

MR. WESLEY

An Intimate Sketch of John Wesley

by

T. Crichton Mitchell

Bolton, England

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Cover photo of John Wesley printed by courtesy
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Dedication

To my true friends
Dr. and Mrs. J. Kenneth Grider
to whose
friendship and faith
I owe
more than I can
otherwise express.

CONTENTS		PAGE
CHAPTER I		
Shades of Night and Fingers of Dawn		9
CHAPTER II		
The Youth from the Fens		25
CHAPTER III		
"Wrestling Jacob"		37
CHAPTER IV		
"In the Steps of the Master"		50
CHAPTER V		
"This Is the Message!"		66
CHAPTER VI		
How Great a Flame!		80

INTRODUCTION

It is with genuine delight that I introduce the writer, Rev. T. Crichton Mitchell, and commend this product of his pen, MR. WESLEY, to our people and friends everywhere.

I first met this Scottish minister in Glasgow in 1950. I soon discovered that, despite his youth, he was an ardent and careful student of the lives, writings, and hymns of John and Charles Wesley. Even then his growing library was in line with the best in British traditions for the Christian ministry, and I observed that his accumulations in *Wesleyana* were especially replete.

Rev. T. Crichton Mitchell has traveled extensively in recent years on this side of the Atlantic and has always been a favorite on our college campuses and in the Seminary chapel at Kansas City. He brings the same preparation and radiance evident in his pulpit ministry into this story of John Wesley.

The charm of the book lies in its readableness and in its evident historical accuracy. While the writer does not belabor the technical historical points, he does reveal a sound grasp of source materials by the flash of his pithy and broad summary paragraphs.

My prediction is that this book will have a wide and useful place in introducing young people and others to the redoubtable Mr. Wesley. I would encourage all to dip into the book itself almost anywhere and see if you don't want to read it in sequence for yourself, and read it in its entirety.

—SAMUEL YOUNG

CHAPTER ONE

SHADES OF NIGHT AND FINGERS OF DAWN

It is an impressive fact that in the year 1726 two men who were to powerfully affect the life and thought of the entire world almost trod upon each others toes!

Voltaire, French apostle of skepticism and unbelief, came to England in 1726 and remained for three months, imbibing the pernicious infidelity of eighteenth-century England; and in that same year John Wesley was elected to the fellowship of Lincoln College, Oxford.

Is it any great stretch of the imagination to think that some people met and heard both the apostle of unbelief and the future herald of God's good news? Presumably no one who did meet both men would suspect that what was then fermenting in the mind of Voltaire would have such dire effects upon his native land; nor would they know that the prim parson from Oxford was even then in process of becoming the human agent in the salvation of England and one of the greatest evangelists in the history of the Christian Church.

From England, Voltaire wrote about the religion he saw: "They are so disgusted with that sort of thing, that a new religion, or an old one revived would hardly make its fortune." In that year John Wesley won his first convert through personal evangelism, years before his own entry into conscious saving faith!

Thus were heard in 1726 the first mutterings of revolution and revival.

The Thirsty Land

When readers survey the deplorable condition of England in 1726 they will not be surprised that Voltaire should arrive at such a verdict. The plain truth is that the land he saw invited such a conclusion, and much

kindlier eyes than his had likewise concluded England to be beyond redemption.

The historian's verdicts upon the eighteenth century tempt one to suppose that the dark side has been exaggerated. The debauchery and ignorance, the drunkenness and vice, the immorality cited as among high and low alike, the graft and bribery, the gambling and cursing—and so on down the sordid schedule—force us to ask whether the picture is a true one or whether some Rembrandt has been among the historians.

When one historian writes, "Our light looks like the evening of the world," and another, "We should take great care not to overshoot ourselves even in the pursuit of virtue," and yet a third, "The first great duty of religion is to be tepid," the question arises as to whether they are fairly reflecting their age. Is Addison painting too vividly when he writes in the *Spectator*, "A father is often afraid that his daughter should be ruined by those entertainments which were invented for the accomplishment and refining of human nature"? Or when Fielding wrote that gin was "the principal sustenance of more than a hundred thousand people in the metropolis of London alone" and predicted that "should the present drinking of this poison be continued . . . for the next twenty years, there will, by that time, be very few of the common people left to drink it," was he exaggerating the evil?

The quotes could be multiplied, but the point is that the writers are not overstating the evil of their contemporary England. It is not only to eighteenth-century historians, whose main occupation was the rubbing of eighteenth-century dust from their eyes, to whom we turn for the authentic note; we turn also to succeeding generations, who were able to stand off and see clearly. Take this from Wesley Bready: "Till toward the end of the fifth decade, indeed, it seemed as though, when the century had run its course, its certain epitaph would be

ICHABOD: for the glory of the land of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton had steadily been ebbing away; and dawn was long deferred."

The Social Scene

When John Wesley was born, darkness covered the land and gross darkness the people. There were more poverty-stricken people in England than in any other European country, and in no city were beggars found in greater numbers than in London.

Hand in hand with appalling poverty walked abysmal ignorance. Tyreman has the shocking story of an incident in Cornwall. It appears that a prolonged thunderstorm had driven the villagers to the local saloon in terror of judgment day. Nowhere else in the village was there a religious book, but here at the gin shop there was, it seemed, a prayer book, and the saloonkeeper was the only reader among them. As he acted the priest in a most pompous manner, someone butted in to say that he was not reading from the prayer book but from *Robinson Crusoe*! The saloon man's ingenious defense was, "There are as good prayers in *Robinson Crusoe* as in any other book."

Jails were rat-infested, bug-ridden dens of darkness, and in them languished crowds of prisoners who had been thrust there for some paltry offenses and many of whom were doomed for public execution. These public hangings in their turn provided the public with one source of brutalizing pleasure. Even the great Dr. Johnstone defended these lurid spectacles as late as 1783, crying, "Sir! Executions are intended to draw spectators. If they do not, they don't answer their purpose . . . the public was gratified by a procession; the criminal was supported by it; why is all this swept away?"

Yet for every criminal thus dealt with there were scores of others in the dark dens and alleys of London and out on the muddy, boggy roads of the land.

If, as Simon says, the character of a people may be judged by their amusements, the people of the early eighteenth century will not rate high. A degenerate and immoral theater was the main amusement, and even Addison and Garrick had small success in their attempt to clean it up. Among the sports, cockfighting held pride of place, and it is on record that in one pit alone one hundred birds were slain in one day. Few people seem to have felt any disgust at such scenes.

The poverty is beyond description. There were only eight million people in England in 1772 and for the most part these lived in squalor and misery. Their homes were hovels; working hours were long; work was hard, and the wages but a comparative pittance. The average earnings of a male textile worker were about \$1.50 weekly, and not always paid in cash! A woman could earn 80c and a child about 35c. Children were thrust into the "dark Satanic mills" at the most tender ages. Some survived.

The *Journal* and letters of Wesley abound in vivid references to the social conditions of the land. "I have seen it with my eyes in every corner of the land," he wrote as he described the poverty and need: "I have known those who could only afford to eat a little coarse food once every other day. I have known one in London . . . picking up from a dunghill stinking sprats, and carrying them home for herself and for her children. I have known another gathering the bones which the dogs had left in the streets, and making a broth of them to prolong a wretched life."

Wesley turned a keen eye upon these conditions, and traced the bulk of the poverty to the unemployment and high cost of living. The high cost of food he traced in turn to the social evil of liquor. He flayed the distillers with words that burned and blistered: They are "poisoners general. They murder his Majesty's subjects by wholesale, neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive

them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is it not the blood of these men?"

The Spiritual Scene

A spiritual paralysis had fallen upon the land of England in the eighteenth century, and it would be difficult to show the full extent of the blight. Let us not forget, of course, that here and there spiritual life can be seen in its beauty and power. Some godly men and women were adorning the doctrine of Christ, and these sprinkled throughout the nation were its saving salt. But by and large, religion was a very dry root out of a very dry land; it was spiritually paralyzed with a paralysis that shocked historians and preachers alike. Green, the historian, describes the clergy of the period as "the idlest and most lifeless in the world"; and Charles Wesley the preacher, even the most ardent of Anglicans, reveals his shame also. "Before I went forth into the streets and highways," he writes, "I sent, after my custom, to borrow the church. The minister . . . sent back a civil message that he would be glad to drink a glass of wine with me, but durst not lend me his pulpit for fifty guineas!"

All this has a still more sinister note. By the Act of Uniformity passed in 1622 scores of the best men in the national church had been excommunicated, and the welfare of the people now lay with ministers, who as a group struck a low note in morals and duty. The fox-hunting and drunken pastors, holding a handful of parishes while caring for none, could not lift the people nor lighten their darkness. The blind were leading the blind and the ditch awaited both!

Charles Wesley's poetic verdict is closest to the point:

*Saw ye not the cloud arise, little as a human hand?
Now it spreads across the skies, hangs o'er all the thirsty
land.*

The Hidden Springs

Many of the Lord's greatest saints and leaders have sprung from godly stock. A slave hut by the Nile sends forth the towering Moses; a humble highland home sends forth Samuel; John the Baptist is cradled in prayer; from Nazareth comes the Christ of God. Paul is raised in the faith of Israel, and Timothy partakes of the faith of his mother and grandmother.

It was thus with the men whom God raised in the midst of the moral and spiritual decadence of the eighteenth century. The blood of holy and courageous saints flowed through the veins of John and Charles Wesley, and to read *Memorials of the Wesley Family* is to call the roll of priest and preachers, monks and chaplains, and to find at least one abbot and a crusader!

Adam Clarke describes the immediate ancestors of John Wesley as having been "respectable for learning, conspicuous for piety, and firmly attached to those virtues of Christianity which they had formed from the sacred Scriptures." This is probably the finest description we can find of them. Both Bartholomew Wesley and his son John Wesley (our hero's great-grandfather and grandfather respectively) had suffered considerably by sticking to their gospel guns. Both were expelled from the national church and became wandering preachers dependent upon the Lord through His people. The latter died when just a little over forty years of age, a man heartbroken for the plight of his nation; and, because the authorities would not permit his body to be buried in the church, he lies in some "unknown grave in the church-yard of Preston" in Dorsetshire.

There are many striking resemblances between John Wesley the grandfather and John Wesley the grandson. Itinerant preaching, passionate evangelism, loyalties deeply held, the will to follow where the truth led, the patient bearing of reproach for Christ's sake—these make them blood-brothers!

Samuel Wesley

In spite of the harsh treatment meted out to Grandfather Wesley, his son Samuel Wesley returned to the fold of the Church of England on the grounds of personal persuasion and principle. In this power of decision he too reveals the characteristics of his forebears. He is forever known to history, not for his own accomplishments so much as for being the father of John and Charles Wesley, the revivalists of the eighteenth century. But we shall have more of Samuel later.

Dr. Annesley

On the maternal side also John Wesley was linked with the aristocracy of heaven. "How many children has Dr. Annesley?" enquired someone at the baptism of Annesley's new baby, Susanna: "I believe," came the answer, "it is about two dozen or a quarter of a hundred!" The accurate figure was two dozen! And that twenty-fourth child was Susanna, who was soon to reveal that she had gathered into her own character all the zeal, godliness, determination, and orderliness of the great Dr. Annesley himself.

Annesley was noted as a most gifted and powerful preacher. He was eulogized by no less a person than Daniel Defoe and he also had suffered for the sake of his Master. He too had left the established church, but had been spared the traveling agonies of the Wesley ancestors. His life was marked by deep and continuous consecration to Christ and a tremendous zeal for righteousness.

Such then was the father of Susanna Annesley, and his youngest daughter soon revealed that she possessed her father's noble qualities. Her name is forever linked with John and Charles Wesley, her sons. She became the mother of Methodism.

The Streams Unite

Samuel Wesley was in love! This experience, thrilling enough for any man, was particularly wonderful to

Samuel. The young lady was Susanna Annesley, now sweet and serious thirteen. There was no doubt about either the "sweet" or the "serious," for Susanna was very lovely in appearance. Her sister had "sat" for the great artist Lely, but Susanna was reputed to be the more lovely one. As for being "serious," this young lady Susanna could at thirteen discuss logic, metaphysics, and anatomy—to say nothing of her subtle understanding of the controversy between the Anglicans and the Nonconformists, nor of her firm grip on the doctrine of the Trinity!

For his part Samuel was quite a scholar too. He had been acknowledged as a linguist when commissioned to translate the works of John Biddle from Latin into English, and had blossomed as a theologian of repute by laying down the task of this translation when he discovered that Biddle was the "father of the English Unitarians." And Samuel was a poet too, although of somewhat doubtful fame!

Romance

Susanna and Samuel spent many hours together in the discussion of religious and spiritual questions; and the more they considered their personal positions, the more did they tend towards the Anglican fold, from which their fathers had gone. Soon they returned to it.

Some separation was called for while Samuel, having left the Nonconformists' ranks (those who did not agree with the Anglican church), went to Exeter College, Oxford. Here he was an unqualified success as a student, and, as it turned out, also a "financial success." Having entered the university with two pounds and ten shillings (\$7.50), he left with over ten pounds (\$30.00) plus his education!

Samuel Wesley was ordained priest of the Church of England in 1689, and with his stipend of thirty pounds (\$90.00) a year and the income from the publication of

his first book (with the creepy title of *Maggots*), he felt free to marry his youthful sweetheart, Susanna Annesley, who was now full twenty summers old.

Marriage

It is strange that no one seems to have thought it worthwhile to record the date of the wedding nor the name of the church in which it took place! Somewhere in London, late in 1689, Samuel and Susanna were married according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England. Before the wedding Dr. Annesley preached a preparatory sermon on "This Is a Great Mystery," showing that Christ and His Church reveal the best pattern for all Christian marriages. Had the good doctor known the future of the young couple and their children, he would doubtless have rejoiced at the magnitude of the mystery!

Homes . . . Babies . . . and a Fire!

The newlyweds lived for a little while in Holburn, and here Samuel Wesley, Jr., was born. Soon the little family removed to South Ormsby in Lincolnshire, where they lived in a house of which little is known save what the Rector Samuel wrote about it:

*In a mean cot, composed of reed and clay,
Wasting in sighs the uncomfortable day:*

*.
Let the earth go where it will, I'll not repine,
Nor can unhappy be while heaven is mine.*

Six babies were born while the Wesleys lived at Ormsby: Susanna, Jr., Emilia, Annesley, Jedidiah, Susanna III, and Mary. Of these six babies three died, namely, Susanna Jr., Annesley, and Jedidiah. Indeed in the first seven years of her married life Susanna Wesley bore seven children and buried three of them. One biographer insists that "that was a creditable proportion for those days"!

