

Weslyans

Extract from John Noake's Worcester Sects (1861)

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Methodism has been called the great English schism of the eighteenth century. Oxford was its cradle, John Wesley its parent and the Countess of Huntingdon its nursing mother. With the two Wesleys was associated the great Whitefield, the son of a Gloucester innkeeper, and who afterwards became chaplain to the Countess. These were the chiefs of the Methodist movement, under whose leadership three grand detachments of Christian warriors were led forth to do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The separation of the forces was occasioned by the doctrine of election; the followers of John and Charles Wesley adopting Arminian views of universal redemption, [page 298] and those of Whitefield, Calvinism; while the Countess, at the same time that she leaned towards the religious principles of her chaplain, chose to act herself as the founder of a sect.

Dr. Burton has said that "the church of Christ has no deadlier enemies than those who seek to divide it into parties, and who are always looking out for points of difference rather than those of agreement." This may be true in cases where the points of difference are of no higher importance than mere matters of candlesticks, flowers,, and surplices ; but the remark surely loses its force and significance when aimed at that great religious movement which in the middle of the last century aroused both the Established Church and all ranks of dissenters from the lethargy into which they had fallen, and may be likened to the stirring of the waters in Bethesda's pool by the Angel who brought healing in his wings. The state of the Church Establishment at that period is well known and admitted by her own members: both clergy and laity had forgotten their relative positions, and were mixed up together in the chafe, the bull-bait, and the beer-house; and when such an article as a sermon was procurable in a village church, the fundamental doctrines of faith in Christ and the necessity of a holy life were but seldom heard. Nevertheless, when a "Gospel preacher," [page 299] like some comet, bringing life and health from another system, appeared in the neighbourhood, not unfrequently did the parochial minister assemble his rural forces, and eject the intruder by pitchfork and cudgel; while those who made no hostile demonstration against the movement were content to leave it to its own energies, or meet it with withering contempt. We can well imagine a churchman of that time writing his own epitaph thus:

"This be my record: sober, not austere,
A churchman honest to his church lies her;
Content to tread where wiser feet had trod,
He loved established modes of serving God,
Preached from a pulpit rather than a tub,
And gave no guinea to a Bible club."

Nor was this spiritual deadness peculiar to the church: the same opiate had affected every religious community, and those who were not lulled into an ignoble repose had better have slept than been employed as they were --- though somewhat drowsily it is true --- in scattering the seeds of Socinian and Antinomian error (see the Life of Rowland Hill).

All honour then be to those young and ardent minds who associated together in our principal seats of learning, resolved on braving the ridicule of their fellows and the persecution of a semi-barbarous world, in order to reawaken the echoes [page 300] of gospel truth in the dark corners of the land, and to carry out their profession --- undertaken at baptism --- of Christian soldiers fighting against the enemies of the cross. Nor must we fail to bear in mind that it was not part of the scheme of these great and good men to found a new church or to secede for the old one; their aspirations were to continue within her communion, while they pleaded for greater strictness of life and more zeal in the ministry. This was the head and front of their offending, for which they were driven forth from the pale of the Establishment; and having, as sportsmen say, "taken to the open", they did the work of their Master in fields and highways, in barns, and all other available places, and gathered together the halt, the lame,

and the blind, for whose souls no man had cared. Lay preaching was their great agency and this was the "irregularity" of which the Church complained --- under the conviction that it was preferable for their fellow creatures to die in fatal ignorance than to have their conversion effected in an irregular manner.

The year 1729 is considered as the time at which Methodism began, when the Wesleys and a few other student at Oxford (afterwards joined by Whitefield) formed a little association for their common spiritual improvement, as was subsequently done also by Dr Stillingfleet [page 301] (afterwards Prebendary of Worcester), and at Cambridge by Rowland Hill and a small body of students who would expound, pray, and invite other to do likewise, but were expelled from their college by the Vice-Chancellor. It was not till the year 1740, however, that the first Methodist society was formed (in Moorfields, London), more than twenty years before a society was established at Worcester. The instruments for the propagation of this new discipline were generally persons from the lower classes of society; but the Huntingdon family took it under their patronage, and there were two or three other ladies of rank who attached themselves to the Countess, and encouraged the labours of the Methodist preachers, giving them access to many in the rank of the aristocracy, and thereby greatly increasing their influence. The late Mr Wilberforce and Mrs Hannah More, too, contributed much to the advancement of Methodism in this country. But it was to the character and abilities of Wesley and Whitefield, in the first instance, that its extraordinary progress was mainly due. Whitefield, as a popular preacher, has probably never been surpassed --- at least if we may judge from the effects of his appeals to his audiences. Who can forget the description of his open-air assemblies at Kingswood, and the electric sensations occasioned among the poor colliers by him [page 302] "Whose restless eloquence, Wielded at will that fierce democratic?"

