that effort, suspended them. Called at various times New Lights, Schismatics, Stoneites, and Marshallites, they adopted the Scriptures as their only rule of faith and practice, but continued to encourage the voluntary performance of bodily exercises accompanied by public testimony.[11]

The congregations of the dissenting ministers largely seceded with them, and together these churches joined the Springfield Presbytery. In June of 1804 they issued the curious "Last Will and Testament of the Presbytery of Springfield." The witnesses claimed that the presbytery had been "knit together in love, had lived in peace and concord, and had died a voluntary and happy death." They had decided that "there was neither precept nor example in the New Testament for such confederacies as modern Church Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, General Assemblies, etc.," and concluded with an expression of "thanksgiving to God for the display of his goodness in the glorious work he is carrying on in our Western country," hoping that the work "would terminate in the universal spread of the gospel, and the unity of the Church."[12] Planning to establish a world wide kingdom in which all the denominations should unite, the church members began simply to call themselves Christians and their church the Christian Church.

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[10] McNemar, op. cit., 43.

[11] Cleveland, op. cit., 137, 138.

[12] "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery," Peter G. Mode, (Compiler) Source Book and Bibliographical Guide for American Church History (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1921), 342-345.

The principle of complete liberty in the Christian Church soon proved a powerful force against continued unity. In the East news of the Kentucky revival had been welcomed by the Shakers, a small communitarian sect of New England and New York. Because of a prophecy of "Mother Ann," the founder of the sect, that there was to be a great opening for the new gospel in the western country, three Shaker missionaries set out. They were able to convert both John Dunlavy and Richard McNemar, who became their principal spokesman in the West. Both Marshall and Thompson returned to the Presbyterian church, and only Barton W. Stone remained true to the views that had been announced in the Springfield will. In 1832 Stone joined forces with the Christian Church organized by Alexander Campbell.[13]

Another group that broke off from the main stream of Presbyterianism was the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Because of the large numbers of converts in the Logan County revival, many new Presbyterian congregations were formed and accordingly there was a demand for more ministers. To alleviate the situation the Transylvania Presbytery authorized four men in the fall of 1801 to exhort and catechize in vacant congregations. Although none of these men had a college education, three of them, Alexander Anderson, Finis Ewing, and Samuel King, were licensed by Transylvania Presbytery to preach in April, 1802 with three ministers and two elders dissenting. In the fall of that same year the Synod of Kentucky created the Cumberland Presbytery by dividing Transylvania Presbytery. Composed of ten ministers, a majority of whom favored the revival, the new presbytery continued to license educationally deficient candidates, and both

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[13]Ada Humphreys, "Early History of the Disciples of Christ, 1801-1832," (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1951), 54, 55. See also Garrison and DeGroot, op. cit., 212.

Anderson and Ewing were ordained.[14] In the words of Davidson, "illiterate exhorters, with Arminian sentiments were multiplied, till they soon numbered seventeen."[15]

The licensed "exhorters" borrowed circuit riding tactics from the Methodists and were so effective that the anti-revival men began to fear revivalists would control the Synod of Kentucky. In the meeting of Synod in October, 1804, a letter of protest signed by the Reverend Thomas Craighead and others was read. Resolving to conduct a thorough investigation of the practices in Cumberland Presbytery, the Synod ordered parties from both sides to appear at the next stated session of Synod "with all light and testimony on the Subject that can be afforded; and further that the Rev. Mssrs. David Rice, James Blythe, John Lyle, Archibald Cameron, and Samuel Rannels or any two of them be a committee in the meantime to attend the earliest meeting of the Cumberland Presbytery to inquire into the case and report at the next meeting of Synod."[16]

The next meeting of the Synod of Kentucky in October, 1805, examined the situation and appointed a Commission "vested with full Synodical Powers to confer with the Members of Cumberland Presbytery and to adjudicate upon their Presbyterial proceedings."[17] After determining that the Cumberland Presbytery had "acted illegally in receiving Mr. James Haw as a regular minister of the Methodist Republican Church without examining him on divinity, requiring him to adopt the Confession of Faith of the

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[14]Sweet, The Presbyterians, 90, 91.

[15]Davidson, op. cit., 229.

