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BENJAMIN ABBOTT, "NO MAN'S COPY"

**Compiled and Edited by Duane V. Maxey from: "Cyclopedia of Methodism," Revised
5th Edition of 1882, edited by Matthew Simpson, and from "History of the Methodist
Episcopal Church," Volumes I -- III, by Abel Stevens**

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Part 1 ABBOTT CHARACTERIZED

Benjamin Abbott was a Pentecostal "son of thunder," a Methodist "Elijah" who was feared by the wicked, wondered at by the many, and loved by multitudes that were converted and sanctified under his unique ministry. His ministerial brethren characterized him in their Minutes "as one of the wonders of America, no man's copy; an uncommon zealot for the blessed work of sanctification, he preaching it on all occasions and in all congregations, and what was best of all, living it." -- Minutes of 1796, as quoted by Abel Stevens in "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Vol. III, Book V, Chapter III.

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Part 2 A BRIEF SKETCH OF ABBOTT -- BIRTH IN 1732 -- DEATH IN 1796

The following information about Abbott is taken from the "Cyclopedia of Methodism, 5th Revised Edition of 1882, edited by Matthew Simpson: Benjamin Abbott was born in Pennsylvania, in 1732, and died Aug., 1796. He was one among the earliest laborers and pioneer preachers in New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. His youth had been irregular, but at the age of forty he was converted, and he immediately commenced an active Christian life. Through his influence, a society was organized near Penn's Grove where he resided and he became its class-leader. He acted as a local minister for a number of years, and preached successfully and extensively. In 1789, he was admitted on trial in the Philadelphia Conference M. E. Church, and in

the following year, according to the rule which then existed, was admitted into full connection. He had not enjoyed the advantages of an early or extensive education, but he was exceedingly earnest and frequently remarkably eloquent, sometimes overwhelmingly so; and many thousands were awakened and added to the church under his ministry.

All of the remaining material below is taken from "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Volumes I -- III, by Abel Stevens:

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Part 3

ABBOTT AN UNIQUE EVANGELIST

About the year 1773 another notable evangelist appeared in New Jersey, who, though he was not yet recorded in, the Minutes, equaled his itinerant brethren in labors if not in travels. The name of Benjamin Abbott has already been cited; in our day that name is inscribed on a monument under the shadow of a Methodist Church in Salem, N. J., one of the principal scenes of his usefulness; thousands of Methodists have visited it in devout pilgrimage, and thousands will, as long as the denomination lasts, pondering the wonders of his strangely eventful life. Benjamin Abbott became one of the most memorable men of early Methodism. He was thoroughly original, unique in mind and character; religious biography hardly records his fellow except in the story of the "evangelical tinker" and "glorious dreamer" of Bedford jail. [John Bunyan]

Like Bunyan, he had a rude, robust, but holy soul, profound in the mysteries of spiritual life; a temperament deeply mystic and subject to marvelous experiences which baffle all scientific explanation, unless we resort to the doubtful solutions of clairvoyance and somnambulism. He was a great dreamer, and his "visions of the night," recorded with unquestionable honesty, were often verified by the most astonishing coincidences. He was an evangelical Hercules, and wielded the word as a rude irresistible club rather than a sword. His whole soul seemed pervaded by a certain magnetic power that thrilled his discourses and radiated from his person, drawing, melting, and frequently prostrating the stoutest opposers in his congregation. It is probable that no Methodist laborer of his day reclaimed more men from abject vice. He seldom preached without visible results, and his prayers were overwhelming.

Like Bunyan, his early life had been riotously wicked. He first appears as an apprentice in Philadelphia, "where," he says, "I soon fell into bad company, and from that to card-playing, cock-fighting, and many other evil practices. My master and I parted before my time was out, and I went into Jersey, and hired with one of my brothers, where I wrought at plantation work. Some time after this I married, and when I got what my father left me I rented a farm, and followed that business. All this time I had no fear of him before my eyes, but lived in sin and open rebellion against God, in drinking, fighting, swearing, gambling, etc.; yet I worked hard and got a comfortable living for my family." [Quotation from: Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott. To which is annexed a Narrative of his Life and Death. By John Firth. New York. 1854.]

The moral sense, however, seldom dies out, even in the rudest and most reckless souls; and no fact is more clearly shown, in the history of the success of Methodism among the common people, than that the most apparently reprobate men, the drunken, blasphemous, uproarious leaders of the mobs which so frequently opposed the early itinerants, have borne, even in scenes of outrageous hostility, sensitive, trembling consciences; deep, hidden chords of moral susceptibility which, touched by the right appeal, have responded with the finest delicacy of religious feeling. God, who has made all men for immortality, has left none without the faculty, the instinct even, for religion.

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Part 4 CONVICTION STRUGGLES

Scores, if not hundreds, of boisterous opposers, stricken by the preaching of Abbott, bowed in tears before him, ready to kiss his feet. He knew how to address them, for he had been one of them; and while yet himself in vice, he "went," he says, "often to meeting, and many times the Spirit of God alarmed my guilty soul of its danger; but it as often wore off again. Thus I continued in a scene of sin until the fortieth year of my age; yet many were the promises I made, during that period, to amend my life, but all to no purpose; they were as often broken as made; for as yet I never had heard the nature of conviction or conversion: it was a dark time respecting religion, and little or nothing was ever said about experimental religion; and to my knowledge I never had heard either man or woman say that they had the pardoning love of God in their souls, or knew their sins were forgiven. My wife was a member of the Presbyterian Church, and a praying woman; yet at that time she knew nothing about a heart-work."

Waking and sleeping, his strong soul was struggling against itself. The truths that he resisted by day overwhelmed him in the dreams of the night. Coming out of one of these visions, "I awoke," he writes, with "amazement at what I had seen, and concluded that I should shortly die, which brought all my sins before me, and caused me to make many promises to God to repent, which lasted for some time; but this wore off again, and I went to my old practices." Reports of a Methodist preacher reach him; he goes to hear him, and returns "thinking of his misspent life;" "in a moment," he says, "all my sins that I ever had committed were brought to my view; I saw it was the mercy of God that I was out of hell, and promised to amend my life in future. I went home under awful sensations of a future state; my convictions increased, and I began to read my Bible with attention, and saw things in a different light from what I had ever seen them before, and made many promises to God, with tears and groans, to forsake sin; but I knew not the way to Christ for refuge, being ignorant of the nature both of conviction and conversion. But blessed be God, he still gave me light, so that the work was deepened in my soul day by day.

The preacher came to preach in our neighborhood, and I went to hear him again; it being a new thing in the place many came together to hear him. The word reached my heart in such a manner that it shook every joint in my body; tears flowed in abundance, and I cried out for mercy, of which the people took notice, and many were melted into tears. When the sermon was over, the people flocked around the preacher and began to dispute with him about principles of religion. I said that there never was such preaching as this; but the people said, 'Abbott is going mad.' " And

now, as with Bunyan, ensued a struggle with despair itself; "Satan suggested to me that my day of grace was over; therefore I might pray and cry, but he was sure of me at last." In passing through a lonely wood at night, he was tempted to commit suicide; but while looking for a suitable place for the deed, he was deterred by an inward voice, which said, "this torment is nothing compared to hell." This was logic too clear to be resisted; he forthwith mounted his wagon, and believing the tempter to be immediately behind him, drove home "under the greatest anxiety imaginable," with his hair "rising on his head."

His mind had evidently become morbid under its moral sufferings. His dreams that night were appalling; the next day, seeking relief in the labors of the field, his "troubled heart beat so loud that he could hear the strokes." He threw down his scythe and "stood weeping for his sins." Such is the reclaiming, the sublime strength of conscience in the rudest soul when once awakened. This "strong man armed" in his vices, ignorant, boisterous, and dreaded among his neighbors, but now standing in the solitude of the field "weeping for his sins," was a spectacle for men and angels. "I believe," he adds, "I could not have continued in the body had not God moderated the pain and anxiety I was in, but must have expired before the going down of the sun."

He flew to the end of his field, fell upon his knees, and for the first time in his life prayed aloud. Hastening the same day to a Methodist meeting, "I went in," he writes, "sat down, and took my little son upon my knee; the preacher began soon after. His word was attended with such power that it ran through me from head to foot; I shook and trembled like Belshazzar, and felt that I should cry out if I did not leave the house, which I determined to do, that I might not expose myself among the people; but when I attempted to put my little son down and rise to go, I found that my strength had failed me, and the use of my limbs was so far gone that I was utterly unable to rise. Immediately I cried aloud, Save, Lord, or I perish!

But before the preacher concluded, I refrained and wiped my eyes; my heart gave way to shame, and I was tempted to wish I was dead or could die, as I had so exposed myself that my neighbors and acquaintance would laugh at and despise me. When meeting was over I thought to speak to the preacher, but such a crowd got round him, disputing points of doctrine, that I could not conveniently get an opportunity. That evening I set up family prayer, it being the first time I ever had attempted to pray in my family. My wife, being a strict Presbyterian, was a praying woman, and much pleased with having family prayer, so that she proved a great help to me and endeavored to encourage me in my duty; although, dear creature, at that time she knew nothing of experimental religion."

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Part 5 CONVERSION

Thus did this rough but earnest soul struggle as in "the hour and power of darkness." The next day, accompanied by his sympathetic wife, he went more than ten miles to a Methodist assembly; he appealed to the itinerant for counsel and comfort, asking to be baptized, hoping it would relieve his distress, for he had yet no idea of justification by faith. "Are you a Quaker?" asked the preacher. "No," he replied, "I am nothing but a poor, wretched, condemned sinner," and

burst into tears. The preacher comforted him with the promises of the Gospel. "He then said I was the very man that Christ died for, or he would not have awakened me. That it was the lost Christ came to seek, and the greatest of sinners he came to save, and commanded me to believe." That night (the 11th of October, for he is minute in such memorable dates) he awoke from terrible dreams and saw, as in a vision of faith, the Lord Jesus, with extended arms, saying, "I died for you." He wept and adored God with a joyful heart.

"At that moment," he says, "the Scriptures were wonderfully opened to my understanding. My heart felt as light as a bird, being relieved of that load of guilt which before had bowed down my spirits, and my body felt as active as when I was eighteen, so that the outward and inward man were both animated." He rose, and calling up the family, expounded the Scriptures and prayed, and then set off to spend the day in telling his neighbors what God had done for him. He had singular rencounters before night. "While I was telling them," he writes, "my experience, and exhorting them to flee from the wrath to come, some laughed and others cried, and some thought I had gone distracted. Before night a report was spread all through the neighborhood that I was raving mad." Rustic polemic discussions, imputations of self-deception and madness, met him on every hand. A neighboring clergyman tried laboriously to deliver him from the "strong delusions of the devil." The honest man was becoming perplexed. "It was suggested to my mind," he says, "he may be right." "But," he adds, "I went a little out of the road, and kneeled down and prayed to God if I was deceived to undeceive me; and the Lord said to me, 'Why do you doubt? Is not Christ all-sufficient? is he not able? Have you not felt his blood applied?' I then sprang upon my feet and cried out, not all the devils in hell should make me doubt; for I knew that I was converted: at that instant I was filled with unspeakable raptures of joy."

Benjamin Abbott had thus placed his feet securely in "the path of life." He had reached it indeed through darkness and terrors, stumbled into it, it may be said, through errors, morbid agitations, if not temporary insanity; but had evidently attained, at last, the fundamental truth of the Reformation and of Christianity, justification by faith, and he now and henceforth, till his last hour, stood out in the light, with unshakable steadfastness, on this rock of divine truth, a saved, a consecrated, a triumphant man.

