



F. G. ALLEN

***AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF FRANK
G. ALLEN,
MINISTER
OF THE GOSPEL
AND SELECTIONS
FROM HIS
WRITINGS***

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Autobiography of Frank G. Allen, Minister of the Gospel and Selections from his Writings

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PREFACE.

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By prescription, which often has the force of law, a book should have both a *Preface* and an *Introduction*: the first relating to the writer; the second to the things written. I may well dispense with the latter, for what is here written the humblest capacity can understand; and it would be cruel to detain him long on the porch who is anxious to enter the building.

But, dear reader, a word with you (for that is the meaning of "Preface") before you begin this unpretentious little book, the joint production of an author, an editor, and a publisher.

It is due the first, to say that he wrote what is here called his Autobiography in great physical weakness, and without expecting that it would appear in this form. This will account for its homely garb, and apologize for it, if apology be necessary. Frank Allen had no time to spend upon mere style in anything he wrote. He aimed at clearness and force of expression, and reached these in a remarkable degree in his latter days. If any one, therefore, should take up this volume expecting to find literary entertainment, he will have the search for his pains; but if he seeks for what is far better, the secret of a life devoted to God and goodness, told in plain, unvarnished English, he will not be disappointed.

When I received from the gifted author the record of his "travel's history," I intended to write his Life, but death came and found us, not him, unprepared; and so, under the

constraint of other and pressing duties, my purpose was reluctantly abandoned. Besides, upon examination it was found that with a few changes and additions here and there, these memoranda, as they came from the hand of their author, could, under the circumstances, appear in that form and do him no discredit.

Such is my admiration of this noble man, and such my deference to what I am sure must be the desire of his friends, that I have preferred to let *him* tell in simple phrase the strange story of his struggles and triumphs; and if its perusal should give the reader half the pleasure it has been to me to prepare it for the press, I shall not have labored in vain. The book is intended to be a *Memorial Volume*, and especially one to encourage young men who, under adverse circumstances, are striving to qualify themselves to preach the gospel. Bro. Allen was always in warm and loving sympathy with these—so much so, that he was rightly called the young preacher's friend.

It is a pleasure to say that such is the veneration of the publishers, The Guide Printing and Publishing Company, for the memory of our deceased brother, that but for them this tribute would hardly have appeared. With a generosity as rare as it is praiseworthy, they have undertaken to publish the work in the best style of their art, at a low price, and without any pecuniary risk to Sister Allen; and, indeed, in all their transactions with her they have given abundant proof that men can carry into business the benevolent spirit of pure and undefiled religion.

It only remains to be said that whatever profits arise from the sale of this book go to the wife and children of its

lamented author, and that should sufficient encouragement be given, a companion volume containing the letters and miscellaneous productions of Bro. Allen may in due time be issued.

The Editor.

Lexington, Ky., May, 1887.

PART I.—AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

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CHAPTER I.

Birth and Ancestors. Family Circumstances. "Fist and Skull" Entertainment. Removal to Ohio and Return. Fight with his Mother. Gets Lost. His Father Buys a Farm. The "Improvements." Plenty of Hard Work. His Opinion of Work and of Play.

I was born near La Grange, Oldham county, Ky., March 7, 1836. My father, Francis Myers Allen, was born in Brown county, Ohio, December 7, 1807. He was the son of Thomas Allen, who, in 1812, when my father was only five years old, moved from Brown county, O., to Shelby county, Ky., and lived on Little Bullskin, a few miles west of Shelbyville.

My mother, Sarah A. Gibbs, was a daughter of James L. Gibbs and Mary Ashby, and was born in Loudoun county, Va., April 6, 1808. The family moved from Virginia to Kentucky in 1810, and lived in Shelbyville.

My grandparents on both sides reared large families of industrious, thrifty children, and both grandfathers lived to be quite aged, my mother's father living to be nearly one hundred years old.

