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Francis Asbury

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By REV. L. P. McGEE
The history of the Methodist Church is the record of unselfish and heroic men who toiled and suffered hardship and privation and who achieved a success that fascinates, encourages and inspires those who are striving to extend the Kingdom of God in the earth and to bring men under its power and influence. The Methodist Church in America is more remarkable for heroic deeds and marvelous achievements in many lines of religious, intellectual and social activities than any other branch of this greatest denomination of the modern world.

Every preacher of the Methodist Church should know something of the origin, growth and status of his church. The Methodist people themselves should have some elementary knowledge of the history of the church to which they belong. From that momentous day in the year 1739 when eight or ten people came to Mr. Wesley in London convicted of sin and “groaning for redemption” down to this hour, the Methodist Church has been a tremendous factor in the life of the English race. That event was the beginning of a tiny stream that has grown into a mighty current that is flowing through and carrying health and life and salvation to all the nations of the world.

To know the story of American Methodism during the first fifty years of its existence it is necessary to know the life of Francis Asbury, the pioneer bishop of the Methodist Church in America. “All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography.” Asbury’s Journal gives us the story of his life and his work in detail. This Journal is the record of a truly great soul striving for the highest spiritual attainments and for the achievements of
the best things for his fellowmen. It is the history of a man who gave himself to God and the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. No more unselfish man ever lived. No purer motive ever inspired the heart of a man than the impulse that sent this man on his great mission to preach the gospel.

He did not desire any biography of himself but this desire could not be fulfilled. Many biographies of Asbury have been written. One of these is written by Ezra S. Tipple from which volume most of the information in this paper has been taken. This and many other books on the life of this extraordinary man would be a source of useful information and helpful inspiration for the young men in the ministry of the Methodist Church. For if every institution is the shadow of a great man then surely Bishop Asbury’s life should be carefully studied. American Methodism is indebted to him more than to any other man. This is high praise, for there are great names on the pages of Methodist annals. He is a brightly shining star in a great constellation of Methodist heroes and saints. Wesley, Whitefield, Coke and Asbury shine out from the background sparkling with smaller lights. Asbury stands first in the long line of distinguished preachers who have lived and worked in the Methodist Church in America. “Columbus needs a planet to shape his course upon. Newton and Laplace need myriads of ages and thick strewn celestial areas.” Asbury had a continent for his diocese and he influenced the men of his time for good as possibly no other man of that era of American history. And great names rise up in our memories as we contemplate that heroic period of our country’s history. On the screen of imagination pass before us the faces of Washington and Franklin and John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and Jonathan Edwards and Chief Justice John Marshall and in dimmer outline fading away in the distance we see the faces of warriors,
statesmen, pioneers and the builders of the world’s greatest republic. Yet in far reaching influence for the moral uplift of the people and for the permanent stability of our government and its institutions this humble Methodist preacher takes his place among these great men and the country owes him a debt of gratitude as great as it owes to the greatest of them.

Francis Asbury was born in England on the twentieth of August in the year 1745. When he was born the great revival under the Wesleys and George Whitefield had been going on several years. This revival is one of the most far reaching religious awakenings in the entire course of the Christian centuries. It was in fact a rebirth of the spirit of apostolic times. It touched the heart of the English people as no other religious movement has ever done. The individual was transformed by the regenerating power of the gospel, the national conscience was aroused to a sense of the evils of the day, a movement for reform in morals and a quickening in religious affairs was felt throughout all the social life of England. If we are to accept the statements of those who tell us of the life of the people of England at this time, this revival did not come a moment too soon. England must have been in a bad way. Moral corruption and spiritual decay pervaded all classes of English society. There were good men and women in England and yet they seemed to have been powerless against the mighty tide of evil sweeping over the land. The Church of England was cold, formal and without much spiritual influence on the lives of great and small alike. The religion of the day was without zeal or emotion or enthusiasm. The cultured classes were honey-combed with skepticism. The theological beliefs were tinged with deism and the religion of revelation was displaced by the religion of nature. The clergy was ignorant, careless in their ministerial duties and many of them lived lives un-
worthy of their high calling. Drunkenness, impurity, profanity and lawlessness stalked abroad in the land.