[16]"Minutes of the Synod of Kentucky, 1802-1811," Sweet, The Presbyterians, 329.

[17]Ibid., 335.

Presbyterian Church,"[18] the Commission heard the balance of the testimony concerning the charges of illegal licensing and ordination. The Commission then proposed to examine those who had been licensed or ordained under irregular circumstances. All refused to submit to such an examination, claiming "that they had the exclusive privilege of examining and licensing their own candidates and that Synod had no right to take the business out of their hands."[19] Vainly the Commission tried to persuade the members to submit, but a majority of the regular ministers of the presbytery, including James McGready, William Hodge, John Rankin, and Samuel McAdow refused to bow before the authority of the Commission. Individually all but two of the seventeen who were "licensed and . . . ordained in a disorderly manner,"[20] also refused to submit.

The Commission held that by refusing to comply with its request the majority of the men in the Cumberland Presbytery had virtually renounced the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church. The Commission described the men in question as "illiterate," and "erroneous in Sentiment," and resolved that:

> . . . as the above named persons never had regular authority from the Presbytery of Cumberland to preach the Gospel &c the Commission of Synod prohibit. . .the said persons from exhorting, preaching and administering ordinances in consequence of any authority which they have obtained from the Cumberland Presbytery, until they submit to our jurisdiction and undergo the requisite examination.[21]

The regular members were ordered to appear at the next Synod, and when the Commission had departed, the revival members of the Cumberland Presbytery

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[18] Ibid., 337.

[19] Ibid., 339.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 341.

organized themselves into a council. After the General Assembly had supported the action of the Synod of Kentucky in 1809, the council decided to organize as an independent presbytery, despite the fact that a number of its leaders including James McGready, had either returned to the discipline of the Presbyterian Church, or had withdrawn from Presbyterianism entirely.[22] In 1813 this independent presbytery, under the leadership of Finis Ewing, Samuel King, and Samuel McAdow became the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Thus one result of the Second Great Awakening had been the departure of a number of revival members from the Presbyterian Church. The effect on the church can be seen clearly when the reports of the General Assembly on the condition of the church are compared for 1803 and 1804. In the former year there were 31 presbyteries, 322 ministers, and 48 probationers, contrasted with 27 presbyteries, 130 ministers, and 33 probationers in 1804.[23]

Among the Baptists and Methodists, the general result of the Great Revival was an increase in membership and an overall increase in their strength as separate denominations. A modern writer states that 10,000 persons had been added to the Baptist Church in Kentucky during the revival,[24] but on the whole the Methodist Church seems to have benefited most from the Second Great Awakening. By 1805 their Western Conference contained nearly 12,000 communicants, as compared to about 2,700 five years before.[25] The Methodists took over the camp meeting, discarded by the

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[22]Sweet, The Presbyterians, 91-94.

[23]Cleveland, op. cit., 146.

[24]Beardsley, op. cit., 101.

[25]Cleveland, op. cit., 148.

Presbyterians as too irregular and emotional, and made it into "the most important social institution of the frontier."[26] Though the Methodists used camp meetings extensively, they never made the practice "official." Yet their Bishop Asbury held them in high regard, reporting in his Journal in December, 1805:

> Some of my northern letters have come in: they bring good news; camp meetings at Albany, New York; at Lebanon, Vermont; in the New Hampshire districts; all successful. But O, the wonders of Doctor Chandler's report! He says his authority bids him say that at Duck Creek camp meeting five hundred souls; at Accomack camp meeting four hundred; at Annamessex Chapel, in the woods, two hundred; at Somerset Line chapel, one hundred and twenty; at Todd's chapel, Dorset, two hundred; at Caroline quarterly meeting, seventy-five; all, all these profess to have received converting grace![27]

A twentieth century historian, Charles A. Johnson, has suggested that the fact that Bishop Asbury remained one of its staunchest advocates "perhaps accounts for the fact that the open-air revival maintained its influence among the Methodists long after the other major denominations had dropped it."[28] The Methodists were able to make the camp meeting a respectable religious device, and in the process, they preserved much of the fervor of the western revival. The open air encampments became annual affairs with fixed duration and a generally well-organized session.[29]

During and immediately after the most intense period of the revival some observers noted a general improvement in the public behavior of Kentuckians. Davidson cites a letter from Doctor George Baxter who travelled in Kentucky soon after the wave of revivalism had receded. "On my way to

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[26]William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), IV: The Methodists, 68.

