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**BEVERLY ALLEN**  
**(The Sad and Sobering Story of an Early Methodist Apostate)**  
**By Duane V. Maxey**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is not a happy story. It begins with notes of promise. It ascends to a pinnacle where the subject of the story is at the apex of his usefulness and popularity, and had it ended there it might have been a happy story -- but in swift succession the record next shows of the subject a sudden fall into sin, a rapid degeneration into a criminal, a more hideous picture of the subject as a murderer, a death-row convict, then as a fugitive at large, a seeker of solace in the dark deceptions of Universalism, and finally, as one who plunges, without one ray of hope, into the regions of the damned! The subject of the story is Beverly Allen, Early Methodist Apostate.

In writing the story, I have placed dates at the beginning of paragraphs so that the reader can more easily follow chronologically the sad train of events leading to the sad conclusion of this man's life. I have not found a date for either Beverly Allen's birth or for his death. Those dates, however, are of little importance to the intrinsic message of the story. I have found a rather happy sequel to Beverly Allen's story involving his sister, and with that I have closed this publication. --  
DVM

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**BEVERLY ALLEN**  
**(The Sad and Sobering Story of an Early Methodist Apostate)**

1781 -- According to the Minutes for 1781, Beverly Allen was one of 19 new recruits received into the Methodist itinerancy in America that year -- some 3 years before the M. E. Church was organized at the Lovely Lane Christmas Conference of 1784. Thus, he labored among some of the earliest Methodist ministers in America. He was a contemporary of John Wesley, and

had correspondence with him. He was ordained by Thomas Coke, the first M. E. Bishop, and Francis Asbury, the second M. E. Bishop. His Methodist labors began less than 2 decades after the first Methodist society in America was organized in New York City.

Allen's ministry continued about 11 years, to the year 1792, and his first efforts were quite successful. In hdm0878, M. T. Plyler describes Beverly Allen as a "brilliant young preacher of striking appearance and unusual popularity... He could win his way wherever he went and gain a hearing among all. He managed to carry on an extended correspondence with Mr. Wesley, and for a brief time did an excellent work..."

Francis Asbury was a man who brooked little or no dissent to his way of governing American Methodism -- a godly leader, but one who worked to bring about conformity to his will in church polity. This trait in Asbury grated on such men as Robert Strawbridge, James O'Kelley. Further, John Wesley himself, Thomas Coke, Thomas Rankin, and even George Shadford, were negatively impressed with what was perceived to be a degree of high-handedness in Asbury's leadership of American Methodism.

After Shadford had returned to England, Asbury once stated in a letter to Shadford: "Mr. Wesley and I are like Caesar and Pompey -- he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior." Word of Asbury's observation traveled. For whatever reason, Shadford related Asbury's statement to John Wesley, and later in a letter Wesley, related Asbury's statement to Beverly Allen. It seems unfortunate that Asbury made the remark, and also that it was passed on until Beverly Allen was made aware of it. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in their governing of church polity both Wesley and Asbury "ran a tight ship," and some reacted negatively to their mode of guiding the Church.

Beverly Allen was apparently one such individual who reserved the right to disagree with Asbury in matters of church government, and it was not long before Asbury sensed this, and described Allen thus: "A promising young man, but a little of a Dissenter."

Asbury was suspicious of Beverly Allen early-on, perhaps dating back to the days shortly after Allen joined the itinerancy: This is borne out by one of Asbury's comments after Allen had left the M. E. Ministry: "I have had my opinion of him nine years, and gave Dr. Coke my thoughts of him before his ordination."

1783 -- Also early-on, Allen's efforts brought good results, and he began to "turn heads" and gain recognition in Methodist ranks, particularly in North Carolina. He introduced Methodism into Salisbury, North Carolina in 1783 and formed the first class there. One writer characterized his successes there as being during "the early days of his meteoric career." Another says: "He was a man of great popularity as a preacher."