My parents were married near Simpsonville, in Shelby county, April 9, 1829, and to them were born thirteen children—five boys and eight girls—ten of whom lived to be grown. I was the fifth child—two boys and two girls being older. The oldest child, a boy, died in infancy. Being poor, both parents and children had to work hard and use strict economy to make ends meet. We all knew much of the toils and hardships of life, little of its luxuries. Both parents were blessed with good constitutions, and had fine native

intellects, but they were uneducated save in the mere rudiments of the common school. They thought that "to read, write and cipher" as far as the single rule of three, was all the learning one needed for this life, unless he was going to teach. If my father's mind had been trained, it would have been one of vast power. He was philosophical, a good reasoner, and possessed of unusual discrimination. He had also great coolness and self-possession in emergencies.

In illustration of the latter statement, there recurs an incident in my father's life that will bear recital. In those old-fashioned days of "fist and skull" entertainments on public occasions, it was common for each county to have its bully. Oldham at different times had several—men of great muscular build and power, whose chief idea of fame was that they could "whip anything in the county." My father was a small man, weighing only one hundred and thirty pounds, and of a peaceable disposition. Indeed, it was hard to provoke him to pugilistic measures. But circumstances caused one of these bullies to force a fight upon him at La Grange, in which the man was whipped so quickly and so badly that no one knew how it was done. The man himself accounted for it on the ground that "Mr. Allen came at me smiling." This caused one or two others, at different times, to seek to immortalize themselves by doing what the first had failed to accomplish; but with the same result.

Being a farmer, my father was never without occupation, and he always had plenty for his boys to do; hence I knew nothing but hard work on the farm, except a few school days in winter, from the time I could pull a weed out of a hill of corn till I reached my majority.

In the fall after I was born my parents moved from the farm near La Grange to Brown county, O., not far from Hamersville. There they remained a year; but my mother being much dissatisfied, they moved to Floydsburg, Ky., and in the following spring, when I was two years old, returned to the old place where I was born. Here the memories of life begin. The incidents of daily life from this time forward are fresh in my memory to-day. Here I had my first and last fight with my mother. When I was three years old, my father, one day in June, was plowing corn in a field not far from the house. When he went out, after noon, I wanted to go with him. He took me behind him on the horse to the field. When we got there I wanted to come back. He brought me back. I then wanted to go to the field. He took me to the field. I then wanted to come back. He brought me back. I then wanted to go to the field, but he left me, telling my mother to take me in charge. Because she attempted to control me I began fighting her. She whipped me with a small switch, and I fought till I fell. Being completely exhausted, I begged my oldest sister to fight for me, and when she refused and I had recovered a little, I got up and went at it again. But when I fell the second time, I lay till they took me and put me to bed, and there I remained several days. Though I did not surrender, I never afterwards felt disposed to renew the engagement. It was almost death to my mother, for she did not chastise me in anger; her firmness, however, saved me.

In the spring of 1840 we moved to a farm some two miles south of La Grange, on the road leading from that place to Ballardsville. Here we lived one year. Only one event worth naming occurred while we lived here. My mother took

myself, an older sister, and a younger brother to visit a sister she had living in La Grange. It was a beautiful summer day, the roads were good, and we walked. My mother stopped at the house of a neighbor on the road side for a few minutes, and told us to go on, and be sure not to leave the road. With childish perversity we thought the green fields better than the dusty road, and were soon into them. It was not long till we were completely lost, and naturally wandered the wrong way, not thinking to observe the sun and consider our course. So, when we did not put in an appearance, the whole neighborhood was aroused, and several hours of excitement followed before we were found. My sister Bettie, two years my senior, was captain of this expedition.

In the spring of 1841 my father bought a farm of one hundred and twenty acres, lying about three miles southwest from La Grange. Most of the land was poor, and the "improvements" equally so. The house was a hewed log cabin about 18×20 feet, with clap-board roof held down by weight poles, and the walls "chinked" with mud. It had a large fire-place at one end, and a chimney made of slats and mortar, familiarly known as a "stick" chimney. The only window was paneless, with a solid shutter hung on leather hinges, propped up with a stick, except when it was wanted down. The floors above and below, were of broad lumber, and laid loose. The door, when closed, was fastened with a big pin. A narrow porch ran along the front, connecting with another at one end of the house, between it and the kitchen. This was large and of the same style of architecture as the house, but what that style was would puzzle any one

to tell. These two rooms and porches, with the smoke-house and hen-house, constituted the "improvements" in that line. The out-buildings were stables and a crib, of round logs. The fences were all of rails, and inferior in kind. "Bars" and "slip-gaps" supplied the place of gates in some places, and in others the fences had to be often pulled down for lack of such conveniences. A fine spring gushed from the foot of a hill, one hundred yards in front of this humble abode. The location of dwellings, in that age and country, was determined almost exclusively by springs. Every other consideration yielded to this.

