

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

(Not included in original booklet)

[Front Cover](#)

[Foreword - By Lillian B. Griffith](#)

[Introduction - By B. H. Pearson](#)

[Chapter I - Parentage and Youth](#)

[Chapter II - American Methodism in 1771](#)

[Chapter III - Francis Asbury as a Preacher](#)

[Chapter IV - Francis Asbury as a Man](#)

[Chapter V - Dedication of the Asbury Memorial](#)

[Back Cover \(inside\)](#)

---

# Francis Asbury



**Founder of  
American  
Methodism**

**By  
George W. Griffith**

---

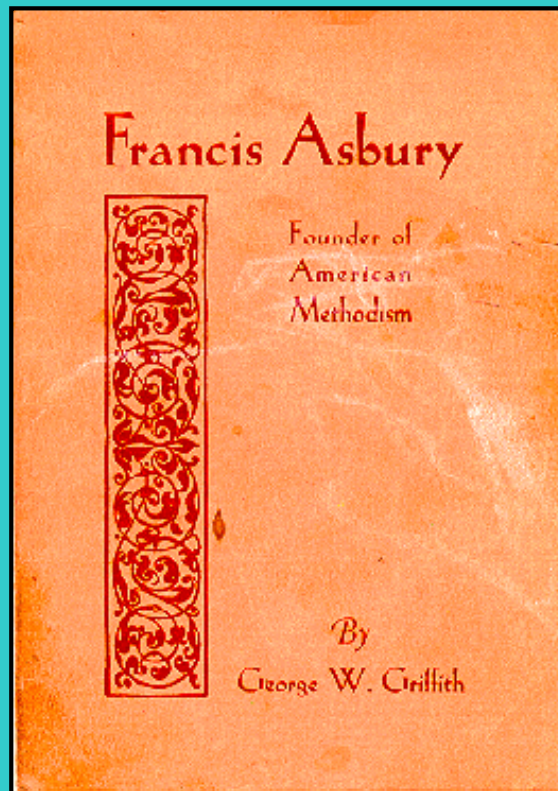
(Inside Cover)

**Price 3 5 Cents  
3 for \$1.00  
Postpaid**

**Order from  
MRS. G. W. GRIFFITH  
Editor and Publisher  
554 Wheeling Way  
Los Angeles, Calif.**

Copyright 1939  
Mrs. G. W. Griffith

Printed in U.S.A. by  
  
Glendale California



[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## FOREWORD

Soon after Mr. Griffith's home-going, February 13, 1936, I felt a divine urge to collect and publish his writings.

"Living Embers", a memorial volume, appeared in 1937. At the suggestion of friends this included a brief biography.

"Altar Coals", a practical daily reading book, a companion volume to "Living Embers", is ready for the press, but the publication of it has been postponed for a time.

"Francis Asbury" first appeared in 1916 as a serial in the Free Methodist, while Mr. Griffith was pastor of the College Church at Greenville, Illinois.

The reader of these pages who knew Mr. Griffith intimately or who has carefully read "Living Embers" will be struck with his similarity to Bishop Asbury in many respects. He will note the same deep humility in the two men, the same genius for masterly planning, the same whole-hearted devotion, the same clear vision and balanced judgment, the same indomitable courage, unbending integrity, and unquenchable zeal, the same untiring application and the same high standards of spirituality.

"As a wise masterbuilder" Francis Asbury laid the foundation well. In Mr. Griffith's words, "May a double portion of Bishop Asbury's spirit fall upon the entire body of the collective Methodism of today!"

This booklet is being sent forth with a prayer that it may have the same challenge to its readers as the life of Bishop Asbury had to my husband and as his interpretation of it has had to me.

-Lillian B. Griffith.

[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## INTRODUCTION

Among the immortals of all ages shines the name of Francis Asbury. The statue to "The Prophet of the Long Road" erected by Act of Congress in the National Capitol is the first purely religious memorial of its kind. The life of this man of the burning heart is inextricably bound up with all that is best in the life of our Republic. As a boy he learned the secret of living in the Book, of living upon his knees, of keeping "within whispering distance of Jesus", and his God-directed life is perhaps the most constructive spiritual contribution that England made to the greatness of these United States of America.

Most men whose lives count in the Kingdom have somewhere stated that next to reading God's Word the lives of God's chosen ones has been their greatest source of strength. No romance excels the drama of such a life as Bishop Asbury's, and few other names hold greater inspiration for the Christian youth of the world. The man who has interpreted this life for us, the late beloved Bishop George W. Griffith, was one who knew the secret of Bishop Asbury's power and in these pages shares it with us.

To read the suggestions and questions at the close of each chapter is to feel impelled to find the answers. With an insight born of long experience, Mrs. Lillian Bushnell Griffith, the editor and compiler, directs attention to what is vital. She has done worth-while service for the reader who wishes to secure maximum values from this inspiring biography and especially for study groups who will use this volume with profit to themselves and to the cause of God.

-B. H. Pearson.

[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## CHAPTER I

### PARENTAGE AND YOUTH

"The undevout historian is mad," wrote Dr. A. T. Pierson. This is the carefully weighed statement of a faithful student of history. The wheels of Providence are intricate and involved, yet they move straight forward, and, at times, move with exceeding swiftness. Blind indeed is the eye that can look upon the eclipse of Babylonian glory, the collapse of Alexandrian dreams and the repeated cataclysms of the race and not see "that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Dan. 4:17). Pharaoh, Cyrus and the Caesars are proofs. The preparation of the political world for the Messianic advent reveals God's finger-marks on history. The coming of Savonarola and Martin Luther was God's rebuke to the pall of the dark ages. The "Holy Club" of Oxford was God's answer to the skepticism and moral darkness of the eighteenth century.

"Westward the course of empire takes its way," is a historical fact poetically expressed. The wheels of the car of Providence must parallel that march of empire, so that where its camp stakes are set, above them may be unfurled the banner of the cross, upon which is inscribed, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Hence, it was the consistency of divine operations that a second Wesley should be called and trained for Christian leadership in the new world. He must be a man of clear vision, of balanced judgment, of indomitable courage, of unbending integrity, of unquenchable zeal, of holiest ambition, of superlative devotion. That man was Francis Asbury. Thomas Carlyle said: "We can not look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near." The passing of a century has not lessened the power of that light nor has it dulled the pleasure that comes from looking at the portrait of this great and good man.

