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Protestantism in the Mississippi Territory

by Margaret DesChamps Moore

The growth of Mississippi into a Biblical stronghold was a late nineteenth century development, perhaps foreseeable by the middle of the century, but hardly imaginable at its beginning. At that time missionaries and travelers found the people of the Old Natchez District far more interested in seeking riches in this world than in the next.¹ Few areas of the United States were characterized by so cosmopolitan a population, and its religious tendencies were almost as diverse as its people.

Free thought, skepticism, deism, or indifference to religion were characteristic of the upper class. Thomas Rodney, a territorial judge, had been a vestryman in Pennsylvania but seems never to have attended any religious service in Mississippi. Stephen Duncan, one of the most affluent and philanthropic citizens, made no profession of Christian faith. B. L. C. Wailes's biographer found that the geologist, planter, and historian, could hear ministers of varying beliefs and abilities with complete impartiality for one over another.²

Peter Little, business man and large landowner, could not be so indifferent as Wailes to the activities of Methodist circuit riders. He

This article was originally published in the November 1967 sesquicentennial edition of *The Journal of Mississippi History*. Some of the language may be offensive because the article is a product of its time and place. The article is reprinted verbatim to reflect the scholarship as it was presented at the time.

¹ See Margaret D. Moore, "Religion in Mississippi in 1860," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXII (October 1960), 223-238.

² William B. Hamilton, *Thomas Rodney, Revolutionary and Builder of the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1953), 58, 87; John H. Moore, *Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 49; Charles S. Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L. C. Wailes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), 213-214.

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built “The Parsonage” where his young and devout wife might entertain Methodist itinerants, for he did not want to be bothered by them in his own mansion, “Rosalie.” His early sawmilling partner, Andrew Brown, was a skeptic who was probably educated at the University of Edinburgh and elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society. He too had trouble with a zealous member of his family. When his son and namesake grew to manhood he besought his father to desert rationalism and follow “a Newton or a Locke or a host of others who after treading the labyrinth of science and philosophy for years...threw all their research at the feet of Jesus.”³ An early Methodist itinerant said of such old and established settlers that while respectable in many ways they were so rich that they were “above religion, and religion ... above them.”⁴

These early financial and cultural leaders were inclined neither to establish nor to join Protestant churches; they were more likely to organize such groups as the Mississippi Society for the Acquirement and Dissemination of Useful Knowledge.⁵ Yet, ministers did not find them antagonistic toward religious endeavors. Some of them supported the American Colonization Society and the American Bible Society, both organized the year before the territory achieved statehood.⁶

Missionaries and travelers reported that the gentlemen of Natchez were hospitable and urbane. Jacob Young recalled that when he was a presiding elder for the Methodist Church men of “the first class” were “a great benefit” to his work.⁷ James Hall, who was accustomed to preaching to educated and affluent North Carolinians, spoke highly of the Natchez aristocracy after a missionary tour in 1800. He thought they possessed the highest morals of any class in the territory and only once did he hear a profane oath from one of them. A minister

³ John H. Moore, *Andrew Brown*, 47; Harnett T. Kane, *Natchez on the Mississippi* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1947), 264-277.

⁴ John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1887), I, 173.

⁵ Sydnor, *Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region*, 125; Hamilton, *Thomas Rodney*, 87.

⁶ *Religious Intelligencer*, I (July 6, 1816), 103-105; Early L. Fox, *The American Colonization Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1919), 61-63, 122-123; P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 146.

⁷ Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young; with Incidents, Observations, and Reflections* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curtis, c. 1857), 222.

who spoke equally well on Calvinism or natural philosophy, Hall was well received by the educated planters and urged to stay in Natchez.⁸ One of the few dissenting opinions on the aristocracy was entered by Thomas Ashe, an English traveler, whose writing was, to say the least, picturesque. The gentlemen of Natchez, he said, were sick with venereal disease and fevers, avid gamblers, horse racers, and dissolute drunkards. “The vice of Natchez,” he wrote, “is proverbial through America.”⁹

