CHAPTER I

Stone's Early Life, Conversion, and First Ministry

When Barton Warren Stone's father, John Stone, died in Maryland, the Revolutionary War had already begun. Maryland, with the other Colonies, was in the war, and the market for her great money staple, kite foot tobacco, was closed. In consequence "the Stones," with many other families in southern Maryland, moved to the southwestern part of Pittsylvania County in Virginia, near the Dan River, in a region William Byrd had called "the Land of Eden." Byrd, who in 1728 headed the commission that established the boundary of Virginia and North Carolina, owned one hundred and five thousand acres of this soil in the Dan Valley, which he described as "a broad leven of exceeding rich land, full of large trees, with vines marry'd to them, if I may be allowed to speak so poetically." [1]

Despite Byrd's enticing descriptions of the land, few settlers had come there during Stone's boyhood days. It was true frontier territory. Forests of great oaks in the Piedmont section led the people to call it the "backwoods." And Stone was a child of the frontier; he always remained one. The impress of the struggles for life in the backwoods during the Revolutionary War was evident in his later life.

In his ninth year, the British military forces made a desperate bid to conquer the Colonies through an invasion of the South. The patriots in Pittsylvania County joined in freedom's battle. In an adjacent county, near Barton Stone's home, Patrick Henry spoke for the Revolutionary cause. Stone doubtless heard of the orator, for he testifies early that he "drank deeply" of the "Spirit of liberty." Certainly the draughts he drank carried potency, for Stone writes that he "could not hear the

[1] William Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line,* ed. W. K. Boyd (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), p. 208.

name of British or Tories without feeling a rush of blood through the whole system."[2] He never lost the emotions born of the backwoods fight for freedom; sixty-three years later he confessed that the name of Tory still called up memories of injuries.

The record suggests that the entire county militia of Pittsylvania served in the battle of Guilford Court House.[3] Stone reports that they heard at their home the sounds of the battle thirty miles away. Greene and Cornwallis were the antagonists. Three months later the homes of Peter Perkins, Nicolas Perkins, and William Harrison, all neighbors of the Stones, were used by General Greene to hospitalize his soldiers.

The invasion brought soaring prices. Continental currency was on its last legs. Four barrels of corn sold at 244 pounds, a cow and a calf for 426 pounds, and two sheep for 100 pounds.[4] With her older boys away in the militia, Stone's widowed mother struggled to make ends meet. Stone later etched the remembered life in the war zone:

> parents in tears—tented field—great anxiety—depredations—nothing secure—bands of thieves—many vices—gambling—swearing—debauchery—drunkenness—quarreling—soldiers caressed (promiscuously)—demoralized society.[5]

Stone managed to escape these vices of war. In the midst of demoralization he sought perfection in his daily living. While not an active member of the church, he gave thought to his standards of moral virtue. He would withdraw from his companions to read such books as he could find. There were no books of science, but only a few novels in addition, of course, to the Bible. Three of the novels, *Peregrine Pickle, Tom Jones,* and *Roderic Random,* Stone read and condemned as "trash." "These were poor help," he said, "and yet from reading these my ardent thirst for knowledge increased."[6] He read the Bible so much that he tired of it.

Young Stone rebelled not only against "Tories" but also against a teacher whom he termed "a very tyrant." So sensitive was the lad and

[2] Elder John Rogers, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone* (Cincinnati: J. A. and U. P. James, 1847), p. 3.

[3] Maude Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell Co., 1929), p. 185.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 175.

[5] Rogers, *op. cit.,* p. 2 f.

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

so domineering the teacher, that Stone, when an old man, recalled vividly:

> I could learn nothing through fear of him [the teacher]: When I was called on to recite my lessons to him, I was so affected with fear and trembling and so confused in mind that I could say nothing.[7]

Barton Stone soon exhausted the meager educational resources of his community. His tutor, Robert W. Somerhays, declared that he was a finished scholar, and the ignorant backwoods community applauded his negligible scholastic attainment. He turned to North Carolina for a richer educational diet.