Puritanism was dead and the people were still submerged under the corrupting influences of the Restoration. Methodism was just rising as a giant to struggle with the evils of the time. No doubt prayers went up from devout hearts here and there to God to arise and scatter His enemies because in the dark hour of England’s moral and spiritual decline there burst forth the purifying fires of the great revival.

Great historians and writers of England have eloquently emphasized the significance and beneficial results of this religious movement upon the manners and conduct of the English race. It came in good time. Possibly it saved England from the unspeakable horrors of the French Revolution and no man can estimate its value upon the people of America in the period following the American Revolution.

Those were times of great movements and upheavals in church and state. Old ideas were fading away, age long traditions were passing, and old conceptions that had held the masses in bondage, were giving place to new ideas and ways of thinking. Rousseau and Voltaire had put a new leaven in the minds of men. They had pulled down; and indeed they had pulled down much that needed pulling down, but they had nothing to put in the place of the things they had destroyed. The spirit of democracy is a dangerous thing. Unguided and unchecked it may dash down the precipice. These intellectual, political and social currents have swept through the decades down to our time and no man may predict where they will finally stop. The French Revolution and the American Revolution have forever changed the world. But the sinister elements in these upheavals have been largely cancelled by the moral and religious revolutions of those stirring days.

It is an old story and yet one that will never become
tiresome to thoughtful minds. It is as full of romance as the story of the Crusades. It is a history of wonderful sacrifice, of moral miracles, of heroic deeds and of heroic lives. It all started in the study of the New Testament in Greek by a band of Oxford students. John Wesley, his brother Charles, and a few other young men of like mind, formed a sort of Holy Club for mutual help in their spiritual culture and development. They drew attention to themselves by their pious habits and of course were laughed at by those not in sympathy with them. They were called names and one of these names given in derision stuck. They were called "Methodists" and it stuck. Of course these college wits could not see that in time this name would become a badge of honor and in two centuries millions upon millions would be proud of it. So history is more wonderful than fiction.

A few names stand out on the page of history in every great movement. In this great revival, the name of John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and later on, the names of Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury are not to be forgotten. These men belong not only to the history of Methodism but also to all history. They left to the modern world a movement that will abide through the long generations of man’s life on this planet. They were alike in many things and yet they differed greatly among themselves.

John Wesley, the oldest of them, was the organizer and promoter of the societies. He was a great preacher and the greatest revivalist of the Christian church. He was also the author of many volumes and the editor of many more. He was the statesman of the movement. He is given first rank by great writers among the ecclesiastical statesmen of the church. He was the most successful man of his time. The work of his contemporaries has mostly gone but his legacy to the world, the Methodist Church, is here to remain. He and
George Washington were the most successful men in the long line of the world's great workers.

Charles Wesley, the younger brother, was the poet of the movement. He was the “sweet singer” of this religious awakening. Competent critics have placed him in the foremost rank of the hymn writers of Christendom. He put the great ideas of the movement in song. Where the logical arguments of John Wesley and the fiery eloquence of Whitefield failed to quail the mob, the hymns of Charles Wesley melted and subdued. Methodism sang its way into the hearts of men.

George Whitefield was the greatest orator that Methodism produced. Probably no greater orator ever arose in the Christian church. His words of eloquent appeal fell like drops of rain upon the parched and withered hearts of England’s toiling and neglected poor. The people flocked to his preaching wherever he appeared. He crossed the Atlantic thirteen times and died in this country after preaching to an admiring crowd. The rich and the noble were also charmed by the preaching of Whitefield.

Through these men the flame of pure religion was kindled on the altar of the church and in the hearts of individuals in England, Scotland, Ireland and across the Atlantic in the colonies of America.

