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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

HULDA A. (MRS. SETH C.) REES

Hulda Rees was born October 15, 1855 on a farm, three miles southwest of the town of Lynn, Indiana. At one time, the farm included about four hundred acres. Over this delightful, fertile farm she roamed a happy, carefree girl. Naturally fond of outdoor life and scenes, she was permitted to indulge her fancy and was the almost invariable companion of her brother and father as they worked on the farm. Her parents were Nathan W. and Malinda Johnson, members of the Society of Friends. The Johnsons, as a family, had come from North Carolina to Indiana early in the century, and were thus a part of the great movement of Friends who sought new homes and fortunes in the Mississippi Valley.

The companions of Hulda's childhood remember her as a remarkably cheerful and vivacious girl, ever overrunning with merriment, and always a leading spirit among the circle of her friends.

Even the days of her childhood were not without tokens of the character of her future life and work. Her sisters recall distinctly child-sermons which, in innocent fun, she preached to her playmates, and she frequently conducted play-meetings with great zest and keen enjoyment. But there were more serious glimmers in her youth. Although of bright and merry temperament, she was at the same time capable of the deepest religious feeling. Even as a child, the Spirit of God made profound impressions upon her spiritual nature.

Jonathan Johnson, her grandfather, a man of rare insight and of more than ordinary devotion, firmly believed and said that "Hulda would be a minister, and, if faithful, would accomplish much good." When in her tenth year, she arose in a meeting and gave in a testimony. This was the more remarkable because, at that time, children rarely took any part in the meetings of the Quakers.

At the age of eleven she attended the public funeral of her grandmother; and although the silence of the occasion was profound, she knelt by the open coffin and offered vocal prayer. Thus, as a child, she felt and frequently obeyed the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

At the age of sixteen she was truly converted. The great revival was sweeping over the meetings of Western Friends. The services, in many cases, were Pentecostal in power and depth. A God-honored preacher came to Cherry Grove Meeting, the Johnsons' home meeting, and began services in harvest-time. The people came in throngs. The evangelist preached in his characteristic, but always effective, way.

Hulda Johnson, in company with a number of her girl friends, attended the meetings. For days she felt no conviction whatsoever. She sat well forward in the meeting, undisturbed by the Knox-like declarations of God's servant.

One day, while he was preaching, the mind of the evangelist was moved to pray for her. He poured forth his scathing message, his heart meanwhile ascending to God for the thoughtless girl before him. Suddenly, as she afterward related, she was seized with profound conviction, and dropped her head upon the back of the seat before her.

The preacher stopped speaking, and then, after a moment, cried out in gratitude, "Thank God, her head is down!" Instantly, pride asserting itself, she raised her head and sat perfectly erect in her place throughout the remainder of the service. She told herself that she had been insulted. She determined never to enter the meeting house again. Her parents might entreat and persuade, but she would not cross the threshold of the building again.

The moment the meeting "broke up" she started for the door; but the preacher, divinely impressed that a soul was in peril, passed out another door, and met her in the yard. He grasped her by the hand, exhorted her to seek the Lord, dropped upon his knees and began to pray. When he had ceased a Christian young woman, deeply interested in the salvation of the proud girl, also prayed. God heard his servants, and by the time opportunity came, Hulda Johnson, thoroughly penitent, kneeling upon the grass in the old meeting house yard, cried to the Lord, and was clearly converted.

Immediately after her conversion she began to preach; but, although she was frequently blessed and often enjoyed manifestations from the Lord, her Christian life was more or less vacillating for three years, the memory of which gave her great pain in after-life.

But the spiritual shadows were soon dispelled forever. She was fully reclaimed in a series of meetings held at Cherry Grove in December, 1875. From this on her course was one of unwavering fidelity to her Lord. The monthly meeting, of which she was a member, recognizing her earnestness and appreciating the gift which God had bestowed upon her, soon recorded her a minister. In December, 1876, she was married to Seth C. Rees, also a minister in the Society of Friends.

From the time of their marriage, Hulda and her husband were constantly associated together in the work of the ministry. It is not often that God endows a woman both with a love of home and the gift of preaching. She was extremely domestic in her makeup and naturally shrank from public work of any kind; but the call God was more to her than anything else in the world, and she almost invariably accompanied her husband in all his labors.

In 1877 there were meetings held at Greenwood, Halley, and Poplar Run Indiana. God graciously poured out His Spirit, and many were converted and reclaimed.

But to Hulda Rees the work was not easy. In the first place, she was excessively timid and feared the people to whom she ministered. She has been heard to say that, at this time in her life, when sitting in the pulpit, waiting for the time to come to preach, she often closed her eyes, simply to avoid seeing the congregation. Then the cares of home, and her responsibility as the wife of a minister, and as a preacher herself weighed upon her.

About this time a dream came to her which made her very hungry for a better experience. In her dream it seemed to her that she was a child again, at the old home perfectly happy and free from care. She was sitting in her favorite seat, in the willow tree, near the spring-house. She could hear the bees humming in the sweet locust flowers, and the birds were singing with their old-time beauty. She looked up and saw her mother standing in the door at the house, and she said to herself, contentedly, "By and by, when I get hungry, I will go to the house and mother will give me something to eat."

There were no cares or responsibilities to oppress her. She need take no thought for anything. The dream passed, and she sighed when she remembered that it was merely a dream. Then it seemed as if the Lord spoke directly to her:

"Wouldn't you like to be as free from care as when you were a little girl?"

"Yes, Lord, could I?" she said, wistfully.

"Would you be willing to be childlike and happy and contented, and just be my little girl and do errands for me?"

"Oh, I would be so delighted!" Thus the Lord led her along to seek sanctification.

Other things revealed to her the extreme need of her soul; Sometimes the feeling that she could not measure up to the expectations of the people well-nigh crushed her. On one occasion she was expected to preach at a First-day morning meeting, at Westfield, Ind. A large anticipative audience came together. She arose, took her text, and in ten minutes had said all that she could possibly think of to say. She sat down feeling, as she said afterward, "like a fool."

It was a great humiliation to her. She felt extremely mortified. She determined that she would never preach again. She "had not done herself justice," and "wished that she was not recorded a minister." Suddenly she found herself, naturally enough, in great darkness. God convicted her deeply for her lack of humility and her want of deafness to the opinions of other people.

She began to seek holiness. A series of meetings was in progress. One night she remained home in order to be alone and pray. She locked the door of her room and faced the Lord. As she

prayed, God gave her such a revelation of her own heart that she arose from her knees, went out of the room, and closed the door, unable to endure the sight.

But she could not rest, and finally, after a long struggle, she made a complete and entire consecration of herself to God, and was SANCTIFIED wholly.

With her new experience came the usual concomitant, persecution. She no longer feared congregations, but preached "in the power of the Spirit." Consequently, it was said that she was "not so humble as before." Some thought that she "was not so modest and womanly;" but God, on the other hand, began to honor her with souls, and used her in His work as never before. Her ministry gained in effectiveness and force by her sanctification.

Source: "Hulda: The Pentecostal Prophetess"
by Byron J. Rees

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THE END