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HOW THEY ENTERED CANAAN
(A Collection of Holiness Experience Accounts)
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

FRANCIS ASBURY
1745 -- 1816

(*5 Items, plus compiler's comments in brackets)
(Methodist -- First American Bishop)

[It seems quite possible that Francis Asbury may have been Divinely assured, sometime before his death, of his entrance into the experience of perfect love. Item 1, is taken from pages 97, 206 and 216 of Larrabee's book, "Asbury and His Coadjutors," published in 1853. The capitalization is mine. -- DVM]

*Item 1

(Page 97) -- "I am resolved," says he, "on more frequent access to the throne of grace, not continuing so long as heretofore. I feel greater sweetness in so doing. It tends more to an hourly and monthly walk with God." After riding some forty miles one day, in heart and dust, he exclaims, "O help me to watch and pray! I am afraid of losing the sweetness I feel. FOR MONTHS PAST I HAVE FELT AS IF IN THE POSSESSION OF PERFECT LOVE. I have no desire for any thing but God."

(Page 206) -- like his divine Master, he "went about doing good." Holiness of heart and sanctification of soul in him produced their natural fruits -- zeal and active benevolence.

(Page 216) -- "I LOOK BACK ON A MARTYR'S LIFE of toil, and privation, and pain, AND I AM READY FOR A MARTYR'S DEATH. The purity of my intentions, my diligence in the labors to which God has been pleased to call me, the unknown sufferings I have endured, what are all these? The merit, the atonement, and the righteousness of Christ alone make my plea."

[In his youth Asbury may have received the experience of perfect love, but, if indeed he was then sanctified wholly, he did not long retain his assurance of that grace. Item 2 is taken from page 21 of a book by Horace M. Du Bose entitled, "Francis Asbury, a biographical study".]

With his conversion emerged a longing and hunger for perfect love or entire sanctification, which was also in harmony with the new doctrine which he had embraced...Concerning an experience which came to him soon after his conversion, and which he for a time misnamed the blessing of perfection, he writes: "Some time after I had obtained a clear witness of my acceptance with God, the Lord showed in the heat of youth, and youthful blood, the evil of my heart. For a short time I enjoyed, as I thought, the pure and perfect love of God; but this happy frame did not long continue, although at seasons I was greatly blessed."

[The most positive comments found by this compiler in support of the thought that Asbury was sanctified wholly are found in the last two paragraphs of Item 3 below, written by J. O. McClurkan.]

*Item 3

Among the men who contributed most in molding the early religious life of this nation, Francis Asbury stands first. Born near Birmingham, England in 1745, converted at the age of twelve years, he began to preach four years later. He came to America in 1771, and died in Virginia in 1816. A born leader with an indomitable will, the most rigid self-denial with a fervor of spirit in which there was never a break, apostolic in zeal, "in labors more abundant," this "bishop in the saddle" made full proof of his ministry. That devout sweet-spirited Bishop and gifted author, O. P. Fitzgerald, in his Centenary Cameos, thus describes him:

"There he goes -- an embodied itinerary, a bishop whose episcopal throne is in his saddle, whose diocese is a continent. "There he goes -- a bishop on horseback, climbing the hills, swimming creeks and rivers, threading the forest trails, splashing through prairie mud, drenched by the rains, buffeted by the winds; riding on for forty-five years, preaching sixteen thousand five hundred sermons, traveling two hundred and seventy thousand miles, presiding in two hundred and twenty-four Annual Conferences, and ordaining four thousand preachers.

There he goes -- going was his passion. The natural was bent in his case -- was sanctified to the attainment of the gracious purpose of God. The genius that would have made a world-traveled adventurer by divine grace made a world-revered apostle. The search for souls was the spring of an intenser activity than the search for newer scenes and undiscovered lands.

"There he goes -- thus the Church will always look at him. His name can scarcely be associated especially with any particular spot of earth for his tireless feet tarried not at any place longer than as necessary to speak his message. The regions beyond held a charm for him that lured him on. The sinner that nobody else had found was the one to whom he felt called to go, and whom he tracked with unflinching steps until he overtook him and told him that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

"There he goes -- and there he will be going as long as the Alleghenies stand on their rocky foundations and the Gulf breezes stir the magnolia booms in the South. Invisible to the bodily eye, yet present in the inspiration of his grand and heroic life, he still rides by the side of the men of God who carry the gospel into the wilderness-places and he will be thus riding with them until the

last round is made on the last circuit, and the angel reapers shall come to gather in the final harvest.

