Every writer who has undertaken to tell the story of John Wesley has had to deal with the subject that I am to discuss with you at this time. Naturally among these numerous authors, there have been considerable differences of opinion. Some have possibly magnified this experience too much. That is, in seeking to emphasize the amazing change that came to Wesley at this time, they have given too little emphasis to his deeply religious life from his youth. They have perhaps pictured Wesley as a greater sinner than he really was. Wesley, himself seems at times to belong to this group.

Then there is a tendency, especially on the part of Dr. Lee to give this experience less importance than it deserves. He insists that Wesley was not converted at Aldersgate in the sense in which we use the word. He simply passed from a little faith to a larger faith. He received, as Wordsworth would express it, authentic tidings of invisible things to a greater degree than he had ever done before.

Now, it would not become any to be too dogmatic about a matter upon which so many abler men differ. But, upon this I think we can all agree:—Whatever the nature of this experience, it remade Wesley. Whether we call it conversion or not, it was an experience without which I am confident that the Wesley that we know would never have existed. I am equally sure that but for this experience, the Methodist Church of which we are glad to be a part, would never have been born.
I.

What then was this experience? I think much of our confusion arises from the fact that Wesley had been an earnestly religious man all his life. But that fact would not necessarily cancel his need of conversion. Many other deeply religious men have been converted in the soundest evangelical fashion after years of sincere religious living.

Take Paul for instance. Wesley was a deeply earnest man, but in this he did not excel that brilliant young Pharasee who stood by and saw Stephen stoned to death. Paul was a man of faith, and a man of prayer—a man of consecration. For his loyalty to his religion, he would gladly have died. But he needed regeneration just the same.

Martin Luther is another example. Luther was deeply religious man before he ever had any vital experience of Jesus Christ. There was no price that he was not willing to pay in order to be a disciple. But, it was not until this devout and earnest man was climbing the stairway at Rome that the text flashed in his mind "The just shall live by faith" from there he rose to a newness of life.

Now, if admitting that Wesley was not converted in the sense that the whole direction of his life was changed, he was converted in the sense that he experienced salvation in a way that he had not experienced it before. He had an assurance of being saved from the law of sin and death. This was an assurance that had not come to him heretofore. That sounds strongly to me like a good old fashioned case of conversion.

Our ministers and teachers have not made as much of conversion in recent years as did our fathers. We have been just a little shy of the word. There is a heartening passage in one of the Psalms "When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up." It was heartening
that when the saints began to forsake conversion, then the psychologists took it up. They give it all sorts of fancy names. One calls it re-education. Another calls it reorientation to reality. I like that word, it has suggested a fine atmosphere of intelligent respective. But it comes to the same thing in the end that conversion means—that turning about toward God that enables him to make us new creations.

Now we do not all come to this experience in the same fashion. Wesley came one way, Luther another, Paul another. How you were converted is interesting, but it is not fundamental. The big question is: Have you been converted? Is there anything in your experience that can be expressed in language like this "I felt that I would trust Christ and Christ alone for salvation, and that the Lord had put away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death, even death." This may come with the suddeness of the lightning flash; it may come like the dawning of the day; or the slow coming of spring. But come, it must, or you can no more do your work than Wesley could have done his.

II.

What did this experience of conversion, or whatever that experience was, do for Wesley?

1. As stated above, it saved him from sin. He dares that whereas he had fought and lost the fight in previous days, he still fought, but he fought victoriously.

2. This experience gave Wesley new passion. He felt his heart strangely warmed. Just how warm hearted he had been before, it is not ours to say. But, there did come a new warmth. After this experience he became a lover in a profounder sense than he had ever been before. It was not not easy for
this Oxford gentlemen to be distinguished for warm heartedness. A new love came to him that day because the "love of God had been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit." Just as this experience brought to Wesley a new passion, so it did to Paul. He had been an earnest man before, but his earnestness was of a legalistic type. It was a bit like the earnestness of Paul before his conversion. No man could have been more earnest than this brilliant Pharisee. But his zeal had been zeal for a creed. After this he became zealous for a person. As he faced his important task he tells us the motive power that drives him "He loved me and gave himself up for me."

