Something Of Perry Hall, Where Methodist Heroes Met In Days Long Gone

The Harford County Homestead Of Henry Dorsey Gough, Made A Place Of Hallowed Memories To Methodists By The Visits There Of Francis Asbury, Was Goal Of Modern Pilgrims.

By Emily Emerson Lantz.

IT was not the Tabard Inn to which they were going, yet somehow the whole adventure had the picturesqueness of an episode out of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. In truth it was an excursion, made October 27, 1921, under the auspices of the American Methodist Historical Society, to Perry Hall, the old colonial residence on the Belair road, that in 1784 was the estate of Henry Dorsey Gough and his devout Methodist wife, who was a daughter of Governor Ridgely.

Henry Gough possessed a fortune in lands and money amounting to more than $300,000 and Perry Hall, that crowns a noble height in Baltimore county. Here on December 17, 1784, the Rev. Francis Asbury, the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., William Black, an English preacher, and 64 clergymen of the Methodist faith met in conference and to make formal arrangements for the organization of the Methodist societies into the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America.

"On Friday, the 24th of December, 1784," says one historian, "the apostolic little company rode from Perry Hall to Baltimore, and at 10 o'clock A. M. began the first General Conference in the Lovely Lane Chapel." Here the Rev. Francis Asbury was ordained the first Bishop of the American Methodist Church.

Bishop Asbury has been called "the Prophet of the Long Trail," for his mission of establishing the Methodist Church in America carried him from State to State along the Atlantic Coast on horseback, often alone and often through primeval forests. Letters addressed to him were inscribed "To Bishop Francis Asbury, of North America," for want of a local address, for the 43 years of his itinerary to the church he organized was spent moving from place to place. If there was one spot on the Western Hemisphere that this saintly man called home it was the little conference room adjoining the First Light Street Church, built by Bishop Asbury on Light and Redwood streets, which was the successor of Lovely Lane Meeting House, the site of which is now occupied by the Merchants' Club Building, and upon a height of Mount Olivet Cemetery, Frederick road, the body of the first Bishop of American Methodism is laid to rest.

The Conference In 1784.

On December 17, 1784, all these earnest Christian men assembled beneath the hospitable roof of Perry Hall. "The most elegant house," says Bishop Coke, "in this state. Here I have a noble room to myself, where Mr. Asbury and I may, in the course of a week, mature everything for the conference." William Black also mentions Perry Hall as "the most spacious and elegant building" he had seen in America. "It is," he says, "about 15 miles from Baltimore. Mr. Gough, its owner, is a Methodist and supposed to be worth £100,000. He is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. He has built a neat stone meeting house, entertains the circuit preachers and at times preaches himself; and this he continued to do during the late war (the Revolutionary War) at the risk of his immense estate."

The conversion of Henry Dorsey Gough was due to Francis Asbury. Despite his great wealth he had not been a happy man. His wife had been a convert to Methodism, but he forbade her listening to the preaching of Methodism until one night while reveling with wine and gay companions some one proposed the company further divert themselves by going in a group to a Methodist assembly. Francis Asbury was the preacher. "What nonsense have we heard tonight!" exclaimed the convivalists as they returned home, but their host startled them by answering: "No; what we have heard is the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus." As he entered the house and met his wife he said to her: "I will never hinder you again from hearing the Methodists." The religious impression thus made was deepened by his riding to the cabin of one of the slaves on his plantation and hearing a negro from a neighboring plantation leading religious services and his own servants offering fervent thanks to God for the blessings of their humble lot. Both Henry Gough and his wife then became members of the Methodist Church and Perry Hall from 1774 became an asylum for the itinerant Methodist clergy and what was known as "a preaching place." One who visited it wrote of the host and hostess, "I spent a most agreeable evening with them. A numerous family of servants were called in for exhortation and prayer, so that with them and the rest of the house we had a little congregation."

Being a man of wealth, Henry Gough erected a chapel adjoining Perry Hall, which was the first American Methodist Church to have a bell. It rang morning and evening to summon members of the household and slaves to family worship and a congregation of 100 persons was not unusual. The circuit preacher addressed the assembly twice a month and local preachers led divine service each Sunday.

Worship At Perry Hall.