John Wesley preached, opened schools, ministered to the poor and needy, published many books in cheap editions, sent out tracts and started enterprises for helping those in want and need. And the societies grew amazingly in numbers and influence. When the conference met in the year 1769, there were one hundred preachers under his direction and thirty thousand people in the Methodist societies. There were forty-nine circuits in Great Britain. And another is soon to be added to this number. There was a conference of Mr. Wesley and his preachers held in Bristol, Eng-
land, in 1771. Among the preachers there was a young man attending his first conference. He had been used by Mr. Wesley for a few years in the work. In this conference Mr. Wesley arose and said, "Our brethren in America call for help. Who will go?" This raw recruit of twenty-six years of age, answered the call and offered himself for the work in America. This young man was Francis Asbury. To all outward appearance it is a very prosaic occurrence indeed and yet it is one out of which were to come momentous events for America and all the world. It was a milestone in a human life and a corner stone in the colossal structure of this great denomination of the Protestant world. It was one of those great decisions that lead to the highest achievements and that mold and fashion the destiny of a large part of mankind. From this hour a chain of events and providences place this man in the class of famous men who have made the history of the world we live in today.

Who was he? He was born of pious parents who were poor and obscure, although they were respectable and made an honest living by the work of their hands. Young Asbury went to school for a short time and then went out to make his way in the world. Religious impressions at an early age were made upon him and his religious experience goes back into his childhood. He was true to the highest moral standard in childhood and youth. He never took the "mud bath" nor did he sow any wild oats nor did he ever reap any in later life. The best preparation for the ministry is a life based on the highest moral living in these early years. He carried no scars of moral wounds received in youth. He was never haunted in manhood by the noiseless tread of the ghosts of the sins of youthful days. He was converted when about fourteen years old. At the age of seventeen he began to hold religious services and at eighteen he began to preach. At the
age of twenty-one he gave himself entirely to the ministry. Then, for five or six years he preached in England.

Then came the impression that it was his duty to go to America. America was on everybody's lips. Events that were to affect the destinies of nations were rumbling in the political world. The battle of human freedom was to be fought and won on American soil. A great nation is coming into existence on the continent of North America and this insignificant young preacher is destined to act a part second to none in molding the character of the people on this side of the Atlantic ocean. The Methodist Church has exerted a vast influence on the thought and life of the American people and Asbury influenced this church during its first fifty years as no other man ever did.

The beginning of Methodism in America contained no hint or prophecy of its coming greatness and power. The first service in America was held in the year 1766 in New York city in the home of Philip Embury and at about the same time Robert Strawbridge began to preach in Maryland. This same year Asbury began to preach in his native land.

Mr. Wesley had thought much upon the spiritual needs of the people in the colonies and the opportunities for extending the Kingdom among a people so largely without gospel privileges. Thirty years previous to this time Mr. Wesley spent some time in the colony of Georgia. His work in Savannah, Georgia, was not a great success, but the opportunities and needs of the colonists were impressed upon his mind.

A hundred and fifty years have come and gone since the Methodist Church had its beginning in our country. And what changes these passing years have brought about! There were something like two million people in all the colonies when Embury preached his first sermon to five people. Now one hundred and ten mil-
lion people live in the United States. New York, Philadelph­ia, Boston, Baltimore and Charleston were the only towns of any size. New York at that time had only twelve thousand inhabitants. Agriculture was the principal occupation. The people were thinly scattered along the Atlantic seaboard. Roads were few and hardly worthy the name. Men traveled for the most part on horseback. There were no railroads or steam­boats or telegraph lines or telephones or automobiles in those days.

There were many denominations well established in America before the Methodists came. In the middle colonies there were many Presbyterians; the Congregational Church, with Baptists and Quakers were in New England; in Pennsylvania there were many Quakers; in the South, the Episcopal Church was the leading organization although there were many Baptists also. The prevailing type of theology was Calvinistic.

