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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

LELA MCCONNELL

"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). Jesus spoke these words to His disciples. Often in my life has this promise come to pass. Why did the Lord permit me to be born on a farm? Why did I have to work so hard? Why so poor? Why so few luxuries? Why did I have to rustle for an education? Why so much prevenient grace thrown around me from early childhood? To lay a good foundation for a rugged ministry in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky.

My precious mother, Rebekah Martha Elizabeth Eshelman, was saved early in life at a Methodist altar. She gave me a good start even before I was born. I am the youngest of seven children: four boys and three girls. Mother told me how the Lord came upon her in a marked way all during my prenatal days. She read her Bible, prayed, sang, and rejoiced in the Lord as never before. No doubt this largely accounts for my deep hunger for God.

In early childhood I would often pray in the attic, in the barn, and in my room alone. Visitors often mentioned my remarkable bent after spiritual things.

Sometimes Mother would get blest. She would walk up and down the church aisle waving her hands, her face filled with the glory of God. I would cry and want Jesus, too.

In 1895 Bro. McComas, pastor of the Methodist church in Honey Brook, Pa., was holding a revival in the country schoolhouse called Poplar Grove. Father got under conviction and raised his hand for prayer. Mother shouted. I can see her yet. God used it to bring great conviction on the unsaved. Father did not like it. The devil was stirred. After we reached home, Father shook his fist in Mother's face and said, "Beckie, if you shout again, I'll never go to the altar."

A few weeks later, revival began in the church in Honey Brook. Conviction fell. Many came to the altar. Frequently, they would spend days seeking the Lord. They confessed their sins and pled for mercy. One man was deeply convicted. When the preacher asked him to come to the altar, he left the church in a rage. Others ran to the altar crying for mercy. These gracious scenes made an indelible impression on my ten-year-old mind and heart.

In this meeting Father was again moved upon. He fell at the altar and sought the Lord desperately for a few nights. The burden became so heavy that one afternoon he came into the house and said, "Beckie, let's pray." Mother prayed; then Father prayed. While Mother was praying the second time, Father jumped up and said, "I've got it. I've got it." He shouted all over our big farm house. The neighbors, we children, and the cattle all knew Henry McConnell had religion. I can hear him singing yet, "Happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away."

People talked about salvation on the streets and in their homes. One of the outstanding converts was a fearful drunkard, father of a large family. The powerful change in his life and home brought much glory to Jesus. His testimony was filled with great love to God for saving him from drink.

Many times I missed Sunday school and went into the Class Meeting just to hear Mother, Father, and others testify. In the great Love Feasts, which were held one Sunday morning a month, the people of God had great liberty in praising the Lord. The house was filled. Seldom was there time for all to testify. The leader would direct some grand old song after nearly every testimony. He would exhort the saints to press on. Oh, the precious memories of those days of God's manifest power!

Father was mighty in prayer. In January 1902, when revival was pulling hard, the pastor called on him to pray. God used that prayer to lift the entire service and break the devil's power. The blessing of God was so upon Father that we hardly spoke all the way home. That was the last time he attended church. In a few days, in his 52nd year, he became very ill. The preacher asked Mother what he could do to help. She said, "Pray that Henry will regain consciousness so he can give one more testimony before his homegoing." About 4 P.M., he rose up in bed and sang so clearly, "I want to go there; I want to go there." All of the children and Mother stood around crying. The glory of God filled the room. Father talked about Jesus and heaven all through the night. The next morning at 7 A.M., his spirit went sweeping through the gates washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

I firmly believe that the Lord sanctified Father 15 hours before he died. Many true Christians, who have never had light on full salvation, are thus made clean on their deathbeds. Some who are so victorious and who eagerly walk in all the light, I believe, have received the blessing some time in their lives and did not know what to call it. I have heard some say the first time they heard sanctification preached, "I received that experience back there," and they relate very clearly just how and when it happened. If folk have backed down on light or fought holiness, it is a different story. God is faithful to all who truly love and obey Him. He will sanctify them just as He takes care of cleansing the Adamic (carnal) nature in children who die under the age of accountability. All are born with the sin nature in them. Praise God for the provision made on Calvary for the taking out of "inbred sin" and thus preparing us to go to heaven where no sin can enter. "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;" (Ps. 24:3,4). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