Epworth

In 1697 the family moved to Epworth in Lincolnshire and in that year came another baby, Mehetabel by name. The year following Hetty was born, a girl who became the most brilliant of the Wesley sisters.

Between the years 1697 and 1701 Mrs. Wesley had sorrows enough to break her gentle heart. During those years five more babies came to the rectory, and all five were buried in the churchyard. Yet England's greatest mother stood up nobly to all the harrowing sorrow of it and bore more than a fair share of the burden of the church and the poverty of the home. Added to all of this was the downright savagery of the barbarous inhabitants of the fens around Epworth. Epworth is situated on an island created by the three rivers Trent, Don, and Idle. When the Wesleys arrived in 1697, the village was surrounded by marshland called "the fens." These fens were peopled by men who delighted in the chief occupations provided by the marshes, namely, fishing and hunting.

The trouble was that the government had salvaged much of the land and had given much of the reclaimed ground to the Dutch and French Protestants who had assisted in the draining. This had been bitterly opposed by the local "fenmen," who had not only resented the draining away of the water but even more deeply opposed the granting of the ground to the strangers.

The whole affair was at its height when the new rector arrived with his family, and Samuel had not helped things by befriending the government tax collector! So the men of the fens gave Samuel and Susanna a tough time. They stabbed the rector's cattle, wounded his dog, and more serious still, they willfully set fire to the rectory and stubbornly resisted all the efforts made to befriend them.

Both Susanna and Samuel had very decided personal opinions about most things and sometimes they had to

agree to differ; sometimes it was more serious. John Wesley tells a story that has become famous:

"'Sukey,' said my father to my mother one day after family prayer, 'why did you not say Amen this morning to my prayer for the king?' 'Because,' said she, 'I do not believe the Prince of Orange to be the king.' 'If that be the case,' said he, 'you and I must part: for if we have two kings we must have two beds.' My mother was inflexible. My father went immediately to his study, and after spending some time with himself, set out for London. Being convocation man for the diocese of Lincoln, he remained there for the remainder of the year.'"

But in the providence of God, the Prince of Orange died and Anne succeeded him. There being no question about her right to reign, Mr. Wesley returned to Epworth in time for the birth of yet another daughter, whom he named Anne in honor of their mutual queen!

Birth of John Wesley

On June 17, 1703, another baby came to the Epworth rectory, a boy this time. He was given two Christian names and was the only Wesley child to be thus endowed when baptized at the old octagonal font in the church. The names were "John Benjamin Wesley."

John came as the thirteenth child of his parents and the seventh to survive. Six more children were born in the rectory, but only three of these survived infancy: these three were Martha, Kezzia, and Charles.

The Mother of Methodism

Poverty, stark and grim, haunted the Wesley family. The rector was seldom out of debt and was frequently the victim of men who had neither grace nor mercy. He was jailed in the debtors' prison at Lincoln and describes his cell as a "mouldy old jail sunk a thousand fathoms below nothing," yet he reckoned the jail to be a para-

dise compared with his trials at Epworth, his only worry being his wife and family.

It was upon Susanna that the burdens fell. Samuel could frequently pack his bags and enjoy a pleasant time at convocation, or he could escape into his writing; but Susanna had to sustain the battle against grim poverty, and bravely did she do so.

"Tell me, Mrs. Wesley," queried Archbishop Sharpe once, "whether you ever really wanted bread." In mingled honesty and pride Susanna replied, "I will freely own to your grace that strictly speaking I never did want bread. But then I had so much care to get it before it was eat, and to pay for it after, as has often made it very unpleasant to me: and I think, to have bread on such terms is the next degree of wretchedness to having none at all." Next morning the archbishop made her a handsome present!

The children were Susanna's constant care, and she could with truth claim, "Never were children in better order." She nurtured soul as well as body, so that each child was personally dealt with about spiritual things once every week in a period set apart for that child. In later years John, no mean judge himself, fell back upon his mother's wisdom, and in the stern battle of life he yearned to have "his hour" again: "If you can spare me only that little part of Thursday evening," he wrote, "which you formerly bestowed upon me in another manner I doubt not it would be as useful now for correcting my heart as it was then for forming my judgement."

Susanna also educated her children, and overcame the dullness of Samuel and the backwardness of Kezzy. At five years they were taught to read, one day only being allowed for the learning of the alphabet. Only Molly and Nancy failed in this task; they took a day and a half and were therefore considered dull! On the second day each child began reading at Genesis one, verse one;

and as Church remarks, "John was developing that all his life!"

Susanna tended her own soul also, setting aside two hours each day for personal prayer and meditation, saying, "No business, unless it cannot be laid aside or suspended without sin, can be of equal, much less of greater importance, than caring for the soul."

Fire!

The date is February 9, 1709. The family sleep soundly. The clock hands "are snipping off another day." Suddenly through silence of the long, eerie corridors rips the cry, "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

That frantic yell roused all the sleepers except little John. Susanna dashed for the door of the nursery and roused the maid and the girls, who ran for safety. The nurse carried the baby, Charles. Somehow or other they got outside and the rector gathered his family around him in the lurid glare of the flames. And then horror gripped the parents' hearts—little John was not with them! He was still inside the blazing building!

In his upstairs bedroom the little fellow roused at long last, spluttered a bit, rubbed his smarting eyes, dashed to the window, and threw it open. Back to the door he ran, but there is no way through. Over to the window again, and out onto the ledge. As he stood there silhouetted against the glare, the crowd saw him and one man clambered swiftly on the shoulders of another, thus reaching the window, and lifted the lad down . . . just as the roof caved in!

The house was gutted by the fire, and what little they had of worldly goods was gone. Nevertheless the rector knew his riches, and kneeling down with his wife, family, and neighbors, he said, "Come, neighbors, let us kneel down; let us give thanks to God; let the house

go. He has given me all my eight children; I am rich enough."

That fire left vivid memories in the minds of John and Charles, and John in later years stopped public worship in order to give thanks for his deliverance from the flames. Charles has a background of fire for his hymns.

A Girl's Memories

On the whole, childhood days were happy for the young Wesleys. They were not repressed, nor were their wills broken—at least not in the sense in which some have taken those terms. Even Hetty, looking back, could write, poetically of course, and in true Wesleyan tempo:

*We wandered innocent through the sylvan scene—
Or tripped like fairies o'er the level green.
Youth, wit, good nature, candour, sense, combined
To serve, delight, and civilise mankind.*

Parents' Verdicts

John's hardheaded qualities began to show early. "I profess, Sweetheart," the rector nodded wisely to his wife one day, "I think our Jack would not eat his dinner unless he could give a reason for it." No doubt Jack could!

As for Susanna and Jack, there came a day when she wrote, maybe with the memory of the fire alive in her heart: "Evening May 17 1717, Son John: what shall I render to the Lord for all His mercies? I would offer myself and all that Thou hast given me; and I would resolve—O give me grace to do it—that the residue of my life shall be devoted to Thy service. And I do intend to be more particularly careful with the soul of this child that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever

I have been; that I may instill into his mind the principles of true religion and virtue. Lord, give me grace to do it sincerely and prudently."

Coming Events . . .

In 1711 an interesting episode occurred, an incident described by Crook as an "illustration of the Non-conformity remaining in the mind and heart of Susanna."

Samuel Wesley went up that year to London, and his place in the parish was filled by a curate who was both blundering and inefficient. In her concern for the spiritual well-being of the parishioners, Susanna decided to hold services in her home. These were held on Sundays and the attendance swelled until anywhere from thirty to almost two hundred tried to attend.

Susanna wrote jubilantly to Samuel about the wholesome effect upon the community and the change the services were making in the attitude of the people to the rector's family. But the curate was not so sure. Indeed he was furious and fearful and spoke of the meeting being "a conventicle" and thus illegal. He wrote in similar strain to Samuel in London, who in turn ordered Susanna (as nearly as he could!) to cease holding these services in the rectory. But that intrepid lady replied in such strain as threw the whole responsibility for the possible backsliding of the people upon the rector, and he was pleased to leave the matter to her!

"If you do after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you *desire* it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your positive command in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment, for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Annesleys and Wesleys had spoken in that manner before; and they would soon do so again!

FOR FURTHER READING:

SIMON, J. S. *The Revival of Religion in England in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Epworth Press.

BRAILS福德, MABEL. *Susanna Wesley*. London: Epworth Press, 1938.

SOMETHING TO DO:

1. Contrast the life of Voltaire and that of John Wesley.
2. Debate the value of the maternal and paternal backgrounds of John Wesley.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How do the moral and social conditions today compare with those in the eighteenth century?
2. What was the size and condition of the family of Susanna and Samuel Wesley?
3. What characteristic of Susanna Wesley is most significant and why?

CHAPTER TWO

THE YOUTH FROM THE FENS

Rev. Samuel Wesley was a poor man all his life. He was also a most impractical fellow. Yet he could lay claim to being rich in one very real way, and to having done at least one thing well. He could claim to be rich in his talented and handsome family; and he could, even in old age, lay claim to having given his sons "the best education I could get them in England." Each of his three sons attended one or other of the two famous London schools, Westminster and Charterhouse; and all three went up to Oxford University.

Charterhouse School

John's school was Charterhouse, and he went thither after having had his name on the waiting list for three years. In May, 1711, the Duke of Buckingham nominated "John Benjamin Wesley, son of my chaplain the Rev. Samuel Wesley of Epworth," as a fit candidate for the school which admitted "persons exceedingly well-connected, but really poor"—a pretty accurate description of the Wesley family! But it was January, 1714, before John left the seclusion of Epworth and its fens for the bustle that was London.

What a box of tricks London would be to the lad from the fens! Here he was, a boy whose life had hitherto been spent in the company of a batch of little girls in a parsonage in a remote village, suddenly plunged into the midst of about seventy other boys in a school of some distinction right in the heart of a throbbing city. Perhaps his mother, being herself a Londoner, had fore-

armed him; certainly her discipline and training were now to be a strong staff to him.

John bravely endured the rigors of public-school life. The domineering of the younger element by the seniors seems to have agitated him a bit, and the theft of his food he came to see as a blessing in disguise! Indeed many years later he wrote of this: "How marvellous are the ways of God! How He has kept me ever from a child! From ten to thirteen or fourteen I had little but bread to eat and not great plenty of that. I believe this was so far from hurting me that it laid the foundation of lasting health."

It is hardly to be expected that visitors to the school would pay much if any attention to a little, wiry form trotting round the green. John put this exercise on his daily program at his dad's advice, and found it a wonderful way of keeping fit; and, incidentally, of raising an appetite which was but little appeased by the meager rations of the dining hall! But what can a youngster do when there are no organized recreations at school?

While at Charterhouse, John earned a reputation for "quietness, regularity, and application." Dr. Walker, the schoolmaster, and Andrew Tooke, the usher, laid worthy foundations of learning in Wesley's young mind. The former, who is described as a "most exact scholar in Greek, Latin and Hebrew," probably laid the base of Wesley's classical knowledge. The latter, described as "a scientist of ability and brilliant mathematician," raised an altar to Euclid in Wesley's mind and should probably collect both the credit and blame for Wesley's near-worship of the science!

"Old Jeffery"

One day the mailbag brought stirring news from Epworth. "Stirring," that is, to a teen-age schoolboy! The parsonage was haunted! No doubt about it! Queer things

were happening around the old homestead. A ghost was having a fine time in the attics and corridors, but mostly around the girls' rooms! Loud rattings were being heard; unseen hands were rocking the cradle; doors were being thrown open; a "strange creature"—now like a badger and then like a white rabbit—had been seen! Even the levelheaded Susanna had seen the thing!

These queer goings on lasted for almost two months and seem to have been witnessed by everyone save the rector. It may be that he was too busy with his book on *Job*—sometimes called "the family incubus"! At any rate, the manservant and the maidservant both saw and heard weird things. The sight caused the maid's hair to stand up on end; and Robert, the servant, said the ghost made a sound like a turkey. At other times the sound was as of the rattling of bottles, the clinking of coins, the splintering of coal, or the rubbing of some strange beast against the wall.

Yet no one was the least scared. On the contrary, even the girls seemed to have enjoyed the attentions of this queer visitor and affectionately named him "Old Jeffery." The ghost paid his last respectful visit to the parsonage in January, 1717, and left behind him a curious group of females, and one unimpressed male in the person of the rector.

John was sorry to be missing it all, but later in life he collected, examined, sifted, and arranged all the evidence, and came to the conclusion that the rectory had suffered—or enjoyed—a genuine ghostly visitation.

Wesley remained at Charterhouse until 1720, and all his life retained a deep affection for the school. He visited it frequently in the months following his conversion, and sometimes vacationed there in order to enjoy its solitude in which to meditate.

And Charterhouse remembers John Wesley! The school gave him a place in her song:

*Wesley, John Wesley was one of our company,
Prophet untiring and fearless of tongue;
Down the long years he went, spending yet never spent,
Serving his God with a heart ever young.*

As recently as 1937 a tablet was unveiled in the school "to the memory of John Wesley."

Spiritual Life

At the time of his leaving Charterhouse school, Wesley was not happy about his spiritual condition. In 1738, when writing a brief review of his life, he says, "I believe, till I was about ten years old, I had not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism: having been strictly educated and carefully taught that I could only be saved by 'universal obedience,' by keeping all the commandments of God. But all that was said to me of inward obedience of holiness I neither understood nor remembered. So that I was indeed as ignorant of the true meaning of the law as I was of the gospel of Christ."

Tyreman says that "John Wesley entered Charterhouse a saint and left it a sinner"; but this is exaggerated. It is true that John speaks of having been guilty of outward sins; but he also says that he read his Bible, prayed, and went to church. There is no need for us to overaccentuate his deeply personal assessment of soul as a boy leaving Charterhouse in order to magnify his conversion almost twenty years later. John had not been entirely alone in London during those days, for big brother Samuel was schoolmaster over at Westminster, and took a fatherly interest in John. From the correspondence that flowed between the Samuel in London and the other Samuel in Epworth, we are able to say that, although John had reason for concern over his almost mechanical attitude to the spiritual life, and needed the saving grace of God, he was very far from being as deep a sinner as Tyreman seems to imply.