[27]Asbury, op. cit., II, 488.

[28]C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 82.

[29]Ibid., 82-85.

Kentucky," Baxter wrote, "I was informed by settlers on the road that the character of Kentucky travelers was entirely changed: and that they were now as remarkable for sobriety as they had formerly been for dissoluteness and immorality." Dr. Baxter went on to comment on the effect of the revival in promoting "a friendly temper" among the people, and described neighborhoods, "formerly notorious for private animosities and contentions," from which "many petty lawsuits had commenced," as having reformed. "When the parties to these quarrels were impressed with religion," he observed, "the first thing was to send for their antagonists, and it was very often affecting to see their meeting."[30]

But not every one who commented on the revival gave it such generous praise; for example, the Reverend David Rice, a Presbyterian minister of the anti-revival group, wrote in 1808:

> That we had a revival of the spirit and power of Christianity among us, I did, do, and ever shall believe, until I see evidence to the contrary, which I have not yet seen; but we have sadly mismanaged it; we have dashed it down and broken it in pieces. Though I hope a number will have reason to bless God for it to all eternity, yet we have not acted as wise master builders, who have no need to be ashamed.[31]

Two missionaries who had been sent to "that part of the United States which lies west of the Allegheny Mountains," by the Missionary Society of Connecticut, John Schermerhorn and Samuel Mills, reported in 1814 that they "found the inhabitants in a very destitute state; very ignorant of the doctrines of the Gospel; and in many instances without Bibles or other religious books."[32] Perhaps the influence of the revival did not reach some

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[30] Davidson, op. cit., 186.

[31] David Rice, quoted in Ibid., 187.

[32] Schermerhorn and Mills, op. cit., 48.

of the people in Kentucky; perhaps by the time Mills and Schermerhorn had visited Kentucky its influence had disappeared, or perhaps they saw what they had expected to see, and ignored any evidence to the contrary.

Although the immediate effects of the great revival in the West might have soon vanished from the scene, other results were not so quick to pass away. The camp meeting, born in the chaos of the revival movement in Kentucky in the last years of the eighteenth century and the first five years of the nineteenth, has continued to the present day in a more restrained form, though not without some opposition. One observer, writing in 1903 felt that the camp meeting had been continued too long. "The Camp Meeting," he wrote, "grew out of a necessity, but was prolonged until its usefulness had not only departed, but became a stench, a byword, a demoralizing power and a blighting curse."[33]

The effects of the revival as a whole are almost intangible. Possibly it affected the abolition crusade that was to burn across the northern half of the country in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, for Barton W. Stone declared that "this revival cut the bonds of many poor slaves, and this argument speaks volumes in favor of the work."[34] The revival probably also aided the temperance campaigns and perhaps stimulated more freedom in religious thinking.[35]

The effects of the camp meeting are more easy to discern than those of the revival as a whole. To be sure it has been a device used by revivalists, but as the camp meeting became less emotional and more standardized, its use continued and broadened until camp meetings became common in

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[33]MacLean, loc. cit., 246.

[34]Stone, loc. cit., 165.

[35]C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 238-240.

the eastern states. As a religious device it had many weaknesses--noisy unchurchlike atmosphere, ungenuine or short-lived conversions, services that were excessively emotional, and a kind of fascination that appealed to the curiosity of otherwise irreligious people. Nevertheless, it was, in the words of Charles A. Johnson, "a vital socioreligious institution in backwoods America."[36]

In some respects an unusual institution, the frontier camp meeting had an origin that was natural, growing out of a practical solution to existing problems. In some western regions, public lodging facilities were virtually unavailable, and it was common for travelers to stay in private homes when they were at hand. When they were not, the westerner, or the newly-arrived easterner, simply camped out. Religious services were seldom held in the sparsely settled areas, and often several neighboring congregations would combine their efforts in sacramental meetings. Drawn by the excitement of a large crowd, a chance to socialize, and by the possibility of seeing something unusual, many people collected at the well-advertised encampments in Kentucky. When the first large crowd gathered at a sacramental meeting and stayed the night on the grounds of the meeting, which probably had been moved out of doors because of the great number of people present, a camp meeting was born. Gradually the leaders of the revival, men like James McGready, the McGee brothers and John Rankin, came to plan prolonged services in order to stimulate revival feeling among the worshippers and to take advantage of the fervor thus generated.