Here is his own sketch of one of those gatherings:

"The trees and hedges were full. All was hush when I began; the sun shone bright, and God enabled me to preach for an hour with great power, and so loud that all, as I was told, could hear me. Blessed be God, Mr ----- spoke right: 'the fire is kindled in the country!' To behold such crowds standing together in such an awful silence, and to hear the echo of their singing run from one end of them to the other, was very solemn and striking. As the scene was new, and I had just begun to be an extempore preacher, it occasioned many inward conflicts. When twenty thousand people were before me, I had not, in my own apprehension, a word to say either to God or them. but I never was totally deserted; and my confidence was increased when I saw the white gutters made by the tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks --- black as they come out of their coal pits. The open firmament above me, the prospects of the adjacent fields, with the sight of thousand and thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback and some in the trees, and at times all affected and drenched in tears together; to which sometimes was added the solemnity of the approaching evening; was almost too much for, and quite overcame me."

Whitefield, it will thus be seen, held unbounded sway over the elements of popularity. Wesley, [page 303] while less commanding, was more insinuating, and possessed, both in writing and preaching, a perspicuous and pleasing simplicity. Whitefield had comparatively little reading, while Wesley was both a gentleman and a scholar. He had, moreover, a strong and capacious mind for government. His sermons seldom exceeded half an hour in length, and his dislike for rant and fanaticism was shown on all occasions. "Scream no more (says he in a letter to one of the preachers in connection with him), scream no more at the peril of your soul. Speak earnestly as you can, but do not scream. Speak with all your heart, but with a moderate voice." He is known to have severely reproved two of his preachers, Bell and Owen, for what was once called, by Grattan, "the noisy familiarity of the sectaries with their God," for their irreverent expressions in prayer, their accounting the work of the imagination to be the work of the Spirit, their supposing the preachers of all other denominations were doomed to be lost, and their undervaluing reason and knowledge generally; and at length he dismissed Bell altogether for his screaming and fanaticism. With all this sense of decorum and public decency, Wesley propounded as one of his leading principles the reality of perceptible and instantaneous conversion; and the general reader, on perusing his diary, cannot but [page 304] be struck with the business-like manner in which statistical information

is supplied to him with regard to these new births, which are calculated, numbered and labelled, like so many tons of goods or bales of cotton in a railway warehouse. Here are specimens: "Last week eleven were justified and this week eleven more, eight of whom received remission of sins, and three a clear heart, and a troop are waiting for the moving of the waters". In Limerick, "fourteen have a clear sense of being renewed, and several have been justified this week." Samuel Meggott writes to him from Barnard Castle --- Within ten weeks at least twenty persons in this town have found peace with God, and twenty eight the pure love of God. This morning, before you left us, one found peace, and one the second blessing; and after you was gone two more received it."