*His Parentage and Youth.* Joseph and Elizabeth Asbury belonged to the better class of the common people of England and were in fairly moderate circumstances. Two children were born to them, one, a daughter, dying in early childhood. Francis was born in Staffordshire, about four miles from Birmingham, August 20, 1745. His mother was a pious woman and trained him with religious care. He says of himself that he "never dared an oath or hazarded a lie." He read the Bible with pleasure when seven years of age. His father was very anxious to give him an education and placed him in the school of one Arthur Taylor, where he remained a few months, but was compelled to leave because of the harshness and cruelty of the pedagogue. He was then placed to learn a trade; the result is given by himself as follows: "Soon after I entered business God sent a pious man, not a Methodist, into our neighborhood, and my mother invited him to our house; by his conversation and prayers I was awakened before I was fourteen years of age. It was now easy and pleasing to leave my company, and I began to pray morning and evening. I soon left our blind priest, and went to West-Bromwick church: here I heard Ryand, Stillingfleet, Talbot, Bagnall, Mansfield, Hawes, and Venn; great names, and esteemed gospel ministers. I became very serious, reading a great deal-Whitefield's and Cennick's sermons, and every good book I could meet with.

"It was not long before I began to inquire of my mother who, where, and what were the Methodists; she gave me a favorable account, and directed me to a person who could take me to Wednesbury to hear them. I soon found this was not the church-but it was better. The people were so devout-men and women kneeling down-saying AMEN. Now, behold! they were singing hymns-sweet sound! Why, strange to tell! the preacher had no prayer book, and yet he prayed wonderfully! What was yet more extraordinary, the man took his text, and had no sermon book: thought I, this is wonderful indeed! It is certainly a strange way, but the best way."

After attending several of these services he was enabled to believe that the Lord "pardoned his sins and justified his soul," as he expressed it. While not always rejoicing in as much of the Spirit's power as he desired, yet he said, "I was happy; free from guilt and fear, and had power over sin, and felt great inward joy." It was some time after this he tells us when the Lord showed him the evil in his heart and he sought and obtained what he called the pure and perfect love of God. His conversion, and association with the

Methodists filled him with zeal, and, young as he was, he took an active part in the services.

"After this we met for reading and prayer," he continues, "and had large and good meetings, and were much persecuted, until the persons at whose houses we held them were afraid, and they were discontinued. I then held meetings frequently at my father's house, exhorting the people there, as also at Sutton-Cofields, and several souls professed to find peace through my labors. I met class awhile at Bromwick Heath, and met in band at Wednesbury. I had preached some months before I publicly appeared in the Methodist meeting-houses; when my labors became more public and extensive; some were amazed, not knowing how I had exercised elsewhere.

"My mother used to take me with her to a cottage meeting, which she conducted once a fortnight, for the purpose of reading the Scriptures, and giving out hymns. After I had been thus employed as a clerk for some time, the good sisters thought Frank might venture a word of exhortation. So, after reading, I would expound and paraphrase a little on the portion read. Thus began my gospel efforts, when a lad of sixteen or seventeen; and now I would rather have a section or chapter for a text than a single verse or part of a verse. When the society called me forth from obscurity my performance in public surpassed all expectation. But they knew not that the stripling had been exercising his gifts in his mother's prayer meeting."

The "young stripling" was now made a local preacher in his eighteenth year, and became, as he himself says, "the humble and willing servant of every preacher that called on me by night or by day; being ready with hasty steps to go far and wide to do good; visiting Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and indeed almost every place within my reach for the sake of precious souls; preaching, generally, three, four, and five times a week, and at the same time pursuing my calling."

How does that record sound in the ears of many who are supposed to be regular itinerants of today, to say nothing of the local class?

Serving an apprenticeship as outlined in the foregoing, when about twenty-one he became a regular itinerant, preaching and laboring with great zeal and success until the Bristol conference. He says: "On the 7th of August, 1771, the conference began at Bristol, in England. Before this, I had felt for half a year strong intimations in my mind that I should visit America; which I had laid before the Lord, being unwilling to do my own will, or to run before I was sent. During this time my trials were very great, which the Lord, I believe, permitted to prove and try me, in order to prepare me for future usefulness. At the conference it was proposed that some preachers should go over to the American continent. I spoke my mind, and made an offer of myself. It was accepted by Mr. Wesley and others, who judged I had a call. From Bristol I went home to acquaint my parents with my great undertaking, which I opened in as gentle a manner as possible. Though it was grievous to flesh and blood, they consented to let me go. My mother is one of the tenderest parents in the world: but I believe she was blest in the present instance with divine assistance to part with me."

How lame our language! how feeble our words! yet in these last simple sentences can be read the yearning of a father's loving heart, the poignant grief of a tender-hearted mother and the grief of the son in that parting. Reverence demands that the curtain of gentle silence be drawn across the picture of that domestic tragedy, while respect bows in all humility before such un murmuring sacrifice. Truly, there were giants of moral heroes in those days!

Although he had been laboring actively for over eight years, nearly five years in the regular itinerancy, so scant was the remuneration that when he reached Bristol the last of September, he had no money. The Lord opened the hearts of some of his friends, however, who provided him with clothing and ten pounds in money. The voyage was very trying. He was very sick the first few days; he had no bed except two blankets placed on a plank, but he consoled himself with the reflection that if men endured such hardships for worldly gain, he could do it for Jesus' sake. After the first Sabbath he preached to the sailors each returning Sabbath, the rest of his time being spent in study, prayer and self-examination. He found a strong and increasing desire to be "complete in all the will of God, and holy in all manner of conversation, as He that had called him was holy."

The landing at Philadelphia was an occasion of great joy. He says: "The people looked on us with pleasure, hardly knowing how to show their love sufficiently, bidding us welcome with fervent affection, and receiving us as angels of God." Such was the welcome extended to this twenty-six-year-old missionary, who was providentially destined to become to American Methodism what Mr. Wesley was to English Methodism—a truly Pauline evangelist, founder of churches and far-seeing ecclesiastical builder.

## FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION

1. Cite other evidences than those mentioned by the author "that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men."
2. What did God raise up as a buffer to the skepticism and infidelity of the nineteenth century? the twentieth?
3. Name the seven colorful qualities that blend to make the rainbow character of Francis Asbury. Compare Carlyle's statement of a great man with Longfellow's in the "Psalm of Life."
4. Give three results of a pious mother's training; an outstanding life change as a result of a Godly guest in the home, and note the spiritual appetite of a truly awakened heart manifesting itself in a hunger for morning and evening prayer, religious reading and gospel preaching.
5. Note again the influence of Asbury's mother in his contacting the Methodists. What if she had not given him a favorable account of them? What if she had hindered his going to their meetings instead of helping him? Describe these meetings.
6. What two definite experiences came to him as a result of attending these meetings?
7. How did this new life manifest itself? With what result? What benefit would a young Christian receive from attending class meeting, prayer meeting and band meeting today?
8. Where did young Asbury as a youth of sixteen or seventeen exercise his gifts in expounding and paraphrasing the Scripture? How did this come about?
9. Describe the eighteen-year-old local preacher.
10. Note Asbury's attitude toward what he thought his call to America, and his preparation for future usefulness.
11. What does Mr. Griffith say of the parting of parents and son?
12. Describe Asbury's financial condition on leaving for America, his voyage, how he spent his time, and his desires.
13. What welcome did this twenty-six-year-old missionary to America receive on landing at Philadelphia? How does Mr. Griffith describe him in the closing words of this chapter?
14. What sentence in this chapter most deeply impresses you?

[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## CHAPTER II

### AMERICAN METHODISM IN 1771

About 1760, Robert Strawbridge, a typical Irishman from the Province of Ulster, a fiery Methodist local preacher, with his young wife, set out for America to make a home for themselves. They made their way into the wilderness, a few miles northwest of Baltimore. As soon as his cabin was built, the restless young Irishman unrolled his local preacher's license and began to preach to the few settlers within reach, his cabin serving as chapel. He soon organized several small societies and in 1764 built a log meeting-house, the first in America. In 1801, Bishop Asbury held a conference in the same vicinity and made the following entry in his journal: "Here Mr. Strawbridge formed the first society in Maryland and *America*." The italics are his. About 1769 he was joined by another lay worker by the name of King. To this zealous itinerant belongs the honor of preaching the first sermon in Baltimore. His first pulpit was a blacksmith block; the second was a table. Within five years the society was strong enough to entertain a conference.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, Louis XIV of France, in his zeal to suppress Protestantism, laid waste the French province of German-speaking Protestants in what was called the Rhine Palatinate. A large number of refugees made their way to Holland, from whence the English transported them to London. About fifty families of these refugees made their way into Ireland, settling in the county of Limerick. Being deprived of pastors, in the course of half a century, they degenerated to the level of their Celtic neighbors, becoming noted for their wickedness, drunkenness and profanity. In this state they were found by the Methodist itinerants, converted and reformed, and a Methodist chapel built in their midst. From this German community in an Irish county, a number of Methodist converts joined a company of emigrants and landed in New York in 1760. In this company were Philip Embury and his wife; also, Paul Heck and his wife, Barbara, the latter a cousin of Philip Embury. According to Dr. Abel Stevens, those of the emigrants who were Methodists became backslidden after reaching New York, with the exception of Philip Embury, Barbara Heck and a few others.

Mr. Embury had been converted in 1752 and given a local preacher's license. But he was of a retiring disposition and there is no evidence that he exercised his gifts for several years after reaching New York. In 1765 or 1766, Mrs. Heck visited her brother who had come over with a later company of colonists. On entering the house she found several parties playing cards. It stirred her righteous soul, and, catching up the cards, she threw them into the fire and exhorted the astonished company to repent. From there she went straight to the house of her cousin, Philip Embury, where she threw herself prostrate before him and with tears besought him to take up his cross and preach to them. At last he consented. The energetic Barbara then went out, found four persons whom she brought into Embury's house and the five composed the first Methodist congregation in the present city of New York.

In 1765 Mr. Wesley preached in Bristol. In the audience was a man dressed in the uniform of a captain of the British army. The officer was convicted and converted on the spot. At once he became an active worker and was soon made a local preacher. He had seen a number of years' service in America; had lost an eye at Louisburg; had been wounded at the storming of Quebec; he now became as active a soldier of the cross as he had been in the service of the king. The next year found him stationed at Albany. Here he heard of the new society of Methodists in New York City. In a few weeks the members of the little society were astonished and a little alarmed to see a British officer in full uniform, even to his sword, march into their place of worship. Their fears were soon dispelled, however, for they quickly found out who he was and gladly welcomed him as a kindred spirit. His fitness as a leader was quickly recognized. A natural leader; a Boanerges in his preaching; filled with the fire of Wesleyan evangelism; rich, and generous with his means, Captain Webb became another of the chosen vessels providentially raised up to plant the gospel in the new world. He was soon retired from the army on full pay and devoted the rest of his life to the ministry. He organized societies on Long Island and in New Jersey and was the first to preach in Philadelphia. This occurred in 1767 or 1768, when he secured an old sail loft, where he preached and where he organized a society of seven members.

In 1769 a strong appeal was sent to Mr. Wesley for aid. The conference at Leeds sent Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor. As already noted, these were followed in 1771 by Francis Asbury and Richard Wright. Behold, then, American Methodism as Mr.

Asbury found it. Scarcely more than ten years since the first Methodist had come to America, yet a beginning had been made in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore; about 600 members had been gathered into the various small societies by the energetic lay workers, among whom were Embury, Webb, Strawbridge, Owen, Williams and King; while only two regular itinerants were on the field—Boardman and Pilmoor. The infant church had three church buildings only, including the log house built by Robert Strawbridge in Maryland.

*Mr. Asbury as an itinerant.* After a short rest in Philadelphia, Mr. Asbury went to New York. Here he began those labors which for over thirty years caused him to make the entire eastern half of the North American continent a vast Methodist circuit, and which, in the language of Dr. Daniels, "he traveled in true itinerant fashion, preaching incessantly, day and night, week days and Sundays; stopping not for storms, without shelter; for forests, without roads; for rivers, without bridges; or for a purse without money."

