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JAMES AXLEY

**A Compilation by Duane V. Maxey
From the HDM Library**

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INTRODUCTION

As mhalb-44.jpg, a picture of James Axley accompanies this compilation, which consists of the following material: Chapter 16, titled "James Axley" from hdm0230, Sketches of Western Methodism by James Bradley Finley; Material about James Axley from "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Vol. IV., by Abel Stevens; three sentences about James Axley from hdm0719, the "Cyclopedia of Methodism" (A-Listings) by Matthew Simpson; the date he was received and the date he located, from hdm0012, Nathan Bangs' M. E. History; material about James Axley from hdm1557, "Autobiography of Peter Cartwright"; and finally, material about James Axley from hdm0575, "William McKendree, a Biographical Study" By E. E. Hoss.

I have made no effort to arrange the materials gathered, but hopefully the students of Early Methodism who take the time to read this compilation will find to be both interesting and edifying.
-- DVM

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Part 1
From "Sketches of Western Methodism: hdm0230
By James B. Finley

Chapter 16
JAMES AXLEY

The following graphic and stirring sketch of the Rev. James Axley, the eccentric preacher, has been kindly furnished for us by the Rev. Thomas A. Morris, D. D., Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It consists mostly of personal reminiscences of that remarkable man, and such,

indeed, in a majority of instances, is all that we can gather of the fathers of Methodism in the west. So far as a connected biography is concerned the most that, we can find is the bare announcement, on the Minutes of the various fields of labor, occupied by the preachers from year to year, and then, at the close of their earthly labors, a short obituary, embracing but a meager outline of their life and labors, and the circumstances connected with their death. But even this is denied the toil-worn soldier, should he be found in the local ranks, when death calls to take him home.

"In 1804 the Western conference was reinforced by a class of young men, some of whom became very distinguished Methodist preachers -- among them were Samuel Parker, Peter Cartwright, and James Axley. With the last-named I never enjoyed but one week's personal acquaintance, but that left on my memory an indelible impression of his person and character, of which this pen-portrait is but an imperfect reflection. He had mingled with scenes of excitement, toil, and peril, well calculated to develop his physical and mental energies. Among his early fields of labor were Red river, Hockhocking, French Broad, Opelousas, and Powel's Valley. Subsequently he labored on Wabash, Holston, Green River, and French Broad districts as presiding elder. These widely-separated points in the Lord's vineyard, all included in the old Western conference, indicate that he had a pretty thorough breaking into the Gospel harness after the manner of our fathers, in the days of Bishop Asbury, when itinerancy was what its name imports.

"Long as I had been crossing the path of that notable man, and much as I had heard of him among the people, my first sight of him was not obtained till the autumn of 1837. That year the Holston conference met at Madisonville, eastern part of Tennessee, some ten miles from which brother Axley, then in a local relation, resided. The first day of the session after adjournment I was walking to my lodgings alone, when I heard a brother some forty steps behind me say to another, 'Yonder comes brother Axley.' Looking ahead, I observed a man advancing toward me whose person was imposing. He was perhaps five feet eight inches high; not corpulent, but very broad and compactly built, formed for strength; his step was firm, his face was square, complexion dark, eyebrows heavy, appearance rugged; dressed in the costume of our fathers, with straight breasted coat, and broad-brimmed hat projecting over a sedate countenance. His wide-spread fame as a natural genius without any early education, and especially the numerous incidents I had heard of him as a western pioneer, had excited in me a greater desire for his personal acquaintance than that of any other living man I had ever seen, except Jacob Gruber. The sound of his name falling on my ear involuntarily quickened my pace, and we were soon together. As I neared him I held out my right hand and received his, when the following salutations were exchanged:

'How are you, brother Axley?'

"Who are you?'

"My name is Thomas A. Morris.'

"Then surveying me from head to foot, he replied, "Upon my word, I think they were hard pushed for Bishop timber when they got hold of you."

"That is just what I thought myself; brother Axley."

"Why, you look too young for a Bishop."

"As to that, I am old enough to know more and do better."

"Turning back with me, we walked to our lodging, being both quartered at the same place. Every hour that I could redeem from conference and council business was enlivened by his quaint but thrilling narratives of his early travels, labors, and difficulties. Unaccustomed to the free use of the pen, he kept all his records in his tenacious memory, much strengthened by use, and narrated with uncommon precision as to names, dates, and the order in which facts transpired. This he did leisurely and with perfect self possession, but spiced the whole with such apt remarks and consummate good humor that the attention of the company never faltered. Never was I better entertained or more instructed with the conversation of a fellow-sojourner in one week than with his. It was decidedly rich.

