

## A Chaplain in the War of 1812

Hugh P. Williamson

THIS is the story of the Reverend Carter Tarrant, who labored for the Lord in the green fields of Kentucky, and also where the Mississippi rolls her vast brown flood. It is a story of success, of tribulation and pain, and finally of seeming defeat, but always of dedication and devotion, for which reason the story is worth telling.

Of his family nothing is now known other than the fact that his father, who was thought to have been a native of Ireland, lived in Virginia, where this son was born, probably not later than 1748. The occupation of the father, his location in the state, whether there were brothers and sisters—all of these things are to us unknown. We do know that in 1774 Carter Tarrant was a minister, holding the pastorate of the Upper Banister Baptist Church, which was in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, down on the North Carolina border. It was the largest in the state, which would indicate that Tarrant was more than ordinarily active and talented. How long he occupied this position we do not know. Our source of information for this phase of his life, "A History of Kentucky Baptists," by J. H. Spencer, states only that he was at this church "for a time."

Of him Spencer writes: "Carter Tarrant, another active preacher among the emancipators, was a native of Virginia. He was for a time pastor of Upper Banister church, in Pittsylvania county, which was, in 1774, the largest (Baptist) church in Virginia. He was one of the early settlers in what was then Logan County, Kentucky, and was very active and successful in gathering the earliest churches in the Green River country, and in organizing them into Green River Association. He afterward moved to Woodford county, where he became the pastor of Hillsboro and Clear Creek churches, and, as already noted, joined John Sutton in constituting New Hope church of emancipation Baptists. For a few years, he was very active in promoting the emancipation scheme."

Logan County, mentioned above, is in the southwestern part of Kentucky, and is on the Tennessee line. Woodford County is in the north central part of the state. Its county seat is Versailles. It adjoins Fayette County on the east. Lexington, in this latter county, is only some twelve or thirteen miles from Versailles. This area is in the heart of the fabulous Bluegrass region.

In reference to the "Emancipation Baptists," Bayless E. Hardin, Secretary of the Kentucky Historical Society, writes: "The term 'Emancipators' in connection with the quotes we sent you from the History of Baptists in Kentucky does refer to the emancipation of slaves."

"The Emancipation Movement lasted about thirty years, starting in Goochland County, Virginia, on March 7, 1788. It was put aside, however, until the General Committee convened in Richmond on August 8, 1789, where the following resolution was offered and adopted: 'Resolved, That slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and therefore recommend it to our brethren, to make use of every legal measure to extirpate this horrid evil from the land, and pray Almighty God that our honorable legislature, may have it in their power to proclaim the great jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy.' (History of Virginia Baptists, page 79.)"

"The movement followed a stormy course, doing little good and causing much trouble and division among the churches, insubordination among the slaves, and nullifying the influence and usefulness of many fine preachers. In the year 1820 it became apparent even to the men who started it in all sincerity, that the scheme was futile, and the movement died."

How long this period of holding pastorates in Woodford County, and seeking emancipation for the slaves, continued, we do not know. Of Tarrant, Spencer, in conclusion, writes: "But becoming much reduced in his worldly circumstances, he accepted a position as Chaplain in the American Army, during the war with Eng-

until this day—the delay of which you will please to accept as an apology for a reply—meantime will inform you sir that I accept with humility and gratitude the appointment which our *Illustrious President* has been pleased to bestow upon me: the former of which I had not relinquished.

"Your Honorable Board will please to accept the avowal of my sincere attachment

Carter Tarrant  
Chaplain U. S. Army"

The commission to which Tarrant refers reads:

"Department of War  
October 7, 1815

"Sir:

"You are hereby informed that the President of the United States has appointed you to fill a vacancy of Chaplain in the Army of said states.

"On the receipt of this information, you will please to communicate to this department your acceptance or non-acceptance of said appointment; and in case of the former, report yourself to General Jackson at Nashville, Tennessee.

"Geo. Graham

"The Rev.<sup>d</sup> C. Tarrant,  
Chaplain U.S. Army"

We have no more written documents from or about Tarrant. It will be recalled that the "History of Kentucky Baptists," referred to above, states that he died in New Orleans. It would seem probable that his death occurred sometime in 1816, and certainly not later than 1817.

A newspaper clipping, pasted in an old scrapbook which is in the possession of my family, reads: "Died in Boone County, Kentucky, Mrs. Catherine Tarrant, May 25, in her 89th year. She was the widow of Rev. Carter Tarrant who died some 36 years ago, and who previous to his death was well and favorably known as a Baptist Minister, particularly in the interior part of the state. Mrs. Tarrant resides with her children in Boone County and holds her membership in the Bullitsburg Church."<sup>(4)</sup>

The name of this newspaper, which was no doubt published in Boone County, does not appear, nor does the date of publication.

If therefore, as seems likely, Tarrant died in or near 1816, then his widow must have died in or near the year 1852. And if, as we assumed, Tarrant was born not later than 1748, he was at least 68 years old at the time of his death. Since his widow lived to be 89, and survived her husband by 36 years, we know that she

was at least 15 years his junior. From the clipping we know that the couple had children, the full number of which is not known to us. We do know, however, of at least two daughters. A family Bible is in the possession of this writer which records that on May 22, 1789, Rachael S. Tarrant was born in Henry County, Virginia, and that on March 17, 1808, she was married to John T. Johnson, in Woodford County, Kentucky. This certainly was a daughter of Carter Tarrant. The same source shows that Rachael S. Johnson was married to John Williamson, in Scott County, Kentucky, June 20, 1817. Also that Carter Johnson, undoubtedly a son of Rachael and John T. Johnson, married Margaret Berryman, in Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1830, and that Jane Johnson, who certainly was a daughter of Rachael and John T. Johnson, was married to Chester Allen in 1832. Colonel John Williamson and his wife Rachael died in Carroll County, Missouri, in 1852 and 1866, respectively, and are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery near the town of Carrollton. Their monuments show that he was born January 25, 1786, and that her birth date was May 22, 1789. They were the parents of John W. Williamson and of Mathilda Francis, who married Colonel James A. Pritchard.

