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## **FIVE VERSIONS OF THE SIMON CARLISLE STORY**

**Compiled By Duane V. Maxey**

Proverbs 12:19 "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment."

Revelation 21:8 "All liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the text below this Introduction, you will find "The Simon Carlisle" story -- as recorded by five different authors: James B. Finley, Peter Cartwright, Abel Stevens, W. E. Shepard, and W. M. Tidwell.

It is interesting to note that some of the details of the story vary in these accounts. For example, in one account a "brace of pistols," plural, is involved in the plot, while in the other account it is a single pistol. And, there are other variations, but they all speak of the same sad and sobering chain of events in the life of Simon Carlisle -- a story that ended well for the innocent victim, but very possibly with the eternal damnation of the culprit.

Simon Carlisle and his brother Coleman Carlisle were early M. E. Itinerant preachers. In his M. E. History, Nathan Bangs records: "Carlisle, Simon -- Received, 1790, Died 1838." According to James B. Finley's account, the particular story from Simon Carlisle's life that is here focused upon transpired approximately between 1793 and 1796 -- some 42 years before the end of Simon Carlisle's life, but I think it may have been a story that this dear, unjustly maligned victim of a "frame-up" remembered very clearly to his dying day.

In Abel Stevens' version of the Simon Carlisle Story I have included some material preceding it about his brother, Coleman Carlisle.

WHICH OF THESE ACCOUNTS IS MOST ACCURATE? Frankly, I am not sure. W. E. Shepard and W. M. Tidwell took their versions from Peter Cartwright, but whether it was James B. Finley, Peter Cartwright, or Abel Stevens that got the story the straightest, I know not. I will let the reader judge on that. The basic facts in the story are virtually the same, with only some variation in the details.

[P.S. In Shepard's and Tidwell's versions of this story you can see how that in some instances HDM has in its Library the source material from which later holiness writers have quoted. By presenting some of the earliest Wesleyan/Holiness material, HDM sometimes makes it possible for students of Holiness History to go back to the original source(s) to verify facts, and in some cases, to pick up on misquotations and errors related by later holiness writers. -- DVM]

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### Part 1

#### JAMES B. FINLEY'S VERSION OF THE SIMON CARLISLE STORY

Taken from "Sketches of Western Methodism," hdm0230

There were several important events which transpired this year in the bounds of Guilford circuit that require a passing notice. A few years previous brother Simon Carlisle, quite a talented young man, was stationed on Caswell circuit, the circuit adjoining Guilford. He had been acceptable and useful, and completed his year to the satisfaction of all. In those days it was the custom for the preacher to select some place in the circuit which he considered his home, where he deposited for safekeeping his surplus books and clothes, etc. He had made his home at a brother Harrison's, not far from Dunn river; and on the morning he was about to leave the circuit for the annual conference, he packed up his things in his saddle-bags, and left them in his room unlocked, and went out to see something about his horse. In his absence a wicked young man, son of brother Harrison, put a pocket pistol into his saddle-bags. On his return to the room, without making any examination, he locked his saddlebags; and left for conference. When he arrived at his mother's, on the way to conference, on taking his things out of his saddlebag, he, found a pocket pistol. He could not account for its being there; but leaving it he proceeded on to conference. During the year the pistol was taken to a shop on the road to have some repairs done to it, and a person passing challenged the same as being the pistol of young Harrison, and the same was traced to brother Carlisle. At the next annual conference, in 1794, he was charged with the fact of taking the pistol, and excommunicated from the Church, and so returned on the Minutes of that year. During the summer of 1796 young Harrison was taken sick and died; but just before his death he made a full confession of his having put the pistol into the saddle-bags of brother Carlisle, with the intention of injuring him; and I had the pleasure of restoring brother Carlisle again to the bosom of the Church, to his great joy. He has remained a minister in good standing ever since, and has been living for many years in Middle Tennessee, and has in old age connected himself with the traveling connection in the Tennessee conference.

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### Part 2

## PETER CARTWRIGHT'S VERSION OF THE SIMON CARLISLE STORY

Taken from Chapter 16 of Cartwright's Autobiography

[At the time this document was completed, work was still in progress on Peter Cartwright's Autobiography, the source from which this version of the Simon Carlisle story was taken. Therefore, no HDM file number could be given, but the reader can locate the file number by referring to the title: "Autobiography of Peter Cartwright," in the HDM Titles Index.]

There is another circumstance I wish to state before I close this chapter.