However, when a useful preacher meets with outstanding success in his labors, Satan is always there endeavoring to counteract those assaults on his domain, and the weapon he used in this instance seems to have been the wedge of division. I suspect that when word began to spread of the charisma gathering around Beverly Allen at that time, Satan used that news to magnify Asbury's concern about Allen's independence, and at the same time he aroused to a higher level Allen's dissatisfaction with Asbury's heavy-handed style of leadership. The tip of the wedge was

driven between Allen and Asbury, and it may have been during this year that their mutual distrust began to widen into a breach of heart-to-heart fellowship between themselves, even though they continued to work together.

A charter member of the Salisbury, North Carolina Society, Mrs. William Cole, described how Beverly Allen began the work there. She was born in 1763 and who would have been about 20 years old at that time in 1783:

"Soon after my return to Salisbury, at the close of the [Revolutionary] war, it was announced that there would be preaching in a schoolhouse by a new kind of people, called Methodists. I knew nothing about that people, either good or bad, but rejoiced at the prospect of hearing the gospel. I went early expecting to see a minister resembling the old parsons; but judge of my surprise, when instead of a stout, good looking, finely dressed gentleman with gown and surplice, in silk stockings and silver buckles, in walked a slender, delicate young man, dressed in homespun, cotton jeans. Though plainly attired, I perceived in his countenance unusual solemnity and goodness." The preacher was Beverly Allen.

"The impressions made upon my mind and heart by this sermon -- the first I ever heard from a Methodist minister -- have never been effaced from my memory. The subject was experimental religion, explained and enforced. To my surprise, the preacher unfolded my experience, and seemed to give in detail all the exercises of my mind, from my first conviction for sin, until I was made happy in the love of God. Not till then did I know that I enjoyed religion; although happy, I did not fully understand why. My experience exactly agreeing with the word preached, I concluded that the preacher, an entire stranger, could not have known so much about me, had not God revealed it to him. At his third visit he formed a small class, of which I was one. Such was the introduction of Methodism into Salisbury, N. C., in the summer of 1783."

I gather from the foregoing description of how Beverly Allen brought Methodism into Salisbury, North Carolina, that while he was striking in his personal appearance, preaching, and manner, he was also, at that time, a sincere, anointed minister of the gospel.

1784 -- Allen's pioneer work in Salisbury was followed by more pioneering success in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1784. He and James Hinton were appointed there that year, "and a return was made of 80 members." Wherever he labored, Beverly Allen seemed to meet with good success in his early years. Thus, it is not surprising to learn that even though he did not attend the Christmas Conference of 1784, Allen was elected to the office of elder by that famous gathering at Barratt's Chapel where the M. E. Church was organized.

1785 -- The Christmas Conference of 1784 did not actually conclude until January 2, 1785. James Edward Armstrong, in his "History of the Old Baltimore Conference," hdm0805, describes the proceedings that placed Beverly Allen among the honored group of the very first M. E. Elders in America:

"On Sunday (January 2, 1785) twelve, previously ordained deacons, were set apart as elders, and 'thus,' adds Whatcoat, 'we ended our Conference in great peace and unanimity.' John Dickens was ordained deacon. Ignatius Pigman and Caleb Boyer were elected, but not ordained

until the meeting of the Baltimore Conference in June following. William Gill, LeRoy Cole, Nelson Reed, John Hagerty, Reuben Ellis, Richard Ivy and James O'Kelly were ordained Elders. John Tunnell, Henry Willis and Beverly Allen were elected, but ordained subsequently. Freeborn Garrettson and James O. Cromwell were ordained elders for Nova Scotia, and Jeremiah Lambert for the same office for Antigua in the West Indies. Besides these, Lednum tells us, there were certainly present William Glendenning, Francis Poythress, Joseph Everett, William Phoebus, Thomas Ware, William Black (of Nova Scotia)."

It is clear from all accounts, that Beverly Allen had at that time gained the respect of the majority of the leading men in American Methodism -- all of Asbury's misgivings to the contrary notwithstanding. They elected him to a place among the notable worthies of who first built and guided the Methodist Episcopal church in this land -- an honor of no little significance.