3. This experience gave to Wesley his power. Up to this time, tireless and eager worker that he was, he was largely a failure. He was a fine and highly trained man, but the power was wanting. After this, there was a light about him that could only be accounted for in terms of God. His sermons today make rather dreary and loggy reading, but when they had him behind it; men fell by the score and the slain of the Lord were many.

4. Here is where Wesley got his gospel. It has been rightly said that this experience made little change in his theology, but it did something far better, it made his theology live. It changed a gospel into my Gospel. He no longer sang the Lord is a Shepherd, but the Lord is my Shepherd. He could preach the love of God with passion and power because he had experienced it. He could cry "Ho everyone that thirsts" with confidence because he had thirsted and he come and he had drunk.

III.

How did Wesley come to enter upon this experience?

He did not enter it by the path of good works. If ever a man had tried desperately to enter by this way—Wesley was that man. What he asks in
astonishment is "Must I do nothing?" "Nothing" he answered, except to accept Him as my righteousness, my sanctifier, and redemption.

As we turn the pages of the biographies of the saints, there is an amazing amount of good in this matter. Wesley delighted to preach on the text "To him that worketh nothing, but who believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted unto him for his righteousness." That was Wesley's experience. It was also the experience of Paul. It was the experience of Abraham. It is every man's experience that has found God. When Wesley stopped seeking to save himself and gave the task over into the hands of Christ, the work was done. It was not easy for one so full of pride as himself. That way worked for Paul. It works still. Stanley Jones tells of a certain Indian who came eight hundred miles on foot to see Gandhi. He wanted to ask Gandhi two questions "How may I be rid of sin?" and "How may I find God?" These are age old questions. They are as important now as they ever were.

When this ancient man had finished with his interview with Gandhi, Jones asked what answer the great mystic had given. "He told me," said the Indian, "to learn to stay in one place, and to conquer my desires, and then possibly I would find God." "Did he offer no immediate relief?" Jones questioned. "No" was the reply. "He said it might take ages!"

Then this God-hungry man turned to Jones and said "What do you say?" He said I told him it did not take ages, it just took me. It did not take waiting, it just took surrender. That is what Wesley did. That is the open door for all of us. When a man does that, he feels his heart strangely warmed. He feels then he does trust Christ and Christ alone.
Had you been on board a little trans-Atlantic vessel that
headed at Philadelphia a hundred and fifty years ago today there
would have been at least one of its passengers that would have
attracted your attention. You would not have marked this man be-
cause of his age. He was in the springtime of life. He was only
twenty-six. You would not have marked him because of his rich
attire. He wore the simple garb of a Methodist preacher. But you
could not have but marked his strong face, his serious and vivacious
manner. And you would have been struck by those clear blue eyes
that had a trick of looking straight out at you and into you and
through you. Then, too, you would have felt the strong personali-
ty of the man, the personality that was made at once awful and wins-
some by the presence of God.

Had you entered into conversation with this young man he
would have told you that he was on his way to the British colony
of America. And pressed for a reason for his coming, he would have
made it very plain that he was not coming as a home-steader. Nor
was he coming to seek his fortune. Nor was he in search of ad-
venture. He would have given you his full purpose had you read
his "Journal." For this entry he made soon after his leaving the
shores of England: "Why am I going to America? In search of fame?
Not if I know my heart. For money? No. I am going to live unto
God and to induce others to do the same."

Now, many men have crossed the Atlantic Ocean since that
far-off day. But whoever they were or wherever they were going or
whatever were their motives, I defy you to find one single one of
them who had a higher or a more Christlike motive than that that
actuated this old time Methodist preacher, Francis Asbury. He is
Prophet of the long road

coming to us in obedience to the will of God, and he is coming to induce others to enter into the large freedom of that same kingship.

And from the moment that he set foot upon this continent he lived for that one purpose. He never forgot. He never allowed himself to be turned aside. And it is immensely thrilling when we read the last entry he makes in his "Journal" at the close of the last active year of his ministry. Since his coming he has labored much. He has loved much. He has suffered much. But his purposes have not changed. Listen to what he says at the end of the long road,- "My one purpose is to live unto God. The time is short."

This is the man whom we come together, a few of us, today to honor. We are but a little handful in comparison with that innumerable company that today honor this man, a company that no man can number. A century and a half has passed since he came. A hundred busy, rushing years have trodden upon his grave. Yet the world has not forgotten him. And I dare to believe it will never forget.