Into every remote corner of North Carolina and southern Virginia, the fame of David Caldwell's school at Guilford had spread.[8] It was thither Stone journeyed. This log college in the Carolina wilderness was called an "Academy, a College, and a Theological School." Ever since the founding of Princeton in 1746, a stream of Presbyterian circuit riders had gone out to carry the Gospel from the Wyoming Valley to Georgia. In 1775, of the eight youthful ministers, who served in the valley of Virginia, all were recent Princeton graduates. "Thus it was that Princeton," says T. J. Wertenbaker,

> became the religious and educational center of Scotch-Irish America. The graduate of Nassau Hall invaded the South with the Bible in one hand and the Greek or Latin textbook in the other. Having knit together his congregation, and built a meeting house, he next busied himself with founding an academy, modelled upon William Tennent's famous log college.[9]

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[8] Caldwell constituted the entire faculty. A native of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Caldwell graduated from Princeton, the mother of teaching preachers, in 1761. He was ordained in Trenton, New Jersey in 1765. He began his ministry two years later in the Buffalo and the Almance Presbyterian Churches near Greensboro, North Carolina. But one who only preached starved; therefore he opened a school to finance his preaching. Since teachers starved too, farming became a necessity to sustain life. Before a minister could preach the "Bread of Life," his daily bread had to be wrested from the Carolina soil. Further, doctors were almost unknown in North Carolina and the knowledge Caldwell had gleaned in the medical school of the celebrated Dr. Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia also served the countryside. See Burton Alva Konkle, *John Motley Morehead* (Philadelphia, 1922), p. 12 ff.

[9] T. J. Wertenbaker, *The Old South* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 209.

It was such a college that David Caldwell had established on a small slope near the present city of Greensboro. Caldwell sent out in the forty years of his regime, from his school, fifty ministers and five governors of states. "For many, this famous 'log college' with an annual enrollment of between fifty or sixty students was the most important institution of learning in North Carolina." [10]

Governor John Motley Morehead, often called "the Father of Modern North Carolina," was a student under Caldwell. He described him as a

> man of admirable temper, fond of indulging in playful remarks, which he often pointed with a moral; kind to a fault to every human being, and I might say to every living creature. . . . He seemed to live to do good.[11]

Having arrived at the Academy, Stone began the study of Latin grammar on February 1, 1790, resolved to secure an education, or "die in the attempt." [12] The school had no library, but a few Greek and Latin classics, Euclid's *Elements of Mathematics,* and Martin's *Natural Philosophy* were available and in use. The course in Moral Philosophy was taught from a syllabus of lectures delivered by Dr. Witherspoon of Princeton College.[13]

Stone plunged into his studies with the determination to excel. He practiced an almost ascetic type of self-discipline, adopting vegetarianism and giving up normal sleeping hours. Of his rigid regimen, he says:

> I stripped myself of every hindrance for the course—denied myself of strong food, living chiefly on milk and vegetables, and allowed myself but six or seven hours in twenty-four for sleep.[14]

Almost at once, however, religion disturbed his perfect program of study. The cause of the distraction was the vivid preaching of James McGready, a Presbyterian revivalist.[15] As he sought to concentrate on

[10] Konkle, *op. cit.,* p. 13.

[11] W. B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: R. Carter and Brothers, 1858–1869), III, 266 f.

[12] Rogers, *op. cit.,* p. 6.

[13] C. C. Ware, *Barton Warren Stone* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1932), p. 24.

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

[15] James McGready (1760–1817) was born in Pennsylvania and lived for a while in Guilford County, North Carolina, before returning for schooling to the log college of John McMillen near Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania. McGready's preaching later aroused such opposition in Orange County, North Carolina, that his

his studies, Stone was astonished to find about thirty "pious students" assembling every morning before classes, for singing and praying in a private room. These religious meetings made him uneasy. "I labored to banish these serious thoughts," Stone wrote,

> believing that religion would impede my progress in learning—would thwart the object I had in view, and expose me to the frowns of my relatives and companions. I therefore associated with that part of the students who made light of divine things and joined with them in their jests of the pious. For this my conscience severely upbraided me when alone, and made me so unhappy that I could neither enjoy the company of the pious, nor of the impious.[16]

Revival preaching was not unfamiliar to Stone. The Church of England parish in the Pittsylvania community had been inactive during and following the Revolution. Its alleged alliance with "Toryism" had made it suspect to many of the backwoods people, but revivalists appeared on the scene, and Stone had attended many of the meetings.