In such an environment Methodism was planted. The outlook was not very promising and yet there was a crying need for the work these early Methodist missionaries came over to do. They started their work on their own initiative. Embury and Strawbridge had no directions from Mr. Wesley. Along with these two men were others preparing the virgin soil for Asbury and Coke. We find the names of Captain Webb, an officer in the British army, and Robert Williams, who was the means of bringing many men to God. Mention should be made of John King, Edwards Evans and Robert Owen. These men were preparing the way for the regular missionaries sent over to America by Mr. Wesley.

In the year 1769, two men, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pillmore, offered themselves for the American work and were sent over by Mr. Wesley.

These men were the forerunners of Asbury. They
rendered a useful service, but they did no really constructive work; and set in motion no great enduring plans for the evangelization of a continent, and the founding of an organized church that would cover the land with churches and send preachers wherever people were to be found. This gigantic task was waiting for the man of Providence and the man was Francis Asbury.

Asbury did not have the benefit of any large amount of early educational advantages, and yet he became an educated man. He made diligent use of all the means of getting information. He employed every spare moment in intellectual culture. He got up at 5 o’clock in the morning to pray and study the Bible. His rule was to read a hundred pages every day. With so many other things to do, it is a marvelous achievement. He continued this reading habit for nearly fifty years and must have read something like two million pages.

He set an example for all men who have never had the advantage of a college education. A few great books and the will to employ the fleeting moments otherwise usually lost, lift the mind out of the ruts of the commonplace and trivial. Such a course of mental application for a few years will lead a man out of the narrow paths of provincial thought and place him in the royal highway of the world’s great thinkers. Washington, Franklin and Asbury were not college trained men but their work and influence will abide through the centuries yet to be.

Asbury was not a writer of books as Mr. Wesley was. Asbury wrote only one book and that book is his Journal. The first date in this Journal is September 4, 1771. He is sailing from a port near Bristol, England, a young man going to America to preach the gospel. The last date is December 7, 1816. He is an old man now, worn down with toil and bodily suffering, taking
leave of the long journey he had traveled nearly fifty years on the American Continent.

This Journal is not a literary production. It has very little interest from an intellectual standpoint. His mind was at rest from the haunting questions that arise to perplex and disturb. He was not a great thinker and his mind never wandered beyond the pale of things accepted. Yet for the student of American history, there is a wealth of facts in his Journal that throw a stream of light on the people, the customs and thoughts of pioneer days. Also, for the student of the early history of Methodism in this country, the Journal is a priceless treasure.

We see in the Journal the life of a man striving to fulfill a lofty purpose. The details recorded become very monotonous and often exceedingly trivial, but as the end of the volume is reached, there stands before us a hero and a saint. He knew the people as no other man of his day. He came in contact with all sorts of men from the highest state officials to the most ignorant squatter in his cabin on the border of civilization. He literally went everywhere, he knew everybody and never forgot any one he ever met. He preached to high and low alike.

In this Journal is the record of his life, his thoughts and his journeys from Maine to Georgia year after year. He never wasted his time or let slip an opportunity for rendering a service for his Master. He was everlastingly at the task of his life. That task was to preach, to visit, to study, to travel from one end of the land to the other. He came to America a raw recruit, but he learned sufficient Greek, Latin and Hebrew to read the Bible in these languages. He claims that his meditations on the Hebrew Bible gave him great pleasure. Not only these languages occupied his moments, snatched from sleep and care of all his churches, but he also studied divinity, grammar, his-
tory and literature. He mentions in his Journal more than a hundred volumes that he studied. He said he wished to improve himself in the best things. But his favorite book was the Bible. He thought that this one volume was of more importance and value to him than all the other books in the world.

He wrote his Journal as he could snatch a few moments from the crowded hours of the passing days. He wrote a great many letters to his preachers and to his friends. He wrote about a thousand letters each year. His Journal is not only a mirror of the fifty years he traveled but it is above all else the history of a man who made the chief business of his life the care of souls.

Asbury landed in Philadelphia on the twenty-seventh day of October in 1771. He went to church and was kindly received by the people. He hired no house and made no arrangement for a room or meals. He never had a place he could call home. He literally lived with the people. He ate what was set before him and slept wherever night overtook him.