Why do we remember him today? We remember him because the lofty purpose that brought him here made him one of the world's great givers. Paul, the first great missionary, declared that for Christ he had suffered the loss of all things and did count them but as refuse. And what was true of Paul was not one whit less true of Francis Asbury. He absolutely laid everything upon the altar of his Lord.

To come to America cost him the giving up of his native country. He came to this country an Englishman. He died here in America. To come to America cost him the father and mother whom he devotedly and passionately loved. He never forgot their tears at parting. And when the news of their death came to him in the
The prophet of the long road

wilderness it came with a stab of unspeakable pain. But he never went back for one single visit.

His high purpose cost him not only his home in England, but his home in America. He has been well spoken of as "The man without a home." There is something magnificent and yet extremely pathetic in the address of the letter that Bishop Coke wrote him from England. It is addressed like this, "The Rev. Bishop Asbury, North America." It is marked by no city. It is marked by no state. When folks address us they have our city, our street and our number. We have homes. But Asbury's mail comes to North America.

And this address, mark you, was not born of carelessness or ignorance on the part of Bishop Coke. It was rather born of his knowledge. He knew that Asbury was a persistent and constant traveler. He knew that by the time his letter reached America the great itinerant might be struggling with the swamps of South Carolina, or he might be amidst the majestic mountains of East Tennessee, or he might be among the primeval forests of Ohio, or he might be among the spruce and hemlock of Maine. There was no telling where he would be. For he had no home.

Giving up his home, he gave up what would have doubtless been unspeakably dear to him, the privilege of wife and children. His love for children is one of his outstanding characteristics. Adults sometimes thought the good Bishop stern, but not so the children. They climbed into his lap. They hugged his neck and kissed his lips. They fought their way from their mother's arms into his, just as children fought their way into the arms of the great Prophet of Nazareth centuries before. But the great lover of children slept at last in a childless grave.

But the big gift of all was that he gave himself. For almost
half a century he travelled an average of near six thousand miles a year. This distance he made almost wholly on horseback. He made it over roads that were at times next to impassible. He made it in spite of the fact that he was almost constantly battling with disease. There were times when the only entry he could make in his "Journal" was "Pain - pain - pain." He made it in spite of the fact that there were times at night when he had not where to lay his head, or when the places that he did have were worse than the out-of-doors. He tells us that the only chance a man would have to protect himself from vermin and disease while sleeping in some places that he slept was to wear a brimstone shirt. He rode when he was too weak to mount his horse at the beginning of the day, and when he had to be helped from his horse at its close. But in spite of difficulties and dangers and pain, he kept on till the very close of his life.

And we can not withhold our honor from the givers. We honor the soldier boys, for instance, who "in one moment played glad life's arrears of pain, darkness and cold." ("Young fellow, my lad."

But we can not but honor still more those who offer themselves a living sacrifice "wholly acceptable unto God." We can not forget this great hero who not only died a martyr's death, but who lived a martyr's life. He did not simply die worn out with his toil in 1866, but he died daily throughout all his battling years.

Then, too, we honor Francis Asbury today because of his courageous loyalty to duty. When Asbury came to this country, in 1771, those who were leaders in the infant Methodist Church were all Englishmen. When the Revolutionary War broke out a little later, every single one of them returned to England except Asbury. He said he was tempted, but that he felt that it was his part to stay at his post.
His American children were in his heart, to live or to die with them.

In later years he was at times misunderstood. Oftentimes he was maligned and slandered. Sometimes his friends criticised him most severely. Many misjudged him and thought him harsh. Even his great father in the faith, John Wesley, administered to him some very sharp rebukes. But he never swerved. He never turned aside. He never faltered for a moment. He never ceased to press the battle every moment of his waking existence for the accomplishment of the great purpose that lay closest his heart. ("If.")

Then, we not only honor this man today because of his unselfish giving and because of his high and heroic courage, but we honor him because of his great achievement. If you honor the man who gets results, then you can not withhold your tribute from this man. I doubt if ever there was another man in America whose life was more fruitful than the life of Francis Asbury.