The zealous Methodist preachers particularly had attracted Stone, who saw them as "grave, holy, meek, plain, and humble," checking "levity" in all around them and electrifying congregations by their preaching. Baptists and Episcopalians alike warmly attacked them. The Baptists, feeling that these "Arminians" denied the doctrine of grace and affirmed salvation by work, publicly declared them to be the "locusts" of the Apocalypse.[17] While his sympathies were with the "misrepresented and persecuted" Methodists, Stone had never been converted, though he retired often for secret prayer. Becoming discouraged, he finally quit praying and "engaged in the youthful sports of the day."[18] Even as a youth, he struggled for a "perfect" way of conversion. No half-way conversion would meet his requirements.

Stone was neither to escape religious conversion nor experience it suddenly or easily. His religious life even for a while after his conversion suggests the tracings on a seismograph, showing, now, deep emo-

---

pulpit was burned and a threatening message written in blood was sent to him. Subsequently, he became a leader of the wave of revival meetings which historians have named, "The Great Revival of 1800." In Kentucky, this revivalism reached its peak at Cane Ridge, in August, 1801.

[16] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

tional stirrings and now, states of quiescence. His was a "tortured" soul, seeking religious satisfaction, finding it momentarily, only to plunge into some temporary despair. Actually, he feared conversion. Committed to follow the law as a profession, he did not wish to give it up; but religion fascinated him as much as the fear of damnation overwhelmed him. Religion at once drew him and repelled him. Revivals played their part in his conversion, but when that spiritual experience came, Stone was not to be found in a crowd touched by "revival magic," but alone in the woods, Bible in hand, an independent frontiersman, adventuring along new trails of American religious discovery.[19] He did not choose then to go with the despised Methodists and Baptists, but entered the more socially acceptable Presbyterian Church.

Stone knew from this previous experience how unsettling revivals could be, and he resolved to escape the one in Caldwell's log college. One day he packed his things, planning to start the next morning for Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia "for no other reason than that I might get away from the constant sight of religion." [20] A severe storm prevented his departure and he thereupon resolved to pursue his own business and let others go their own way. Had he gone to Hampden-Sidney, he would have been chagrined, for at that time a powerful revival was rocking that college near Farmville, Virginia! [21]

Stone remained at Caldwell's College and there it was that James McGready, a visiting evangelist, captivated him. To Stone, his appearance was not compelling except for a "remarkable gravity and small piercing eyes." His gestures were the "perfect reverse of elegance," but his coarse tremulous voice seemed to Stone "unearthy." Stone, sitting on the log bench, forgot everything except the speaker, who in turn forgot everything but the "salvation of souls." Stone never before had seen such zeal and earnestness. The imagination of the preacher inflamed the imagination of the young man as he described the pleasant topography of heaven and the fearful "lakes of hell." [22]

McGready was noted for his revival fervor and "fiery brimstone" preaching. For example, he once said that a quill plucked from the

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[21] Gerald W. Johnson, *American Heroes and Hero Worship* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 131.
[22] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

wing of a cherub and "dipped in a ray of glory emanating from the divine throne"[23] could not describe the goodly land of heaven. He himself, however, felt equal to the task of picturing the long torment of sinners in hell!

To one who argued that such expressions as "a lake of fire burning with brimstone"—"a lake of fire"—"Hell fire"—"the place of torment" —"the bottomless pit"—were figurative only, McGready replied that these afforded only a faint view of the reality. The strongest figure, he said, was mild compared to the actual state of hell.

> We shall suppose that all the pains and torments that ever were endured, by all the human bodies which ever existed upon the earth, were inflicted on one person; add to this ten thousand times the horror endured by Spira, yet all this would not bear the same comparison to the torments of the damned in hell, that the scratch of a pin will do to a sword run through a man's vitals.[24]

Something more dreadful remained for McGready to describe. The torment of the sinner "will be a growing torment." The misery of the sinner will increase as he receives the "unmilled wrath of a sin-avenging God."