The revival began among the Presbyterians, who may be credited with the first organized use of the camp meeting, but extreme emotionalism like that demonstrated at Cane Ridge caused a division to develop in the

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[36]C. A. Johnson, op. cit., 240.

Presbyterian Church between those who favored the emotional but disorderly revival, and those who were opposed to it. Evidences of the division remain today in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Christian Church. Discarded by the regular Presbyterians, the camp meeting was adopted by the Methodists, and under their guidance it reached maturity.

The heritage of the camp meeting has included effects which were many and varied. Encampments, both religious and secular, have followed the tradition of open-air meetings and overnight camping. The great "Chautauqua Assembly," organized in 1874, held summer sessions at a camp site on the shores of Lake Chautauqua, New York. The revival impulse, so greatly stimulated by this backwoods institution, continued and today has moved from the "sawdust trail" to gospel tabernacles and television. Finally, the spirit of interdenominational cooperation, evident at many of the earliest meetings, has been incorporated into local cooperation through ministerial alliances and into national cooperation by means of the National Council of Churches.

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Stone's autobiography lends much to an understanding of the Kentucky revival and the use of camp meetings, but also a great deal toward a fuller comprehension of the physical exercises and the divisions among the Presbyterians after the Cane Ridge Camp Meeting.

Schermerhorn, John F., and Samuel J. Mills. A Correct View of That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains With Regard to Religion and Morals. Hartford: Peter Gleason and Company, 1814.

Coupled with the accounts of religion and morals in the West are brief descriptions of geography, topography, and population distribution.

Toulmin, Harry. The Western Country in 1793; Reports on Kentucky and Virginia. San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1948.

Toulmin was a young Unitarian minister who had come to America to report on the possibilities of settlement. His is an interesting and favorable account.

COLLECTIONS OF DOCUMENTS

Armstrong, Maurice W. The Presbyterian Enterprise. Philadelphia: The Wesminster Press, 1956.

Contains historical sketches and representative documents including a description of the Cane Ridge Camp Meeting.

Mode, Peter G. Source Book and Bibliographical Guide for American Church History. Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1921.

Contains a variety of documents unavailable in any other printed collection, including several relating to the Kentucky revival.

Smith, H. Shelton, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher. American Christianity--An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960.

In this case the title accurately describes what may be found in this book.

Sweet, William W. The Baptists, 1783-1830. A Collection of Source Materials. (Religion on the American Frontier, I). New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931.

With a historical sketch at the beginning this volume sets the pattern for the series showing the effects of the frontier.

_____. The Methodists, 1783-1840. (Religion on the American Frontier, IV). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946.

Helps one to understand the peculiar way of the Methodists on the frontier and follows the pattern established by the first volume.

_____. The Presbyterians, 1783-1840. (Religion on the American Frontier, II). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936.

This work is most valuable for its documents that illuminate the formation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and for those which treat the theological controversy that took place after the Cane Ridge Camp Meeting.

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Gewehr, Wesley M. "Some Factors in the Expansion of Frontier Methodism." Journal of Religion, VIII (1928), 98-120.

Most valuable in this article is the interpretation of the use made of the frontier camp meeting by the Methodists.

MacLean, J. P., "The Kentucky Revival and Influences on the Miami Valley." Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publications, XII (1903), 242-286.

In addition to the text of the article the author printed a portion of the autobiography of John Rankin, one of the leaders of the Logan County revival. The author takes a very dim view of late nineteenth century camp meetings.

UNPUBLISHED THESES

Carter, Ernest Lee. "The Early Camp Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley." Master's thesis, Department of History, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1922.

Carter suggests several possible reasons as to why camp meetings originated and discusses the whole revival movement.

Humphreys, Ada. "Early History of the Disciples of Christ." Master's thesis, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1951.

Most helpful in tracing the happenings after the Cane Ridge Camp Meeting.

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