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THE CONTRIBUTION OF FRANCIS ASBURY  
TO THE  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIAL AMERICAN LIFE

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY  
in  
The Biblical Seminary in New York

New York, N. Y.  
1933

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTRIBUTION OF FRANCIS ASBURY  
TO THE  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIAL AMERICAN LIFE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject.

1. The subject stated and delimited.

The purpose of this study is to discover wherein, and by what method, Francis Asbury contributed toward the development of the social life of Colonial America.

The subject is delimited by two primary considerations; (1) the period of time through which Francis Asbury lived, and (2) the range of social problems toward which he contributed.

The years through which Francis Asbury labored in America were from 1771 until his death in 1816. It is this period of time which has been designated by the term Colonial America. The range of social questions with which Mr. Asbury dealt is limited only by the definition of the word "social." If by "social" we mean "all phenomena which we cannot explain without bringing in the action of one human being or another,"<sup>1</sup> we shall be allowed enough freedom to deal adequately with this many sided social genius. Based upon the definition that social conditions are "all of the numerous and diverse conditions that determine the

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1. Ross, E.A.: Foundations of Sociology, p. 7.

content of the life of society and of the individuals of whom society is composed,"<sup>1</sup> this study will be limited to the specific ways in which Francis Asbury created or modified the social conditions of Colonial American life.

2. The subject explained and justified.

By the term "contribution" is meant the impact of the life and the influence of the work of Bishop Asbury upon the life of his time. It is hardly possible to measure with accuracy the impact of a personality upon a single generation and the complexity of the problem is increased not only by the multiplicity of the phases of his influence but also by the complexity of influences which were being impressed upon the life of Colonial America. The effect of this man's work did not cease with his death in 1816 but as President Coolidge asks "Who shall say where his influence, written upon the immortal souls of men, shall end?"<sup>2</sup> It is of interest for the American people to study the life of this one of whom it is written:

"To Asbury and his Methodist circuit riders belongs the credit for sowing broadcast the spiritual seed which probably did more to establish justice, love of liberty, righteousness, and integrity of character among the people than any other single influence that operated throughout the formative period of the national history."<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Hayes, E.C.: Introduction to the Study of Sociology, p. 25.
2. Calvin Coolidge. Speech delivered in Washington, October 15, 1924.
3. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 207.

Not only is a study of Francis Asbury important from the standpoint of secular or national history, but also because of his outstanding effect upon the formation of the ecclesiastical body known as the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the propagation of the so called "social gospel" the Methodist Episcopal Church has been accused of "lobbying" and delving into affairs which are not strictly theological or spiritual. In 1908 the General Conference of the Methodist Church adopted the first official statement of its social creed. The statement as adopted by the General Conference of 1932 states in part:

"We believe in making the social and spiritual ideals of Jesus our test for community as well as for individual life, in strengthening and deepening the inner personal relationship of the individual with God, and recognizing his obligation and duty to society. This is crystallized in the two commandments of Jesus: 'Love thy God' and 'Love thy neighbor.'"<sup>1</sup>

To show that this is not a new emphasis toward which Methodism has swung from some more "spiritual" emphasis will be one of the interests of this study.

#### B. Sources for the Study.

##### 1. Primary sources.

The greatest source for this work will be the Journal of Francis Asbury, which was published five years after the death of the author. Other sources are the Journals of Asbury's traveling companions such as the

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1. Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 647.

"Reminiscences" of Henry Boehm, whose more accurate chronicles often throw fuller light upon Bishop Asbury's work than his own Journal reveals. Another valuable source is the "Short History of the Methodists in United States of America" which was published six years before the death of Francis Asbury.

## 2. Secondary Sources.

The secondary sources consist of the various histories of Methodism, histories of the United States and standard encyclopedia articles.

### C. Plan of Procedure.

The task of this thesis shall be to evaluate the influence of Francis Asbury upon the social life of the American nation. This shall be done by treating, in a brief way, the social and economic factors in England and America which gave rise to the origin and spread of the Wesleyan movement. Chapter two will be an analysis of the social program of Bishop Asbury, including the social conditions with which he dealt, his reasons for dealing with specific problems, and the methods he used to influence the group life of his day. Chapter four will be a discussion of the concrete or tangible results obtained by the direct influence of the pioneer bishop, and the last chapter will be a summary of the work and an evaluation of Asbury's contribution to the social life of the Colonial period of American life.

CHAPTER II

FRANCIS ASBURY: SOCIAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL  
PERSPECTIVE

## CHAPTER II

### FRANCIS ASBURY: SOCIAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### A. Conditions Which Gave Rise to the Methodist Movement.

##### 1. Background of Methodism in England.

Under the reign of good Queen Anne in England, in a little island town of Lincolnshire was born John Wesley, the founder of the Wesleyan revival. This man whose life so influenced the life of eighteenth century England, was the father of American Methodism and it was to him that Francis Asbury owed much of his inspiration for coming to the New World. Wesley was the product of his century and his movement can only be understood in the light of its relation to the theological, political, and philosophical thought of the eighteenth century. From 1700 to 1714 was a period of religious activity. "Then it was that our two oldest Church societies for spreading Christian knowledge at home and abroad were floated." "Then it was that a real effort was made to provide religious education for the poor, an effort was made to relieve the crying poverty of the great mass of the clergy, and then it was that St. Paul's in London was completed."<sup>1</sup> With the accession of the first of the Georges there was ushered in a period of scepticism

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1. Cf. Overton, J.H., The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century.

which was to characterize the eighteenth century.

A new interest in the natural sciences had been awakened by the advancement of the Copernican view of the universe. Galileo and Newton had overthrown the old conception of the flat earth with its tent like canopy above and its planets fixed upon revolving spheres.<sup>1</sup> The Royal Society of science was founded in 1660 and already the writings of Bacon were influential in guiding the new movement toward rationalism. The period of enlightenment was in part founded upon a new era in scientific thought.

In theological and philosophical thought there were many contending forces in Wesley's day. The Deism of Lord Herbert of Cherburg and the materialism of Hobbes in the seventeenth century were appearing in the eighteenth in the form of the "supernatural rationalism,"<sup>2</sup> of Locke, Tillotson and Clarke. In England the sceptical tendency found its clearest and completest expression in the writings of David Hume. Of Hume, James Orr writes:

"He seems to have early convinced himself that the bases of ordinary religious beliefs, even those of current Deism, were vanity, and that the philosopher would spend his time better in sceptically explaining, or explaining away, these beliefs, than in allowing them any influence over his own conduct."<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Lecky: Rationalism in Europe. Vol. I, p. 289.
2. McGiffert: Protestant Thought Before Kant, p. 189.
3. Orr, James: David Hume, p. 3.

Although the history of this century records the names of such men as Marlborough and Wellington, Nelson, Clive and Wolfe, Swift and Addison, Byron, Burns and Coleridge<sup>1</sup> there are few who more typified the sceptical thinking of the period than Edward Gibbon and Thomas Paine, both of whom followed Hume and went farther in their attacks upon Christianity. Gibbon's fame rests upon his great historical work, while Paine devoted his energies to essay writing, and is remembered better, perhaps, by his work "The Age of Reason." The position of Gibbon is summed up by Stephen:

"The zeal of the early Christians was earthly; their doctrine of future life subordinated to worldly purpose; their legends of miracles, so many proofs of their credulity; their morality imperfect and suited to popular prejudices; their disavowal of ambition, a mere covering to ambition of a different kind; their success was singularly slow and imperfect, and the sufferings which they endured not to be compared with those which have been voluntarily encountered by other men supported by no supernatural intervention."<sup>2</sup>

To this rationalistic conception Paine contributed "The Age of Reason" which was written for the masses rather than for the scholars. His book was addressed to his "fellow citizens of all nations" and is fully entitled "The Age of Reason; being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology. The reason given by Paine for his writ-

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1. Lucecock, H.E., and Hutchinson, Paul: Story of Methodism, p. 15.
2. Stephen, L., English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, Vol. I, p. 449.

ing was that it was necessary "lest, in the general wreck of superstition, or false systems of government, and false theology, we lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to these sceptical influences at work in Europe during Wesley's youth, there were influences tending toward a purer social order and a renewal of spiritual or mystical religion. The Reverend William Law was the leader of a reactionary movement against the supremacy of reason as the basis of religious truth. He pressed his case against reason in the endeavor to show that God is above reason.<sup>2</sup> The work which most profoundly influenced the thinking of the early Methodists was Law's "A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life Adapted to the State and Condition of All Orders of Christians." This book was read often by both Wesley<sup>3</sup> and Asbury.<sup>4</sup>

An even more important situation than the religious condition of England in the eighteenth century was the social situation. Many of the primary convictions of John Wesley find their source in the corrupt social condition of the England of his day. These attitudes of Wesley were in turn communicated to Francis Asbury in

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1. Paine: The Age of Reason, p. 21.
2. Law: The Works of the Reverend William Law, M.A., Vol. 2, p. 76.
3. Winchester: The Life of John Wesley, p. 32.
4. Journal. Francis Asbury, Vol. 1, p. 195.

America and thus are important factors in the formation of the social doctrines of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

That gambling, drinking, and swearing were prevalent in Wesley's day is shown by such selections from his Journal as:

"I met a gentleman in the streets cursing and swearing in so dreadful a manner, that I could not but stop him. He soon grew calmer, told me he must treat me with a glass of wine; and that he would come and hear me, only he was afraid I should say something against fighting of cocks."<sup>1</sup>

Not only was there a prevalence of the more petty nature, but there were the grosser forms of social evils such as the sweat shop systems and industrial slavery.

"The industrial revolution brought upon the masses of the people a nightmare of ferocious cruelty and wrong. Great numbers of the population were swept off the countryside to be herded round factory, mill and mine, in working and housing conditions that were as crudely as they were rapidly devised. Not only did men and women find themselves in bondage to masters as relentless and ruthless as their new machinery, but little children, even of the tenderest years were caught also in the toils of the new money-making death-dealing Mallock--the factory system."<sup>2</sup>

It was among the coal pits of Bristol where the early Methodist preachers found their greatest field. As the historian says of George Whitefield:

"It was no common enthusiast who could wring gold from the close fisted Franklin and admiration from the fastidious Horace Walpole or who could look down from the top of a green knoll at Kingswood on twenty thousand

. . . . .

1. Journal: Wesley. April 23, 1743.
2. Belden, A.D.: George Whitefield the Awakener, p. 53.

colliers, grimy from the Bristol coal pits and see as he preached the tears 'making white channels down their blackened cheeks.'<sup>1</sup>

As John Wesley was a contemporary of James Watt, so Methodism was a contemporary of the industrial revolution. Wesleyanism and the industrial revolution were destined to sweep westward together and only in an understanding of these two great movements can we find the secret of Methodism's historic interest in human welfare.

