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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

JESSE LEE
(Early M. E. Church Itinerant)

Jesse Lee was born in Prince George County, Va., March 12, 1758. His parents, Nathaniel and Elizabeth Lee, were respectable, well-to-do country folk, who lived on their own farm about fifteen miles south of Petersburg. The elder Lee was a moral man, a good citizen, and brought his family up in the church. About 1772 he became very much concerned for the salvation of his soul, and before long he and his wife were happily converted. Jesse says: "When I was about fifteen years of age I was awakened by hearing my father tell about his conversion." This all happened about the time Robert Williams, the first Methodist preacher to come to Virginia, began preaching in Mr. Lee's neighborhood.

Born during the French and Indian War, Jesse Lee was only seventeen years old when the first gun of the Revolutionary War was fired. The agitation and excitement caused by war and rumors of war must have hindered young men of Mr. Lee's talents. The schools to which he had to look for his education were poor and indifferent. He attended the singing schools of his time taught by roving singing masters and from them received one of the needed preparations for an itinerant preacher. In after years when he stood on the street corner or mounted a table under the elm tree on Boston Common to preach, he knew that his song leader was present and ready.

Robert Williams, mentioned above, organized the first Methodist society in the community of the elder Lee, who joined the Church with his wife, eldest son, and Jesse; and in the summer the first circuit, called Brunswick, was formed. In 1775 this circuit was traveled by George Shadford, Edward Drumgoole, and William Glendenning. Under their ministry was held the greatest revival ever known in that part of the country. "I had never seen anything like it," says Jesse in his journal. "Some would be seized with a trembling and in a few moments drop on the floor, as if they were dead; while others were embracing each other, with streaming eyes, and all lost in wonder, love, and praise." From the time of this revival he was very happy, and in the following spring attended a Quarterly Conference in which the Spirit of God was poured out in a remarkable manner. Of this meeting Lee writes: "Many souls were brought into favor with God, and a number professed

sanctification." And he went from this Conference determined never to cease seeking for the blessing of perfect love until he felt that his heart was cleansed from all sin.

As this great awakening advanced in 1775, he says, "I felt a sweet distress in my soul for holiness of heart and life. I sensibly felt, while I was seeking purity of heart, that I grew in grace and in the knowledge of God. This concern of soul lasted some time, till at length I could say, I have nothing but the love of Christ in my heart. My soul was continually happy in God. The world with all its charms was crucified to me, and I crucified to the world."

Thus endued with power from on high, while yet in. His eighteenth year, he was maturing for the great work before him.

Source #1: "A Short History of the Methodists"
by Jesse Lee

Source #2: "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,"
Vol. I, by Abel Stevens

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