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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

GEORGE PECK
(Methodist)

The Oneida Conference met at Norwich, August 21, 1839. Bishop Hedding presided. I had previously sent the trustees of the seminary a letter dissolving my connection with the institution. I was appointed presiding elder of the Susquehanna District, and also elected a delegate to the General Conference. The appointments were read Thursday evening, and my first act in my new position was early the next morning to behold the distress and the tears, and hear the protest, of a young man who had been sent down for that same Canaan circuit to which I was sent in 1820, when it was almost a wilderness. Now a railroad ran through the center, and good roads traversed it in every direction; the people were living in comfort, and not a few were becoming rich. Still, the Bishop was so far moved by this young preacher's anguish of soul that he released him from the unwelcome appointment, and left him in the hands of the presiding elder or another, if any could be found worthy of him. The district over which I was appointed to preside comprised, in 1839, fifteen appointments, twenty preachers, and about four thousand members.

I spent the Sabbath succeeding the Conference at Cazenovia, where I heard Bishop Hedding preach a great sermon, which stirred the depths of my soul; and then, bidding farewell to my many valued friends there, returned to Kingston, the place fixed upon as our residence.

The early part of this year was to me a memorable period on account of certain religious experiences which, not without much reflection and some hesitation, I have concluded to record more at length than has been my custom.

I was not conscious of any spiritual decline, but, on the contrary, felt that I was advancing. The evidence of my acceptance with God was clear. From the time of my conversion, and specially from the time of my entrance into the ministry, I had striven to exercise a constant faith, "to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men," to be obedient to every Divine call, yielding a willing service. Still, I was not at rest. Grateful for all that I had received, I felt that there were better things in store for me. I began more and more to hunger for

deeper spirituality, a stronger faith, a prompter and more complete victory over temptation, a new advance into better light and richer joy.

At my first quarterly meeting on the district I preached on the subject of holiness, with no great satisfaction to my own mind, but in pursuance of a determination to seek a deeper work of grace in my own soul and preach it to others. The next week I went to a camp-meeting in McClure's Settlement, on the Lanesborough Circuit, where I preached three times with unusual liberty, my yearning after a clean heart constantly increasing. It was a time of rejoicing and of power. Two brethren were active and useful in the meeting, and attracted my attention. One was Major Dixon, a great and good layman, famous as a leader in the prayer-meetings, which were in his charge throughout the entire week. His control over a crowd was something wonderful. He issued his orders with the air of a general on the field of battle. When he shouted, "Power! power! On, brethren, on!" it was like the storming of a battery; and when he paused and said, "Hark! hark! Silence," the stillness of night followed. None of the preachers interfered with his management. There was always unity of design, perfect harmony, and uniform success in his plans. His equal, in his own line of service, I never saw.

The other one referred to was Dayton F. Reed, afterward a member of the Newark Conference, and now, I doubt not, in the home above. He had been for a short time at the Cazenovia Seminary, but could not confine himself to study. He was at this time a young man of about twenty-one years of age, deeply pious, enthusiastic, with a very acute and active mind, and a reputation for eccentricity. He had received license as an exhorter, and on the strength of the authority bestowed was constantly preaching. He came to me on Sunday morning, and said that he thought that God required him to "sound the alarm somewhere" that day. I told him that older men must occupy the stand; but that if he felt like it he might, at the close of the morning sermon, mount a certain wagon that stood a little way off, and preach till the time for the afternoon service to as

This seemed to please him, and as soon as the morning service closed he mounted the wagon, and with all the strength of his lungs shouted, "All you who want to hear the crazy boy talk for a while draw near." The whole multitude gathered about him, and he held them for two hours listening to an argumentative and convincing discourse on the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, the certainty of a general judgment, and the eternal doom of the lost. I stayed to hear every word of the sermon. For conclusiveness of argument, originality of illustration, and forcible appeal, I have seldom heard its equal.

The next week I attended another camp-meeting, in South Canaan, during the progress of which I preached four sermons. My spiritual necessities were pressing more heavily than ever upon my heart. We closed Saturday morning with a sacramental service. As I was making some remarks after the sacrament I came, without any previous intention, to speak of my own religious state, and observed that my experience had been somewhat variable, and of too low a grade, but that I expected to be "made perfect in love in this life." This accidental allusion, as it seemed, to a solemn question which I had answered at the time of my ordination and reception into Conference membership, fell upon my own soul with so much weight that I could not refrain from weeping.

Spending a Sunday in my quarterly meetings at Dundaff and Carbondale, I returned home, where I remained several days suffering great mental depression, and feeling an increasing self-abhorrence and thirst after God.

The next Sunday, in the love-feast at Gibson, several clear testimonies were given to the enjoyment of perfect love. I began now to feel the blessing near, and was more than ever fixed in my purpose to seek until I attained it. Monday morning, September 30, I woke in the spirit of penitence and prayer. The Rev. William Reddy, one of the preachers on the circuit, led the family devotions in the house where we lodged. As he read the fifty-first psalm the words came home to my mind with new light and power, and pierced my soul like sharp arrows. During his prayer my tears flowed freely, and it was only by strong effort that I refrained from weeping aloud.

