

B.T. Roberts
(1823-93)

Free Methodist Historical Society

Newsletter

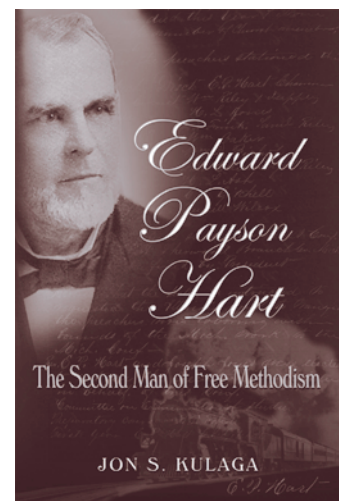
S U M M E R / F A L L 2 0 0 7 — V o l u m e 8 , N o . 1

E. P. and Martha Hart Come Alive in Pages of New Biography

Professor Jon S. Kulaga of Spring Arbor University has just published *Edward Payson Hart: The Second Man of Free Methodism* (Spring Arbor University Press). This significant new 285-page biography of the founder of Spring Arbor University (as it is now) and the second man to be elected a Free Methodist general superintendent, fills in much that was unknown about the early Free Methodist story. It also tells the story of Martha Bishop Hart, E. P. Hart's wife and partner in ministry.

In his early years E. P. Hart was strongly influenced by John Wesley Redfield, particularly through the dramatic Redfield revival in Marengo, Illinois. The Harts pioneered Free Methodist work in Michigan and later played a key role in establishing Free Methodist churches in California.

The Marston Memorial Historical Center has collaborated with the author and Spring Arbor University in bringing this important addition to Free Methodist history to the public.



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Renovation of North Chili Inn Awaits Closing

As reported in the last issue of the *Newsletter*, a legal settlement was reached in January, 2007, to preserve the historic tavern in North Chili, N.Y. (popularly known as the Stagecoach Inn) that B. T. Roberts purchased and converted in 1866.

In the legal agreement the Walgreens corporation agreed to help restore the building in exchange for approval of its plan to build a new Walgreens on part of the property.

Final closing on the legal agreement has not yet been reached, so restoration of the inn will not actually begin for some time yet.

B. T. Roberts purchased the tavern so it could be closed and the building used for other purposes as he was founding Chili Seminary (now Roberts Wesleyan College). It has since passed through numerous owners and uses, including a store run by Roberts' friends, the Cadys.

Grow in Love



As God will convert every one who will be converted, so he will keep every one who will be kept.

. . . If you have sought and obtained the blessing of holiness you must keep adding to the graces you have already received. If you ever get where you do not grow in holy, humble, tender love you will be in danger.

— B. T. Roberts, "Kept from Falling,"
The Earnest Christian (Dec. 1885), 166-67.

REVIEW ESSAY –

QUESTIONS FROM

BY BISHOP DAVID W. KENDALL

John Wesley

“Live While You Preach”: The Autobiography of Methodist Revivalist and Abolitionist John Wesley Redfield (1810–1863), edited by Howard A. Snyder (Scarecrow Press, 2006). 412 pp. ISBN 0-8108-5280-2 (paper).

John Wesley Redfield surely qualifies as one of the most colorful and fascinating figures in nineteenth-century Methodism. Unordained until near the end of his life, Redfield felt called to the work of an evangelist and gave himself to passionate labor to “save” the Methodist Episcopal Church by a return to its primitive theology and practice.

Ultimately, of course, his church rejected such salvation and, as a consequence, Redfield joined with B. T. Roberts and others to found the Free Methodist Church. In this autobiography, now made accessible to the general public in this carefully edited edition, readers have access to Redfield’s own account of his life and ministry.