Oxford University

Wesley went to Christ College, Oxford, in 1720, when he was but seventeen years old. He soon discovered, however, that the university was noted for neither industry nor morality, and was probably deserving of the scathing criticisms that had been hurled at it. Indeed, those judgments passed by others on life at Oxford soon became his own opinion of the place; and he came to no very high estimate of these academic groves. Later in life he wrote: "The moment a young man sets foot either in Oxford or Cambridge he is surrounded with a company of all kinds, except that which would do him good . . . with men who no more concern themselves with learning than religion."

The moral tone of the place was bad. There is not lacking evidence that gross immorality and license were now found under the towers and spires of the university whose halls had echoed to the bugle notes of Wycliffe and the gentler tones of Cranmer and Ridley. If anyone desires to know what Wesley came to think of Oxford, let him read those sermons which John preached there. In 1747 he wrote in his *Journal*, "I see not why a man of tolerable understanding may not learn in six months time more of solid philosophy than is learned at Oxford in four (perhaps seven) years." In a letter to his mother he complains that Oxford is opposed even to a proper use of time and money.

But it is chiefly in his sermon "Scriptural Christianity" that Wesley leaps to attack Oxford University and city. After a close questioning of his congregation, "Where, I pray, do the Christians live?" he accuses: "So many of you are a generation of triflers; triflers with God, with one another, and with your own souls. In the name of the Lord God Almighty, I ask, what religion are you of? Even the talk of Christianity ye cannot, will not bear. O my brethren, what a Christian city is this! 'It is time for Thee, Lord, to lay to Thine hand!'"

That sermon, preached only seventeen years after Wesley had taken his degree at the university, reflects fairly the environment into which he stepped upon leaving Charterhouse in 1720.

Debt to Oxford

Oxford's critics succeeded in finding their scholastic training there! Even John Wesley! He was fortunate to have at least two able tutors to offset the indolence of the professors, and his course at Oxford became successful to a degree not then common.

In four years he completed his work for the B.A. degree, but probably the chief gain of those years was the deepening of his love of knowledge. He came to know Greek, Latin, Spanish, German, French, Italian, and that list surely testifies to the successful planting in him of the love of knowledge.

Diary

John was not easy in his spirit. He felt that he was squandering time; and in April, 1725, he began to keep a record of his life and employment of time. An old and worn notebook had come into his possession. It bore the names of John Wesley and Samuel Wesley, and to these John soon added in his neat, round hand, "John Wesley."

What a trio is there! What heaven-born courage, holy suffering, and achievement are mirrored in these three names on that yellow old page! It is small wonder that about this time, 1725, John's life shows evidence of spiritual concern and desire more intense than ever before.

Discipline

It is well to consider John's assessment of himself at this point. He writes, "Being removed to the university for five years, I still said my prayers both in public and

in private, and read, with the Scriptures, several other books of religion, especially comments on the New Testament . . . I cannot well tell what I hoped to be saved by now . . . unless by those transient fits of what so many divines taught me to call repentance."

That phrase "transient fits" seems indicative of a restless heart, and it is clear that John Wesley was in the throes of a deep spiritual struggle.

In 1725 a new phase begins. So marked indeed is its commencement that John himself wrote, "I began to alter the whole form of my conversation and to set in earnest upon a new life." Some have wanted to call this his "conversion"; but, vital as was the year 1725 to Wesley, he was not converted then. Nevertheless, it is important to realize how crucial this year was. Hear his own words, "When I was about twenty-two, my father pressed me to enter into holy orders. At the same time, the providence of God directing me to a Kempis's CHRISTIAN PATTERN, I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions."

The Christian Ministry

In the vital year of 1725 Wesley, after correspondence with his parents (more especially his mother), turned his face towards his lifework. Hitherto swithering, he now became determined to enter the priesthood of the Church of England, and was ordained deacon in September of that same year.

In 1725 came also his reading of a Kempis and Jeremy Taylor, two writers by whom he was profoundly impressed, although disagreeing with them on some points. Correspondence flowed between John and his mother concerning the teachings of these authors and specialists of the life of the soul. These letters savor more of the findings of two connoisseurs of theology than they do of messages from mother and son.

Wesley scrutinized his soul in the light of the works of a Kempis and Taylor and made many resolutions relative to his spiritual life, including fasting "every Wednesday in a month, never to laugh or talk idly in church" (a brand of irreverence widespread in his time), and as a counter-offensive to unclean thoughts, "to remember God's omnipresence."

The Fellow of Lincoln College

John's sound scholarship is manifest in the fact that in 1726 he was elected fellow of Lincoln College, while he was yet twenty-three years of age. This signal honor meant a great deal to him in a number of ways: it gave him new and higher status at the university; and it brought him a new allowance of money, the scarcity of which had constantly embarrassed him hitherto.

The honor meant much to his mother also. She wrote in her sober way, and with her happy knack of keeping to the point, "I consider myself bound to return abundant thanks to Almighty God who has given this great success to our Lincoln Fellow." But to the rector of Epworth it meant the very opening of heaven! His jubilation knew no bounds, and despite the fact that it was only March when John's election was announced, and it was yet five months until harvest, the rugged old warrior cried, "I have not five pounds to keep my family till after harvest . . . What does it matter? . . . Wherever I am, my Jack is *Fellow of Lincoln!*"

Meanwhile John was busy. "Leisure and I have parted company," he declared as he gave himself to lecturing in Greek, presiding over the debating society, his writing, and to the keeping of his diary in shorthand—Wesley style! He studied his Bible, prayed, fasted, and generally gave brother Samuel strong reason for supposing that he "was shortening time and ensuring eternity."

In 1727 came John's M.A. degree, and he threw himself into an even stricter program of studies and spiritual discipline, saying, "I have drawn up for myself a scheme of studies, from which I do not intend, for some years at least, to vary." He agreed with his mother that there was truth "not worth while to know," and that it would be "an ill-husbandry of time to spend a considerable part of this small pittance now allowed us, in what makes neither a quick nor a sure return." And, so applying himself, John was ordained priest in October, 1727.

John Wesley was a scholar of the highest rank. That fact is not always remembered by those who review his life and work. He held no mean place in the university, and was clearly a man of keen mind and wide learning which would have graced any chair of divinity or the highest pulpit in the land.

The Good Companions

Wesley created for himself a most congenial set of social circumstances also. Although in deadly earnest about his spiritual life he was no recluse. He kept physically fit by riding out and around in the lovely countryside; he enjoyed long walks in the fields and along the hedgerows, and seems to have preferred walking to riding. He relished the noble game of tennis, especially in the earlier university years. It may well be that his adversity was his friend and that his poverty helped to save him from the immoral convivialities of his fellows. The riding, walking, swimming, and tennis not only toughened his apparently slight frame but sharpened his mind also.

He chose his friends carefully. Each of them was hand-picked! He says, "When I formerly removed from one college to another, I fixed my resolution not to be hastily acquainted with anyone; indeed, not to return any visit unless I had reasonable hope of receiving or doing good therein." In the light of this, therefore, John's

friendship with Robert Kirkham is both revealing and comforting. Robert was the son of the rector of Stanton, a delightful country parish not too far from the university. He was of a very cheerful disposition and of spiritual bent of heart. He later became one of the Oxford Methodists.

The home circle of the Kirkhams took Wesley to their delighted and delightful hearts . . . especially the girls! For their part, the girls found John Wesley a most desirable friend, so different from the Oxford "set" they knew. On his side, John found Stanton rectory a most welcome change from the musty study of his room at Oxford, and the girls he soon found most engaging and charmingly helpful.

Sally and Betty Kirkham were greatly different from each other. The elder sister, Sally, was inclined to seriousness; and the younger, Betty, was a most vivacious young lady. John Wesley was certainly a handsome man even though he was rather small. His fine features were topped by a rich growth of auburn hair which fell in sleepy curls down to his shoulders. He refused to have it cut, saying that he had no money to waste on hair-dresser's wages!

Of the two it was really Sally who most deeply influenced John. So true is this that Curnock, the editor of the *Standard Edition of John Wesley's Journal*, names her among the "dominating influences on Wesley." Be that as it may, there is no doubt that John owed much to both sisters. To Betty he owed his introduction to a Kempis and Taylor, whose books so deeply searched his soul. Sally, on the other hand, certainly came to know him better.

During the later years at Oxford another lady joined the group at Stanton, a Mrs. Pendarves by name, to whom John was introduced by the Kirkham sisters. Later still, Charles Wesley joined the company, "a pleasant little society of young people," as it has been called.

In line with current custom the little society adopted classical names. Mrs. Pendarves became Aspasia; Anne Granville, upon joining the group, was dubbed Selina; John became Cyrus; and Sally seems to have alternated between Varenese and Sappho. When Charles came along he was known as Araspes.

Wesley's Lady Friends

Much has been written about John Wesley's relationships with the fair sex. Some of it is entertaining reading but poor biography, and some is unadulterated drivel.

John's life was in the main enriched by these friendships; and although even his most ardent admirers have longed for a degree more of worldly wisdom on his part, they have ever held with the considered judgment of a great modern Methodist who writes, "No one who appreciates the value of evidence could describe them [i.e., these friendships] in the language of vulgar intrigue or amorous adventure."

The Curate of Wroote

About the autumn of 1727, John uprooted himself from Oxford, and, tearing himself away from the pleasant little society at Stanton, he set out for the muddy, boggy, uninspiring Wroote, a little village close to Epworth. Wroote was under the pastoral care of Samuel Wesley, the Epworth rector; but the old priest was weakening, and John, renouncing the satisfactions of Oxford and the pleasures of Stanton, hurried home to the help of his father by taking upon himself the care of Wroote—a place as dull as its name!

For close upon two years Wesley ministered at Wroote. He preached week after week to a people he absolutely failed to reach, all the while feeling down in his own soul the gnawings of a spiritual hunger which would not be satisfied. That blank in his soul remained

whether he was at Oxford, at Stanton, or at Wroote. He came in later years to describe just how he felt at this time. Preaching on "Spiritual Worship," he declared that he was not happy either as a boy at school or as a young man at university: "I was not happy . . . having plenty of all things in the midst of sensible and amiable friends who loved me as I loved them; and being in the way of life, which of all others, suited my inclinations; still I was not happy: the reason was . . . I did not know God the source of present as well as eternal happiness." And then comes the poignant confession, "I knew not one single week which I would have thought it worth to have lived over again!"

Yet those months at Wroote were by no means wasted. He was near to Epworth, and could again take counsel with the mother-confessor of his life, Mrs. Susanna Wesley.

FOR FURTHER READING:

CHURCH, LESLIE F. *Knight of the Burning Heart*. New York: Epworth Press, 1938.

HARRISON, G. ELSIE. *Son to Susanna*. Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938.

SOMETHING TO DO:

Obtain a map of the British Isles and have someone locate Epworth, Wroote, London, and Oxford and determine the distances between them. Discuss the hazards of eighteenth-century travel, and John Wesley's accomplishments on horseback.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What guidance does this chapter give on the question of companionship?
2. What do you think about the "ghost story"?
3. Discuss the advisability of keeping a spiritual diary. What have we gained from John Wesley's?

CHAPTER THREE

"WRESTLING JACOB"

Charles Goes to Oxford

The launching of Charles Wesley upon his university career was made much smoother by the fact that John had prepared the way for him. But the prospects were none too rosy, for the defiant cry that had gone up from the jubilant heart of the rector of Epworth, "Wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln!" had been hotly pursued by a more apprehensive one warning Charles not to expect financial help for some considerable time.

Nevertheless, Charles threw himself into enjoyment of life at the university. He reveled in bright company; and his friendly disposition, his gift of rhyme and music, made him a desirable companion. Charles gave John some anxious moments, resisting his remonstrances with, "What! Would you have me to be a saint all at once?"

John's removal to Wroote shook Charles, and there came a marked change in his behavior. "God has thought fit," he wrote to John, "it may be to increase my wariness, to deny me at present your company and assistance. It is through him strengthening me, I trust to maintain my ground till we meet . . . God will establish what he has begun in me."

The Holy Club

This change of mind in Charles was the original soil of the Holy Club. Having been brought to think more seriously of life and religion, he confided in two friends, Robert Kirkham and William Morgan; and together they agreed to meet for prayer, Scripture reading, and Holy Communion. Their one intention was to deepen their own spiritual life in a systematic manner.

In 1729, John returned from Wroote to assume his duties as fellow of Lincoln College, and almost immediately became the recognized leader of the group. In those days Charles seems to have been content to move in John's shadow. Indeed one of the Holy Club writes, "I never observed a person have a more real deference for another than he constantly had for his brother. Indeed he followed his brother entirely. Could I describe one of them I should describe both."

Characteristically, John drew up a system of rules for the group. They would meet "four evenings a week . . . to read . . . the classics which they had already read in private, and on Sunday evenings some book on Divinity." Thus the generalship of John was soon felt, and before long every evening was devoted to prayer, reading the Greek New Testament, and a system of soul scrutiny fit to shame the most zealous monk.

Works of charity were added, such as feeding the hungry, clothing and teaching the poor, and prison visitation. This last came through the report of Mr. Morgan, who told John that he had "called at the jail . . . and verily believed it would do much good" if the prisoners were visited periodically. The club agreed to do this once or twice a week.

The Methodists

The spectacle of some young men taking religion seriously was almost too much for Oxford! It had an impact such as that of the early Christians in Antioch, and the undergraduates vied with the wits of Antioch in finding a nickname. "They were first called 'Methodists' at Oxford." Yet it should be remembered that only the Wesleys had much further connection with the Methodist Societies.

The rector of Epworth wholly approved of the activities of his sons and proudly wrote that if John was

being styled "the father of the Holy Club" then certainly the rector must be "grandfather of it."

George Whitefield

One of the later members of the group was George Whitefield. He had stood swithering on the fringe of the fellowship for some time, but Charles brought him right into it.

He first associated with the Oxford Methodists in 1735 and his name has been linked with the Wesleys ever since. Charles was especially attracted by the lad from Gloucester who became a close friend of both brothers and an effective co-worker for many years.

"A Serious Call"

A Serious Call to a Holy and Devout Life, a little book written by William Law, master of arts and fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, must be reckoned among the works which most profoundly influenced John Wesley. John is on record as witnessing that Law's works convinced him "more than ever, of the impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined . . . to be all devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance."

Law's book virtually stunned the Holy Club, and led them to review their use of time. Its insistence upon following Christ "in our common way of spending every day" led to more rigorous fastings, more frequent devotions, and earlier rising.