As late as 1870 Mary Tarrant, known as "Aunt Mary," who must also have been a daughter of Carter Tarrant, was living with her nephew, John W. Williamson, in Carroll County.

After the death of Carter Tarrant in New Orleans his personal effects appear to have been sent to his family in Kentucky. What these consisted of we do not fully know, but of them two articles found their way to Missouri and into the possession of this writer, a great, great-grandson. One is the much-prized commission as chaplain, which is in an excellent state of preservation. Another is a red silk sash ten feet long and five inches wide. This sash has tasseled ends. In it is a hole surrounded with blood stains. This was the type of sash worn around the waist and over the shoulders by British officers. It was no doubt taken from the body of an officer killed or wounded at the battle of New Orleans. In some way it came into Tarrant's possession. It likewise is well preserved.

(Continued on page 1114)

## Persons

**M**OST of us know what it stands for, how few of us are authors—that hasers who met in and sixty-nine years of government would both unite and meet needs.

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"Carter Tarrant was regarded a good and useful man, and a preacher of above medium ability, in his day. He published a History of the Emancipationists in Kentucky."

In regard to his position as spiritual adviser to the United States Army, we have, from Tarrant's hand, addressed to "Hon. James Monroe, Secretary of War,"<sup>(1)</sup> the following letter:

"Lexington, Febry, 1815

"Sir:  
"Yours of the 19th of December last has this morning come to hand. I hereby notify the War Department that I have accepted of the appointment of Chaplain in the army of the United States and shall this day forward a letter to Maj<sup>r</sup> Gen<sup>l</sup> Jackson to inform him that I shall be with him as soon as possible. I am just recovering from a severe sickness but am so far recovered that I think I shall not be detained long on that account.

I am very respectfully yours,  
Carter Tarrant  
Chaplain U.S. Army"

We do not have the letter to which Tarrant refers, and which was, we note from the respective dates, at least forty-three days, and probably longer, enroute from Washington, D. C., to the interior part of Kentucky. It appears that soon after its receipt Tarrant proceeded to his post of duty, which was New Orleans. From that place he writes to "Hon<sup>ble</sup> William Crawford,<sup>(2)</sup> Secretary of War, Washington, C. Tarrant, Chaplain U. S. Army," as follows:

"New Orleans, November 4<sup>th</sup>—1815

"Dr Sir:  
"Last February the President of the U.S. sent me a commission as Chaplain to the U.S. Army which ordered me to this station. I obeyed the call and will continue to preach to the troops every Sunday and shall continue to so do until the power which sent me here lets me know that there is no further occasion for my services.  
"Looking over the Peace Establishment I was led to believe from the following clause that it was my duty to remain at my station until further orders.

"The Act of each Congress Establishing the Ordnance Department  
"The office of the commissary general of purchases, and the military academy, remain in force as well as certain other acts authorizing the appointment of Judge Advocates and Chaplains to the Army.

"Now sir, if I have misconstrued the above it is my misfortune! for I am a poor man and am now 1200 miles from home,<sup>(3)</sup> without funds, resources or friends. You will therefore be so good as to drop me a line upon this subject which will tell me my destiny: If government intends to have chaplains under the Peace Establishment I am willing to continue at this or any other locations, but I shall remain here until I hear from you. Pray sir give me the earlist possible notice.

"Meantime I am  
yours most respectfully  
Carter Tarrant  
Chaplain U.S. Army"

In the file of the National Archives there appears a memorandum, in behalf of Tarrant, to President James Madison. This document is unlocated and undated. It reads:

"The President is requested to read the gratitude of the Revd. Carter Tarrant as expressed in his letter; this is the sentiment of the virtuous in the West; the (illegible five-letter word) to malcontents to the contrary notwithstanding. If a Chaplain should be retained in the south Tarrant is the only one I know of. If it would not be asking too much of the President I would solicit the continuance of this good man in office who is patriotic and virtuous but poor and needy.

R— Johnson"

Who R— Johnson was we do not certainly know, but it seems probable that he was Richard Mentor Johnson, who was born near Louisville, Kentucky, in 1780. He was a member of Congress from Kentucky from 1807 until 1819. During the War of 1812 he commanded a company of riflemen on the Canadian border. He was U. S. Senator from Kentucky 1819 to 1829. He was again in Congress from 1829 to 1837, at which time he was elected Vice-President of the United States. The Encyclopedia Americana (Vol. 16, p. 174) states that, "In Congress his chief efforts were in behalf of soldiers of the Revolution and of the War of 1812 who applied for pensions. He was the author of the law abolishing imprisonment for debt in Kentucky." He died in Frankfort in 1850. Assisting Tarrant to keep his badly needed job as chaplain would appear to be consistent with his aid to soldiers seeking pensions.

Now we again hear from Tarrant, who writes:

"New Orleans, December 23, 1815

"Dear Sir:  
"The Commission (dated Oct. 7, 1815) you had the goodness to send me never came to hand