"Next morning I observed him seated near the door, remote from the business platform, and invited him forward to conduct the opening religious service of the conference. Then it was that some of his peculiarities were practically developed to me for the first time. His reading and prayer were brief and simple, yet quite impressive; but his singing took me entirely by surprise. He used no hymn book, gave out no lines but led off on a familiar hymn and tune in strains so exhilarating and devotional that both appeared to be new and super excellent. Whether he had ever paid any special attention to tune-books is doubtful, as he was proverbial for his opposition to choir-singing. However that may have been, his voice embodied in itself more strength, more volume, more melody, and certainly more devotional influence, than that of an ordinary church choir of a dozen select singers. He was invited to a seat on the platform.

"After the journal was read, an unimportant resolution was offered, over which there was a little sharp shooting by speech-makers. Our guest, though opposed to the motion, did not interfere in the discussion. The brethren, having fired their minute guns, came to a vote, expressed in the usual way by raising their hands: two hands were plainly visible, and another was partly elevated and then suddenly drawn down. Before the Chair had time to announce the decision, brother Axley vociferated, in a very quaint manner, 'Just two votes and a half for that!' The effect upon the risibles of the body ecclesiastic was electrical; the gravest of the fathers were convulsed with laughter. Only the author of it seemed to be self-possessed.

"There were points of singular contrast in his character. His exterior was rough as a block of granite fresh from the quarry, and his manner of reproving disorderly persons at popular meetings over which he presided was said to indicate severity; yet his conscience was so tender and his moral sensibility so acute, that a mere suggestion from a friend that he had erred in any given case would draw from him prompt acknowledgment with a shower of tears. His dress and address indicated the rustic, probably perpetuated by the force of early habit; and yet in social intercourse he was both kind and attractive. His conversational talent was of a superior order. Without classical learning or much pretension to book knowledge, he was such a master in practical, everyday affairs that he could not only delight, but instruct sages and divines. He could so present even a commonplace topic as to throw interest around it, and by his musical powers he conquered some who could be reached by no other means. I was informed that individuals who

were at first his enemies and persecutors because of his profession as a Methodist preacher, on hearing him sing, became his warm friends; and I do not doubt it. Indeed, he told me of himself an instance in which he was relieved from great embarrassment by singing, without saying any thing as to the merit of the performance. It occurred while he was laboring on the Opelousas mission, in Louisiana, perhaps about the year 1807 or 1808. In order to supply some destitute neighborhoods with the Gospel by enlarging his mission, he went on a tour of exploration where he was a stranger to all. Some of his adventures during that expedition would, by the ministers of this generation, be regarded as specimens of moral heroism. But omitting other incidents, I shall refer only to the point in hand. One evening, after riding all day without any dinner, he called at a house where the family consisted of a widow lady, a grown daughter, a number of children, and some servants, none of whom were religious. The lady and her family regretted his coming, would not grant his request to remain over night, and clearly indicated, by looks and actions, that he was an unwelcome guest. The reader may ask why he did not leave immediately. The reason was, he knew, if defeated in obtaining lodging there, nothing remained for him but a berth in the dark wood, without food or shelter, at an inclement season of the year. As he lingered a little to warm himself and consider how he should manage to pass that dreary night, the thought of his forlorn condition as a homeless stranger, without money or friends, came like a dark cloud over his mind. His deep, sad cogitations proceeded in silence. Then, as was natural in his extremity, he turned his thoughts toward his heavenly Father's house above, where he hoped some day to find a home free from the ills of mortal life. Being a little cheered with the prospect, without leave, introduction, or ceremony, he began to sing one of the songs of Zion in a strange land. As he proceeded his depressed feelings became elevated; the vision of faith ranged above and beyond the desolate wilderness he had just been contemplating as the place of his night's sojourn; the family were soon all melted into tears; he took fresh courage, and sang on with the least possible pause, till he had finished, perhaps, the third song, when the lady called a servant, and ordered him to put the gentleman's horse in the stable; and the, daughter added, 'Be sure to feed him well.' Thus a few strains of sacred melody, such as Axley could wield, removed all opposition and relieved the case.