"Coincidentally with the opening of the continent by the genius of Watt and Fulton, Methodism has maintained Christianity abreast of the progress of immigration and settlement throughout the states and territories of the Union."<sup>2</sup>

"It is quite inadequate to interpret the Wesleyan Revival merely as an emotional or superficial phenomenon; it was a social protest that became a social revolution."<sup>3</sup>

"Wesley's heart was a flame of indignation against a society that was unclean, ungodly and cruel. When his flaming words became too hot for the churches, he went out into the fields where men walked whose feet had never crossed the threshold of any house of prayer. Under God's own sky he looked into the grimy faces of the miners worn with subterranean toil, into the dull faces of city slums whence hope had fled, into the tawny faces of laborers tamed by the sun. He discovered Englishment whom both rulers and bishops had forgotten. The great religious revival came when that man appeared who was capable of moral indignation and conscious of the dignity of human lives that everyone else held cheap."<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Green, J.R.: History of the English People. Vol. IV, p. 146.
2. Stevens, Abel: History of American Methodism, p. 32.
3. Kingdon, Frank: Humane Religion, p. 128.
4. Ibid. p. 130.

As the new religious enthusiasm could not remain confined in the church, neither could the European continent confine the forces which were set at work by the Wesleyan revival. "The world is my parish" declared Wesley, and the world into which his movement was projected was a world that was deeply conscious of a New World across the Atlantic. "Westward the star of empire takes its way" sang Berkeley as he contemplated the prospects of the formation of a new nation with a new political structure and unlimited possibilities.<sup>1</sup> What Berkeley and the philosophers saw as a new utopia, Wesley saw as a field of missionary enterprise where there must be provided "a religious system, energetic, migratory, 'itinerant,' extempore, like the population itself, must arise; or demoralization if not barbarism, must overflow the continent."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Background of Methodism in America.

"English Methodism dates from 1739, when the first Methodist congregations were formed in London and Bristol and the first regular preaching places established."<sup>3</sup> Just thirty years from this date the first official missionaries of the Wesleyan movement arrived and began their work of preaching from the steps of the Old State House, now known as Independence Hall, in Philadelphia.

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1. Stevens, Abel: History of American Methodism, p. 22.
2. Ibid. p. 22.
3. Sweet: Methodism in American History, p. 48

When Methodism arrived in America there was already a wide diversity of religious culture which had been planted here by the various colonizing groups. Although the Massachusetts Bay Colony was formed for economic gain, and in spite of the fact that their predecessors had come in quest of gold, we must recognize the large part that religion played in the establishment of the American Colonies. Charles A. Beard says: "In no relation can the religions in English expansion be neglected without doing violence to the record."<sup>1</sup> The most of the colonies had been founded because of religious zeal. "The one fact, more than any other, which explains American religion in the period of the colonies is that the colonial churches were largely planted by religious radicals."<sup>2</sup> Behind this religious zeal were other factors, potent and inextricably woven into the motives of the colonists.

"When therefore, the Dutch emigrated to New Netherlands they took with them the Reformed Church; when Sweden sent her colonials to Delaware, they transplanted their Lutheranism; when England established her first permanent settlement in Virginia, the Church of England was a part of the establishment."<sup>3</sup>

And thus it can be written that "when young evangelists who had shared John Wesley's heart warming experience appeared in New York and Maryland, and began to form classes

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1. Beard, C.A.: The Rise of American Civilization, p. 10.
2. Sweet: Story of Religions in America, p.2.
3. Rowe: History of Religion in the United States, p. 12.

and circuits of the people called Methodists, America presented a most complicated religious pattern."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the diversity of religious bodies in America and in spite of the renewed spiritual fervor of the Great Awakening under such men as Jonathan Edwards and Gilbert Tennant<sup>2</sup> there still remained great moral and social problems which were not under the influence of the church. "In many portions of the country there was much indifference to true religion and the shepherds of souls were few indeed."<sup>3</sup> America was ready for the great advance into the West. If the Gospel was to reach the homes of the pioneers there must come the men of whom it is written:

"They preached wherever opportunity offered--in taverns, in private houses which were frequently nothing more than single room log cabins, in town halls, in county poorhouses, in courtrooms, in taprooms, in schools, on street corners, in barnyards, in clearings in the woods."<sup>4</sup>

B. The Relation of Francis Asbury to the Social and Economic Conditions in England and America.

1. Asbury's English Background.

In 1771, at a conference of Wesley's preachers, their leader arose and "with much solemnity remarked, 'Our brethren in America call aloud for help,' and then

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1. Sweet: Methodism in American History, p. 9.
2. Sweet: Story of Religions in America, Chapter IX.
3. Atkinson: The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement, etc. p. 138.
4. Lucecock: Story of Methodism, p. 218.

expectantly inquired, 'Who will go?'"<sup>1</sup> In response to this challenge there arose the man who was to do for America what Wesley had done for England. This man was Francis Asbury, the great itinerant of early Methodism. Of the experience of his call he writes in his Journal, "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."<sup>2</sup> This young volunteer had been born in Old England near the foot of Hampstead Bridge, in the parish of Handsworth<sup>3</sup> in 1745. Of his family he records:

"My father's name was Joseph, and my mother's Elizabeth Asbury: they were people in common life; were remarkable for honesty and industry, and had all things needful to enjoy; had my father been as saving as laborious, he might have been wealthy."<sup>4</sup>

Francis had only one sister of whom he was very fond but she died in infancy. Mr. Asbury speaks very tenderly concerning his mother who was a very devout woman and who "invited any people who had the appearance of religion to her house."<sup>5</sup> In 1798, two decades after having left England for America, Asbury received word of the death of his father. This news prompted him to write in his journal:

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1. Tipple: The Prophet of the Long Road, p. 37.
2. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 1.
3. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 133.
4. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 134.
5. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 134.

"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 with grief he cried out, 'I shall never see him again.' For about thirty-nine years my father hath had the gospel preached in his house."<sup>1</sup>

Because of the special tasks which he was to perform, it appears providential that the founder of the American itinerary should have a unique training and preparation. He says little concerning his school days, but we know that he was not a graduate of any of England's famous schools, though his father had earnestly desired for him to complete his education.<sup>2</sup> Before he was fourteen Francis was apprenticed to a blacksmith. It so happened that the man to whom he was apprenticed and under whom Asbury worked for six and a half years, was a Methodist layman. Thus a man was prepared for the pioneer work which God had in mind for him to do in America. The years which he spent in the blacksmith's shop of that Old Forge, during which his muscles were strengthened and his bodily strength increased, were infinitely more valuable to him than had they been spent in a university. The anvil on which he wrought is still preserved as a precious memento of his providential early training.<sup>3</sup> He speaks with much appreciation about his master in the trade, of whom Asbury writes: "In the family I was treated more

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1. Asbury: Journal, Vol. II, p. 318.
2. Cf. Tipple: The Prophet of the Long Road, p. 47.
3. Briggs: Bishop Asbury, pp. 12-14.

like a son or an equal than an apprentice."<sup>1</sup> Asbury later met one of the sons of this blacksmith in America and found his house a place of solace and rest in his lonely wandering life.<sup>2</sup> No doubt this experience at the forge gave the apprentice a feeling of sympathy with laborers everywhere, but this humanitarian motive was not all that entered into his call to the New World. In order to find the impetus which drove him to America we must examine his religious experience.

Soon after Francis entered on the business of being an apprentice, God sent a pious man, not a Methodist, into his neighborhood and his mother invited the newcomer to the Asbury home. "By his conversation and prayers I was awakened before I was fourteen years of age."<sup>3</sup> In his Journal he records how he began to pray more earnestly and to seek a more spiritual life. He had always been a religiously minded boy and between the ages of six and seven he learned to read the Bible and took delight in the historical parts of it. He was often melancholy and meditated much upon the religious truths. Early in his boyhood he exhibited a hatred for sinfulness or folly. He writes:

"I abhorred mischief and wickedness, although my mates were among the vilest of the vile for lying, swearing,

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1. Asbury: Journal, Vol. II, p. 135.
2. Lewis: Francis Asbury, p. 17.
3. Asbury: Journal, Vol. II, p. 135.

fighting, and whatever else boys of their age and evil habits were likely to be guilty of; from such society I very often returned home uneasy and melancholy."<sup>1</sup>

Thus he failed to find happiness in his religious experience. At this time the fervor of such Wesleyans as Whitefield and Cesnick was gaining recognition in England and young Asbury began to enquire of his mother who these methodists were. She directed him to where he could hear them, and this is the strange account of his first contact with living Wesleyanism:

"I soon found that 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."<sup>2</sup>

From this experience the conviction of his sinfulness grew until on a certain occasion when he was praying in his father's barn he experienced the pardon of God in his heart. He writes that he "was happy; free from guilt and fear, and had power over sin, and felt great inward joy."<sup>3</sup>

After this experience he began to exhort people at his father's house and became a local preacher. He had been a local preacher about five years when he offered himself to God and his work. During his labors in the itinerary in England he had heard the appeals of the American Meth-

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1. Asbury: Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury. Vol. II, p. 134.
2. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 135.
3. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 135.

odists, and two months before the session in 1771 his mind had been impressed with the thought that America was his destined field of labor. "He saw in the New World a befitting sphere for his apostolic aspirations."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Asbury's Reasons for Coming to America.

The America which attracted this young pioneer preacher was a country beset with strange difficulties. Soon after he came to the Colonies in 1771 the Stamp Act was soon to have been passed and repealed (1765-66). The modern industrial revolution had set in; Hargreaves had invented the spinning jenny in 1764, Watts the steam engine in 1765, and Arkwright the spinning machine in 1768. "Industrialism and democracy were stirring in the cradle, and Adam Smith had just issued his economic bible, 'The Wealth of Nations.'<sup>2</sup> Within the next five years the Boston tea riots will have taken place, Lexington and Bunker Hill will have become history and the Declaration of Independence will have been issued.<sup>3</sup> Into the midst of this turmoil came Francis Asbury wearing a suit of clothes which had been given him by the Bristol Methodists, with earthly possessions amounting to ten pounds, and a message of salvation like unto that of his precursors, Whitefield and Edwards. The fact that he came to America

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1. Stevens: History of American Methodism, p. 61.
2. Lewis, James: Francis Asbury, p. 23.
3. Ibid.

to preach to the founders of a new nation is attested to by the records of the fact that he preached his first sermon on the day of his arrival<sup>1</sup> and that thereafter for forty-five years scarcely a day passed that he did not preach, sometimes three times a day, occasionally five times, until at the end of his ministry it was estimated that he had preached seventeen thousand sermons.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most famous quotation from Asbury's Journal explains his real reason for coming to America.

On Thursday, September the twelfth, 1771, he wrote:

"I will set down a few things that be on my mind. Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honour? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No, I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do."<sup>3</sup>

Thus by forty-five years of service he demonstrated that he came to America to save souls; and all of his various other activities must be studied in the light of this one supreme ambition.