The vice that was proverbial, of course, was under the hill. Here congregated a truly mongrel and transient population. Jacob Young, trying to cross the Mississippi from Natchez to his preaching appointments in Louisiana in 1807, was detained under the hill for one-half day because of rough waters. He later recalled that the wickedness he saw surpassed anything he had ever imagined. Americans, French, Spaniards, English, Irish, Dutch, Negroes, and mulattoes mingled together, while Kentuckians lay on their flatboats “drinking, fighting, swearing, and acting like demons.” “I had often heard of Natchez under the hill,” he concluded, “but never saw it before, and I thought I should be glad never to see it again.”¹⁰

The reputation of the city under the hill, but more especially the widespread knowledge of the climate, discouraged ministers from entering the territory. As late as 1820 an English traveler reported that half the families of Natchez were in mourning because of deaths the previous year.¹¹ Earlier in the century attrition from fevers was even greater. When the Western Conference of the Methodist Church called for volunteers for the missionary station at Natchez in 1803, no one answered. On the last day of the session, Launer Blackman agreed to go, although he thought it a great cross “to go to a country said to be one of the most sickly countries in America and ... [where] I should

⁸ James Hall, *A Brief History of the Mississippi Territory, to which is Prefixed, a Summary View of the Country between the Settlements on Cumberland River and the Territory* (Salisbury: Francis Coupee, 1801) in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, IX (1906), 539-573.

⁹ Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America, Performed in 1806 ...* (London: E. M. Blunt, 1808), 317. For opposite views, see: Samuel R. Brown, *The Western Gazeteer; or Emigrant's Directory* (Auburn, New York: H. C. Southwick, 1817), 234; William Darby, *A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana, the Southern Part of the State of Mississippi, and the Territory of Alabama* (New York: James Olmstead, 1817), 314-315.

¹⁰ Young, *Autobiography*, 223.

¹¹ Adam Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey through North America in the Year 1819, 1820, and 1821* (New York: J. Seymour, 1823), 191.

be 1500 or 1600 miles from home.”¹² Jacob Young admitted that he was forced by Bishop Francis Asbury to follow Blackman to Natchez.¹³ A minister who succeeded them expressed doubt that people could “form an adequate notion of the resolution required to volunteer as an Itinerant Preacher in such a region.”¹⁴

Yet, as soon as the territory was organized hardy souls like these went to minister to the population. Richard Curtis, who had been forced to leave the Natchez area because of Spanish opposition to his ministerial activities, returned by 1789 to the Church of Jesus Christ on Coles Creek which he had served before the land passed to the United States. Curtis, with a group of South Carolinians, had made a settlement on the creek in 1780, and although an elder rather than an ordained minister, he had in the absence of regular clergy performed weddings, baptized believers, and buried the dead. During his exile, which he spent in South Carolina, he was ordained as a Baptist minister.¹⁵

For more than a decade after Curtis returned, additions to the Baptist faith came not so much from conversions as by emigration, especially from South Carolina. By 1800 Baptists had organized four congregations, but when the Mississippi Baptist Association published its first minutes in 1807 it claimed only 196 members. So slow was the growth of the church that the first circular letter sent by the association to its members compared the denomination in the territory to a barren fig tree. Its members, found chiefly among the poor and ignorant, were regarded by wealthier citizens with indifference or even contempt.¹⁶

A few Baptists, however, accumulated property and became relatively affluent. By 1810, the church on Bayou Pierre, the second oldest in the territory, inquired of the association whether it was necessary to wash the saints' feet. The association answered that footwashing was indeed a Christian duty, a practice which prosperous

¹² Albert E. Casey (ed.), *Amite County, Mississippi, 1699-1865* (Birmingham: Amite County Historical Fund, 1950), 496. Blackman is referred to as Launer, Learner, or Learned Blackman.

¹³ Young, *Autobiography*, 206.

¹⁴ Ray Holder (ed.), “The Autobiography of William Winans” (Unpublished Master’s thesis, University of Mississippi, 1936), 116.