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Part 6

TESTED BY THE FALL OF ABRAHAM WHITFORTH

He was soon to be tested by one of the severest trials, one that touched his tenderest Christian affections, and which was associated with an example of those mysterious workings of his strange mind that startle us so much in his autobiography; but his simple faith and good sense saved him. "Toward the dawn of day," he says, "in a dream I thought I saw the preacher, under whom I was awakened, drunk and playing cards, with his garments all defiled with dirt. When I awoke and found it a dream I was glad, although I still felt some uneasiness on his account. In about three weeks after I heard that the poor unfortunate preacher had fallen into sundry gross sins, and was expelled from the Methodist connection. The tidings of his fall filled me with such distress that I wandered about like a lost sheep with these reflections: If the head is thus fallen what will become of me, or what combats may I have with the devil? At length, when in prayer,

under sore temptation, almost in despair, a new thought was impressed on my mind, that I must not trust in the arm of flesh, for, 'Cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh.' I then saw that my salvation did not depend on his standing or falling; I had to stand for myself, and to give diligence, through grace, to save my own soul; that my soul must answer at the bar of God for my own deeds."

The fact here referred to has the peculiar and painful interest of being the first instance of apostasy that dishonored the struggling ministry of Methodism in the new world; its first case of expulsion. The name of Abraham Whitforth appears in the list of the little band of itinerants reported in the appointments of the first Methodist Conference. He was an Englishman, and had labored faithfully with his countrymen Webb, Asbury, and Shadford, in New Jersey, during the year 1772. His eloquence was powerful, and his usefulness extraordinary. It was under his ardent ministrations that Abbott had been saved. He subsequently preached with continued success on both the Eastern and Western Shores of Maryland. While on the Kent Circuit he fell by intemperance, and fell apparently to rise no more. "Alas for that man!" wrote Asbury, when the sad news reached him, "he had been useful, but was puffed up, and so fell into the snare of the devil." Years later, when Asbury first heard Abbott preach, he wrote, "here I find remains the fruit of the labor of that now miserable man Abraham Whitforth; I fear he died a backslider." The last trace we can discover of the fate of the unfortunate man is in the report of "the old Methodists," that he entered the British army to fight against the country and was probably killed in battle.

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Part 7

BIBLE STUDY AND EXHORTATION

Abbott now devoted himself to the study of the Bible, and to "exhort all that" he "had any intercourse with." He tells the story of his daily life with entertaining naiveté and honesty. The Scriptures "were wonderfully opened" to him. In his sleep texts occurred to his mind, with divisions and applications, and he woke up preaching from them. His good wife checked him, saying "you are always preaching;" "however," he adds, "it caused her to ponder these things in her heart. I saw that if ever I should win her to Christ it must be by love, and a close walk with God; for I observed that she watched me closely." He soon won her; Philip Gatch arrived; she was converted after hearing him preach, and when Abbott returned home he met her at the door with tears of joy in her eyes. "We embraced each other," he says, "and she cried out, 'Now I know what you told me is true, for the Lord hath pardoned my sins.' We had a blessed meeting; it was the happiest day we had ever seen together. 'Now,' said she, 'I am willing to be a Methodist too;' from that time we went on, hand and hand, helping and building each other up in the Lord. These were the beginning of days to us. Our children also began to yield obedience to the Lord, and in the course of about three months after my wife's conversion we had six children converted to God."

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Part 8

GRADUATION TO PREACHING

From "exhorting" he at last began to preach; his first sermon was over the coffin of a neighbor. His word was now uniformly "with power;" the sturdiest sinners trembled, or escaped in alarm from his mongrel assemblies. He was a man of great natural courage, and though there was an unction of habitual tenderness and humility in his manners, often revealing itself in tears, yet woe to the man who dared in his presence to treat religion with ridicule or irreverence. His indignant exhortations overwhelmed and swept before him any such offender. He was an example of what the evangelical historians report of the apostolic ministry: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

On one of his walks of prayer and exhortation he met an old friend, who invited him to dinner. He went, and when they were about sitting down at the table he proposed to ask a blessing; as soon as he began two journeymen burst out laughing: "at which," he says, "I arose and began to exhort them all in a very rough manner, thundering out hell and damnation against the ungodly with tears in my eyes. This broke up dinner, and neither of us ate anything." But a young woman present was much affected, and entreated him to visit her mother; the honest man went, palpitating with his holy indignation, but was soon in a happier mood. "The old lady," he writes, "and I fell into conversation. She was a pious Moravian. I was truly glad that I had found a witness for Jesus. She knew that God, for Christ's sake, had freely forgiven her sins. We had a comfortable time in conversing together on the things of God. She told me that I was the first person she had met with, in that place, who could testify that his sins were forgiven. I left her, with strong impressions on my mind, to preach the Gospel."

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Part 9

A MURDERER STRUCK WITH CONVICTION

"On one occasion while I was speaking with great zeal," he continues, "and exclaiming against the various abominations of the people, and pointing out their enormous sins, I cried out, 'For aught I know there may be a murderer in this congregation!' Immediately a lusty man attempted to go out, but when he got to the door he bawled out, and stretched out both his arms and ran backward, as though some one had been before him pressing on him to take his life, and he endeavored to defend himself from the attack, until he got to the far side of the room, and then falling backward against the wall lodged on a chest, and cried out very bitterly, and said, 'He was the murderer, for he had killed a man about fifteen years before.' Thus he lay and cried with great anguish of soul. This surprised me so much that I stopped preaching; the people were greatly alarmed, and looked on the man with the utmost astonishment. After a short pause, I went on again and finished my discourse. The man, who was in this wonderful manner wrought upon, recovered himself and went away, and I never have seen or heard of him since."

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Part 10

BECOMES A METHODIST CLASS LEADER

A Society was now formed in his neighborhood, he becoming its Class Leader; it was soon included in the circuit, and Methodism was permanently established in that region. Abbott spread it out in all directions. He broke up the ground around him for fifteen miles. He worked for his livelihood on week-days, held prayer and Class-meetings at night, and preached on Sundays. No itinerant in New Jersey did more to found securely the denomination in the State. He was its first Methodist convert that preached the Gospel. Asbury said, "he is a man of uncommon zeal, and of good utterance; his words come with great power." We shall have occasion to follow him hereafter in his extending labors and surprising successes.

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Part 11 SPARED FROM A TAR AND FEATHERING

Meanwhile [during 1774] the rough energy but saintly devotion and apostolic zeal of Abbott were awaking large portions of New Jersey. Though he was the Class Leader and practically the Pastor of the Society in his own neighborhood, he was preaching at large on Sundays and at nights. He went to Deerfield, where a mob assembled and threatened to tar and feather any itinerant who should appear there. He was met by a friend on the road and admonished to turn back. "At first," he says, "I thought I would return; consulting with flesh and blood, I concluded that it would be a disagreeable thing to have my clothes spoiled, and my hair all matted together with tar." But he recalled the sufferings of his Lord, and immediately "resolved to go and preach if he had to die for it." He found a large congregation filling the house and crowding the neighboring premises. "I went," he continues, "in among them, and gave out a hymn, but no one sung; I then sung four lines myself, while every joint in my body trembled. I said, Let us pray, and before prayer was over the power of God fell on me in such a manner that it instantly removed from me the fear of man, and some cried out. I arose, took my text and preached with great liberty; before the meeting was over I saw many tears drop from their eyes, and the head of the mob said that the had never heard such preaching since Robert Williams went away; so I came off clear. Glory be to God, who stood by me in this trying hour!"

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Part 12 SANCTIFIED WHOLLY

He meets soon after with a Methodist preacher who talks with him about Wesley's views of sanctification, and he resolves to seek that higher grace. "I was now," he says, "engaged for the blessing more than ever. Soon after, Daniel Ruff came upon the circuit, and my house being a preaching place, he came and preached, and in the morning, in family prayer, he prayed that God would sanctify us soul and body. I repeated these words after him, 'Come, Lord, and sanctify me, soul and body!' That moment the Spirit of God came upon me in such a manner that I fell flat to the floor. I had not power to lift hand or foot, nor yet to speak one word; I believe I lay half an hour, and felt the power of God running through every part of my soul and body, like fire consuming the inward corruptions of fallen, depraved nature. When I arose and walked out of the door, and stood pondering these things in my heart, it appeared to me that the whole creation was praising God; it

also appeared as if I had got new eyes, for everything appeared new, and I felt a love for all the creatures that God had made, and an uninterrupted peace filled my breast. In three days God gave me a full assurance that he had sanctified me, soul and body. 'If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him,' John xiv, 23, which I found day by day manifested to my soul, by the witness of his Spirit. Glory to God for what he then did and since has done for poor me!"

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Part 13

MORE ZEALOUS THAN EVER AFTER HIS SANCTIFICATION

More than ever did his soul now flame with zeal for the salvation of the people. He soon found his way into Salem, where his bones now rest, and where he is still venerated as the tutelary saint of its Methodist community. "A large congregation," he writes, "assembled, to whom I preached, and God attended the word with power; some cried out and many were in tears. After the sermon I made another appointment for that day two weeks. There being an elder of the Presbyterian Church present, he asked me if I would come and preach at his house; I told him that I would, on that day two weeks, at three o'clock. Another said it was the truth I had spoken, but in a very rough manner. At the time appointed I attended, and found many people at both places. At the first, I felt much freedom in speaking, and after sermon found that both the man and his wife were awakened.

At the second, great power attended the word; several cried aloud, and one fell to the floor. After meeting, I asked the man of the house if he knew what he had done. He replied, 'What have I done?' 'You have opened your door to the Methodists, and if a work of religion break out your people will turn you out of their synagogue.' He replied that he would die for the truth.' I appointed to preach again at both places that day two weeks. Next day, on my return home, I called at a Baptist's house, whose daughter was very ill; after some conversation, I went to prayer, and the Lord set her soul at liberty, and she praised God before us all. Here I fell in company with one of Whitefield's converts, who had known the Lord forty years; we had great comfort in conversing together upon the things of God; he was an Israelite indeed. About two years after he came to see me, and told me that he had come to die at my house; accordingly he was taken sick, and died there happy in God."

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Part 14

INVASION OF THE DEVIL'S STRONGEST HOLDS

Abbott, after his own hard struggles with the "great adversary," felt a sort of bold defiance of him, and was prepared always to invade his strongest holds. He now made a Sabbath expedition to a place which, for its notorious depravity, was called "Hell Neck." "One sinner there," he writes, "said he had heard Abbott swear, and had seen him fight, and now would go and hear him preach. The word reached his heart, and he soon after became a convert to the Lord. After meeting he invited me home with him, and several others invited me to preach at their houses, so that I got

preaching places all through the neighborhood and a considerable revival of religion took place, although it had been so noted for wickedness. Among others, a young lad, about fifteen years old, was awakened, and in a few weeks found peace; his father, being a great enemy to religion, opposed him violently, and resolved to prevent his being a Methodist, and even whipped him for praying. This soon threw him into great distress, and on the very borders of despair. I heard of it and went to see him. He told me his temptations." Abbott perceived his morbid anxiety, and comforted him. "The son," he adds, "then cried out, 'The Lord is here! the Lord is here!' The father said to me, 'Benjamin, are you not a freemason?' I told him 'no, I knew nothing of freemasonry, but I knew that this was the operation of the Spirit of God.' The father then wept. I went to prayer, and the family were all in tears; after this the son went on, joyfully. After I left this house I went to another of the neighbors, and after some conversation with them I went to prayer; the man kneeled, but the woman continued knitting all the time of the prayer. When I arose I took her by the hand and said, 'Do you pray?' and looking steadfastly at her, added, 'God pity you.' This pierced her heart, so that she never rested until her soul was converted to the Lord. The whole neighborhood seemed alarmed."

