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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

## JOHN OLIVER

To The Rev. John Wesley

Rev. and Dear Sir -- I was born at Stockport, in Cheshire, in the year 1732. My father was fond of me to excess. I went to school till I was thirteen, and there contracted such acquaintance as led me into every kind of folly, dancing, plays, races, cock-fighting, and the like; which laid a foundation for all the vices incident to youth. Indeed, the Spirit of God was daily striving with me; but my companions made all his strivings ineffectual. My father designed to give me a liberal education, and accordingly put me to the grammar school; but, being reduced in the world, he soon took me from school into the shop, where I remained some years.

The Methodists then coming to Stockport, I was greatly prejudiced against them; and, knowing one of them, called upon him, and laboured much to convince him they were of a bad religion, and were enemies to the Church. But he soon convinced me that I had no religion at all: so I came near him no more. But I began to feel myself a sinner, and resolved to drop all my acquaintance and diversions, and to keep close to the Church, and to repeat the prayers and collects every day. Accordingly I dropped them at once, notwithstanding all the arguments and expostulations of my companions. I read, prayed, fasted, went to church, and seemed more and more resolved, till, after a few months, several young men of my acquaintance came from Manchester, on the Lord's day, to an inn just opposite to our house, and sent over for me. My father pressing me to go, I went; only resolving not to stay long. But I soon forgot this, and all my good resolutions. When I came home at night, I was in agony. I did not dare to pray. My conscience stared me in the face, and the terror I felt was inconceivable.

It was soon spread abroad that I was melancholy. A neighbour, who was a hearer of the Methodists, sent me word there was to be preaching that night. My father declared, "if I went he would knock my brains out, though he should be hanged for it." However, I stole away. The preacher was John Appleton, who invited all that were weary and heavy laden to come to Jesus. It was balm to my soul. I drank it in with all my heart, and began to seek God as I had not done before. Till now I thought of saving myself. My cry now was "Lord, save, or I perish." Yet I knew

not how to go on, till one sent me word there was a person at her house who would be glad to see me. It was Miss Simpson. She told me the manner of her conversion to God. She sung a hymn, and went to prayer. I was all in a flame to know these things for myself. As soon as I got home I went to prayer, and pleaded the merits of Christ. Suddenly, I thought I heard a clear voice, saying, "Son, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven." I cried out, "Lord, if this be from the Spirit, let the words be applied with power." Instantly I heard a second time, "Son, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee." In that instant all my load was gone, and I felt such a change as cannot be expressed. I loved God: I loved all mankind. I could not tell whether I was in the body or out of it. Prayer as turned into wonder, love, and praise.

In this happy state I remained for several months, feeling nothing in my heart but love. Yet I wanted some agreeable companions; and I thought over all the people I knew. I could not recollect any of our Church that were such as I wanted: no, nor any among the Dissenters or Quakers. The last people I thought of were the Methodists: I found my soul united to them: I took an opportunity of asking one of them, Robert Anderson, what were the terms of admission among them." He told me, "These:" putting the rules of the society into my hands, and desiring me to read and consider them. Having done this, I told him there was one rule which I was afraid I could not keep: "meeting every week:" but I would meet as often as I could. So I joined the society in the year 1748...

Our society was now much united together, and did indeed love as brethren. Some of them had just begun to meet in band, and invited me to meet with them. -- Here, one of them speaking of the wickedness of the heart, I was greatly surprised; telling them I felt no such things; my heart being kept in peace and love all the day. But it was not a week before I felt the swelling of pride, and the storms of anger and self-will: so when I met again I could speak the same language with them. We sympathized with each other, prayed for each other, and believed God was both able and willing to purify our hearts from all sin...

In the spring of 1762, I went to Canterbury ... This summer there was a great pouring out of the Spirit in London, and many were athirst for the whole Christian salvation: so was I. I loved the very name of it. I loved to hear it spoken of. I loved all the people that were in pursuit of it, and was never so happy as in their company and conversation ... My soul was sweetly united to them. I caught their spirit, and felt such zeal for preaching a present and full salvation, that wherever I was, I preached it to all believers in the best manner I could. This soon had its use, both upon the people and upon my own soul. I was convinced more deeply than ever of inbred sin, and of the promise of God to save me from it. And never did man at a bar plead harder for life, than I pleaded with God for this salvation.

Mr. Perk, of Lincoln's Inn, then a sober, rational Christian, desired me one day to call and dine with him. I there unexpectedly met with Messrs. Colley, Jay Coughlan, Bell, Owen, and some others. When dinner was over, one said "Our Lord has promised, Whatsoever two or three of you shall agree to ask in my name, I will do it. We agree now." A hymn was sung. It seemed as if the glory of the Lord filled the place. We went to prayer. A general cry arose, but without any confusion. The Lord was moved by our instant prayer, and we had the petition we asked of him. I was baptized as with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and felt that "perfect love casteth out fear." Great was our fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. After an hour spent in supplication and thanksgiving, we sung from the ground of our hearts, --

Hang our new-born souls on Thee  
Kept from all idolatry;  
Nothing want, beneath, above!  
Happy, happy in Thy love.

If ever I had access to the throne of grace, it was on this memorable day. Our Lord was inexpressibly near: it seemed we might ask and have whatever we wanted. And we were exceedingly drawn out in prayer for you, your sons in the Gospel, and the people under your care, feeling the communion of saints, both on earth below and in heaven above. But in all this there was nothing wild; but all calmness, meekness, love, and peace. -- From this time I went forth in the power and spirit of love: I felt nothing but love, and desired nothing but more love. And so I continued, without any intermission, all the time I remained in London.

I could now understand that objection commonly made against those who long to be all devoted to God, that they do not love to converse with other people, with many but those of their own sort." How little spiritual conversation is to be found among other people! Among any that are not "going on to perfection!" Generally the tenor of their conversation is dry, lifeless, and useless. But those who are earnestly going on, hardly care to talk of any thing else. And whatever conversation has no savour of this is dull and insipid to them. From that day to this, I have not lost my sight of, nor my affection for, Christian perfection. But I have been so pressed down by the exercises of every kind which I have passed through since that time. I fear some of them were purposely laid in my way by those who were no friends to this doctrine, and who were not greatly pleased with me for enforcing it in every place. But I willingly leave this and all my affairs to the disposal of a wise and gracious providence.

The next year I was at Bristol, with Mr. Oddie, and was happy both with him and with the people. My heart was given up: I was all athirst for God, and wanted very thought to be holiness to the Lord. Jesus was the first beauty to my soul; he reigned alone in my heart. I was entirely and constantly happy in God: he was my all in all...

I am, Rev. sir, your affectionate son in the Gospel.

John Oliver

Source: "The EXPERIENCE of several eminent Methodist Preachers with an account of their Call to and Success in the Ministry in a series of letters written by themselves to the Rev. John Wesley" J. Collard, Printer, New York 1837

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