### 3. The Labors of Francis Asbury in America.

When Francis Asbury came to the American Colonies he was twenty-six years of age. For eleven years the Wesleyan movement had been planted in America but its activities were largely confined to the cities such as New York and Philadelphia. The work done by the early

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1. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 4.
2. Tipple: The Prophet of the Long Road, p. 213.
3. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 2.

Methodists was after the manner of the English societies and would probably have remained a part of the English Wesleyan movement had it not been for the vision and energy of the great pioneer bishop. Upon his arrival in Philadelphia he writes:

"When I came near the American shore, my very heart melted within me, to think from whence I came, where I was going, and what I was going about. But I felt my mind open to the people, and my tongue loosed to speak."<sup>1</sup>

The vision which Asbury had of the work to be done in America made him dissatisfied with what was already being done. On Tuesday, November 20, 1771, he writes:

"I remain in York, though unsatisfied with our both being in town together. I have not the thing which I seek--a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity. However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan, and to do what I do faithfully as to God."

The next Thursday he wrote in his Journal: "My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way." For the forty-five years of his remaining ministry he showed them the way by "starting his great, free, open-air ministry to the scattered colonial population, and laying broad and fair the foundations of the Methodist Episcopal Church."<sup>2</sup> It was this itinerary which has characterized Methodism in its American growth and it was this itinerant system to which Asbury devoted his life. "If one particular service of a life

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1. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 4.
2. Lewis: Francis Asbury, p. 30.

of singular devotion as father and founder of American Methodism were to be selected for its preeminent value, it would be, I think, Asbury's success in persuading the preachers to itinerate."<sup>1</sup>

C. Summary.

We have now seen that because of the social and economic condition of both England and America at the time of the beginning of Methodism, and because of the special qualifications of its leaders, it was to be a strong factor in the social structure of Colonial America. We have been introduced to the character of the man who was to become the personification of the spirit of the pioneer itinerant and to the relationship which he maintained to the social structure of early America.

It is in the records of his travels and experiences that we shall find the main source of information concerning the impress which this man made upon the social development of Colonial American life. As a preacher, teacher, politician, reformer, and molder of national ideals, we shall pay tribute to this man of whom Calvin Coolidge said: "He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation."<sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

1. Carroll, H.K.,: Francis Asbury, p. 73.
2. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 204.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF FRANCIS ASBURY'S  
SOCIAL POLICIES

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#### A. Introduction.

One who would know the work of Francis Asbury has no greater storehouse of information than the Journal which the man himself kept. In 1774 he wrote: "September 3, 1771, I embarked for America, and for my own private satisfaction began to keep an imperfect Journal."<sup>1</sup> In this Journal he recorded not only his own deeds but his motives and his opinions. In it is to be found the record of his forty-five years of travel. During that period of time great changes were taking place on the American continent, and these changes are reflected in the writings of the pioneer bishop. In 1798 he recorded this significant statement:

"I make no doubt the Methodists are, and will be, a numerous, and wealthy people, and their preachers who follow us will not know our struggles but by comparing the present improved state of the country with what it was in our days as exhibited in my journal and other records of that day."<sup>2</sup>

We shall attempt to analyse some of the major social questions with which he dealt by considering first what he wrote about the problem in his Journal; secondly,

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 88.
2. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 309.

by attempting to discover his reasons for his attitude, and then by examining his method of treatment of each social issue.

B. Social Problems With Which Francis Asbury Dealt.

1. Slavery.

There are many references to slavery in the Journal and most of them show the extreme love which the bishop had for the negroes as underprivileged people. Among the representative quotations throughout the Journal are the following:

"I spoke to some select friends about slavekeeping, but they could not bear it; this I know, God will plead the cause of the oppressed, though it gives offense to say so here. Oh, Lord, bannish the infernal spirit of slavery from thy dear Zion!"<sup>1</sup>

"I pity the poor slaves. O that God would look down in mercy and take their cause in hand."<sup>2</sup>

"I am grieved to see slavery, and the manner of keeping these poor people."<sup>3</sup>

"There are many things that are painful to me, but cannot be removed, especially slavekeeping and its attendant circumstances. The Lord will certainly hear the cries of the oppressed, naked, starving creatures. O my God, think on this land."<sup>4</sup>

". . . and the Africans, dear, affectionate souls, bond and free, I must preach to them."<sup>5</sup>

"At the (communion) table I was greatly affected with

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 289.
2. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 375.
3. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 295.
4. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 293.
5. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 287.

the sight of the poor negroes, seeing their sable faces at the table of the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

These quotations are typical of many in the writings of this venerable bishop. In them we see his deep love for the black people and his special interest in their welfare. If we examine his reasons for such beliefs we see that his love for the slaves was for reasons similar to that expressed in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the subject:

"We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of Slavery. We believe that buying, selling or holding of human beings as chattels is contrary to the laws of God and Nature, and inconsistent with the Golden Rule."<sup>2</sup>

The eighth Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, over which Mr. Asbury presided, declared that the holding of slaves was "contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not that others should do to us and ours."<sup>3</sup> It is thus apparent that the real cause for Asbury's hatred of slave holding was a religious conviction. He saw all men as equals in the sight of God and saw in many of the negroes potential witnesses for Christ.

The first means by which this end of slavery was fought by Asbury was by preaching. He preached in the homes of slave holders, in the fields, and to the

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 26
2. Discipline of Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 62.
3. Lee, Jesse: History of Methodism, p. 66.

colored people wherever he was permitted. He spoke against slavery to legislators and men of influence. The most effective means whereby the bishop struck at this evil was by educating the Methodists against it and by prohibiting the holding of slaves by them. He trained his preachers to denounce the practice until it became common for the slave holders to look upon Methodist preaching as dangerous.) The people of South Carolina became especially indignant when informed of the General Conference rulings against holding negroes in bondage. In 1801 Asbury made this entry:

"Sure nothing could so effectually alarm and arm the citizens of South Carolina against the Methodists as the Address of the General Conference. The rich among the people never thought us worthy to preach to them: they did indeed give their slaves liberty to hear and join our church; but now it appears the poor Africans no longer have this indulgence. Perhaps we shall soon be thought unfit for the company of their dogs. But who will mourn the loss of friendship of a world that hath so hated our Lord and Master Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Thus we see that (the circuit rider preacher attacked slavery as a practice contrary to the principles of Christianity, he used his available means to combat the practice, such as preaching, teaching, and legislating against it, and demonstrated his fidelity to the negroes by accepting them equally into church membership.) In a later chapter we shall discuss the influence of the pioneer bishop on the movement toward emancipation and his influence on the national thought concerning slavery.

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 13.

2. War.

In March, 1776, Mr. Asbury recorded that "some inconsiderate persons have taken occasion to censure the Methodists in America, on account of Mr. Wesley's political sentiments."<sup>1</sup> The Methodists were soon in disrepute in the colonies because of the attitude of their leader in England. Asbury felt very strongly against war as such but he sympathized with the American cause. As a minister he refused to bear arms and refused to pledge his allegiance to any authority which might demand that he bear them.<sup>2</sup> Asbury was the only one of Wesley's preachers to stay in America through the entire Revolution.<sup>3</sup> In 1778, the last English preacher took leave of Asbury to start on his return journey. At the time of their parting Asbury said: "My convictions are as clear and strong as ever that it is my duty to remain."<sup>4</sup> Among the quotations which express his attitude on the war are these:

"I spoke both morning and evening, but we were interrupted by the clamor of arms and preparations of war. My business is to be more intensely devoted to God."<sup>5</sup>

"But alas! we hear of bloodshed and slaughter. Many immortal souls are driven to eternity by the bloody sword. This is grief to my soul. Lord, scatter them that delight in war and thirst for human blood!"<sup>6</sup>

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 132.
2. Cf. Sweet, W.W.: Methodism in American History, p. 88.
3. Ibid. p. 92.
4. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 268.
5. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 119.
6. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 149.

"Arrived at the other side, we found the smallpox and camp fever raging, and heard of several poor creatures, white and black, that had died on the road. Ah! we little know what belongs to war, with all its train of evils; churches converted into hospitals and barracks, houses pillaged or burned."<sup>1</sup>

"But martial clamors confuse the land. However my soul shall rest in God during this dark and cloudy day. He has his way in the whirlwind, and will not fail to defend his own bark."<sup>2</sup>

(It is apparent that Asbury hated war because it interfered with the spiritual work which he came to accomplish.) He was sympathetic with the American cause and believed that Mr. Wesley would have been also had he understood their cause more fully. He writes of Wesley:

"I am truly sorry that the old man ever dipped into the politics of America. . . . Had he been a subject of America, no doubt he would have been as zealous an advocate of the American cause."<sup>3</sup>

The method by which Asbury met the problem of war was that of carefully and quietly going on about his work and maintaining as far as possible a neutral position. He suffered confinement and hardship because of his pacifistic tendencies, but he looked to his Lord and patiently served Him. Even while in "confinement" because of his connection with the Methodists he writes that it was no period of inactivity. He says: "It was the most active, the most useful, and most afflictive part of my life."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 338.
2. Ibid. Vol. I p. 122.
3. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 132.
4. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 291.

During this period he preached on most of the Sabbaths and even stole through the woods after dark to proclaim "that truth I had left father and mother and crossed the ocean to proclaim."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah Cornock, the editor of Wesley's Journal says:

"Both in England and New England politicians were beating plowshares into swords. The church, too feeble or too deeply compromised to interpose, gazed with unseeing eyes on the moral problems involved. Meanwhile, two men of Providence wrestled with the situation: John Wesley saved England; Francis Asbury, in the same sense and by exactly similar means, saved America."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Economic Issues.

There were two kinds of problems concerning money which grieved Asbury; the first was the problem of the wealthy and the other was the problem of the poor. He feared the accumulation of money and expressed his feelings thus:

"I fear there is more gold than grace, more of silver than of that wisdom that cometh from above."<sup>3</sup>

"It will be well for them if they prefer Jesus Christ and his cross to all the wealth and vanity of this world. . . . They seem to roll in plenty; but 'there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.'"<sup>4</sup>

". . . a young lady with fifty thousand dollars--can she get and keep religion? I doubt."<sup>5</sup>

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 291.
2. Carroll: Francis Asbury, Centinarry Volume, p. 85.
3. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 40.
4. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 150.
5. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 325.