> While the one hand of enraged Omnipotence supports the sinner in being and enlarges his capacity for suffering, with the other, he tortures him with all the miseries and pains which infinite wisdom can invent, or Almighty Power inflict. Oh, how dreadful must be the torments of hell![25]

McGready's descriptive account of "heaven, earth and hell" awakened "feelings indescribable" in Stone. Concluding, McGready addressed the "sinner to flee the wrath, to come without delay." Stone was enchained. "Such was my excitement that had I been standing," wrote Stone, "I should have probably sunk to the floor under the impression."[26]

Stone was anything but a rock. With night coming on, he went out

[23] James Smith (ed.), *The Posthumous Works of the Reverend and Pious James M'Gready* (Nashville: Lowry and Smith, 1833), II, 297. (The first volume was published in Louisville by W. W. Worsley in 1831. Hereafter, this source will be referred to as *McGready's Works.*)

[24] *Ibid.*, I, 63.

[25] *Ibid.*, II, 241.

[26] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

into an open field to weigh the subject of religion. The time of decision had arrived. In legal fashion Stone described his inner debate:

> Shall I embrace religion or not? If I embrace religion, I must incur the displeasure of my dear relatives, lose the favor and company of my companions—become the object of their scorn and ridicule—relinquish all my plans and schemes for worldly honor, wealth and preferment, and bid a final adieu to all the pleasures in which I had lived, and hoped to live on earth. Are you willing to make this sacrifice to religion? No, no, was the answer of my heart. Then the certain alternative is you must be damned. Are you willing to be damned—to be banished from God—from heaven—from all good—and suffer the pains of eternal fire? After due deliberation, I resolved from that hour to seek religion at the sacrifice of every earthly good, and immediately prostrated myself before God in supplication for mercy.[27]

According to the religious pattern of Stone's day and vicinity, he was led to expect a long painful struggle before he would be in a position to "get religion." In this he was naturally not disappointed, since the psychology of conversion in the individual usually follows the pattern of his religious group. The doctrine Stone then believed was the one publicly taught: that mankind is so totally depraved that it could not take any initiative until the spirit wrought a change of heart in the individual in "God's own sovereign time." God's time and Stone's did not coincide immediately.

> For one year I was tossed on the waves of uncertainty—laboring, praying, and striving to obtain saving faith—sometimes desponding, and almost despairing of ever getting it.[28]

McGready's doctrines of depravity and conversion intensified Stone's struggle. McGready believed that by the fall of Adam, man lost all knowledge of God. He lost the love of the perfections inherent in God's nature.[29] Moreover, in Adam's fall, man lost the moral image of God. So disastrous was Adam's experience that the image of God in man was replaced by the image of the devil. Man was recast in the devil's image. Man in such a state was unregenerate and lived under the awful judgment of God.[30] His every moment of activity was under

[27] *Ibid.*
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[29] *McGready's Works*, II, 63.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

condemnation because it was not directed toward the glory, or love of God.

How was man to escape from his predicament? McGready's answer was that he must experience a new birth.[31] The Judge of all men will attach supreme importance to the spiritual birth. McGready solemnly declared:

> In that awful day, when the universe, assembled, must appear before the quick and dead, the question brethren, will not be, were you a Presbyterian —A Seceder—a Covenanter—a Baptist—or a Methodist; but, did you experience a new birth? Did you accept of Christ and his salvation as set forth in the gospel? [32]

The new birth, according to McGready, is the "implantation of a living principle of grace in the soul, which before was spiritually dead." [33] In regeneration, or the new birth, a change comes to the whole soul. The image of the sinner's idol, Satan, is defaced and the likeness of God is drawn anew upon the soul.[34] The misguided will be re-directed toward God and holiness.[35]

Barton Stone wanted this kind of conversion experience. But how was he to receive it? McGready answered only the power of God could effect it. Those who are dead in sin are as powerless to renovate the soul as are "those in the graves to raise themselves to life." One attains new spiritual life only by the irresistible power and operation of the Holy Spirit.[36] No effort of the creature can avail. To spin "a faith out of one's own bowels" is impossible; it is the gift of God.