But, despite these disciplines and multiplied good works, inner peace eluded John's grasp. He almost made shipwreck. Fitchett well says, "The strain of such a religion as that on which Wesley was now trying to live was too much for human nature. Even Wesley's tough body . . . broke down." He worried brothers Samuel and Charles, and gave mother Susanna good reason to suppose that he was on the verge of consumption.

With weary heart he turned to Susanna once more, wishing that he could again have "only that little part of Thursday evening" which had been his privilege as a child.

All through those months there runs the same familiar strain, "to save our own souls"; and if any man had deserved salvation by works it was John Wesley in those days.

Death of the Rector

"In the spring of 1735," writes Wesley, "I was suddenly called to attend my dying father." So to Epworth he hurried.

Surrounded by his family, Rev. Samuel Wesley died like an old-time patriarch! To him Epworth had been a valley of Achor, but in his death he saw it to be a door of hope for all England. "Be steady," he urged the family. "The Christian faith will surely revive in this kingdom. You shall see it, though I shall not!" And with the prophecy of revival the rector gave his dying word on the evidence of personal faith: "The inward witness, my son . . . this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity." A short pause, and then, "Do not be concerned at my death. God will then begin to manifest Himself to my family." And with that the rector of Epworth was gone! For full forty years he had been in Epworth; and whatever his many critics have said, he fought a good fight as best he knew how.

The rector was laid to rest in the yard of his own church. The old home, hearthstone of Methodism, was broken up. Susanna went to live with Emilia at her school in Gainsborough, and the three sons set about piloting the rector's massive book on *Job* through the press.

Succeeding at last in publishing *Job*, John returned to London with a copy for the queen. Caroline received

John as she sat among her giggling girls, but did not even open *Job*! Receiving the book with a royal gesture, she made the right-royal comment, "It is prettily bound." Poor Caroline . . . poor Samuel . . . poor Job!

Off to America

"Almost as soon as I returned to Oxford I was obliged to go to London . . . I was strangely solicited to go to Georgia, in order to preach to the Indians . . . Many providential incidents followed, which at length constrained me . . . so that on October 14th 1755, Mr. Ingham, Mr. Delamotte, my brother and I embarked for America."

John sought counsel from one person only—Susanna. The reply given by that amazing woman is now almost proverbial: "Had I twenty sons, I would rejoice if they were all so employed!"

In deciding to go to America, Wesley was revealing an almost inherited urge to reach the heathen. From Epworth the family had looked out upon the whole wide world. Both Samuel and Susanna had shown deep concern for the heathen, and Grandfather Wesley was a most zealous friend of foreign missions.

The Colony

The Wesleys were going to what was really an experiment in philanthropy. Oglethorpe, founder of the Georgia colony, was the friend of small debtors who had been harshly imprisoned. This good man had, at great sacrifice, founded the colony in order to open a new door to life for those whose release he secured. He suffered the hardships of colonization with them. Returning to Georgia after business in London, he took back with him Charles Wesley as his secretary, John as pastor, and Ingham and Delamotte for no known reason. Charles was not sure that he should go, and events showed that he would have done more good at home; but he went

for John's sake, saying, "My brother, who always had the ascendancy over me, persuaded me."

The Voyage

The Wesleys were not popular aboard the "Simmonds." They tried to impose Holy Club discipline upon the unwilling passengers; and the voyage was not a pleasant affair. Indeed it would not have been such even in pleasant weather. To make it worse, storm after storm threatened to wreck the ship and struck terror into the hearts of nearly everyone. One such dreadful hurricane brought "fearful cries" and "terrible screaming" from all aboard. "All," that is, except a small group of Moravians from Germany. These devout people gave Wesley his first real insight into the religion of inward assurance by calmly singing at the very height of the storm.

"Were you not afraid?" Wesley asked them. "No," they replied, "we are not afraid to die." John could not but admire and envy them, saying for himself, "I am not willing to die."

The Misfit

In February, 1736, the party arrived at their destination and John went to Savannah, Charles to Frederica.

John was disillusioned almost immediately as far as the Indians were concerned, for he found that they were not, as he had expected, the "unspoiled children of nature," but sinners like the rest of men! And in any case, his ministry lay almost entirely among the difficult colonists from Europe.

The colony was riddled with scandal and intrigue, and John was soon in hot water—first over Charles, and later because of his own lack of discretion and too rigid discipline.

Charles was a complete misfit. He endeavored to straitjacket the entire community in Holy Club religion. He sought to compel everyone to down tools and toys

and come to church four times a day at the beat of a drum. He opened his ears too widely to gossip, especially that of Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Welsh—two women who had given considerable trouble on the voyage across. These women now turned their tongues upon Oglethorpe and spread the tale of their supposed guilty associations with him.

The lying gossip found lodging in the mind of Charles and effectively severed him from his employer, so that within one month of his arrival he wrote, "I was enabled to pray earnestly for my enemies, particularly Mr. Oglethorpe, whom I now looked upon as the chief of them." This disastrous condition brought John posthaste from Savannah, and only his sympathy (Charles would have called it some other name) succeeded in restoring some small degree of harmony to the situation.

But Charles had had enough of Georgia, and Georgia had had enough of Charles! Oglethorpe decided to return Charles to England with some letter for the trustees of the colony; so after having submitted a rather nasty resignation couched in verse, Charles gratefully left for England only a few months after having set foot in Georgia.

The Holy Lover

When John Wesley first met Sophy Hopkey she was but sweet eighteen. He describes her in the language of adoring wonder! She was "humble and meek . . . born without anger . . . wholly made up of mildness, longsuffering, and gentleness . . . a friend to human kind," and much more to the same effect. In short, there is no doubting the fact that John Wesley was in love with this charming young lady; nor can we have any doubt but that his affections were returned—not unopened!

The whole affair is an astounding tangle of love avowals, half-avowals, and romantic sparring. Wesley

even went the length of a half-proposal of marriage, and chose a most striking time for such an adventure—in a boat, on rough waters, and soaked to the skin!

Sophy's guardian tried hard by various methods to bring Wesley to the desired point, but all to no avail; and the whole business came to a most inglorious end. Sophy was married to a man she hardly knew by a clergyman she knew not at all; and John denied her the means of grace at the Lord's table, for what he called her backsliding! Thereupon, Sophy's guardian and her husband sued Wesley for defamation of character.

Despite Wesley's efforts to bring the case before the magistrate, it did not reach any satisfactory conclusion and was really the final blow at Wesley's usefulness in Georgia. So he gave honest notice of resignation, shook the Georgian dust from his feet, and boarded the "Samuel" on Christmas Eve, 1737, enroute for England. He had been in America about twenty months.

Retreat

John preached regularly aboard ship on the return voyage, but the whole journey was an emotional and spiritual purgatory. Turning his attentions to two Negroes and a Frenchman, he assiduously tried to "compass their salvation"; but he was himself a disappointed man. Nevertheless, he faced himself with typical candor, "I went to America to convert the Indians: but, oh, who shall convert me?"

Strange are the ways of God! As the "Samuel" came close to England another vessel passed her, outward bound; and aboard that boat was George Whitefield of the Holy Club, bound for Georgia!

Wesley landed at Deal and immediately conducted morning devotions in the inn. He then took breakfast and left at once for London to face the Georgia trustees. As he neared the great city his thoughts took clear shape:

"Many reasons have I to bless God . . . for my having been carried into that strange land . . . Hereby God has given me to know many of His servants . . . my passage is opened to the writings of holy men in the German, Spanish, and Italian tongues" [he had studied languages while in America] . . . all in Georgia have heard the Word of God. Some have believed."

Nor did he hesitate to meet the trustees of the colony. He made several unsuccessful attempts to see Oglethorpe, but had to be content with giving the trustees a "short but plain account of the state of the colony"—an account which it seems they did not like too well!

But John had many battles to fight in the realm of the spiritual. On Sunday, February 5, he preached on "those strong words 'If any man be in Christ,'" and was afterwards informed that many of the best people had been so offended by his message that he was not to preach there again.

From there on he preached a number of farewell sermons, but he pressed on rather grimly toward the light which seemed to glimmer afar off.

Peter, the Moravian

One of the richest fruits of Wesley's Georgian adventure was his close association with the Moravian brethren; and now in London he found one of these earnest men ready to help him.

John set out with Peter Bohler for Oxford on February 17. He was helped by the conversation on the way, and the meeting with old friends at Oxford, especially the former. As they walked across the college squares the students mocked their grave bearing. The mocking disturbed Wesley, but Bohler simply remarked, "My brother, it does not even stick to our clothes."

But John could not follow Bohler's reasoning, especially when he heard him say "My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away!"

The next contact with Bohler came at Oxford in March. John had interrupted another journey to come to Oxford, having heard that Charles was seriously ill in that town. And at Oxford he found that Charles had company—Peter Bohler.

In this discussion with Bohler, Wesley says that he was “clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.” “Immediately it struck into my mind, ‘Leave off preaching.’ How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?” But Bohler set his mind at ease by saying, “Preach faith *till* you have it; and then, *because* you have it you will preach it.”

In this light John went forward, himself a seeker, yet offering to all who would hear him this message of saving faith. On March 23 he again met the Moravian and writes: He “now amazed me more and more by the accounts . . . of living faith.” This made Wesley delve more determinedly than ever into his Greek New Testament.

April went past—a very busy month, which afforded him little time for the quiet meditation he sought. But on April 22, Bohler, ever the zealous fisher of souls, got down to angling once again. He drove Wesley from retreat after retreat by the plain word of scripture. John’s last refuge lay in the notion that God wrought salvation instantaneously in men only during the early ages of the Church—not now! “Times are changed,” said he. But Bohler soon drove him from that refuge by confronting him with several witnesses who all declared that they had been saved “instantaneously.” All Wesley could do now was to cry out of his yearning soul, “Here endeth my disputing . . . ‘Lord, help thou my unbelief.’”

The Fringe of the Light

Bohler left London for America on May 4, leaving behind him a most grateful Wesley, who wrote that day,

“O what a work hath God begun since his coming into England! Such an one as shall never come to an end till heaven and earth pass away.” But even distance did not throw Bohler off the scent. He wrote John urging him to “beware of the sin of unbelief . . . Delay not, I beseech you to believe in YOUR Jesus Christ.”

On May 21, Charles Wesley, although ill in bed, found peace in believing. The shackles dropped from his spirit and Christ brought him out of the prison house.

*I woke; my dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my heart was free . . .*

John now walked alone, but greatly encouraged by his brother’s deliverance.

“About a Quarter Before Nine . . . , May 24, 1738

“I think it was about five this morning that I opened my Testament on those words, ‘There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature . . .’

“Just as I went out, I opened it again on those words, ‘Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.’ In the afternoon I was asked to go to St. Paul’s. The anthem was ‘Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord.’

“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther’s preface to the epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away MY sins, even MINE, and saved ME, from the law of sin and death.”

There you have it in its beautiful simplicity—the record of what transpired on the greatest day of the eighteenth century, and in some ways the greatest event

in the history of the modern Church . . . the conversion of John Wesley!

His newborn soul danced for sheer joy. A troop of exulting friends escorted him to the lodgings of his brother Charles, where he cried simply, "I believe!"

The now twice-kindred soul of Charles leaped to the call for praise, and there is nothing anywhere in literature quite so thrilling as the picture of these two brothers standing to sing their first great evangelical duet:

*Where shall my wondering soul begin?
How shall I all to heaven aspire?
A slave redeemed from death and sin,
A brand plucked from eternal fire!
How shall I equal triumphs raise,
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?*

As year follows year, a new hymn will appear in memory of this epochal day. And each anniversary they will sing such as:

*Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise!
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!*

FOR FURTHER READING:

JONES, D., *Charles Wesley*. London: Epworth Press.

SOMETHING TO DO:

1. List those books and their authors that were influential in the life of John Wesley to this point.
2. Locate the area of Wesley's work on a map of Georgia.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is the place of good works in the plan of personal salvation? Did John's help or hinder him?

2. Why was Peter Bohler effective in his personal evangelism?

3. Why were John and Charles and others in the "Holy Club" called Methodists? How could we all benefit by these characteristics?

CHAPTER FOUR

"IN THE STEPS OF THE MASTER"

What Happened at Aldersgate?

Wesley's spiritual experience has been subject to probably more scrutiny than that of any other man since Paul. Psychologists, theologians, biographers, and adventuring novelists have found the theme of undying interest. It has been made the fuel of burning controversy, not always in the best of taste. There are those who have seen in the Aldersgate experience but one more incident in a life full of such. Some have dismissed it as unimportant, others as having been exaggerated beyond its value. The discussion goes on still as it did among John's own friends. His brother Samuel was horrified by it. Even Susanna was perplexed; and friend Hutton, the bookseller, was sure John had gone mad!

But what did John see in the event? Probably he is the one to hear! Wesley says simply that he was "converted" on May 24, 1738, and by that word he means personal, inward faith in Christ, and the assurance of acceptance with God. It was the word "instantaneous" which torpedoed his former opinion on salvation by faith, and it was the evidence that God still converts men "instantaneously," which overthrew his defenses and made him cry: "I was now thoroughly convinced; and by the grace of God, I resolved to seek it unto the end . . . this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for ME: a trust in Him as MY christ, as MY sole justification, sanctification, and redemption." These pronouns, taken together with those in the account of what happened at Aldersgate, clearly explain what Wesley meant when he said, "I was not a Christian till May 24th"; and although Wesley

came in later life to evaluate more highly his good works before 1738, never once did he minimize the importance of the memorable event of that year.

Wesley was justified in adopting, as he did, his double system of chronology: *anno domini* (the year of our Master) and *anno meae conversionis* (the year of my conversion); for it is perfectly clear that the Wesley of 1725-38 could never have accomplished what he did in later years without the experience of May 24, 1738. We have a new man from that date. He himself says: "From 1725 to 1729 I preached much, but saw no fruit of my labour . . . From the year 1729 to 1734 . . . I saw a little fruit . . . From 1734 to 1738, speaking more of faith in Christ, I saw more fruit . . . From 1738 to this time [1746], speaking continually of Jesus Christ . . . the Word of God ran as fire among the stubble"; and Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

From May 24, 1738, Wesley went forth, as his sermon at Oxford only two weeks later urged others to do, as a "little child that believest in Him." And that sermon seems almost a prophecy of himself: "Thou shalt march on, under the great Captain of thy salvation, 'conquering and to conquer' until all thine enemies are destroyed, and 'death is swallowed up in victory.'"

