

**THE CIRCUIT RIDER; A TALE
OF THE HEROIC AGE OF
AMERICAN METHODISM**

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The circuit rider; a tale of the heroic age of American Methodism by Edward Eggleston

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EDWARD EGGLESTON

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AMERICAN METHODISM**



"YOU ARE TWO TO ONE. WILL YOU GIVE ME TIME TO DRAW MY COAT?"—See p. 94.

THE
CIRCUIT RIDER

*A TALE OF THE HEROIC AGE OF
AMERICAN METHODISM*

BY

EDWARD EGGLESTON.

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness." *Isaiah*

"—— Beginners of a better time,
And glorying in their vows." *Tennyson*

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"NEC PROPTER VITAM, VIVENDI PERDERE CAUSAS"

TO
MY COMRADES OF OTHER YEARS

THE BRAVE AND SELF-SACRIFICING MEN
WITH WHOM I HAD THE HONOUR TO BE
ASSOCIATED IN A FRONTIER MINISTRY

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED



PREFACE



WHATEVER is incredible in this story is true.

The tale I have to tell will seem strange to those who know little of the social life of the West at the beginning of this century. These sharp contrasts of corn-shuckings and camp-meetings, of wild revels followed by wild revivals; these contacts of highwayman and preacher; this *mélange* of picturesque simplicity, grotesque humour and savage ferocity, of abandoned wickedness and austere piety, can hardly seem real to those who know the country now. But the books of biography and reminiscence which preserve the memory of that time more than justify what is marvellous in these pages.

Living, in early boyhood, on the very ground where my grandfather—brave old Indian-fighter!—had defended his family in a block-house built in a wilderness by his own hands, I grew up familiar with this strange wild life. At the age when other children hear fables and fairy stories, my childish fancy was filled with traditions of battles with Indians and highwaymen. Instead of imaginary giant-killers, children then heard of real Indian-slayers; instead of Blue-Beards we had Murrell and his robbers; instead of Little Red Riding Hood's wolf, we were regaled with the

daring adventures of the generation before us, in conflict with wild beasts on the very road we travelled to school. In many households the old customs still held sway; the wool was carded, spun, dyed, woven, cut and made up in the house: the corn-shucking, wood-chopping, quilting, apple-peeling, and country "hoe-down" had not yet fallen into disuse.

In a true picture of this life neither the Indian nor the hunter is the centre-piece, but the circuit-rider. More than any one else, the early circuit preachers brought order out of this chaos. In no other class was the real heroic element so finely displayed. How do I remember the forms and weather-beaten visages of the old preachers, whose constitutions had conquered starvation and exposure—who had survived swamps, alligators, Indians, highway robbers, and bilious fevers! How was my boyish soul tickled with their anecdotes of rude experience—how was my imagination wrought upon by the recital of their hairbreadth escapes! How was my heart set afire by their contagious religious enthusiasm, so that at eighteen years of age I bestrode the saddle-bags myself and laid upon a feeble frame the heavy burden of emulating their toils! Surely I have a right to celebrate them, since they came so near being the death of me.

It is not possible to write of this heroic race of men without enthusiasm. But nothing has been further from my mind than the glorifying of a sect. If I were capable of sectarian pride, I should not come upon the platform of Christian union¹ to display it. There are those indeed whose sectarian pride will be offended that I have frankly shown the rude as well as the heroic side of early Method-

¹ "The Circuit Rider" originally appeared as a serial in *The Christian Union*.