"Brother Axley made every important interest of life a subject of prayer as all Christian people should. Toward the close of our week's interview he incidentally alluded to his courtship and marriage, which occurred, I believe, after he had been a minister some years. He opened his mind to his intended by letter, inclosed in another letter to her brother, with whom she resided. To the brother he wrote, if he had any objection to the correspondence with his sister, to burn it, and that would end the matter. The letter, however, was delivered into her hand, containing a proposition of marriage, and a notice that he would be there on a given day to receive the answer. On the day appointed he came, obtained an interview, and opened the cause by stating he wished to talk over the subject alluded to in his letter; 'but, first of all,' said he, 'we must pray for direction.' They kneeled together, and he led in prayer. After prayer he wished to know whether she consented to the proposed union. She thought it would not be amiss for her to have longer time in which to decide; but he deemed that needless, as they were well acquainted, and insisted on a present and direct answer. The result was marriage.

"He was proverbial for his opposition to slavery and whisky. After he located he supported his family by the labor of his own hands as a farmer, and was wont to testify, on all proper occasions, that his logs were rolled, his house raised, and his grain cut without whisky; and

though he had plentiful crops of corn, not the first track of a negro's foot was ever seen in one of his fields. Such was his version of facts, as I learned from some of his friends.

"I never heard brother Axley preach; but, according to popular fame, his pulpit performances were practical, forcible, and left a deep and abiding impression on the multitudes that thronged together to hear him. To this day we occasionally hear allusion made to a sermon he preached in the city of Baltimore, during the General conference of 1820, of which he was a member. It must have been a potent sermon to be remembered so distinctly for the third of a century. I have heard also very frequent allusions to his pulpit performances in different parts of the western country, where he had operated to good purpose as a traveling preacher, more particularly in Kentucky and Tennessee. But perhaps the effort which occasioned the most talk and obtained the greatest notoriety was the one said to have been made in his own section of country, and was commonly known as Axley's temperance sermon, though not so designated by any pre-announcement. It should be known that east Tennessee in those days was regarded as a great country for producing peach-brandy, and for a free use of it; also, that the New Lights abounded there, familiarly called Schismatics, and that Church members who rendered themselves liable to a disciplinary process would occasionally go over to them, as a city of refuge, where they felt safe from its restraints. With this preliminary, I proceed to recite a passage from the sermon, reminding the reader that my authority is not personal knowledge, but the verbal statement of a highly-respectable Methodist minister, Rev. Dr. G., of Tennessee. I write it substantially as I heard it:

"TEXT: 'Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works,' 2 Timothy iv, 14.

"Paul was a traveling preacher, and a bishop, I presume, or a presiding elder at least; for he traveled extensively, and had much to do, not only in regulating the societies, but also in sending the preachers here, there, and yonder. He was zealous, laborious, would not build on another man's foundation, but formed new circuits, where Christ was not named, 'so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ.' One new place that he visited was very wicked -- Sabbath-breaking, dancing, drinking, quarreling, fighting, swearing, etc., abounded; but the word of the Lord took effect; there was a powerful stir among the people, and many precious souls were converted. Among the subjects of that work there was a certain noted character, Alexander by name, and a still-maker by trade; also, one Hymeneus, who was his partner in the business. Paul formed a new society, and appointed brother Alexander class-leader. There was a great change in the place; the people left off their drinking, swearing, fighting, horse-racing, dancing, and all their wicked practices. The stills were worked up into bells and stew-kettles, and thus applied to useful purposes. The settlement was orderly, the meetings were prosperous, and things went well among them for some time. But one year they had a pleasant spring; there was no late frost, and the peach crop hit exactly. I do suppose, my brethren, that such a crop of peaches was never known before. The old folks ate all they could eat, the children ate all they could eat, the pigs ate all they could eat, and the sisters preserved all they could preserve, and still the limbs of the trees were bending and breaking. One Sunday, when the brethren met for worship, they gathered round outside of the meeting-house, and got to talking about their worldly business -- as you know people sometimes do, and it is a mighty bad practice -- and one said to another, 'Brother, how is the peach crop with you this year?' 'O,' said he, 'you never saw the like;