The great excitement attending the new style of preaching produced its usual effects: when a class assembled, one or more of its members would fall into agonies, while the remainder were "wrestling with God" for them. one of the afflicted would, by and by, spring on his feet and shout aloud "My sins are forgiven". At Limerick, on one occasion, the whole congregation "were in floods of tears; they trembled, they cried, they prayed, they roared aloud, all of [page 305] them lying on the ground; they began to sing, but could not rise and sang as they lay along; and when we concluded, some of them could not go away, but stayed in house all night". Wesley, probably, did not go the length of supposing that these frenzied fits should be called by the name of religion, or that the fright and painful tension in which the human mind was kept by them, during the contagion of a crowded room by night, could be expected ultimately to advance the kingdom of Him whose Spirit worketh in the quiet breathing of love and peace. Such worshipping by great outcries and bodily manifestations is more to be likened to the religion of those heathens who adored their god Hercules with showers of stones and brickbats, under the notion that it would be the most acceptable form of homage to one who all his life long had been accustomed to brave physical difficulties. The worshippers of Baal cut themselves with stones, and the Catholic devotee volunteered a vast amount of corporal suffering, but we nowhere learn that tortures such as these are acceptable in the sight of that God has said by His prophet Joel, "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." The founder of Methodism, it seems, had but little sympathy for extravagance, and attacked with equal goodwill Welsh Jumpers, English formalists, and Popery in [page 306] its Irish strongholds, yet there is reason to believe that he often mistook for divine influence what was nothing but the overflow of a heated enthusiasm; and it is extraordinary that so acute a man should have tolerated to any extent those bodily contortions which were a melancholy caricature of the genuine effects of conversion. Wesley was a plain writer, but then he wrote not for same: the aim of his life was to do the work of his Master, and to the performance of that work he devoted fifty years, during which period it is estimated that he travelled 225,000 miles --- a distance more than equal to nine times round the globe! He was a visitor of prisons, hospitals, and houses of mourning; and it has been truly said that "wherever there was a friend to serve or soul to save, he readily repaired. he thought no office too humiliating, on condescension too low, no undertaking too arduous, to claim the meanest of God's offspring." Wesley was peculiarly a genial man --- not morose or gloomy, nor like those Puritans of whom it was said that they would not put on a corn-plaster without scraping a text over it; he was not one of those spiritual hypochondriacs who depress their natural spirits with a rigour which shuts out the light of day from the chamber of their hearts, and keeps it in constant gloom and shadow, as if a smile or the enjoyment of a cheerful sunbeam would imperil [page 307] their salvation. In company he was among the most agreeable; he was forgiving, unsuspecting, and liberal to a fault, with a temper warm, but judgement excellent. In him old age appeared delightful, like an evening without a cloud. The great object of his life was to revive the doctrines and extinguished spirit of the Church of England: he was treated as a fanatic when he should have been deemed the best friend of the Church; but he lived to see himself respected if not beloved by all.

Wesley was simplicity itself, but yet not devoid of humour, an instance of which occurs in his account of which occurs in his account of a visit to Doncaster, where he mentions an ass walking gravely in at the gate and up to the door of the house, where it lifted up its head and stood stock still in a posture of deep attention. "Might not the dumb beast (says Mr Wesley) reprove many who have far less decency and not much more understanding?" And yet a strange compound of contradictions was this same man; for with all his scholarship and good sense he practiced sortilege --- that is, to refer promiscuously to the first Bible text you open upon, for advice whether to undertake or abandon any important step in life --- a religious kind

of fortune telling, reminding one of the *Sortes Virgilianae* of Charles I, and the superstition which impelled Buonaparte to consult [page 308] oracular problems. He doubted, too, whether any one could tell the real distance of the sun, moon, or planets, at the same time that he believed in demonology and possession by foul spirits. Once, he declares, "a vehement noise arose and shot like lightening" through a congregation at Bristol, amidst terror and confusion indescribable: benches were broken, and much other damage done, and he ascribes this to preternatural influences. Notwithstanding this trait of his character, he is known to have preached at Spitalfields, when so great a commotion was excited by the confident expectation that the end of the world was to be on 28th February, 1763, when thousands wandered into the fields in a state of distraction, expecting to be swallowed up by an earthquake. His sermon was intended to show the absurdity of a supposed human foreknowledge of such an event; and he himself went home to bed, and was fast asleep by ten o'clock, while the streets and fields were swarming with an excited multitude.

In his annual tour throughout the United Kingdom, he preached in churches wherever he could obtain permission --- as at St Andrew's, Worcester --- but otherwise in barns, old buildings, or in the open air. He was a great admirer of cathedral services, which he attended whenever an opportunity presented itself; and once he took [page 309] the sacrament with Bishop Lavington, his old opponent. Nor was he so absorbed in his own vocation as to be perversely disregarding of the natural beauties of God's creation or the works of human art which incessantly were brought before his view: here and there he peeped into beautiful gardens, such as Mr Shenstones Leasowes, at Halesowen, or Hagley Park, or ascended the Malvern hills, and old castles and other "lions" did not escape him on his way. It is interesting to notice another instance of his genial mind, that when once at Worcester he attended an assize trial, and in his diary reports with great satisfaction the humane efforts of the Judge and counsel to restore a poor, half-starved, pocket-picking boy to a better course of life, instead of glutting themselves with his punishment, as was too much the spirit of the last century.