"When I behold the conduct of the people who attend the Springs, particularly the gentry, I am led to thank God that I was not born to riches; I rather bless God that I am not in hell, and that I cannot partake of pleasure with sinners."<sup>1</sup>

"Our society in the city of Philadelphia are generally poor; perhaps it is well; when men become rich they sometimes forget they are Methodists."<sup>2</sup>

"He (Wesley) made this observation that it is rare, a mere miracle for a Methodist to increase in wealth and not decrease in grace."<sup>3</sup>

If Mr. Asbury was concerned about riches he was even more concerned about poverty. The poor were constantly in his thought, especially the poor preachers. He writes:

"The brethren were in want, and could not provide clothes for themselves, so I parted with my watch, my coat and my shirt."<sup>4</sup>

"What are called the comforts of life I rarely enjoy. The wish to live an hour such a life as this would be strange to so suffering, so toilworn a wretch. But God is with me, and souls are my reward."<sup>5</sup>

"I . . . gave special charge concerning the poor. O, let me ever remember these!"<sup>6</sup>

"To begin at the right end of the work is to go first to the poor; these will, the rich may possibly, hear the truth."<sup>7</sup>

Asbury's traveling companion, Henry Boehm, wrote of his co-worker:

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 53.
2. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 83.
3. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 156.
4. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 206.
5. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 271.
6. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 282.
7. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 49

"The bishop used to say that the equipment of a Methodist minister consisted of a horse, saddle and bridle, one suit of clothes, a watch, a pocket Bible, and a hymn book. Anything else would be an incumbrance."<sup>1</sup>

We can see from these and numerous other quotations from the Journal of Asbury, that he was deeply interested in the poor. He felt that riches were a hindrance to salvation but that poverty was not. He pitied the rich as well as the poor, but saw fit to cast in his lot with the less fortunate.

The means by which he dealt with the matter of poverty was first by living sacrificially himself and demonstrating frugality as well as piety. He raised funds for the poor among the societies and earnestly distributed alms, clothes and food to the poor. It is important to note that his interest in the poor is in direct connection with his theological position. He states it thus:

"The people are poor, and cruel one to another; some families are ready to starve for want of bread, while others have corn and rye distilled into poisonous whisky; and a Baptist preacher has been guilty of the same; but it is no wonder that those who have no compassion for the nonelect souls of people should have none for their bodies."<sup>2</sup>

Thus we find our circuit rider ministering to the bodily wants of the poor while at the same time exhorting them to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven.

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1. Boehm, Henry: Reminiscences, p. 445.
2. Asbury: Journal. Vol. I, p. 299.

4. Education.

The problem of education is one that has not often been associated with the pioneer preacher. Peter Cartwright looked back upon the days when he entered the ministry and wrote:

"A Methodist preacher in those days, when he felt that God had called him to preach, instead of hunting up a college or a biblical institute, hunted up a hardy pony or a horse and some travelling apparatus, and with his library always at hand, namely, Bible, Hymn Book, and Discipline, he started, and with a text that never wore out or grew stale, he cried, 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!'"<sup>1</sup>

Although such a description would be applicable to Francis Asbury it would not be fair to infer that he was not deeply interested in the educational task of the ministry and of the masses. In our appraisal of his educational enterprises we must recognize as Duren says, that "He had no theories of education and spent no time studying the psychology of the educational process."<sup>2</sup> His interest was in the welfare of the pioneer frontiersmen and especially in the educational problem presented by the remoteness of the children from institutions of learning. Asbury labored for a system of public education years before our country became convinced of its worth. In a letter which Asbury wrote to Coke he said:

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1. Grant, H.H.: Peter Cartwright: Pioneer, p. 30.
2. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 72.

"If it were not for the suspicions of some, and the pride and ignorance of others, I am of the opinion I could . . . take two thousand children under the best plan of education ever known in this country. The Lord begins to smile on Kingswood school. One promising young man is gone forth, another is ready, and several have been under awakenings. None so healthy and orderly as our children; and some promise great talents for learning."<sup>1</sup>

Some other quotations from his Journal bearing on the problem of education are:

"People in general care too little for the education of their children."<sup>2</sup>

"If we cannot have a Christian school, that is, a school under Christian discipline and pious teachers, we will have none."<sup>3</sup>

"Cokesbury college is consumed to ashes, a sacrifice of about 10,000 pounds in about ten years! . . . The Lord called not Whitefield nor the Methodists to build colleges. I wished only for schools; Dr. Coke wanted a college. I feel distressed at the loss of the library."<sup>4</sup>

"Arose, as I commonly do, before five o'clock in the morning, to study the Bible. I find none like it, and find it of more consequence to a preacher to know his Bible well than all the languages or books in the world, for he is not to preach these, but the Word of God."<sup>5</sup>

"I have been reading some of both Greek and Hebrew; but my soul longeth to feel more deadness to everything but God, and an increase of spiritual light, life, and love."<sup>6</sup>

"On Thursday we appointed a committee to procure five

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1. Tipple: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 317.
2. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 210.
3. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 207.
4. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 241.
5. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 244.
6. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 178.

hundred acres of land for the establishment of a school in the state of Georgia."<sup>1</sup>

From these and similar quotations from Asbury's writings it is easily discernable that his interest in education was secondary to the purely spiritual culture of the people. Asbury himself read constantly and along many lines, but especially the writings of John Wesley and the biographies of great church leaders. It was Asbury who was instrumental in the foundation of the Methodist Book Concern for the purpose of making religious books more easily available to the common people. In his "Notes on the Discipline" of 1796 Asbury wrote:

"The proper education of children is of exceeding great moment to the welfare of mankind. About one half of the human race are under the age of sixteen, and may be considered, the infants excepted, as capable of instruction. The welfare of states and countries in which we live, and what is infinitely more, the salvation of their souls, do, under the grace and providence of God, depend in a considerable degree upon their education."<sup>2</sup>

All educational tasks, whether the establishment of schools or colleges or the printing of tracts, were to contribute to the great goal of Asbury's life, which was to evangelize. Although he was responsible for founding six institutions of learning, he would have counted his labor in vain if they were not run to glorify God rather than man.) On November 13, 1795, he wrote to Nelson Reed of Cokesbury College:

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 45.
2. Duren, W. L.: Francis Asbury, p. 69.

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"I want you to be particularly cautioned against corrupt Latin authors being taught in the College, it is that causeth infidelity, and filleth the minds of youth with infidelity and lust.' . . . So also, he repudiated such a conception of education in the ministry as would make it a substitute for spiritual power and evangelistic passion."<sup>1</sup>

Thus far we have seen something of Asbury's attitude toward education and his reasons for this attitude. In the next chapter there shall be a summary of his permanent contribution to pioneer education by his establishment of schools, distribution of books, organization of Sunday Schools, and by his establishment of the class system of local instruction in the spiritual life.

5. Temperance.

Historically the Methodist Episcopal Church has stood officially opposed to the manufacture and sale of alcoholic liquor and perhaps no other man has been more instrumental in liquor reform than has Francis Asbury. Wesley was so strongly opposed to the consumption of intoxicating beverages<sup>2</sup> that the Methodists in England became known for their qualities of total abstinence. Unfortunately this was not so true of the settlers in America and it grieved Asbury greatly to see even his preachers indulging in this vice. The strong feeling which Bishop Asbury had toward this evil is seen in such statements as:

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1. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 69.  
2. Cf. Luccock: The Story of Methodism, p. 208.

"This (drunkenness) is the prime curse of the United States and will be, I fear much, the ruin of all that is excellent in morals and government among them."<sup>1</sup>

"I had about three hundred people; but there were so many wicked whiskey drinkers, who brought with them so much of the power of the devil, that I had but little satisfaction in preaching."<sup>2</sup>

"He was greatly offended that we prayed so loud in his house. He is a distiller of whiskey, and boasts of gaining 300 pounds per annum by the brewing of his poison."<sup>3</sup>

"There was a strange medley of preachers, drovers, beasts on four legs, and beasts made by whiskey on two, traveling on the turnpike at one time."<sup>4</sup>

"My host is a branā plucked from the burning; strong drink had scorched him forty years. He had a pious son who watched over and prayed for him, and he himself never closed his doors against the pious. The Lord heard prayer on his behalf and has entirely delivered him from the love of whiskey. I hear of another wonderful emancipation from the slavery of drunkenness."<sup>5</sup>

The best statement of the early ministers' stand against alcohol is to be found in the pastoral address to the General Conference of 1812: It reads as follows:

"It is with regret that we have seen the use of ardent spirits, dram drinking, and so forth among the Methodists. We have endeavored to suppress the practice by our example; and we really think it is not consistent with the character of a Christian to be immersed in the practice of distilling or retailing an article so destructive to the morals of society, and we do most earnestly recommend the Annual Conference and our peo-

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 331.
2. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 330.
3. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 71.
4. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 331.
5. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 330.

ple to join us in making a firm and constant stand against an evil which has ruined thousands both in time and eternity."

These quotations demonstrate the attitude of Francis Asbury toward drinking. In these three ways he brought his influence to bear upon the problem, (a) by compelling the conferences to enact rules against spiritous liquor; (b) by procuring the insertion of a prohibitory section in the first Methodist Discipline, and (c) by insisting upon a literal obedience to the general rule of the Wesleyan societies against drams except in case of illness.<sup>1</sup> Francis Asbury leaves no doubt as to his feeling in regard to drunkenness and he did his part to train his followers in his idealism. In waging war against strong drink the pioneer preacher felt that he was waging war against spiritual death and in that fight the Methodist Church has battled nobly even unto now.

#### 6. Politics.

In the city of Washington, D. C., there stands, among the statues of political and military heroes, a bronze figure on horseback; under his arm is his Bible, and his stern countenance reflects the hardships which he endured for the sake of his calling. One wonders what sort of a man this must have been who deserves so prominent

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1. Cf. Asbury, Herbert: Methodist Review. Vol. 9, 1926, p.345.

a memorial in the nation's capital, of whom the nation's president said, "He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation."<sup>1</sup> Professor John Miley expressed the belief that, in the failure of the historians to take notice of Francis Asbury, "they had really overlooked one of the most effective forces in the nation's development."<sup>2</sup> Bishop Asbury lived at a time when the United States were in a formative period. Due to his extensive travel and contact with men of all ranks he was uniquely qualified to hold opinions on political and governmental affairs. These opinions find expression in his Journal. Typical extracts are:

"I am truly sorry that the venerable man (Wesley) ever dipped into politics in America. My desire is to live in love and peace with all men; to do them no harm, but all the good I can. However, it discovers Mr. Wesley's conscientious attachment to the government under which he lived. Had he been a subject of America, no doubt he would have been as zealous an advocate of the American cause."<sup>3</sup>

"We waited on General Washington who received us very politely and gave us his opinion against slavery."<sup>4</sup>

"Who bought the liberty of the states? The continental officers--and surely they should reap a little of the sweets of rest and peace; these were not chimney corner Whigs. . . . As to myself, the longer I live, and the more I investigate, the more I applaud the uniform conduct of President Washington in all the important stations which he has filled."<sup>5</sup>

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1. Calvin Coolidge: Christian Advocate. Vol. 99, Oct. 15, 1924.
2. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 205.
3. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 132.
4. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 385.
5. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 242.

