

John Dickins According to his Contemporaries

John Dickins was warmly recalled by other early Methodist pioneers, among them Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827), who served with him in New York in 1787, and whose memoirs were published by John in 1791. Garrettson wrote that Dickins was “a wise and good man, a great and useful preacher... He compiled that most excellent Scripture Catechism, which has been so long and so useful in the church. In his piety he was ardent, in his reproofs pointed, in his discipline rigid, but he was more rigid towards himself than towards others. He was one of my very intimate friends...”²⁹

Thomas Ware, quoted earlier regarding Dickins’ role in naming the Methodist Episcopal Church, called Dickins “a man of excellent sense, and amiable spirit. To this good man I could open all my heart, knowing that, if I erred, he would correct me, and do it in a spirit which would increase my obligations to, and esteem for him.”³⁰ Another early preacher who worked with Dickins was Jesse Lee (1758-1816). In his 1810 *Short History of the Methodists*, he described Dickins as

a man of quick and solid parts, a sound and close reasoner, and pointed preacher. He was peculiarly attentive to his duty, and very conscientious in the discharge of the exercises of prayer, both in the family and in the closet. His skill and fidelity as editor, inspector, and corrector of the press were exceedingly great. He conducted the whole of his business with punctuality and integrity... His death was more sensibly felt by the Methodist connection in general, than we had ever known or felt in the death of any other preacher that had died among us.³¹

Bishop Francis Asbury and John Dickins were particularly close. John named his son Asbury in honor of his friend, and managed the bishop’s personal financial affairs. Indeed, Dickins was called upon to defend the bishop’s integrity, when gossip alleged him to be profiting from the book business. Upon learning of Dickins’ death, Asbury wrote Ezekiel Cooper, asking him to take over the publishing work of the

²⁹Robert Drew Simpson, *American Methodist Pioneer: the Life and Journals of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 1752-1827* (Rutland, Vermont: Academy, 1984), 401, 411, 412.

³⁰Ware, 213.

³¹Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 254.

church, but communicating his own personal sense of loss: "What I have greatly feared for years hath now taken place. Dickins, the generous, the just, the faithful, skillful Dickins, is dead!"³² Within a few weeks of Dickins' death, Asbury was in Baltimore with Asbury Dickins, and recorded in his journal for October 9, "I had John Dickins' son with me: we sketched out a few traits of his father's life. For piety, probity, profitable preaching, holy living, Christian education of his children, secret closet prayer, I doubt whether his superior is to be found either in Europe or America."



Rev. Thomas Ware

For his part, Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, who would pick up Dickins' fallen mantle as Book Editor, was called upon to preach his funeral service at St. George's Church, which took place January 6, 1799. Cooper later recalled:

My own personal acquaintance with him has been considerably long and intimate.... Some of my most happy hours have been spent in his company, and I can say, it was good for me to be with him. With regard to his human literature or scientific knowledge, of which he possessed a great deal, I never could perceive that it puffed him up in the least; he possessed it, as though he possessed it not. But upon all suitable and profitable occasions, he would discover and exercise himself, a man of profound wisdom and knowledge... Where shall I find another, equally profitable, both in scientific and religious improvement? Were it necessary, how many testimonies could be produced in confirmation of the worth and excellence of the late great and good, the wise and useful Dickins?³³

³²Clark, III:173. On Asbury's finances and Dickins, see Darius L. Salter, *America's Bishop: The Life of Francis Asbury* (Nappanee, Indiana: Francis Asbury Press, 2003), 280-281.

³³Cooper, 35-36.