Even though years later Francis Asbury later wrote: "I have had my opinion of him nine years, and gave Dr. Coke my thoughts of him before his ordination," I am somewhat inclined to think that Asbury's concern about Allen at the time of the organizational conference was more focused upon the question of whether Allen would follow his leadership, than it was focused upon a question about his moral steadfastness. Part of my reason for so thinking is that Asbury may have later proposed to Wesley that Beverly Allen be made an M. E. Bishop! But more on this in later lines. Suffice it to say at this point that on January 2, 1785, Beverly Allen was given the great honor of being elected as one of the very first M. E. Elders.

In "A Hundred Years of Methodism," hdm0519, Matthew Simpson wrote: "Three Annual Conferences had been appointed for the year 1785. Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury traveled southward, and visited Charleston, South Carolina, and other points. They held their first Conference for the South at the residence of Mr. Green Hill\* in North Carolina." It was at this conference in the home of Green Hill that Beverly Allen was ordained by Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury.

[\* On their way toward the North Carolina Conference to be held at the home of Green Hill, Coke and Asbury visited with George Washington at Mt. Vernon. Dr. Coke was delighted with Washington, whom also Asbury held in high esteem. It is interesting also to note that Mr. Green Hill, in whose home the conference was held, had been a member of the first provincial Congress.]

Pinpointing the time when Beverly Allen was ordained more precisely, another wrote: "Following the Christmas Conference, in the latter part of April 1785, he [Beverly Allen] was ordained by Asbury, in presence of his southern brethren, first to deacon's and then to elder's orders -- supposed to be the first ordinations in the North Carolina Conference. He had been a devout and successful preacher, a man of extraordinary talents and, a correspondent of Wesley, and was now a leader of the southern ranks of the ministry." A total of twenty preachers attended that conference, and the "increase in this southern district was 91." At this point, all seemed to be going well in Beverly Allen's life and ministry.

The Minutes of 1785 show that Beverly Allen was sent that year as missionary to Georgia. Perhaps Asbury conveyed that news to him at the time he was ordained. Writing of this new

assignment for Allen, Bishop Asbury recorded in his Journal: "Beverly Allen has all Georgia to range in." -- a statement that may have been prompted by a feeling on Asbury's part that if Allen wanted more freedom to work for the church -- a free rein without interference from the Bishop -- he ought to be satisfied now, for he was given the entire state of Georgia as his parish!

Thus, in 1785 Beverly Allen was commissioned to introduce Methodism into Georgia, and in the Minutes his name stood as the only itinerant for that whole state. Here too, Allen gained in influence and respect. According to one writer, he "became the most prominent representative of Methodism in all that part of the country, having an almost unparalleled popularity as a preacher." Further, he married into a highly respectable family of Georgia -- to a "fine, pious woman, a member of the Church." The following year he reported 78 members, and for several years his influence rose continually in Georgia and South Carolina.

1786 -- It appears to be in this year that Beverly Allen's prestige in the M. E. Church peaked. Edward J. Drinkhouse in his "History of Methodist Reform," hdm0428, conjectured how that in 1786, in a letter from Asbury to Wesley, Asbury may have suggested to John Wesley the idea of making Beverly Allen an under-bishop. And, it appears to me that Drinkhouse presents some good evidence supporting that possibility:

"In 1786, Mr. Asbury complained of the long Latin word superintendent, and wished it to be termed bishop. This was not all; but he proposed to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, Mr. T., Mr. W., and Mr. A., as three persons to be appointed bishops for the United States to act under Mr. Asbury. Mr. Wesley's answer was to this purport, and is worthy to be engraven in characters of gold, 'During my life, there shall be no Archbishops for the Methodist Church, but send me the man of your choice, and I shall have him appointed joint superintendent with you.'

