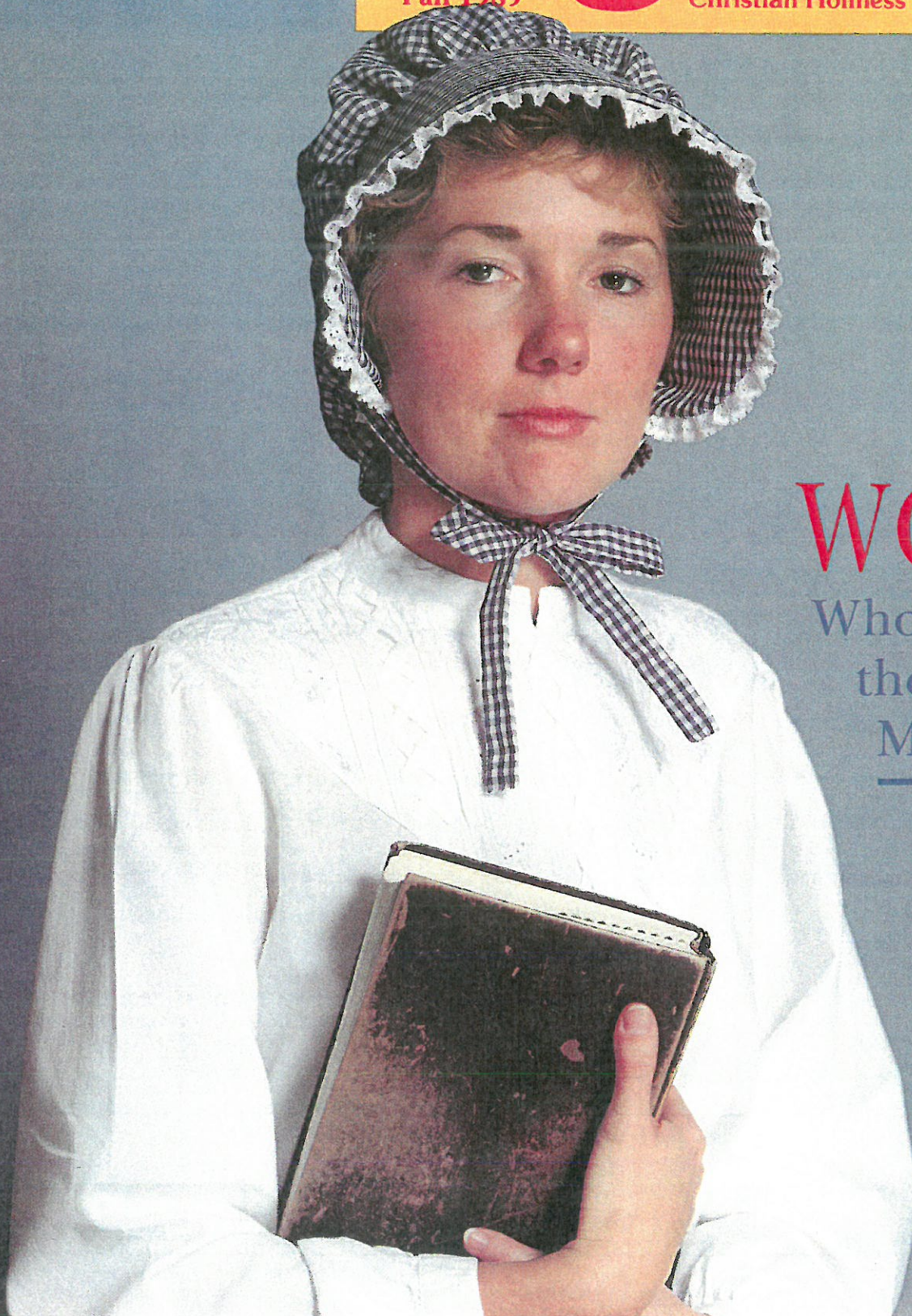


Holiness Digest

Fall 1989

Christian Holiness Association



WOMEN

Who Influenced
the Holiness
Movement

An Elect Lady

Some Reflections Upon the Life and Ministry of Iva Durham Vennard

by Merne A. Harris

Iva Durham Vennard's relationship with the holiness movement was lifelong, beginning with her conversion at the age of twelve under the ministry of a holiness evangelist of that era, Rev. Milton (Father) Haney. Six years later she received great benefit from attending the Decatur, IL Holiness Camp, then one of the largest (10,000 people on Sundays) in the Midwest. The slate of preachers for the 1889 camp included William McDonald (Pres. of NHA), Joseph H. Smith, J. A. Wood, and E.I.D. Pepper. Later that same year Joseph H. Smith conducted revival services in her home church, and it was during those meetings she was sanctified.

During the early years of her life, Iva Durham developed friendships with such holiness leaders as Bishop William F. Oldham and Dr. C. J. Fowler. These people were a source of spiritual and personal strength as her ministry was developing and her gifts of leadership were beginning to be exercised.

As naturally as a stream flows into a river, Iva Durham's ministry moved into the holiness movement which had led her through years of searching, skepticism (she had an encounter with Universalism during her early college years) and surrender to the ministry she entered in 1894. First she conducted evangelistic meetings in area holiness churches, but following her 1898 appointment as Deaconess-at-Large for the Methodist Church, her ministry



Photo courtesy of Vennard College

stretched from coast to coast.