Visit to Germany

As we have seen, the religious group known as Moravians had profoundly influenced Wesley's life. On board the "Simmonds" they had revealed the kind of faith he wanted, and one of their pastors had been the chief single human agent in his conversion. Wesley was therefore sure that to have fellowship with this group in their own circumstance would be a great means of grace to him now. So he set out for Germany with a few companions.

His visit was brief, and although it yielded a little fruit in his later ministry, it did not greatly impress him.

The Orphan House he saw became the model for later ones of his own, and he came to admire more deeply some of their hymns, which he later translated for his people. But he could not accept the Moravian way. He considered that they held their leader Zinzendorf in too high veneration; that they magnified their own group too much; that they sometimes "used cunning, guile, or dissimulation." Thus he wrote twelve years later, "I love them but I cannot admire them." His visit had not yielded what he had expected. He did not find the perfect Christian community!

Into the Fields

Wesley's field of ministry narrowed because of his new spirit. Church after church was closed against him. As one biographer puts it, he soon learned to get his message across at the first service . . . it was usually the last! He came almost to rely upon the religious societies for fellowship and a field of service. These societies have an entrancing history, but let us simply note that they were groups of Christians who met at other than regular church hours and not in the churches, for mutual edification and inspiration to good works.

As door after door was banged in Wesley's face, these societies provided his chief arena of activity. But their scope was, after all, limited. Soon, however, a "great door and effectual" was opened to him; and although he passed through it most reluctantly, it led him to the lost legions of England.

George Whitefield had returned to England in November, 1738, and found the churches closed against him. Denied access to the pulpit, Whitefield took to the fields! The results were phenomenal. Thousands of unreached common people heard the gospel and responded to its call.

But the call of America was upon Whitefield, and his one concern became for someone to carry on this work of field preaching. His mind raced to John Wesley; and

the more he pondered it, the surer he became that Wesley was the man to succeed him in Bristol, where most of the work had been done. Whitefield knew Wesley's prejudice against the unprecedented and unconventional, and scarcely could hope that the idea would succeed. But at any rate he could try; so he wrote to Wesley.

Whitefield's letter shook not only Wesley but the entire Fetter Lane society. Charles would not hear of the idea, and others disputed it. Strange scriptures were cited on either side of the question, but at last it was decided by lot that John should go to Bristol. His departure was like a funeral, but he went!

Whitefield's battle was half won, and on March 31, when John arrived in Bristol, George wrote, "I was much refreshed with the sight of my honored friend, Mr. John Wesley," quaintly adding, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace" (with reference to America, of course, and not to Abraham's bosom)!

On Sunday, Wesley accompanied Whitefield to three open-air services. His soul was moved at the sight of the hungry crowds, and he committed himself that day. When the two men parted at night to preach in different services, Whitefield announced in his that Wesley would preach on the following day "in the brickyard at the farther end of St. Philip's plain." Across at his service Wesley preached from the Sermon on the Mount, cryptically remarking to himself, "A pretty remarkable precedent of field preaching!" An Englishman had founded a precedent!

Forth in Thy Name, O Lord!

On April 2, Wesley awoke "singing within," and at four in the afternoon he turned his door of opportunity into an arch of triumph: "I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation . . . speaking . . . to about three thousand souls."

The lost legions of England had been discovered at last! A crusader was among them, as the *Cambridge Modern History* declares: "From this date, April 2nd, 1739, may be reckoned a new era in the religious history of England; for her greatest religious leader between Cromwell and Newman had found his way to the hearts of the people." For his part, Wesley, who had said that he would have thought it almost a sin if souls had been saved outside a church, now cried that it should be done "church or no church"—and usually it was "no church"!

The New Room

April, 1739, saw also the small beginnings of Bristol Methodism. On the fourth Wesley writes: "In the evening three women agreed to meet together weekly with the same intention as those in London, viz. 'to confess their faults one to another, and pray for one another . . . At eight four young men agreed to meet in pursuance of the same design.'"

May 9 saw the little group take a major step of faith by purchasing a plot of ground upon which to build the first meetinghouse. Only one year after Aldersgate, Wesley laid the foundation of the now famous New Room with three taps of the hammer (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). He had made himself responsible for the debt because of a warning from Whitefield and others about the powers of trustees, although he had "neither money nor the human prospect of procuring it." In many ways the New Room at Bristol enshrines the spirit of the Methodist revival in a way that cannot be found elsewhere.

Bath

Wesley next invaded Bath, the playground of western England. At the beginning, Wesley had serious thoughts of misgiving over this fashionable city. "I have often reasoned with myself concerning this place, 'Hath

God left Himself without a witness?' . . . in the midst of this sinful generation?" But like Bristol, Bath became one of Methodism's strongholds.

It was here that Wesley had his famous encounter with Beau Nash, the worldly cavalier. "There was great expectation at Bath," writes Wesley, "of what a noted man would do to me there," and so Wesley found a vast congregation awaiting him—and the encounter! He commenced to preach and was well under way when Beau Nash appeared and immediately challenged Wesley's authority to preach, and likewise declared the meeting to be an illegal assembly forbidden by parliament. Wesley easily overthrew these points, so the challenger then accused the preacher of "frightening the people out of their wits." "Sir," asked Wesley, "did you ever hear me preach?" "No," came the reply. "How then can you judge of what you never heard?" "Sir, by common report." "Common report is not enough. Give me leave, Sir, to ask, Is not your name Nash?" "My name is Nash." "Sir, I dare not judge of you by common report: I think it is not enough to judge by." "Here," says Wesley, "he paused awhile, and, having recovered himself, said, 'I desire to know what this people comes here for,' on which an old woman replied, 'You, Mr. Nash, take care of your body; we take care of our souls; and for the food of our souls we come here.' He answered not a word, but walked away."

A Mystics Brewing

On Monday, June 11, Wesley received news of trouble brewing at the Fetter Lane society in London and hurried there. By prayer and wise counsel he sought to prevent possible division, and there was an apparent healing of the wound, for Wesley writes on June 16, "In that hour we found God with us as at the first." But the peace did not continue long; the dangers of "Stillness" had come in.

"Stillness" was an extreme form of mysticism and had as its main idea the thought that, to receive the assurance of salvation, men have to be still and wait for the Lord to work. No means of grace were necessary, good works were harmful, there was no need of prayer or Bible-reading, there were no degrees of faith. All these negative tenets found their place within this "grand delusion."

To John Wesley these people were mystics, because they dispensed with the means of grace: "Mystics: under which term I comprehend ALL, and only those who slight any of the means of grace." Therefore he tried to persuade them of their error by preaching on the various means of grace for a whole week. But it was of no avail; and on July 20, 1749, Wesley read a paper in which he stated the error of Stillness, and refuted it. He then called on those who agreed with him to follow him out. Eighteen or twenty did so, and on July 23 this break was completed when twenty-five men and fifty women, "all of whom think and speak the same thing," met with Wesley at the new point of meeting, the foundry.

The effects of this break upon Wesley and the revival were all wholesome, and although thirty years were to pass before the Foundry group—by then much enlarged—would move to the chapel in City Road, only eighteen months had passed since Aldersgate! The flame was spreading.

North to Newcastle

The topmost link of the famous revival triangle around which Wesley worked was forged on May 28, 1742. As he rode into that great but wicked city, Newcastle, Wesley was appalled at its sin: "I was surprised: so much drunkenness and swearing . . . I never remember to have seen and heard before . . . surely this place is ripe for Him who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

The harvest was ripe and the laborer was willing. He preached to between twelve and fifteen hundred people the first Sunday, and in the evening of that day he had his largest congregation to date. The great crowd showed him remarkable affection and esteem, and he says that they were "ready to trample him underfoot out of pure love and kindness."

Newcastle was fruitful ground, and on Wednesday, December 8, Wesley took possession of two tracts of ground for the erection of an orphan house and a meeting room. He laid the foundation stone on December 23, for what became one of his most virile centers of evangelism. Although no one had any money, and the converts were appalled at the debt of seven hundred pounds, Wesley says, "As it was begun for God's sake, He would provide what was needful for the finishing of it."

The Death of Susanna

On July 20, 1742, after a horse-dash from Bristol to London, Wesley wrote in his diary, "I found my mother on the borders of eternity." Susanna lingered for but a few days. On the morning of July 23 she sweetly murmured, "My dear Saviour! Art thou come to help me in my extremity at last?" That afternoon four of her daughters sat on her bed and sang a comforting hymn, and about four o'clock the mother of the Methodists made her last request: "Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God!" God then took her to that home where already were gathered her husband and twelve of her children.

John laid what was mortal of his mother in Bunhill Fields burying ground in City Road, London. His eyes were wet and his voice unsteady, but he preached a sermon over her grave, taking as his text, "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it . . ."

Thus triumphantly was the mother of Methodism released into eternity; and her son, turning away from

the grave, threw himself once more into the crusade for souls.

"Now I Have Lived a Day!"

Amid all these multiplied labors, Wesley carefully nurtured his own soul. He guarded his early morning devotions jealously and conversed with the Lord on horseback over the long journeys. He kept a strict schedule of Bible reading and read much also in the classics of the spiritual life. The more he read, the more earnestly he sought to be entirely devoted, in every department of his being, to the Lord he served. His spirit is revealed in the hymn:

*O Love divine, how sweet Thou art!
When shall I find this longing heart
All taken up by Thee?*

Seeking such entire devotement, Wesley came to a great spiritual crisis in December, 1744. For two days he had been strangely lifeless, but as he was reading prayers at Snowfields on December 24, something happened. He describes it in language as clear as that for Aldersgate, although not so detailed or extended:

"I found such light and strength as I never remember to have had before. I saw every thought, as well as action or word, just as it was rising in my heart; and whether it was right before God, or tainted with pride or selfishness. I never knew before, (. . . not as at this time) what it was to be still before God.

"I waked, by the grace of God, in the same spirit; and about eight, being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God as greatly confirmed me therein: so that God was before me all the day long. I sought and found him in every place; and could truly say, when I lay down at night, 'Now I have lived a day!'"

Now Wesley was most reticent on the publicizing of his inner experiences. He may have erred on that side for a number of reasons; but surely here, if anywhere, is a man witnessing to a new work of God in his heart and to the flooding of his soul by the love of God.

From that day you have a man gripped by a consuming passion and a magnificent obsession to "offer Christ to the people." He took few holidays; he suffered the rigors of weather and harsh mobs; he worked tirelessly, rode thousands of miles, preached hundreds of sermons indoors and out in all weather; he wrote scores of books and edited scores more; he bore burdens of evangelism and church government equaled only by Paul. His continued consecration is the ultimate credential of his experience of December 24, 1744. In 1771 he could still write, "We are saved from sin, we are made holy by faith . . . I have continued to declare this for above thirty years, and God hath continued to confirm the word of His grace!"

These are not the words of a spectator, but of a "partaker of the blessing."

Glorious Monotony

Dobree describes Wesley's life from 1744 to 1765 as "a noble monotony," and such it can be called rightly. For although Wesley lived until 1793, the main lines of Methodism were laid by the end of 1745. They were not simply planned or arranged, as we shall see; but by that date they were all in existence.

Wales

In 1739, Wesley entered Wales and immediately established contact with that fiery evangelist Howell Harris. Although Wesley did, from time to time, preach in that area, he largely left the evangelizing of the Welsh people to this prophet whom God had raised among them.

Ireland

Wesley first went to Ireland in August, 1747, and he made many subsequent visits—too many for the liking of the London Methodists! He loved the Irish people, saying, "For natural sweetness of temper, for courtesy and hospitality, I have never seen people like the Irish." And Ireland amply repaid Methodism for Wesley's attentions. Some of the most outstanding early Methodists hailed from here: Adam Clarke, the great Bible expositor; Thomas Welsh, of whom Wesley said, "Such a master of Biblical knowledge I never saw before and never expect to see again"; and, among many others, Henry Moore, who became Wesley's earliest biographer.

Wesley found that the chief difficulty in Ireland was the fickleness of the Irish nature: "The danger is that the Word should not take deep root."

Scotland

Calvinistic Scotland did not respond too quickly to Wesley's message. He had gone there against the advice of Charles and Whitefield, but he revisited it twenty-one times. The warmth of his spirit, and that of the slow-growing groups he raised, gradually thawed out the frigid atmosphere of the Scottish churches. Many were converted to God. Leith, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow, and many smaller towns heard the joyful news eagerly, and societies were formed.

Although Methodism took root slowly in Scotland, and never to the same degree as in the south and in Ireland, the influence of Wesley upon the religious life in the north was considerable.

Wesley's Preaching

Sometimes strange effects followed the preaching of Wesley. People fell to the ground in agonies of guilt under the impact of the Holy Spirit. Wesley often questioned these people; and although he occasionally sug-

gests that the devil had a hand in some of these doings, he stood amazed at the workings of God's Spirit in the vast majority of cases.

His preaching was clear and unhysterical. His method tended to be terse but plain. There was "no striving after effect" and he used the "utmost simplicity and plainness suited to every capacity," keeping to a very positive presentation of his message. He was the living example of his own advice to his preachers, "We are not to fight against notions, but sins . . . Keep to our one point; present inward salvation by faith."

Wesley's Helpers

Especially in the early days of the revival, Wesley received wonderful help from a large number of Anglican clergymen, the names of many of whom are now remembered because of the help thus given Wesley! Outstanding among the number was John Fletcher, vicar of Madeley, one of the saintliest souls who have ever graced the annals of history. "I want nothing," he said to those who offered him preferment in the church, "nothing but more grace." Yet he came to wield a most formidable pen in the realms of controversy and in support of Wesley's doctrines. His *Checks to Antinomianism* remains among the classics; and when he died, it was Wesley who wrote his biography.

The Cutting Edge

The cutting edge of the revival was really that noble body of laymen called "the early Methodist preachers." The list reads like the eleventh chapter of Hebrews! No more abandoned crusaders ever strode or rode the earth.

John Nelson, Thomas Mitchell, Thomas Walsh, John Haime, John Furze, Thomas Maxwell, John Jane, and a host of others—these were Christ's cavalry, and they rode in all weather to every corner of the land, their en-

durance matched only by that of the wiry figure at their head.