The brother, Simon Carlisle, before mentioned, had been a regular circuit preacher, somewhere down south, and there was a wealthy family at or near one of his appointments. The old gentleman and lady were members of the Church; but they had a very profligate son, who behaved disorderly at one of Carlisle's appointments, and Carlisle sharply reproved him for his disorderly conduct, at which the young man took great umbrage, and swore he would have satisfaction out of Carlisle. The house of the father of this young man was the preacher's home. When Carlisle came round next time, he was as usual invited by this old brother home with him. Brother Carlisle said, as he had offended his son, perhaps he had better not go; but the old brother and sister insisted he should go; for they knew their son was to blame altogether, and that Carlisle had done nothing but his duty in reprovng him; so he went. This young man was at home, but slunk about, and would not be social with Carlisle; and next morning, while Carlisle was fixing his horse to ride on to his next appointment, he took a brace of pistols, and slipped into the room where Carlisle's saddle-bags were lying, and put those pistols in the bottom of his saddle-bags, unperceived and unsuspected by Carlisle, or any body else. Shortly after Carlisle started, the young man pretended to miss his pistols, and declared he knew that Carlisle had stolen them. The old people remonstrated against any such imputation; but he persisted in affirming he knew that the preacher had stolen his pistols, and off he started, got a writ and an officer, and pursued Carlisle, and before he reached his next appointment they overtook him. The officer informed him of the allegation, and that he had a writ for him, and that he was his prisoner. Carlisle, conscious of his innocence, told the officer that he was welcome to search him, and handed over his saddle-bags, when, lo and behold! there were the pistols at the bottom of them. What could he say? He protested his innocence, but submitted to the law, was found guilty, and only escaped being incarcerated in prison by the father of this mean young man going his bail till further trial.

We will not narrate the trouble and cost Carlisle was put to before he got clear of this malicious prosecution. Suffice it to say, during the pendency of this prosecution, the annual conference came on, and Carlisle had to answer to this criminal charge; but what could he say? He had no evidence of his innocence, and by possibility could have none. The conference did not believe him guilty, but his guilt was sworn to by this young man. In this dilemma into which the conference was thrown, Carlisle rose and requested the conference, for the honor of the cause of God, that they would expel him till God should, in some way, vindicate his innocence. He affirmed he was innocent, and that he believed God would shortly make his innocence manifest to all.

The conference very reluctantly, and by a bare majority, expelled him. Able counsel, believing in his innocence, volunteered in his defense. He was cleared. Believing it to be his duty and privilege, he married, and when I saw him he had an interesting rising family. The Church

restored him to his former standing, offered him a circuit, but for the present he declined traveling, and went to work to support his family, and did it with credit to himself and them.

But the circumstance that triumphantly vindicated his innocence remains yet to be told. The young man who pursued him so maliciously, in about nine months after Carlisle was arrested, was taken down with a fever common to that region of country. The best medical aid was called in; he was faithfully attended and administered unto. His parents were much alarmed for his safety and his salvation. He was talked to and prayed with, but to no purpose. His physicians told him he must die. He then said he could not die till he disclosed one important matter. His parents were called in, and he frankly told them and others that he put his pistols in Carlisle's saddle-bags himself; and shortly after the disclosure he expired, without hope of mercy.

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### Part 3

#### ABEL STEVENS' VERSION OF THE SIMON CARLISLE STORY

Taken from Stevens' M. E. History, Vol. III, hdm0226

[I have included Stevens' remarks about Simon Carlisle's brother, Coleman Carlisle. -- DVM]

