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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

ANN PRESTON ("HOLY ANN")

"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me? I thank God through Jesus Christ." --
Rom. 7:24, 25

Among our readers we doubt not there will be wide diversity of view in theological matters, and even with those who have the assurance of salvation there will be great differences of opinion as to the expressions to be used to describe various phases of Christian experience. As the unhappy contentions in the Church of Christ have rarely conduced to edification, it is not the purpose of this book to enter into controversial themes.

However, we come to describe a great change in this life under consideration, and we do not wish to be misunderstood. A numerous body of Christians believe that Christian life can be divided into two distinct stages, the one summed up under the word "justification," and the other and further experience under the term "sanctification." In defining these states, however, great diversity of opinion is expressed. Some maintain that sanctification is something only to be experienced in the future state. Then among those who believe that sanctification is the present privilege of the Christian, two different views prevail some contending that the experience consists in the entire eradication of the "old Adamic nature," while others contend that it is the state in which inward evil tendencies are entirely controlled or suppressed but in the contention the one side too often gives evidence that there is need of a more perfect eradication, and the other that there is room for a more complete suppression. In this narrative, therefore, we are not contending for a theory, but simply narrating facts, and are frank to admit that we have witnessed the practical results which we are about to set forth in the lives of Christians taking either view of this great doctrine. In a general way we can appeal to our readers, and feel confident they will admit that in the circle of their acquaintances there are two classes of Christians. In the one there is not much to attract those who have never tasted of Christian joys. They live all too much under the cloud. It is true that they struggle to do right, and that there has been certainly a great change from their former life. They witness that their sins are forgiven. With actual wrongs committed there is speedy confession and repentance. They acknowledge their own powerlessness in the presence of temptation, and admit that they too often yield to some special besetment.

On the other hand, there is another class whose whole life and presence seems attractive. It is characterized by joyous victory. The soul has unbroken fellowship heavenward, and with its peace and joy it carries blessing wherever its influence is felt. The will is surrendered and the life wholly consecrated and the Divine acceptance is sealed by the filling of the Spirit. We shall not quarrel here as to how the transition is made from one state to the other. That those who have lived in the one should pass out of the first and into the second is sufficient for us. In other words, that the latter life is possible by grace, is all that we desire to maintain.

In the case of Ann, who had been schooled among the Methodists, we cannot wonder that she largely dropped into their phraseology and more or less felt the impression of the teaching that prevailed. However, up to this time she knew very little of the teaching of John Wesley, and did not understand his theory of sanctification, and still less had she any corresponding experience. Her ungovernable temper was her great besetment. She wept over it, confessed it, fought with it, but all too frequently the whole process had to be repeated in the face of some great outbreak under specially trying circumstances. There came a change, however, and a time when she was delivered from its slavery.

It happened thus: A young man who stayed all night at the home, before retiring led the family worship, reading Psalm 34. The 16th verse was strongly impressed upon Ann's mind: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." She requested the young man to mark it for her, and then went to her room and knelt down and prayed for light. She opened the Bible at the place where the leaf had been turned down, but the adversary was there to contend with her. His first suggestion was, "You can't read it," to which Ann replied,

"Well, the Lord will give it to me," and in a wonderful way she was enabled to read it over and over again. Men may explain it as they will, but until this time, with the one exception already noted, Ann had never been able to read a word or decipher the alphabet, but from this time forth she could read in a simple way from the Bible, although until toward the close of life she was unable to read any other book, and a newspaper was like a foreign language to her. While still upon her knees, she said, "Lord, what is evil?" And the answer came, "Anger, wrath, malice," etc. All night long she wept and prayed as the inward sinfulness was revealed to her. Toward morning, in sheer desperation, she cried out, O Lord, how will I know when I get deliverance?" The answer came, "Well, Jacob wrestled until he prevailed." In her simplicity, Ann asked, "What does 'prevailed' mean?" and to her the reply came, "Getting just what you come for and all you want." Again she queried,

"And what will it do for me when I get it?" The reply came back, "It will enable you to rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. You will live above the troubles of this world and the things that now upset you."

But other suggestions were interpolated from another source. Like a flash she recalled the circumstances of former outbreaks, and the suggestion came, "Yes, just wait until you are scrubbing the floor and the children come in with their dirty feet then you will see." But the conviction deepened that these outbreaks of the carnal mind were displeasing to God, and that

there was deliverance from them. When the morning broke and the children began to awaken, she was almost fleeing back to the bush to continue in her waiting for deliverance. She said determinedly, "I'll die, but I'll have it." She arose and went downstairs. To her overwrought mind the personal struggle with the adversary was so great that she thought she could hear him following her. In the parlor she met the young man whose word had reached her heart. He asked her what she had been crying for all night, to which she replied, "I want to be sanctified throughout-body, soul and spirit." he simply said, "Well, Ann, how were you justified?" She replied. "Why, just by believing what God said." "Well," he said, "complete victory comes in the same way."

Again Ann went to prayer and pleaded the promise. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." She cried, "Lord, I have been knocking all night. Open unto me! Open unto me!" And there is little doubt but that the answer came there and then. For two hours it seemed to her as though she had entered heaven. This time the family were aroused with her shouts of praise instead of her cries and groans. She said as she looked out that nature took on a different hue, and the very trees seemed to be clapping their hands and praising God. With her heart overflowing, she cried, "Father, didn't you intend that man should praise you more than these?" She at once began to tell it around. She went to her old class leader and made known her new-found joy. He bade her to rejoice evermore, and pray without ceasing in order to keep it. This brought in a shade of doubt, as she wondered how she could pray without ceasing. She thought of the absorbing affairs of life and the things that would occupy her mind, and wondered how such a thing was possible. But her mind was speedily set at rest by the Scripture passage, "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Her joy was so great that she could not eat, and for eight days she was without food. Friends tried to persuade her to break her fast and to go forth and give her testimony, but it was some time before she felt that she could return to the ordinary duties.

For seven years and a half after this it just seemed as though she were living in heavenly places. She fell back on the Methodist Hymnal for expression, as she often cried:

"The opening heavens round me shine
With streams of sacred bliss,
While Jesus shows His presence mine
And whispers 'I am His.' "

At the first dawn of consciousness in the morning her mouth was filled with praises and her hands clapping for joy. There was very little difficulty in maintaining her Christian life with such a joyous experience. One morning, however, she awoke, and instead of the usual sense of joy and the burst of praise, her lips were dumb. At once the temptation came, "You have lost the blessing." While thus tried, she fell asleep again and dreamed that she was talking to another woman with a like experience, and in her dream Ann urged her to walk by faith, quoting the text, "But the just shall live by faith," and urged her just to trust God. With that she awoke and turned her sermon upon herself, with the resultant obtainment of perfect peace of mind.

Source: "An Irish Saint, The Life Story of Ann Preston,
Known also as "Holy Ann" By Helen E. Bingham

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THE END