Here we took up our abode in a home of our own in the spring of 1841, as above stated. The farm was afterwards enlarged by other purchases, and the original still remains in the family. The poverty of the soil, its tendency to produce briars, its large amount of heavy timber, with the clearing necessary to be done, made it a place specially favorable for the cultivation of industry. My father was one of those men who never ran short of work; he always had plenty of it for himself and the whole family. Recreation was almost unknown, and we had hardly rest enough to secure good health. We were not of those who had to resort to base-ball and foot-ball for exercise; it was ours to combine pleasure with profit, only the profit was more than the pleasure. There is no doubt that employment contributes to health of both body and mind. Good blood, good thought and good morals are born of industry, provided it be not pushed to the extreme of exhaustion. Children and young people must have relaxation from toil, that both the physical and mental powers may recuperate; but not much attention

was paid to this beneficent philosophy in my father's family. Had there been, it might have been better for at least some of his children in after years. There is a golden mean in this, as in other things, which parents sometimes miss in their blind adhesion to a false theory. Rest and labor are both appointments of God's benevolence.

CHAPTER II.

His First School. The School-house. The Teacher. The Order of Reciting. Spelling Matches. First Sweetheart. Extremes in Likes and Dislikes. Fondness for Study. Improvement in Schools.

At the age of about seven I attended my first school. The house was on my father's farm, a half a mile from our dwelling. It was constructed of round logs, and had *five* corners—the fifth was formed at one end by having shorter logs laid from the corners at an obtuse angle, like the corner of a rail fence, and meeting in the middle. It was built up thus to the square, then the logs went straight across, forming the end for the roof to rest on; consequently this fifth corner was open, and this was the fire-place. Stones laid with mud mortar were built in this corner, extending several feet each way, and wood nearly as long as the breadth of the house would be filled in. The seats were split logs smoothed on the flat side, and supported on legs put in with an auger. From these the feet of the children dangled early and late. There was no support for the back. The house had a dirt floor and a clap-board roof. Light was let in by cutting away part of two logs in the end. A wide puncheon was fastened just below this for the writers, with a seat to correspond. During winter they pasted paper over these openings, and light for the rest of the school came down the chimney.

The first teacher we had was an old man by the name of Ballou. He lived on our place, not far from the school-house, and taught for several years. He was very poor, did poor

teaching, and got poor pay. He was master of only reading, writing and ciphering.

There were no classes in the school, and each one went it independently, studying what suited his taste and ability. Some read in the Testament, and others in any book they happened to have. In those days the rule was that those who got to school first "said first"—that is, they recited in the order in which they got to the house. This would sometimes get up a great rivalry, and I have known young men living two miles away to be at school before daylight. The whole day, except an hour at noon, was spent in saying lessons. The old teacher sat in his chair, and the pupils went to him one by one, in the order in which they got to the house, and said their lessons. When they got around, the same process was repeated. Sometimes between turns the old man would take a little nap, and then we all would have some fun. One more bold than the rest would tickle his bald head or his nose, and to see him scratching would afford us much amusement.

Each Friday afternoon was spent in a spelling-match. Captains were chosen, and they would "choose up" till the school was divided into two classes. Beginning at the head, one of each class would stand up and spell, till one was "turned down;" then another took his place, and so on until all on one side were down. I began at this school in the alphabet, and the second winter I could spell almost every word in Webster's old Elementary Speller. If provided with a sharp knife, and a stick on which to whittle, which the kind old man would allow, I could generally stand most of an afternoon without missing. Strange to say, after a few years,

when I had given myself to the study of other things, it all went from me, and I have been a poor speller ever since.