In 1901 she was invited to establish a school for the training of Deaconesses in St. Louis. Epworth Evangelistic Institute began classes the following fall. While her leadership of Epworth did represent a new direction in her ministry, it did not mean the end of what had been a very fruitful ministry within the holiness movement – 1200 decisions during the winter of 1901, for example. Many holiness churches, colleges and camps welcomed her clear, biblical and practical teaching on Scriptural Holiness. As one person wrote, "Mrs. Vennard (in

1904 she had married Tom Vennard) led me to the Lord many years ago, and she is still pointing the way for me." *

Yet another avenue of ministry was to be hers, this time as President of the second training school founded by her in 1910, Chicago Evangelistic Institute. In 1920 she embarked upon a world tour of ministry to missionaries identified with the holiness movement. Because there was no chaplain on board the ships upon which she took passage, Dr. Vennard often conducted services "nearly every Sunday" to a "grand mixture" of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish passengers. "I literally preached my way around the world" she wrote in reviewing her fourteen-month journey.

Dr. Vennard further impacted the holiness movement with her pen, publishing *Revelation* in 1914 and *Upper Room Messages* in 1916. For thirty years she was editor of *Heart and Life*, a monthly publication which featured articles by leading holiness exponents. In 1915 she served with a group which compiled and published a collection of holiness songs, *Heart and Life Songs*.

When the leaders of The National Holiness Association met in University Park, IA in 1910 to consider the organization of a missionary society, the proposed Constitution for such a venture had been written by Dr. Vennard. And when officers for the fledgling organization were elected, Dr. Vennard became secretary to the

* All of the quotations in this article are taken from the official biography of Dr. Vennard, *Alabaster and Spikenard* by Mary Ella Bowie published by CEI in 1947.

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new National Holiness Missionary Society.

The last years of her life (1902-1945) were devoted in the main to the two training schools she founded, Epworth 1902-1910 and Chicago Evangelistic Institute 1910-1945. It was in the leadership of these schools that her character, courage and convictions were tested and proven true. Basic to the victories of those years was her unflinching commitment to the Word of God, the doctrine of holiness, and effective evangelism.

She never wavered from these commitments, and that courageous stand became a respected voice in the crusade against a liberalism which labored so diligently (and in many cases successfully) to destroy the authority of the Bible, discredit the doctrine of holiness and diminish the place of evangelism in the life of the church. Wrote Dr. D. Willia Caf-ray: "Few women have possessed such moral courage, such range of and clearness of vision, and such unswerving loyalty to the truth."

There is no way to calculate the impact of that kind of stand. One friend put it this way: "She minded God, else the world would be more sinful than it is." It is valid to believe that many of her contemporaries of every rank and station were emboldened by her brave stand and encouraged to resist the degradations of liberalism where they lived and served.

Further, the results of such a life, described by Miss Bowie as "an ever-flowing river", must be considered. Again there are no

objective tests of measurement but a suggestion of that influence comes from a former student who said, "She was one who inspired courage." As Bishop Leslie Marston said, "... in the field of training youth for a holiness ministry there have been few her equal. She has placed such a clear imprint on the long line of youth through whose lives she, though dead, yet speaketh to future generations. Truly, the fragrance of the ointment of her poured-out life has gone to the ends of the earth.

And so they left her classrooms to give life and leadership to the holiness movement all over the world. Some pioneered enduring ministries such as the Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association and Bethany Children's Home. Others staffed the mission fields of WGM, OMS International and numerous denominational missionary boards. Among her graduates are presidents of colleges and a missionary society, teachers in our schools and professors in our colleges. Many appear on the preaching schedules of holiness camps all over America, and some have received citations for special achievements.

That torch, then, of fidelity to the Word, the doctrine of holiness and effective evangelism still burns. It illumines the path the holiness movement must ever follow. And as we do, we pay due homage to those who have gone before, including Dr. Iva Durham Vennard described by Dr. George G. Vallentyne as "an 'elect lady' as dear old John would say." ■

Dr. Merne Harris is a 1946 graduate of Chicago Evangelistic Institute (now Vennard College). He spent thirty-nine years in ministry at the school Dr. Vennard founded; nineteen years as its fifth president. Dr. Harris and his wife, Sue, are now retired but devote several months each year to ministry as International Pastors to World Gospel Mission missionaries.

Heritage continued

sciousness of our theological community. We must be willing to expend the time and energy necessary to preserve the documentation of the past, then reflect on it, interpret it, and share it with joy and conviction.

There are fragments of the story of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement which lie buried in old desks, hidden in trunks, or forgotten in crumbling old books and periodicals. Much of our documentary heritage is at risk. There are diaries, letters, journals, photographs, scrapbooks, poems, newspaper clippings, tapes and other forms of personal and corporate records which evidence the history, development and passion of the movement which are in danger of disappearing forever. There are persons whose memory hold stories and observations which, unless we capture them now, will never be available to inform our future.

In an effort to address this situation, the B. L. Fisher Library at Asbury Theological Seminary along with a number of other CHA related institutions and individuals, have become actively involved in an effort to uncover, preserve, and make available as full a record of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement as is possible. They intend to make increasingly visible a history which has so often been invisible; to bring new appreciation of the meaning of our heritage in the lives of contemporary people.

You are invited to become a partner in this mission. Together we can preserve a heritage at risk. We can make the past a gift to the future. ■

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This article was sent to us by Stan Ingersol, and Phil Nendel.

It is from the archives of the Nazarene Church.

The reference information:

Holiness Digest. Fall 1989. Journal of the Christian Holiness Association. Issue devoted to women who influenced the holiness movement. Articles on Willia Caffray, Catherine Booth, Phoebe Palmer, Amanda Berry Smith, Hannah Whitall Smith, Iva Durham Vennard, and Wesleyan-holiness women in social ministry in New York City.

Note: Dr. Harris wrote the article on Dr. Vennard. The issue also includes an article on Willa Caffray, one of the professors at C.E.I.