they are rotting on the ground under the trees; I don't know what to do with them.' 'How would it do,' said one, 'to still them? The peaches will go to waste, but the brandy will keep; and it is very good in certain cases, if not used to excess.' 'I should like to know,' said a cute brother, 'how you could make brandy without stills?' 'That's nothing,' replied one, 'for our class-leader -- brother Alexander -- is as good a still-maker as need be, and brother Hymeneus is another, and, rather than see the fruit wasted, no doubt they would make us a few.' The next thing heard on the subject was a hammering in the class-leader's shop; and soon the stills in every brother's orchard were smoking, and the liquid poison streaming. When one called on another the bottle was brought out, with the remark, 'I want you to taste my new brandy; I think it is pretty good.' The guest, after tasting once, was urged to repeat, when, smacking his lips, he would reply, 'Well, it's tolerable; but I wish you would come over and taste mine; I think mine is a little better.' So they tested and tasted till many of them got about half drunk, and I don't know but three quarters. Then the very devil was raised among them; the society was all in an uproar, and Paul was sent for to come and settle the difficulty. At first it was difficult to find sober, disinterested ones enough to try the guilty; but finally he got his committee formed; and the first one he brought to account was Alexander, who pleaded not guilty. He declared that he had not tasted, bought, sold, or distilled a drop of brandy. 'But,' said Paul, 'you made the stills, otherwise there could have been no liquor made; and if no liquor, no one could have been intoxicated.' So they expelled him first, then Hymeneus next, and went on for compliment, till the society was relieved of all still-makers, distillers, dram-sellers, and dram-drinkers, and peace was once more restored. Paul says, 'Holding faith and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck; of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.'

"Of course they flew off the handle, and joined the Schismatics.

"Now, in view of the peculiar structure of brother Axley's mind, and his characteristic habits of thought and expression, they who were best acquainted with him will be most likely to admit that the above outline may be substantially correct. I was anxious to have learned more items of the history of that good man; but at my next visit to Holston conference, in 1840, I had left me only the mournful pleasure of visiting his grave, in a rural cemetery, which, at that time, was without inscription or inclosure. If some one of our senior brethren, better acquainted with the subject of this brief notice than the writer, would favor the public with a reliable biography, and thereby rescue the name of James Axley from oblivion, he would confer a lasting benefit on the Church and the numerous friends of the deceased. Whatever is to be rescued from oblivion concerning the early pioneers of Methodism must be soon done."

To the personal reminiscences of the Bishop might be added others by those who knew Axley, and were privileged to wait on his ministry. In the autobiography of Samuel Williams, Esq., we find the following:

"The name of James Axley was rendered familiar to us by being carved by himself during the sitting of the conference of 1807, on the back of the seat in front of the one in which we usually sat, in the little, old brick chapel. Our recollection of his person is rather indistinct; but we think he was tall and raw-boned, and a little awkward in his manners and movements. In the matter and delivery of his discourses there was a marked originality, a vein of humor, and even drollery,

which, while it interested and frequently amused his hearers, often gave severe point and directness to his rebukes. He was, nevertheless, a preacher of very respectable talents and undoubted piety. And if he was not a 'polished shaft' in the quiver of the Almighty, yet the arrow was none the less sharp and keen. We have heard many anecdotes of his sayings and doings. The following, related to us about thirty years ago by the Rev. John Collins, we give the reader as a specimen:

"In one of his discourses Mr. Axley was descanting upon conformity to the world among Christians, particularly in fashionable dress and manners. To meet the pleas and excuses usually set up in behalf of these departures from the good old way, he held a sort of colloquy with an imaginary apologist, seated at the further end of the congregation, whose supposed pleas and excuses he would state on behalf of his man of straw, in an altered tone; then resuming his natural voice, he would reply and demolish the arguments of his opponent. After thus discussing the subject for some time, the opponent was made to say.

"But, sir, some of your Methodist preachers themselves dress in fashionable style, and in air and manner enact the dandy."

"O no, my friend, that can not be. Methodist preachers know their calling better. They are men of more sense than that, and would not stoop so low as to disgrace themselves and the sacred office they hold by such gross inconsistency of character."

"Well, sir, if you won't take my word for it, just look at those young preachers in the pulpit, behind you."

Mr. Axley, turning immediately around, with seeming surprise, and facing two or three rather fashionably dressed junior preachers seated in the rear of the pulpit, he surveyed each of them from head to foot for two or three minutes, while they quailed under the withering glance of his keen and penetrating eye; then turning again to the congregation, and leaning a little forward over the front of the desk, with his arm extended, and his eyes as if fixed on the apologist at the farther end of the church, he said, in a subdued tone, yet distinctly enough to be heard by all present,

"If you please, sir, we'll drop the subject!"