"... untracked snow covering all the roads . . . we had much ado to keep our horses on their feet . . . the wind was ready to overturn man and beast . . . Rain and hail . . . drove through our coats . . . yet froze as it fell, even upon our eyebrows, so that we had scarce any strength or motion left."

Any attempt even to outline their exploits in anything shorter than their own brief accounts would be insult. They preached amid flying stones; they were brutally attacked and stamped upon by mobs; they were all but drowned in pools by drunken men headed by parsons and policemen; they were tarred from head to toe, stripped and beaten, well-nigh starved, and unjustly imprisoned. Their families and friends were victimized for no other reason than that they were such. And still they rode on behind Wesley. No mere pulpit evangelists these! Frozen to the saddle, accosted by highwaymen, still they rode on singing:

*Soldiers of Christ, arise!
And put your armor on!*

and their armor was "the panoply of God." They met hate with love, brutality with gentleness, contempt with lowly service, and sin and the devil with the drawn Word of God!

The "baiting of the Methodists" (a favorite pastime of those years) gradually passed out, overcome by the word of their testimony; and towards 1770, they received comparative peace in which to spread their message.

Wesley's Marriage

Wesley was not invulnerable to the arrows of Cupid even in good health, but in sickness they struck him deeply. He fell ill at Newcastle in 1748, and came under the sweet charm of Grace Murray, a gifted woman whom

he had placed in charge of the women's work in the orphan house. It is certain that Wesley would have married this "inexpressibly tender . . . quick . . . cleanly . . . skilfull" and understanding nurse had not Charles blundered into the picture.

Charles, happily married himself, became suddenly scrupulous over a promise made early in life between the brothers; and in John's words, he "flew around" and engineered the marriage of Grace with a preacher named Bennett. That was in 1748.

On Tuesday, February 20, 1751, John Wesley was married to Mrs. Vazielle, a wealthy widow, of whom little beyond that is known save that she had nursed John when he sprained his leg in a fall. He made her settle her wealth upon her own family. The marriage was not a happy one. John's long and enforced absences from home, plus his wife's petulance and maliciousness, brought on the day when she walked out. Although Wesley made honest and repeated efforts to heal the rift, she remained away; and on Friday, October 12, 1781, he wrote in his *Journal*: I came to London, and was informed that my wife died on Monday. This evening she was buried, though I was not informed of it till a day or two after.

Some interesting speculations have been made as to what effect a happy marriage would have had upon Wesley's work. Speculation on this is futile! Perhaps after all, Berridge of Everton, one of Wesley's Anglican helpers, was correct when he declared that the Lord had given Whitefield and Wesley "a brace of ferrets"! And perhaps those ferrets kept them moving!

The American Outreach

The Irish visits of Wesley helped to establish the work in America, for there he contacted some exiles from Germany. Among them was Philip Embury. This man later emigrated to New York; and after a somewhat un-

steady spiritual experience, came to a deep assurance of salvation. With this came the desire to save others, and with the renting of a small room in 1765 a Methodist group was under way in America.

The soil had been prepared by the widespread preaching of Whitefield, who had traveled up and down the colonies with the gospel. Soon an ally came in the person of the colorful Captain Webb, who introduced himself as "Captain of the King's service, a soldier of the Cross, and a spiritual son of John Wesley"!

The work grew so rapidly that by the English conference in 1769 more preachers were needed. Wesley read a letter to the conference and asked, "We have a pressing call from our brethren in New York who have built a meeting-house, to come over and help them. Who is willing to go?"

Two men, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmorr, volunteered at once, and were immediately commissioned. They set out for America with seventy pounds in their pockets, but fifty of that was to help pay the debt on the new meetinghouse!

In 1771, the American Wesley emerged in the person of Francis Asbury. He had been among Wesley's preachers for some time, and was noted for his amazing zeal and deep piety. This young man was sent out under the blessing of God and of Wesley; and over in the still largely untracked regions of the New World, he exceeded even the endurance of the man who sent him. There is no language strong enough truthfully to describe the reckless and holy abandon of Asbury. On the voyage across he wrote, "Whither am I going? To the new world. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No, I am going to live to God and to bring others to do so." And live to God he did! His life was all that Paul implied by "a living sacrifice." He preached over sixteen thousand sermons; pioneered over the pathless mountains, crossing the Al-

legheeny range at least sixty times. He remained in America when others went home during war, and strenuously spread the good news in every corner he could reach.

Let us write the words of Asbury over the heroic and holy lives of all these men and women who spread the fire of this revival across England and the new world:

"I am always on the wing but it is for God."

FOR FURTHER READING:

RATTENBURY, J. E. *The Conversion of the Wesleys*. London: Epworth Press, 1938.

BRAILS福德, MABEL. *A Tale of Two Brothers*. London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

SOMETHING TO DO:

Outline Wesley's triangle of preaching points on a map of Britain and then follow him to Scotland. Compare this travel on horseback with travel today.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Compare the *Journal* entry for December 24, 1744, with that of May 24, 1738 (not including the summary of his past life). How do the two entries compare for clearness of personal experience? Is the experience of the "second blessing" as clear as the "first"?

2. What is Wesley's concept of mysticism?

3. Who were the earliest Methodist preachers in this country?

4. What do you think of Asbury's statement of his purpose in coming to this country?

CHAPTER FIVE

"THIS IS THE MESSAGE!"

Wesley was a man with a message from God—a message of which he was very sure. In a letter written to a most vigorous opponent of his teaching, John wrote: "I have again and again, with all the plainness I could, declared what our constant doctrines are, whereby we are distinguished only from the heathen or nominal Christians, not from any that worship God in spirit and truth. Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three—that of Repentance, of Faith, and of Holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; and third, religion itself."

No summary could be much clearer than that. Wesley's teaching is to be interpreted within this framework. He reduced theology to certain basic doctrines which were verifiable in experience: repentance—that is the porch at which we first arrive when coming to God; faith—that is the door through which we must pass; holiness—that is the life of the Father's family into which we come.

"Methodism," said Wesley, "is the old religion, the religion of the Bible," thus giving further testimony to his determination to teach only what he found in the Book of God.

Sources of the Message

The sources for an understanding of the message preached by Wesley and his brother, and spread around the known world by his henchmen, are three in number:

- I. Wesley's *Standard Sermons*
- II. Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*
- III. The hymns written by both brothers but especially Charles's hymns as edited by John

With regard to the third source it may be well to remember that John Wesley wants us to regard his hymnbook as a "little body of experimental and practical divinity," and asks, "In what other publication have you so distinct and full an account of Scriptural Christianity; such a declaration of the heights and depths of religion, speculative and practical; so strong cautions against the most plausible errors; particularly those that now are most prevalent; and so clear directions for making your calling and election sure; for perfecting holiness in the fear of God?" These three then are the chief sources for any understanding of Wesley's message.

"Seed of Sin's Disease" . . . the All-defiling Sin of Man

When Wesley preached his sermon on "Original Sin" he chose a text that showed it to be universal, internal, and continual. The text was Gen. 6:5. Taking this searchlight from God's Word, John descended into the black caverns of man's depravity. He exposed the virus of sin poisoning all men in all ages and in every department of their beings. Not only did he show the sinfulness of man before the Flood, but in characteristic fashion he proved from Scripture and experience that the eighteenth-century man was in a similar foul condition. Men "have by nature, no knowledge of God, no acquaintance with Him," and "having no knowledge, we can have no love of God: we cannot love Him we know not"; man has "not only no love, but no fear of God."

Wesley analyzes the disease of man in the white light of God's Word. There is "the desire of the flesh," that is, of the pleasure of sense in every kind." He speaks of "sensual appetites . . . they lead him captive: they

drag him to and fro, in spite of his boasted reason." There is "the desire of the eye," "the desire of the pleasures of the imagination." And there is "the pride of life: the desire of praise, of the honor that cometh of men."

Wesley is tenderly ruthless as he exposes the polluted springs of the human soul, but he is never far from the cure: "God's method of healing a soul which is thus diseased." Even in the sermon on "Original Sin" he moves forward graciously and gladly to the divine remedy: "Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: therefore 'ye must be born again' of God. By nature ye are wholly corrupted: by grace ye shall be wholly renewed. In Adam ye all died: . . . in Christ, ye are all made alive."

Although dealing with sin in the race, Wesley did not leave his hearers in any doubt about their own sin and guilt. Defining sin as "a voluntary transgression of a known law," he made men feel the piercing power of God's conviction. The element for which he looked in vain in the preaching of a great contemporary, namely, "the voice that says, 'Thou art the man,'" was certainly in his own preaching. Many felt as did John Nelson, one of Wesley's converts and early preachers, that he had singled them out from the crowd, and was like a man who saw into their very souls. "From this evil fountain flow forth the bitter streams of vanity, thirst of praise, ambition, covetousness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life . . . anger, hatred, malice, revenge, envy, jealousy, evil surmisings."

"Now cast thyself on the Lamb of God, with all thy sins."

The universal sin of man was preached by hymns also. A fair illustration of this is to be found in a hymn originally included in Wesley's *Journal*, and which was written by Charles as a commentary upon "the bloody issue cured."

*How shall a sinner come to God?
A fountain of polluted blood
For years my plague hath been;
From Adam the infection came,
My nature is with his the same,
The same with his my sin.*

*In me the stubborn evil reigns;
The poison spreads throughout my veins;
A loathsome, sore disease
Makes all my soul and life unclean.
My every word, work, thought, is sin,
And desperate wickedness.*

But like John, Charles never goes far without proclaiming the gospel cure.

*Seed of sin's disease,
Spirit of health, remove!
Spirit of perfect holiness,
Spirit of perfect love!*

The Wesleys' message, then, lays bare the sin of the human heart; but the Wesleys have no morbid love of doing so—they are prompted only by loyalty to what they find in the Bible.

"*Thy Undistinguishing Regard*" . . . *the All-embracing Love of God*

The gospel according to John Wesley is God's good news to all men in every age and each man where he is. "Just as wide as sin extends, the propitiation extends also." And defining "world" he writes, "World . . . that is, all men under heaven!"

Wesley could not brook any limitation of the grace of God to any section of humanity. To him God's provision was wider and deeper than man's need. No person anywhere at any time was outside the sweep of the divine pity and love. All men may repent and be saved.

Under the Lord, it was John and Charles Wesley who freed Christendom from the horrible clutches of an error that had held it for centuries, and to which John Calvin had given almost creedal utterance in his doctrine of the decrees. As put forward in the era around the eighteenth century, this meant that the bulk of mankind had been unconditionally elected to endless damnation. Indeed Calvin had gone so far as to say, "God speaketh to them that they may be the deafer: He giveth light to them that they may be the blinder; He offers them instruction that they may be the more ignorant; and uses the remedy that they may not be healed."

To this Charles Wesley made the scathing rejoinder:

*The righteous God consigned
Them over to their doom;
Then sent the Saviour of mankind
To damn them from the womb!*

*To damn for falling short
Of what they could not do!
For not believing the report
Of that which was not true!*

*Good God! That any child of Thine
So horribly should think of Thee;
Lo, all my hopes I here resign
If all may not find grace with me!*

But the Wesleys were very sure that all men may find grace. They found it in the Bible and confirmed it in experience.

The "Calvinistic Controversy," as this is called, brought out some strong arguments from either side. George Whitefield, influenced probably by Jonathan Edwards in America, took the opposite view from Wesley, and was sure that Wesley was wrong. Whitefield

wrote, "O that we were of one mind, for I am yet persuaded you greatly err." But John was kind to his friend and even suggested that they must agree to differ: "Therefore for a time, you are suffered to be of one opinion and I of another." John probably saw that, although Whitefield was Calvinistic by opinion, his great passionate heart took him out into the world to offer salvation to all men . . . and John was happy with that!

Nevertheless a wedge was driven in the work. The Calvinistic Methodists emerged under Whitefield in Lady Huntingdon's connection and under Howell Harris in Wales. The two friends, Wesley and Whitefield, were fully reconciled; and when Whitefield died in America in 1770, it was Wesley who preached the memorial sermon in England.

Others joined in the controversy, Augustus Toplady among them. He wrote "Rock of Ages" and the Wesleys loved that hymn and used it. But he also proved a nasty arguer, and was at times most scurrilous. His opposition was so bitter that it finally could not be ignored, and Wesley reduced his teaching to one incisive sentence: "The sum of all is: One in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will; the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can." And in another place pungently declared, "But if this is so, then is all preaching vain," and shows that such a doctrine tends to overthrow the whole Christian revelation and makes it to contradict itself.

Let us remember, however, that New Testament religion is neither Calvinism nor Arminianism (as the view of the Wesleys is called), and that Wesley was out to preach no "ism" of any sort, but the religion of the Bible. This he did by pen and tongue. By song, sermon, book, and pamphlet, he spread "the joyful news," and offered all men everywhere the gift of God's grace in repentance and faith; holding, as did Arminius, "that

it does not cease to be a gift because the beggar puts out his hand to receive it." Wesley's message was a very positive one. He did not waste much strength arguing, and it was his positive preaching that stirred up the trouble. His message was for all men, each man, and the whole man; and, as Charles sent it marching or dancing into the minds of men, John made sure that men got to know and use the hymns his brother wrote.

*Thy undistinguishing regard
Was cast on Adam's fallen race;
For ALL Thou hast in Christ prepared
Sufficient, sovereign, saving grace!*

*For ALL my Lord was crucified!
For ALL, for ALL my Saviour died!*

Wesley reveled in the eternal love of God toward all men. "Free grace" is "... all in all! ... It is free IN all to whom it is given; it is also free FOR all"; "... every man in every place without exception either of place or person ... wherefore turn yourselves and live!"

"Remember Calvary" ... the All-atoning Death of Christ

Wesley began by exposing the heart of man as that is exposed in the Bible. He continued by disclosing the heart of God as does the Bible. His message found its true heart and core at Calvary. To Wesley, the death of Christ was all-atoning, but no man can hope to plumb its deep, eternal meaning and mystery.

*Endless scenes of wonder rise
From that mysterious tree!*

Here was God's love, forever holy love, propitiating sin, yet redeeming the sinner for his own sake! Here "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself"; yet, as Wesley wrote, "setting forth Christ ... to demonstrate His justice ... whose essential character and principal

office is, to punish sin." Thus at Calvary we see the propitiation for sin and the motivation of forgiveness. It is mysterious, inexplicable, but it was God's doing!