I knew a dear Presbyterian lady in Bristol, Pa., who had lived a good, consistent Christian life. She came to her deathbed. Her granddaughter told us how fearful she was of death and the judgment. She cried and prayed. Her pastor and other preachers failed to help her. One day as she prayed, the Lord came with great joy and victory. After that she lived a number of weeks, but with no fear. Carnality was gone. Her soul was quiet and restful in the joy of this new victory. The Holy Ghost had come in sanctifying power. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

My childish heart was hungry to know the Lord. Through our family altar, God's rich grace on Father and Mother, and the powerful, blest singing of the saints in our Methodist Class Meetings, the Lord deepened conviction on my heart. Two songs made me want to be a Christian. They were

Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go,
Anywhere He leads me in this world below,
Anywhere without Him dearest joys would fade,
Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid.

and

More about Jesus would I know,
More of His grace to others show;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love who died for me.

When I was in the fifth grade, one of my brothers ran away from home. At the family altar the next morning, we children cried while mother prayed so tenderly and powerfully for him. The next day he came humbly walking home. God had heard Mother's prayers.

When I was 13, another revival was held in our church. Miss Amy Plank, who had been my school teacher, spoke to me. She said, "Lela, wouldn't you like to be a Christian?" She led me to the altar. I confessed my sins and prayed for the Lord to forgive me. One fearful lie I had told came before me. I had borrowed my sister's skates. She wanted to take them to high school the next day. I said I had given them to one of the boys to sharpen and would get them tomorrow. The truth was I had hidden them under a fence on my way from school. I planned to use them the next day. I made this right with Mother and my sister, Mabel.

I have never ceased to praise God for the good seeking He held me to. For three days I was repenting and confessing. At last my faith took hold of His promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). My soul sang, "O, happy day when Jesus washed my sins away." I knew my name was written down in glory. The burden of sin was gone. Oh, the joy of sins forgiven!

The pastor, W. Q. Bennett, assigned me to the Tuesday night Class Meetings when I joined the church. I often walked alone in the dark to attend these. I loved this service better than any

other. Truly the words of the Psalmist were mine, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps. 42:1).

Town people bought our big spring at the head of the Brandywine and built a reservoir. I often visited, prayed, and talked salvation in their homes. One man tried to argue with me, but when I prayed, he would cry and ask me to come again.

The pastor soon began to call on me to lead in prayer in public meetings. These things gave me courage, helped me grow in grace, bear the cross, and keep blest. The enemy was after me persistently. He tried to discourage me in my zeal for the Lord. I joined the Bible Study class each winter and never missed a meeting, even though many times I had to go alone. I was allowed to take Old Nell, our family horse. I would come home about 9 P.M., and put the horse and buggy away alone in the dark. God was building into me some good timber for my future work.

The four boys were the oldest in our family. After they left home to work, it fell my lot to work with the horses. To roll or harrow a 10-acre field was no small job for a 13-year-old girl. Sometimes the roller would come apart or the spring-tooth harrow would catch on a stump. The Lord often dried my tears and helped me when I prayed.

I rode a horse without saddle or bridle with no fear. The creamery where we took our milk was six miles round trip to Uncle George Emery's place in Cambridge. In warm weather I let the horse have her own gait, while I lay on the seat of the big spring wagon and prayed. The kind men at the creamery lifted the heavy milk cans for me. I appreciated this kindness. These toils on the farm taught me many valuable lessons.

We often attended revival meetings within four or five miles from home. I would hitch the horse to the buggy or sleigh, get Bessie and Mabel, my sisters, and away we would go over snow or ice, smooth or rough roads. I would work around the altar, and pray and testify in the meetings. My love for the Lord and for souls grew richer all the time.

One night when the roads were very icy, we went to Morgantown Methodist Church to a revival. We had to cross a steep, mile-long hill. It was a sheet of ice. I was not a bit afraid. My sisters were sure the horse would fall and upset the sleigh. God took us there and back, and rewarded us for our efforts. All these spiritual exercises were weaving into me courage and faith to help keep me from backsliding. These were good days to my soul. They help me now to tell others the way to establishment in grace. The church folk and preachers were very kind to encourage me. My entire ambition was to live wholeheartedly for the Lord.

Central High School in Honey Brook Township was built largely through the efforts of my mother. My sisters were among the first to enroll. The school was two miles from our home, but I never missed a day except when Father died.