Mr. Asbury had no sooner become acquainted with the work in America than he discovered a tendency to localize the preachers. The societies and pastors favored it. Within a week after reaching New York he wrote: "I have not yet the thing which I seek—a circulation of preachers. I am fixed to the Methodist plan; I am willing to suffer, yea, to die, sooner than to betray so good a cause by any means." Again: "At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way. I am in trouble, and more trouble is at hand, for I am determined to make a stand against all partiality." How well he succeeded in "showing the way" will now appear. He made up a circuit, embracing the country adjacent to New York, which he traveled until spring. It appears that the understanding with the English itinerants who were taking charge of the work was to have the preachers change every three months; every six months at the latest. In harmony with this plan the spring of 1772 finds Mr. Asbury in Philadelphia; the autumn, in New York; New Year's of 1773, in Baltimore; July, in New York and July 15 in Philadelphia in attendance at the first American Methodist conference.

Ten preachers took part in the deliberations presided over by Thomas Rankin, who had been sent over from England by Mr. Wesley. Mr. Rankin was a strong disciplinarian and was a great help in assisting in giving form and system to the work. Mr. Asbury was appointed to Baltimore with three assistants. Baltimore meant the state of Maryland, and, as nearly one-half of the 1,160 members reported to the conference were within the bounds of his circuit, he had ample opportunity to practice his itinerant theories. The day the conference adjourned he was in the saddle enroute for Baltimore, praying as he rode, "May the Lord make bare His holy arm, and revive His glorious work!" The answer to this prayer was seen in the doubling of the membership in the state that year.

The conference of 1774 stationed him in New York again; while the following year it sent him to Virginia. During these years he was greatly afflicted in body, but was untiring in zeal. The year he was stationed at New York he traveled over two thousand miles. The fourth conference held in 1776 sent him to Baltimore again. On account of sickness he was not able to attend the conference, but as soon as he was able to travel, he was on the field. Later he was compelled to go to Warm Sulphur Springs in Virginia for treatments. While here he was quartered in a house twenty by sixteen feet, in which were seven beds, sixteen adults and several noisy children; yet he made out the following plan to follow while *rusticating and regaining his strength*: "To read one hundred pages a day, to pray in public five times a day, to preach in the open every other day, and to lecture in prayer meeting every other evening."

By this time most of the English itinerants had returned to England on account of the American revolution. Mr. Asbury expressed himself as follows: "I can by no means leave such a field for gathering souls to Christ as we have in America. It would be an everlasting dishonor to the Methodists that we should all leave three thousand souls who desire to commit themselves to our care; neither is it the part of a good shepherd to leave his flock in time of danger; therefore I am determined by the grace of God not to leave them, let the consequence be what it may." The years covered by the revolution were very trying to him. Two years of the time he had to remain in hiding in Delaware. Once he had a narrow escape from an assassin's bullet, and, several times, had close calls from arrest from over-zealous patriots who were searching for Tory sympathizers. When, at last, he ventured to renew his ministry, it was with inexpressible relief. He reorganized the scattered forces and gathered the lost ends to such good purpose that the close of the year 1784 found the church with a membership of fifteen thousand, requiring the services of one hundred-four preachers.

## FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION

1. When, where and by whom was the first meeting house in America built? Previous to this where did Mr. Strawbridge preach? With what result? What zealous lay worker joined him five years after the church was built and preached the first sermon ever preached in Baltimore? What was his first pulpit? his second? What proof is there of the healthy growth of this society?
2. What was the occasion of the first Methodist meeting in New York City? Name two of the five members of the congregation. Trace the travels of Barbara Heck and her cousin Philip Embury from France to New York City. When, where, and by whom was the gospel first preached in Philadelphia? Characterize Captain Webb. Where did he organize societies?
3. Think of American Methodism as Mr. Asbury found it: in ten years hot-hearted, lay workers, had preached Christ in New York City, Baltimore and Philadelphia, gathered about 600 members into various small societies, had built three churches, and appealed to Mr. Wesley in conference at Leeds, England, for regular missionaries. What four were sent?
4. Bound Mr. Asbury's circuit. How did he travel it without shelter, without roads, without bridges, without money? How did he overcome the tendency to localize the preachers? When, where and by whom was the first American Methodist Conference held? Describe Mr. Asbury's appointment. How did he succeed in doubling his membership in Maryland that year. Where was he sent the second year? the third? the fourth? When unable on account of illness to travel, where did he rusticate and what schedule did he follow?
5. Compare the way he felt about leaving America with the way the missionaries in the Orient feel about leaving during the conflict there. What hardships did he encounter during the Revolution? Note the remarkable growth of the church under his ministry during this period.

[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## CHAPTER III

### FRANCIS ASBURY AS A PREACHER

He was a man with a message. His biographer, Dr. Strickland, says he preached seventeen thousand sermons during his forty-five years of ministry in America. This would be an average of one a day. His journal contains notes on nearly two hundred texts. They show that his preaching was expository, logical, direct, and preeminently spiritual. One of his friends said of him: "Asbury was the only preacher I ever heard who preached *to* his text. He never preached *from* it, as many do who select a passage as the mere theme of a discourse, the discussion of which would be as applicable to an axiom of Coleridge as to the text, but he would start a proposition, and in its elaboration would come directly *to* the text. With him, proposition, argument, illustration, incident, everything was either immediately drawn from or directly connected with the subject of discourse."

The following is the outline of a sermon preached in Baltimore, August 16, 1801, on the text, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

I. The character of those who, by justification, are in a *special* manner, called to be pure in heart; called by promise, by privilege, by duty.

II. The purity of the gospel in authority, in example, precept and spirit; in its operative influence on the understanding, conscience, intentions, will, hopes, fears, joys, sorrows and affections, producing sanctification of the soul in a deliverance from all sin.

III. The visions: in what manner the pure in heart should see God; they shall see Him in His perfections, in His providences, in His works of nature, and the operations of His grace, and they shall see Him in His glory.

His preaching was directed toward the heart and consciences of his hearers. There was a serious cast to his mind which, at times, was tinged with melancholy. This became noticeable when he had "a dry time," or "a dull time," or his hearers were "dead," "indifferent to the message," or "at ease in Zion." But when he felt "enlargement of heart," "great liberty of soul," or his congregations were "moved," or "there was a stir," or "souls convicted, converted and sanctified," this melancholy disappeared and he was happy and praising the Lord. Frequently he speaks of delivering an "awful sermon," or of the Lord's giving him a "searching message."

