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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

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(Methodist)

I was born into this world in Windham, N. Y., October 5, 1824; into the kingdom of God in Wilbraham Mass., in the spring of 1842. I could never write the day of my spiritual birth, so gradually did the light dawn upon me and so lightly was the seal of my justification impressed upon my consciousness. This was a source of great trial and seasons of doubt in the first years of my Christian life. I coveted a conversion of the Pauline type. My call to the ministry was more marked and undoubted than my justification. Through a mother's prayers and consecration of her unborn child to the ministry of the Word I may say, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that should bear witness to the truth." My early religious experience was variable, and for the most part consisted in "Sorrows and sins, and doubts and fears, a howling wilderness."

The personality of the Holy Spirit was rather an article of faith than a joyful realization. He had breathed into me life, but not the more abundant life. In a sense I was free, but not "free indeed"; free from the guilt and dominion of sin, but not from strong inward tendencies thereto, which seemed to be a part of my nature. In my early ministry, being hereditarily a Methodist in doctrine, I believed in the possibility of entire sanctification in this life instantaneously wrought. How could I doubt it in the light of my mother's exemplification of its reality? I sought quite earnestly, at times, but failed to find any thing more than transient uplifts from the dead level. One of these, in 1852, was so marked that it delivered me from doubt of the question of regeneration. These uplifts all came while earnestly struggling after entire sanctification as a distinct blessing. But when I embraced the theory that this work is gradual, and not instantaneous, these blessed uplifts ceased. For, seeing no definite line to be crossed, my faith ceased to put forth its strongest energies. In this condition, a period of fifteen years, I became exceedingly dissatisfied and hungry. God had something better for me. He saw that so great was my mental bewilderment, through the conflict of opinion in my own denomination relative to Christian perfection, that I would flounder on, "in endless mazes lost," and never enter "The land of corn and wine and oil," unless He, in mercy, should lead me by another road than that which has the fingerboard set up by John Wesley. I was led by the study of the promised Paraclete to see that He signified far more than I had realized

in the new birth, and that a personal Pentecost was awaiting me. I sought in downright earnestness. Then the Spirit uncovered to my gaze the evil still lurking in my nature; the mixed motives with which I had preached, often preferring the honor which comes from men to that which comes from God.

I submitted to every test presented by the Holy Spirit and publicly confessed what He had revealed and determined to walk alone with God rather than with the multitude in the world or in the Church. I immediately began to feel a strange freedom, daily increasing, the cause of which I did not distinctly apprehend. I was then led to seek the conscious and joyful presence of the Comforter in my heart. Having settled the question that this was not merely an apostolic blessing, but for all ages -- "He shall abide with you forever" -- I took the promise, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." The "verily" had to me all the strength of an oath. Out of the "whatsoever" I took all temporal blessings, not because I did not believe them to be included, but because I was not then seeking them. I then wrote my own name in the promise, not to exclude others, but to be sure that I included myself. Then, writing underneath these words, "Today is the day of salvation," I found that my faith had three points to master -- the Comforter, for me, now. Upon the promise I ventured with an act of appropriating faith, claiming the Comforter as my right in the name of Jesus. For several hours I clung by naked faith, praying and repeating Charles Wesley's hymn

"Jesus, thine all-victorious love shed in my heart abroad."

I then ran over in my mind the great facts in Christ's life, especially dwelling upon Gethsemane and Calvary, His ascension, priesthood, and all-atoning sacrifice. Suddenly I became conscious of a mysterious power exerting itself upon my sensibilities. My physical sensations, though not of a nervous temperament, in good health, alone, and calm, were indescribable, as if an electric current were passing through my body with painless shocks, melting my whole being into a fiery stream of love. The Son of God stood before my spiritual eye in all His loveliness. This was November 17, 1870, the day most memorable to me. I now for the first time realized "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Reputation, friends, family, property, everything disappeared, eclipsed by the brightness of His manifestation. He seemed to say, "I have come to stay." Yet there was no uttered word, no phantasm or image. It was not a trance or vision. The affections were the sphere of this wonderful phenomenon, best described as "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It seemed as if the attraction of Jesus, the loadstone of my soul, was so strong that it would draw the spirit out of the body upward into heaven. How vivid and real was all this to me! I was more certain that God loved me than I was of the existence of the solid earth and of the shining sun. I intuitively apprehended Christ. This certainty has lost none of its strength and sweetness after the lapse of more than seventeen years. Yea, it has become more real and blissful. Nor is this unphilosophical, for Dr. McCosh teaches that the intuitions are capable of growth.

I did not at first realize that this was entire sanctification. The positive part of my experience had eclipsed the negative, the elimination of the sin principle by the cleansing power of the Paraclete. But it was verily so. Yet it has always seemed to me that this was the inferior part of the great blessing of the incoming and abiding of the whole Trinity. John 14:23.

After seventeen years of life's varied experiences, on seas sometimes very tempestuous, in sickness and in health, at home and abroad, in honor and dishonor, in tests of exceeding severity, there has come up out of the depths of neither my conscious nor unconscious being any thing bearing the ugly features of sin, the willful transgression of the known law of God. All this time satan's fiery darts have been thickly flying, but they have fallen harmless upon the invisible shield of faith in Jesus Christ. As to the future, "I am persuaded that He is able to keep my deposit until that day."

In regard to the process of becoming established in holiness, I find this to be God's open secret -- "to walk by the same rule and to mind the same thing." Phil. 3:16. The rule is, faith in Christ ever increasing in strength; the heart being fertilized with the elements of faith, a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, the conscience being trained to avoid not merely sinful and doubtful acts, but also those whose moral quality is beyond the reach of all ethical rules, and known to be evil only by their effect in dimming the manifestation of Christ within. The rule of life, I find, must be sufficiently delicate to exclude those acts which bring the least blur over the spiritual eye. Heb. 5:14. If any act brings a veil of the thinnest gauze between me and the face of Christ I henceforth and forever give it a tremendous letting alone. As another indispensable to establishment in that perfect love which casts out all fear I have found the disposition to confess Christ in His uttermost salvation. As no man could long keep in his house sensitive guests of whom he was ashamed before his neighbors, so no man can long have the company of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the temple of his heart while ashamed of their presence or their purifying work.

In this respect I follow no man's formula. The words which the Spirit of inspiration teaches in the Holy scriptures, though beclouded with misunderstandings and beslimed with fanaticism, are, after all, the most appropriate vehicle for the expression of the wonderful work of God in perfecting holiness in the human spirit, soul and body.

I testify that it is possible for believers to be so filled with the Holy Ghost that they can live many years on the earth conscious every day of a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and of no shrinking back, because of a felt need of further inward cleansing, from an instant translation into the society of the holy angels and into the presence of the holy God. This was my daily experience since 1870. I have the Johannean evidence that my love is pure and unmixed -- that is, perfected in the fact that I have boldness in view of the day of judgment. (1 John 4:17, 18, Dean Alford's Notes.) This joyful boldness is grounded on the assurance of a conformity to the image of the Son of God, and that I am, through the transfiguring power of the Spirit, like Him in purity, and that the Judge will not condemn facsimiles of Himself, "because, even as he is, so are we in this world."

Yet I am conscious of errors, ignorances, infirmities and defects, which, though consistent with perfect loyalty and love to God, need, and by faith receive, every moment, the merit of Christ's death. In other words, the ground of my standing before God is neither perfect rectitude in the past nor a faultless present service, but the divine mercy as administered through Jesus Christ. Hence I daily pray, "Forgive us our debts."

DANIEL STEELE, BOSTON, March, 1888.

Source: "Forty Witnesses" by S. Olin Garrison

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