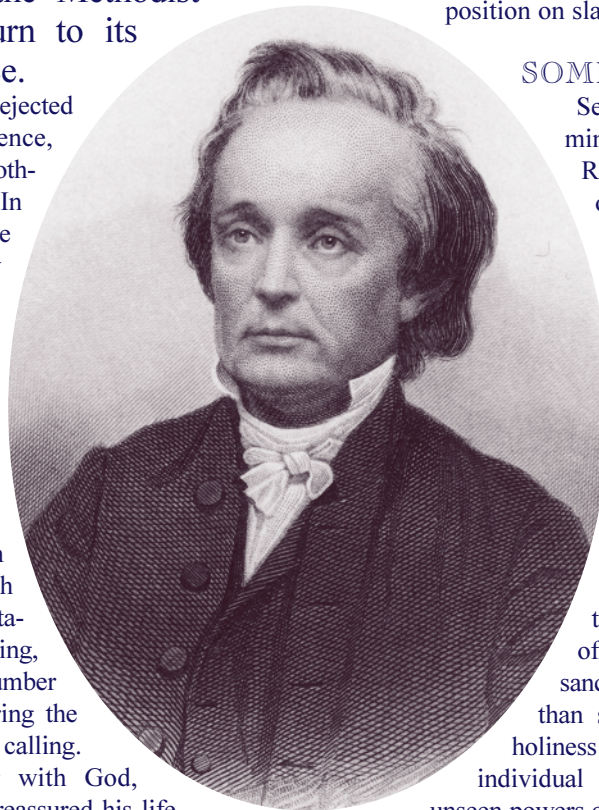
Redfield reveals the difficulty with which he accepted his call to preach. He was beset with self-doubt, a physical and emotional constitution all too vulnerable to the rigors of itinerant ministry, and an unfortunate marriage that ended in separation and divorce and clouded both his own sense of worthiness and his reputation. Periods of intense seeking and fasting, several visionary experiences, and a number of experimental fleeces all failed to bring the confidence Redfield needed to fulfill his calling.

Finally, in a powerful encounter with God, Redfield heard words that assured and reassured his life-long ministry in the face of opposition and adversity: “Live while you preach!” God would spare his life as long as he was obedient to his call. Even so, it was not until Redfield experienced his own full consecration and the blessing of entire sanctification that he gained consistent victory over self-doubt and the sustaining power to fulfill his calling.

In the decades that followed, Redfield traveled widely in the east and as far west as Illinois holding “protracted” meetings in hopes of recalling the Methodist Church to its mission of spreading holiness across the nation. His meetings were characterized by powerful movements of the Holy Spirit, with signs and wonders. People often “fell under the power,” moved by deep conviction of sin, and found deliverance only through surrender to the Spirit’s claim on their lives. Sometimes these displays of power gripped the lives of people not even present at the meetings, either through the prayers of the church or as a manifestation of the Spirit’s expanding work in the community.

Redfield’s ministry incurred the hostility of many, particularly

Methodist clergy. His message of holiness that led to forsaking worldly fashion and pleasure, to simplicity in church buildings and ministries, and to a focus on the poor, often threatened clergy who aimed at making their churches respectable to the community. Redfield’s uncompromising commitment to abolition, also a consequence of holiness teaching, made him an enemy to the pro-slavery crowd and a burden to any who sought a mediating position on slavery.



SOME REFLECTIONS

Several features of Redfield’s life and ministry merit careful reflection. First, Redfield advocated for the full integrity of the church as the primary means of winning the lost to Christ. “Preach holiness, and sinners will be converted” became the succinct expression of his evangelistic strategy. Surely, a church indistinguishable from the culture will have nothing to offer the unbelieving, even if it desires to.

Second, the holiness Redfield commended was holistic, touching all dimensions of personhood and all aspects of human society. Undoubtedly, holiness as conceived by the Bible will engage us in every arena of life, in the marketplace as well as in the sanctuary, and in relation to social no less than so-called spiritual realities. Likewise, holiness of life transforms social structures and individual persons, profoundly challenging the unseen powers of sin and evil that plague each.

Third, holiness requires openness to the Holy One and his powerful work in human life. In Redfield’s ministry that work included awesome displays of supernatural power which he welcomed, though critically. A people who value control and “propriety” may, by that very fact, be closed to the deepest and holiest work God may wish to do.