Stone was not a trained theologian and argued in backwoods fashion: You say that without faith it is impossible for me to please God. But God does not send faith to me so that I can act, and yet you say I must act. How, in this situation, can I either act or have faith? McGready answered that the sinner must do what God required of him. He must use the means given him. A man

> has natural power to go to a ball and dance and frolic with the wicked—he could, by exerting the same power—stay at home, pray, and read the

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 82.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 82.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

word of God. . . . The sinner has the same natural power to forsake wicked company—and his outbreaking sins—to pray and seek religion—as he has to plough the ground and plant his corn.[37]

Some sinners objected: How can God command me to believe when I have no more power to exercise faith, than to create a world? Will he damn me if I do not believe under such conditions? Does God command impossibilities, and damn me for not doing that which I have no power to do?

McGready answered that God demanded nothing unreasonable because he offered his power to the sinner to perform all his commands.[38] But the sinner will not use the means to obey God's command to pray, to repent, and to believe in Christ. He wills to attend balls and frolics —he *will* neither pray nor read the Bible, neither keep the Sabbath nor attend the preaching of the word; therefore "his damnation is just."[39]

This answer did not satisfy Stone. He did not dance, frolic, or enter taverns. He did attend services, pray, and read the Bible, and yet he had never experienced the second birth. He had used the means of conversion and yet God had withheld his favor. If God granted the new birth why did he refrain from acting even when a man forsook wicked company and tried desperately to do right? McGready did not answer this question adequately for Stone.

Stone's second contact with James McGready sent him to lower depths of confusion. In February, 1791, with many fellow-students he attended a meeting at Sandy River in Virginia. J. B. Smith, the president of Hampden-Sidney, so depicted the "broken and contrite heart" that Stone felt his own described. He sensed a "gleam of joy" as he ate the emblems of the Lord's Supper, or Communion, for the first time.[40] But in the evening, James McGready, speaking on the theme "Weighed in the Balances" plunged Stone almost to the nadir of hopelessness. "He went through all the legal works of the sinner," said Stone,

all the hiding places of the hypocrite—all the resting places of the deceived —he drew the character of the regenerated in the deepest colors, and thun-

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 149.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[40] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 9 f.

dered divine anathemas against every other. Before he closed his discourse I had lost all hope—all feeling, and had sunk into an indescribable apathy.[41]

The discourse finished, McGready sought to arouse Stone from his torpor, by the "terrors of God and the horrors of hell." Stone was unresponsive and declared that McGready "left me in this gloomy state without one encouraging word." [42]

Stone's emotions were turned upside down. His physical strength began to fail. He wandered and languished in uncertainty. Finally his relatives in Virginia, hearing of his condition, sent for him. His mother, alarmed over his state, changed from the Episcopal Church to the Methodist, apparently in the hope that she might help her son.[43] Unquestionably her efforts to help him intensified his own struggle.

Upon returning to the Academy, Stone attended a meeting in Almance, the more liberal of David Caldwell's two churches. Here he heard William Hodge, who had been trained by Caldwell. Hodge had been preaching only one year, but succeeded with Stone where McGready had failed. He was the reverse of McGready in technique and theology. His text Stone never forgot: "God is love." "With much animation and with many tears," Stone reported, "he spoke of the love of God to sinners, and of what that love had done for sinners. My heart warmed with love for that lovely character described, and momentary hope and joy would rise in my troubled breast." [44] The doctrine of God's love as preached by Hodge appeared both new and convincing to Stone.

When Hodge had ceased speaking, Stone did not remain with the excited congregation. He retired to the woods alone with his Bible. Reading and praying with feelings oscillating between hope and fear, he seemed to hear the text of Hodges' discourse ringing through the trees of the forest: "God is love." Stone had found his way. "I yielded," he asserted

and sunk [sic] at his feet a willing subject. I loved him—I adored him—I praised him aloud in the silent night, in the echoing grove around. I confessed to the Lord my sin and folly in disbelieving his word so long and

[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.*

in following so long the devices of men. I now saw that a poor sinner was as much authorized to believe in Jesus at first, as at last—that *now* was the accepted time, and day of salvation.[45]

