

All Rights Reserved By HDM For This Digital Publication
Copyright 2000 Holiness Data Ministry

Duplication of this CD by any means is forbidden, and
copies of individual files must be made in accordance with
the restrictions stated in the B4UCopy.txt file on this CD.

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF ELLEN ROBERTS
By Dr. Howard A. Snyder

Quotes taken from the book
"Ellen Roberts" by Adella P. Carpenter

Digitally Published with Permission
By the Author, Dr. Howard A. Snyder*
From an Article Appearing in
The Marston Memorial Historical Center Newsletter
Spring/Summer 2000 -- Volume 1 No. 1
Bob Haslam, Editor

* * * * *

Digital Edition 06/21/2000
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

Ellen Roberts raised four sons and a grandson, did inner-city ministry in Buffalo, helped run Chili Seminary and edit *The Earnest Christian* during her husband Benjamin's frequent travels. Her half-century of fruitful ministry came at the cost of a long spiritual struggle in her younger years. A future article will discuss her accomplishments; here we focus on those early years and the key role of Phoebe Palmer...

Ellen Lois Stowe married Benjamin Titus Roberts on May 3, 1849, and was immediately plunged into the life of a Methodist preacher's wife. For ten years she had lived with her uncle and aunt, George and Lydia Lane, in Manhattan, New York.

Ellen was of medium height, her naturally wavy brown hair and wide-set blue eyes giving her a look of thoughtful charm. She possessed a quiet charisma that she herself didn't see. Physically quite attractive, she was introverted (or "retiring"), loving to spend time alone.

Twelve years after her marriage, Ellen wrote a spiritual autobiography (*The Earnest Christian*, September, 1861). Here she tells of her struggles to enter into the life of holiness. During a revival at the Niagara Street Church, Buffalo, in 1853, she experienced the deeper work of the Spirit.

Before her marriage, Ellen's life centered in the Lane home and in the Allen Street and Greene Street Methodist churches in New York. Allen Street was the church of Walter and Phoebe Palmer; the Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness were held in the Palmer home nearby.

Living with the Lanes, Ellen was soon "deeply convinced of [her] need of religion." But her spiritual breakthrough came only many months later. Praying alone, "it seemed as if something had slid off of me, the weight... was removed and almost in audible language I heard a voice saying, 'peace, peace.'"

Ellen attended a Methodist class-meeting of about 30 women for two years. When it was disbanded, she was assigned to Walter Palmer's class. She notes on March 7, 1844, "I felt bad that [my group was discontinued,] as I... was strongly attached to the members." She "felt almost like a stranger" in the new class of around 50."

Ellen attended Rutgers Female Institute during the winters of 1841-42 and 1842-43, "a fashionable school" that clashed with Methodist plainness. She found her studies exhausting, often demanding her time from 4:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.; "I fear lest my soul's interest is neglected," she wrote.

Ellen's struggle was compounded by the unexpected death of her sister in late 1842. Not until the following May did Ellen again pick up her diary. She wrote, "My studies have occupied my whole time. I have spent... not enough [time] in prayer."

She finally discontinued her schooling; "My health would not admit of my attending longer." Reflecting back later, Ellen said she had "lost the evidence of... acceptance with God."

During the summer of 1843, Ellen met Edmund Longley, a young Wesleyan University tutor, and soon his "affections... entwined themselves around my heart." But his interest brought her conflict. How would a romance affect her love for God? For nearly two years her spiritual quest was intertwined with her feelings for Longley.

In September, 1844, at the Sing Sing camp meeting, apparently, Ellen "was reclaimed, and immediately" began seeking holiness. Phoebe Palmer was ministering at the camp, and Ellen visited her meetings. Though she got some help, she left the camp feeling "not satisfied."

In January, 1845, Ellen was thrown into despair by news that "blasted my every earthly prospect." Apparently she heard that Edmund Longley was about to marry. "While I try to write my heart bleeds at every pore. Alone! Alone!! The One whom I had (vainly) thought cared for me... has been a trifler with my better feelings."

When the news of Longley's marriage plans were later confirmed, Ellen suffered "agony of mind." But then "hope like a grain of mustard seed sprang up, and I said 'God reigns;' it is of Him that this thing has happened, and I began to exclaim 'Glory to God!'"

This crisis led Ellen to deeper commitment. At class meeting she again received help through Phoebe Palmer: "We had one of the best of meetings. [Mrs. Palmer] talks

long to us but is not tedious. She dwelt much on our taking earnest heed lest we let slip the grace we have obtained."