"I have dispatched eleven official letters. Hilliard Judge is chosen chaplain to the Legislature of South Carolina; and O, great Snethen is chaplain to congress! So we begin to partake of the honor that cometh from man. Now is the time of danger. O Lord, keep us pure, keep us correct, keep us holy!"<sup>1</sup>

"I preached in the legislative chamber, and had the members for a part of my congregation." (Columbia, S.C. 1812.)<sup>2</sup>

"We dined at father Bidlack's and went forward to Wilkesbarre. The court was sitting and a meeting was expected. My subject was, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. They gave me the court room."<sup>3</sup>

"I preached at old Israel Anderson's. Our friend has been in fellowship with us thirty-two years, and has been honored by missions from his county and district to the legislature and to congress: his family of children are pleasing."<sup>4</sup>

"I was employed in writing to the missionaries in the Mississippi Territory. Company does not amuse, congress does not interest me. I am a man of another world, in mind and calling; I am Christ's, and for the service of his church."<sup>5</sup>

"Dec. 20. Came to Columbia. Taylor, of the Senate of the United States, lent his house for the session of our Conference."<sup>6</sup>

"Out of the fifteen United States, (1794) thirteen are free, but two are fettered with ecclesiastical chains, taxed to support ministers who are chosen by a small committee and settled for life. My simple prophesy is that this must come to an end with the present century. The Rhode Islanders began in time and are free. Hail, sons of liberty! Who first began the war? Was it not Connecticut and Massachusetts? and priests are now saddled upon them. O, what a happy people these would be if they were not thus priest-ridden."<sup>7</sup>

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 319.
2. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 339.
3. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 331.
4. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 326.
5. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 190.
6. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 301.
7. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 199.

It is clear from the above statements that Francis Asbury's first interest in politics was a spiritual interest. He sought no office for himself and held himself free to express opinions regarding the spiritual implications of political questions. He preached in state houses, court houses, and the homes of the influential. He taught the principles of liberty and justice and was loyal to the founders of the nation. His visits in the homes of such men as Governor Van Cortland in New York and Governor Tiffin in Ohio testify to the respect which he commanded among them. The personal influence of the pioneer bishop was manifested in the lives of such companions of his as Jesse Lee, of whom it is said: "He was twice elected Chaplain of Congress. His fellowship with the Congressmen, many of whom were old friends, was very delightful to him,"<sup>1</sup> and Peter Cartwright who defeated Lincoln in the election to the Illinois legislature in 1823.<sup>2</sup>

It was under Asbury's influence that the New York Conference in 1789 passed a resolution declaring loyalty to the United States government. This resolution was the first document of this kind to be presented to congress by any religious body in the United States.<sup>3</sup> So by his preaching, by his loyalty to governmental institu-

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1. Lee, Jesse: Short History of Methodism, p. 387.
2. Cf. Grant, HH: Peter Cartwright: Pioneer, p. 151.
3. Cf. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 197.

tions, by his training others to carry on the fight for righteousness in politics, Francis Asbury has come to be recognized as worthy of a memorial among the nation's heroes.

#### 7. Marriage.

In dealing with a man with such a many sided character as Francis Asbury, it is not strange that he should have some eccentricities; yet even these can be explained as arising from his devotion to one supreme goal for his life. He was very fond of children and took great delight in visiting homes where children were his company. He often longed for the joys of a permanent home but he did not entertain such a thought very long. During his forty-five years in America he had become a well known figure and was talked of around the firesides of the rich and in the hovels of the poor, yet often he hadn't even a blanket to lie down upon at night. He never tarried long in any house, first, because he didn't want to be a burden to anyone, and also because he always had visions of "fields white unto the harvest" on beyond.

Asbury had a deep appreciation of the value of a Christian home but he felt that a preacher of that day could serve the Lord better if he were not held to one place by a family. On this subject he writes:

"Marriage is honorable in all, but to me it is a ceremony awful as death. Well may it be so, when I calcu-

late we have lost the travelling services of two hundred of the best men in America or the world, by marriage and consequent location."1

"Erasmus Hill may possibly sell the Gospel for a rich wife as three or four others have done."2

"Edward Dromgoode is a good preacher, but entangled with a family. We spoke of a plan for building houses in every circuit for preachers' wives, and the society to supply their families with bread and meat, so the preachers should travel from place to place, as when single; for unless something of the kind be done we shall have no preachers but young ones, in a few years; they will marry and stop."3

"Stand at all possible distance from the female sex, that you be not betrayed by them that will damage the young mind, and blast the prospects of the future man. I leave you to your Master, and be sure to keep close to your faithful guide."4

"Our preachers get wives and a home, and run to their dears almost every night: how can they by personal observation know the state of the families it is part of their duty to watch over for good?"5

"Alas! what miseries and distresses are here. How shall we meet the charge of seventy married out of ninety-five preachers--children--sick wives--and the claim of the conference."6

In order that we might understand his feeling about the institution of marriage, it is necessary that we recognize his primary purpose in securing an itinerant ministry. "Asbury's passion for spiritual adventure was so great that he could not realize the arbitrariness and

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 173.
2. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 282.
3. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 290.
4. Letter to William Duke, 1774. Drew MSS.
5. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 339.
6. Ibid. p. 452.

unreasonableness of the rules which he put upon himself, nor could he understand why some men drew back at the sacrifices which he demanded of them."1 The classic passage from his Journal and the one which most fully explains his attitude concerning marriage is as follows:

"If I should die in celibacy, which I think quite probable, I give the following reasons for what can scarcely be called my choice: I was called in my fourteenth year. I began my public exercises between sixteen and seventeen; at twenty-one I travelled; at twenty-six I came to America: thus far I had reasons enough for a single life. It had been my intention of returning to Europe at thirty years of age, but the war continued, and it was ten years before we had a settled, lasting peace. This was no time to marry or to be given in marriage. At forty-nine I was ordained superintendent bishop in America. Among duties imposed upon me by my office was that of travelling extensively, and I could hardly expect to find a woman with grace enough to enable her to live but one week out of the fifty-two with her husband. . . . I may add to this that I had little money, and with this little administered to the necessities of a beloved mother until I was fifty-seven. If I have done wrong, I hope God and the sex will forgive me."2

Asbury felt that when a young preacher took a wife, from then on he was a man of a "divided mind and a divided duty" involving an additional expense for ministerial support. It was for reasons such as these that caused this old warrior for God to exclaim: "The women and the devil get all my preachers." 3

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1. Duren, W. L.: Francis Asbury, p. 188.
2. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 128.
3. Carroll, H.K.: Francis Asbury, p. 84.

8. Social Life of the Frontier.

Methodism, in a unique sense, is a product of the American frontier. Its pioneering spirit and adaptability of government and program made it above all other religious organizations, capable of influencing frontier life. It was a parish of thousands of miles in extent which challenged Francis Asbury and the circuit-rider preachers of whom he is the primary American example. He was faithful to his journalizing and now we are indebted to him for much information concerning the manner of life of the people who made up his vast parish. He writes in great detail concerning the customs, the vices, and the hardships of those hardy folk who wrought our nation out of a wilderness. His Journal is filled with such references as:

"My mind has been severely tried under great fatigue endured by both myself and my horse. O, how glad should I be of a plain, clean plank to lie on, as preferable to most of the beds; and when beds are in a bad state, the floors are worse. The gnats are almost as troublesome here, as the moschettoes in the low-lands and sea board. This country will require much work to make it tolerable. The people are, many of them, of the boldest cast of adventurers, and with some the decencies of civilized society are scarcely regarded, two instances of which I myself witnessed. . . . on the one hand savage warfare teaches them to be cruel; and on the other, the preaching of Antinomian's poisons them with error in doctrine; good moralists they are not, and good Christians they cannot be, unless they are better taught."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 36.

"Why should a living man complain?--but to be three months together upon the frontiers, where, generally, you have but one room and a fireplace, and half a dozen folks about you, strangers perhaps, and their family certainly--and they are not usually small in these plentiful new countries--making a crowd. And this is not all; for here you may meditate if you can, and here you must preach, read, write, pray, talk, eat, drink, and sleep--or fly into the woods."<sup>1</sup>

"Perceiving the great wickedness of the people who were swearing and drinking in a tavern, great struggles arose in my mind about preaching there; however, I broke through every difficulty, and felt both life and power in dispensing the word among them."<sup>2</sup>

"It is a matter of great grief to me to see the inhabitants of this town so much devoted to pride, spiritual idolatry, and almost every species of sin."<sup>3</sup>

"There appeared to be many wild people in the congregation, though the grace of God is sufficient to make them tame."<sup>4</sup>

". . . before, the people were swearers, drunkards, fighters, horse racers, and such like; but the Lord hath done great things for them."<sup>5</sup>

"We resolved to travel in our order, and bound ourselves by honor and conscience to support and defend each other, and to see every man through the wilderness. But we could not depend upon wicked unprincipled men, who would leave and neglect us, and even curse us to our faces. Nor were we at liberty to mix with swearers, liars, drunkards; and for aught we know, this may not be the worst with some."<sup>6</sup>

"This country improves in cultivation, wickedness, mills, and stills; a prophet of strong drink would be acceptable to many of these people. I believe that the Methodist preachers keep clear, both by precept and example. Would to God the members did so too!"<sup>7</sup>

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 44.
2. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 41.
3. Ibid. p. 61.
4. Ibid. p. 117.
5. Ibid. p. 244.
6. Ibid. Vol. II, p. 165.
7. Ibid. p. 220.

And so he writes on and on of swimming rivers, Indian massacres, gambling, slavery, drunkenness, and all manner of evils which characterized the rough life of those pioneer people. Into their log-cabin homes he went and preached and lived. He toiled with them and shared their poverty. He gave to the poor, sympathized with the weak, buried the dead,) and converted the sinners. His most admired traveling companion writes about his lectures on family life in this manner:

"The Bishop's lectures in families were full of instruction. He would dwell upon the domestic relations, that of husband and wife, parents and children, and the duties they owed to each other; on their deportment to each other and to their neighbors, and the duty of exemplifying the Christian character throughout; on family prayer, order, and cleanliness, which he always recommended as 'next to Godliness.'"<sup>1</sup>

(The goal of Asbury's work under such difficult conditions was that expressed by his traveling companion Jesse Lee:

"The preacher had to encounter many difficulties, and to endure many hardships. But one thing which made up for all the difficulties was this, the people were fond of attending meetings day or night, and were very kind to the preachers. And the best of all was, sinners were soon awakened, and in a little time some of them became the happy subjects of the favor of God, and were zealously engaged in trying to help forward the work of the Lord as far as they could."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Boehm, Henry: Reminiscences, p. 442.
2. Lee, Jesse: Short History of the Methodists, p. 222.