The two brothers, Coleman and Simon Carlisle, were successful evangelists of the South. The former joined the itinerancy in 1792, and was sent to Broad River Circuit; in 1793, to Tar River; 1794, Broad River. At the end of this year he located; but in 1801 he rejoined the Conference, and was sent to Broad River; in 1802, to Saluda; in 1803, to Sandy River. This year, compelled by domestic necessities, he again located; but he loved the itinerancy, and whenever he could leave his helpless family to travel he did so. In 1819 he again joined the Conference, and was appointed to Bush River Circuit. In the latter part of 1823 he "finally located, not from choice, but from absolute necessity." "He was," says one of his ministerial contemporaries, a poor man, with a sickly; though truly good and excellent wife, and quite a number of little boys and girls. I have known him, after returning home from preaching several miles distant, after supper, take the same horse (having but one) and plow with him by moonlight 'until nearly midnight, and then go off next morning to his appointments. He neither owned nor hired servants. O tell me not of the hardships of our itinerant brethren in the present day! In Carlisle's time there was no provision made for 'family expenses.' Every married preacher had to buy his corn and meat out of the small pittance of his disciplinary allowance, which, small as it was, was very frequently not received. In such cases the poor itinerant had to raise his bread and meat, and make a little, to school his children, by hard and incessant labors, with anxious watching thereunto. He was a very popular preacher, and when local, he would be sent for far and near to preach funeral sermons; and what is strange, passing strange, if for his long rides and good sermons he ever received a present to the amount of a picayune [Oxford Dict. picayune -- n. 1 a small coin of little value, esp. a 5-cent piece. 2 an insignificant person or thing. -- adj. mean; contemptible; petty. -- "picayunish" -- DVM] I know not. He was a man of strong passions, by nature quite irritable, and his peculiar temperament was a matter of deep regret to him. Hence he used to say to me, that he believed an ounce of grace would go further with some than a pound would with others. But he was deeply pious, conscientious in his attention to closet and family worship, and by grace was enabled to

subdue his natural passions, and to keep them in proper bounds. I never knew him thrown off his hinges in the pulpit but once. While preaching a woman sat right before him with a child, which kept up a constant squalling; about midway of his sermon he said, 'Do, sister, take that child out,' and down he sat, not rising again to finish his sermon. He was in general quite social and agreeable with all around him. He was in particular a great favorite with the young. To myself he was a father, brother, and sincere friend. I hope never to forget him. Carlisle lived to a good old age 'and he died,' when, where, or how, some of his children and near neighbors may know; but, alas! the Church at large in South Carolina knows it not. Yet he was among the pioneers of Southern Methodism. He endured hardships as a good soldier of Christ. He often hungered and thirsted. He labored, working with his own hands: being reviled, he reviled not again; being persecuted, he suffered it; being defamed, he entreated. He endeavored, as far as in him lay, to preach Christ crucified to rich and poor, to white and colored, to young and old. The day of judgment will tell of many who were brought home to God and to glory through his instrumentality. Peace to his remains wherever they may lie!"

It is a grateful privilege to rescue from oblivion the names of such laborers and sufferers for the Church, however sad may be our sense of the inadequacy of their record.

His brother, Simon Carlisle, preceded him in the ministry by two years, endured also the severest hardships of the itinerancy, and an additional and extraordinary trial, from which, however, he had at last one of those providential vindications which so often occur in the annals of English and American Methodism, and which may well inspire with hope all innocent sufferers. After having labored with humble but intrepid devotion on some of the hardest fields of the South, he was arrested before the Church, and expelled in 1794, and his name appears in the Minutes of that year branded with reproach as a fallen and outcast man. No affliction, no martyrdom could have been more appalling to a faithful Methodist preacher of those days of ministerial chivalry. The charge alleged against him was such as, if possible, to enhance the bitterness of his grief; by combining meanness with guilt, for it was theft! For two years the guiltless man bore, with bowed head, this great, and to him mysterious, sorrow; but his faith failed not. He had given offense by reproofing a disturbance in one of his rude frontier congregations; under the provocation a young man went to his stopping place, placed a pistol in his saddle-bags, and the next day got out a search-warrant for him, making oath that he believed Carlisle had stolen his weapon. An officer hastened after him on his circuit, overtook him, and charged him with the crime. The astonished preacher, conscious of innocence, readily consented to have his saddle-bags searched. The pistol was found in them; he was thunderstruck; he knew not what to do, but calmly gave himself up to the officer. He was found guilty, and had no way to clear himself. Even the Church threw him off; but the criminal young man was cast on his death-bed. About an hour before he expired he frantically cried out, "I cannot die, I cannot die until I reveal one thing. Mr. Carlisle never stole that pistol; I myself put it in his saddle-bags." He then became calm, and so passed into eternity. Carlisle was restored to the ministry, and died in it with peace in 1838.

Such are a few of the "giants of those days" in the more southern field of Methodism.

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WILLIAM EDWARD SHEPARD'S QUOTATION OF THE SIMON CARLISLE STORY  
From "Sin, The Tell-Tale," hdm0707

The Traveling Preacher And Dying Deceiver

Peter Cartwright, in his autobiography, tells the story of Simon Carlisle, a circuit rider: "At or near one of his appointments was a wealthy family. The old gentleman and lady were members of the church, but they had a very profligate son, who behaved disorderly at one of Carlisle's appointments, and Carlisle sharply reproved him for his disorderly conduct, at which the young man took great umbrage, and swore he would have satisfaction out of Carlisle.