"Perry Hall," states an ancient record, "was the resort of much company, among whom the skeptic and Romanists were sometimes found. Members of the Baltimore Bar, the elite of Maryland, were there. But it matters not who were there; when the bell rang for family devotion they were seen in the chapel, and if there was no male person present who could lead the devotions, Mrs. Gough read a chapter in the Bible, gave out a hymn, which was often raised and sung by the colored servants, after which she would engage in prayer. Take her altogether, few such have been found on earth." It is said Bishop Asbury called her a "true daughter" to himself and Bishop Coke designated her "a precious woman, of fine sense." Her faith was a beautiful example to her husband, who once said, "Oh, if my wife had ever given away to the world I should have been lost; but her uniformly good life inspired me with the hope that I should one day be restored to the favor of God."

PERRY HALL

A visitor to the hospitable household said of it: "So large and well-regulated a family I never saw before. All seemed to know their place and duty and did it. Perry Hall was the largest dwelling house I had ever seen, and all its arrangements, within and without, were tasteful and elegant, yet simplicity and utility seemed to be stamped upon the whole. The garden, orchards and everything else, were delightful indeed and looked to me like an earthly paradise. But what pleased me better than anything else, I found a neat chapel attached to the house with a small cupola and bell that could be heard all over the farm. In this chapel morning and evening prayers were offered to God. The bell rang about half an hour before prayer, when the manager and servants from the farm house and servants' quarters and garden, together with the inhabitants of the great mansion repaired to the chapel."

The historical pilgrims of the Methodist church in 1921, commemorated Thursday the One Hundredth and Fiftieth anniversary of the first landing in America of Francis Asbury by visiting this shrine in Baltimore county, where he and other godly men planned the organization of the American Methodist church in these United States.

The day was full of the sparkle of sunshine and tingle of frosty air. Between "happy autumn fields" the cavalcade threaded its way along roads bordered with trees glorified by the scarlet and gold, the bronze and browns of autumnal foliage. Amid them, and scenting the air with fragrance, towered evergreen pines and sentinal cedars. Floats there were commemorating important episodes of Methodist history. Automobiles there were with posters bearing the names of the 64 clergymen who assisted at Perry Hall in planning the church organization to be submitted to Methodists of Maryland at what has long been known as the Christmas Conference at Lovely Lane Meeting in Baltimore. The strains of hymns that have been pillars of strength to the Methodist household of faith drifted along the way.

A Modern Pilgrimage.

Numberless automobiles chugged and strained up the steep hill that makes winding ascent to the ancient manor house and their occupants found the mansion enshrined in majestic trees flaming with gold and scarlet leaves. The plateau upon which it is builded crowns the hill and from verandas and windows is obtained a magnificient view of the surrounding country.

Only half of the ancient stone mansion covered with stucco remains standing and in perfect preservation. Fire completely destroyed the other wing and the chapel that adjoined it, but from the magnificent proportion of the wing that remains, which contains 17 rooms and 5 cellars, some idea of the original size of the house can be obtained. The present owners had courteously thrown open the entire building to the Methodist visitors, who roamed at will from garret to sub-cellars, where stone foundations were fully five feet thick. Deep down in the lowest cellar was the well, where in days long past wines and watermelons were cooled. Yonder stood what was said to be the whipping post, where disobedient slaves may have been meted out punishment for misdemeanors. There in the basement kitchen was a dumb waiter by means of which viands were raised to the dining rooms above. Doors had mammoth locks and massive hinges reaching almost across their frames, and basement steps were of stone and broad and easy of ascent.

Above was the spacious hall that served as the ballroom, and divided the present and the destroyed wings of the house, and here were great fireplaces and high wooden mantels beautifully carved and doors with cut-glass knobs. Spacious drawing rooms opened into the hall from the wide windows of which Francis Asbury must many a time have looked into the spreading branches of oak and hickory trees that are still scattering the gold and crimson benediction of their leaves upon the ground. Beyond the drawing rooms are imposing banquet and dining halls, and above stairs are those "noble" chambers of which Thomas Coke speaks in his memoirs.

Some of the stables and "quarters" still stand, but the stone from the fire-destroyed wing and chapel has been cleared away and of this stone has been builded a chapel facing the Belair road. It was all most lovely and quaint and the assembled pilgrims camped temporarily upon the hilltop or upon the wide veranda that has been added where the destroyed portion of the house once stood. Hymns were sung, al fresco luncheon was eaten under the noonday sun, the story of Bishop Asbury's early welcome to this gracious home and the blessings that resulted from his coming was told, and then the pilgrims passed on. Warm sunshine and peaceful stillness fell upon the mansion and the twitter of birds and clarion call of chanticleer succeeded the melody of song.