¹⁵ John G. Jones, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest* (St. Louis: P. M. Pinchard, 1866), 19-48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association from its Organization in 1806 to the Present Time* (New Orleans: Hinton and Co., 1849), 3-6, 12-15, 364.

members of this church apparently had come to find displeasing. Another evidence of affluence in this congregation was the provision made by the Association for preaching to slaves on Bayou Pierre. A congregation of Negroes known as the African Church met once a month at Josiah Flower's sawmill on the bayou where, with passes from their owners or overseers, they could hear sermons from white Baptist ministers who volunteered to preach to them.¹⁷

As Baptists prospered, educated clergymen of that faith came to the territory. The most able of these were probably Moses Hadley, Thomas Mercer, and David Cooper. On behalf of the Association they wrote letters on problems of faith and government that were worthy of the best talent of the Presbyterian Church. Yet, no Baptist Church was built in Natchez until statehood was achieved, and its clergymen were not so successful as the Methodist in gathering middle class converts on the rivers, creeks, and bayous of the countryside.¹⁸

The Methodists should be credited with sending the first Protestant missionary to the Mississippi Territory, for the few ministers who preceded Tobias Gibson had not been sent by eastern churches but had moved there with congregations or family groups. In January of 1799, Bishop Francis Asbury appointed Gibson to the Natchez country, and he arrived later that year. In Washington he formed a congregation of eight persons. Three of these came from the family of his cousin, Randall Gibson, and four, including two slaves, from the household of William Foster. Randall Gibson had planned to join the Baptists and was waiting to be immersed when his cousin arrived.¹⁹

Foster, an old resident of the area, was a fortunate convert for the Methodists. Of taciturn disposition and devoid of preaching talents, he never became an exhorter as did Randall Gibson. His great contribution to Methodism was financial. He had no children, and as he prospered, he shared his wealth with the church. Almost every Methodist itinerant who wrote a reminiscence of life in the territory praised Foster for personal kindness. They recalled gifts ranging from overnight lodging to \$500 with which to pay personal debts. The first official meeting of the Mississippi Conference in 1816, where Methodists

¹⁷ Ibid., 20-21, 42.

¹⁸ Ibid., 12-72.

¹⁹ Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, I, 24-39, 451-460; Jones, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism*, 98-126.

effected a permanent organization of scattered churches, was held in one room of Foster's home. There members transacted business and stayed overnight. His financial support was also instrumental in the erection of the first Methodist church in Natchez.²⁰

At first they won few converts, but a number of Methodist itinerants followed Tobias Gibson. The minister most responsible for the perseverance of the Methodists in the Natchez area was Launer Blackman, presiding elder of the Natchez district from 1804 until 1807.²¹ William Winans, who came in 1810, was an outstanding itinerant who remained in Mississippi. At ease with all economic classes, he became the leading Methodist of the antebellum period. He married a woman with a modest amount of land and slaves, and then farmed, taught school, ran unsuccessfully for public office, and became a presiding elder of his church. His influence extended far beyond his own era, for he collected a voluminous file of correspondence, papers, and diaries which constitute our best single source for a history of Protestantism in Mississippi.²²

Itinerants, with the financial aid of William Foster, built a Methodist organization in the territory. When they began their work, Lorenzo Dow, surely the most colorful and controversial one of them, doubted that there were three Christians, Negro or white, in Natchez.²³ At the end of the territorial period they could claim less than two thousand white and Negro members in Mississippi and Louisiana, but they had outdistanced their Protestant competitors in winning numbers to church membership. Methodists were generally neither so poor as Baptists nor so prosperous as Presbyterians. With the opening of north Mississippi to white settlers in the 1830s, Methodism won the state; and the agricultural prosperity of the 1850s made the church one of influential planters as well as farmers.²⁴

The growth of Methodism was in measure due to effective use

²⁰ Ibid.; Young, *Autobiography*, 230-231; Holder (ed.), "Autobiography of William Winans," 265-266.

²¹ Young, *Autobiography*, 218-220.

²² The William Winans Collection is deposited in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.

²³ Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite: or the Writings of Rev. Lorenzo Dow: Containing the Experience and Travels, in Europe and America up to near his Fiftieth Year* (Cincinnati: Anderson, Gates, and Wright, 1860), 217.