The importance of this moment in Stone's history has not received the recognition which it deserves. Stone's formal departure from Calvinism came when he withdrew from the Synod of Kentucky in 1804. But, here, at the very moment he formally accepted Calvinism, he had begun to break with it by rejecting its conventional pattern of agonizing struggle for immediate commitment to the founder of Christianity. Stone always felt that men are not so depraved that they cannot take the initiative in conversion once they recognize that God has already taken the initiative in the revelation of Christ made known in the Bible. This position later forced Stone to reject such creeds as interfered with the conversion experience. Stone found his norm not simply in the inner light, but primarily in the Bible. The book that had wearied him in the Virginia forest, he now took into the woods alone, because its light had made plain a path which evangelists and crowds did not illumine.

Thus, it is apparent, Stone early combined some genuine Protestant biblicism with a first-hand experience of religious awakening and the stress some "left-wing" groups placed on perfectionism. All of these influences were to criss-cross throughout Stone's life in his struggle to find freedom from strict religious authority, and in his dominant desire for the unity of all of the followers of Christ. Some of Stone's contemporaries took one or more of these insights and hardened them into rigid patterns; Stone let the emphases play important roles in his thought without becoming rigid and arbitrary.

Stone had experienced a new orientation to God; hereafter, until he finished school, he said, "I lived devoted to God." The study of the dead languages and sciences he found not irksome, but pleasant, "from the consideration that I was engaged in them for the glory to God, to whom I had unreservedly devoted my all.[46]

Two difficulties now arose which were to plague the young convert for a long time. Stone's money from his father's estate ran low. Already on an almost ascetic regimen, Stone found it even more difficult

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[46] *Ibid.*

to procure "decent clothes, or books, or things indispensably necessary." Dr. Caldwell urged him to complete his studies, promising to postpone the collection of the tuition until after graduation. Because of broken promises, country-wide inflation, and perhaps his own incapacity, Stone was destined always to have financial problems. Indeed, his struggle on the frontier led him to take on characteristics of the faith of "the disinherited."

Theological problems were even more troublesome. Young Stone desired to enter the ministry, but was troubled because no soul-shaking call had come to him. Caldwell assured him that no miraculous call was needed. He gave Stone a text and requested him to write a discourse on it, for presentation at the next meeting of the Orange Presbytery.[47] Stone said that the "only book on theology" he had ever read was the Bible. When he was therefore assigned the subject of the "trinity" for his dissertation, he felt lost. Samuel Holmes and he were studying under William Hodge.[48] The theologian Herman Witsius[49] was recommended to them; his book only confused Stone and his colleague. The crux of the problem for Stone was mirrored in Witsius' claim that it was "idolatry to worship more Gods than one, and yet equal worship must be given to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."[50] Confusion, gloom, and fear now invaded Stone's mind, so recently set at rest in his stirring conversion. Only the reassuring treatise of Isaac Watts on the Trinity gave him peace of mind and kept him on the road to the ministry.

Six months normally lapsed between sessions of the Orange Presbytery. Candidates were examined at one session and, if successful, were licensed at the next. Henry Pattillo (1726–1801), a liberal who accepted Watts' views on the Trinity, was at this time in charge. Wishing to keep peace in the Presbytery, he tactfully worded his queries on the Trinity. He had managed so well that few trials for heresy had arisen in his Presbytery. Stone passed the examination.

Unfortunately, financial as well as theological pressures, plunged

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[48] Holmes, whom Stone called a "prodigy of a genius," afterwards became president of the University of North Carolina.

[49] Witsius was a professor of divinity in Holland (1636–1708). He wrote the "Divine Economy," which Stone read. See Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[50] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

him into deep depression. He wavered from the ministry momentarily and hoped that he would discover another calling on a trip to Georgia.