Such quaintly told incidents abound throughout the narrative of this good man's life. He thus "went about doing good," and in his devout simplicity and earnestness rescued more souls than all the more formal pastors for miles around him. The simple but degenerate people understood his artless words. They intuitively recognized the genuineness of his religious character, the purity of his motives, and as he concerned himself exclusively with the essential truths of religion, they gladly clung to him with repentant tears, as a safe guide to their awakened souls. The prejudices of their religious education could not withstand his simple and affectionate appeals. People of all denominations gathered in his congregations, and often an individual conversion became the germ of a flourishing society. "A Quaker," he says, "who one day came to hear me, asked me home with him; when I entered his house I said, 'God has brought salvation to this house.' At prayer, in the evening, his daughter was struck under conviction, and soon after the old man, his wife, three sons and two daughters, were all brought to experience religion, so that we formed a considerable society."

In Mannington, his nearest appointment, great throngs attended; the man and his wife, at whose house the services were held, were both converted, "and many others were stirred up to inquire the way to heaven." He reached Woodstown, where he had a crowded house. He was mobbed there, and bayonets were presented at his breast; "the people fled," he says, "every way; a man presented is gun and bayonet as though he would run me through; it passed close by my ear twice. If ever I preached the terrors of the law, I did it while he was threatening me in this manner, for I felt no fear of death, and soon found he could not withstand the force of truth; he gave way and retreated to the door. They endeavored to send him back again, but in vain, for he refused to return."

He moved his family to a new home, near Salem; "here," he continues, "I had many doors opened for me to preach, and a powerful work of religion took place, attended with several remarkable conversions." Many of these "remarkable" occurrences were evidently cases of mental as well as of moral disease. But the mental disturbance which not unusually attends the awakening of the conscience, is perhaps an unavoidable effect of the discovery, by the soul, of its long and perilous neglect of its highest interest and duty. Abbott was not able scientifically to appreciate

such examples, but his good common sense and tender evangelical spirit enabled him to counsel them with singular pertinency; and seldom or never did he fail to recover such sufferers, more effectually and promptly than could any scientific skill. It is astonishing how frequent were these cases among people of almost every variety of religious education, and how aptly and successfully he treated them.

"A Quaker woman," he says, "went from preaching under strong conviction, and such anguish of mind that she paid no attention to her family, nor even to her sucking child. Early in the morning I was sent for: when I arrived she was sitting with both hands clenched fast in the hair of her head, crying out, 'Lord, have mercy on me! Save, Lord, or I perish!' I told her to pray in faith, to look to Jesus, and lay hold of the promises, and God would have mercy on her; but she replied, 'I cannot pray.' I said, 'You do pray very well; go on.' I then kneeled down and prayed; three pious women who were present did so likewise. One of them said she could not pray in English. I told her to pray in Dutch, for God understood that as well as English.

The distressed woman appeared to be worse, like one going distracted. I then sang. When the last words were sung I felt such faith, that I told them the Lord would deliver her; and said, let us pray. I kneeled down; in a few minutes she clapped her hands together and cried, 'My Lord, my God, and my Father!' Her soul was immediately set at liberty, and she sprang up, rejoicing, and giving glory to God. Her husband burst into a flood of tears. I exhorted him to look to God, and he would find mercy. In about six weeks after he was safely converted." A woman who was present became doubtful of her own conversion, because she had never had any of these remarkable experiences. Abbott's good sense was again shown. "I told her," he says, "that was no proof, for I was not wrought on in that manner myself, yet I knew that I was converted. God works upon his people as he in his wisdom sees best; no one's distress can be a standard for another; so that, if our sins or guilt are removed, and the power of religion fixed in the soul, it is enough. None should doubt it because he has not been brought in as he sees others. The Lord blessed her with such light and comfort that every fear and doubt was removed."

Another instance was a headstrong Papist, who had sturdily persecuted his wife for her devotion to religion among the Methodists. On a Sunday morning he left her, in a violent passion, because she would not spend the day with him in visits, rather than in religious services. "But," says Abbott, "before he had gone far he concluded he would return, and with malice and murder in his heart, determined that she should go with him, or he would kill her; when they met she spoke to him with such tenderness that his rage calmed away. He concluded he would go with her to meeting; they both came, and, under preaching, the word struck him with such power that he cried aloud, and told before all the congregation what had passed in the morning, and wanted to know what he should do to be saved. I explained to him the way and plan of salvation; and in a short time he found peace, and became a steady, religious man."

A schoolmaster, who "was a learned, sensible man, but a very drunken and wicked one, was awakened, and so far reformed that he left off drinking to excess, and other vices, for some time, but again gave way to temptation and was overcome by strong drink. After he became sober, his mind was tormented with great horror; he went to a neighbor's house to tarry all night, but, after the family were all in bed, he could not sleep under his tormenting reflections" -- which at last resulted in an obvious case of mania a potu. Abbott was no judge of such a phenomenon, but he

met it skillfully. The wretched man thought he saw devils menacing him. The whole family was alarmed and rose, but did not know what to do. "They sent over for me," says Abbott; "I went, and found him in a shocking condition. I told him it was only the strength of imagination; the that there were no devils there to take him away; but he still declared they were in the room. I instantly went to prayer; all present fell upon their knees, much affected, and continued in supplication during the whole night. Soon after this scene, all the grown part of the family were brought into the liberty and knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus."

No evangelist of that day was more successful than Benjamin Abbott, and there can be no more truly historical rationale of his extraordinary usefulness than is afforded by such examples. He was mighty as a preacher, and he preached with the expectation of such immediate and individual results. The distinct, demonstrative reformation and salvation of individual souls were the only satisfactory proofs to him of the success of his ministry; and he sought for such proofs in every place he visited, after every sermon he delivered. He pursued them to their utmost results, and they became, as has been shown, the germs of many of the Societies which he formed. He thus combined, with his overwhelming preaching, a species of most important pastoral labor, without which his public exercises would have lost half their value. And it is particularly noteworthy that this unlettered man was endowed, as we have seen, chiefly by the effect of religion on his own mind, with so much clear and genial good sense as to be particularly apt in ministering to minds diseased, so common, so inevitable, perhaps it should be said, in times of religious excitement; not so much the effect of such excitement as of the previous guilty life, then often suddenly and for the first time revealed, in its true character, to the awakened moral sense.

Though very credulous himself, and in his early religious history somewhat fanatical, inwardly combating with demons and seeing wondrous visions of the night, yet, like Bunyan, with whose early religious struggles his own were so remarkably coincident, he became prudent, and "mighty in the Scriptures," and thus acquired uncommon skill in the ministration of comfort to morbid consciences, in directing them from delusive fears to the consolatory promises and the simple and gracious conditions of acceptance with God. Withal he attained a truly scriptural catholicity. "For my part," he writes, "I do not believe that religion consists in either form or mode. Neither do I believe a record of our names, on any church-book under heaven, will stand the test in the awful hour of accounts, unless they are recorded in the Lamb's book of life. I love real heart religion, let me find it where I may."

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Part 15

WORD ABOUT ABBOTT AND HIS MINISTRY SCATTERED ABROAD

Abbott's fame was now general, and "the work," he says, "became general; we used to hold prayer-meetings two or three times a week, in the evening; sometimes we would begin preaching at eleven o'clock, and not part till night; many long summer days we thus spent. Sometimes we used to assemble in the woods and under the trees, there not being room in the house for the people that attended. Often, some of them would be struck to the ground in bitter lamentations. The Lord wrought great wonders among us. It was truly a fulfillment of that Scripture which says, 'I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.'

Acts xiii, 41. The alarm spread far and near; friends sent for me to come to New Mills, Pemberton, about sixty miles distant. The first time I preached God worked powerfully; we had a weeping time, and one fell to the floor; this alarmed the people, for they had never seen the like before; when meeting was over, we took him to a friend's house, and prayer was made for him till he rejoiced in the love of God. Next day I preached again, and the Lord poured out his Spirit among us, so that there was weeping in abundance, and one fell to the floor; many prayers being made for him, he found peace before he arose. He is a living witness to this day. I saw him not long since, and we had a precious time together. Next day I traveled some miles, and preached in a Presbyterian meeting-house. I had a large congregation, and spoke from these words; 'Ye must be born again.' God attended the word with power; some wept, some groaned, and others cried aloud. I believe there were about twenty Indians present, and when I came out of the pulpit they got all round me, asking what they should do to be saved, and tears ran in abundance; many of the white people also wept. This was a day of God's power; from the accounts afterward given me, it appeared that twelve were converted and many awakened. One who was a deacon in the Church found the Lord and joined our Society; I have spent many precious moments with him since that day."

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Part 16

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF HIS MINISTRY CONSIDERED

These physical effects of religious excitement -- the excesses of a commendable spiritual earnestness -- were not peculiar to Methodist preaching. Outcries, convulsions, syncopes, had been common in the province before the first visit of Whitefield, under the ministrations of Rowland, whose hearers "fainted away," and were often carried out of the churches as dead men. Similar effects attended Whitefield's preaching there. They had been common under the labors of Edwards, in New England. The best Methodist authorities have not considered them necessary accompaniments of a genuine religious awakening, but, while admitting them to be hardly avoidable in times of profound religious excitement, they regret them as human infirmities and recommend all possible caution against them.

Thus the labors of this energetic man went on from village to village, town to town, county to county, till the whole state felt, more or less, his influence, and acknowledged that he was a strange but indisputable power among the people, turning scores and hundreds "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." We shall frequently meet him hereafter, and find him growing mightier unto the end.

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Part 17

PHYSICAL PHENOMENA DURING ABBOTT'S MEETINGS

It is difficult to trace with exactness, through the present period, (1775-1784) the labors of Benjamin Abbott, in many respects the most remarkable evangelist in the eventful field. This mighty but simple-minded apostle, intent only on the spiritual results of his humble mission,

seldom pauses to note dates or localities. It is his "next appointment," and again, and still again, his "next appointment," with the marvelous effects of the truth that he records; hurrying us forward with intense interest, with frequent and bewildering surprises at the mysterious power of the man, and at both the spiritual and physical phenomena which it produces. If we can pause at all over his exciting narrative, it is to wonder at the moral, the beneficent efficacy of his ministrations, the peculiar, the magnetic eloquence of his unpolished discourse, and the questionable if not inexplicable problems of its physical effects. Seldom does he preach without some of these "physical phenomena;" his hearers by tens and scores fall like dead men to the earth. If he is himself, at first, astonished at these wonders, his simple and honest mind has a very direct logic respecting them. They are "insanity," they are "demoniacal," cry out shrewd and self-possessed spectators. Wait, replies the evangelist, let us see how these slain come to life again. If they are insane they will show it; if these strange things are of the devil they will recover their self-possession blaspheming and be worse than they were before.

They "come to," not in general, but invariably, with words of praise upon their lips, with grateful tears, with resolutions and strength to live a new life. "Stand still," cried Abbott to gainsayers, "stand still and see the salvation of God." Intellectually he was incapable of other reasoning on the subject, and went forward preaching, swaying and prostrating his wondering congregations. The preaching of no early Methodist itinerant was attended with more of these marvels, but they were not peculiar to him. Edwards had recorded them in his account of the "Great Awakening." They had occurred in the scene of Abbott's present labors in New Jersey, as we have seen, under the preaching of the Presbyterian evangelists of Whitefield's day. Among the severe-minded Scotch Whitefield's preaching had produced them, and cool, stout-hearted men had been carried out of his great congregations "as if slain in battle."

They had attended Wesley's calm, perspicuous preaching, even before the powerful oratory of Whitefield produced them. Wesley could never reach any conclusive opinion of their character, though he instituted, at Newcastle, a sort of scientific investigation of their causes and symptoms. At one time he admits them to be the effect of divine influence; at another he suspects a diabolical cause. Charles Wesley conclusively condemned and endeavored to repress them. Richard Watson has expressed the general sentiment of Methodists respecting them, that though they are evidently physical, arising from some occult nervous susceptibility, peculiar, perhaps, to certain constitutions, they do not prove that an extraordinary work of God is not at the same time going on in the hearts of persons so affected; that by the exercise of a firm discipline, then most of all to be exerted, they are as far as possible to be repressed, "for the power of the work does not lie in them," and that yet discipline, though firm, ought to be cautious, for the sake of the real blessing, with which at such seasons God is crowning the administration of his truth.