²⁴ Moore, "Religion in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXII (October 1960), 224-225, 231; *Methodist Magazine*, I (February 1818), 75.

of camp meetings. Dow, the greatest evangelizer on the American frontier, held the first encampment south of Tennessee in 1804.²⁵ Early Mississippi revivals were characterized by emotionalism and religious exercises common to the west. While the Methodist clergy took the initiative in arranging such meetings, Baptists and Presbyterians often helped with the preaching. Jacob Young recalled revivals where ministers warred with each other over predestination and immersion, and bands of ruffians on the outskirts of the camps tried to break them up. On one occasion a planter in the audience engaged in a shouting match with a preacher when he attacked the high living and ostentatious dress of some members of the congregation. In spite of such confusion, camp meetings resulted in additions to the church.²⁶

While these meetings were the most spectacular way of gaining converts, the Methodist itinerant system was probably more responsible for the growth of the denomination. Indeed, Winans regarded the meetings as detrimental to Methodism because ministers eventually became too dependent on them and thought it "a strange thing if any person were converted under the ordinary ministry."²⁷ The itinerant's regular preaching points were usually houses, since churches and public buildings were few. Their work consisted of preaching, holding prayer meetings, administering the ordinances of the church, catechizing, and teaching.²⁸

Penniless, poorly dressed, and half-sick, these men made their appointed rounds in all kinds of weather. While crossing swollen streams, all had narrow escapes from death by drowning, and felt fortunate indeed if they lived to recover their horses and saddle bags. Many people who listened to them never heard any other preaching in the new land to which they had moved. Sometimes Methodists were harassed and rudely treated by the populace; more often they were warmly welcomed by a poor and unsettled people who shared with them their crude homes and scanty fare. Where they could organize congregations, itinerants left behind laymen, known as class leaders, who oversaw flocks until they returned. By the time of statehood,

²⁵ Dow, *History of Cosmopolite*, 218; Charles B. Galloway, "Lorenzo Dow in Mississippi," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, IV (1901), 241.

²⁶ Young, *Autobiography*, 232-245.

²⁷ Holder (ed.), "Autobiography of William Winans," 136.

²⁸ Young, *Autobiography*, 232.

“local” ministers settled among the people and itinerants were less influential in the Methodist organization. William Winans regretted the passing of the days when itinerants traveled “as a band of brothers” and Methodists tried to stand apart as a people with distinct morals, manners, and dress.”²⁹

The only other church to develop a permanent organization in the territorial period was the Presbyterian. Three missionaries, James Hall, William Montgomery, and James Bowman, were sent to Natchez in 1800 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. They did not remain, and so the first Presbyterian minister to settle permanently in the Natchez country was Joseph Bullen. Bullen, after a persistent but unsuccessful mission to the Chickasaws, moved to Jefferson County where in 1804 he organized Bethel, the first Presbyterian Church in Mississippi. Jacob Rickow and James Smylie soon moved to the territory and William Montgomery returned. Before statehood was achieved, these four ministers, with the help of Daniel Smith, a missionary, had established eight churches and organized them into the Presbytery of Mississippi.³⁰ Presbyterian clergymen were welcomed by the established settlers because they were well educated and able to exercise leadership in cultural activities. They came primarily to seek fellow churchmen who had migrated from the southeastern states, and they established congregations only where literate men of Calvinist persuasion had settled. These were usually composed of well-to-do people, although Union, settled by a group of Scots, was an exception.

Protestant pioneers met no active opposition from the Roman Catholic Church. Few Catholic families remained after the passage of the Old Natchez District to the United States. In 1806, a traveler observed that the Catholic Church in Natchez had been “stripped of ... its Spanish possessions” by the Americans and closed.³¹ Ministers who crossed the river into Louisiana found the Catholic influence there formidable, but the church did not effectively re-enter Mississippi until the 1830s. While a few Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Quakers

²⁹ William Winans to Joseph McDowell, August 31, 1830, Winans Papers; Casey (ed.), *Amite County*, II, 499-500; Jackson *Mississippian*, May 2, 1834.

³⁰ E. H. Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), II, 367-373; T. L. Hamer, “Beginnings of Presbyterianism in Mississippi,” *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, X (1909), 203-221; *Southwestern Presbyterian*, October 30, 1890, May 28, June 18, 1891.