Stone started out on horseback alone, with fifteen borrowed dollars in his pockets. After a difficult trip across the "Piedmont" areas of the Carolinas, and the forests of Northeast Georgia, he arrived at his brother's home in Oglethorpe County, Georgia.[51]

At Washington, Georgia, known as Heard's Fort during the Revolution, Stone became a teacher of languages in Succoth Academy. Hope Hull[52] (1763–1818), the father of Georgia Methodism, was the founder of the Academy. Hull was something of a liberal, having sympathized with James O'Kelly's attempt to democratize the government of the church, though he did not break with the organization. Here, too, Stone developed a great friendship for John Springer, a Presbyterian preacher whose liberality contrasted startlingly with the narrow sectarianism of Georgia in the 1790's.

Stone labored to improve his teaching, and remarked that he won some approbation in the backwoods community. He gave some time to "perfecting" his knowledge of French with the help of one of the refugees in Washington who had fled the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. He sought perfection in his spiritual life, as well. Sensitive to flattery, he guarded himself against its baneful effects:

> The marked attention paid me by the most respectable part of the community was nearly my ruin. Invitations to tea parties and social circles were frequent. I attended them for a while, until I found that this course would cause me to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. Though I still maintained the profession of religion, and did not disgrace it by improper conduct, yet my devotion was cold and communion with God much interrupted. Seeing my danger, I denied myself of these fascinating pleasures, and determined to live more devoted to God.[53]

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[52] Hull came from the eastern shore of Maryland and joined the Methodists in their first Episcopal conference in America in June, 1785. He travelled circuits in South Carolina and Virginia before going to Washington, Georgia in 1788. He accompanied Francis Asbury (1745–1806) to the first Kentucky Conference, near Lexington, when the Bishop was guarded through the wilderness "by sixteen men with thirteen guns." In 1792 he went to Hartford, Connecticut, where he converted the eccentric Lorenzo Dow. Hull was a founder of the University of Georgia.

[53] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

In the spring of 1796, Stone, with more than enough money to defray his debts, reluctantly bade farewell to his friends in Washington and turned again alone to North Carolina, three hundred miles away. A license to preach awaited him at the Orange Presbytery in Hawfields Church. Henry Pattillo [54] gave the charge in person to the three licentiates, Barton Stone, Robert Foster, and Robert Tate, tendering each of them a Bible, but no Westminster Confession of Faith.

Stone and Foster were commissioned to go on a missionary tour in the lower part of North Carolina.[55] The designated locality was probably in the southeastern part of the state, where three-fifths of the people had been Episcopalians. Since the Revolutionary War, the ministers had left their parishes, and religion was in decline. The enthusiasm of these young licentiates failed to penetrate the hard crust of indifference covering the people. Foster soon conceded that he "was not qualified for such solemn work." Stone, regarding himself as lower in moral perfection than Foster, was even more discouraged. He soon resolved to go to Florida, where he would be "a perfect stranger." His timidity and hypersensitivity were attacked effectively one May morning in 1796 in a church, after he had made only one day's journey toward Florida. A pious old lady, suspecting his intentions, told

> me plainly that she feared I was acting the part of Jonah—solemnly warned me of the danger, and advised me, if I disliked the lower parts of the State, to go over the mountains, to the West. In the evening of that day, to my surprise, I saw Robert Foster in the congregation. . . . He immediately agreed to accompany me.[56]

The trip west, though arduous, strengthened the confidence of the young ministers. Stone was persuaded to ascend the pulpit in Grimes' meeting house on Reed Creek in Virginia, and while "singing and praying" his mind was "happily relieved." After that experience, he never mentioned any timidity in his preaching. He ministered among congregations in Wythe and Montgomery counties which were "desti-

[54] Pattillo was a man of singular tolerance and one of the earliest men to advocate that Americans shake off European religious influences and think in their own patterns of thought. When Stone later was accused of having insincerely broken his ordination vows in withdrawing from the Presbyterians, he appealed to Pattillo's views to sustain his own. Cf. *post,* chapt. v, p. 87.

[55] Rogers, *op. cit.,* p. 16.

[56] *Ibid.,* p. 17.

tute of preaching," until July 1, 1796.[57] He found the people "attentive, kind and liberal," but the west lured him on.

