REMINISCENCES OF EARLY LIFE.

BY REV. JAMES B. FINLEY.

It was on one of those balmy days of autumn, in the year 1788, when my father and his associates loosed their boats from their moorings at the mouth of George's creek, now Geneva, on the Monongahela, to descend the Ohio river, to the land of canebrakes, in Kentucky. These were dangerous times; for the constant, rapid emigration to that country had roused the western Indians into fury, believing the whites would soon take possession of their hunting grounds, and drive them and their families from their homes and their own native soil. They continually waylaid the two great thoroughfares, namely, the old Crab Orchard road, (leading from North Carolina,) and the Ohio river. Several boats had been captured the previous spring and summer, and their inmates either massacred or made prisoners. This made our company take precautions against attack. Every man and boy was furnished with a gun. All the boats, numbering sixteen, were put under the command of one man, who had been up and down the river frequently. The boats being numbered, were to proceed two abreast, in regular order, as far as circumstances would admit. On each of these boats were a captain and two steersmen. The rest of the men were coupled two and two, to pull the oars in regular turns, by day and night. My father's boat was to lead, and was commanded by Captain James Bartley, a man of great skill and courage. There were on this boat, besides my father, three Presbyterian preachers, Carey Allen, of blessed memory, Robert Marshall, and James Welsh. The notorious Richard M'Nemer, of Shaker memory, was then a boy, and under my father's care. You will say this boat had its share of divinity, and these men were for the weal or woe of many. Mr. Allen, like a flaming minister of the cross, preached Christ everywhere, and was the instrument of turning many to God. His zeal and labors soon wore him out, and he died triumphing in the God of his salvation. He was converted to God at a Methodist quarterly meeting held in Virginia, by the Rev. Bennet Maxey.

I shall never forget the parting scene. Many of my father's congregation were present, with the numerous friends and relatives of the company about to sail. My father stood on the boat and preached his farewell sermon to the crowded shore. His text will be found in Acts xx, 25, 26, 27. This was an overwhelming scene. Ministers and flocks were parting, parents and children hanging on each other's necks, weeping, and parting to meet no more until the judgment of the great day, and none knowing but in a few days all or part of the emigrants would fall a prey to the scalping-knife or tomahawk of an incensed and savage foe. At the close, Rev. C. Allen arose and gave out that beautiful hymn of Dr. Watts:

"And let our bodies part—
To different climes repair—
Inseparably joined in heart
The friends of Jesus are.

Jesus, the corner-stone,
Did first our hearts unite;
And still he keeps our spirits one,
Who walk with him in white."

While this hymn was sung, the sobs, the sighs, and the smothered shouts of some, and bursts of cries in others, seemed to me, then a boy, to move earth and heaven. Then his parting prayer: (*all, yes, all* were prostrated on their knees:) his strong appeals to God were awful. I had no doubt then, nor have I now, but his petitions were all lodged hard by the mercy seat in heaven. This was the second time in my life that I had ever heard any noise at meeting. I never had been at a Methodist meeting in my life. But were I now to meet with such an assembly, I would set it down, instanter, that they were Methodists. Many of the Presbyterian ministers of this day were experimental, thundering preachers. Sinners were awakened, and fell under the mighty power of God, and cried for mercy as on the day of Pentecost. They preached the Gospel: they did not read it.