³¹ Ashe, *Travels in America*, 316.

could be found in the territory, these groups were too small to organize congregations.³² The field was left to the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians.

Often ministers and members of these denominations quarreled with each other on matters of doctrine, but their areas of agreement were greater than their differences. By 1811, the Baptist Association sought to promote harmony and good will among Christians of all denominations. Moses Hadley, appointed to write a circular letter for the Association on the benefits of denominational union, stated that a union of all churches would “eternally shut out” controversies and bigotry, and enable Christians to “sit together in heavenly places.”³³ Baptists and Presbyterians in 1817 took the lead in organizing the Religious Convention of Christian Denominations. Participants in these meetings, to which ministers in good standing and official lay representatives of all Christian churches were welcomed, avoided discussions of doctrines and discipline. Instead, they concentrated on promoting Christian fellowship and raising the moral tone of the population.³⁴ Newly settled areas of the state continued to experience controversies, but in civilized Natchez inter-denominational relations had reached maturity.³⁵

Wherever Protestants established churches, schools usually followed. Probably the first classical academy in the territory was the one organized by James Smylie in Washington. The superior educational requirements of their church made Presbyterian ministers like Smylie the ablest teachers in early Mississippi. William Montgomery, who could recite Horace’s odes from memory and correct his students’ translations from Virgil without a text, became the first president of Jefferson College.³⁶

Montgomery was undoubtedly a better scholar than his Methodist contemporary, William Winans. Winans, who had little appreciation

³² Frances A. Cabaniss and James A. Cabaniss, “Religion in Ante-Bellum Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, VI (October 1944), 191-224. A Congregational minister had formed a congregation during the Spanish regime, but it disappeared with his death in 1784.

³³ *Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association*, 26, 30-34.

³⁴ *Religious Intelligencer*, II (March 21, 1817), 686-687; *Christian Herald*, V (February 6, 1819), 655-659.

³⁵ Moore, “Religion in Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXII (October 1960), 230.

³⁶ Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, II, 370. Walter B. Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1952), 183-184.

for any literature that was not morally didactic, could not parse a sentence until he began to teach. He never advanced beyond the level of teaching a school for children in his neighborhood. Methodists, however, made a unique contribution to education when they opened Elizabeth Female Academy in 1818. At that time the education of women was generally neglected, even in eastern cities.³⁷

The educational advantages of Natchez were due entirely to the efforts of Presbyterians and Baptists. In 1817, Daniel Smith, a Presbyterian missionary, wrote back east: "A year ago there was not a good school in the place; now almost all the children are under the care of well qualified and pious instructors."³⁸ He found eighty students "from the most respectable families" in the new Presbyterian academy. The Baptists had begun to educate poor children by operating a Lancasterian school, where advanced students taught beginners. A charitable society formed by ladies had quickly raised \$2,000 to finance it. The teacher, Benjamin Davis, established the first Baptist congregation in the town. Between Presbyterians and Baptists cordial relations seem to have existed as they began their schools and churches in Natchez.³⁹

Ministers also helped spread Bibles and religious tracts among the people. After the publication of a report that five thousand families in the Mississippi Territory were destitute of the scriptures, the Massachusetts Bible Society and the New England Tract Society sent Daniel Smith to the Southwest as their representative. In 1816 he distributed Bibles from the Pearl River to Natchez using as his agents Baptist and Presbyterian clergymen as well as the Mississippi Bible Society which had been founded in 1813. Members of [the] Mississippi Presbytery, individuals along the Pearl River, and settlers in Amite County, helped him distribute tracts. A Presbyterian elder told him that "nothing set the people to reading like them [tracts];" while a small boy expressed gratitude for literature that did not merely entertain,

³⁷ Winans to Brother Scranton, July 1, 1820, Winans Letter Books; Winans to Nancy, September 16, 1820, *ibid.*; Holder (ed.), "Autobiography of William Winans," 3; Charles B. Galloway, "Elizabeth Female Academy—The Mother of Female Colleges," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, II (1899), 169-178.