He came to us when the Church was in its swaddling clothes. He nursed it. He taught it. He trained it. He baptized it with his prayers and his tears. And when he left it it was no longer a helpless child whose very life was in doubt. It was a husky young giant with the prophecy of world's strength in its strengthful thews.

And not only did this great prophet come when the Church was in the making, but he came when the nation was in the making, and builded himself into its foundations. He knew the United States of that day better than any other man. I am confident he was acquainted with more of its people and had been into more of its homes. From Maine to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Atlantic Ocean to the interior of Ohio, he travelled.

And mark you, he did not travel as a vagrant, but as a crusader. Wherever he went he lifted the cross of Christ. He entered
Prophet of long road

into the log cabins of the frontiersmen. He stopped at the trading posts. He was received into the comfortable homes of the wealthy. And wherever he went he went as God's prophet. Wherever he went he preached that righteousness that exalteth a nation. To the lonely of the wilderness he brought the Christ of all comfort. To the weak he brought the secret of abiding strength. To those whose feet were in slippery places he pointed out the Rock of Ages. To those whose skies had grown black he showed the radiance of the Star of Bethlehem.

The might of the influence of this man in the Christianizing of America, I think, has never been fully estimated. Under his ministry the wilderness and the solitary place became glad, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as a rose. As a corn of wheat he fell into the ground and died. But as a result of his sowing himself, harvests have grown and ripened that will forever make Heaven pulsate with hallelujahs.

Mark you, I am not claiming for a moment that Asbury was a politician. He was a preacher. He was a herald of the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was a church builder. But because he was this, he was also a nation builder. "Ye are the salt of the earth", said the Master to His disciples. And what He meant was just this, that without the saving salt of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the individual, society, the community, the nation rots down. And the man who does most for this nation is not the man who organizes the largest army, but the man who in largest measure brings to bear upon it the saving salt of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because this is true Asbury was one of the great nation builders. I repeat that it is my firm opinion that no man ever rendered a larger service to a nation than did this Knight of the Long Road.

Now, how are we to account for this great man and for the high service that he has rendered to the church and the nation? The effect of the man can not be ignored. Civilization has been made
different because he lived. How are we to account for it? He produced a mighty effect. He himself was a mighty effect. What was the cause of that effect?

First of all, Asbury was a man of faith. That is, he was a man who believed something. All great leaders are. We live in a day when it is fashionable to make flings at creeds. But wherever you find a great life, you find a great creed. There is absolutely no exception. The men who do things are the men who believe something. The men who utter thunderbolts are the men who can say, "I believe; therefore have I spoken." God has usually to pass by those who are obnoxious with problems to those who are affluent with certainty.

Yonder is a merchant vessel going to pieces in the Mediterranean Sea. Who takes charge and dominates that ship? A preacher by the name of Paul. How does he come to do it? He believes something. And he steadies himself upon the storm-swept deck and recites his creed: "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told to me."

If you get great living you must have great believing. You can not grow a giant redwood tree in an oyster can. You can not float an ocean liner in a mud puddle. You can not confine the Seven Seas within your bathtub. You can not run the machinery of the world with an icicle in the fire box. You can not hang the solar system in the ceiling of your bedroom. You can not banish the night and bring in the daylight and put out all the stars with a tallow dip. To have a might such as Asbury you must have back of it the dynamo of a great faith.

But not only was this man what he was because he believed, but because of the content of his belief. Napoleon had a creed. He believed that creed with all his might. But its content was not man-making. It was rather man-destroying. But the content of Asbury's creed was of such a nature as to bring into his own life the largest enrichment and the largest usefulness.
It is easy for us to know what this man believed. It is written on every page of his "Journal." It came out in all the sermons that he preached. It uttered itself in the life that he lived. In the first place, he had a profound conviction that men outside the redemption that is in Christ are lost. "Oh that we might realize," we hear him exclaiming, "the awful dangers to which sinners are exposed!" He had a mighty conviction of salvation, but he never forgot that there was something to be saved from.

He remembered also that there was something to be saved to. He tells us that he preached a present conviction and a present conversion and a present sanctification. He believed in instantaneous salvation, that a man might instantly pass out of death into life, that instantly the Son of Righteousness might rise upon a darkened soul with healing in his wings. And he believed that this salvation went to the very heart and center of life, that it wrought a change so profound that it could be described by no other word than that of new birth.