### C. Summary.

In this chapter we have seen that the chief social problems with which Francis Asbury dealt were:

1. Slavery
2. War
3. Economic Problems
4. Education
5. Temperance
6. Politics
7. Marriage
8. Frontier Life

We have shown that his interest in these questions was primarily because of their relation to the spiritual welfare of the people and that the means he used in dealing with the problems were (a) preaching, (b) teaching, (c) training preachers, (d) ecclesiastical legislating, (e) influencing national leaders, and (f) inspiring others to carry on toward a more concrete expression of his ideals.

In the next chapter we shall discuss the permanent results of Asbury's work upon Colonial American Life and endeavor to show his direct influence upon Methodism's contribution to the development of the American National life and traditions.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTRIBUTION OF FRANCIS ASBURY  
TO THE  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIAL AMERICAN LIFE

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A. Introduction.

In considering the effects of Francis Asbury's work upon the social conditions of his time, there are two types of materials which must be dealt with. There are (1) his tangible accomplishments which can easily be enumerated, and (2) those intangible influences which are really more effectual than the former, yet more difficult to trace directly. One fact that must be kept in mind is that Asbury labored during a very formative period of our nation's history when customs and ideals were being formulated and imbedded into the national consciousness. The things which he did were seeds thrown into fertile soil and the harvest was left for his followers.

X In this chapter the plan has been to discuss the effects of Asbury's labors under four classes, namely, (1) the ecclesiastical, (2) the political, (3) the educational, and (4) the moral. These are not mutually exclusive because they are all different phases of one man's personality and work. In the consideration of these aspects of his work it becomes more and more apparent that Francis Asbury was the real founder of what has become known as American Methodism.

B. The Effect of Francis Asbury's Labor  
Upon Colonial American Life.

1. Ecclesiastical.

a. Organized the Methodist Episcopal Church.

It is now generally accepted that John Wesley did not intend to found a new church when he began the Wesleyan revival in England<sup>1</sup>, yet in the course of events which followed there came a necessity for an independent and American church. The religious bodies of the colonies were all closely united with their recent European backgrounds until the Revolution made great changes in the attitude of the colonists concerning their attachment to European tradition. The time was at hand when the American churches were to declare their independence and "the first religious body in America to work out an independent and national organization was the Methodist Episcopal Church."<sup>2</sup>

The real organization of the church took place at what is known as "The Christmas Conference" of 1784. This Conference was composed of a group of hardy pioneer preachers who had suffered much for their faith during the war. They were assembled for the serious task of organizing a church for a new nation. A young preacher by

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1. Faulkner, J.A.: Burning Questions in Historic Christianity. Chapter XIII.
2. Sweet, W.W.: Methodism in American History, p. 100.

the name of Thomas Ware attended and wrote concerning the place of Francis Asbury at the Conference:

"Among these pioneers, Asbury, by common consent, stood first and chief. There was something in his person, his eye, his mein, and in the music of his voice which interested all who saw and heard him."<sup>1</sup>

Of this Conference, Asbury writes in his

Journal:

". . . it was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders and deacons. When the conference was seated, Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the church and my ordination followed, after being previously ordained deacon and elder, as by the following certificate may be seen."<sup>2</sup>

There has been much discussion as to Dr. Coke's right to ordain Asbury, yet it was characteristic of these early preachers that when they saw something which needed to be done they did it without too much regard for ecclesiastical precedent. Whether ordained legally or illegally and whether a "superintendent" or a "bishop" we soon find Asbury being called "Bishop" Asbury and fulfilling the Episcopal functions with diligence. It is of singular importance to note that Asbury was the only English Methodist preacher to stay in America during the Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Not only did Francis Asbury contend for the right of having an independent and American church, but

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1. Tipple, E.S.: The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 223.
2. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 378.
3. Sweet: op. cit., p. 101.

also for a certain type of church government. At the time that Methodism was organized, the Wesleyan movement had been abroad in the colonies for eighteen years<sup>1</sup> yet it had confined itself to the cities and to a small group of people. During the thirteen years that Asbury had been travelling up and down the Atlantic coast he had become convinced that there was a great need for a religious movement which would reach the families in the remote sections of the country. He had vision enough to foresee the westward movement of the population and he held firmly to the belief that his preachers should not be tied down to one locality.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult for us to understand a situation where there is only one minister for a whole state but the itinerant system of preachers was born of just such a need. Asbury knew what the frontier needed so he insisted upon the circuit-rider type of preacher as well as a highly organized type of local church government. The very fact that the minister could visit his people only at long separated intervals made it necessary to use the system of local preachers or class leaders.) Jesse Lee, the first Methodist historian, wrote in 1809, "There have been raised up among us in the course of the same time (40 years) more than 3000 local preachers. This is

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1. The first Methodist gatherings were held in America in 1766. See Stevens, Abel: p. 35.
2. Carroll, H.K.: Francis Asbury, p. 75.

the Lord's doing and marvelous in our eyes."<sup>1</sup>

( This system of travelling ministers, ordained local preachers, and class meetings was uniquely adapted to the frontier civilization. For months at a time the spiritual care of the members was thrown upon the laymen themselves. The class meetings in the homes of the class leader became a back-woods substitute for permanent church buildings, while the ordained minister forded stream and broke a trail through the wilderness in order that he might administer the sacraments in the home of some remote settler. By his insistence upon the Episcopal form of government and by his constant struggle to build a church capable of evangelizing the wilderness, Francis Asbury became "the out-rider of an ever growing army of apostolic men who knew neither self nor fear, who conquered a continent and covered it with a net work of circuits and conferences."<sup>2</sup> )

b. Projected church societies.

Bishop Asbury's mind, says Dr. Strickland, "was stamped upon the genius and institutions of American Methodism as effectually as was that of Wesley upon English Methodism. . . . No man ever lived who projected himself into the future of all that pertains 'to the Church's'

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1. Lee, Jesse: A Short History of the Methodists in the United States, p. 344.
2. Carroll, H.K.: Centenary Volume, p. 86.

genius, government and institutions than did Asbury."<sup>1</sup>  
From the very first, Methodism has been a missionary institution. John Wesley said, "The world is my parish."<sup>2</sup>  
The early preachers came to America as missionaries. In 1820 the General Conference declared, "Methodism itself is a Missionary Society. Yield the missionary spirit and you yield the very life blood of the cause."<sup>2</sup>

Although the first Missionary Society of Methodism was established three years after Asbury's death, one cannot consider it without mentioning the work which he did in its behalf.<sup>3</sup> On April 30, 1786, Asbury writes, "I preached three times and made a collection to defray the expenses of sending missionaries to the Western settlements."<sup>4</sup> He always considered that his task was an enormous one and looked upon the whole continent as a missionary field. He writes:

"I observed in reply that the Methodist preachers who had been sent by John Wesley to America, came as missionaries; some of them returned, but all did not. And now behold the consequences of this mission! We have seven hundred travelling preachers and three thousand local preachers, who cost us nothing. We will not give up the cause, we will not abandon the world to infidels."<sup>5</sup>

This missionary zeal found expression in an effort on the

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1. Strickland, W.P.: The Pioneer Bishop, p. 184.
2. Luccock, H.E.: The Story of Methodism, p. 302.
3. Cf. Carroll: Francis Asbury, p. 142.
4. Asbury: Journal, Vol. I, p. 397.
5. Ibid., Vol. III, 385.

part of the Methodist preachers to go from house to house with a subscription list asking people to contribute to the cause of foreign and home missions.<sup>1</sup> "The General Conference of 1812 authorized the Annual Conferences to raise funds for 'missionary purposes,' at Asbury's request."<sup>2</sup> Asbury's contribution toward the cause of missions was not in the form of a definite organization, but in his tireless energy in raising missionary funds and the laying of the foundations for a missionary society which became organized three years after his death.

Another institution for which Methodism has always been enthusiastic is the Sunday School. "Bishop Asbury with far vision saw the importance of providing for the care of the children and held the first Methodist Sunday School in America at the house of Thomas Crenshaw, Hanover County, Virginia in 1786."<sup>3</sup> James M. Buckley, the Methodist historian, thinks this was the first Sunday School in the New World<sup>4</sup>, but Dr. E. W. Rice<sup>5</sup> says that there were a number of isolated Sunday Schools in America as early as the seventeenth century. Four years after the founding of Asbury's first Sunday School in Virginia the Conference discussed the subject and approved of the

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1. A facsimile of Asbury's own subscription list is reproduced in Tipple: Francis Asbury, p. 294.
2. Carroll, H.K.: Francis Asbury, p. 149.
3. Carroll: op. cit., p. 151.
4. Buckley, James M: A History of the Methodists in the United States, p. 271.
5. New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Vol. XI, p. 151-164.

organization of such schools. The Conference minutes of 1790 contain the following question and answer:

"Ques. What can be done to instruct poor children, white and black, to read?

"Ans. Let us labor as the heart and soul of one man to establish Sunday Schools in or near the place of public worship. Let persons be appointed by the bishops, elders, deacons, or preachers to teach gratis all that will attend and have capacity to learn, from six in the morning till ten, and from two o'clock in the afternoon till six, where it does not interfere with public worship. The council shall compile a proper schoolbook to teach them learning and piety."<sup>1</sup>

There were few free public schools in America in the latter part of the eighteenth century and these Sunday Schools were valuable in their contribution to the general literacy of the people. All other instruction was secondary to instruction in the Bible itself. In 1790 the Bishop wrote, "I am making close application to my Bible. Nothing can take the place of God's Word."<sup>2</sup>

Another institution of which Asbury was the sponsor was the Methodist Book Concern. John Wesley is probably the originator of the idea of re-editing and publishing books and tracts among the Methodists. He made abundant use of the press as a means of distributing magazines, sermons and notes, and hymns among the societies. When one of the first English missionaries (Robert Williams) came to America he brought many of Wesley's publications with him and found ready sale for them. In this Conference

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1. Tipple, E.S.: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 291.
2. Ibid. p. 293

of 1773, Asbury, with wise foresight, reserved the privilege of selling books to the denomination, the profits to go to the benefit of retired itinerants. He appointed John Dickens as the first agent of The Methodist Book Concern, and gave to the new institution his Journal for publication. The first books published and circulated by the Methodists in America were Wesley's sermons, the Discipline and the Bible. Asbury was enthusiastic about the distribution of the Bible. "He became a member of the first American Bible Society, in Philadelphia, and taking supplies of the book in his saddlebags he distributed them widely."<sup>1</sup> In 1808 he proposed that one thousand dollars be appropriated from The Book Concern for the printing and free circulation of religious tracts.<sup>2</sup> This anticipated the organization now known as the Tract Society of the denomination. The distribution of suitable religious literature greatly aided the cause of evangelizing the frontier even in the absence of the preachers. Sweet says, "These books were read in the household, and were then loaned to the neighbors until they made the circuit of the settlement."

Thus we see the mind of Francis Asbury stamped upon the organizations now known as the Methodist Missionary Societies, the Board of Sunday Schools, the Methodist

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1. Carroll, op. cit. p. 154.  
2. Ibid. p. 156.