Fourth, the revivals that followed Redfield’s ministry clearly changed people. Profound lifestyle adjustments affected the use of money, time, and energy. Perhaps these revived Methodists focused too much on externals. Yet, if there are *no* distinguishing markers, in what sense has revival come?

Fifth, Redfield’s remarkable ministry illustrated the cost of discipleship and being on mission with Jesus. There was the cost of prayerful agonizing over the condition of a compromised church and its failure to reach the lost; the cost of offering a demanding gospel to an unappreciative church and world; the cost of hostility, even violence, from those resistant to the message, sometimes the very ones who should be supportive—the clergy.

Redfield

DEEPER QUESTIONS

Other facets of Redfield's account raise important questions for this reviewer—questions which should be considered in examining the trajectory of Redfield's life and the ministry he so powerfully launched.

First, Redfield often described his teaching and preaching as simply a matter of declaring unwaveringly the truth of the Bible. Yet one finds here little evidence of disciplined Bible study and reflection. One's *understanding* of holiness, and especially of how it should be experienced, can become a canon within the canon. When Redfield asserts he is being biblical, he means he is conforming to tried and true holiness theology, which he believes is Bible-based. When this happens, theology tends over time to trump the Scriptures, filtering out other biblical themes necessary



John Wesley Redfield near the end of his life. This rare photograph appears to have been taken sometime after his stroke in November, 1860. He died at age 53.

for that theology to be and remain biblically balanced.

Second, Redfield was committed to a non-negotiable focus on the "crisis" of entire

sanctification as the dominant or even exclusive emphasis in holiness preaching. No one can question the fruitfulness of early Methodist evangelists in generating a holiness movement through this focus on crisis. But one wonders to what extent the social and religious setting of the time made that focus particularly apt. Does a different setting, such as that of twenty-first-century North America's cultures and subcultures, require some adjustment in focus?

Third, how can the early Methodist insistence on simplicity in living and in church buildings and programs find compelling expression today? Merely replicating nineteenth-century practices will hardly suffice. Yet Methodism's unyielding insistence on simplicity resonates with deep and recurring themes in the whole Bible story.

Finally, the awesome displays of power in Redfield's preaching ministry stood in stark contrast to the staid regularity and controlled patterns of most churches in his day. Spiritual breakthrough often came through a willingness to allow the Spirit to do strange things among and with them. One wonders if that remains a vital key for twenty-first-century heirs of Redfield, Roberts, and Wesley.

News & Notes

▷ EXTRA COPIES of the Newsletter are available free of charge upon request (up to ten copies to one address). If you wish to send current or back issues to friends or family, contact the Historical Center by phone or letter or by email at History@fmcna.org.

▷ The Historical Center's ORAL HISTORY PROJECT is continuing. A significant archive of video interviews has now been established, including: Bishops Donald Bastian and W. D. Cryderman, Carroll Fortress, Gertrude Haight, Bruce Kline, Frank and Carol Ogden, and David McKenna. Recent additions are interviews with G. Herbert Livingston and Esther James, conducted by Don Joy. Dr. Joy commented, "Both were very engaged in the responses and the interviews should be a very good sample of the person's genius and ministry."

▷ PASTORS' SABBATICAL PROGRAM applications are now available. Contact the Historical Center for information on scholarships and scheduling.

LETTERS

The article about Gene Alston and Julia Shelhamer (Winter 2007 issue) was of real interest to me because I knew both of them quite well. I responded to an invitation by Gilbert James to move from Wessington Springs, SD, to Shreveport, LA, to open up a Christian school for black children. My wife Mary and I were there for five years and then transferred to Crew, Virginia. My task in Crew was to pastor the black church and organize a camp for black children from Washington D.C. Julia Shelhamer was raising money for such a camp. I made trips to Julia's mission in Washington to get acquainted with her and plan for the camp. Buildings were built and children from Washington came. Gene came to help with the camp. He became a good friend to our sons. [When we] had to leave Crew and move to Michigan, no one [was available] to look after the camp and the buildings and land were sold.