"Although the following additional anecdote of Mr. Axley may be familiar to many of our readers, we hope they will pardon us for inserting it, as it is worthy of a more durable record than the columns of a newspaper, from which we clip it. The late Judge Hugh L. White, who relates it, was a learned and able jurist and distinguished statesman, and for many years a conspicuous member of the United States senate from the state of Tennessee.

"On a certain day a number of lawyers and literary men were together in the town of Knoxville, Tennessee, and the conversation turned on preachers and preaching. One and another had expressed his opinion of the performances of this and that pulpit orator, when at length Judge White spoke up:

'Well, gentlemen, on this subject each man is, of course, entitled to his own opinion; but I must confess that father Axley brought me to a sense of my evil deeds, at least a portion of them, more effectually than any preacher I ever heard.'

"At this, every eye and ear was turned, for Judge White was never known to speak lightly on religious subjects, and, moreover, was habitually cautious and respectful in his remarks about religious men. The company now expressed the most urgent desire that the Judge should give the particulars, and expectation stood on tiptoe.

"I went up,' said the Judge, 'one evening to the Methodist church. A sermon was preached by a clergyman with whom I was not acquainted, but father Axley was in the pulpit. At the close of the sermon he arose and said to the congregation, "I am not going to detain you by delivering an exhortation; I have risen merely to administer a rebuke for improper conduct, which I have observed here tonight." This, of course, waked up the entire assembly, and the stillness was profound, while Axley stood and looked for several seconds over the congregation. Then stretching out his large, long arm, and pointing with his finger steadily in one direction, he said, "Now, I calculate that those two young men, who were talking in that corner of the house while the brother was preaching, think that I am going to talk about them. Well, it is true, it looks very bad, when well-dressed young men, who you would suppose, from their appearance, belonged to some respectable family, come to the house of God, and instead of reverencing the majesty of Him that dwelleth therein, or attending to the message of his everlasting love, get together in one corner of the house" -- his finger all the time pointing as steady and straight as the aim of a rifleman -- "and there, during the whole solemn service, keep talking, tittering, laughing, and giggling, thus annoying the minister, disturbing the congregation, and sinning against God. I'm sorry for the young men. I'm sorry for their parents. I'm sorry they have done so tonight. I hope they will never do so again. But, however, that's not the thing I was going to talk about. It is another matter, so important that I thought it would be wrong to suffer the congregation to depart without administering a suitable rebuke. Now," said he, stretching out his huge arm, and pointing in another direction, "perhaps that man who was asleep on the bench out there, while the brother was preaching, thinks I am going to talk about him. Well, I must confess it looks very bad for a man to come into a worshipping assembly, and, instead of taking a seat like others, and listening to the blessed Gospel, carelessly stretching himself out on a bench, and going to sleep. It is not only a proof of great insensibility with regard to the obligations which we owe to our Creator and Redeemer, but it shows a want of genteel breeding. It shows that the poor man has been so unfortunate in his bringing up as not to have been taught good manners. He don't know what is polite and respectful in a worshipping assembly among whom he comes to mingle. I'm sorry for the poor man. I'm sorry for the family to which he belongs. I'm sorry he did not know better. I hope he will never do so again. But, however, this was not what I was going to talk about." Thus father Axley went on, for some time, "boxing the compass," hitting a number of persons and things that he was not going to talk about, and hitting hard, till the attention and curiosity of the audience were raised to their highest pitch, when finally he remarked:

"The thing of which I was going to talk was chewing tobacco. Now, I do hope, when any gentleman comes to church who can't keep from using tobacco during the hours of worship, that he will just take his hat and use it for a spit-box. You all know we are Methodists. You all know that our custom is to kneel when we pray. Now any gentleman may see, in a moment, how exceedingly

inconvenient it must be for a well-dressed Methodist lady to be compelled to kneel down in a puddle of tobacco spit."

"Now," said Judge White, "at this time I had in my mouth an uncommonly large quid of tobacco. Axley's singular manner and train of remark strongly arrested my attention. While he was stirring to the right and left, hitting those "things" that he was not going to talk about, my curiosity was busy to find out what he could be aiming at. I was chewing and spitting my large quid with uncommon rapidity, and looking up at the preacher to catch every word and every gesture -- when at last he pounced upon the tobacco, behold, there I had a great puddle of tobacco spit! I quietly slipped the quid out of my mouth, and dashed it as far as I could under the seats, resolved never again to be found chewing tobacco in the Methodist church."