Book Concern and, as we shall discuss later, the Board of Temperance and Public Morals.

Another type of contribution which Asbury made to Colonial America was ecclesiastical legislation which influenced the Methodists who formed an important factor in the national population. He brought his influence to bear upon the conferences over which he presided, sometimes autocratically, and secured the desired legislation. One type of church law which he secured had to do with good government. In the Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church as organized in 1784 we read this rule:

"As far as it respects civil affairs we believe it is the duty of Christians, and especially of all Christian Ministers, to be subject to the supreme authority of the country where they may reside, and to use all laudable means to enjoin obedience to the powers that be, . . . and behave themselves as peaceable and orderly subjects."<sup>1</sup>

Because of such an interest in the affairs of State, Asbury was in conference with George Washington on at least two significant occasions, once in 1785 when they were discussing the question of slavery, and again in 1789, just after Washington had become President. At the latter conference Asbury and Coke presented a congratulatory address, pledging the allegiance of the church to the government of the United States. To this address Washington replied in part:

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1. Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 24.

"It always affords me satisfaction when I find a concurrence of sentiment and practice between conscientious men, in acknowledgments of homage to the great Governor of the Universe, and in professions of support to a just civil government."<sup>1</sup>

The early conferences legislated not only in favor of good government but in opposition to what they felt to be great social evils. First and foremost among these was the question of slavery. Duren says of Asbury, "All in all, he was probably the greatest influence operating against the institution of slavery in the years when the nation was becoming established."<sup>2</sup> The General Conference of 1816 passed the following ruling:

"Therefore no slaveholder shall be eligible to any official station in our church hereafter, where the laws of the state in which he lives will admit of emancipation, and permit the liberated slave to enjoy freedom."<sup>3</sup>

In the Conference of 1784 "there were also some rules drawn up respecting the emancipation of slaves, which were in substance as follows: 'Every member in our society who has slaves, in those states where the laws will admit of freeing them, shall, after notice given him by the preacher, within twelve months, legally execute and record an instrument, whereby he sets free every slave in his possession.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sweet, W.W.: Methodism in American History, p. 121.
2. Duren: op. cit., p. 208.
3. Boehm, Henry: Reminiscences, p. 436.
4. Lee: op. cit., p. 97.

It was this issue that brought about the break between the Northern and Southern Methodist Churches in 1844, as well as the staunch loyalty of the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Union cause in 1860. In dealing with the slave problem Asbury did not write in terms of sociology or politics, but in scriptural terms regarding the salvation of human souls. He writes concerning the negroes:

"Who will take the pains to lead them into the way of salvation, and watch over them that they may not stray, but the Methodists? Well, now their masters will not let them come to hear us. What is the personal liberty of the African which he may abuse, to the salvation of his soul?"<sup>1</sup>

The best statement of Methodism's stand against slavery is the question asked by the Conference of 1780:

"Does this conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours?"<sup>2</sup>

The answer to this question was an emphatic "yes" and even today the Discipline of the Methodist Church contains a definite statement as to the Christian conviction that slavery of any sort is evil and "contrary to the laws of God and nature."<sup>3</sup>

Still another social evil against which Asbury saw fit to secure ecclesiastical legislation was the evil

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1. Tipple, E.S.E Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 608.
2. Sweet: op. cit., p. 231.
3. Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 62.

of drinking and drunkenness. The Conference of 1780 wrote into the minutes this question:

"Ques. 23. Do we disapprove of the practice of distilling grain into liquor? Shall we disown our friends who will not renounce this practice?  
Ans. Yes."

The Conference of 1783 asked this question:

"Ques. 11. Shall our friends be permitted to make spiritous liquors, sell and drink them in drams?  
Ans. By no means; we think it is wrong in its nature and consequences and desire all our preachers to teach the people by precept and example to put away this evil."

Perhaps we cannot go too far as one writer does who claims that "the real father of prohibition in this country was Francis Asbury,"<sup>1</sup> but it is reasonable to state that "under his instruction and leadership the Methodists were the first sect to make drinking a matter of concern to the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Drinking was not the only social evil against which Asbury caused the church to legislate. The Conference of 1784 made a rule against superfluity of dress and urged the preachers to speak frequently and faithfully against it.<sup>2</sup> This same body formed a rule respecting the impropriety of Methodists marrying with unbelievers. "Let every preacher publicly enforce the Apostles' caution, be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."<sup>3</sup> Among

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1. Asbury, Herbert: "Francis Asbury: Father of the Prohibition law in the United States." The American Mercury Vol. 9, p. 344.
2. Lee: op. cit., p. 82.
3. Ibid., p. 92.

other "evils" against which the church took an official stand were the contracting of debts,<sup>1</sup> use of snuff or tobacco,<sup>2</sup> and jesting and foolishness of conduct.<sup>3</sup>

Carroll sums up the church's official stand against social evils in the following manner:

"It was not strange, therefore, that Asbury and his host, . . . bore testimony against slavery, against drunkenness and that which creates it; against war as a curse, against violation of the sanctity of marriage and of the family; against duelling, the lottery, gambling, fighting and other evils; and most of these things which were tolerated by public sentiment in those times are under the ban of the law, government following at somewhat long range the leading of the Church."<sup>4</sup>

It is therefore apparent that the first way in which Francis Asbury contributed toward the social development of Colonial America was through the medium of his church for which he, above all others, was responsible. He controlled its organization, projected its societies, and dominated its legislation. As Methodists we have paid tribute to his genius as a churchman, as Americans let us examine his contribution in other fields.

## 2. Political.

The first way in which Asbury contributed to the political life of his time was by personal contact with the men of political influence. As the bishop never

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1. Lee: op. cit., p. 35.
2. Ibid., p. 189.
3. Ibid., p. 94.
4. Carroll: op. cit., p. 204.

had a home of his own he often stopped over night in the homes of governors and senators. Senator Taylor of South Carolina loaned him his home for a conference session in 1810,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rusk, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and holder of "many high positions in the army, state and nation" paid Asbury a personal visit in 1811.<sup>2</sup> He was frequently entertained at Governor Van Courtlandt's in New York where he says "we had all we needed and abundantly more than we desired."<sup>3</sup> Governor Tiffin of Ohio often had the circuit-rider bishop in his house. On Sept. 19, 1810 Asbury writes, "We reached Chillicothe, and put up with our old friend, Dr. Tiffin,"<sup>4</sup> but even the homes of the governors were weary abodes for this ceaseless and tireless traveler. On one occasion he writes, "O what a charming view presents itself from Dr. Tiffin's house! But these long talks about land and politics suit me not."<sup>5</sup> During the times of persecution during the Revolution, Asbury found refuge in the home of Judge Thomas White of Delaware.<sup>6</sup> Of a Lawyer Bassett with whom he stayed, Asbury says "he is very conversant and affectionate and acknowledges he is sick of sin."<sup>7</sup> The

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1. Tipple, E.S.: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 631.
2. Ibid., p. 635.
3. Ibid., p. 402.
5. Ibid., p. 617.
6. Ibid., p. 124.
7. Lewis, James: Francis Asbury, p. 77.

one character which really inspired the bishop was that of George Washington, of whom he said:

"I am disposed to lose sight of all but Washington: matchless man! At all times he acknowledged the providence of God, and never was he ashamed of his Redeemer; we believe he died, not fearing death. In his will he ordered the manumission of his slaves-- a true son of liberty in all points."<sup>1</sup>

Not only by personal acquaintance with the politicians did Asbury influence them, but also by his preaching in legislative assemblies and county courthouses. The Conference of 1810 was held in the Senate Chamber of the State House of North Carolina. Preaching services were held in the House of Representatives and among the converts were the Secretary of State and several members of his family.<sup>2</sup> There was perhaps no more widely traveled man in Asbury's day and he became known far and wide. He preached in Washington where many came to hear "the man who rambles through the United States."<sup>3</sup> He became known by "governors, members of congress, generals, judges, lawyers, doctors, men of learning, influence and wealth, as well as the common people."<sup>3</sup>

Although the preachers could do nothing directly in politics, their part was to arouse public opinion which in turn influenced legislation. The primary means by which this public feeling was aroused was by preaching.

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 365.
2. Tipple: op. cit., p. 634.
3. Carroll: op. cit., p. 199.

Asbury preached everywhere he went. He visited and preached in the homes, in schools, in churches, and in the woods. He also aroused public opinion against such evils as slavery by the circulation of tracts on the subject. All of this feeling found official expression in rules passed by the conferences which in turn regulated the conduct and instructed the minds of the Methodists. In 1806 Asbury said "it will perhaps be found that we preach to four millions of people,"<sup>1</sup> which was an influential group in the society of that day.

By preaching, Asbury and his workers influenced legislation against drinking and slavery. By example he influenced the politics of war. He refused to bear arms and as a minister refused to take a pledge of allegiance which would require him to bear arms if necessary.<sup>2</sup> The immediate effect of such a stand is seen in the refusal of Jesse Lee to bear arms. Lee was a traveling companion of Asbury's. When the colonel of the regiment found that Lee would preach even when under guard, he made Lee a teamster and it was not long before the first historian of Methodism was looked upon as chaplain as well as a teamster.<sup>3</sup> These early precedents are very important now in Modern Methodism's official endeavor to outlaw war as

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1. Tipple, E.S.: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 581.
2. Sweet, W.W.: Methodism in American History, p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 98.

a means of settling international disputes.<sup>1</sup>

All of the means whereby Asbury influenced the political life of our nation were secondary to the great spiritual mission for which he labored. He looked upon the political tasks as being under the jurisdiction of the Divine Ruler and looked upon sound government as a necessity for a Christian nation. It was a part of his gospel to demand just laws, to protect the sanctity of human life, and to provide equality and justice to all men. Although he said "Congress does not interest me,"<sup>2</sup> many congresses have been interested in him and in his spiritual posterity who bitterly oppose slavery in any form, war as a legitimate means of national polity, and the exploitation of human sobriety in order to swell the governmental income.

### 3. Educational.

The third means by which Francis Asbury contributed to the social development of Colonial American life was by his interest in educational enterprises. The first type of educational enterprise in which he was interested was the establishment of schools or colleges. The school for which Asbury labored most diligently was Cokesbury College at Abingdon, Maryland, which opened in 1787.<sup>3</sup> The bishop preached the dedication sermon<sup>4</sup> and for seven

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1. See the Discipline, p. 650.
2. Tipple, E.S.: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 573.
3. Sweet, W.W.: Methodism in American History, p. 112.
4. Ibid., p. 208.

years labored for its financial and spiritual welfare. In 1795 he learned that the college had burned to the ground. He relates the news in his Journal as follows:

"We have now a second and confirmed account that Cokesbury College is consumed to ashes, a sacrifice of about ten thousand pounds in about ten years. Its enemies may rejoice, and its friends need not mourn. Would any man give me ten thousand pounds a year to do and suffer again what I have done for that house, I would not do it. . . . I feel distressed at the loss of the library."<sup>1</sup>

A second attempt was made to establish Cokesbury but it met with the same fate as the first.<sup>2</sup> Frustrated in his plan to build a college, Asbury set about establishing a system of academies such as Bethel Academy in Kentucky, Ebenezer Academy in Virginia, and Bethel in South Carolina.<sup>3</sup> His scheme was that there was to be an academy in each "district."<sup>4</sup> In 1792 Asbury expressed a desire to place "two thousand children under the best plan of education known in this country."<sup>5</sup> All of this educational zeal has crystallized in our day into a series of universities, colleges and seminaries all over the United States. To some degree at least they all owe much to Francis Asbury who transferred the educational ideal of John Wesley to the American frontier.

