



DISCOVERY

Edited by
FREDERICK E. MASER

An Unpublished Asbury Letter

When I received this unpublished Asbury letter, I immediately forwarded all the information that accompanied it to my good friend Dr. W. Guy Smeltzer, author of *Bishop Francis Asbury, Field Marshal of the Lord* and probably the greatest authority on Francis Asbury in America today. His commentary and the unpublished letter follow. My deepest appreciation is extended to Dr. Smeltzer not only for his book but also for his scholarly ability in analysing this new Asbury letter and placing it in proper perspective. FEM

Explanation About the Letter

The letter was written to Stephen Brooks, whom Asbury had ordained a Deacon on May 14, 1792. Brooks was an Englishman who had emigrated to the United States after the Revolutionary War. In 1792 he served Green in South Carolina but "located" the following year at Table Rock, South Carolina, where he was in 1796 when Asbury wrote to him.

That year, Asbury's route took him to a two-month stop in Charleston, South Carolina, from December 30, 1795 to March 3, 1796. He had come south along the seaboard, and from March 3 to April 24, he crossed South Carolina and North Carolina following his usual route along the Little Tennessee River across the southern mountains heading westward, his goal the conference at Nolachuckie, Tennessee, which was scheduled for April 20.

There are no letters in Vol. III, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, between February 17 and June 21, 1796, so this letter fills a gap in Asbury's extant letters.

The letter was discovered through the efforts of George L. Thomason, who is a great-great-grandson of Stephen Brooks. In passing it down through the generations it came into the possession of Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Campbell of Cleveland, South Carolina. Mrs. Campbell is a great-great-

granddaughter of Stephen Brooks. The Campbells are Baptists and did not recognize the significance of this Asbury letter.

George Thomason is chairman of the Historical Society of the Bethel United Methodist Church, which was founded in 1801. His address is P.O. Box 11, Mauldin, South Carolina 29662. Mr. Thomason had obtained a copy of the letter for his church historical society, and it was seen there by Dr. Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., who visited the Bethel Church while on a tour of Wofford College. The original letter has now been donated by Mr. and Mrs. Campbell to the Wofford College Library.

The letter itself is characteristic of Asbury's letters. In its opening he refers to the limitations placed upon him by his health. Asbury suffered a succession of serious illnesses from 1795 to 1801 which caused him to think his death might be imminent. He complains about the location of so many of his preachers and the low state of religion among preachers and people. His perennial optimism shines forth when he turns to his divine encouragement in Christ. He exhorts Brooks to continue in the faith and preach the pure gospel.

Dr. Maser is intrigued by the possibility of some connection between this letter to Stephen Brooks and Asbury's only romantic attachment with Nancy Brooks in England as revealed by his letter to his parents on October 26, 1768. (See *Letters*. Vol. III, pp. 3-6.) It is true the names coincide. And Stephen Brooks was an Englishman. Mr. Thomason does not know of any connection, and to prove or disprove any connection would require research that is beyond my skills.

—Wallace Guy Smeltzer

The Newly Discovered Unpublished Asbury Letter

Stephen Brooks

—River, March 23, 1796

My very dear Brother:

I am prevented the pleasure to see you and many of my dear, very dear brethren and sisters in Table Rock. My last years campaign was a masterpiece and nearly threw me entirely off the hinges. Indeed, like old Jacob, I have to halt on my feet if not on my thigh.

O my brother, for the Lord's sake, do not let dirt cloud thy eyes from seeing the worth of souls and the glory in Jesus. It is a time of Zion's distress. Her sons desert her and sit down by the rivers of Babylon and hang our harps on the willows, weeping when we remember Zion. Such Locations and such apostacies among preachers and people [have occurred] where few, we are afraid, will be saved, preachers as well as people. O my dear let's help in the work of God. This is the time of Jacob's trouble. O that he may be delivered from it. If we cannot do all the good that we would or all the good that we desire let us still set out ourselves for Christ and souls above all. Let's cry to the Church of God, be ye holy for

he that hath called you is holy. In this we fail in that heavenly work, [the] doctrine of charity.

Let us expect every moment that God will sanctify as well as justify souls and press it home on every Christian. The Lord God fill thy soul and make thee a pure preacher of [the] pure gospel. Go on in the strength of Jesus.

F. Asbury

COKE LETTER

(Footnote to the Coke Letter in January 1983 *Methodist History*—Discovery, pages 124-125.)

In January 1983 issue of *Methodist History* we requested assistance in identifying several names that appeared in the letter of Thomas Coke to Mr. Phillips. This was an hitherto unpublished letter, and it stirred the interest of John Vickers, author of *Thomas Coke, Apostle of Methodism*. Vickers is probably the most important living authority on Thomas Coke. Mr. Vickers writes:

The Coke letter naturally interested me and added one more to my collection. The people mentioned in it are fairly easily identified, I think. 'Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie' must have been Elizabeth Ritchie's brother and sister-in-law (her father, as you say, died long before). The Ritchie graves at Otley were recently restored. Mrs. Philips and Mrs. Ratcliffe were the wives of the two itinerants who were stationed in Otley Circuit that year, John Phillips and William Radcliffe.

Many thanks to John Vickers for this helpful information.