"Mr. Asbury objected to either of these men proposed as joint superintendents with him; but desired Mr. Wesley to send a man of his choice, and he would receive him. The history is that subsequently Mr. Wesley called through Dr. Coke a special General Conference for America, and named Richard Whatcoat as a Superintendent. The result has already been traversed.

"After the practice of Methodist writers of the period as to so much that was done in secret, and written, if at all, in initials, you are left by this writer to guess who the three were. Examining the minutes of that period, and of the eligible elders whose reputation would make them a likely choice with Asbury, Mr. T. was John Tunnell; Mr. W., Richard Whatcoat; and Mr. A., Beverly Allen."

Even though Wesley rejected the proposal which would have, in effect, made Asbury an Arch-Bishop, if Drinkhouse interpreted the initials correctly, it shows that Beverly Allen was regarded and ranked very highly within the M. E. Church in 1786 -- so highly that had John Wesley approved of Asbury's suggestion Beverly Allen might have become the 3rd, 4th, or 5th M. E. Bishop!

1787-1791 -- In the year 1787 Beverly Allen was placed in charge of the work in Charleston, South Carolina. One M. E. historian records: "In 1787, the Rev. Beverly Allen was placed in charge; as an elder, of the society in this place. He was a man of great popularity as a

preacher, had married into a respectable family, and acquired much influence in the community." As in other localities, Allen gained the respect and high esteem of people in Charleston. How long he continued thus, I am not sure, but it appears that at some time during the span of years 1787 to 1791 Allen experienced a spiritual and moral collapse.

In the January 20, 1794 entry of his Journal, Asbury noted: "Poor Beverly Allen... has been going from bad to worse these seven or eight years, speaking against me to preachers and people, and writing to Mr. Wesley and Dr. Coke, and being thereby the source of most of the mischief that has followed..." Seven years back from the date in Asbury's Journal would place the time of Beverly Allen's downfall at about 1787, after he had gone to Charleston.

Deduction from the following, found in Nathan Bangs' M. E. History, hdm0008, locates the time of Beverly Allen's fall as some time prior to 1791:

"Methodism received a wound in Charleston from one of its professed friends and public advocates. In 1787, the Rev. Beverly Allen was placed in charge; as an elder, of the society in this place. He was a man of great popularity as a preacher, had married into a respectable family, and acquired much influence in the community. This unhappy man fell from his steadfastness, and in his fall inflicted a wound upon the cause from which it did not recover for a long time... The cause, however, gradually gained ground, and was acquiring the public confidence, until the year 1791, when the church was [again] convulsed by the conduct of the Rev. William Hammett..."

It seems quite obvious from the preceding dates given by Francis Asbury and Nathan Bangs that Beverly Allen's downfall occurred some time before 1791, possibly in 1787, the year in which Allen was appointed to Charleston, South Carolina. Whatever the exact date of his fall, it is the fact of its occurrence that mattered most, rather than the date and details thereof.

Still, some readers of the next paragraph of this publication may wonder thus wonder: If Allen's fall occurred in 1787, why was he not expelled from the M. E. Church until 5 years later? I wish that I could give a definite reason for this, but I found no explanation for it myself. The rather unusual length of time between the time of Beverly Allen's fall and the time of his expulsion may have been partly because his fall was not immediately known, and partly because those who loved him were loathe to have him expelled -- hoping and praying that he would recover himself from the snare of the devil, and not willing take that action until it became their only ethical option.

1792 -- Regarding Allen's sad fall, Nathan Bangs wrote: "In the notice we have taken of the rise and progress of Methodism in Charleston, South Carolina, we have seen that Mr. Allen brought a great reproach upon the Church in that place by his apostasy. What the particular sin was by which he thus wounded the cause of God, I am not informed." Indeed, the details concerning the sin whereby Allen fell are not recorded by any M. E. historian so far as I am aware, but in 1792 he was ingloriously expelled from the M. E. ministry "for immorality."