*'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mystery all! Let earth adore!
Let angel minds inquire no more!*

Whatever theme Wesley handled was treated in the white light of Calvary. At his first appearing in any town he preached the law in the most searching manner possible, that he might "conclude all men under sin"; but soon he led his hearers to Calvary to look upon Christ. Here was the throbbing heart and solid core of his message. "The Methodists," said he, "always held, and have declared a thousand times, the death of Christ is the meritorious cause of our salvation—that is of pardon, holiness, and glory." And again, "If we could once bring all our preachers ... uniformly and steadily to insist on those two points, 'Christ dying for us' and 'Christ reigning in us,' we should shake the trembling gates of hell."

"Should Know ... Should Feel" ... the All-assuring Spirit

"The inward witness ... this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity!" Thus had spoken the dying rector of Epworth to his boys. Now those boys were to maintain much the same thing to the world.

Wesley had traveled by a long and hard road to the point of knowing his acceptance with God, and it was thus inevitable that he should so strongly emphasize the "witness of the Spirit." By this phrase Wesley meant "... an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses with my Spirit that I

am a child of God; that Jesus hath loved me and given Himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

This note rung strangely on the ears of an age in which the "chief duty of religion was to be tepid," that had an unbounded horror of being sure of anything, especially in the area of personal religion. Two of Wesley's greatest contemporaries, Dr. Johnstone and Bishop Butler, had both gone on record against this kind of assurance. "No man," declared Johnstone, "can be sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation." And the good Bishop Butler, one of the very finest and most devout men of the century, found on his deathbed that he was "still afraid to die." Only when his chaplain had read one of the Bible promises did he relax on Christ, saying, "I never felt its virtue till this moment. And now I die happy!"

But Wesley had searched for years for a salvation of which he could be assured; and, as we have seen, he received such on May 24, 1738. Therefore he preached everywhere that this assurance is the birthright of every believer. "If it were possible . . . to shake the traditional evidence of Christianity, still he that hath the internal evidence (and every true believer hath the witness or evidence in himself) would stand firm and unshaken."

*What we have FELT and SEEN
With confidence we tell!*

While it is true that Wesley said, "I have not, for many years, thought a consciousness of acceptance to be essential to saving faith," he insisted with all his powers that this assurance is the right of every pardoned sinner. Therefore he rejoiced to hear his people sing:

*The Spirit answers to the Blood
And tells me I am born of God.*

He rejoiced also in the words by which Charles said the same thing as himself:

*The pledge of future bliss
He now to us imparts;
His gracious Spirit is
The earnest in our hearts.*

"Thy New Best Name of Love" . . . Love Made Perfect

One short year before his death Wesley wrote, "This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up." Here is John's understanding of God's will for his people. There is no ambiguity in his words. Therefore it would seem that to understand what Wesley meant by "full sanctification," "Christian perfection," and "perfect love" would be to grip his peculiar message. Here again he found it in Scripture and verified it in experience—his own and others'.

These terms refer, by and large, to the same truth in different aspects. Sometimes Wesley called this element of his teaching "Christian perfection" and sometimes "perfect love," but he had a decided preference for the latter. He showed clearly that those who have been "born again" are to go "on unto perfection," and that they may be restored to the image of God "in a moment," in the twinkling of an eye.

Wesley consistently maintained that Christians, being made free from sin, are also "made perfect in love." Christian perfection he clearly defined as *not* freedom "from either ignorance or error . . . nor from infirmities . . . nor from temptations," but freedom "from all outward sins . . . also from the sins of the heart." It was freedom to love God with a pure heart fervently. He taught that even a sanctified soul could make mistakes in judgment and practice, but that these were not inconsistent with

freedom from sin and loving God with the whole heart, so that "every thought and word and work springs from and is conducted to the end by the pure love of God and our neighbour."

Wesley's teaching on this head is clearly expressed in a hundred places. It is "that habitual disposition of soul which . . . is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit'; and by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so 'renewed in the spirit of our minds' as to be 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.'"

To think of Christian perfection as only freedom from sin is to do despite to Wesley's message. He meant much more than that. Always he is positive about its being a sacrifice of the spirit "continually offered up to God, through Christ, in flames of holy love." Learn his wise counsel: "Let your soul be filled with so entire a love of Him that you may love nothing but for His sake." This is the circumcision of the heart; this is Christian perfection. It is sin removed from the soul of man and the heart made perfect in love toward God and all men. This is "the second blessing properly so-called."

In a letter to Mrs. Adam Clarke, Wesley wrote: ". . . as to the image of God, how soon you may be a partaker of sanctification! And not only by a slow and insensible growth in grace, but by the power of the Highest overshadowing you, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, so as to utterly abolish sin and to renew you in the whole image . . . why may you not receive it now?"

Wesley saw this doctrine verified in scores of witnesses up and down the land. He interviewed many people who were simple and ordinary men and women claiming quietly but confidently that this priceless gift of God's grace was in them. He wrote to Charles, "I think I see a hundred witnesses." He urged his preachers to

keep spreading this message. He devoted whole conferences to considering the implications of the message and how best to present it, and insisted that where it was not preached "the work languished." He kept his people singing the hymns about it, and ever kept the central tenet of his message before them.

*Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt and fear and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to Thee.*

Or again:

*A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine!*

And this:

*Thy blood makes us clean both without and within;
It conquers the world, and the devil, and sin.*

"O Let Me Commend" . . . the Passion of Evangelism

To Wesley, theology was not a series of abstractions about God, or the relationship between God and man. Theology was evangelism. It was God in action in Christ, reclaiming men from the devil and sin and restoring them to the image of himself . . . and using John Wesley in the doing of it! Therefore he was consumed with a passion to reach all men everywhere with the gospel. The experience of the warmed heart moved him out to the masses, and the theology of the warmed heart demanded nothing less. He loved his neighbor as himself and therefore went to him with the

*Joyful news of sins forgiven,
Of hell subdued and peace with heaven!*

This evangelism was not merely tacked on; it was part and parcel with the man and the message. Evangelism was not his program; it was his passion, the flower of his faith. So he "went every where preaching the word," God working with him. His whole spirit is here in Charles's words:

*And let me live to preach Thy Word;
And let me for Thy glory live.
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinners friend!*

These are the main strands in the message of Wesley; but remember that he had much to say, in the light of these doctrines, about almost every phase of human life. In the register of sermons you will find some on "Patience," on "Dress," on "The Danger of Riches," on "A Christian's Use of Money," on "The Reformation of Manners," and upon almost every human interest and problem. But always there is the same deep-flowing motive—

"O let me commend my Saviour to you!"

FOR FURTHER READING:

BETTS, HENRY. *What Methodists Believe and Preach*. London: Epworth Press, 1938.

BETTS, HENRY. *The Hymns of Methodism*. London: Epworth Press, 1945.

WESLEY, JOHN. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. London: Epworth Press, 1950.

SOMETHING TO DO:

1. Read and discuss Wesley's famous Preface in a Methodist hymnbook.

2. List the terms used by Wesley in the section "Love Made Perfect." Place the scriptural terms beside them. Now list all the nonscriptural terms you know.

3. Compare the hymn "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" with "Rock of Ages." Do you see any significant points of difference? What?

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are the three sources of an understanding of John Wesley's message?

2. What did John Wesley preach and teach about sin?

3. What did he teach and preach about Christian perfection?

CHAPTER SIX

HOW GREAT A FLAME!

Six months after his conversion Wesley, almost by chance, formed his first society. About a dozen seriously minded people sought his spiritual help, and he agreed to meet with them on Thursday evenings. The numbers swelled into many hundreds and he says, "The case was the same at Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle, and many other parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland." He is careful to emphasize that this was the desire of the people and that he had either to help them or become guilty before God.

The vast majority of these people had been converted under the preaching of the Wesleys and Whitefield, and it was Wesley's intention that they should remain within the Church of England as its saving salt. They were to meet together at times other than the hours of church service and for their mutual spiritual help; but they were to be most diligent in their attendance on "all the ordinances of God" in the Church of England.

That was the idea that didn't work! For whatever Wesley expected or hoped would happen, many of the clergy of the church had other ideas; and they served such treatment to the Methodists as virtually forced them out of the Church of England.

Wesley felt that the converts of the revival should have been warmly welcomed by the church, and that through them the Anglican church could have received a transfusion of new fresh blood. To him this was not only an opportunity to revive the national church, but it was the sacred privilege and duty of the ministers.

HOW GREAT A FLAME!

They ought "... to have taken them who had just begun to serve God into their peculiar care; watching over them in tender love, lest they should fall back into the snare of the devil." But what happened? Wesley says that many of the bishops and clergy acted "as though the devil, not God," had brought these converts into the church.

People who had not hitherto cared to attend church service now came but to be either driven off or vilified from the pulpit. Some were cursed in the name of the Lord; many were repelled from the Lord's table, "to which till now they had no desire to approach"; others were dismissed from their employment, and "harrassed in all manner of ways."

In short, Wesley was not thrust out of the church—but his people were. "The clergy," he says, "watched over them ... even as a leopard watcheth over his prey"—and this not only in the early enthusiasm of the revival, but for many years. Wesley himself sat in a church service as late as 1784 and heard a most hateful tirade against the Methodists. Sorrowfully he went home and wrote in his *Journal*, "All who preach thus will drive the Methodists from the church, in spite of all that I can do." That was precisely what happened.

Another and important point was that the Methodists could see neither rhyme nor reason for their receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper from the hands of so many drunken, swearing, and bitter parsons, when there were among themselves some traveling preachers of unblamable life.

The Binding Link

For many years the only binding link between the societies was Wesley himself. In 1766 he writes that from the beginning he held "... power of admitting into, and excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving and not receiving helpers." There were a few brethren who ac-

cused him of wielding too much power, but he answered them wisely with, "I did not seek any part of this power: it came upon me unawares. But when it was come, not daring to bury my talent, I used it to the best of my judgment; yet I was never fond of it. I always . . . bear it as my burden."

The Class Meeting

These travels of Wesley from society to society all over the land, preaching everywhere en route and at all hours, are still miraculous to readers. But even so, Wesley could be in but one place at one time, and had therefore to give serious thought to how the societies were to be nurtured and supervised in his absence. The abiding answer to this problem seemed to come by chance.

In discussing with the Bristol society the question of the debt on their property, Wesley was thrilled by a suggestion put forward by one of them, Captain Fey. "Let every member . . . give a penny a week till all [the debts] are paid." Someone objected that some of the members were too poor to pay even that modest sum, whereupon Fey replied, "Put eleven of the poorest with me: and if they can give anything, well; I will call on them weekly: and if they can give nothing I will give for them as well as for myself." Several others took up the idea and Wesley immediately saw in it an answer to a problem even deeper than the debt of the Bristol society. "It struck me immediately," he wrote. "This is the very thing we have wanted so long."

He called the leaders together at once and advised them not only to collect money, but to charge themselves with the spiritual care of the groups of givers. By this means some were spiritually corrected and restored, some unworthy people were expelled from the societies, and the classes thus formed became a chief means of help and discipline.

Before long these classes met at the society room, and Wesley says, "It can scarcely be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little regulation . . . They began to bear one another's burdens . . . and care for each other."

Wesley drew up "Rules for Classleaders" which reveal that these leaders had to visit each member once a week "to enquire how their souls prospered: to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort . . . ; to receive what they are willing to give towards the support of the Gospel." They had also to keep the minister informed of the sick, and the spiritual condition of the members of their classes. The money they received had to be passed on to the local steward (treasurer), together with a review of accounts.

The Bands

The "bands" were really an early type of class meeting, but were rather more select, and were comprised of Christians who "poured out their souls in each other's bosom." But the class meeting was wider in scope and was open to all who desired to be delivered from their sins. Hence it was really the class meeting which Wesley saw to be the divine answer to his problem of supervision for the scattered societies.

Wesley visited each society regularly and met with the different classes. He issued tickets each quarter to those whom he found still faithful to God.

Chapels

As we have seen, the first Methodist chapel or preaching-house was built in Bristol in 1739, but buildings rose all over the land in the wake of the revival and almost as quickly as societies were formed. In 1749 Wesley drew up a Trust Deed, but the rapid spread of the societies and the corresponding increase of property necessitated another in 1788. This latter not only settled

the holding of property, but also safeguarded its proper use. No other doctrines were to be preached in these chapels than are found in Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament* and in the four volumes of *Standard Sermons*.

Preachers and Conferences

The Methodist organization was not built to a blueprint pattern but grew out of need, challenge, and opportunity. By 1744 all the principal developments had taken place: bands, societies, classes and class leaders, lay preaching, and conference.

In the matter of lay preaching we have to thank Susanna Wesley for the counsel she gave John when he was about to forbid Thomas Maxwell, a young layman, to preach. Said Susanna, "Take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are." John then saw that Maxwell's call was verified by its fruits, and his scruples were overcome. Thereafter he appointed scores of laymen, many of whom became engaged as full-time itinerant preachers traveling around circuits of societies and living on a very meager allowance. Once appointed by Wesley, these laymen became known as "assistants." In their case also Wesley drew up twelve rules to guide them in their work. These "Rules of a Helper" are most searching still to anyone taking upon himself the help of God's people.

TWELVE RULES OF A HELPER

JOHN WESLEY

1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away the time; nor spend more time at any place than is strictly necessary.
2. Be serious. Let your motto be, Holiness to the Lord. Avoid all lightness, jesting and foolish talking.
3. Converse sparingly and cautiously with women, particularly with young women.
4. Take no step toward marriage, without solemn prayer to God, and consulting with your brethren.

5. Believe evil of no one; unless fully proved; take heed how you credit it. Put the best construction you can on everything. You know the judge is always supposed to be on the prisoner's side.

6. Speak evil of no one; else your word, especially, would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your breast till you come to the person concerned.

7. Tell everyone what you think wrong in him, lovingly and plainly, and as soon as may be; else it will fester in your own heart. Make all haste to cast the fire out of your bosom.

8. Do not affect the gentleman. You have no more to do with this character than with that of a dancing master. A preacher of the gospel is the servant of all.

9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin; not of fetching wood, (if time permit,) or drawing water; nor of cleaning your own shoes, or your neighbours.

10. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And, in general, do not mend our rules, but keep them; not for wrath but for conscience sake.

11. You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work; and go always not only to those that want you, but to those who want you most. Observe! It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance; and with all your power, to build them up in that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. And

12. Remember! A Methodist preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in the Methodist discipline. Therefore you will need all the sense you have, and to have all your wits about you.