Evesham appears to have been the first place he visited in his county, and there he preached in the Abbey Church as he calls it. The magistrates in that town seem to have been worthy descendants of those who had so maltreated the Quakers (see page 208 [Worcester Sects, John Noake, 1861]), for they frequently encouraged the mob against Wesley, yet he appears not only to have escaped injury but to have won the hearts of the common people there as elsewhere.

The first recorded visit of John Wesley to [page 310] Worcester was in the autumn of 1760, when on his way from Ireland to the south-west of England. At Wolverhampton he hired fresh horses for Worcester, and on the road one of the horses fell, and gave him such a shock that he was seized with a violent bleeding of the nose which nothing would stop, "so (says he) we were obliged to go a foot-pace two miles and then stay at Broadwaters, August 28th; soon after we set out the other horse fell lame; an honest man at Worcester found this was owing to a bad shoe; a smith cured this, but at the same time, by paring the hoof too close, he effectively lamed the other foot, so that we had hard work to reach Gloucestershire." From thence he went on to Bristol and Cornwall. In the following year he does not mention Worcester, but went from Oxford, via Evesham and Redditch, to Birmingham and Dudley. At Evesham he there found "a poor shattered society, almost sunk to nothing, and no wonder, since they have been almost without help till Mr Mather came". He then preached in the Town Hall to large congregations, "many of whom came determined neither to hear themselves nor allow others to hear, but they were overruled, and behaved with tolerable decency, till the service was over, when they roared again; " he, however, walked the street among them and they offered not the least rudeness. [page 311] At Dudley there was a large and quiet congregation. "The scene here (he says) is changed since the dirt and stones of this town were flying about me on every side".

No further accounts of his visits to Worcester occur till four years afterwards, namely, in March 1765, when he rode from Stroud to this city, "and had the pleasure (says he) of spending an hour with Mr R---, a sensible, candid man; but who is proof against prejudice? Especially when those who labour to infuse it converse with him daily, and those who strive to remove it not two hours in a year."

On the 16th of March, 1768, occurs this entry in Mr Wesley's diary:

"In the afternoon I preached at Upton, and then rode to Worcester, but the difficulty was where to preach. No room was large enough to contain the people, and it was too cold for them to stand abroad. At length we went to a friend's, near the town, whose barn was larger than many churches; here a numerous congregation soon assembled, and again at five, and at ten in the morning. Nothing is wanting here but a commodious house; and will not God provide this also?"

The barn above mentioned is supposed to have been the old Workhouse in the London Road, on the site of which now stands the residence of Mr George Chamberlain.

[page 312] A good specimen of Wesley's labours, and his devotion to the cause on which he had set his devotion to the cause on which he had set his heart, is contained in the following entry:

"March 14, 1769. We rode towards Tewkesbury, notice having been given of my preaching about noon at a house a mile from the town, but we could not get to it, the floods were so high; so I intended to go straight to Worcester, but one informing me a congregation from all parts was waiting, we set out another way, and waded through the water; the congregation, too, seemed quite earnest, so that I did not regard my labour, but the going and coming was hard work, so that I was a little tired before we came to Worcester. I began preaching about six in the Riding House. Abundance of people were deeply attentive, but toward the close a large number of boys made a great noise. When we came out, men and boys joined together in shouting and pushing to and fro; many were frightened, but none hurt. Hitherto could Satan come, but no farther!"