During forty-five years he gave himself in body and soul to his divinely appointed task. Through these eventful years he gave his time and thought and strength to the Methodist Church. No man can estimate the influence for the good of the people of this solitary itinerant who went up and down the land preaching the gospel, teaching respect for law and order and instilling in the masses a desire for knowledge and the higher things of life.

Although he loved his native land and his parents whom he never saw again, he surrendered all to carry out the purpose he had in his heart. It was an unselfish purpose. He came to America neither for money nor fame nor adventure. His purpose was to live for God and to influence others so to do. He was held in the grip of this mighty purpose through the
long, weary and toilsome years. He never wavered, he never hesitated, he never turned aside from his purpose, neither in sickness, nor hardship, nor danger.

He came when new ideas of government were stirring the minds of the colonists. He lived through two wars with the country of his birth. He saw scattered colonists shake off the power and authority of the British crown and organize themselves into a free and independent nation. All the thrilling events from the battle of Lexington to the disastrous defeat of the British at New Orleans by General Jackson, happened during the years of Asbury’s ministry in America. In his day the great Napoleon rose and fell. He lived through the greatest epoch of the history of modern times.

He lived through another revolution no less far-reaching on the lives and character and destiny of thousands of American citizens. When he came he found a handful of unorganized Methodists but when he entered into his everlasting reward this handful had become a free and independent ecclesiastical body, numbering thousands upon thousands and exercising a tremendous influence in the country. He found three hundred and sixteen Methodists when he came and when he died in 1816, there were 695 preachers and 214,235 members.

He came to preach. He began at once on his arrival in Philadelphia. He went to New York and preached there. New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore were centers around which he radiated in those preaching tours that finally extended through the length and breadth of the land.

The first Conference of the preachers was held in Philadelphia in 1773 and was followed by the second and third in the same city. In 1776, the Conference met in Baltimore. Asbury believed in “a circulation”
of the preachers. He succeeded in fixing this itinerant plan in the polity of American Methodism.

All these early Methodist preachers were Englishmen. The atmosphere in America at this time was rather depressing for them, and they finally went back to England. Asbury was the only one of them who did not return. It seems that he too desired to go, but he could not give up his converts and the growing church. The Methodist Church grew rapidly in numbers through all the years of the Revolutionary War. He remained at his post of duty though he was under suspicion and was in retirement at a friend’s home in Delaware for nearly two years. He was wise and prudent, he saw the outcome of the struggle and prophesied the success of the American cause. He soon left his place of retirement and went about his work unmolested.

Up to the year 1784, the Methodists were groups of believers in societies without ecclesiastical existence and without an ordained ministry. They were dependent upon churches with an ordained ministry for the rite of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Most of them received baptism and the Lord’s Supper from the clergy of the Episcopal Church.

But a new day had come. The authority of England was gone and, with it, a large part of the prestige of the Episcopal Church. For years the Methodist preachers and people had been restless and discontented. They did not wish to continue in this ecclesiastical bondage. Asbury, with difficulty, restrained many of the preachers from administering the rite of baptism and the sacrament.

Mr. Wesley saw that this need of American Methodism must be met. He broke through an ecclesiastical fiction, hoary with age, and, following the example of the early church, ordained Thomas Coke a presbyter of the Church of England, Superintendent of the
American branch of Methodism. This was a bold step. Neither Martin Luther nor Henry the Eighth did a bolder deed when they overthrew the traditions that had shackled men's minds for a thousand years. Wesley based his action on the Bible and the Primitive Church. He also ordained Whatcoat and Vasey elders to accompany Dr. Coke to America.