In this school I had my first sweetheart—a buxom, jolly good girl, about six years my senior. To her I wrote my first love letter, and when it was done its chirography looked as if it had been struck by lightning; and I had to get an old bachelor friend to help me read it. Here I am reminded of an early tendency to extremes in my likes and dislikes. I had a race one morning with a girl whom I saw coming to school from an opposite direction, each striving to get into the house first. I clearly went in ahead, but she claimed the race and beat me out of it. From this on I had an extreme dislike for her. The spring to which we all had to go for a drink, was about a hundred yards from the house. The path to it passed through a broken place in a large log that lay across this path. In this I would never walk, nor would I pass through the gap, but would always climb over that big log.

These school days were only during winter, after the crop was all gathered in and before spring work began. After I got large enough to help in winter work, my attendance was only "semi-occasional." After a while a better school-house was built, a mile further away, and it was every way more comfortable, save that we had still the backless slab seats. Here I went at odd times in winter for several years. I had acquired a great fondness for reading, devouring everything in the way of books I could lay my hands upon. Especially I had a great passion for history, biography, geography, natural philosophy, and the like, and I let nothing escape me that the country afforded. I had no money to buy books, and had to depend on borrowing them. I soon went through

arithmetic, grammar, and the history of the United States. This was more than my paterfamilias recognized as essential to a practical education, and hence he was not disposed to let me go to school as much as the other children, who gave themselves no concern about books out of school. The idea of one's going through grammar, philosophy, or more than half the arithmetic, "unless he was going to teach," he regarded as a waste of time. His conception of life and mine were so different that there was frequently more or less friction. It was decidedly unpleasant from youth to manhood to be discouraged and opposed in my one absorbing passion for obtaining an education. My mother sympathized with me, but could not help me. The first dollar I ever made I spent for a book, and for this purpose I saved my hard-earned pennies. Midnight often found me poring over this book by the light of kindling prepared for the purpose. This was opposed; and thus the struggle went on during my minority.

I can not forbear, before closing this short chapter upon my school life, to allude to the great improvement in the matter of common schools since I was a boy. My native State, though sadly behind many of her younger sisters, has made some progress in this direction, and I can but hope this is only an earnest of what is to come. In a few favored localities, chiefly the cities, there is ample provision made for the education of the children of the people, but in the country districts much remains to be done before we are up with the demands of the age in regard to the comfort of the pupils as well as the facilities for the prosecution of their studies. We need more and better school-houses, better

furniture, and more attractive surroundings. Well qualified and earnest teachers are not yet as thick as blackberries in Kentucky. When as much attention is bestowed on these as on jockeys, and on our boys as on our horses, we shall be both richer and better.

CHAPTER III.

His Religious Experience. Tries to be a Methodist. Hopes to become a Preacher. Boy Preaching. Attends a Sunday-school. "Chaws" Tobacco. Goes to Love Feast. Mourners' Bench Experience. Is Puzzled and Disgusted.

My parents were Methodists, as were their ancestors on both sides. My mother was uniformly religious, but not fussy about it. I have seen her intensely happy, but never heard her shout. Her religion was a deep, smooth, current without fluctuation. My father was religious more by spells, but still he never went to extremes, and could never "get religion" at the altar, in the Methodist fashion. This lifelong failure of his discouraged him, causing him at times to become somewhat skeptical and indifferent. But he died, rejoicing in the faith of Christ as held by the Methodist Church.

When about ten years of age I joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. A great revival was in progress at La Grange, and over one hundred persons united with the church. I enjoyed the services, and continued to do so for a number of years. Often in those early times I rode to meeting at surrounding churches and private dwellings on horseback behind my mother. I still remember, as vividly as if it were but yesterday, the texts and treatment of many of the sermons I heard. In later years I have frequently thought of the fallacies the preachers imposed upon us, and, I charitably believe, upon themselves, in these sermons, but which neither we nor they could detect for want of correct scriptural knowledge. The thought that I should one day become a preacher impressed me, and it clung to me for

years. When afterwards I grew wild and wicked, this impression possessed me, and many a time, when my good wife would rebuke me for my wickedness, I would say, "Never mind, dear; I'll be a preacher yet." I had a high regard for preachers, and from early life was fond of their company; and since I have become one myself, the society of good, faithful men of God brings me as near heaven as I shall ever be in the flesh.