"He was mighty in the scriptures. He learned Greek and Hebrew on horseback. A professor in a modern Biblical school might have given him some points in scholarship, but he dug deep into this mine of heavenly riches, and became a masterly expounder of the Bible.

"He was specially endowed with the praying gift, if it may be so called. Prayerfulness was his most characteristic quality. He prayed so much in secret that his soul was always tuned for leading public devotions. In prayer he received divine illumination in the study of the sacred oracles; on his knees he sought and found strength to bear the heavy burdens, guidance amid the perplexities and comfort under the sorrows of his life. Prayer was his recreation. From the place of secret prayer he went into the pulpit with his face shining like that of Moses when he came down from the mount where he had talked with God, and the awe-struck multitude felt strangely moved while he spoke to them the word of life. On his journeys he would pray with such sweetness, tenderness and power that his visit was remembered as benediction, and the tradition is handed down to children's children. By the way-side, yielding to a sudden impulse, he kneeled down and prayed for a Negro ferryman, and twenty years afterward, meeting him again, found that his impromptu prayer was blessed to the saving of a soul. This is the key to his wonderful career: through the channel of prayer the supernatural element flowed into the life of this man of God, and flowed out again in blessing to the world. God was with him, and wrought mightily by his hand because he waited daily at his feet in prayer for power from on high. Maintaining this expectant, receptive attitude toward the Pentecostal promise, his soul enjoyed its perpetual fulfillment. As long as his successors shall follow his example in this regard, the hosts of our Israel will not halt in their triumphant march, and the pillar of cloud shall lead them by day and the pillar of fire by night."

In this day, confronted as we are in too many instances with an ease-loving self-indulgent, effeminate ministry, it is refreshing to study such lives as that of Asbury, who looked with disdain on all soft, easy places, braved every kind of hardship, spurned with contempt the smiles of the Christ-crucifying world, and denounced every kind of sin. No wonder the gates of hell trembled wherever he went. Such a ministry would have similar results today. What was the secret of the tremendous evangelism of such men as Asbury, who shook the country wherever they went, like a moving mountain? Ah! here is the secret: they were dead to the world. "Confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims" here, and like Enoch, walked with God.

G. C. Smith, in his life of Asbury, says: "All Methodists in that day after a conscious conversion began to seek for what they called the removal of the least and last remains of the carnal mind." This reveals the secret of the peculiar power which characterized their ministry. They did not backslide because they set their faces immediately after their conversion toward the Canaan of Perfect Love. This was the goal to which they all aspired, and any Church doing the same today would be a strong center of spiritual power. In Asbury's ministry the doctrine of Perfect Love was constantly emphasized and to this can be attributed much of the marvelous results which attended it.

In his journal he reported both the conversions and sanctifications occurring at various places under his ministry. Sometimes they ran up to several hundred of each. Early in his ministry he writes as follows: "I felt much power while preaching on Perfect Love. The more I speak on this subject the more my soul is filled and drawn out in love. This doctrine has a tendency to prevent people from settling on their lees." In 1782, we have the record that he was constantly pressing this precious truth upon others. In 1803 he writes: "I feel it my duty to speak chiefly upon perfection and above all to strive to attain unto that which I preach."

In 1814 he said that he was divinely impressed to preach sanctification in every sermon. These extracts are sufficient to show the emphasis he put on preaching sanctification, but we add two others taken from letters addressed to preachers: "Preach sanctification directly or indirectly in every sermon. O Purity! O Christian perfection! O sanctification! IT IS HEAVEN BELOW TO FEEL ALL SIN REMOVED. Preach it whether they will hear or forbear. Preach it!"

Source: "Chosen Vessels"
by J. O. McClurkan (July, 1901)

[When Asbury says, "O sanctification! It is heaven below to feel all sin removed," it would appear that at some point Asbury's striving to attain Christian Perfection came to a happy conclusion, and his soul began to rest in full deliverance from the carnal mind. Reckoning from the above differing statements of Asbury in 1803 and 1814, one might conclude that it was some time between 1803 and 1814 that he was sanctified wholly. --D.V.M.]

*Item 4

Bishop Asbury left in writing, written years before his death -- "I LIVE IN PATIENCE, IN PURITY, AND IN THE PERFECT LOVE OF GOD." I call that a profession of perfect love.