Axley must have been a thorough student of human nature, as was generally the case with the Methodist preachers of that day. Men whose profession calls them to travel in all sections of the country, and mingle with all classes of society, as Methodist preachers have to do, must be dull students and stupid observers of men and things, if they don't become thoroughly acquainted with men's hearts and lives. What the eccentric Axley learned in the wide field of labor before him he put to good account, and thus gave evidence that he was not like the sage of olden time, who mingled with the world only to learn its follies and then retired to his cell alone to weep over them.

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Part 2

MATERIAL ABOUT JAMES AXLEY

From: "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,"

Vol. IV., by Abel Stevens

James Axley has left traditions of his character and work in the Church from Indiana to Louisiana. A fellow-laborer (himself one of the most genuine products of nature and the West) has said that Axley "was the most perfect child of nature I ever knew." He was born on New River, Va., in 1776, removed, in childhood, to Kentucky, where he became a hunter and thrifty farmer, joined the Methodists in 1802, and in 1805 entered the itinerant ministry. He was tossed about, with singular rapidity, in his appointments, from Tennessee to Ohio, from Ohio to the Holston Mountains, from Holston to Opelousas, in Louisiana, back again to Holston, then to the Wabash District, in Indiana, back again to the Holston District for four years, thence to Green River District in Kentucky, and finally to French Broad District, among the Alleghenies of North Carolina. In 1822 he located, near Madisonville, Tenn., where he died in 1838. Through this vast range of his ministerial travels he was one of the most energetic, most popular, and most useful preachers of the times. His pulpit talents were not above mediocrity, his manners utterly unpolished; but he combined with profound piety and much tender sensibility the shrewdest sense, an astonishing aptness of speech, and an exhaustless humor. The latter, however, was usually so well directed that it seemed wisdom itself; arrayed in smiles. Few, if any, of his contemporaries drew larger audiences, for Axley was irresistible to the western people. A bishop of the Church has given us our fullest record of him. "His person was imposing. He was perhaps five feet eight inches high, not corpulent, but very broad and compactly built, formed for strength; his step was

firm, his face was square, complexion dark, eyebrows heavy, appearance rugged, and he dressed in the costume of our fathers, with straight-breasted coat, and broad-brimmed hat projecting over a sedate countenance. His widespread fame as a natural genius without any early education, and especially the numerous incidents I had heard of him as a western pioneer, had excited in me a greater desire for his personal acquaintance than that of any other living man I had ever seen except Jacob Gruber. As I neared him I held out my right hand and received his, when the following salutations were exchanged: 'How are you, Brother Axley?' 'Who are you?' 'My name is Thomas A. Morris.' Then, surveying me from head to foot, he replied, 'Upon my word, I think they were hard pushed for bishop-timber when they got hold of you.' 'That is just what I thought myself; Brother Axley.' 'Why, you look too young for a bishop.' 'As to that, I am old enough to know more and do better.' Turning back with me, we walked to our lodging, being both quartered at the same place. Every hour that I could redeem from Conference and council business was enlivened by his quaint but thrilling narratives of his early travels, labors, and difficulties. He spiced the whole with such apt remarks and consummate good humor that the attention of the company never faltered. Never was I better entertained or more instructed with the conversation of a fellow-sojourner in one week than with his. There were points of singular contrast in his character. His exterior was rough as a block of granite fresh from the quarry, and his manner of reproofing disorderly persons at popular meetings over which he presided was said to indicate severity, yet his conscience was so tender, and his moral sensibility so acute, that a mere suggestion from a friend that he had erred in any given case would draw from him prompt acknowledgment, with a shower of tears. In social intercourse he was both kind and attractive. His conversational talent was of a superior order. Without classical learning, or much pretension to book knowledge, he was such a master in practical, everyday affairs, that he could not only delight, but instruct sages and divines. He was proverbial for his opposition to slavery and whisky. After he located he supported his family by the labor of his own hands as a farmer, and was wont to testify, on all proper occasions, that his logs were rolled, his house raised, and his grain cut without whisky; and though he had plentiful crops of corn not the first track of a Negro's foot was ever seen in one of his fields."