As a preacher, he was a constant and unremitting student. Deprived of an education in his youth, he made such use of his time that he mastered Greek and Hebrew, and was familiar with history, theology and general literature. When it is remembered how constantly he was on the move, it is remarkable how much studying he accomplished. He carried his Greek and Hebrew texts with him and always had a few books in his saddle bags, which were read and studied by the hour as his horse threaded the lonely trails of the wilderness or hurried over the more beaten roads of the settlements. Over one hundred titles of books he had read are given in the journal. In many instances these are accompanied with criticisms or comments which indicate a discriminating mind, keen analytical powers and a balanced judgment. During one of his enforced stays at Bath, Virginia, taking treatments from the mineral wells there, he made the following entry: "I am now closely engaged in reading, writing, and prayer-my soul enjoys much of God. We have great rains, and are obliged to keep close house; but we have a little of almost everything to improve the mind-the languages, divinity; grammar, history, and belles-lettres; my great desire is to improve in the best things."

*Francis Asbury's Constructive Work.* Methodism is the science of saving souls by method. The method included definite conversion, sanctification of the soul, an aggressive, untiring evangelism operating along the lines of an itinerating system original within itself, the whole regulated by such necessary rules as, from time to time, seemed to be necessary. A new world in which to work; a new evangelism to be housed and set in order; a new body of workmen, untrained, to be conserved and made contributory to

the success of the whole; all of this required qualities in a leader which would include sound wisdom; good judgment; broad vision and indomitable courage. Such a leader was to build; not for a day; not for a generation; but for the future. Alexander's dream of a world empire collapsed like a bubble before he was scarcely cold in his grave. Napoleon had years in which to view the wreckage of his ambitions before he went hence. The apostle's admonition for every man to take heed how he builds is of universal application. The qualities, natural and acquired, which made Francis Asbury the man, the Christian and the preacher that he was found their highest expression in his work as a constructive builder.

He believed firmly that his position was of divine appointment. Hear him: "I will tell the world what I rest my authority upon. 1. Divine authority. 2. Seniority in America. 3. The election of the general conference. 4. My ordination by Thomas Coke, William Philip Otterbein, German Presbyterian minister, Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey. 5. Because the signs of an apostle have been seen in me." Fortified by this conviction; conscious that the exercise of his episcopal powers were ever and always for the glory of God and the best interests of the church; for thirty-two years his executive genius was exerted in shaping American Methodism.

Following the example of Mr. Wesley, he planned for the establishment of schools. He projected a scheme for the opening of preparatory schools in every conference. The ill-fated Cokesbury College of Maryland was the object of his special care and solicitation for the necessary funds for its maintenance. He organized the first Sunday-school in America in Hanover county, Virginia, in 1786. He laid the foundations of what is now the Methodist Book Concern and raised funds for its support. He was an active home missionary, sending preachers to new and needy points and then soliciting funds for their support. He carried with him a subscription book for what was known as The Asbury Mite Fund. This was used for the worn-out preachers and widows and was the foundation of what was afterwards the "Preachers' Fund." He also planned a fund for the relief of needy preachers on the frontier which has since been incorporated under the "Chartered Fund." One writer says: "Wesley himself never devised and carried into execution so many plans of benevolence in connection with his societies as did Asbury for the Methodist Episcopal church."

The first conferences held in America had nothing in the way of rules of procedure, except the minutes of the Wesleyan conferences in England. The quarterly, annual and quadrennial gatherings, together with the rules incident thereto, were formulated as the growth of the church and the exigencies seemed to demand. The guiding hand and the directing mind during this formative period was Bishop Asbury. It was he who presided at the conferences; it was he who edited the discipline, and, out of the mass of conference minutes, reduced to logical order the legislative acts which formed the basis of ecclesiastical Methodism.

Unquestionably, the centralization of power in an episcopacy is accompanied by great danger. Modern church history is proof. In Bishop Asbury this power was well-nigh absolute. He did not have even the so-called "cabinet." He made the appointments and beyond his decision there was no appeal. The latter part of his life, when the last sitting of the conference was held, he would have his horse saddled and waiting at the door. The moment the appointments were read he was mounted and off, no one knew where. If the appointments were not satisfactory, there was nothing to be done; the bishop was gone. There was a certain military finality about it all, that, to some, in these days of ease and luxury, seems almost heartless. But Bishop Asbury was a man of God; he was a man of prayer, each appointment being made only after earnest supplication for divine direction; he possessed a remarkable faculty for reading character and judging as to the fitness of men; he had an unselfish, God-given passion for the welfare of the church; above all, he was the noblest Roman of them all—not one could excel him in holy zeal, patient suffering, arduous labor, personal sacrifice and unceasing devotion. To serve under such a leader was an honor; to be appointed to a hard field was an expression of confidence; to die in the line of duty was but a soldier's lot. In such a program and under such a general, laggards had no place, place-seekers no opportunity; policy men no recognition. But those who believed in losing the life in order to save it formed an ever increasing band of moral heroes and skillful workmen with whom Bishop Francis Asbury laid the foundations and raised a large part of an ecclesiastical superstructure, the shadow of which has fallen on every land. If later builders have marred the building as planned or have used counterfeit material, the responsibility is theirs. It does not detract from the greatness of the original architect; he is made greater by the contrast.

Conditions change; environments change; the approaches to men's minds and souls change; but the fact of sin and salvation remains. The physical disabilities and inconveniences of Bishop Asbury's day are past. The moral problems of today are as perplexing and exacting upon mind and soul as then. Their successful solution and the success of present day evangelism demand the same genius for masterly planning, the same whole-hearted devotion, the same deadness to every invitation to ease and pleasure, the same untiring application, the same high standards of spirituality that crowned his work with such glorious success. May a double portion of his spirit fall upon the entire ministry of the collective Methodism of today!

*"Twilight and Evening Bell."* At the session of the Tennessee conference in 1815, Bishop Asbury made the following entry in his

journal: "My eyes fail. I will resign the stations to Bishop M'Kendree - I will take away my feet. It is my fifty-fifth year of ministry, and forty-fifth year of labor in America. My mind enjoys great peace and consolation." This was in October. By November he was in Virginia; by December he was at Columbia, South Carolina; a few days later, the seventh, he makes his last entry. Weak in body, yet clear in mind and ambitious in spirit, greatly desirous of meeting with the general conference at Baltimore in May, he turns northward, tenderly nursed and cared for by his traveling companion, the Rev. John Wesley Bond. Richmond, Virginia, was reached in March, where he preached his last sermon the twenty-fourth. He had to be carried from his carriage to the pulpit. Seated on a table prepared for the purpose, he preached from Romans 9:28, speaking nearly an hour, with frequent pauses for breath. The following Tuesday, Thursday and Friday he journeyed northward, reaching the home of an old friend, Mr. George Arnold, in Spottsylvania.