It was a common thing with me, when I came home from meeting, to get up one of my own by gathering the children together and preaching to them the sermons I had heard; and while these were not verbally correct, there was in them the substance of what the preachers had delivered. I would sing and pray, and go through the whole performance. I improvised a little pulpit, and had a church after my own notion; I was a great plagiarist, and in this, too, I copied after some others.

I attended the first Sunday-school I ever heard of; it was conducted by Floyd Wellman, a gentleman who afterwards became a prominent and honored citizen of Louisville. Sunday-schools were then poor things, as I fear many of them are yet. Little question-books, with the answers supplied, and reading-books, mostly about angelic boys and girls who died of early piety, furnished the staple of our reading, while but little of the Scriptures was taught, or thought about.

To chew tobacco seemed to me to be manly; so to let the people see I was thus far developed, I prepared me a rough twist of "long green;" this I stuck in my pantaloons pocket, for the occasion, and when everything was propitious in the

Sunday-school, I drew out the twist and bit off a "chaw." It raised quite a laugh, in which the superintendent himself joined; and this ended for life my chewing tobacco to be seen of men.

I often went with my parents to "love feast." At the first of these which I attended I had an experience of my own. The light-bread was cut into slips about two inches long and a half an inch wide and thick. Some of these were then divided into small pieces. On the plate which was passed around were two long pieces, and I concluded that if there was any virtue in the thing it would be enhanced by my taking a long one; but when I discovered that all the rest had taken but a bite my philosophy failed, and I hid the remainder where Rachel hid the gods of her father Laban.

When about fifteen years of age the Methodists had a big revival at Mount Tabor, a neighboring country church. In this meeting a great many of my friends and companions were "getting religion" at the altar of prayer. I became intensely desirous of the same blessing, and in great anxiety and hopefulness I went to the altar. Day after day did I go, but only to be disappointed. Every time some would "get through," and there would be great rejoicing, till only one young man and myself were left. The whole power of the church was then concentrated on us, but to no purpose. In this extremity I began to reason about it as I had not done before. I had been taught that "God was no respecter of persons; but that in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." My soul ever recoiled from the idea of His decreeing some men to salvation and others to damnation, irrespective of their own

will and conduct. Here, now, I was as helpless as a stone till God should do this work of grace for me. Why would he send down the Holy Spirit and convert one on my right, another on my left, till the "bench" was vacant, and not convert me? The preachers were praying for Him to do it; my father and mother were praying earnestly for it; the whole church were pleading with Him, and yet He would not do it. I knew I was a sinner; that I wanted salvation; that I was sincere, earnest as the others could be: but all this availed nothing. The preachers tried to explain the failure on the ground that I was still clinging to the world and my own righteousness; that I had not given my heart wholly to God, etc. This I knew to be false. I concluded that if a poor, penitent, agonizing sinner with all his prayers and pleadings, with the whole church earnestly coöperating, could not induce God to save him, he might just as well be decreed to damnation from all eternity. With these reflections I left the mourners' bench in disgust, and ever since I have had for it an inexpressible contempt. Time and observation have confirmed me in this feeling; and while I cherish a sincere respect for those who in ignorance think it is a divine arrangement, and that in resorting to it they are obeying a command of God, I have none for those who, knowing better, still use it as a means of conversion. As often employed by professional evangelists, there is so much of clap-trap that it must bring the whole subject of religion into contempt with sensible people. It is amazing to me that, in view of its entire lack of Scripture precept or example, the light and knowledge of this day, and its

frequent failures, it, and the whole system of which it is an essential part, are not laid aside.

Having been taught that Methodism and Christianity were identical, and having completely lost faith in the former, it was natural enough that I should become skeptical as to the latter. Only a lingering suspicion that after all they might be different, saved me from hopeless infidelity; and had I not in after years learned such to be the case, I should have lived and died in rebellion against God.