We have already seen how abandoned many of these men were to the cause of God, what they suffered, and the wonderful work they did. Heaven alone will reveal what England and America owe to this apostolic band.

Conference

In 1744, Wesley wrote to several Anglican clergymen associated with him in the revival, and to a few others, inviting them to meet him in London to confer on the best method for carrying on the work of God. He

emphasizes the fact that they did not desire the meeting; "But," said he, "I did." This was the conference. From time to time after that Wesley invited *those whom he would* to meet him in this way. Always *he* did the choosing! "I sent for them to advise, not govern me!"

Conference became the "head" of Methodism and its only legislative body. At first composed chiefly of ordained Anglican clergymen, it soon came to include some outstanding lay preachers.

For forty years conference had no legal standing or specification. Therefore Wesley yielded to the entreaty of some brethren who were disturbed at the prospect of what could happen to the work and property at Wesley's death. In 1784 he enrolled officially a Deed of Declaration which established by law both the constitution of conference and its powers.

Ordinations

Sooner or later Wesley had to give serious thought to the need for ordained ministers. The need was especially being felt in America, Scotland, and Ireland. Now Wesley had studied the entire subject of church government and ministry both prayerfully and closely. So, being convinced that it was the proper and scriptural course to take, but much to the disgust of Charles, he ordained Thomas Coke, Richard Whatcoat, and Thomas Vasey for the work in America. He sent Coke, in turn, to ordain Francis Asbury. This he did after serious thought and only after he had made an unsuccessful appeal to the bishop of London to do it for him! In 1788-89 he ordained men for the work in England. Over all, Wesley ordained twenty-seven ministers for the work of Methodism in six different countries.

Brother Charles Again

Charles differed from John in about everything that affected relationship with the Church of England. He

was one of that body's most zealous sons and resisted everything that suggested any break from it. He kept a weather eye on the proper Anglican observance of the sacraments, and was shocked beyond words at John's ordinations. So deep was his concern that he prayed that he might die before the Methodists did anything any more shocking!

Charles opposed, therefore, the Deed of Declaration and continued to make powerful appeals to the societies not to forsake the Church of England. He did, however, continue to preach at the Methodist "cathedral" in City Road, London, and kept faithfully on with his prison evangelism.

The poet of Methodism died in March, 1788, after an illness of almost three months. It took five days to get the news to John, and very strangely, the elder brother made no *Journal* entry of it, but his loss was the sorest blow yet to fall upon him. He was parted from, not only his brother, but the closest co-worker that he had ever had.

There is a touching picture of the aging John conducting worship in one of the societies. He has just given out the hymn, and the congregation is singing the first stanza:

*Come, O Thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold but cannot see!
My company before is gone
And I am left alone with Thee.*

Here John broke down and wept, and the melted congregation wept also at the sight of this old man, now humanly almost alone in the world.

"The Best of All . . ."

In 1783, Wesley took his first holiday and visited Holland. He was then eighty-one but still appeared to

be able to do without rest! He preached regularly at 5:00 a.m. and still traveled among the societies.

Many things were changed by 1783, and he was an almost venerated figure as he moved among the people. Mob violence was at an end. Methodism was established, although still officially within the Church of England.

In 1789, he wrote, "I now find that I grow old," but he had three more years' work to do. There are some touching incidents of those closing months. The aging Wesley was ever young in spirit; and we see him as an old man trudging through the snow and slush from door to door, for a whole day, begging help for the poor!

But he was nearer "headquarters" than he knew. On February 23, 1791, he preached for the last time. The next day he wrote a letter of encouragement to Wilberforce, the champion of the slaves. At the end of February he took to his bed and with impressive calmness awaited death.

On the evening of March 1, many of his friends clustered around his bed. He had still the same old message for them, and raising his hand he said, "The best of all is—God is with us!" Then he prayed and seemed to sleep. In the middle of the night he tried to repeat the words of Watts, "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath," but he was too weak. On the morning of March 2, 1791, Rev. John Wesley, A.M., fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, crossed the river, and the trumpets sounded on the other side!

The Watershed

The streams that flow from the Methodist revival are like the river which "went out of Eden" and watered the earth. The spiritual, intellectual, and social areas of life all felt the gracious influence.

The historian Halevy investigated the striking fact that in an age of world-wide "revolt and discontent" in England alone were great changes gradually accom-

plished. He traces this to the beliefs of certain of the population, and these he in turn traces to the preaching of "three clergymen and their disciples." He says that in England "the popular ferment took the shape of an outburst of enthusiastic Christianity." In France that "popular ferment" took the shape of the Revolution! Another historian writes of the revival and says that it reformed our prisons, infused clemency into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade . . . gave the first impulses to popular education." And he might have extended the list somewhat more!

Christian Citizenship

Wesley's message was primarily a spiritual one, but nothing is more evident than that it had great social results. The gospel which was proclaimed as "a new and living way" to God also produced a new way of living among men. The Methodists were first of all "citizens of heaven," but by that very fact they became good citizens of England.

"Christianity," said Wesley, "is essentially a social religion . . . and to turn it into a solitary one is indeed to destroy it." Therefore his gospel made men good neighbors. Belief and behavior joined hands; faith and good works kissed each other. The social implications of doctrines like that of perfect love are tremendous, but Wesley led his people into working these out in an amazing number of directions.

Thousands of the downtrodden masses of England were lifted to a new and higher plane of living, not only spiritually, but materially. So much so that Wesley saw the danger that material prosperity, resulting from their deliverance from drunkenness and the like, might make materialists out of them!

Hence his searching teaching on the "Christian Use of Money." He taught his people thus, "We ought to gain all we can" . . . but never at the expense of body,

soul, mind, or possessions—our own or others'. "Save all you can" . . . but not for selfish securities, but always to the end that we might "give all we can" to the Lord and the needy around us. And Wesley backed up this teaching with a life that more than fully illustrated it. He was an incurable giver!

Industry and Politics

Methodism pioneered the way for many social changes. The relief of the poor, the prison visitation, the care of the aged and sick, the education of the illiterate, all pointed the way to what could be done. Wesley even ran a medical service for the sick, and a loan system for needy Methodists!

In Copenhagen in 1950, one of the leaders of the British Labor Party said of the origins of British socialism that they were "Methodist, not Marxist." That may be overdrawn, but he was facing in the right direction.

Many of the leaders in the industrial and political reform of the nineteenth century were Methodists working out some of the implications of Wesley's teaching, for Wesley himself had lived through days of great industrial change. The steam engine was patented in 1769, and the inventions of Hargreaves, Arkwright, and Crompton created centralization of "spinning in the dark Satanic mills." He faced the consequent upheaval with the plain word of the gospel and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, from which, incidentally, the bulk of his *Standard Sermons* were preached. Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, once said that the doctrine of perfect love suggests "immense practical questions," and it was the working out of at least some of these that brought some great leaders of industrial reform from the ranks of the Methodists soon after Wesley's death.

Prison Reform

In this realm, too, the Methodists showed the way. The Wesleys consistently and continuously undertook

such visitation from the beginning, and some of the most trenchant exposures of the state of prisons are to be found in Wesley's writings. John Howard, the greatest benefactor of prisoners, was a friend of Wesley's and gratefully acknowledges his debt to him. "I was encouraged by him to go on vigorously . . . I saw in him how much a single man might achieve."

Wesley supported Howard's campaign by lip and pen; and the early Methodists are certainly due considerable credit for the more humane treatment of prisoners which got under way early in the nineteenth century.

Slavery

Wesley called slavery "the execrable sum of all villanies," and set his face stubbornly to fight it. He published a strong tract against it in 1774, while it was yet accepted "in the best of circles," and worked to expose and expurge it from the face of the earth.

Wilberforce, the emancipator of the slaves in the British Empire, was very strongly influenced by Wesley and Methodism, although he remained within the Church of England. Wesley's last letter was written to encourage Wilberforce in the appalling task that confronted him. It is also worthy of mention that the tie was so close between Charles Wesley and Wilberforce that the latter provided personally a pension for Charles Wesley's widow.

Although slavery in the British Empire was not abolished until 1807, the Methodist battle against it began in 1772.

Elections

Wesley's influence was felt too in the area of the electoral vote. He frequently deplored the system which deprived great cities of any governmental representation and yet could give tiny hamlets and even deserted areas two or even three seats in parliament!

Not only so, but Wesley warned his people against selling their vote—a very common affair then—and gave them wise counsel in its proper use. In these things, too, Methodism pointed the way.

Intellectual

From the very beginning, even in Holy Club days, the Wesleys had tried to educate as well as evangelize.

When the Orphan House was built at Newcastle, one of Wesley's intentions was to provide an elementary education for children. Schools were founded also in London and at Kingswood, and in these the children were taught the rudiments of learning by teachers who were themselves Methodists. And this in a day of accepted ignorance.

It is also true to say that the Methodists were first in the field of Sunday schools. Hannah Ball, a Methodist, had a children's Sunday school as early as 1769, almost twenty years before Robert Raikes commenced his magnificent campaign. And Raikes was himself greatly encouraged by Wesley, who extolled the Sunday schools as "nurseries for Christians."

The Methodist revival also brought masses of almost illiterate people into an amazing inheritance of true learning in yet another way. Thousands of them came to know hundreds of Wesley's hymns "by memory" and were thus introduced into the treasures of evangelical truth. They also became familiar with good music from some of the great masters; for the Wesley hymns were sometimes set to such. It is well known that Handel wrote some settings specifically for Charles Wesley's hymns.

And still more vital, by means of the class meeting hundreds of unprivileged common people became diligent students of the English Bible and many of them attained to amazing knowledge of that Book.

Further, Wesley wrote scores of works and edited scores more from the spiritual classics of the ages. These latter he produced in the "Christian's Library" at a very low price, thus pioneering the way, not only in Christian education, but in the field of cheap religious literature.

Literary Influence—Methodists' Works

The literary works of the Early Methodists have not yet received the commendation they deserve. Indeed they have never been really honestly assessed by the worldly critic.

1. The *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, written by themselves and usually at Wesley's request, have become classics in the field of religious biography. There is nothing quite like these anywhere else. Written in plain and unadorned language, beautiful in its simplicity, they vibrate with spiritual power.

2. The hymns of Methodism are beyond human praise, even as literature. No poet or hymn writer is half so thrilling as Charles Wesley, nor half so expert in the matter of meter and rhyme; while in the handling of great themes from the Bible and Christian experience he is unapproached anywhere in the history of the Christian Church.

Living as he did in an age of very prosaic poetry, and much of it deadly dull, he threw off all shackles and outsoared, outmourned, outmarched, and outthought all that went before him or have yet appeared since he wrote. The plain, unvarnished truth is that Charles Wesley is the Orpheus of the Church, the sweetest singer of them all. It may please God to give us a sweeter than Charles Wesley, but that one has not yet arrived.

These hymns were soaked in Scripture, and the expositional value of them is astounding. They likewise express every mood of the human quest for and enjoyment of God. He sings his way through the Bible, the

Early Church fathers, the Christian year, and individual Christian experience in a way unexcelled.

John Wesley was no mean literary critic, and he asserted Charles to be "the most admirable devotional lyric poet in the English language." There are some able critics who see no need to change those words even in the twentieth century.

3. John's works, of course, include his peerless *Journal*, his *Letters*, some translations of hymns written in other languages, and his *Notes on the New Testament*.

Of the first, the *Cambridge History of English Literature* says, "If we judge the *Journal* with the life it lays bare, it is one of the great books of the world."

So far as the *Letters* are concerned, Wesley believed himself to be the busiest correspondent in Europe, and his letters seem to prove this. He wrote thousands of letters to all sorts of people in all sorts of places on all sorts of subjects. These letters are still intensely alive, unlike many letters from that age. They are a clear mirror of the man and his friends and conditions. They have been called "a major contribution to English literature."

His translations of hymns, notably those from the German language, have the virtue of being not only clear but, according to able critics, much more singable than some of them were in their original language! In his translation of the New Testament he anticipated more than half the number of changes made by the English revisers of 1888.

The Romantic Poets

The Methodist revival influenced also the literature of the eighteenth century and in great measure the later literature also. This was done chiefly through the spirit shed abroad through the revival.

William Cowper was a Methodist in all but name. Indeed he once wrote, "Perhaps I am turned Methodist."

He waxed eloquent in a poem on Wesley's power as a preacher, and apart from a little Calvinism received through his friend (and Wesley's) John Newton, he sang nobly the message of the gospel.

Blake too was affected deeply by the revival. In his poem "Milton" he uses both Wesley and Whitefield as the witnesses of God, and asks:

... were they prophets?

Or were they Idiots and Madmen?

He too was strongly evangelical and believed he had a message from God for men:

... that the Perfect

May live in glory, redeemed by the Sacrifice
of the Lamb.

Burns, Coleridge, Crabbe, and Wordsworth might also be shown as examples of the influence of the revival upon English literature.

Wesley might have written:

Oh! let Thy Word prevail to take away
The sting of human nature. Spread the law
As it is written in Thy holy book
Throughout all lands: let every nation hear
The high behest, and every heart obey.

The way is marked,

The guide appointed, and the ransom paid.

But it was Wordsworth!

Whose Is the Inheritance?

Brillioth wrote in *The Anglican Revival*, "Wesley's legacy was never fully used up by his successors."

That is very apparent from all that has gone before in this little book. Through Wesley the Lord gave to His Church a graciously renewed Pentecost, a rebirth of evangelistic passion, a recall and restatement of heart holiness, and a fresh missionary impetus. These have been felt in different ways all around the world.

But who will use his legacy now? Who are his present-day successors? They are found in those men and women who have "trusted in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and are saved from the law of sin and death"; whose hearts have been "strangely warmed"; who "walk in righteousness and true holiness"; who "love their neighbour as themselves" and yet take the "world as their parish," making a brother of every man; who, trusting Christ humbly, and walking humbly with God, "offer Christ to the people"!

FOR FURTHER READING:

RATTENBURY, J. E. *Wesley's Legacy to the World*. London: Epworth Press, 1938.

URWIN, E. C., and WALLEN, DOUGLAS. *John Wesley, Christian Citizen*. London: Epworth Press, 1937.

SOMETHING TO DO:

List the principal "departments" of early Methodism and note the evolution of the conference.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In what ways does the title "Mr. Wesley" reflect Wesley's influence upon his earliest followers.
2. How was Christian education carried out in Wesley's societies?
3. How is the Church of the Nazarene in true Wesleyan succession?