We shall hereafter have to record frequent examples of these "phenomena," especially in the West, not always arising from Methodistic influence, but, in the most extraordinary instance, from the ministrations of another denomination. Apparently a specific effect of religious excitement, on a peculiar cerebral susceptibility, they have been common to all religions. The tranquil Friends owe their name of "Quakers" to them. The devotees of Brahma and of Bhudda, the Dervishes of Islamism, the Convulsionnaires of France, the Mystics of all faiths and all ages, have afforded examples of them.

In our day [the 1850s and 1860s] they have occurred almost on a national scale in Ireland, in connection with a salutary religious interest. Our future science can alone give their just solution. But science has its pride and its Pharisaism, as unbefitting to it as the same vices are to religion; it affected at first to ridicule Hervey, Jenner, Galileo, and Copernicus. A fastidious repugnance to the charge of charlatanism has led it, in the present age, to ignore or impute solely to imposture, falsely called "spiritualistic" phenomena, which have deluded half the civilized world, which have afforded the most palpable data for investigation, and in which imposture has evidently been but exceptional, while an occult and profoundly interesting scientific law has been indicated; a law the ascertainment of which would probably disclose the as yet dim and misty intermediate region that connects the material and immaterial worlds. The scientific solution of these mysteries might dispel a vast amount of superstition, and afford beneficent reliefs to our psychological and theological science.

To the student of such marvels the autobiography of Abbott offers the most curious data; a magnetic power, if such it can be called, which, intensified by his piety, was as irresistible, to certain temperaments, as the electricity of lightning -- a seemingly clairvoyant discernment, a somnambulant insight and foresight, in dreams; facts that would be incredible, were not his honesty absolutely unquestionable, and were they not so circumstantially given, and so well known in the community among whom his narrative was circulated, as to silence all denial. Few if any men were better known, in his day, throughout New Jersey, than Benjamin Abbott. He was not only generally respected, but beloved. The natural kindliness of his temper, the unction of his religious feelings, the purity and simplicity of his life, his quiet courage, the fatherly tenderness of his manners, the richness, in fine, of his nature in all those qualities which make "the whole world kin," and to which the unsophisticated common mind so readily responds in popular assemblies, made him dear, not only to all devout but to all honest men. He was generally addressed as "Father Abbott;" many delighted to call him their "spiritual father;" and not rarely were public assemblies melted into tears by the sight of robust men, hardy but reclaimed sinners, rushing into his arms and weeping with filial gratitude upon his neck.

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Part 18

THE UNSELFISH AND GENEROUS CHARACTER OF ABBOTT'S MINISTRY

He traveled and preached for years without one cent of compensation, except his hospitable entertainment among the people. Frugal and industrious, he sustained his family by tilling a small farm, hiring laborers that he might alternate his manual toils with itinerant excursions; and, when he preached, within convenient proximity to his farm, he led his workmen to his meetings, paying them for their time at the rate that he paid for their labor. All his family were members of the Church, and shared his zeal; one of his sons went forth an itinerant; the remainder of the household made their home a sort of chapel; it was the resort of earnest inquirers, often from a distance; and at such visits not only the father, but the mother, and child after child, took part in the customary prayers and exhortations. Many a visitor went from the door with his face turned forever heavenward.

He had a chapel erected in his neighborhood, for which he begged money and timber, from house to house. Though he was not yet fifty years old, his appearance was unusually paternal, if not patriarchal; his person was large, his countenance bland, his manners marked by religious tenderness. He dressed with Quaker-like simplicity, and his broad-brimmed hat and straight coat added not a little to the attraction of his devout temper among the numerous "Friends" of New Jersey. They frequented his appointments, entertained him at their homes, and urged him to preach in their Meeting-houses. "Thee appears so much like us we will welcome thee," said their own preachers to him. They liked him the more for his Quaker doctrine about war, then raging in the land.

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Part 19

A POLITICAL WAR PACIFIST -- A SPIRITUAL WAR ACTIVIST

He was a sound patriot, but could not approve fighting, though in early life a formidable pugilist. "My call is to preach salvation to sinners," he said; "to wage war against the works of the devil. He was sometimes assailed by troops. Then more than ever he blew the "trumpet of the Gospel," and never failed of victory. A major angrily attacked him for not "preaching up war." "I related to him," he says, "my conviction and conversion, and he was calm and wished me well." While the state was distracted with the marching and counter marching of troops, he was allowed to go on, in his own evangelical warfare, through its length and breadth. Like Christ on the highways, his preaching was "talk" to the people; he entered no house but as an evangelist, and his colloquial ministration of the truth probably did more good than His public discourses.

"On my way to my next appointment," he says, "I came to a small village, stopped at a house, and asked the man if they had any preaching there. He said, 'No.' I said; 'I am a preacher, and if you will give notice I will preach to the people.' But he replied, 'They do not want preaching here,' and appeared angry. I then told my experience to the man, his wife, and two young women; and the dreadful state that man is in by nature, and then pointed out a Saviour. One of the young women began to weep. I was very happy, and asked the man if I might pray; he gave me leave, and I said, 'Let us pray.' I had no sooner began than they wept aloud." Such was his simple method, as he "went about doing good," and it could seldom fail to be effectual. In this case the weeping family offered him dinner, and food for his horse. "I left them," he says, "all in tears. I saw one of the young women some time afterward, and she told me that she was awakened at that time, and had since found the Lord precious to her soul, and had joined a Methodist class."

He went to Trenton, but found the Methodist Chapel used as a stable by the army, and preached in the Presbyterian Church. He went forward and "preached in the evening to a crowded congregation," he writes, "and God poured out his Spirit in such a manner that one fell to the floor. A captain and some soldiers came to take me up, but the Spirit of God took him up in such a manner that he returned home crying to God for mercy. I saw him some time after, happy in God. We spent a precious time together, and parted in love. This meeting was a time of God's power; many were awakened to a sense of their danger, and the people of God were happy, and, for my part, I was very happy."

He visits an uncle, whom he had not seen for seventeen years, and says: "As I sat my foot on the steps of the door the Spirit of the Lord came upon me. After asking them all how they did, I told them my experience. My uncle and aunt wept sore, and I cried out, 'The Lord is here!' A friend present said, 'He is come, for I feel his Spirit upon me,' which caused my aunt to wonder what this meant." They all accompany him to his next appointment, where there is "a melting time." He soon after meets them again, and finds his aunt thoroughly "awakened." Other relatives of his family learn the news; they meet him; and we had a weeping time," he writes, "all the evening. They said this is the religion of Jesus!"

He forms a class among them, and sends to it a leader from Trenton. Many a Society does he form in this manner. He continues: "I went to my next appointment, where they had threatened to tar and feather me. Some advised me to go some other way; but when I arrived at the place I found a large congregation assembled, to whom I preached, and God attended the Word with power -many shed tears in abundance." They were now unwilling to let him go away. "As I was about to depart, two young men came to me; one took hold of my leg, and the other held my horse by the neck, and said, 'Will you go!' I sat on my horse for some time, exhorting them to persevere, and the Lord would bless them. Many more stood weeping; so we parted, and I went to the New Mills, (Pemberton,) where the people came out by hundreds, to whom I preached my farewell sermon. I returned home, and by Thursday night a letter was sent, informing me that sixteen were justified, and two sanctified. The reading of this letter filled my soul with love, and I was determined to preach sanctification more than ever. I received a letter from a Presbyterian in Deerfield, that his house and heart were open to receive me, adding, 'When you read these lines look upon it as a call from God.' "I accordingly wrote to him to make an appointment for me on the Sunday following. I attended, and found a large congregation, to whom I preached, and some few wept. I attended again that day two weeks, and we had a melting time. I then made an appointment for the traveling preacher.

"This and several other places in the neighborhood were taken into the circuit. The Lord began to work in a powerful manner, and we soon had two classes; then the devil roared horribly; but God worked powerfully, and blessed the Word, and sent it with power to many hearts; many fell under it like dead men, being alarmed of their danger. We appointed a watch-night. This brought so many to see what it meant that the house could not contain the people. One of our preachers preached, and then an exhortation was given; the Lord poured out his Spirit in such a manner that the slain lay all over the house; many others were prevented from falling by the crowd, which stood so close that they supported one another. We continued till about midnight; some stayed all night, and in the morning others came; several found peace, and many cried to God for mercy; it was a powerful time to many souls."

He went to a Quarterly Meeting on Morris River, "and," he writes, "we had a powerful time; the slain lay all through the house, and round it, and in the woods, crying to God for mercy, and others praising him for the deliverance of their souls. At this time there came up the river a look-out boat; the crew landed and came to the meeting; one of them stood by a woman that lay on the ground, crying to God for mercy, and said to her, 'Why do you not cry louder?' She immediately began to pray for him, and the power of the Lord struck him to the ground, and he lay and cried for mercy louder than the woman. This meeting continued from eleven o'clock till night."

These extraordinary effects sometimes spread through nearly his whole congregation, few escaping, except such as rushed out of the doors, or leaped out of the windows. If a temporary tumult ensued it was soon allayed, while the moral impression seemed to be permanent and salutary; many of the most noted reprobates of the county being reformed and converted at once into good Christians and good citizens.

He attended another quarterly meeting soon afterward, where "the Lord made bare his arm, and some fell to the floor, and others ran away." When he was about to depart an "old lady," he says, "put two dollars into my hand. This was the first money that I had ever received as a preacher; but He that was mindful of the young ravens was mindful of me. I had always traveled at my own charge before. When I received this I had but fifteen pence in my pocket, and was above two hundred miles from home."

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Part 20

LABORS IN THE REGION ABOUT SALEM

His labors in all the region about Salem, noted at that time for its demoralization, were surprisingly successful. Some able preachers were raised up by him. Often a single sentence in his conversation left an ineffaceable impression. Taking leave of a family, he gave his hand to a military officer at the door, saying, "God, out of Christ, is a consuming fire. Farewell." "And so," he adds, "we parted; but God pursued him from the very door, and gave him no rest; before twelve o'clock that night he was out of bed on the floor at prayer. In about two months his soul was set at liberty, and he is a member of our Church at the present period."

At one of his appointments near his residence one of his friends (a Quaker) and his family attended. "Before I concluded," he says, "himself, his wife, son, and daughter, were all struck under conviction, and never rested until they all found rest to their souls and joined our Society. About six months after the son died in a triumph of faith; the father was taken ill at the funeral and never went out of his house again, until carried to his grave. He departed this life praising God in a transport of joy. By this time there was a general alarm spread through the neighborhood. We had prayer-meetings, two or three times a week, and at almost every meeting some were either convinced or converted. Next morning a young man came to my house to know what he must do to be saved. I applied the promises of the Gospel, and then prayed, and after me my wife, and then my daughter Martha. While supplicating the throne of grace on his behalf; the Lord, in his infinite goodness, spoke peace to his soul; and we were all made partakers of the blessing. He joined Society, lived several years, and died clapping his hands, and shouting, 'Glory to God! I am going home!'"

Such humble labors with such positive results (however fastidiously we may criticize their incidental irregularities) could not fail of a general impression. The Society in the neighborhood of his residence increased; hitherto he had preached to them under the trees of the forest; he now projected his chapel, and Methodism was thus securely founded in that vicinity, and spread out dominantly into many neighboring towns.