Source: Maturity and Purity by J. A. Wood

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*Item 5

BISHOP ASBURY'S TESTIMONY TO SALVATION AND HOLINESS

[After having read a number of writings by and about Francis Asbury, and having been heretofore disappointed in not finding a clear testimony by him to his entire sanctification, I was pleased this afternoon to come upon what, to my knowledge, may be the most direct testimony of Asbury that may be found to the second work of grace. I have compiled the following quotations from that portion of Sandford's book containing the "Memoirs of Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. -- DVM]

I was born in Old England, near the foot of Hampstead Bridge, in the parish of Hansworth, about four miles from Birmingham, in Staffordshire, and, according to the best of my after-knowledge, on the 20th or 21st day of August, in the year of our Lord 1745.

On a certain time when we were praying in my father's barn, I believe the Lord pardoned my sins, and justified my soul; but my companions reasoned me out of this belief, saying, "Mr. Mather said a believer was as happy as if he was in heaven." I thought I was not as happy as I would be there, and gave up my confidence, and that for months; yet I was happy; free from guilt and fear, and had power over sin, and felt great inward joy. After this, we met for reading and prayer, and had large and good meetings, and were much persecuted, until the persons at whose houses we held them were afraid, and they were discontinued. I then held meetings frequently at my father's house, exhorting the people there, as also at Sutton-Cofields, and several souls professed to find peace through my labours. I met class a while at Bromwick-Heath, and met in band at Wednesbury. I had preached some months before I publicly appeared in the Methodist meeting-houses: when my labours became more public and extensive, some were amazed, not knowing how I had exercised elsewhere. Behold me now a local preacher; the humble and willing servant of any and of every preacher that called on me by night or by day, being ready, with hasty steps, to go far and wide to do good, visiting Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and indeed almost every place within my reach for the sake of precious souls; preaching, generally, three, four, and five times a week, and at the same time pursuing my calling. I think, when I was between twenty-one and twenty-two years of age [1766-67] I gave myself up to God and his work, after acting as a local preacher near the space of five years. [This dates Asbury's conversion at about the year 1761 when he was 16 years of age. -- DVM]

Some time after I had obtained a clear witness of my acceptance with God, the Lord showed me, in the heat of youth and youthful blood, the evil of my heart: for a short time I enjoyed, as I thought, the pure and perfect love of God; but this happy frame did not long continue, although, at seasons, I was greatly blessed. [One can but speculate the date and age of Asbury when he was apparently first sanctified. However, from this data, his first sanctification seems to have occurred some time between 1761 and 1767 and between his 16th and 22nd years of age. -- DVM]

On the 7th of August, 1771, the conference began at Bristol, in England. Before this, I had felt for half a year strong intimations in my mind that I should visit America; which I laid before the Lord, being unwilling to do my own will, or to run before I was sent.

Monday, March 1 [1779]. I have of late, for the most part, had liberty in preaching, and the Spirit of the Lord has been with me: and from my various and peculiar exercises, I am strongly impressed with a persuasion that the Lord is preparing me for future services. But alas! what cause for shame, on account of my great unfaithfulness. This present life may be well compared to a tempestuous ocean: sometimes the fair wind of prosperity blows a fresh gale; at other times the cross wind of adversity rages and threatens a hurricane. How difficult it is, in the midst of such opposing diversity, to pay proper attention to the divine compass, and still pursue the right course.

On Friday I was inclined to believe, that the night before [Thursday, March 4, 1779] the Lord had re-sanctified my soul. It afforded me much comfort ; and I was ready to conclude it had been so for many years past, if I had maintained and believed it. But I fear I have been too slack in urging both myself and others diligently to seek the experience of this great and blessed gift. May the Lord help me from this time to live free from outward and inward sin, always maintaining the spirit of the gospel in meekness, purity, and love.

[The fact that Asbury above spoke of this experience as his "re-sanctification" indicates that he believed that he had been sanctified in his youth. Further, he dates his "re-sanctification" as March 4, 1779, making him 34 years of age when he was re-sanctified. Search where you will, I know of no other account where Asbury gives a more straightforward testimony to entire sanctification than is recorded in this place. In all other accounts, so far as I am aware, you will find nothing more than allusions to the experience -- allusions from which one may deduce that Asbury claimed the experience, but still, only allusions, and not direct testimonies. I am of the opinion that he may have, in fact, had the experience from the time of his youth. He certainly lived a sanctified life, and it is good to find this testimony among Asbury's writings. -- DVM]

Source: "Mr. Wesley's Missionaries to America," By P. P. Sandford

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