At Mount Olivet.

From Perry Hall the cavalcade returned to Baltimore to stop at the sites of Lovely Lane Meeting House and of the Light Street Church builded by Bishop Asbury. Thence the pilgrims passed to Eutaw Street Methodist Church, where Bishop Asbury's remains rested after being brought from Virginia, where he died, until his final interment in Mount Olivet Cemetery. In the latter place imposing memorial shafts mark the graves of Bishop Asbury and of that pioneer of Maryland Methodism—Robert Strawbridge—who went before Asbury as John the Baptist went before the Master and prepared the world for the Master's greater work. The memorial shafts of the men so closely associated in life and work were draped in the American flag and adorned with flowers and the graves also of many Methodist divines laid to rest in Mount Olivet Cemetery were decorated with little flags emblazoned with crosses symbolic that they were soldiers of the Cross, who, at peace after faithful service, awaited the silver trumpet call of the Resurrection.

Dr. John F. Goucher, dean of Methodism in Maryland and president of the American Methodist Historical Society, stood upon the speakers' platform as the story and significance of Bishop Asbury's life was recounted by the Rev. C. G. Chappel, of Washington and Tennessee. Evening sunset light fell upon the Baltimore clergyman's head, he who has done so much to keep green in the hearts of the rising generation the most sacred memories of the Methodist Church. He seemed to embody the spirit of Methodism which his life has so worthily "carried on."

Love's Treasure.

Were I to be tempted with charm and gold
To sacrifice what I now hold,
My answer would be, proud to say,
Emphatically a strong "Nay, nay."
For a man who so does lend an ear
And parts with that which he holds dear,
And barters it for selfish gain
To set the primrose path aflame,
Will live to see a dismal fate,
With reparation much too late.
So, if you're possessor of some one's heart,
That some one true till death doth part,
Remember, you hold a treasure rare
And are richer than a millionaire,
Mightier than a king in shame,
Greater than with perjured fame.
For love and happiness are gems,
And he who slights them so condemns
Himself unto a pit of mire
And feels the pangs of shame and ire,
With strength too weak to extricate
His carcass from its own just fate.

By Mark Lesworth.

The Actor's Salary

THE actor's salary has for years been a subject of speculation and conjecture by the public, and often of romance and magnification. The average salary of actors is small. The stage is a poor paymaster, and the actor often remains an actor because he is in love with his art or his profession and because he has hope that some day fortune will be kind and generous.

Facts about actors' salaries have been coming to public notice, first in the discussion concerning the Actors' Equity Association and, later, in a discussion of the reasonableness and prospects of returning to the stock company system. An actor who is evidently familiar with the matter he discusses said recently in a published letter: "A reasonable salary, apart from the salary of a star, must obviously be such as will enable the artist to live well and comfortably for 52 weeks each year, to provide him with reasonable comforts, reasonable amusements, a reasonable vacation without financial worries and a reasonable sum to be put aside each year for old age."

Taking up a recent salary list of "a first-class star on tour," he writes that "We find that exclusive of said star (one of the first magnitude), the rest of the company average $135 a week. To make that average, figure what some of them were getting. Suppose they went for 30 consecutive weeks; that would give an average of $4,050 for a year's income. Make a conservative deduction for income tax, commissions, advertisements and clothes of, say, $850, and we have $3,200 left to live on. While on tour in such a company it would be impossible to manage on less than $60 a week or a total of $1,800, there will then be left 22 weeks in New York at a little less than $40 a week, or a total of $880, and if you deduct these items from your $3,200 you have exactly $520 left for illness, amusements, those forgotten expenses that will crop up, and to save enough to keep yourself out of the actors' home."

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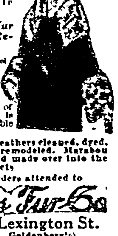

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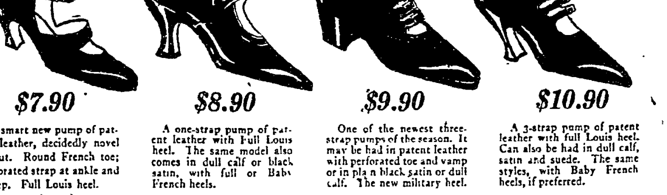

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