As we were traveling in the same direction that morning I took a seat with Mr. Reddy in his carriage, and led my horse. He had told us something the day before of the possession of the blessing, and I wished to converse with him on the subject. His account of his past experience and his present enjoyments was modest, clear, and, as I judged, scriptural. He was much younger than I, but I was ready to be taught by any messenger whom God might send, so I fully opened my mind to him. My hunger and thirst for holiness were increased by our communings, and when our roads diverged and I left this dear brother and rode on alone till night, I prayed with every breath.

Tuesday, October 1, I rose, in the spirit of prayer, and resumed my homeward journey. I crossed the Susquehanna at Tunkhannock, and rode forward in inexpressible anguish. When passing through the forest and solitary places, where there was none but God to hear, I uttered aloud my burning supplication for a clean heart. I came to a stream where the bridge had been swept away in a recent flood, and as I was preparing to ford it these words came with power to my soul, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

As my horse entered the water, and went in deeper and deeper, the great deep of my soul was broken up, and I wept aloud, with exclamations of self-condemnation and self-abhorrence. My whole being seemed dissolved in a torrent of godly sorrow; but in a moment I caught encouragement from the language of the prophet. It implied a Divine wish that men would hearken. I was most assuredly willing, eager to hear the voice Divine. Quick as lightning I felt that God would bless me and write his commandments on my heart. An indescribable change passed through all the avenue of my spirit. God seemed to be there, in the glory of his grace. I melted like wax in the presence of the Lord. I sank into nothing. Christ was all, elevated upon the throne of his holiness. As my horse gained the shore I felt that I, too, was emerging from troubled waters and gaining the land of rest. In the fullness of my joy I wept aloud and gave glory to God in the highest.

I went on my way exulting in God, the holy and adorable God, whose glory I now saw, as never before, impressed upon mountain and rock, forest and river, and whose presence and favor I felt so powerfully that I seemed almost in heaven. In this inexpressibly happy state of mind I reached my home in the evening, scarcely knowing how I had passed over the road.

This was the way in which God led me, and for his glory, and with devout gratitude, I pen the narrative. I write not for "the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world." My years are

passing, and soon, to me, neither the praise nor the censures of men will possess any value. Still, when my eyes no more behold the light, other eyes may rest upon this page, and the record is made with the humble hope that here and there a reader whose soul thirsts for the living God may be thereby encouraged, and therefrom gain, possibly, a little light.

I would also add, with humble gratitude and giving God all the glory, that the impulse which my religious life then received has helped me ever since, even to this hour. From that day I have had a stronger faith, a deeper joy, a clearer evidence of my acceptance with God, a readier and more thorough victory over temptations of every kind. I have labored to exercise a faith which would enable me to hold my position, and I have never wholly failed. Gloom has gathered about me at times, but the light has always returned. A faith that constantly appropriates the blood of Christ is able to maintain, in the soul, a constant fellowship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

In regard to the duty of relating what God has done for us, one cannot well judge for another. I have seldom felt that I was called to say much in mixed assemblies about this peculiar experience; still there certainly are times and occasions when an unostentatious profession may not only be allowable, but beneficial. When earnest Christians commune one with another in regard to the possibilities of the religious life, and are of one heart and one mind, waiting for the salvation of God, it is certainly right for each to tell all that God has done for him. This question came before me at an early period of my own experience, and I find my conclusions thus set down in a memorandum made at the time:--

"1. God should be acknowledged in his gifts whenever an opportunity occurs which promises good results. 2. The example of eminent Christians, both the living and the dead, encourages us in this course. 3. The help and encouragement which such relations afforded me when I as athirst for full salvation, convince me that they may be of service to others in like circumstances."

I will here take the liberty of expressing, in regard to another phase of the general subject, an opinion to which I tend. I incline to think that one who has enjoyed a great salvation, does not by unfaithfulness decline into simple justification, but falls into condemnation, from which new acts of repentance and faith must lift him, if at all, not simply to a justified state, but to something of the condition from which he has declined; though it may be in some cases a shade less joyous, than before.

There were soon indications of a high degree of religious interest throughout the district. There was, in fact, a revival in every charge. Many were converted, and many attained the love which "casteth out fear." Protracted meetings were everywhere in progress. Wherever I went to attend my quarterly meetings I was importuned to remain and help in the work. Even the few days which I occasionally spent at home were not an exception. Revivals were in progress in the Churches at Wilkesbarre and Forty Fort, and for weeks services were held every evening, and between the two my "rest days" were as busy as any.

Source: "The Life and Times of George Peck" by George Peck and "Holiness Miscellany And Experiences" by John S. Inskip

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THE END