For some time Abbott had been intimate with James Sterling, Esq., of whom the historian of the denomination, in New Jersey, says that probably no layman in the state "ever did more to advance religion and Methodism." A merchant of rare ability and great wealth, an officer in the American Revolution, a citizen of universal esteem and influence, this zealous layman devoted himself to the new Church in the day of its deepest humility. He accompanied Abbott in many of his excursions, and often exhorted in his congregations. His house at Burlington was the home of not only Methodist itinerants, but of Christian ministers of all denominations. His friend, Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, says that "It is believed he has entertained in his house and contributed toward the support of more preachers of the Gospel than any other man in the state, if not in the United States." For half a century he thus consecrated his home and his secular business to the promotion of religion.

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Part 21

THE EXTENSION OF HIS MINISTRY INTO DELAWARE AND PENNSYLVANIA

In the latter part of 1780 Abbott writes: "I had been pressed in spirit for some time to visit Pennsylvania, and, in the love and fear of God, I set out with my life in my hand, it being a time when war was raging through the land." He crossed the Delaware at New Castle, and opened his mission in that town to "a pack of ruffians" who had met to mob him. One of them stood before him with a bottle of rum in his hand, threatening to throw it at his head. Abbott preached on, however, dealing out to them "the terrors of the law" in a manner he had seldom done before.

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Part 22

ABBOTT IS DELIVERED FROM ARREST

At his second appointment, in Wilmington, the usual "physical phenomena" of his preaching took place; one of his hearers fell to the floor. He pressed forward, preaching daily. On his way to a place near Newark, Del., not knowing his route, he stopped at a house to inquire about it; his informant promised to accompany him, remarking that a Methodist itinerant was to be there that day, and that his own preacher designed to meet and entrap the intruder. A neighbor, who was a constable, soon joined them; "so," writes Abbott, "we set off, and they soon fell into conversation about the preacher, having no idea of my being the man, as I never wore black, or any kind of garb that indicated my being a preacher, and so I rode unsuspected.

"The constable, being a very profane man, swore by all the gods he had, good and bad, that he would lose his right arm from his body if the Methodist preacher did not go to jail that day. This was the theme of their discourse. My mind was greatly exercised on the occasion, and what added, as it were, double weight, I was a stranger in a strange place, where I knew no one. When we arrived at the place appointed I saw about two hundred horses hitched. I also hitched mine, and retired into the woods, where I prayed and covenanted with God on my knees, that if he stood by me in this emergency I would be more for him, through grace, than ever I had been. I then arose and went to my horse with a perfect resignation to the will of God, whether for death or for jail. I took

my saddle-bags and went to the house; the man took me into a private room and desired I would preach in favor of the war, as I was in a Presbyterian settlement. I replied I should preach as God should direct me. He appeared very uneasy and left me; just before preaching he came in again and renewed his request that I would preach up for war; I replied as before, and then followed him out among the people, where he made proclamation as follows:

" 'Gentlemen, this house is my own, and no one shall be interrupted in my house in time of his discourse, but after he has done you may do as you please.' Thank God, said I softly, that I have liberty once more to warn sinners before I die. I then took my stand, and the house was so crowded that no one could sit down. Some hundreds were round about the door. I stood about two or three feet from the constable who had sworn so bitterly. When he saw that I was the man he had abused on the way, with so many threats and oaths, his countenance fell and he turned pale. I gave out a hymn, but no one offered to sing; I sung four lines and kneeled down and prayed. When I arose I preached with great liberty. I felt such power from God rest upon me that I was above the fear of either men or devils, not regarding whether death or jail should be my lot. Looking forward I saw a decent looking man trembling, and his tears flowing in abundance, which I soon discovered was the case with many others. After preaching, I told them I expected they wanted to know by what authority I had come into that country to preach. I then told them my conviction and conversion, the place of my nativity, and place of residence; also, my call to the ministry, and that seven years I had labored in God's vineyard; that I spent my own money and found my own clothes, and that it was the love that I had for their souls, for whom Christ died, that had induced me to come among them at the risk of my life, and exhorted them to fly to Jesus for safety; that all things were ready; to seek, and they should find, to knock, and it should be opened unto them.

By this time the people were generally melted into tears. I then concluded, and told them on that day two weeks they might expect preaching again. I mounted my horse and set out with a friendly Quaker for a pilot. We had not rode above fifty yards when I heard one hallooing after us. I looked back and saw about fifty running toward us. I then concluded that to jail I must go. We stopped, and when they came up, 'I crave your name,' said one; I told him, and so we parted. He was a justice of the peace, and was the person that I had taken notice of in time of preaching, observing him to be in great anxiety of mind. No one offered me any violence; but they committed the next preacher, on that day two weeks, to the common jail. I went home with the kind Quaker, where I tarried all night. I found that he and his wife were under serious impressions, and had had Methodist preaching at their house. They were very kind, and we spent the evening in conversing on the things of God."

He soon penetrated to Soudersburg, a German settlement, where "the Lord wrought wonders; divers fell to the floor, and several found peace. Many tarried to hear what I had seen through the land of the wonderful works of God. The people cried aloud, and continued all night in prayer." He was welcomed by Rev. Martin Boehm, in Lancaster County. Boehm, as we have seen, was one of the founders, and at last one of the bishops of the "German Methodists," or, "United Brethren." Strawbridge had visited and labored with him; Peter Allbright, founder of the "Allbright Methodists," was one of the good German's converts. Boehm had formed a sort of circuit, consisting of four appointments; one of these, near his residence, was made a regular preaching place for the Methodist itinerants, and his own house was their hospitable home. The region became a stronghold of Methodism. Asbury visited it often; Boehm was one of his most

confidential friends and counselors, and his son, Henry Boehm, joined the Methodist itinerancy, and became the bishop's traveling companion.

Abbott was accompanied to Boehm's Village by quite a procession, twenty at least of the zealous Methodists of Soudersburg following him on the route. His introduction to this new scene was attended, in an extraordinary manner, by those "physical demonstrations" which had occurred under his preaching in New Jersey, and which were comparatively unknown among these quiet, rustic people. They began spontaneously as soon as he appeared among them. "When I came to my appointment," he says, "the power of the Lord came in such a manner that the people fell all about the house, and their cries might be heard afar off. This alarmed the wicked, who sprang for the doors." To tranquilize the excitement, he read a hymn and called upon a friend to raise the tune; but as soon as the latter attempted it he was struck down, and lay as a dead man. Another repeated the attempt, but fell in like manner. Abbott himself then began to sing, but, he says, "as soon as I began, the power of God came upon me in such a manner that I cried out, and was amazed. Prayer was all through the house, upstairs and down."

The veteran Boehm looked on with wonder, and exclaimed that it was a return of the apostolic Pentecost. After some time Abbott and he retired for refreshment, preparatory for a watchnight service, which was to begin at five o'clock. On their return they found prostrate multitudes weeping, praying, or apparently dead, in all parts of the house. Invariably, as they recovered their self-possession, they appeared in unimpaired health, uttering rapturous adorations. Boehm, and other German preachers, shared in the exercises of the watchnight. Under the discourse of Abbott many fell to the floor, and many fled out of the house. The services continued all night. At sunrise the next morning some were still lingering in prayer. A sensation spread through all the regions round about, and scores of the people followed the wonderful itinerant to his next appointment.

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Part 23

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ABBOTT'S MINISTRY AGAIN CONSIDERED

History cannot ignore these facts, to whatever doubtful construction they may be liable. Science, physiological, psychological, and theological, claims them as her data for future and important inquiries. If it be said that they arose from some peculiarity of the physical temperament of the preacher; that men of equal piety and superior ability, passing over these same regions, never produced them; that Asbury himself, gathering into the denomination its most valuable members at this period, seldom or never witnessed them as effects of his own powerful ministry; still these suggestions do not solve them, nor impeach the moral efficacy of Abbott's preaching. Hundreds of reprobate men were reformed amid such scenes, and, after long and holy lives, died repeating, in their last utterances, the shouts of praise which at these meetings appeared clamorous disorders. If they are condemned as human infirmities, still may there not be a genuine operation of divine grace amid, and in spite of, such infirmities, and is it indeed possible that so profound a revolution as the awakening and regeneration of the human soul can take place without involving more or less its infirmities?

Even if these anomalous effects be attributed to a peculiar physical power of Abbott, still does such a fact render questionable the genuineness of the moral effects of his ministry? Are not the natural, even the physical peculiarities of public speakers, legitimate sources of their power -- their vocal peculiarities, the sensibility of their temperaments for pathos, sublimity, or fear? And if there be, in the human constitution, some yet unascertained power of sympathetic action on surrounding minds, may not this be sanctified and used by the divine Spirit, as are other physical or mental qualifications, especially in extraordinary periods, like that through which Methodism was now awakening the land amid demoralization and war? If it be said that such extraordinary excitements need peculiar repressive caution, Methodists generally assent, believing, however, with one of their highest authorities, already cited, that the exercise of discipline in such cases, while it "should be firm, should also be discriminating, for the sake of the real blessing," which may be attending the preaching of the truth.

Abbott passed on to his next appointment convoyed by forty persons. "God there laid to his helping hand. Many cried aloud for mercy; many wept around" him when he dismissed them: "some were truly awakened, and others deeply convicted." He had written to his friend James Sterling, of Burlington, giving an account of the wonders of his journey, and inviting him to hasten to his help. Sterling reached him at Upper Octorara, and, though a layman, worked energetically with him; and at times his own vigorous mind was so overpowered by the prevailing excitement that he too fell, as dead, among the many who were slain by the mighty word of the preacher. At their first appointment the house was crowded, and many fell to the floor.

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Part 24

AN OPPOSER CONVINCED THAT ABBOTT'S MINISTRY WAS OF GOD

An aged Presbyterian accosted Abbott, and declared the strange scene to be diabolical. "If it be so," he replied, "when these people revive they will prove it by their language; wait and see." "Soon after one of them came to, and he began to praise God with a loud voice; and soon another, and so on, until divers of them bore testimony for Jesus. 'Hark, hark,' said I to my old opponent, 'brother, do you hear them? this is not the language of hell, but the language of Canaan.' I then appointed prayer-meeting at a friend's house in the neighborhood. After the people had gathered I saw my old opponent among them. I gave out a hymn, and Brother Sterling prayed, and after him myself. I had spoken but a few words before Brother Sterling fell to the floor, and soon after him every soul in the house, except myself and my old Presbyterian opponent, and two others. I arose and gave an exhortation, and the two men fell, one as if he had been shot, and then there was every soul down in the house, except myself and my old opponent. He began immediately to dispute the point, telling me it was all delusion, and the work of Satan. I told him to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. As they came to they all praised God."

The next morning Sterling and others were again prostrated in a prayer-meeting. They hastened to another appointment, where Abbott was again surprised to observe his "Presbyterian opponent." In a few minutes after the sermon began an alarm was given in the congregation. "I looked around," says Abbott, "and saw it was from my old opponent. He was trembling like Belshazzar. I told them to let him alone and to look to themselves, for it was the power of God that

had arrested him. They let him go, and down he fell as one dead. Next morning we went to our appointment, where we had a large congregation. Looking round I saw my old Presbyterian friend again. This was nine miles distance from my former appointment. I felt great freedom in speaking. A woman began to shake in a powerful manner, and fell on the floor. I bid them to look to themselves, and went on with my discourse. Some wept, some sighed, and some groaned. When I dismissed the people, not one offered to go. I gave them an exhortation: they wept all through the house. I then said, 'If any can speak for God, say on, for I can speak no more.' Who should arise but my old Presbyterian opponent, and began with informing them that he was not one of this sect; that he had been with me four days, and that he never had seen the power of God in this way before; and added, 'It is the power of God!' and gave a warm exhortation for about three quarters of an hour."

Abbott and his companion, Sterling, continued their travels and labors without intermission, almost everywhere attended with such remarkable scenes. They passed over all the ground, then cultivated by Methodism in Pennsylvania, except Philadelphia, Bethel, (Montgomery County,) and Germantown. In about thirty days he had preached twenty-nine sermons, and held nearly twenty other meetings. Scores, if not hundreds, of his hearers were awakened or converted. Large districts of Delaware and Pennsylvania were aroused with astonishment and religious interest.