At about two o'clock the boats loosed, and took up their line of march, according to their previous arrangements, and continued their course on the smooth bosom of the Monongahela, until they arrived at Pittsburg. There they were joined by eight or ten more flatboats. The scenery was all new to me, a lad just lanching into the almost unbounded wilderness of the west, there to act my part in society. My youthful spirit was all alive to the new scenes that were constantly presenting themselves to me: not then, as now, almost always in sight of some splendid farm, or flourishing city, or town. No, all was a dense wilderness, the habitation of savage men and the wild beasts of prey, some of which were almost always in sight. The timid deer, who had come from his lair to slake his thirst in the limpid stream, not at all accustomed to such a flotilla of arks, would stand and gaze, and snuff his native air, until some hunter from the boats would, with deadly aim, send the leaden messenger of death into his body, and make it a prey. Frequently they were seen to plunge into the river to swim across, and were taken by the expert canoeman. Sometimes a turkey, in trying to fly across, would fall in the water and be taken. On one occasion a bear plunged in just before the boats; and I suppose twenty rifles were fired at him, but it seemed none could touch him. At length two men, in a canoe, put for the shore, with the design to head him; but he was out first, and having shaken himself, bid us farewell, departing for his native mountains. This was the first bear I ever saw. The Indians were frequently seen on the shore, watching

for an opportunity of attack; and, on one occasion, there was a desperate effort made by one who appeared to be a white man, to get some of the hindmost boats to land. He could speak English, and represented himself as a prisoner having escaped from the Indians, and in a state of want and danger. But this kind of stratagem would not answer; for it had been tried too often. The same spring, William Orr, with his family, had been betrayed, by perhaps the same person, to land, and were all killed or taken prisoners by a party of Indians lying in wait. And below the mouth of the Scioto three boats, traveling in company, were induced to near the shore for the purpose of relieving a person, as they supposed, in distress, and were fired upon by a large party of Indians lying in ambush; and, after some resistance, two of the boats were taken. The third pulled out into the stream; but while at the oars the men were all killed but one, a Methodist minister, going as a missionary to Kentucky, and he was badly wounded. The women soon plied the oars; and when they were out of gunshot from the shore, the Indians issued from the mouth of a small creek in a canoe, to follow them. The women loaded the rifles of their dead husbands, and Mr. Tucker, the wounded minister, with deadly aim, kept up such a destructive fire, that the pursuers were obliged to give up the chase or all die. So, after the loss of five of their comrades, they drew off to shore. This man lived to reach Limestone. He there died of his wounds, and was buried amidst the tears of the widows and orphans whose lives he had been the instrument of saving.

But we met with no attack from the enemy. Captain Bartley was an intrepid, fearless, and untiring officer; and if this company had been assailed, the enemy would have heard from them; for they were well prepared for battle.

An incident occurred the day before we landed, which made the deepest impression on my mind, and has never been erased to this day. My precious grandmother took leave of us for the promised land. She was an Englishwoman. Her maiden name was Pendergrass. She was married to James Bradley, with whom she had lived about sixty years. He was an athletic and powerful Welshman. They emigrated to America when young, and settled on the Delaware, above Philadelphia. My grandmother was converted to God under the preaching of the Rev. George Whitefield; and she lived a lively, growing, and zealous Christian to the time of her death. In the commencement of the Revolutionary War they moved to Carolina, and in that war lost all their sons, who fell fighting for the liberty of this country. My uncle, Captain James Bradley, fell at Gates' defeat, fighting by the side of the Baron De Kalb, and was buried in the same grave. Washington, when he visited the place, and stood by the grave of the Baron, exclaimed, while the tears rolled over his manly face, "Noble stranger, who left your own country and happy home, to water with your precious blood the tree of American liberty!"

But to return. This grand parent first implanted in my infant heart the knowledge of a Savior, to whom she taught me to pray for God to make me a good and useful man. I never shall forget her death. While her family and friends gazed on the last struggles of life with bleeding hearts, she was calm and composed, and talked of death as of a near friend; and when all present thought her spirit had fled, she revived and repeated these lines:

"O, who can tell a Savior's worth,
Or speak of grace's power,
Or benefits of the new birth
In a departing hour!"

Thus died my precious grandmother, on the Ohio river, in October, 1788, and the next day was buried in Limestone, now Maysville, to rest until the morning of the resurrection.

