

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born September 13, 1875, in IZARD County, Arkansas, near Mt. Pleasant. The fall I was born my parents moved six miles southeast, near where Cushman is now, in Independence County, to a farm. We lived there until the day I was eleven years old, and then moved into Fulton County, near Salem, Arkansas. My father bought 220 acres of land in the woods, and we set about clearing that land and fencing it with rails.

There were twelve of us children--seven boys and five girls. We attended the neighborhood schools which were about four months in the year. My father was a gospel preacher, but did not preach very much. He said he had to stay with us boys to keep us out of the pen. I obeyed the gospel of Christ when I was sixteen years old under the preaching of the lamented W. A. Schultz, but was baptized by Brother J. M. Billingsley. I attended worship at home, and read my Bible every day.

When I was eighteen years old I attended a ten months school at Agnos, Arkansas, taught by W. R. Chestnut; and while there in school I worshiped with the congregation at Agnos. There I received many good lessons from the brethren which have been a great help to me all the way through life. The fall I was 19 years old I traded a long-legged mule for a year's schooling at Viola, Arkansas. My father thought I made a bad trade, and said that I had lost a good mule. I was under the great teacher, E. M. Perkins, who died at Enid, Oklahoma, a few years ago. I just had a change of clothes, and that was all.

The year I was 20 years old I entered school at Salem, Arkansas, under Professor J. H. Caldwell. I boarded at home, five miles from Salem, and rode on horseback to school. I went there ten months, missed only two days, and was not tardy a single time. After school was out in May I taught a school at Flint Hill District, about five miles from home, at \$22.50 per month. I stayed at home and rode horseback to school each day.

When this school was out, I began traveling with Brethren Willie H. George and S. C. Garner. I owned a mare and saddle, and my father gave me a pair of saddle pockets and a Bible. I just had one change of clothes and fifty cents in money. I left home crying on October 1, 1896, and rode thirty miles that day to join Brother George and Brother Garner, who were in a meeting near Sage, Arkansas. They did the preaching, and I would read a chapter and lead in prayer. That was as far as I would go in the work. All three of us went together from place to place on horseback holding meetings. The brethren would pay as much as \$5.00 for a two weeks meeting in those days. The first money I received for my work was seventy five cents; it was given to me by Brother Jack Warner of near Poughkeepsie, Arkansas. That made me

rich for a while.

On November 1, 1896, I preached my first sermon at Lebanon School-house, near Poughkeepsie. I traveled with Brother George and Brother Garner until Christmas that year, and in that time I preached six times. I then started out by myself. I went into Sharp County, and preached out in the sticks, in homes and school-houses. I had in my saddle-pockets the same change of clothes, my Bible, and The Gospel Plan of Salvation by T. W. Brents. I had four cents in my pocket when I left home. I did not say a word to anyone about my poverty, lest someone should think I was preaching for money. I preached all that year (1897), baptized 75 people, and established one congregation. The brethren paid me \$19.00 for my work that year. In May of that year my father sent me \$10.00 to buy myself a suit of clothes. I bought the suit, and felt myself in fine shape for the work. Many days I went without dinner because I did not have the money to buy any.

In the fall of 1897 (November 9), I married Miss Mary Montgomery, and that was the best trade I ever made. She had a mare and side-saddle, one cow, one sheep, and \$25.00. We went to Salem and bought our house-keeping outfit, and it cost \$22.15. We set up to keep house, and I must say that no one, with the finest house on earth, was ever as happy as were we. Mary said she could cross the mountains by my side. I made a crop in 1893, and would feed my team, both night and morning, in the dark. I would plow as long as I could see at night, and be back in the field next morning before the sun arose. Mary was with me and we made a fine crop. We settled down in the neighborhood (Mary had been raised there), and we've been there ever since, never having moved at all. I preached every Sunday that year while I was making the crop.

When Mary and I were married there were six members of the church of Christ in the neighborhood. In the same area we had a Baptist church, Methodist Church, Holiness, and Presbyterians. But today there is only the Lord's true church in this community, and there has not been a sectarian sermon preached in the neighborhood in 35 years.

I made four crops after we were married, and the rest of the time I have been doing evangelistic work. We have remained on the farm all these years. We have our orchard, garden, cows, hens, hogs, horses, and goats. We have been married 46 years, and Mary has made two trips with me for meetings. She has been busy on the farm and caring for the children, stock, garden, and chickens. We have probably bought not more than 25 pounds of meat in the 46 years we have been married. We have never bought any wood. We have never bought any butter, laundry soap, or vegetables of .any kind. Three children have blessed our home, two of our own and one orphan girl whom we raised. I have conducted 107 debates, and have managed

to accumulate one of the best collections of religious books in the state.

I have never been the man to complain about what the brethren have paid me for my work. I preached monthly (for a year) for a congregation and held their meeting; and they paid me \$4.00 for my work. I preached monthly for another congregation, twenty miles away, and held their meeting. They paid me \$1.00 and a bushel of seed corn. Brother O. L. Hayes and I were called to Cotter, Arkansas, to hold a meeting in January, 1904. They paid us \$2.00 and gave each of us a handkerchief. When the meeting closed there was a three inch snow on the ground. Brother Hays and I walked home, a distance of 45 miles. I have gotten off the train at Hardy, Arkansas, in the night, carried my suitcase and walked home that night, a distance of 25 miles. Many times have I sat up in a cold depot all night because I did not have the price of a bed and enough to take me on to my meeting, Going without a meal has been a frequent occurrence because I did not have the money to buy the meal and also the railroad ticket to take me to my meeting appointment.

Mary is the bridge that has taken me over. She had never said not to go, come home, or complained in the least. She has always said, "You go and preach, and do all the good you can, and I will take care of things at home." She has done a fine job of it.

I have been stoned, beaten with green walnuts, and with eggs, I have had dynamite put under the pulpit while I was preaching. I have had to be guarded while I preached. I have had men threaten to take me out of the pulpit and "fix" me so I would never get into another one. I have even been threatened with hanging! All this I have suffered for the cause of our Lord, and yet have not begun to suffer what our Lord or the apostles suffered.

I am now 66 years old, and want to preach for many more years. To God be all the glory. — Joe H. Blue

(Editor's Note? The foregoing sketch of bro. Blue's life and work was written by him in 1944, and used as a handbill to announce a meeting at Stuart, Oklahoma. His beloved Mary passed away on April 23, 1954. Bro. Blue died that same year on September 4. His prayer was that he be spared to care for "Mary" who was bedfast two years before her death. He preached the last Sunday of his life. I never heard bro. Blue debate nor preach. I met him once and talked with him during the debate between the late bro. W. Curtis Porter and the late Ben M. Bogard in Damascus, Ark., in March of 1948. (Incidentally, this was Bogard's last debate, of more than three hundred he had during his lifetime.) I reprint this sketch of bro. Joe H. Blue's life here to remind each of us that we of this generation are the beneficiaries of the toils, hardships, and sacrifices made by countless thousands of devoted saints who

preceded us in the Lord's kingdom. If we want the cause of Christ to continue in the world to bless our children, grandchildren, and all who shall come after us, we likewise must be willing to lay our all—life, time, talents, money, interest and concern—upon the altar of sacrifice to Jesus Christ. All that is really important in life is the cause for which our Lord died— the salvation of men and women. Each of us should dedicate ourselves anew to walking by faith and wearing ourselves out in the service of God as our illustrious forebears did, of whom Joe H. Blue of Salem, Arkansas, was one. --BC)