Sometimes the students would say unkind things to me because I would not go their way. The Lord kept me true. I really pitied them. They were so sad and discouraged with life.

Church services filled my horizon; worldly things did not attract me. The Bible says, "... If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15b). God's divine blessings were in my soul sublimating all earthly desires and wishes.

I firmly believe that to mind religion while young will save us from a thousand snares. God's grace enabled me always to keep in His will. I was set to make a real business of religion. Thus the Lord gave me a bit of seasoning for the hard tasks ahead. When we give up all for Jesus and His kingdom, the rewards are grand, and best of all we glorify Him.

"... for your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

At 17, I finished high school and the next year began teaching in a Quaker community in Chester county. Mother, having attended West Chester Normal School and having taught for five years, instructed my sisters and me how to keep order in the schoolroom. One of my pupils, a large boy named Norman, became quite a problem. I said very firmly one day, "Norman, I'll have to whip you good if you don't stop disturbing school." Later he misbehaved. I sent a boy for a switch. I surely did give Norman a good flogging, even though he was much bigger than I. To my sorrow, I got angry. The boy needed the punishment. It settled him ever afterward, but I went to my boarding house with a sad heart. I wept before the Lord and asked His forgiveness for getting angry. He blest me right there. I said, "Oh God, is this the best you can do for me?"

During the winter I visited a friend in Coatesville, Pa. One night we attended a Salvation Army meeting that was full of blessing. I said, "I'm going to the altar." She said, "No, you are not; you are all right." My heart continued to hunger for more of God.

After teaching four years in country schools, I attended Keystone State Normal School in Kutztown, Pa. As the years went on, carnality manifested itself more and more, and the longing of my heart became more intense. I wrote a dear friend asking where I could go to get more religion. She told me of a camp meeting in Delanco, N.J. The teachers' college closed just in time for me to go to camp for the full 10 days.

When I arrived, Dr. G. W. Ridout was preaching from God's Word about Christians who knew Jesus well, yet needed to have the carnal nature cleansed. He spoke about the carnal traits of pride, jealousy, anger, and strife that needed to be taken from our hearts through the cleansing Blood. He quoted such Scriptures as, "Ye are yet carnal." "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," and "And the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Camp had gone on eight days. I had sought in every service. Some thought I had the blessing, but my heart was not yet satisfied. The Lord was helping me to die out thoroughly. Clara Boyd said, "Sister, put the unknown bundle on the altar."

I said, "Yes, Lord." The last thing was that unknown bundle. I know the Lord saw many things that would need to be fought through as I walked with Him. Thus I could say, "This was in the unknown bundle of my full consecration." This has made it easier to keep saying yes to all the will of God through these years. I came fully to the place where, as John Wesley says, "Faith automatically works when all is on the altar." "... the altar that sanctifieth the gift" (Matt. 23:19). The altar is Jesus; we are the gift.

But I did not get through in that service. Later I was sitting by a tent, discouraged and tempted to leave the camp. The devil was doing his best to defeat me. While reading a little pamphlet called "Heaven or Hell, which?" I cried to the Lord, "O God, I must have the blessing now." Instantly, the Holy Ghost applied the blood of Jesus to my carnal heart and cleansed it, then He came in to abide. Sweet rest and assurance were mine. His glory filled my soul. On July 4, 1904, the work was done. The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, had come. Rom. 6:22 and Gal. 2:20 were mine.

God gave me my highest and best preparation for a pugilistic faith and militant leadership that day when He cleansed my heart from all the carnal traits. The Holy Ghost came in to abide in His fullness. The hindrance to growth in grace was gone and the fruit of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness and faith, were mine. Someone has said, "Holiness is religion made easy." I have found it so.

I do not believe I ever had a wilderness experience. The first time I came to Kadesh-Barnea, I made a beeline for Canaan. Only those who back down when they receive light on holiness ever wander in the wilderness. Since July, 1904, I have been living in Canaan.

God's Word was made more real and blessed. I began at once to feed my mind and soul on holiness literature. Someone at the camp gave me The Daily Holiness Scripture Texts, by John Thompson and E.I.D. Pepper. This is a book of holiness texts with a comment on each, arranged for systematic study of Bible holiness. As I feasted on this little book year after year, God revealed the glorious truth of full salvation to me more and more in His Word.

Source: Autobiography of Lela McConnell, "The Mountain Shall Be Thine"

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THE END