So, you see Mr. Editor, it is now over fifty-eight years since I took up my residence in the western wilds. I have seen the waste places filled up with the teeming millions that now live and sport in this fertile region. My father moved to Washington, where we wintered. Here we were neighbors to the intrepid Simon Kenton, and the Words, and the Chamberses. The next spring we moved out, and settled by Stockton's station, near where Flemingsburg now stands. Nature, in her pride, had given to the regions of the beautiful Ohio a fertility so astonishing that, to believe it, ocular demonstration became necessary. Every thing in this new world assumed a dignity and splendor I had never seen before.

From Maysville we ascended a considerable distance from the shore of the Ohio, and when we might have supposed we had reached the top of some mountain, ready to descend into some deep valley again, we found ourselves on an extensive level. On traveling farther up into the country, it seemed as if eternal verdure reigned: the evergreen cane-brakes covering the whole face of the earth. The vernal sun, pouring from the azure heavens his floods of light and heat on this prolific soil, produced an early maturity, which was both cheering and astonishing: flowers soon grew to perfection, and possessed all the variegated charms and odors which nature could produce, both in elegance and beauty. These wild and romantic scenes, with a forest just springing into life after a dreary winter, and fanned by the soft zephyrs breathing on this garden of nature, gave a glow of health and vigor that seemed to intoxicate the senses. The songsters of the forest appeared to feel the influence of the gladdening spring, and warbled their variegated notes in unison with love and nature. Here were vast droves of the wild buffalo and elk, the sport of the hunter, and food for the adventurer. Here, too, might be seen the sportive deer bounding through his native

wood, the calling turkey, the cunning fox, the wily panther, the sneaking wolf, the surly bear, the cautious wild-cat, the plundering opossum, the nimble, barking squirrel, the hooting owl, the chattering paroquet; while in some limpid streams the wild-geese had convened and were holding their vernal levees. All nature seemed alive, but here was not heard the sound of the woodman's ax, no cheerful ploughboy whistling on his way to the field, no rattling of carts, carriages, or wagons; no, a silent awe hung over all these scenes of nature, and proclaimed that the God of nature reigned here. But, ah! there was a drawback on all the pleasures which the splendid scenery of this new world afforded: that was, in these wilds lay concealed a deadly foe. The Indian was seeking to avenge himself on the intruders into the land of his fathers, and the spoilers of his own home; and like the pestilence, which walketh in darkness, he fell upon and destroyed all that came within his power.

Much has been said about the barbarous modes of warfare adopted by these tribes; but let it always be remembered that they were nobly engaged in the defense of their country, their families, and their natural rights and national liberties. Never did men acquit themselves with more valor, nor, according to their means, make a better defense. They were ignorant of martial tactics, deficient in arms and military stores, and inferior to their foes in numerical strength; but how long and bloody was the conflict before they yielded to the new intruders, and with what reluctance did they submit to their numerous and increasing enemies, let history testify. Their bravery was proved even in their final struggles. The spirits of the red man are now broken, and he sits and smokes his pipe, and looks on his country as lost. The pleasant hunting grounds in which he used to chase the deer and the bear, and the luxuriant cane-brakes, where the elk and the buffalo fed, which furnished him and his family with meat and clothing, have fallen into the hands of strangers. The cheerful notes of the flute and the hoarser sound of the turtle-shell no longer make the groves vocal with joyful melody. The red man is no more seen stretched before the sparkling fire, nor is the tinkling horse-bell heard in the bluegrass plains. The Indian now sits and looks at the graves of his fathers and friends, and heaves a sigh of despair, while his manly face is bedewed with the silent tear. In strains of sorrowful eloquence he tells of the happiness of ancient days, and relates to his listening children the mighty achievements of his ancestors. Gloom fills his heart, while he sees at no great distance the end of his tribe. He walks pensively to the deep and silent forests, wrapped up in his half-worn blanket, and pours out his full soul to the Great Spirit to relieve his sufferings by taking him to rejoin his tribe in another and a better world.