The commissioners from Wesley arrived in New York on the third of November, 1784. Soon after his arrival Dr. Coke preached at Barrett's chapel in Delaware. After the sermon there took place the famous meeting between Dr. Coke and Asbury. Dr. Coke revealed his mission to Asbury. Asbury was unwilling to take so momentous a step as receiving ordination as Superintendent unless the preachers should be called together in a conference and he be chosen to this high office by his brethren. A Conference was called at once. The Conference met in Baltimore on December 24, 1784. Sixty-eight traveling preachers assembled in this historic body. Dr. Coke presided and the Conference was organized and they took up the business on hand. A resolution was offered and carried by which the Methodist societies became the Methodist Episcopal Church. Asbury, with Dr. Coke, was unanimously elected superintendent. Asbury was ordained deacon and the next day elder and on the third day he was consecrated to the office of superintendent. This Conference adopted the first Discipline. After a ten days' session the Conference adjourned. Thus came into existence the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Church contained eighty-three preachers and four thousand nine hundred and fifty-eight members.

Since that day there have been an organized church and an ordained ministry. Asbury, up to this time, had never baptized a person or administered the sacrament. Now he is an ordained elder and a superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church.
His style of living was not changed by the new dignity conferred upon him. He continued his preaching and traveling. Having never married and having no fixed abode, his home was on the road. From New England to Georgia and across the mountains into Tennessee and Kentucky, was the journey he took each year during a large part of his life. Once when he preached in Washington, the people came out to see "the man that rambles through the United States." He said, "I am always on the wing, but it is for God." "I am always upon the road," he said at another time.

He went each year into every state of the then Union. He visited the state of New York fifty times; New Jersey, sixty times; Pennsylvania, seventy-eight times; Maryland, eighty times; North Carolina sixty-three times; South Carolina forty-six times; Virginia, eighty-four times; Tennessee, twenty times; Georgia, twenty times; Massachusetts, twenty-three times. He passed through all the largest cities every year. At the age of sixty, he was traveling five thousand miles a year. No wonder he complains of being a little stiff, of having some touch of age, of his horse having a sore back and of his saddle being somewhat worn.

Traveling was full of hardship, difficulty, and even danger, because there were no great highways from state to state, no steel bridges spanning streams, and no hotels along the way. Streams were crossed by swimming. There were a few inns in the more populous sections, but there were too few for this man who went everywhere. He stopped at the homes of the people on the road and sometimes he slept in the woods. He was often entertained in homes of elegance and wealth, for he had many friends among the wealthy and cultured. Most of the time, however, he found a home with the poor.

In these years he prayed in ten thousand homes, he ordained four thousand preachers, he preached seven-
teen thousand sermons and traveled two hundred and seventy thousand miles.

As has been said, the purpose in the mind of Bishop Asbury was a very unselfish one. He came not for money or renown. He preached for nearly half a century on a small salary. For many years, he received sixty-four dollars a year and later on he was paid eighty dollars a year. His salary while he was bishop was only eighty dollars and his traveling expenses. It was love for God and the souls of men that enabled him to bear hardships, privation and unceasing care and toil. No sublimer motive ever moved the heart of a man.

It was a period of great revivals. Churches sprang up after these religious awakenings. These revivals spread from one section to the other until the whole country was filled with them. The Methodist Church grew rapidly in communicants and extension of territory. In the year 1816, Methodism was firmly established from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi river.

This great religious movement was the direct outcome, from a human viewpoint, of the zeal, the tireless energy and undaunted courage of Bishop Asbury and the heroic men who labored with him. He was the preeminent leader. The men under his direction gladly and cheerfully followed him in his unselfish service. He sent no man where he had not gone or did not himself go. He got the same salary that his fellow laborers got and lived the same kind of life they lived. He shared their hardships and perils and triumphs and was at all times in sympathy with them.

The list of the names of Bishop Asbury's co-workers is a long one. As we read about these men of the early days of Methodism we realize that we live in easier and softer times, though the sum total of our difficulties may balance theirs. They faced dangers of which we
have little conception and suffered hardship we can hardly believe. And yet they were a happy band of workers. No intellectual doubts and perplexities seemed to sweep across the calm depth of their religious experience. They stuck close to the plain truths of the gospel and never appeared to stray beyond its fundamental teachings. Truth has an easy way of making itself felt and accepted when clearly and faithfully proclaimed by men who believe it and feel it. These men preached the things they felt and believed and lived. It was not a gospel of hearsay or a proclamation of second hand truth, derived from sources outside of their hearts and lives. Their doctrine was personal experience. It had changed them. As they told their experience, others were likewise changed. It was life. It was power. They were not much concerned about reputation or place or salary, but they were tremendously concerned about the souls of men; and they had souls for their reward.