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Part 25

BACK ACROSS THE DELAWARE TO KENT CIRCUIT

He returned by way of Wilmington and New Castle so exhausted that when he reached his home his friend supposed he "could never preach again;" but it was not long before he was again crossing the Delaware, on his way to Kent Circuit, Maryland, now traveled by his son, David Abbott. There the same singular power attended his word, kindling extraordinary interest from town to town. He opened his commission at Elkton. It is the first time that we hear of Methodism in that neighborhood. There was no class there at the time. He next appeared at the head of the Sassafras River, where he had a "powerful time." "Some were awakened, and inquired what they must do to be saved;" and he rejoiced to find a small class already gathered. The next day "God attended the word with power; many wept, both blacks and whites." In the Class-meeting "many fell to the floor, among whom was the man of the house." The following day, being Sunday, similar effects attended him in a barn; the people fell as if shot in battle, while "others cried for mercy."

He was now on Bohemia Manor, so notable a place in early Methodism. At another appointment, the same day, more than a thousand hearers gathered around him in the woods. "The Lord preached from heaven in his Spirit's power, and the people fell on the right and on the left. Many were ready to flee." He told them "to stand still and look to themselves, for God Almighty is come into the camp." They kept their places, and he continued to invite them "to fly to Jesus for safety. It was a great day to many souls." He hastened to his afternoon appointment, leaving the slain and wounded on the field. At the next place he found "a large congregation assembled," and preached "with great liberty; many fell to the earth, both white and black, some as dead men," while others "cried aloud to God."

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Part 26

ABBOTT'S "THUNDER-GUST SERMON"

Thus he continued, from place to place, with scarcely varying effect, till he arrived near Kent Meeting-house, (Hinson's Chapel,) where a still more remarkable scene occurred. Many hundreds were collected at a funeral service, which was conducted by a church clergyman, who, after the usual forms and a sermon, invited Abbott to address the assembly. A tempest had been rising, covering the heavens; "two clouds appeared to approach from different quarters and met over the house. The people crowded in, upstairs and down, to screen themselves from the storm. With some difficulty the evangelist made his way through the throng, and took his stand on one of the benches.

Almost as soon as he "began, the Lord out of heaven began also." The tremendous claps of thunder exceeded anything he had ever heard, and the streams of lightning flashed through the house in "a most awful manner. The very foundations shook, the windows jarred with the violence thereof." He lost no time, but "set before them the awful coming of Christ, in all his splendor, with all the armies of heaven, to judge the world, and to take vengeance on the ungodly." The people wept, cried aloud, and fell all through the house. One "old sinner" attempted to escape, but fell to the floor as dead. The lightning, thunder, and rain "continued for about one hour in the most awful manner ever known in that country," during which time he continued to "set before the people the coming of Christ to judge the world, warning and inviting them to flee to him."

Many were "convinced and many converted" on that great day. Fourteen years later, while Abbott was passing through the same region, he met "twelve living witnesses," who informed him that they dated their salvation from it, and enumerated others who had died in the faith, and some who had moved out of the neighborhood, who began their Christian life at that memorable time. It was long an occasion of general interest in the neighborhood, and old Methodists of Kent County were accustomed to speak with wonder of what they called "Abbott's thunder-gust sermon." "Between the voice of the Lord from heaven and the voice of his servant in the house, the people had never known such a time.

Sterling again joined him in this neighborhood, and they pursued together their travels and labors from town to town, among whites and blacks, attended constantly with these astonishing demonstrations. After a fortnight, during which the whole territory of Kent Circuit had been aroused with interest, they returned to New Jersey. "I desire," wrote Abbott when again under his own humble roof "to be ever truly thankful to the great Author of all good, who has brought me in safety to my habitation in peace, and has attended his unworthy dust, when absent in his service, with his Spirit's power, for which my soul adores the God and Rock of my salvation.

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Part 27

BACK TO DELAWARE

In October, this tireless laborer was again in Delaware, relieving his son on Dover Circuit, and scenes, equally extraordinary with those already cited, were of almost daily occurrence, as he advanced from town to town; the same questionable physical effects, the same unquestionable moral results. His simple logic respecting the former sometimes hesitated, but not long. He records an instance which affords a fuller description than has yet been given of the symptoms of this "religious catalepsy." "Next day I went," he writes, "to my appointment, where I was informed the children of the devil were greatly offended, and intended that day to kill me; here I had a crowded congregation. The word was attended with power. Several attempted to go out, but the crowd about the door obliged them to stay in. They began quickly to fall to the floor and to cry aloud. One young man that was struck to the floor was for three hours apparently dead; his flesh grew cold, his fingers so stiff, and spread open, that they would not yield. His blood was stagnated to his elbows. Many said, He is dead. I now began to be greatly exercised, it being the first time I ever had any fears that any one would expire under the mighty power of God. Very great and various were my exercises at this time, and I concluded I would go home, and not proceed a step further, as killing people would not answer; but at last he came to, and as soon as he could speak he praised God for what he had done for his soul!"

If he met with opposition, as he often did, from his own brethren, on account of these startling effects of his discourses, he was only the more confirmed in his own honest interpretation of them by his opponents themselves; for they usually became the most striking examples of his mysterious power. He records, in this excursion, an appointment in a Methodist local preacher's house; "he having heard what was going on, began to tell me he looked upon it all as confusion, for that God was a God of order. However, the people gathered, and I preached. The power of God seized a woman sitting before me; she began to tremble and fell to the floor. Many wept. I had not spoken long before the slain and wounded lay all through the house, and among the rest the local preacher; some crying for mercy, and others praising God for what he had done for them, testifying that he had justified them, and set their souls at liberty. I desired the class to stop, and I spoke first to the local preacher. What do you think of it now, my brother -- is it the work of God or not? O! said he, I never thought that God would pour out his Spirit in such a manner, for I could not move hand or foot, any more than if I had been dead; but I am as happy as I can live."

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Part 28

MEETS ASBURY AT JUDGE WHITE'S HOUSE -- QUARTERLY MEETING

He reached Judge White's house, where he met Asbury and a score of other preachers, on their way to a quarterly meeting at Barratt's Chapel. The itinerants were astonished at the simplicity and power of Abbott. His sermon in the chapel was overwhelming; some of the hearers fell to the floor, others fled out of the house, many sobbed and prayed aloud. Asbury sent him to a neighboring gentleman's house for lodging during the night, but there, while at family prayers, three persons fell, as dead, under the singing of a hymn, one being the lady of the house, and under the prayer "several others" were prostrated; the "man of the house, who was a backslider, was restored;" they continued in prayer three hours. Of course the love-feast the next morning was a

joyous scene. Abbott had never been in so large and goodly a company of preachers. The crowd of people was great; as many around the house as in it.

"It was a precious time -- attended with power." His expedition ended here; it had been successful, and he returned home with a thankful heart. He was now known through much of the land as one of the most extraordinary preachers of Methodism -- a Boanerges -- before whom gainsayers, persecutors, mobs, either yielded, or were prostrated. He was soon to leave house and lands, and, entering the "regular itinerancy," extend his labors and triumphs to other parts of the country, where we shall meet him again.

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Part 29

ANOTHER ACCOUNT OF ABBOTT'S SANCTIFICATION

In 1775 Daniel Ruff traveled the Trenton circuit, New Jersey. Abbott's house was now one of his homes. Ruff was powerful in prayer; and it was while conducting the family devotions of his humble fellow-laborer that the latter believed he received the grace of sanctification. It was a characteristic scene, as we have observed, Abbott being prostrated to the floor by his uncontrollable emotions. "Glory to God!" exclaimed the hearty evangelist, years afterward, "glory to God for what he then did, and since has done for poor me!"

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Part 30

ENCOURAGED BY CALEB PEDICORD

[Caleb B.] Pedicord's labors in New Jersey, in 1781, were greatly successful. He found Abbott in his new home, on Lower Penn's Neck, where the honest evangelist was much perplexed and dejected at his own comparatively slight success. "I had preached again and again," says Abbott, "and all to no purpose. I found there a set of as hardened sinners as were out of hell." Gladly, therefore, did he welcome Pedicord, hoping for a word of consolation in his discouragement. Pedicord was so distressed by Abbott's statements that he could not eat his breakfast, but retired to his chamber to pray. After some time he reappeared with a cheerful aspect. "Be not discouraged," he cried to his host, "these people will yet hunger and thirst after the word of God." In a few months "there was a great work going on in this Neck.

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Part 31

JOINS THE ITINERANCY IN 1789 -- DEATH OF HIS WIFE

Benjamin Abbott continued his irregular but effective labors in New Jersey down to the early part of the year 1789, when he joined the Conference and gave himself wholly to the work of the ministry. In the preceding summer his excellent wife died in the faith, believing that God called her to heaven in order to release her husband from domestic cares that he might pursue, without

embarrassment, his evangelical travels and toils. She died suddenly, but with full preparation for the solemn event. "I asked her," says Abbott, "if she saw heaven sweetly opened before her. She was speechless, but made three nods with her head without either sigh, groan, or throb. Her manner of life from the time she became a Christian was exemplary; she set apart three times a day for private prayer, and I never knew her omit it; and when I was absent she kept up family prayer." She clapped her hands with rapture as she departed.

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Part 32

ON DUCHESS CIRCUIT, NEW YORK -- THEOLOGICAL DISPUTES OVERCOME

Abbott immediately settled his temporal affairs, and, at the next New Jersey Conference, was received as a "regular traveling preacher," and appointed to Dutchess Circuit, New York. It was a new field, and he encountered not a few difficulties in it. He was some times mobbed, and was often assailed by sectarian zealots, clerical as well as lay, who insisted on the discussion of his theology, especially his Arminianism. His righteous soul was vexed and wearied by such rencounters. The political revolution of the country had left the popular mind in an extraordinary fermentation. The agitations of the war being over, the people sought new excitements and new topics of discussion; wherever Abbott went he found them ready for polemical contests; they thronged his assemblies, some weeping, some falling down as dead men under his word, but many prepared to combat him, not only at the door after his meetings, but while he was in the act of preaching. Scenes were of daily occurrence which our modern sense of the decorum of public worship render almost inconceivable.

The good man was sorely perplexed; he was compelled to become a polemic, a character which illy befitted him; but he sturdily fought his way forward, and at the end of the year reported about one hundred new members in his Societies. He penetrated as far north as Albany; "the alarm," he says, "spread far and wide," and in some of his assemblies "a dozen fell to the floor, and there was weeping and praising of God all through the house;" some were justified, some sanctified, and others "seemed lost in the ocean of redeeming love." The next year also he spent in traveling up and down the Hudson, and received into his young Societies about a hundred converts. The ensuing year he was sent to Long Island; he traversed his extensive circuit with the zeal and power of an apostle, triumphing over mobs, preaching the word daily with demonstrations that often overwhelmed his assemblies, prostrating many of his hearers to the floor. He formed numerous Societies, and labored especially to lead their members into the "deep things of God," his favorite theme being entire sanctification. He received between eighty and ninety souls into the communion of the Church during this year.