Asbury may have suspected Allen to be a thief long before he committed the act of immorality for which he was expelled. One source recorded: "At the appointment at Allen's, in North Carolina, Mr. Asbury remarked: 'The people here are famous for talking about religion, and here and there is a horse thief among them.'" However, it does not appear certain from the

preceding quotation that Asbury intended to brand Allen as "a horse thief" by that remark. Regardless of what the truth may have been about that, some time within approximately the range of years 1787 to 1791 Beverly Allen, a preacher held in high regard by his flocks, and holding high rank among early M. E. leaders, fell from Divine grace and next into disappointing shame and reproach in the eyes of men. When the fact of his downfall became known to them, those of His flock and people in Charleston were stunned, and "his fall inflicted a wound upon the cause from which it did not recover for a long time."

Abel Stevens, in his M. E. History, hdm0219, recorded: "In the last year of our present period (1792) his name stands in the Minutes as expelled. He had fallen in his strength and success, and his fall stunned for years his denomination in Charleston and all the neighboring regions. He sunk from bad to worse..." What it was that led up to Allen's plunge from grace is a matter of speculation. Two things that might have preceded that fall are: a wrong attitude toward Francis Asbury, and a thinking more highly of himself than he ought. The Scripture warns that "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Whatever the case, his fall left "a lonesome place against the sky" that was never again to be filled with the visage of the man he once had been.

1794 -- By the year 1794, two years after his expulsion, Allen seems to have returned to the state of Georgia, and there things got much, much worse in Allen's life. Because of some violation of civil law a warrant was issued for his arrest. A prominent citizen and Marshal of the Federal Court of Georgia, attempted to serve a writ upon him. Allen warned the officer not to enter, but the Marshal ignored the warning and broke in to arrest him. Allen shot and killed law-officer, was apprehended and was imprisoned in peril of his life for committing the murder.

The January 20, 1794 entry in Asbury's Journal, partially quoted from earlier, was made while Allen was incarcerated. Asbury went on to record: [Beverly Allen] "is now secured in jail for shooting Major Forsyth through the head. The major was marshal for the federal court in Georgia, and was about to serve a writ upon Allen. The masterpiece of all is, a petition is prepared declaring him to have shown marks of insanity previous to his killing the major! The poor Methodists also must unjustly be put to the rack on his account, although he has been expelled from among us these two years. I have had my opinion of him these nine years; and gave Dr. Coke my thoughts of him before his ordination. I pity, I pray for him, that, if his life be given up to justice, his soul may yet be saved."

In hope that his life would be spared, some of Beverly Allen's friends signed a petition in his behalf, "alleging that he was a maniac." Perhaps after it became apparent that this plea would be ignored, Allen somehow "escaped from the prison and disappeared in the new settlements of the far West." -- Kentucky, to be exact. Abel Stevens wrote that "The early records of Methodism represent his final fate as lost in obscurity; but Peter Cartwright one of the most notable pioneers of the western itinerancy throws a gleam of lurid light upon his wretched end."

More than simply casting a gleam of light on Allen's wretched end, Cartwright's account of Beverly Allen adds some details to the story not found elsewhere. Below, is Peter Cartwright's account of the Beverly Allen story. It was taken from Cartwright's autobiography:

"My father sent me to school, boarding me at Dr. Beverly Allen's; but my teacher was not well qualified to teach correctly, and I made but small progress. I, however, learned to read, write, and cipher a little, but very imperfectly. Dr. Allen, with whom I boarded, had, in an early day, been a traveling preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was sent south to Georgia, as a very gentlemanly and popular preacher, and did much good. He married in that country a fine, pious woman, a member of the Church; but he, like David, in an evil hour, fell into sin, violated the laws of the country, and a writ was issued for his apprehension. He warned the sheriff not to enter his room, and assured him if he did he would kill him. The sheriff rushed upon him, and Allen shot him dead. He fled from that country to escape justice, and settled in Logan county, then called 'Rogues' Harbor.' His family followed him, and here he practiced medicine. To ease a troubled conscience he drank in the doctrine of Universalism; but he lived and died a great friend to the Methodist Church.