Incessant toil, continuous hardship, unending journeys in summer and winter, bad health, unceasing bodily sufferings, heavy responsibility and the consuming care of the rapidly growing church made Bishop Asbury an old man before his time. His desire was to teach and preach as long as he lived and his wish was fulfilled. More than once he seemed nearing the end of the journey, but he would improve in health and work with renewed vigor and energy.

As already stated, one long journey followed another through the years. He crossed the Allegheny mountains sixty times. He was known in every part of the country and, as he says of himself, he became "a spectacle to men." In the year 1814, not long before his death, he made one of these trips through the middle West and on down into South Carolina. Then he goes through the States, finally ending his journey in New England. He swings around his vast circuit into Ohio
and then into Tennessee where he holds his last Conference. After this conference he passes through South Carolina for the last time and slowly proceeds through North Carolina and Virginia trying to reach Baltimore for the General Conference. He came to Richmond, Virginia, and here he preached his last sermon. Going from Richmond, he reached the home of his friend, George Arnold, near Fredericksburg. This was his last stop on the long journey of forty-five years. In this home where he was tenderly cared for by the family and his traveling companion, John Wesley Bond, he died on Sunday afternoon, March 31, 1816. He was first buried in the family graveyard of Mr. Arnold, but his body was removed soon after by the General Conference to Baltimore and placed in the vault of Eutaw Street church. Once again the body of Bishop Asbury was removed and placed in the Mount Olivet cemetery, Baltimore, where it rests with other leading Methodist preachers of Asbury’s day.

An evangelist of unusual power, the leading preacher among the early preachers of his church, Bishop Asbury takes even higher rank as an ecclesiastical statesman and administrator. An organizer, an inspiring leader and a tireless worker, he raised his followers and associates to his own level of zeal and enthusiasm.

In his early ministry he was soon raised by Mr. Wesley to a position of leadership and responsibility. He was loyal to Mr. Wesley and was very insistent on adhering to the rules and regulations of the societies. He was a strict disciplinarian, and believed in order and discipline and held the preachers to a strict observance of them. He was conservative and yet ready to move along lines of progress when the hand of Providence pointed the way. He showed his conservatism in his attitude towards the question of the sacraments. Many of the preachers insisted on their right to administer the sacraments, but he considered such action irregular
and strenuously opposed it. He finally constrained
the preachers to desist, until the matter could be set-
tled in a constitutional manner.

He enjoyed the confidence and love of the preach-
ers, though a few found fault with his administration
and withdrew from the societies. He knew the men
and understood the needs of the churches; and his
appointments were generally satisfactory to the people
and to the preachers. He exercised unlimited power
in sending the preachers to their appointments and yet
he used his power in sympathy and love.

He was strong for what he called a “circulation” of
the preachers and thus he laid the foundation of our
connectionalism. He sent them out over the country
without consulting any one and they went cheerfully
to their work. At times he seemed arbitrary; but the
welfare of the churches and the best interest of the
preachers were uppermost in his mind.

He was a creator of institutions for carrying on the
work of the church. He was himself a missionary to
this country and his long years of service were mission-
ary in spirit. New enterprises to the regions beyond
were ever in his mind. While the church grew steadily
as the years rolled by, he never seemed satisfied with
results obtained. He saw the future of Methodism;
and prophesied great things, which have been more
than fulfilled.