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1. Asbury: Journal. Vol. II, p. 241.
2. Sweet: op. cit., p. 210.
3. Carroll: op. cit., p. 174.
4. Stevens, Abel: History of American Methodism, p. 537.
5. Ibid., p. 538.

The educational work of Francis Asbury was not confined to that of building colleges. He did much by the distribution of books and especially the Bible. He practically founded the Methodist Book Concern in order that a larger distribution of books could be accomplished.<sup>1</sup> The converts were banded together in classes where they learned to read the Bible and every family was expected to have a Bible, a hymn book, a Discipline, and other choice literature which Asbury himself often distributed.<sup>2</sup> In the early days of Methodism there was too little done to educate the children. This grieved Asbury. He writes that "people in general care too little for the education of their children."<sup>3</sup> He believed that the whole aim of education was to evangelize<sup>4</sup> and stated his educational policy in these words:

"The proper education of children is of exceeding great moment to the welfare of mankind. . . the welfare of states and countries in which we live, and what is infinitely more, the salvation of their souls, do, under the grace and providence of God, depend in a considerable degree upon their education."<sup>5</sup>

The first Sunday Schools of the church were established by him in 1786 for the training of children in the fundamentals of Bible knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Asbury himself

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1. Tipple: op. cit., p. 245.
2. Carroll, H.K.: Francis Asbury, p. 196.
3. Tipple: op. cit., p. 390.
4. Duren: op. cit., p. 69.
5. Duren, W.L.: Francis Asbury, p. 68.
6. Carroll: op. cit., p. 197.

taught in the homes of the people<sup>1</sup> and encouraged his preachers to study even though he felt that a polished ministry was unnecessary for the backwoods preaching. He wrote in his Journal "I presume a simple man can speak and write for simple, plain people, upon simple plain truths."<sup>2</sup> Even though this old man had no educational theories, and sometimes made mistakes, he was a pioneer in the whole field of education. A modern historian says that "he laid a foundation for an educational development among the Methodists which reflects great credit upon his rugged simplicity and sterling worth."<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Moral.

In a unique sense Methodism has always laid a special emphasis upon the moral implications of religious convictions. Wesley stressed it in his ministry whether at Oxford or in the coal fields. Asbury came to America and found here a task large enough to keep him occupied for forty-five years. He said, "This country will require much work to make it tolerable. The people are, many of them, of the boldest cast of adventurers, and with some the decencies of civilized society are scarcely regarded!"<sup>4</sup> In order to cope with this situation his first method of attack was to preach. He preached wherever the opportun-

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1. Boehm, Henry: Reminiscences, p. 442.
2. Asbury: Journal. Vol. III, p. 155.
3. Duren: op. cit., p. 72.
4. Asbury: Journal, Vol. II, p. 36.

ity presented itself and in his own right, with the power of God, he brought many souls into a new life. Of the results of his own preaching he seldom speaks, but the thousands of converts<sup>1</sup> testify to his unusual power. His chief aim in preaching was to bring sinners to repentance and a sinner converted meant a new citizen who would be watched over by his "class leader" and held responsible. Asbury's preaching was done largely in what came to be known as "camp-meetings." These were a form of religious services which sprang up throughout the frontier country and which greatly influenced the moral life of the settlers. It became peculiarly a Methodist institution because of the flexible system of government with a traveling ministry and also because of the adaptability of Methodist theology. Their gospel was one of individual responsibility to God, with immediate and conscious salvation freely offered to anyone who would exert the will to accept it. Another important feature of the camp meeting was the emphasis upon singing. Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley were sung vociferously on the western side of the Alleghenies. The Camp-Meeting Hymn Book, contains this meaningful chorus among others like it:

"Stop, poor sinner, stop and think,  
Before you further go:  
Can you sport upon the brink  
Of everlasting woe?

. . . . .

1. Carroll: op. cit., p. 129.

"Hell beneath is gaping wide,  
Vengeance waits the dread command  
Soon will stop your sport and pride  
And sink you with the damn'd."<sup>1</sup>

These camp meetings were more than religious services. They were the social event of the year for many families who lacked contact with other people. The families would come from miles around and bring bedding and provisions for a week or more.<sup>2</sup> Some came to scoff and left to pray. Asbury writes: "Men who neither feared God nor regarded man—swearers, liars, cock-fighters, card players, horse racers, drunkards, etc. are now so changed as to become new men; and they are filled with praises to God."<sup>3</sup> These camp meetings played an important part in the rapid growth of the societies. In the year of 1802 the Methodist Church increased in membership by 13,860 souls<sup>4</sup>, but more important still was the fact that there were seventy young preachers admitted on trial that year.<sup>4</sup>

All of this activity necessarily wrought great reforms in the frontier life. Asbury writes: "Stricter laws are now made, and the people are greatly reformed; for which we may thank the Methodists."<sup>5</sup> On April 11, 1810, he records in his Journal: "There is a great change

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1. Luccock, H.E.: Story of Methodism, p. 268.
2. Luccock: op. cit., p. 259.
3. Tipple, E.S.: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 33.
4. Lee, op. cit., p. 285.
5. Asbury, Journal. Vol. II, p. 86.

for the better in the morals and manners of all ranks of people in this end of the peninsula, and none pretend to deny that the Methodists have wrought it."<sup>1</sup>

Thus by the example of a godly life, by tireless preaching, and by the moral requirements upon church members, Francis Asbury brought about a moral revolution among the pioneers.

### C. Summary.

We have followed the career of Francis Asbury in his contribution to the social development of Colonial American life along four channels, namely (1) the ecclesiastical, (2) the political, (3) the educational, and (4) the moral. It is clear that his main contributions were the establishment of a church suited to pioneer conditions, the emphasis upon definitely Christian legislation, the establishment of schools, and the evangelization of the frontier. By these contributions did he prove himself worthy of the tribute paid him by President Coolidge, who said:

"Who shall say where his influence, written upon the immortal souls of men shall end? How many homes he must have hallowed! What a multitude of frontier mothers must have brought their children to him for blessing.

"It is more than probable that Nancy Hanks, the mother of Lincoln had heard him in her youth. Adams and Jefferson must have known him, and Jackson must have seen

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1. Tipple, E.S.: Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 622.

in him a flaming spirit as unconquerable as his own. How many temples of worship dot the landscape! How many institutions of learning, . . . all trace the inspiration of their existence to the sacrifice and service of this lone circuit rider! He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Lewis, James: Francis Asbury, p. 220.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

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### CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this thesis to present the manner in which Francis Asbury contributed to the social development of colonial American life. Because he was born into a poor family at a time when England was upon the verge of the Industrial Revolution, he was peculiarly enabled to see the necessity of a more Christian social order. Coming to America at a time when the traditional religious ideas of the day were failing to cope with economic and social changes, he set about to re-interpret the Gospel into the terms of the new world development. Because he, above all other Wesleyan missionaries from England, caught the vision of a great work to be done for Christ in America, he became the founder and organizer of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

*Do not Read*

One of the largest contributions which comes to a modern churchman from a study of this sort is that it enables him to re-evaluate the social message of historic Methodism. With the multiplicity of church boards, departments of social welfare, and a rapid trend toward the so-called "social gospel" it is helpful to study a man whose spiritual mission found expression in so many forms of social endeavor.

*Start here*

Francis Asbury determined the course of the Methodist Episcopal Church against slavery because it was contradictory to principles of Christian brotherhood. He preached against war. He refused to bear arms and inspired his followers to hate war as being uncivilized and contrary to the cause of Christ. He promoted education by the establishment of schools, by his own teaching, and by the distribution of good literature. He was instrumental in the formation of missionary societies, Sunday Schools, and societies for the relief of the poor. Personally he went from house to house collecting money to send missionaries to the Indians and even contributed from his own meagre salary for the removal of poverty among his parishoners. He set the precedent for the church's participation in the political affairs of the state and taught that it was an effective means of bringing about a more Christian social order.

The greatest means whereby Asbury propagated his social principles was by his system of circuit-riding preachers. When his preachers showed a tendency to remain amidst the comforts of the city life he led the way into the wilderness, He entered the homes of the people and educated and ministered to the families. He reformed the sinful, adventurous ruffians of the backwoods country and rode among the outposts of the westward marching civilization. To these hardy folks he brought the Bible and his

hymn book. He preached in all manner of places and left behind him a line of log churches to testify to his influence upon the souls of the settlers. When drinking and swearing were the custom of the day, he came into a community and turned their revelry into the singing of hymns and their debauchery into the pursuit of holiness.

Francis Asbury became symbolic of an army of itinerants and local preachers whose influence was felt along the trails of the covered wagons, in the settlements where Indians were a constant menace, and where the traditional ministry would never have been found. It was Asbury alone, among the English Methodists, who stayed in America during the Revolution because he saw righteousness in the cause of the colonies. It was he whom we can thank for almost every distinctive feature of American Methodism. He was the American forerunner of a group of preachers who, with apostolic fervor, preached and labored for the translation of Christian principles into all phases of human life.) He felt that personal morals, habits of dress, the holding of slaves, and the bearing of arms, were all matters of concern to the Lord.

In any evaluation of the work of Francis Asbury we must recognize that all of his social interest was interwoven with, yet secondary to, his spiritual mission. He came "to live to God, and to bring others so to do." His mission was gloriously fulfilled as literal thousands

came to claim him as their spiritual father.

We are his followers in the crusade against vice and social corruption. We would do well to strive for the same deadness to the world and the same fidelity to our Master. The frontier for which he spent his life is gone yet we are confronted with a frontier along the unchristianized areas of our society. We still must labor with the same old questions of human slavery, greed, war, drunkenness, poverty, education, politics, and public morals. The circuit-rider bishop gave to us, as well as to the colonies, a new conception of God's concern over individual conduct but his great contribution to us is his example of what it means to sacrificially preach Christ to all men everywhere.

This saintly rider for God came to the end of the trail in 1816, but his spirit will be guiding the church which he founded so long as that church is devoted to the exaltation of Jesus Christ and to the propagation of the Kingdom of God in its fullest sense.

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