"The house of the father of this young man was the preacher's home. When Carlisle came around next time, he was as usual invited by this old brother home with him. Brother Carlisle said, as he had offended his son, perhaps he had better not go; but the old brother and sister insisted he should go; for they knew their son was to blame altogether, and that Carlisle had done nothing but his duty in reproving him. So he went.

"This young man was at home, but he slunk about, and would not be social with Carlisle, and next morning while Carlisle was fixing his horse to ride on to his next appointment, he took a brace of pistols and slipped into the room where Carlisle's saddle-bags were lying and put those pistols in the bottom of his saddle-bags, unperceived and unsuspected by Carlisle or anybody else.

"Shortly after Carlisle started, the young man pretended to miss his pistols, and declared he knew that Carlisle had stolen them. The old people remonstrated against any such imputation; but he persisted in affirming he knew that the preacher had stolen his pistols, and off he started, got a writ and an officer, and pursued Carlisle, and before he reached his next appointment they overtook him. The officer informed him of the allegation, and that he had a writ for him, and that he was his prisoner. Carlisle, conscious of his innocence, told the officer that he was welcome to search him, and handed over his saddle-bags, when, lo and behold! there were the pistols at the bottom of them. What could he say? He protested his innocence, but submitted to the law, was found guilty, and only escaped being incarcerated in prison by the father of this young man going his bail till further trial.

"We will not narrate the trouble and cost Carlisle was put to before he got clear of this malicious prosecution. The annual conference came on, and Carlisle had to answer to this criminal charge. But what could he say? He had no evidence of his innocence, and by no possibility could have any. The conference did not believe him guilty, but his guilt was sworn to by this young man. In this dilemma into which the conference was thrown, Carlisle rose and requested the conference for the honor of the cause of God that they would expel him till God should, in some way, vindicate his innocence. He affirmed he was innocent, and that he believed God would shortly make his innocence manifest to all.

"The conference very reluctantly, and by a bare majority, expelled him. Able counsel, believing in his innocence, volunteered in his defense. He was cleared.

"But the circumstance that triumphantly vindicated his innocence remains yet to be told. The young man who pursued him so maliciously, in about nine months after Carlisle was arrested, was taken down with a fever common to that region of country. The best medical aid was called in. He was faithfully attended and administered unto. His parents were much alarmed for his safety and his salvation. He was talked to and prayed with, but to no purpose. His physicians told him he must die. He then said he could not die till he disclosed one important matter. His parents were called in, and he frankly told them and others, that he put his pistols in Carlisle's saddle-bags himself, and shortly after the disclosure he expired, without hope of mercy."

In view of the awful certainty of death, why will people hang on to sin till death fastens its cruel clutches upon the heartstrings? How sad that so many when it is too late to rectify, confess that death has overtaken them in their sins and they die with no hope!

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#### Part 5

#### WILLIAM M. TIDWELL'S VERSION OF THE SIMON CARLISLE STORY

Taken From Tidwell's book, "Pointed Illustrations," hdm0231

#### Sin Exposed in Death

Rev. Peter Cartwright relates the following: There was a wealthy family where Brother Simon Carlisle stopped when preaching at a certain place. The father and mother were devout but had a very profligate son, who became offended at Brother Carlisle and swore he would have vengeance on him. Brother Carlisle came again to preach after the young man became so offended. Brother Carlisle insisted that he had better not go home with them, as the young man was so bitter; but the family pressed him. The young man refused to come in and just sulked about the place. This young man had a pistol and slipped into the room and put it into Brother Carlisle's saddlebags. When the preacher had gone, he claimed to miss his pistol and declared Carlisle had stolen it. The father and mother insisted that it was not true, but he secured a writ and officer and pursued Carlisle. Brother Carlisle insisted that he was innocent, but the saddlebags were searched and the pistol found. He escaped imprisonment only by the father of the young man going on his bond.

Conference came on, and Carlisle declared he was innocent but insisted that he be suspended from conference as he was under sentence. The conference reluctantly did it, declaring that God would vindicate him. A few months later the young man was taken with a deadly fever. Soon the end was near. The young man called his parents and said, "I can't die until I confess that I put the pistol in Brother Carlisle's saddlebags," and immediately died without hope.

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THE END