He believed in church schools and established them
wherever he could. He succeeded to a limited extent
but even his prophetic eyes could not see the marvelous
outcome of his feeble efforts in this field of church
work. He left four or five academies. Today the
Methodist Episcopal Church has one hundred and
seventy-one institutions of learning with a property
value of fifty millions of dollars. In these institutions
there are over four thousand teachers and more than
sixty thousand students. In the Methodist Episcopal
Church, South, there are eighty-four institutions of learning with a property and endowment value of over sixty-three million dollars with a student body of nearly thirty thousand.

The support of superannuate preachers, the widows of superannuate preachers, and the children of deceased and worn-out preachers, was started by Bishop Asbury.

The first Sunday school in America was established by Asbury in 1786 in Virginia. Today the Sunday school is an institution of vast numbers and influence.

He encouraged the sale of books and gave at his death what money he had to the Book Concern of the Methodist Church. This Book Concern of the Methodist Episcopal Church is the largest book house in the United States and our Publishing House is not far behind it.

Yet he never forgot that his first and chief duty was to preach. And he preached the gospel. No other theme claimed his attention. He never neglected an opportunity to proclaim the good tidings of salvation. He believed that salvation was possible for every man no matter how wicked or hardened by sin. Wherever he found people, he preached to them and was disappointed if he did not see immediate results. He preached in every sort of place, in private houses, in rooms, in churches, in chapels, in taverns, in stores, under trees, in court houses, in play houses, in a barroom where he claimed to have great liberty, on a wagon, in all places and at all times. He spoke to individuals, he went into the room of the sick, he visited from house to house, he entered the prison with a message of hope for the condemned, and he took special interest in instructing children.

The Bishop was not a sensational preacher. He was serious, dignified and always conscious of an awful responsibility for the unsaved. He was not an orator
and yet men listened to the burning intensity of his message. Preaching to him was by no means a parade of superficial talent or an exhibition of maudlin emotions for a cheap sensation, but a serious business. His pulpit themes aroused the consciences of men and brought a deep conviction of the heinousness of sin and the joy of divine forgiveness. He took time to deliver his sermon. He was thoroughly acquainted with sermonic literature and above all else with the Bible. His message was fundamental. Life and its responsibilities to Almighty God, the call of duty, the blighting effects of sin, the possibility of salvation, the certainty of death and the judgment, occupied his thought as a preacher. He looked to God through the Holy Spirit to convict and save men. He was a man of constant prayer. He was a small man physically, enfeebled with disease and sickness; but, morally and spiritually he was a giant. Strength of body and keenness and largeness of intellect have a certain amount of influence, but gifts of body and mind can never rival in influence spiritual power. Spiritual power makes the man supreme.

Though a truly religious man, he was not a frenzied bigot or a crazy fanatic. While he was serious he was given to fun and humor. His piety was vital and the glow of his religious life sprang from the flame of devotion that burned on the altar of his heart. His chief claim to piety did not rest in proclaiming his excellencies and condemning his neighbors.

Though a saint, he was an agreeable companion, and always in behavior and speech the perfect gentleman. While the source of his religious experience and life came out of his heart cleansed by the blood of the Redeemer, he welcomed forms and ritual in church service. Intimate and unceasing communion with God was the source of his power and influence. This sent him out on a mission that would have strangled the
finest natural talent and withered the most brilliant genius. He was a chosen instrument in the hands of God to render a lasting service in the church and in society.

His fame is secure and will abide through the coming centuries. In the hall of fame, he stands in the foremost rank. His work, his example, his influence and his life of toil and devotion are an inspiration that should thrill the hearts of the people called Methodists and lead them to accomplish greater things in the service of the Master.

His enduring monument is the Methodist Church on this side of the Atlantic. He is not dependent on bronze or stone to perpetuate his memory down the vistas of coming ages. The Methodist Church will see to it that he is not forgotten.

Note for a moment the growth of the Methodist Church. In 1771, when Asbury came he found 316 Methodists in America, and when he died in 1816, there were 695 preachers and 214,235 members. Today in all American bodies there are 48,420 preachers and 8,666,815 members. In both American and English bodies there are 55,651 preachers and 10,153,821 members. In American and English bodies including members, probationers and adherents there are 37,768,882.