Here his weakness and distress became so evident that his friends urged him to call a physician. He refused, saying: "Before the doctor could reach me I should be gone." About eleven o'clock Sabbath morning, March 31, he asked if it was not about time for meeting, then seemed to recollect himself, and requested the family be assembled for prayers. The Rev. Bond sang, prayed and expounded the twenty-first chapter of Revelation. During these exercises, the dying bishop seemed calm and absorbed in devotion. After this, such was his weakness he was unable to swallow a little barley water. Mr. Bond asked him if he felt the Lord Jesus to be precious. Unable to speak, he raised both hands in token of victory. A few moments later, still seated in his chair with his head resting upon the hand of the faithful Bond, without a struggle, he entered into rest.

---

### FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION

1. What four characteristics of Mr. Asbury's preaching are evident from a study of his sermon notes?
2. Deprived of an education in his youth and on the move constantly, how did he master Greek and Hebrew and become familiar with history, theology and general literature?
3. What four things did his method of saving souls include? What four qualities in a leader were required to conserve and continue this new evangelism in the new world with untrained workmen? What convictions fortified him? How many years did God give him to shape American Methodism?
4. Discuss Mr. Asbury's constructive relation to schools, the Sunday School, the Methodist Book Concern, support of worn-out preachers and their widows, and of needy frontier preachers.
5. Was the centralization of power in an episcopacy during the years of Mr. Asbury a good or a bad thing? Prove your answer. What qualities in him made it safe for him to have such well-nigh absolute power? What qualities in him challenged "an ever-increasing band of moral heroes and skillful workmen with whom Bishop Asbury laid the foundations and raised a large part of an ecclesiastical superstructure, the shadow of which has fallen on every land."
6. Discuss Mr. Griffith's statement: "The success of present day evangelism demands the same genius for masterly planning, the same whole-hearted devotion, the same deadness to every invitation to ease and pleasure, the same untiring application, the same high standards of spirituality that crowned Mr. Asbury's work with such glorious success."
7. Analyze your own feelings as you read "Twilight and Evening Bell". What challenge comes to you?

[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## CHAPTER IV

### FRANCIS ASBURY AS A MAN

Humboldt said: "The finest fruit earth holds up to its Maker is a finished man." Francis Asbury was possessed with rather more than the usual degree of the Spartan spirit, especially as it related to what he considered his duty, yet, in spirit, he was gentle as a woman and the possessor of those finer sensibilities which are so beautiful in character.

He had a fine appreciation of nature. Time and again his sensitive spirit responded to the "majesty of the ocean," the "stately grandeur of the mountains," the "lovely Shenandoah," the "thundering Niagara," the "noble Hudson with its Palisades," etc.

He was generous to a fault. One instance must suffice. On one of his visits to the Western conference he said: "The brethren were in want, and could not suit (clothe) themselves; so I parted with my watch, my coat, and my shirt."

He had an innate sense of refinement. The untidiness of many of the homes in which he was compelled to accept entertainment was very galling to him. At one of the conferences, the only thing that came up to mar the occasion was when one of the presiding elders placed his feet on the railing in front of the pulpit. To this bishop, who thought nothing of sleeping on a hard floor or riding thirty miles in a hard rain storm because it was in the line of duty, this rudeness was "like thorns in his flesh," until the offending brother placed his feet where they belonged.

He was exceptionally sensitive to the sufferings of the horses which were so necessary to the prosecution of his work. Again and again he records his grief over the weariness or sickness of the faithful animals, walked miles when they were lame, and grieved when they had to go without food. At one time one of the faithful brutes which he had used for a long time became worn out. He had to sell it and buy another. The touching way in which he refers to the whinnying of the abandoned horse, as he rode off, is exceedingly expressive.

Again, he had a lively sense of humor, giving way to which often caused him grief. For instance we find the following record: "I reproved myself for a sudden and violent laugh at the relation of a man's having given an old negro woman her liberty *because she had too much religion for him.*" The italics are his. Again, "I attempted to preach at Bath, on 'the lame and the blind;' the discourse was very *lame*; and it may be I left my hearers as I found them-*blind.*" He found one society where they had "more gold than grace;" and another where "they had neither dollars nor discipline, being sadly deficient in both." Traveling in New Jersey, he remarked: "Since this day week I have ridden over dead sands and among a dead people, and a long space between meals,"

His manly traits of character were manifested in his solicitude for, and interest in his parents. The greater portion of the time covered by his ministry his salary was sixty-four dollars a year, then it was raised to the munificent sum of eighty dollars. He saved all he could spare out of this and made regular remittances to them as long as they lived. He says he ministered to the necessities of a beloved mother until he was fifty-seven. Several letters written to them have been preserved and breathe the spirit of filial love to a remarkable degree. When word reached him of his father's death in 1798 he wrote in his journal: "I now feel myself an orphan with respect to my father; wounded memory recalls to mind what took place when I parted with him, nearly twenty-seven years next September; from a man that seldom, if ever, I saw weep-but when I came to America, overwhelmed with tears, and grief, he cried out, 'I shall never see him again!'" His mother died January 6, 1802. He penned the following tribute to her memory: "As a woman and a wife she was chaste, modest, blameless; as a mother (above all the women in the world would I claim her for my own) ardently affectionate; as a 'mother in Israel' few of her sex have done more by a holy walk to live, and by personal labor to support, the gospel, and to wash the saints' feet; as a friend, she was generous, true, and constant."

Like all great men he was humble. A sample of this trait and one out of many is found in connection with the general conference of 1792. The O'Kelly faction presented a resolution intended to restrict the powers of the bishop, especially in the appointment of

preachers. When the matter was presented, Bishop Asbury left the room and did not return for two days until the matter was settled. His modesty impelled him to do this that all embarrassment might be removed and the conference left to the utmost freedom of expression. He wrote a message to be read, in which he said: "I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers."