Soon Ellen did enter into the experience of holiness. "I read upon the subject, and prayed, and groaned, for weeks," she wrote. In class meeting one day the leader, after speaking to her, began singing, "Nay, but I yield, I yield, I can hold out no more." Ellen wrote, "I did 'yield,' and Jesus saved me to the uttermost."

Though Ellen's experience was clear and definite, it didn't last. Someone remarked that she "was getting along very fast," so Ellen decided to keep quiet. "I thought, I will be very careful in future and not speak of this blessing except when the Lord requires it. I was so careful [that] soon consciousness of purity began to leave my soul."

She added, "If I had then opened my heart to some faithful Christian I might have been saved years of wandering in the wilderness." On another occasion Mrs. Palmer again led Ellen's class and told her, "You must be definite in your petitions, ask the Lord for holiness."

Following the advice and the language of Phoebe Palmer, Ellen tried again to enter into the experience of holiness. "I give myself away to God and try to rest there, believing that he will receive and sanctify the gift, but I have not the witness of the Spirit that I am cleansed from all sin, perhaps I look to myself too much."

On March 25, after reading Palmer's book, *The Way of Holiness*, Ellen "resolved in the strength of God that the desire for holiness should be all absorbing." "My mind is not yet at rest, but I think faith is increasing."

Sunday, April 6, after church Ellen renewed her commitment. "I have a new covenant with God that I would from henceforth reckon myself dead indeed unto sin, the world, and alive as unto Him. I would give myself to Him for time and for eternity, never more to take back any part of the price or gift, and I believe that the offering is accepted. Ellen L. Stowe."

Two days later, however, she was troubled that she yielded to anger, and wondered "whether a temptation to anger in case we resisted would be incompatible with a sanctified state." Later she wrote, echoing Phoebe Palmer, "I never saw the depravity of my own heart as I do now, but I am determined to lay all upon the altar though that all should be as dear as a right eye or hand. It was discovered to me tonight where the difficulty lay in my past vacillation, by this passage of Holy Writ, 'I beseech, you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, which is your reasonable service.' This blessing is obtained by 'laying all on the altar' and retained by keeping all on the altar a 'living sacrifice.'"

Still, victory did not come. The following Sunday she confessed that she had "wandered far from God." But she noted on September 12, "A peace that passeth all understanding has filled my mind today, a resting in Christ."

A gap in Ellen's diaries until June, 1848, makes it impossible to trace all of Ellen's journey, though the general picture is clear. Shortly after her diary resumes in 1848, she meets B.

T. Roberts. In her diaries Ellen seems serious and introspective. But her diary hints of an active social life, a sometimes playful spirit, and a subtle sense of humor.

Her life in New York was a montage of joy, sadness, and sometimes depression; of spiritual growth and unfulfilled longing; and of a sense of loss of the home she had left in Windsor. Yet Ellen's faith stayed strong, even if she at times lacked "a consciousness of pardon."

Among the influences on Ellen's early life were several women who were in effect her mentors. First among these was Phoebe Palmer. Though Ellen had repeated contact with her, the two never became close.

To Palmer, Ellen was one of the many young women she helped. Ellen was about 17 when she first heard Palmer speak, while Palmer was 33. Yet to Ellen, Mrs. Palmer was something of a "Mother in Israel."

Two women poets, Felicia Hemans and Elizabeth Barrett (soon to be Elizabeth Barrett Browning) were also significant to Ellen. She felt exiled in New York, and Elizabeth Barrett's "Drama of Exile" spoke to her. Felicia Hemans' poetry, full of bittersweet sentiment and nostalgia, also resonated with Ellen.

She quotes Heman's "How many deaths there are for the affections!" Ellen repeatedly experienced such "deaths," the breaking of home ties with her family in Windsor; her disappointment with Edmund Longley; the friends she made and missed.

Yet her faith in God remained strong, and in 1848 she met B. T. Roberts, the one who would be her lifelong companion. Through the struggles of pastoral ministry, the births and deaths of children, the "death" of leaving the Methodist Episcopal Church and the birth of a new denomination, she remained faithful to God.

She later experienced the death of her husband in 1893, and survived him by 15 years. She passed to her home beyond the skies in 1908, finally reunited with the husband she loved so well.

* * * * *

ENDNOTE

*Howard Snyder, Ph.D., teaches in the School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has authored 12 books, including *The Problem of Wineskins*. This article is condensed from part of chapter two of Snyder's projected biography of B. T. and Ellen Roberts.

* * * * *

THE END