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Part 33

A GREAT MEETING IN PHILADELPHIA

At the next Conference he requested Asbury to appoint him to the scenes of his early labors in New Jersey, that he might see his "children in the Gospel" on the Salem Circuit. On his way he

paused at Philadelphia, and in St. George's Church, where he was to preach, the impression of his introductory prayer was so extraordinary that no preaching was possible after it. "The power of the Lord," he writes, "descended on the people in such a manner that some fell to the floor under the power thereof; the cry of mourners, and the joyful acclamations of Christians, were so great that I could not be heard. Many cried aloud, and among them was Brother Cann, one of our preachers, who was wonderfully overcome by the divine power. When he came to, he stepped into the desk and publicly acknowledged that he had ever been an enemy to people's crying aloud, but that he then could not help it himself; that he could no more refrain from it than he could from dying if God were to send the messenger of death to arrest his body. Brother McClaskey went through the house among the mourners, praying for and admonishing all that came in his way, and requested me to do the same; accordingly I left the pulpit without attempting to preach, and followed his example. Our meeting continued until near eleven o'clock. No doubt that meeting is well remembered by many of our friends in Philadelphia. O may its good effects be seen in eternity! It was a gracious time to many souls; several professed justification, and some sanctification."

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Part 34

BACK IN NEW JERSEY -- POWERFUL VISITATIONS AMIDST OPPOSITION

Again, among his former neighbors, he went from place to place like "a flame of fire." "There," he says, "I met many of my dear old friends whom I had not seen for about nine years; many of them were as happy as they could live." All felt that his mode of preaching, his peculiar power, was anomalous, mysterious, but also that it was beneficent; if it observed not the dignities of public worship, still it accomplished the ends of the Gospel, it awakened the heedless, reformed the profligate, led believers into a sanctified life -- it awoke the dead in trespasses and sins, and not only crowded the chapels, but mightily recruited the Societies. Almost everywhere multitudes still fell, as dead men, under his marvelous power. If sober observers were disposed to revolt at the scene, they were yet afterward constrained to acknowledge that the moral result of his preaching was good, and permanently good. Even some of the quiet Quakers declared that his spirit was right, and his peculiar power an unquestionable inspiration.

He preached in their meeting-houses; they attended his congregations in barns and private houses, and sometimes rose, amid the clamors of mobs, and bore their "testimony" that the power of God was with him. The rabble often beset him, sometimes with concerted plans of hostility; but he never feared them, and they always came off defeated. At one of his appointments they determined to frustrate him. The assembly was large; "when," he writes, "we went into the house as many people followed us as could well crowd in and stand on their feet. I took my stand near the door, there being a considerable number outside. Two men followed us into the house, who appeared ill-disposed; one of them took his stand near the middle of the house, where he remained during the meeting, without offering any disturbance; the other stood about three feet from the door with a truncheon in his hand about two feet long; three or four others remained outside the door with like weapons in their hands. I sung and kneeled down to pray before either of them offered any interruption; but when I besought God to visit that part of his vineyard, and to make it as famous for virtue as it had been for vice, one of them replied, 'That it was as good already as any other part he had known,' and made use of several other expressions during the time of prayer.

"When I had done prayer, I asked him if he knew that he had violated the laws of the land, and, if they were put in force, that he had forfeited twenty pounds, and must either give security for his future good behavior or go to jail. I then charged him at his peril to desist and give no further interruption; he made several replies, and appeared very vicious. An old Quaker woman, who sat just at my elbow, seeing the man's conduct, and hearing what had passed, bade me not be afraid, and put me in mind of the sufferings which their friends had undergone for the cause of God. I was truly glad to find her an advocate for Jesus, though I bless God I did not feel the fear of man. I proceeded and gave out my text, 'I have a message from God unto thee.' Judges iii, 20.

"I had not spoken long before he began again to interrupt me, raising himself on his toes to see if the others were at hand; but the door being surrounded by a number of the most respectable inhabitants, those club gentry were either ashamed or afraid, so that they kept their distance. I soon found that it would not answer to dispute, and therefore, without any regard to what he was saying, I began to pour out the terrors of the law upon him in the most awful manner I was capable of. I soon saw his countenance change, and he cried out, 'Is it me, sir, you mean?' 'Yes,' said I, 'you are the very man, and I have a message from God unto you;' which I delivered in plain terms, and began to pray for him. He quickly discovered a disposition to get out of the house; but this he could not hastily do, the crowd was so great in the door. His confusion was great, and he cried out, 'Do not judge! do not judge!' At length he got out, and halloed amen several times, but he soon gave that up. A Quaker gentleman, being at the door, said to him as he went out, 'Thou hast met with thy match.'

"I have since understood that he had anchored his vessel in the Delaware, two or three miles distant, in order to attend this meeting, and had sworn that he never meant to weigh anchor again until he had driven every Methodist out of the region. While I was praying for him God convinced a woman of sin, who soon after got her soul converted, and with her husband joined Society. Blessed be God, notwithstanding all the malice of men and devils, we had a solemn and profitable time to many souls, who were broken into tenderness. Soon after a Society was formed, and they became a precious people. I left the circuit after six months, having received eighty-five members into Society, and seen about fifty sanctified by the mighty power and grace of God. There was a great revival among the Classes. May the Lord be mindful of them, and preserve them in his holy fear!"

At another meeting he says, "The power of the Lord arrested a young Quaker, and he fell to the floor as if he had been shot. His mother being present, cried out, 'My son is dead! my son is dead!' I replied, 'Your son is not dead; look to yourself; your son is not dead;' and in a few minutes we had a number slain before the Lord. An old Quaker stood with tears in his eyes. I said to him, 'Look to yourself; this was the way with you when you had the life and power of God among you. Read Sewel's history of the People called Quakers, and you will find there that John Audland, a young man, was preaching in a field near Bristol, and the people fell to the ground before him, and cried out under the mighty power of God.' The man of the house brought the book, and read the passage before the congregation, and he then acknowledged it to be the work of the Lord. I attempted to meet the class, but did not speak to above two or three, when the people fell before the Lord as men slain in battle, and we had the shout of a king in the camp of Jesus. The young Quaker and several others professed that God had set their souls at liberty; several joined Society,

and we had a precious time. When I went on the circuit there were about six or seven in Society at that place, and when I left it there were about thirty-six, six or seven of whom had been Quakers. At this place our meetings were generally so powerful that I never regularly met the class during the time I was on the circuit, for we always had the shout of a king in the camp of Jesus. Glory to God!"

The extraordinary events of his ministry, while they interest us, inexpressibly, as illustrations of his singular power and of the simple and rude character of the times, perplex us also with many problems, of which it is perhaps vain to attempt any explanation. One thing at least is clear, there could be no moral stagnation in any place which he entered. The whole community for miles around was stirred to its obscurest depths. All talked about him; the friendly defended and prayed with tears for him, the hostile disputed about him, assailed him, were prostrated by him. Few, if any, however indifferent or reckless about matters of religion, could, if within ten miles of his routes, remain undisturbed. They were compelled to share the general sensation of favorable or hostile interest, compelled to think or talk on the questions with which his presence startled the whole population. This, at least, was a blessing. By it hundreds, if not thousands, otherwise inaccessible to the Gospel, were brought to reflect, to pray, and to amend their lives; and it was especially true that the grossest sinners, the ignorant and degraded, who could be aroused to religious inquiry by none of the customary means, were seized, as it were, by this man's strange power and dragged up into the light out of their darkest abysses, and compelled to think, and often to pray and cry out in an agony of earnestness, "What shall we do to be saved?" He crowded the Methodist classes of New Jersey with such souls, reclaimed, purified, and not a few of them, for years after his death, models of the purest Christian life.

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Part 35

ASBURY AND GARRETTSON LEAVE HIS MINISTRY TO GOD'S CONTROL

In the latter years of his career we are, more than ever, startled by the anomalous records of his journals. He had been so accustomed to see his hearers fall insensible under his preaching, that, in his honest simplicity, he now evidently considered such demonstrations the necessary proofs of the usefulness of his ministry; he everywhere expected them, and, in fact, almost everywhere had them. Sometimes they took a character of undeniable extravagance; his own simple but Christian good sense could hardly fail to perceive this fact; but to him it was only proof of the mixture of human infirmity with the work of the divine Spirit; and his generous soul had no difficulty in excusing human weakness when redeemed, as he believed in these cases, by divine power and overshadowed by divine glory. Garrettson and Asbury deemed it proper at times to control, if not restrain him; but they seem at last to have concluded that he had a peculiar work to do, as an altogether peculiar man, and gave him free course.

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Part 36

ON TRENTON CIRCUIT

His next circuit was that of Trenton, still within his old range. He had no sooner entered upon its territory than the usual effects attended his word. "On my way," he writes, "I attended the Quarterly Meeting at Bethel; after preaching and exhortation on Saturday, we adjourned our meeting until Sunday morning. Next morning the love-feast was opened, and the people began to speak their experiences very feelingly. After several had spoken, and a few exhortations had been given, I arose and exhorted them to look for sanctification, for now was the day of God's power; and the power of the Lord fell on them in such a manner that they fell to the floor, all through the house, up stairs and down, so that speaking experiences was now at an end." The "public preaching" had to be dispensed with that morning; the preachers were employed in counseling and praying with the awakened multitude; the "slain and wounded lay all through the house," and the meeting lasted from nine o'clock in the morning till near sunset.

Abbott continued to labor in New Jersey during most of the remainder of our present period with undiminished success. He formed the first Methodist Society of New Brunswick, consisting of nine members. At Princeton, also, he says, the Lord raised up a Society of nine persons before I left the circuit, glory to God!" He subsequently went to Maryland, whither we shall follow him in due time.

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Part 37

FINAL LABORS IN MARYLAND

Benjamin Abbott's appointments for the brief remainder of his life were in Maryland. His journals become more scanty than in the years through which we have already followed him, but they record the same extraordinary effects of his preaching, hearers falling under the word "like men slain in battle," the "opening of the windows of heaven, and the skies pouring down righteousness, so that the people fell before the Lord."

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Part 38

YET ANOTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF HIS MINISTRY

We have had occasion to discuss the astonishing physical and psychological phenomena which attended his ministrations, and to state the cautious interpretation of such anomalies given by the best Methodist authorities. Though not peculiar to his preaching, they were peculiarly powerful with him. They were indeed habitual, almost invariable effects of his singular eloquence for he was eloquent in the best sense of the word. Uneducated, rough, rude even, in speech and manner, his fervid piety and his genial human sympathy made his weather-worn features glow as with a divine light, and intoned his voice with a strange, a magnetic, an irresistible pathos and power.

There may have been a psychological, perhaps a physiological, as well as a moral element in this marvelous power, a mystery which future science may render more intelligible; be this as it may, Benjamin Abbott led a divine life on earth, walking with God, like Enoch, from day to day, and the hardest, the most ruffian men who came within his presence, the clamorous rabble that

frequently thronged his congregations, fell back, or sank prostrate before him, seeing "his face as it had been the face of an angel;" and if they attempted, as they often did, to escape by the doors or the windows, his voice would sometimes smite them down like lightning.

His casual conversation, always religious, his social or domestic prayers, had the same effect. We continually read not merely of "God attending the word, with the energy of the Holy Ghost, in such manner that numbers fell to the floor," that "the wicked flew to the doors," that "there was a shaking among the dry bones," but that at his temporary lodging-places, "in family prayer, the Lord was with him of a truth," and similar wonders attended him. If he went into a house to baptize a child, we hear of like effects -- the "mother trembling in every joint, four persons falling to the floor, one professing that God has sanctified her soul." In some cases, as we have seen, most, or even all his congregation, save himself; were thus prostrated. And, however morally dangerous such scenes might seem to be, (physically they never were injurious,) they appear to have been uniformly followed with salutary results. Few preachers, perhaps no other one of his day, reclaimed more men from gross vice. His mission seemed especially to such.

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Part 39

A HOLY GHOST MINISTRY ON MARYLAND'S EASTERN SHORE

He now kept the whole Eastern Shore of Maryland astir with religious interest. Even those whose religious education had taught them to associate quietude with piety, were infected with the excitement. "In the morning," he writes, "we had a melting time; many wept. In the afternoon the Lord poured out his Spirit and the slain fell before him like dead men; others lay as in the agonies of death, entreating God to have mercy on their souls; some found peace. Glory to God, many in this town seemed alarmed of their danger; may the Lord increase their number. A girl who lived with a Quaker was cut to the heart in such a manner that they did not know how to get her home; I went to see her, and found many round her, both white and black. She lay as one near her last gasp; I kneeled down and besought God for her deliverance, and in a few minutes she broke out in raptures of joy, crying out, 'Let me go to Jesus!' repeating it several times; then she arose and went home. Glory to God! for what my eyes saw, my ears heard, and soul felt that day, of the blessed Spirit. The meeting continued from three o'clock until evening."