In the *Interracial News* photo I am the man standing just in front of Gene. He was an exceptional young man. ... He lis-

tened to the prayers and guidance of Julia Shelhamer.

— Kenneth Park, Tucson, AZ

The article on Vivian Dake by Bruce and Kay Kline (Winter 2006 issue) was fascinating. The Pentecost Bands played a major role in the early years of the Central Illinois (now Gateway) Conference. ... Another colorful minister in early Free Methodism was Charles Hazeltine Lovejoy (1810–1905). He joined the Illinois Conference in the fall of 1864, while still serving as a chaplain in the Kansas Seventh during the Civil War. He, like so many others in that early period, left the Methodist Church because, as his wife reported to the *Western Home Journal*, it had "become too formal for Charles" (*Kansas Historical Quarterly* [May 1947], p. 129). Lovejoy served briefly in the Illinois Conference at Lebanon, Illinois, and at St. Louis in 1865–1866. Then he was appointed to "Lawrence and Kansas" in 1867.

— Don Jordahl, Greenville, Illinois

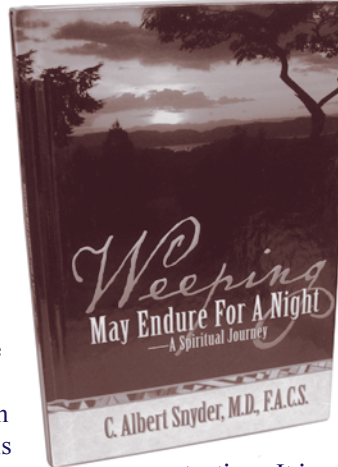
Book Review

Weeping May Endure for a Night: A Spiritual Journey, by C. Albert Snyder, M.D., F.A.C.S. (Xulon Press, 2006). 160 pp. ISBN 1-60034-015-6 (paper).

Weeping May Endure for a Night begins with an essay on depression and the proverb, “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” It ends with the words of John: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But whoever fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). The seventeen essays in between offer us a glimpse of senior Free Methodist missionary Dr. Al Snyder’s “journey into light.”

The essays are not new and will be familiar to readers of *The CAHO Chronicle*, the Central Africa newsletter. But this is the first time they appear together, and that enables us to appreciate as a whole the ups and downs of Snyder’s journey.

The essays touch on the three great passions in Snyder’s life—his faith and missionary service, his family, and medicine. His reminiscences are thoughtful. They cover a life spent growing up in Michigan, serving in World War II, as a surgeon in a U.S. practice, manning the hospital in Kibogora, Rwanda, traveling while on home furlough, and assisting Louise, his wife, in rearing their four sons.



Snyder touches on themes familiar to all Free Methodists, though not always in traditional ways. For instance, unlike his devout Christian mother, he expresses doubt that the suicide of a person suffering from deep depression is murder. In an environment where people sometimes forget the greater church, Snyder writes admiringly of Belgian nuns, every bit as holy as their Free Methodist counterparts in Africa. Gently and persistently Snyder applauds those he has met along the way who manifest God’s love and in so doing promote the dignity of every human being. I especially like the very young Belgian midwife he writes about.

Snyder’s recollections are also purposeful. You finish this book certain you do not want to contract cholera!—but also with a knowledge of how to treat it. One appreciates the difficulties and discomforts of practicing medicine in an ill-equipped part of the world, yet sensing the joy it brings to be happy doing God’s business. The reader is reminded also that when one member of a marriage is called to missionary service, so too is the other.

Weeping May Endure for a Night is the sort of book that can be read in one sitting or an essay at a time. It is worthy reading either way. Snyder’s writing is clear and informal and his topics relevant. And his conclusion, that God is love, is one we cannot hear often enough.

— Kate McGinn, Archivist
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