With these fundamental traits of character, together with others which lack of space forbids mention, and all adorned and beautified by grace, Mark Antony's tribute to Brutus may be very properly applied to this wonderful man:

"His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

*Francis Asbury as a Christian.* Thomas DeQuincey wrote: "Though a great man may, by a rare possibility, be an infidel, yet an intellect of the highest order must build upon Christianity." Dr. Theodore Cuyler said: "The best advertisement of a workshop is first-class work. The strongest attraction to Christianity is a well-made Christian character." Francis Asbury was not only a man; he was a Christian man. Hence, he was great because he was good.

He experienced and preached holiness of heart and life. We read: "My soul is happy in God-purity of heart is my joy, and prayer is my delight." "My general experience is close communion with God, holy fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, a will resigned, frequent addresses to the throne of grace, a constant, serious care for the prosperity of Zion, forethought in the arrangements and appointments of the preachers, a soul drawn out in ardent prayer for the universal church and the complete triumph of Christ over the whole earth. Amen, amen, so be it!" After preaching in one place on 2 Cor. 7:1, he writes: "I find the way of holiness very narrow to walk in or to preach; and although I do not consider sanctification, Christian perfection, a commonplace subject, yet I make it the burden, and labor to make it the savor of every sermon." Again, "We were careful to pray with all the families where we stopped, exhorting all professors to holiness."

He was a man of prayer. When not traveling, his invariable rule was to rise at four o'clock and spend two hours in prayer and meditation and another hour before retiring. For years he prayed daily for each one of his preachers by name, until the number of them made it impracticable. When making out the appointments of the preachers, he was in the habit of praying over each one. Many of his contemporary laborers comment upon his power in prayer in public. He constantly mourned the want of opportunity for secret prayer necessitated by his long journeys. "My mind enjoys peace; and although by constant traveling I am kept from the privilege of being frequently in private prayer, yet I am preserved from anger and murmuring; my soul is wholly given up to God. "My soul is in peace-I want more prayer, patience, life, and love-I walk daily, hourly, and sometimes minutely with God." "I was happy in being alone. I poured out my soul to God for the whole work, and the dear people and preachers of my charge. My body is weak-my soul enjoys peace. I have power over all sin, and possess a spirit of prayer and watchfulness: I feel myself dead to all below, and desire to live only for God and souls."

He was fully submitted to the divine will. This gave him meekness in suffering and trial, but boldness in conquering difficulties and opposing wrong. Some of his brethren in Virginia were uneasy about his power as a bishop and he wrote them he "would lie down and be trodden upon rather than knowingly injure one soul." Again, "I have had lately two *official cordials*, ironically speaking. They know how to come at me, although four or five hundred miles distant. Lord, help me to do and suffer all I ought to do and suffer for Thee, Thy church, and ministers." One more must suffice: "My soul has constant peace and joy, notwithstanding my labors, and trials, and reproach; which I heed not, though it comes as it sometimes does from the good when they are not gratified in all their wishes. People unacquainted with the causes and motives of my conduct will always, more or less, judge of me improperly. Six months ago a man could write to me in the most adulatory terms, to tell me of the unshaken confidence reposed in me by preachers and people: behold, his station is changed, and certain measures are pursued which do not comport with his views and feelings. Oh, then I am menaced with the downfall of Methodism; and my influence, character, and reputation are all to find a grave in the ruins. Should this journal ever see the light, those who read it when I am gone, may, perhaps, wonder that ever I should have received such letters, or had such friends: yes, gentle reader, both have been. Whom then shall I believe; and whom shall I trust? Why, whom but a good, and true, and never-failing God?"

He had clear conceptions of truth. This made him bold and uncompromising in his opposition to all sin, as suggested above. He opposed slavery in public and private. The subject was discussed in several annual and general conferences and Bishop Asbury was

always strong in his attitude of opposition. He preached and warned everywhere against the sin of dram drinking, which was so prevalent in his day. He found one Methodist who had provided a keg of whisky for a barn raising. The doughty bishop ordered the whisky emptied out into the road. The man refused, and Mr. Asbury, although excessively weary from a long day's ride, called for his horse and rode on to find another stopping place, refusing to stay in the house over night. Rev. J. B. Finley relates the following: Mr. Finley and Bishop Asbury stopped at the home of a Methodist family in the west. The daughter and some other young ladies were in the parlor, very gaily dressed. The father and mother came in, followed by the grandparents. Taking the grandmother by the hand, the bishop looked at her closely, then with tears in his eyes said: "I was looking to see if I could trace in the lineaments of your face, the likeness of your sainted mother. She belonged to the first generation of Methodists. You and your husband belong to the second generation. Your son and his wife are the third, and that young girl, your granddaughter, represents the fourth. She has learned to dress and play on the piano, and is versed in all the arts of fashionable life; and, I presume, at this rate of progress, the *fifth* generation of Methodists will be sent to dancing-school." Time and again he mentions preaching an "awful sermon," a "searching sermon," etc. Near the close of his life, we find the following: "Our ease in Zion makes me feel awful: who shall reform the reformers? Ah, poor dead Methodists! I have seen preachers' children wearing gold-brought up in pride. Ah, mercy, mercy!"

Such, in brief, is a superficial analysis of the qualities found in this composite character. His soul was truly a star, but unlike Milton, it did not dwell apart; but, like the Lord whom he served, tabernacled with men.

---

### FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION

1. As a man, compare Mr. Asbury's spartan spirit as it related to duty and his gentleness and finer sensibilities with those of his biographer, Mr. Griffith, as seen in "Living Embers". Especially note: love of nature, innate sense of refinement, kindness, solicitude for parents, humility and also his sense of humor. Note an example of the humility of Mr. Asbury; of Mr. Griffith.
2. As a Christian, note: his experience, his life of prayer, his meekness in trial and suffering, and his boldness in conquering difficulties and opposing wrong, his clear conception of truth, and compare these qualities, also, with those of his biographer, Mr. Griffith, in "Living Embers".
3. What is the best advertisement of a work shop? The strongest attraction to Christianity?
4. What incident illustrates the fickleness of people?

[Table of Contents](#)

# Francis Asbury

Founder of American Methodism

## CHAPTER V

### DEDICATION OF THE ASBURY MEMORIAL

March 31, 1916 was the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Bishop Francis Asbury, the founder, under God, of American Methodism. That year was observed as Asbury Centennial by many branches of American Methodism. By a special act of Congress, ground was donated in the National Capital for an equestrian statue of Bishop Asbury, to be paid for by popular subscriptions taken in the Methodist churches of the United States and Canada. The prospective cost was \$50,000.