³⁸ *Religious Intelligencer*, II (June 2, 1817), 15-16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; Margaret D. Moore, "Early Schools and Churches in Natchez," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXIV (October, 1962), 253-255; *Natchez Gazette*, October 28, 1826.

but told him how to die.⁴⁰

Aside from promotion of education, the greatest influence of clergymen was on the amelioration of slavery. The Methodist circuit riders were anti-slavery and were so appalled by the abuse of slaves by church members that at least one refused to court the daughter of a slaveholder.⁴¹ The first query brought before the Baptist Association was: "What steps would be most advisable to take with members of our society, whose treatment to their slaves is unscriptural?"⁴² Presbyterians, in whose congregations slaveholding was prevalent, were not outspoken in opposition to slavery. Indeed, James Smylie, by the decade of the thirties was the state's most articulate defender of the institution. Yet Presbyterians joined with Methodists and Baptists in support of the colonization movement, and in a united attempt to make masters aware of their obligation to Christianize slaves by providing family worship and religious services for them. Ministers of all denominations preached to slaves, and travelers found an occasional slave exhorter working on Sundays among his fellows. The effect of the clergy on slaveholding, however, was slight, for people had come to Mississippi to make money from slave-operated cotton plantations.⁴³

All churches disciplined members for breaches of moral codes. Dancers, drinkers of alcoholic beverages, card-players, Sabbath-breakers, profaners, and adulterers were frequently brought to judgment before Methodist classes, Baptist congregations, and Presbyterian sessions.⁴⁴ The churches were not yet so strong that they could exercise much influence beyond the confines of their own congregations. Later in the history of the state religious forces were so powerful and well organized that they brought about state laws limiting the sale of alcohol, prohibiting Sabbath desecration, and forbidding the teaching of evolution. During the territorial period in Mississippi, the churches were unable to exert as much influence against crime and

⁴⁰ *Religious Intelligencer* I (October 26, 1816), 364-366; (July 6, 1816), 103-106, (September 14, 1816), 256, (October 26, 1816), 362-363.

⁴¹ Holder (ed.), "Autobiography of William Winans," 131; Young, *Autobiography*, 240.

⁴² *Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association*, 13.

⁴³ Henry Cogswell Knight, *Letters from the South and West* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1824), 111; Posey, *Presbyterian Church*, 79-80; *Christian Herald*, V (February 6, 1819), 657; *Religious Intelligencer*, I (October 26, 1816), 364-366.

⁴⁴ Casey (ed.), *Amite County*, II, is filled with examples of discipline cases. Also see: Moore, "Religion in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXX (October 1960), 228-229.

disorder as they did elsewhere on the frontier. As William B. Hamilton has so aptly pointed out, "the single institution . . . that offered stability, that could cement the society together" in the early nineteenth century in Mississippi was Anglo-American law.⁴⁵

The minister, however, was often a tower of strength in combatting fear and superstition and in maintaining calm in time of crisis. A Methodist clergyman was a leader in allaying panic over an expected Indian uprising during the War of 1812. Another itinerant quieted a woman who thought she saw the devil on the wall in the shape of a big black dog. William Winans once ridiculed fears that a comet would hit the earth. Later he remained calm when even a fellow minister expected the fulfillment of a prediction that the countryside would be destroyed by storm and hail.⁴⁶ In a region where death was an ever present invader, the minister comforted the sorrowing and brought hope of immortality.

In the territorial period, the clergy did not win the battle over immortality; they did not convert the masses of the population; they did not bring churches and schools to all people in the territory. The Methodists lost their battle against slavery and worldly dress. The Presbyterians had little success in spreading an intelligent and unemotional doctrine. The Baptists were consigned an inferior position of work among the poor. When the territory entered the union not more than one person in twenty was a member of any church.⁴⁷ Yet, early Protestant ministers were not soon forgotten, for they possessed in abundant degree the daring, courage, and independent spirit out of which lands were settled and civilizations built.

⁴⁵ William B. Hamilton, *Anglo-American Law on the Frontier: Thomas Rodney and His Territorial Cases* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1953), viii.

⁴⁶ Casey (ed.), *Amite County* II, 499; Holder (ed.), "Autobiography of William Winans," 154-156, 170-172, 175-176.

⁴⁷ See "Documentary Material Relating to the Early History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, XXI (December 1943), 186-208.