Sufficient evidence has heretofore been given to show that he shared fully the opinions of the western ministry on the subjects of temperance and slavery. They saw that whisky was becoming the bane of their rude but grand country, and Axley preached numerous sermons against the distillation of the "fire-waters." They saw slavery also gradually invading the fair domain, and threatening to dishonor labor and demoralize their social life. The strongest men among them arrayed themselves against it. Not a few intelligent laymen emigrated, like McCormick, beyond the Ohio, that they might raise their families away from its menacing evils. "I do not recollect," says Peter Cartwright, "a single Methodist preacher of that day who justified slavery." Many who could not well remove opposed the encroaching barbarism sturdily. Quarterly Conferences acted uncompromisingly against it, and as early as 1808, when all western Methodism was still comprised in the "Old Western Conference," that body enacted stringent anti-slavery laws, which were signed on the journals by Bishops Asbury and McKendree. The latter was at that time a decided abolitionist, as contemporary documents show.

Axley joined the Conference at the same time with Parker and Cartwright. To the latter he was of course a congenial mind. "We were always," says Cartwright, "bosom friends till he closed his earthly pilgrimage." Cartwright records "an illustration of Axley's extraordinary faith," which

is an equal illustration of the character of the times and the country. They were at a camp-meeting in Tennessee, Axley endeavoring to sustain order among a crew of "rowdies" while Cartwright was preaching. "They actually threatened to lay the cowhide over him," says the latter. "He replied with great calmness and firmness that that was not the place for an encounter, and that, if they were really bent on fighting, they must retire outside the encampment. Immediately he found himself in the midst of a crowd there. Axley remarked that he could not possibly go into the fight until he had prayed, and instantly knelt down. He poured forth his heart in a strain of uncommon fervor; the base fellows themselves were actually disarmed, and such an impression of reverence and solemnity came over them that they at once abandoned their impious design, and behaved themselves with perfect decorum. On the Monday following he preached a sermon, under which several of them were melted into tears. When the awakened came forward for the prayers of the Church there were found among them a number of these persons, and, before the meeting closed, some of them professed to have become new creatures in Christ Jesus."

His opposition to spirituous liquors led him to introduce into the General Conference of 1812 a resolution against their use by Church members. It failed; but he repeated the effort in 1816. Many in the Conference opposed him, making merry with his quaint speeches. "He turned his face to the wall and wept," says Laban Clark, who joined him in the measure. He persisted, however; and at last triumphed. "I remember," says Clark, "particularly on the first occasion of my meeting him, Axley made rather a strange and grotesque appearance. He wore a short cloak, and a round Quaker hat, and, as he rode on horseback, made a figure which could hardly fail to arrest the attention of all the passers by. To the boys who ran after him in the street he turned round and said, 'Go along, aint you ashamed of yourselves?' which only made them 'hurrah' the more boisterously. He was evidently a man of great native power, was social and pleasant, and always left the impression that he was living under the influence of the powers of the world to come."

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Part 3

THREE SENTENCES ABOUT JAMES AXLEY

From hdm0719, the "Cyclopedia of Methodism" (A-Listings) by Matthew Simpson

AXLEY, James, entered the traveling connection in 1804, and, after having spent nineteen years in the active ministry, he located in 1823. As a local preacher he was remarkably diligent and useful. He was an earnest, devoted, and successful minister, with but little culture and with marked eccentricities.

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Part 4

THE DATE HE WAS RECEIVED AND LOCATED

From Nathan Bangs' M. E. History, Vol IV, hdm0012

Axley, James -- Received 1804, Located 1822

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Part 5

MATERIAL ABOUT JAMES AXLEY

From hdm1557, "Autobiography of Peter Cartwright"

Here I found the celebrated James Axley, and took him into the Church. Peace to his memory! He was in after years favorably known as a powerful and successful traveling preacher. He was a great and good man of God. He married, located, and long since went to his reward... Brother Axley and myself were like Jonathan and David...

Brother Axley and myself pulled together like true yoke-fellows. We were both raised in the backwoods, and well understood frontier life. Brother Axley was truly a child of nature; a great deal of sternness and firmness about him as well as oddity. He knew nothing about polished life. I will here relate a little circumstance that took place with him and myself at Governor Tiffin's, in Chillicothe.