The Executive Committee of the Free Methodist church, in its annual meeting in October, 1915, adopted a long series of preambles and resolutions relative to the Bishop Asbury Centenary, of which the last three resolutions were as follows:

*Resolved:* That we earnestly recommend our societies and preachers throughout the entire connection to observe the proposed Centenary by appropriate services in connection with which a sermon shall be preached emphasizing Asbury's deep spirituality, his great influence in promoting and conserving Scriptural holiness in the New World, and magnifying his work as "the pioneer, the builder, the hero of the first half century of American Methodism."

*Resolved,* That we also recommend each annual conference to plan for an appropriate service during its session in 1916 in celebration of the Asbury Centenary; and, unless others have been designated for so doing, we request our district elders in the several conferences to act in advance as a committee on preparation of a program for the occasion.

*Resolved,* That we recommend that at each Centenary service a voluntary offering be lifted towards the erection of a bronze equestrian statue in the City of Washington, D. C., in commemoration of this devoted man among the statues of the other great men of the nation.

The late Bishop Wilson T. Hogue was deeply interested in the project and was largely responsible for the definite action taken by the Executive Committee. By pen and voice he gave the matter his heartiest support and constantly urged a general observance of the Centenary by our people.

The Asbury statue is the first purely religious memorial erected on public ground in the National Capital. The Act of Congress donating the ground referred to Bishop Asbury as "a pioneer itinerant, whose continuous journeyings through our cities, towns, villages and early settlements, from 1771 to 1816, greatly promoted the interests of patriotism, education, morality and religion and were a distinct aid to the American republic."

Bishop Asbury was born in Staffordshire, England, August 20, 1745; landed in the United States, October 27, 1771; was ordained bishop in 1784; and died at Spottsylvania, Va., March 31, 1816. He has been most appropriately called, "The Prophet of the Long Road." It is estimated that he traveled 270,000 miles and preached 16,000 sermons. When he landed in America there were but three Methodist preachers in the country. When he died he left a denomination numbering 214,000 members with 2000 ministers.

The completion of the statue and its dedication was long delayed on account of the late war and other reasons. The formal dedication has just been observed and those who contributed to this worthy object will be interested in reading the following account of the ceremonies connected with the unveiling, by Rev. F. F. Shoup, of Washington, D. C.:

The equestrian statue of Francis Asbury, pioneer Methodist bishop in America, was unveiled and dedicated October 15 at Washington, D. C. It occupies a beautiful and prominent site on Sixteenth and Mt. Pleasant Streets. The statue is a full-sized figure in bronze of Bishop Asbury on horseback. The faithful horse is trudging wearily along, while the bishop sits erect with the reins in

the left hand and the Bible in the right.

Representatives from the following churches occupied seats on the platform: Methodist Episcopal; Methodist Episcopal, South; Methodist of Canada Methodist Protestant; Free Methodist; African Methodist Episcopal; African Methodist Episcopal Zion; Colored Methodist Episcopal. Bishop Sellew was to have represented the Free Methodist Church, but as he was providentially hindered, the invitation was extended to the writer.

The monument was presented to the government by Bishop Wm. F. McDowell, and accepted for the government by Lieut. Clarence D. Sherrill, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army. With the assistance of a great amplifier the voices of the different speakers were carried out in every direction, making it possible for the large audience to hear distinctly. Music for the occasion was furnished by the United States Army Band.

President Coolidge occupied a seat on the platform and delivered an address. The President said, "We can not depend upon the government to do the work of religion. An act of Congress may indicate that a reform is being or has been accomplished, but it does not itself bring about a reform. The government of a country never gets ahead of the religion of a country." Religion was described by the President as the foundation of this government. "It is as a result of the preaching of Bishop Asbury, his associates, and other religious organizations," he declared, "that our country has developed so much freedom." "It is well to remember this," he added, "when we are seeking for social reforms. Of course we can help to restrain the vicious and furnish a fair degree of security and protection by legislation and police control, but the real reforms which society in these days is seeking will come as a result of our religious convictions, or they will not come at all. We can not escape a personal responsibility for our own conduct. We can not regard those as wise or safe counselors in public affairs who deny these principles and seek to support the theory that society can succeed when the individual fails." "There is no way by which we can substitute the authority of law for the virtue of man. Peace, justice, humanity, charity-these can not be legislated into being, they are the result of a Divine grace."

From the life of Bishop Asbury, who came to this country as a preacher before the Revolutionary War, the President drew a lesson of sacrifice and devotion which he said "has gone into the making of our country." He recalled that the pioneer bishop traveled about 6000 miles a year, preaching about 16,100 sermons and receiving as his highest salary eighty-five dollars a year." "He had no idea," Mr. Coolidge said, "that he was preparing men the better to take part in a great liberal movement, the better to take advantage of free institutions, and the better to perform the functions of self-government. He did not come for political motives. He came to bring the gospel to the people."

Two hymns were sung, "Jesus, the name high over all," by Charles Wesley, and "Behold the Christian warrior stands," by James Montgomery. The services were simple and deeply impressive; and in every way a splendid tribute to the memory of the man who literally wore himself out in the service of his Lord and Master for the salvation of men.

---

## FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION

1. Why has Bishop Asbury been called "The Prophet of the Long Road?"
2. Describe the statue of Bishop Asbury.
3. How did the Act of Congress donating the ground in the National Capitol refer to Bishop Asbury?
4. What tribute did President Coolidge pay to religion in his address at the dedication of the monument?
5. What contribution has the reading of this booklet made to your life?

[Table of Contents](#)

# LIVING EMBERS

By LILLIAN BUSHNELL GRIFFITH

A biography of Bishop G. W. Griffith, a book of remarkable worth, intensely readable, a literary pleasure and treasure.

-Bishop William Pearce.

The Life and Writings of so able and devoted a man as Bishop George W. Griffith could not be read without inspiration and profit. Through these LIVING EMBERS he, being dead, yet speaketh.

-Bishop M. D. Ormston.

As steel stylus on granite, his character etched an enduring pattern on the church it was his pleasure to serve. We commend LIVING EMBERS, both for interest and spiritual profit. It is an accurate record and a living spirit.

-Bishop L. R. Marston.

Cloth-bound, gold-stamped, 320-pages. \$1.50

Order from

MRS. G. W. GRIFFITH

554 Wheeling Way

Los Angeles, California

---

[Table of Contents](#)