Stone crossed over into the Cumberland region of Tennessee. He and some former companions preached throughout this region. Following the Holston River, he passed through Knoxville, on the wilderness way to Nashville. He described Nashville as then being "a poor little village hardly worth notice." Peace had been made only recently with the Cherokee Indians, and traveling was still considered dangerous. Stone traveled with two companions, one a backwoods Indian fighter of great courage, and another whom he described as being "the biggest coward I ever saw." Once they made a dramatic escape from a roaring band of Indians. Stone later was deserted by his companions when his horse lost a shoe. Forced to walk on by himself in the Tennessee wilderness, Stone felt that he was not alone. A kind Providence, it seemed to him, stood behind the shadows of the barriers, keeping watch over his own.

Near Nashville, William McGee and John Anderson, former schoolmates of Stone in North Carolina, persuaded him to go the 117 miles to Danville, Kentucky, and thence forty miles on to Lexington. Near Lexington, at Concord and Cane Ridge, Stone began his Kentucky ministry, succeeding Robert F. Finley, who had been deposed October 6, 1796, on a charge of "habitual inebriety" and insubordination.[58]

Barton W. Stone had failed as an itinerant missionary-preacher in lower North Carolina following his licensure in 1796. Now in the Cane Ridge and Concord Presbyterian Churches, he experienced his first significant ministerial successes. Within a few months, fifty accessions came to the church of Concord, and thirty to Cane Ridge. Between the young preacher and his congregations a reciprocal affection developed, and Stone soon agreed to become their permanent pastor.

Before he settled in his parishes some unsettled business in Georgia called Stone there. Learning of his proposed trip, the Transylvania Presbytery appointed him to obtain money in Charleston, South Carolina, to establish a college in Kentucky.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[58] Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky* (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), p. 127 f.

Stone quickly settled his business in Georgia and then made his way through the dangerous "dismal swamps" between Augusta and Charleston. In the latter city, Stone for the first time saw the two extremes in society. He saw "splendid palaces" and "a rich profusion of luxuries." Against this background of amiability and impressive wealth, he saw the pain and misery of dark-skinned people.[59] This experience marked the awakening of his conscience on this social evil. In Virginia he found his mother alive and well, but he was depressed to learn that many relatives and friends had died.

One year after he had set out for Georgia, Stone returned to Kentucky. The Cane Ridge and Concord churches gave him a call through the Presbytery of Transylvania. Stone accepted the call.

Once again the doctrinal ghosts of his pre-licensure days confronted him. He was plagued by the concepts of the Trinity, of election, of reprobation, and of predestination as taught in the Westminster Confession. Stone had learned, from his superiors, ways of divesting those doctrines of their hard, repulsive features, and admitting "them as true, yet unfathomable mysteries." In public discourse, he had conscientiously confined himself to the "practical part of religion." After re-examination, he was sure he could not hold these doctrines even "under cover."[60]

On the day of his ordination, Stone had resolved to tell the Presbytery "honestly" the state of his mind. He wished his ordination to be deferred. Dr. James Blythe and Robert Marshall, whom he had first met in Virginia, were informed of his difficulties, and sought unsuccessfully to meet his objections. An alternative remained.

> They asked me how far I was willing to receive the confession? I told them, as far as I saw it consistent with the word of God. They concluded that was sufficient. I went into Presbytery, and when the question was proposed, "Do you receive and adopt the Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible?" I answered aloud, so that the whole congregation might hear, "I do, as far as I see it consistent with the word of God." No objection being made, I was ordained.[61]

[59] Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 27. Stone later wrote very little on the subject of slavery, being content usually to print articles from others against slavery. But whenever he made a brief editorial comment on the subject his indignation was apparent.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[61] *Ibid.*

Stone's answer later was to raise many objections and questions. Both Blythe and Marshall knew of Stone's mental reservation on the Confession, but the records of the Presbytery do not record Stone's evasive answer. This was to cause difficulty later.[62] Stone himself must have known that the doctrines were no longer live options with him.

Stone's mind was, from the beginning, kept in torment by the bitter controversies raging within the religious community and by the widespread apathy outside. The different sects exhibited "much zeal and bad feeling." To Stone, no more certain sign of the low state of religion existed than these continuous, widespread, and riotous debates among the followers of Christ.[63]

[62] Cf. *post,* chapt. v, p. 85.

[63] Rogers, *op. cit.,* p. 30.