He tells us how in one of his meetings a woman was converted. She was the wife of an army officer. The army officer did not know what to make of the change. He knew that something was the matter. So he put a mustard plaster on the back of his wife's head to draw the Methodism out. But the great preacher knew that even assuming the efficacy of the plaster, it was applied at the wrong place. The not Gospel that he preached was a gospel of the renewed head so much as the renewed heart.

And you will notice that this man preached a present perfection, a present sanctification. That has been one of the great cardinal doctrines of Methodism throughout all the years. I fear that we are getting a bit away from it now. But Asbury preached it. He
panted for it continually. I think I have never read the life of any man who more persistently hungered and thirsted for righteousness than did Francis Asbury.

This dauntless knight believed in hell. He spoke of it to the terror of his congregation. In his "Journal" we read where he said, "I preached a terrible sermon." Another time, "I preached an alarming sermon." And the people who heard him were alarmed. And the people who heard, many of them, fell on their faces in penitence and in tears. And many of those who heard felt then and there within their hearts powers of the life to come.

And this "Prophet of the Long Road" also believed in Heaven. As his bodily strength failed his joy in Christ seemed only to deepen. At the close of his last conference when he turned over the task to Bishop McKendree, he turned it over not grudgingly but with a shout. We hear him say, "Glory! Glory! Glory!" He is getting near the Sunset and the Evening Star. But he goes "not like a galley slave scourged to his dungeon", but soothed and sustained by an unfa.tering trust, he approaches his end "like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to sweet and pleasant dreams." And at last when the end came and John Wesley asked him of his sure hope, he lifted both hands Heavenward. And like countless other sons of Methodism, he died well.

But in order to fully account for Asbury it is not only necessary to say that he believed and what he believed, it is necessary also to notice the end of his believing. His faith made him a man of tremendous spiritual power. No man ever won as he won the weapon of whose warfare was carnal. We can not account for his vast attainment in personal character or achievement in service except in terms of the supernatural God.
Will you hear him tell his experience: "My general experience", he says, "is this, close communion with God; holy fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ; a will resigned; frequent addresses to the Throne; a soul drawn out in ardent prayer for the universal church and for the complete triumph of Christ over a whole earth."

A man with an experience like that can not but be a mighty man. Giving all to God, he received all from God. He was a man who did his work in the power of the Holy Spirit. When men came into his presence they felt that "surely God is in this place." He was associated with the greatest men of the century, but he was the leader of them all. The great Dr. Coke said, "I feel but a child in his presence." Another said he had a holy atmosphere about him such as none other man he had ever known. And Freeborn Garrettson said of him that "He prayed more and better than any man" he had ever known. He was personally acquainted with the mighty God. And a mighty God makes mighty men.

And I can not close without this word. Our present Methodism is strong and rich, and I fear worldly. And what you are thinking is this: Oh that we had some great Asbury to lead us! But that is not our need. If God had wanted Asbury for your day and mine, He might have so arranged it. What we need is not Asbury. When Elijah was taken the young prophets over at Jericho thought they could never get along without Elijah. But Elisha had seen behind the veil. And because he had seen, he no longer went about saying, "Where is Elijah?" His cry was a wiser and better, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

A globe that had been giving light in a certain room went out the other night. It was clean burnt out. Since then the room has
been in total darkness every night. When we go into that room do we say, "Where is the globe"? No, we are wiser than that. We say, "The power is still there. We will get a new light. And that new light will shine as bright, and maybe even brighter, than the other because it has all the powers of the dynamo behind it."

So what we need today, hearts, is not the globe that lies here buried. We need to get into closer touch with the infinite dynamo. Not "Where is Asbury", but "Where is the Lord God of Asbury?" That is to be our cry.

I remember visiting my old home a few years ago. And I went down to a lovely spring, and I was thirsty. Now, there used to be a gourd at that old spring, but the gourd was gone. What did I do? Get up and wonder, with swelling tongue and parching lips saying, "Where is the gourd?" No, I got down and kissed the spring on the lip and was satisfied. And so the instrument changes, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. And putting our hands into His we shall fulfill our ministry as the "Prophet of the Long Road" fulfilled his.