This year brother Axley, while I was on the Scioto circuit came over to see me, and he preached for me in Chillicothe. The Governor and his amiable wife were much delighted with brother Axley. The Governor's house was the preacher's home, and we went there. The Governor was easily excited, and he had not entire command of his risibilities. Sister Tiffin had great command of herself. She could control the muscles of her face, and look stern when she pleased. They had no children; but they had a very nice little lap-dog. We were called from the parlor to supper, and among other eatables they had fried chicken, and tea and coffee. Sister Tiffin asked brother Axley if he would have some of the chicken. He said, yes, he was very fond of it. She helped him to some; it was a leg unjointed. Brother Axley never offered to cut the flesh off of it, but took it in his fingers and ate it in that way; and when he had got the flesh from the bone, he turned round and whistled for the little lap-dog, and threw the bone down on the carpet. I saw the Governor was excited to laughter, but suppressed it. I cast an eye at sister Tiffin; she frowned, and shook her head at me, as much as to say, "Do not laugh." This passed off tolerably well.

It was the custom in those days to eat awhile before the tea and coffee were dished out. Said sister Tiffin to brother Axley, "Will you have a cup of tea or coffee?" He asked her if she had any milk. She answered, "Yes." "Well, sister," said he, "give me some milk, for they have nearly scalded my stomach with tea and coffee, and I don't like it." I really thought the Governor would burst out into loud laughter, but he suppressed it; and I thought I must leave the table to laugh; but casting my eyes again at sister Tiffin, she frowned and shook her head at me, which helped me very much.

When we went up to bed, said I, "Brother Axley, you surely are the most uncultivated creature I ever saw. Will you never learn any manners?"

Said he, "What have I done?"

"Done!" said I; "you gnawed the meat off of your chicken, holding it in your fingers; then whistled up the dog, and threw your bone down on the carpet; and more than this, you talked right at the Governor's table, and in the presence of sister Tiffin, about scalding your stomach with tea

and coffee." He burst into tears, and said, "Why did you not tell me better? I didn't know any better."

Next morning, when we awoke, he looked up and saw the plastering of the room all round. "Well," said he, "when I go home I will tell my people that I slept in the governor's house, and it was a stone house too, and plastered at that."

Having been raised almost in a cane-brake, and never been accustomed to see any thing but log-cabins, it was a great thing for him to behold a good house and sleep in a plastered room. But I tell you, my readers, he was a great and good minister of Jesus Christ. He often said a preacher that was good and true had a trinity of devils to fight; namely, superfluous dress, whisky, and slavery; and he seldom ever preached but he shared it to all three of these evils, like a man of God.

Brother Axley entered the traveling connection in 1804, traveled nineteen years, and in 1823 located. He was remarkably useful as a local preacher. He was industrious and economical, lived neat and comfortable, but, by going security for a friend, he lost nearly all his property. The Church helped him some; but he never recovered his former easy and comfortable circumstances, and died in comparative poverty.

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Part 6

MATERIAL ABOUT JAMES AXLEY

From hdm0575, "William McKendree, a Biographical Study"

By E. E. Hoss

James Axley, who never missed a chance to hit whiskey or slavery, again moved "that no stationed or local preacher shall retail spirituous or malt liquor without forfeiting his ministerial character among us." That the Conference should have dilly-dallied with this motion for some time and should finally have voted it down is a piece of history in which no Methodist can glory. In fact if it were not narrated in full in the Journal, one would be tempted to say that it never happened. Axley was thoroughly disgusted with the whole performance, but not discouraged. He was in the war to the finish, and no defeat in a preliminary skirmish could cause him to lose heart or to cease his efforts against the liquor traffic.

As a kind of offset to its action the Conference in its pastoral address made the following deliverance: "It is with regret that we have seen the use of ardent spirits, dram-drinking, etc., so common among the Methodists. We have endeavored to suppress the practice by our example, but it is necessary that we add precept to example; and we really think it not consistent with the character of a Christian to be immersed in the practice of distilling or retailing an article so destructive to the morals of society, and we do earnestly recommend the Annual Conferences and our people to join with us in making a firm and constant stand against an evil which has ruined thousands both in time and in eternity." That sounds well, but was altogether too mild a measure to meet the exigency...

Among other items of business transacted was one instructing the bishops to prescribe a course of study for undergraduates in the ministry. The course when it appeared covered only two years and was rather scant. It was due chiefly to the wisdom of John Emory that it was later enlarged and extended to four years. James Axley, grim and resolute, got the floor once more with his resolution prohibiting traveling or local preachers from engaging in the distillation or sale of whiskey and other liquors and had the satisfaction of seeing it passed. The journal shows, however, that there were some members of the Conference who still thought it too radical.

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THE END