CHAPTER IV.

Fun and Mischief. His Little Cousin and the "Gnats." The Aurora Borealis. A Bumble-bee Scrape. Another Bee Scrape. Justification by Faith alone. Readiness to Fight. Love of Justice. No Surrender.

When a boy, I was as full of fun and mischief as an egg is of meat, and I have never got rid of it. With a younger brother and a neighbor boy of my own age, equally mischievous with myself, there was hardly a thing in the way of fun and frolic that we were not continually into. Hunting rabbits was our chief sport, and, when we got larger, coons, 'possums and the like at night. There was not a tree of any peculiarity, or a hole in the ground, for miles around, that we did not know all about. We knew, also, every fruit tree, from the apple to the black-haw or persimmon in the same territory, and the time they were ready for company; and we never failed to pay our respects to them all in due time. I would not mention many of the bad things of my early life; but that is the way the Bible does with its heroes, and the Bible is always a safe guide to follow.

About all the money we made in our boyhood days was from the sale of nuts and the flesh and skins of the animals we caught during the fall and winter. This was my way of getting books, maps, etc., to help me in my studies. I was the recognized leader in all the mischief we did, and many prophecies were made that I should one day be hanged, and in this anticipation my father fully shared. My younger brother and I were constantly playing practical jokes on

each other, and often upon others. We never became offended, though the pranks were sometimes exceedingly rough; but we were always watching an opportunity to "get even." I will relate a few as samples, while others are too bad to tell.

On one occasion some cousins and their children visited us from Shelby county. They were considered quite wealthy for that time. Their little boy was dressed in very fine clothes, at least, in our estimation, and we concluded he was putting on airs. We thought we would do him a valuable service by taking him down a little, so we asked him if he had ever seen a singular kind of gnat, which we described. He had not. We proposed to show him a fine lot—a big nest of them. We affirmed that they were nice, harmless things to play with. So we went forth to see the gnats. We got him to the nest and stirred them up, and in a few minutes the innocent, unsuspecting boy was covered with yellow jackets. Of course, he ran to the house screaming, and they had a time in getting them off of him. He was badly stung, but we made it appear that we had gone down there to fight them, which was a favorite pastime with us, and that he got too near the nest. Thus we escaped a well-merited whipping.

About the same time in life my younger brother and I caught a rabbit and dressed it for breakfast. It was Saturday afternoon, and father and mother had gone to her father's, some six miles away, to stay till the next evening. That night the aurora borealis was unusually bright, and as the excitement of Millerism had not died away, there was much talk of the world's coming to an end. My oldest sister, Mary, was getting supper ready and was greatly alarmed. She

would go out and watch the sky, and then go back to see about the supper. Finally I said, "Mary, do you really think the world will come to an end before morning?" "I do believe it will," said she. "Then," said I, "*we must have the rabbit for supper.*" I had no notion of losing my rabbit by such a trifling circumstance as that.

Later in life, when old enough to work in the harvest field, we had a neighbor who was very "close," and we never had any fancy for him. He was always boasting of his ability to work with bees. One year he had a large harvest, and many hands employed, and we were helping him. One day we told him we had found a fine bee tree which could be cut down in a few minutes, and that if he would go and take the honey he might have it all except what we could eat. He was delighted with the proposal, so after supper a number of us started for the bee tree, a mile and a half from his house, in a dense forest. He had several buckets prepared to secure a large amount of honey. When we began to chop, the bees began to roar, and our friend was frantic with delight. Soon the tree fell, and he "waded in" with his axe and buckets to get the luscious spoil. As he went in we went out, and soon he discovered himself in a big bumble-bees' nest alone with all his buckets, etc., a mile and a half from home! We saw no more of him that night, and did not care to meet him next day.

This reminds me of another bee scrape, in which my father figured largely. He prided himself on being able to handle bees as so many flies. On a cool, drizzly day we cut a bee tree on the farm. I was wearing a brown jeans sack coat. This I laid aside while chopping. When the tree fell the