



## DISCOVERY

Edited by  
FREDERICK E. MASER

### Learning From the Past

It was an exciting day for me. The mail had brought a letter from a book dealer stating that he had just purchased a Dickins imprint, offering to sell it to me, and quoting a price.

I am always in the market for Dickins' imprints since John Dickins was the first Book Editor of the Methodist Episcopal Church. I was particularly interested in this item because of its rarity. It is "The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson etc." 1791. In all my years of collecting I have never seen a copy of this book for sale. Most Dickins' imprints are rarities, although his Baxter's *Saints Everlasting Rest* keeps turning up in a variety of conditions. Garrettson is a rarity indeed.

After studying the little volume, I decided to write about it, namely because of its "Preface." Although Nathan Bangs in 1830 used the work as a basis for his life of Garrettson, and in recent years Robert D. Simpson turned to it in writing his splendid definitive edition of the early Methodist circuit rider, neither includes Garrettson's "Preface" in his work. Simpson uses that part of the "Preface" in which Garrettson explains how he came to publish his Journal, and for Simpson's purpose this is probably sufficient; but I was deeply moved by the latter part of the "Preface." It reveals Garrettson's evangelical fervor and it sets forth what can be considered an outline of a sermon in which Garrettson urges the non-believer, who might read the Journal, to turn to Christ.

Methodism today has lost much of its original evangelical fervor, replacing it by a tremendous emphasis on social and economic renewal. The question no longer is "What must I do to be saved?" but "What can I do to help improve living conditions?" Certainly this latter aim is a worthwhile purpose. However, we sometimes forget that while an atheist can do as good a job as a believer in the matter of social renewal, only a

Christian can answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" If we omit this emphasis from our preaching we have failed in our mission. The early circuit rider never failed to preach Christ and Him crucified for the salvation of souls. At this point we can learn from the past.

In addition, although we would hardly study homiletics by reading the sermons of the circuit riders, it is interesting to note how they might have approached their subject. Garrettson's "Preface" gives us a possible clue.

But enough of this introduction. Here is the part of the "Preface" omitted from earlier and recent studies:

. . . I doubt not, but some real facts which I have related, will appear strange to some people. Great and glorious discoveries hath the Lord made to me, in various parts of his vineyard, at various times; insomuch, that I think it my duty not to keep silence; but publish to the children of men the great goodness of a benevolent God. Within sixteen years, I have travelled more than sixty thousand miles, in the glorious work of planting or spreading the Gospel; and when I look back, the time seems very short, and I often mourn under a sense of my own unprofitableness, and feel willing to spend the remainder of my days in the service of so good a God.

I have an ardent desire to be useful, and it greatly rejoices my heart when I see or hear of precious sinners embracing the overtures of mercy. I earnestly advise all those into whose hands this short diary may fall, to read it with earnest prayer; then peradventure it will have its desired effect on their hearts. In this account I did by no means intend to gratify the curiosity, or to tickle the ears of those who live in pleasure. I never aimed at this from the pulpit; the truth of which those who know me can testify; and in my writing I aim at the same thing—to be instrumental in bringing precious souls to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What shall I say to God's dear children—the advice of St. John is, "little children, love one another." And "perfect love casteth out fear."

I must entreat all those who are strangers to pure religion, to endeavor to take the following steps before they close their eyes in sleep, viz. 1. Set down and count the cost—consider the state which your soul is in—meditate on the shortness of time, the certainty of death and judgment, and the absolute necessity of a preparation for futurity. 2. Turn your back on everything which you know to be sinful. Sin caused the Son of God to groan and die. Why, O why then should we live and delight in sin? O! behold sin driving, as it were, the spear into the side of the Redeemer, and fly from it as from deadly poison. 3. Betake yourself to prayer; bow your knee before the eternal Judge, and call on the strong for strength. 4. Form a resolution in the name of the Lord, that the remainder of your days shall be spent in a life of piety. 5. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. You shall feel your sins forgiven. The guilt, power, and love of sin shall be removed, and your soul shall be happy in God. Till this is your blessed experience, your soul will be unhappy, and if you die without it, your soul will forever sink into hell.

O! dear sinners, my heart is enlarged toward you; repent and turn to the Lord, and he will in mercy meet you. "Now is the accepted time, &c." The last trump will soon be blown, and all mankind must appear at the tremendous bar. There is a sufficiency in Jesus, and he is now standing ready to save you. That you may live as you would wish to die, and reign with Christ in endless day,

Is the prayer of your  
affectionate servant

F. G.