"It fell to my lot, after I had been a preacher several years, to visit the Doctor on his dying bed. I talked to, and prayed with him. Just before he died I asked him if he was willing to die and meet his final Judge with his Universalist sentiments. He frankly said he was not. He said he could make the mercy of God cover every case in his mind but his own, but he thought there was no mercy for him; and in this state of mind he left the world, bidding his family and friends an eternal farewell, warning them not to come to that place of torment to which he felt himself eternally doomed."

Cartwright made further comment about Beverly Allen's sad fate in connection with, and at the close of, the following 4 paragraphs:

"Time rolled on, population increased fast around us, the country improved, horse-thieves and murderers were driven away, and civilization advanced considerably. Ministers of different denominations came in, and preached through the country; but the Methodist preachers were the pioneer messengers of salvation in these ends of the earth. Even in Rogues' Harbor there was a Baptist Church a few miles west of my father's, and a Presbyterian congregation a few miles north, and the Methodist Ebenezer a few miles south.

"There were two Baptist ministers, one an old man of strong mind and good, very good, natural abilities, having been brought up a rigid Calvinist, and having been taught to preach the doctrine of particular election and reprobation. At length his good sense revolted at the horrid idea, and, having no correct books on theology, he plunged into the opposite extreme, namely, universal redemption. He lived in a very wicked settlement. He appointed a day to publish his recantation of his old Calvinism, and his views on universal and unconditional salvation to all mankind. The whole country, for many miles around, crowded to hear the joyful news. When he had finished his discourse, the vilest of the vile multitude raised the shout, expressing great joy that there was no hell or eternal punishment.

"I will here state a circumstance that occurred to the old gentleman and myself. He was a great smoker, and as he passed my father's one day, to marry a couple, he came to the fence and called to me and said, "Peter, if you will bring me a coal of fire to light my pipe, I will tell you how to get out of hell, if you ever get there." Although I was very wicked, the expression

exceedingly shocked me, and neither the devil nor any of his preachers have ever been able, from that day to this, seriously to tempt me to believe the blasphemous doctrine.

"The other Baptist minister soon took to open drunkenness, and with him his salvation by water expired; but if ever there was a jubilee in hell, it was then and there held, over these apostate and fallen ministers, B. A. and Dr. Allen."

Farther still into his Autobiography, Cartwright recorded the following about "a sister of the apostate Dr. Allen." Beverly Allen's sister and her husband may been part of the "family" who joined him in Kentucky after he fled there. Following are Cartwright's paragraphs relating to Beverly Allen's sister:

"...I found other friends on my journey till I reached Hopkinsville, Christian county, within thirty miles of my father's, and I had just six and a quarter cents left. This was a new and dreadfully wicked place. I put up at a tavern kept by an old Mr. M. The landlord knew my father. I told him I had not money to pay my bill, but as soon as I got home I would send it to him. He said, 'Very well,' and made me welcome. His lady was a sister of the apostate Dr. Allen, whom I have elsewhere mentioned.

"Shortly after I laid down I fell asleep. Suddenly I was aroused by a piercing scream, or screams of a female. I supposed that somebody was actually committing murder. I sprung from my bed, and, after getting half dressed, ran into the room from whence issued the piercing screams, and called out, 'What's the matter here?' The old gentleman replied, that his wife was subject to spasms, and often had them. I commenced a conversation with her about religion. I found that she was under deep concern about her soul. I asked if I might pray for her. 'O, yes,' she replied, 'for there is no one in this place that cares for my soul.'

"I knelt and prayed, and then commenced singing, and directed her to Christ as an all-sufficient Savior, and prayed again. She suddenly sprung out of the bed and shouted, 'Glory to God! he has blessed my soul.' It was a happy time indeed. The old gentleman wept like a child. We sung and shouted, prayed and praised, nearly all night. Next morning the old landlord told me my bill was paid tenfold, and that all he charged me was, every time I passed that way, to call and stay with them."

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THE END