



BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

The Dalton Revival of 1864

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"Battle of Missionary Ridge" by Kurz and Allen | Library of Congress

The demoralized mob of half-starved, half-shod men that was the Confederate Army of Tennessee found itself sojourning in Dalton following the devastating defeat at Missionary Ridge at Chattanooga that had forced the resignation of Gen. Braxton Bragg and brought the cautious and defensive-minded Gen. Joseph E. Johnston to the Georgia Gibraltar, as Dalton was called by some. Within a few weeks after his arrival, Johnston secured new shoes, guns, blankets, food, and all of the equipment, materials, and supplies that an army and its men needed. Morale quickly improved.

Winter 1864, the fourth year of the war, and the idle time spent in the camps around the little city prompted much reflection by the men and officers of the army. Most of the Confederate soldiers had experienced all of the hardships of war from marching to digging, to freezing, to being soaked, to being heat stricken, to being hungry, to being exhausted, to being shot at, to being wounded, to being sick, to remaining sick, to being fearful for their loved ones suffering from hunger or exposure at home. Some had tried to go home, with or without permission. Others had not been home in over two years. Still others, like the Kentucky Orphan Brigade, could not go home because their homes were beyond the enemy's lines.

During this time, men questioned not only the worthiness of the continuing conflict which was the American Civil War, or War for Southern Independence as they generally termed it, but also their own mortality. By January 1864, the common soldiers of both sides knew the risks, and the apparent likelihood, that sooner or later there would be a bullet or cannonball or shell with each of their names on it. From the horrific fields at Shiloh and Perryville, to Vicksburg and Baton Rouge, to Murfreesboro and Chickamauga, and finally at Chattanooga, the veterans understood that, so long as the terrible war continued, it was only a matter of time before they became the next casualties.



"The Christian's Harp" | LOC

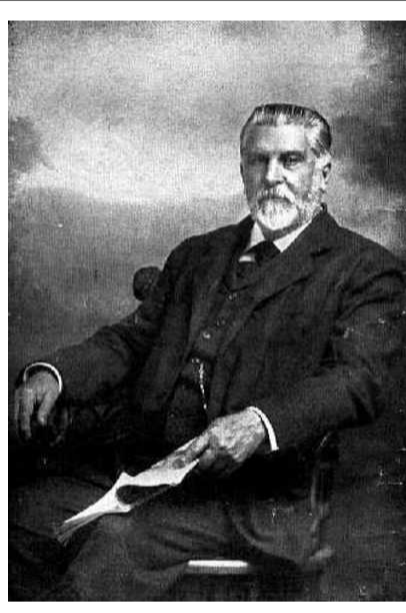
It is no wonder then that, while idle in the camps around Dalton, the men discussed and considered the question of life after death, or that those who had not been religious prior to the war began to consider their faith. It was into this situation that quite a number of chaplains and ministers came to the camps at Dalton to reach, teach, and preach. And preach they did. Beginning in January, and continuing after some fighting in the area in February, men walked to town from their camps to hear various sermons that were available every night in the downtown churches and public buildings.

Church meetings provided a chance for soldiers to increase in faith, as well as to enjoy good entertainment. A number of the preachers were stirring orators. Besides, attending nightly church meetings afforded a chance to see the local ladies and girls who, of course, attended to see all of the men who had made Dalton their temporary home. With a populace of just 3,000 prior to the invasion of the friendly horde, Dalton had suddenly become a city of tents, huts, and makeshift cabins for miles around. The 50,000-plus army settled all around the city, much in the manner that the neighborhoods surround Dalton today. Thus, the soldiers could hike just 3 to 5 miles to town to watch a good preaching and see the fairer sex.

But, while many men came to the preaching for entertainment or for a chance at courtship, just as many took very seriously their discomfiture over the status of their souls. In what became known as the Dalton Revival, a great fervor swept over the city and camps, as many men made public professions of faith and were baptized, and many renewed their commitments to follow Christ.



Rev. Washington Bryan Crumpton ca 1882



Rev. Jabez L. M. Curry in 1901

A substantial number of men also made private covenants with God that, if they should be spared the bullet and the bayonet and survive the war, then they would become ministers or missionaries for their faith. One such "minister-to-be" was Washington Bryan Crumpton, who was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1870 and he went on to serve in a number of ministerial roles for six decades following the war. Wash Crumpton would be instrumental in advancing the role of the Southern Baptist Convention concerning the need to raise awareness and funding for seminaries, missionaries, and educational materials for Sunday School and mission training.

Reverend Jabez L. M. Curry of Alabama was one of Dalton's leading preachers. According to Derrell C. Roberts' *The Gray Winter of 1864 in Dalton*, Curry noted that as many as 50,000 decisions for Christ were made during the winter encampment. If so, then virtually every soldier made a decision or rededication during his tenure at Dalton. Curry noted that not only was Dalton a veritable "Who's Who" of famous Protestant preachers from all denominations, it was also a destination of Catholic priests, including Father William Ryan of Atlanta's Roman Catholic Church.

In order to maximize the effect of the various efforts by the different faiths and preachers, the chaplains and ministers formed, by February 1864, a "Chaplain's Association." By the spring of 1864, as the weather warmed, brush arbors popped up across the camps and the preachers kept on preaching, and more souls were saved, and more commitments to become preachers after the war were made.

Renowned Methodist minister A. G. Haygood recorded, "Many Christians wept and sinners looked seriously and wondering on. It was so unlike the rude scenes of war. I shall never forget, and I shall always feel it, when I remember how these rough-bearded, war-worn and battle-scarred veterans of three years' of fierce conflict crowded around the log—the rude altar improvised for the occasion—to celebrate the death of their gracious and adorable Redeemer (during a communion service). Three-fourths of the communicants—and they were from various denominations represented in the command—were in tears."

The impact of the Dalton Revival was so great that many biblical historians look to the movement during these months as the genesis for the great revivals that spread across the Southland and the nation in the decades following the war. Many of the preachers of that era could trace the origins of their callings to the hills and valleys and camps around Dalton during the war.



Rev. A. G. Haygood

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