Family groups, bearing him in their carriages to their homes, from his meetings, were "awakened, converted," "sanctified," "shouted the praises of God," "lost their strength" or consciousness, as he conversed with them on the route. In love-feasts, sometimes, not one could give the usual narration of Christian experience, but, under the introductory devotions, "the Lord so laid his hand upon them, that sinners trembled and fell to the floor," and the customary exercises had to give way to prayer and praise.

Again we read: "I held prayer meeting, and the Lord manifested his love among us. There was a shaking among the dry bones. One lay as if she were dead for nearly two hours, and then came to with praises to God for her deliverance, with great raptures of joy. The children of God were filled with joy unspeakable. How inexpressible are the pleasures of those who are filled with the raptures of a Saviour's love! Ecstatic pause! 'Silence heightens heaven!' I held prayer

meeting and the power of the Lord fell upon the people in such a manner that the slain lay all over the floor. Several were converted to God; one or two professed sanctification: glory to God, he carried on his own work."

Again, "the Lord attended the word with power, and divers fell before him like Dagon before the ark. I was obliged to leave the slain on the floor in order to attend my next appointment, where I found a large congregation to whom I preached. It was a day of his power; he worked and none could hinder him." Again, "I preached with life and power, and the Lord manifested his presence among us; some cried for mercy, and a solemn awe sat on many faces. I went to my next appointment, and preached to a large congregation. The Lord laid to his helping hand, and there was a mighty shaking among the dry bones; divers persons lay through the house, as dead men slain by the mighty power of God. The same Jesus who raised Lazarus from the dead, raised up nine persons, that we could ascertain, to praise him as a sin-pardoning God; and how many more that we could not ascertain, God only know; for many wept, and some shouted praises. Glory to God, this was a day that will be long remembered by many precious souls. I was as happy as I could live in the body."

As the people returned to their homes they were heard praising God along the highways. And such scenes were not occasional or exceptional; nearly every day's record reports them, for there was hardly a day in which he did not hold a meeting, and hardly a meeting without immediate results. As facts of the times, not uncommon in any part of the Church, they are essential to a faithful record of its history, however our modern criticism, or more decorous ideas of religious life, may judge them.

On the more important or festival occasions of the Church, especially at the great quarterly meetings of the time, this spiritual enthusiasm kindled still higher, and spread out like a flame over whole circuits. They were jubilees to Abbott. On one of them he says:

"Our meeting began at six o'clock in the morning, and when we had sung and prayed, the power of God came down in such a manner that the slain lay all through the house. Some seemed lost in the ocean of God's love, some professed justification, and others, that God had sanctified their souls. This meeting was so powerful that but one attempted to speak her experience in love feast; while she was speaking, she sunk down, crying out, God has made me all love! Immediately the house was filled with cries and praises to God; some trembled and were astonished. We had to carry the slain out of the house, in order to make room that the people might come in for the public preaching; and when we had sung and prayed the presence of the Lord came down as in the days of old, and the house was filled with his glory; the people fell before him like men slain in battle. It was a great day of God's power to many souls; some professed sanctification, some justification. This was a day of days to my soul. The windows being open, there were hundreds outside gazing at those in the house who were slain before the Lord; but they lay both in the house and out of it. Prayers were put up to God, both within and without, in behalf of the penitents and mourners. I trust that many date their conviction, and others their conversion from that quarterly meeting."

If he deviated for such special occasions to other circuits, the same extraordinary scenes attended him. "I went," he writes, "to quarterly meeting on Dover circuit; we had a happy day. On Sunday, in love-feast, the Lord God of Elijah, who answereth by fire, poured out his Spirit. 'Elijah

the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, etc. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, etc. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifices, etc. And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, the Lord, he is the God the Lord, he is the God.' 1 Kings xviii, 36-39. So on this day, when the fire of the Lord came down, the people fell and acknowledged the power of God; and the slain lay all about the house; some were carried out as dead men and women. The house was filled with the glory of Israel's God, who spoke peace to mourners, while sinners were cut to the heart. Glory to God, it was a high day to my own soul. It was thought there were about fifteen hundred looking on, with wonder and amazement at the mighty power of God, which caused the powers of hell to shake and give way; many of the spectators trembled and were astonished; numbers professed faith in Christ, and others sanctifying grace; God's dear children, generally, were refreshed. This was one of the days of the Son of man. On Tuesday, in family prayer, the power of God came down wonderfully upon us; four fell to the floor, and they found 'Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth,' to the joy of their souls."

Of course there could be no stagnation in the region through which such a man traveled sounding his trumpet daily; we read that "the flame spread around the circuit, and many were brought to the knowledge of God."

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Part 40

FAILING HEALTH -- BUT "PERFECT LOVE THAT CASTETH OUT FEAR"

He continued these labors till May, 1795, when, failing in health, he returned to his home in New Jersey, and was never able to resume his travels on a circuit. He had been suffering, in Maryland, for three months from fever and ague. On returning to New Jersey, he frequently exerted his little remaining strength in religious meetings, until June, 1796, when he rapidly failed; but his soul remained unclouded to the last. He testified that "perfect love casteth out fear, and he that feareth is not made perfect in love:" and that he believed a state attainable in this life, through grace, that "would enable us to shout victory to God and the Lamb, through the valley of the shadow of death." Also, that he had seen many leave this world in "the greatest transport of joy imaginable. And for my part," he added, "I can call God to witness, that death is no terror to me! I am ready to meet my God if it were now!"

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Part 41

A GLORIOUS PASSING

On the 13th of August he was in "excruciating pain," which he bore with Christian patience and resignation. He was happy in God, and rejoiced at his approaching dissolution. He appeared to possess his rational faculties to his last moments; and for some time previous was delivered from pain, to the joy of his friends; his countenance continued joyful, heavenly, and serene; 'Glory to God!' he exclaimed, 'I see heaven sweetly opened before me!' "

The next day he was no more. He died as he had lived, "shouting!" "Glory! glory! glory!" are his last utterances recorded by his biographer, who attended him in death. He uttered them "clapping his hands, in the greatest ecstasies of joy imaginable." The ruling passion was strong in death.

Thus passes from the scene of our story one of its most remarkable characters. He had led hosts of souls from the lowest abysses of vice into a good life and into the Church, from the Hudson to the Chesapeake. He has been a problem to students of our history. I have already endeavored to give the solution of that problem; but his singular, yet most effective life will ever remain a marvel, if not a mystery. An extraordinary individuality of character, sanctified by extraordinary endowments of divine grace, must be its chief explanation. They fitted him for a peculiar work, and he did it thoroughly, with all his might and to the end.

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Part 42

HIS CHARACTER ASSESSED

All his characteristics were extreme; we have seen the vices of his youth, the extreme struggles of his early Christian experience, and how, like the godly "dreamer of Bedford jail," he rose from the struggle into a saintly, a genial, and a powerful life. His sincerity, purity, tenderness, and humility, vindicated his character even to the severest accusers of the wonders of his ministry.

A Methodist citizen of Philadelphia, who knew him well for twenty years, and in whose house he spent some time in his last sickness, says "he used frequently to tell me of his life, and manner of living, during his unregenerate state. While he was an apprentice in Philadelphia he was a wicked lad, associated with bad company. He used to quarrel and fight frequently. At times, by fighting, he has had his clothes so bloody, that he has stripped them off and washed them in the night at the pumps in the streets; and frequently, instead of going home, he used to sleep in the Quaker burying ground, between the graves; feeling, at that time, no terror from the living or the dead, by night or by day; for he feared not God nor regarded man. When he became a man he was particularly noted as a great fighter; and but few excelled him in divers kinds of vice.

"He has been known to leave his business, and his dinner, and to walk several miles to meet a noted fighter, in order to show his manhood and bravery in that line. He frequently had to appear before the courts of justice on account of these wicked courses; and he generally pleaded guilty. At one of those courts a certain gentleman, to whose care public peace and justice were committed, took a private opportunity to prevail on him to turn out and fight a man who was there, for which he treated him with a bowl of punch. Surely his conversion was a remarkable instance of sovereign grace and divine mercy. The lion became the lamb! The hero in the service of the devil became a bold veteran in the service of God.

"After his conversion, numbers had old grudges against him, and sought to ensnare him in divers ways; but, by grace, he stood firm, and immovably attached to the cause of religion, maintaining a bold, uniform, and circumspect life. On a certain occasion, after his reformation, he

had to appear before the grand jury, and before they entered on the business for which he was called, he said to the jury, 'Let us first go to prayer!' He prayed, they had a solemn time, and one of the jury was struck under conviction. He was much persecuted by the ungodly; but although his oppositions were many, he was nevertheless remarkably useful in his ministry, and in visiting the sick and distressed."

His later character is thus drawn by the same familiar friend: "He was, in my opinion, a man of the greatest faith I ever was acquainted with. He was an agreeable neighbor and social friend; plain in his manners and deportment; pleasant in his conversation; meek and humble in his spirit. I do not recollect that I ever saw him even appear to be out of temper, so great was the work grace had done for him. He appeared, as far as I could judge, to travail in spirit continually for precious souls. With great zeal and faith he used to urge conviction, repentance, and conversion on the ungodly; and among professors, he, with equal warmth of zeal and love, would insist on sanctification, and the Lord remarkably blessed his labors. The divine power of sovereign grace attended his ministry more wonderfully and constantly than any one I ever was acquainted with, to the conviction and conversion of sinners, and to the sanctification of believers. Through his instrumentality there was a great reformation among the people."

No man was more loved by good men who intimately knew him; they deemed his presence under their roofs a sanctifying blessing. The one from whom I have cited says: "He had remarkable patience and resignation, which was visible and wonderful to the family; he appeared all love, and was heavenly in his conversation. I felt a strong desire that, if it were the will of God, he might die at my house. I should have esteemed it an honor conferred on me by Providence, had so eminent a saint and servant of God ended his days under my roof. But he removed in the spring of 1796 to the Jerseys, where he lingered out a few months in weakness and pain of body, but in peace and happiness of soul; then 'closed his eyes to see his God.' "

He died aged about sixty-four years, had been a Methodist nearly twenty-four years, a local preacher more than sixteen, a traveling preacher more than seven. His ministerial brethren characterized him in their Conference Minutes "as one of the wonders of America, no man's copy; an uncommon zealot for the blessed work of sanctification, he preaching it on all occasions and in all congregations, and what was best of all, living it. He was an innocent, holy man; he was seldom heard to speak anything but about God and religion; his whole soul was often overwhelmed with the power of God. He was known to hundreds as a truly primitive Methodist preacher, and a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost."

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Part 43

WHATCOAT'S WONDER AND REJOICING AT ABBOTT'S MINISTRY

Whatcoat has left us but a page or two respecting his labors in this period. He was Abbott's presiding elder, most of the time, on the Maryland peninsula. Grave, but fervidly pious, he wondered while he rejoiced at the results of Abbott's preaching. An extraordinary revival spread over his extended district. "We had large congregations, and many blessed revivals in different parts of the district," he says: "Our quarterly meetings were generally comfortable, lively, and

profitable. Some appeared extraordinary; souls were suddenly struck with convictions, and fell to the ground, roaring out for the disquietness of their souls, as though almost dead, and after a while starting up and praising God, as though heaven were come into their souls; others were as much concerned for a cleaner heart, and as fully delivered."

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THE END