The Riding House is an old building still standing close to the bowling-green in Frog Lane (now dignified by the unnecessary name of Diglis Street). It was used for teaching soldiers riding, and for administering to them the discipline of flogging. The building has an open roof, but presents no point worthy of remark, except that it would probably contain some 300 or 400 people standing. It was subsequently used for a [page 313] parish school until the present school was built. Lectures were also delivered there (among others) by Mr Bell, one of the founders of the Bell and Lancaster system of education, as may be remembered by many still living. The old house, which is still the property of the Government, is now rented by Messrs. Kerr and Binns for storing up their moulds, used in the porcelain manufacture. In a humble cottage in the street now opposite the Riding House still lives a widow, named Jane Crump, aged ninety-three, who was born in that street and has lived there all her life, who well recollects having sat under John Wesley on several occasions during his visits to Worcester. That however was not at the Riding House, but at the chapel subsequently erected at New Street. I have had the privilege of an interview with this matriarch, who still retains her faculties, and remembered the last text she heard him preach, namely, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." She continues to entertain a high opinion of Wesley as being a great friend to the poor, and more than that (as the old lady said to me with considerable emphasis), "he preached the Gospel too, sir." The people used to rise as early as five in the morning to hear him preach, and, so far from insulting him, would go out some distance from the city to meet him when they knew of his coming to Worcester, and escort him [page 314] into the town as he rode on horseback or in a chaise. Mrs Crump had also heard Whitefield preach in Worcester, but the poor old lady was more intent on impressing upon me the fact of her having been a witness, from her bedroom window, of the cruel floggings which were inflicted on the soldiery in the yard of the Riding House, and the frequent attempts made by the citizens to break in and rescue the sufferers, which attempts were also rigorously repulsed by a guard of soldiers, sword in hand. Mrs Crump is a link connecting three or four generations; and it is something which I shall not fail to remember with pleasure that I have conversed with one who frequently heard Wesley preach.

Another venerable inhabitant of Worcester has but recently departed from us, who was personally known to the great reformer, John Wesley having visited at her father's house; and his last letter, I believe, was found among her papers when she died in the year 1856, at the

age of eighty-six. Of her it has been said that "her life was unceasingly devoted to good objects, in the promotion of which she was frequently subjected to ridicule and abuse, but nothing diverted her from her benevolent and Christian career. The establishment of Worcester City Mission was mainly owing to her efforts, the committee holding their meetings at her house. She was [page 315] held in great respect by all denominations of Christians, especially the Wesleyans, in whose communion she had remained for seventy years, and who, two years before her death, placed her portrait in the vestry of their chapel in Pump Street". The following lines, written to her memory, though not characterised by elegance of diction or purity of style, may be permitted her as a rough doggerel description of this aged Christian (Susan Knapp)

Through earth's wilderness vast
And death's Jordan at last
Sister Knapp got safely home:
By bright seraphs convey'd
And in white robes array'd to the heavenly Canaan hath come

She hath gone to her rest,
And her spirit is blest
For ever with Jesus her Lord;
Now, with rapturous gaze,
She beholds His loved face,
Which on earth she so much ador'd

She is gone! --- but the tear
To her memory dear
Still lingers in many an eye;
While the sick and the poor
And the aged no more
See this "Sister of Mercy" pass by

Her house and her heart
Were alike set apart
To welcome the friends of the Lord;
And the time-honour'd spot
Shall not soon be forgot
Which such peace and rest did afford

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The lov'd Bible her guide
A few tracts by her side,
And counsels and cautions her store:
See her wending her way
Through the city each day,
To do what she could for the poor

She was known in the street
By her dress plain and neat,
And her countenance wearing a smile
When the young she address'd,
Or the aged hand press'd;
For in her pure heart was no guile.

With what earnest desire
She would oft-times inquire
What more for God's cause could be done!
And it was her delight
Lost sinners to invite
To God's house, that their souls might be won.

Weep no! --- thou dear friend
Who her steps did attend,
And say who will stand in her stead?
For thy loss is her gain;
Therefore mourn not in vain
Be thyself "baptised for the dead".

T.L.

But to return from this episode. By the year 1770 the Wesleyan cause in Worcester seems to have progressed considerably. That appears to have been the first year in which this circuit was regularly organised, and in the conference minutes James Glasbrook and Martin Rodda were the first preachers to travel the circuit. The oldest book in the possession of the Worcester Weslyans is entitled The Quarterly Book for Gloucestershire Circuit, 1771, the circuit then including towns and places of Stroud, Painswick, Worcester, Broad Marston, Honeybourne, Admington, Oxill, Bengeworth, Kemerton, Tewkesbury, Stanley, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Beesley, Brimcombe, and Bewdley. Various towns in Worcestershire were subsequently added, and in 1787 the circuit was divided, the Gloucestershire portion branching off, and Worcester then became the head of its own circuit. The first stewards of the circuit, for 1771, were Charles Freebery and James Nind. It is curious to note the financial condition of Wesleyanism in those days as compared with the present; for instance, at Worcester, the first quarterly collection for the support of the ministry amounted to but £2 , at Tewkesbury £1.1s, at Gloucester 5s, Cheltenham 5s 6d, and other places in the circuit in proportion; whereas now there are two ministers supported at Worcester, one at Tewkesbury, two at Gloucester, and three at Cheltenham, all those places (as likewise Stroud) being now heads of circuits. The earliest recorded plan of Worcester (or Gloucestershire) circuit was as follows:

"The brother that goes on the circuit from Worcester sets off immediately after breakfast on Friday morning, dines at Mrs Cannings, schoolmistress at Bengeworth; Saturday morning, after breakfast to Broad Marston, Mr Henry Eden's; Sunday forenoon, preach at Broad Marston, and [page 318] in the evening at Weston, Mr Adkins; Monday, dine at Mrs Guy's, Hampton, near Bengeworth, and after some to Pershore to preach, at Mr Jones's, barge owner; Tuesday morning, return to Worcester; Wednesday, go to Stourport, Mr Cowell's; Thursday, to Bewdley, Mr James Lewis, near the church, shoemaker; Friday, to Kidderminster, Mr James Bell, shopkeeper, Mill Street; Saturday evening, preach here also, and Sunday morning, which falls to their turn in this manner once in the month, because the next preacher that comes to this part of the circuit goes back from Kidderminster to Bewdley on the Saturday morning, in order to preach there the opposite Sunday morning once in the month. From each of these places, Bewdley and Kidderminster, the preacher returns after Sunday morning preaching to dine at Stourport, and preach at half-past two and six in the evening. Monday after breakfast, you go to the Clee Hills, through Cleobury --- a new place (society this year begun, 1791). Tuesday of late has fallen vacant, through giving up a place in that country. I hope that the Lord will open a door for you somewhere to fill up this day. Wednesday, dine at Stourport, preach at night. Thursday morning, return to Worcester, having now completed your fortnight's round. The next preacher then takes the above circuit. You stay in Worcester a whole fortnight."

In 1797, the following was the plan of the circuit:

[page 319] "The preacher who goes to the country circuit sets off from Worcester on Saturday morning to Ombersley, where is a new society of eighteen members formed this year. On Sunday, preach at Droitwich at nine o'clock in the morning, return to Mr Groves's at Ombersley to dine, and preach again at Droitwich in the evening. N.B. Droitwich is a new place opened this year, and in which we have a very good prospect. Here call at Miss Russell's. From hence proceed on Monday to Bromsgrove, John Bott's, needle maker. In this place is a society of nineteen members, steady but not very lively. Tuesday: Mr Samuel Randle's, Netherwood. The prospect in this place is not very good, as the congregations are very small; yet there is a society of eight members, not very lively. Wednesday: Worcester,

a day of rest. Thursday: Bengeworth, Mrs Canning's, schoolmistress. Here is the oldest society in this part of the kingdom --- once a large and flourishing one, but now reduced to fourteen members, and these not much in earnest. Friday: dine at Mr Nathaniel Eden's, Honeyburn, and then proceed to Mr William Eden's at Broad Marston. Preach at night at Pebworth. Here we have no society, as the few serious people who attend her belong to Broad Marston society. Saturday: Weston, Mr Caleb Adkins. Here is a lively society of twenty-four members. Mr Adkins is one of the circuit stewards. Sunday: in the morning in some of the little villages in the neighbourhood of Weston, and in the afternoon or evening, Broad Marston as above. Monday: Bidford, Mr Russell's. Here is a new society of twenty-five members, in earnest, but ignorant and weak. [page 320] Tuesday: Great Allon, Mr Hemming's. we have preached here for some months, but have not attempted to form a society. Wednesday: Alcester, Michael Flaherty, carpenter. We have not preached long in this place. Thursday: Pershore, at Owner Jones's house. There was once a society in this place, but it was dissolved before I came to the circuit. We gave up preaching there for some months, but at the earnest entreaty of some poor people returned to it again. Friday: return to Worcester for the fortnight."

An itinerant preacher's life, in those days was far from a pleasant one, in a worldly point of view, what with hard riding, bad roads, exposure to weather, highwaymen, and damp beds, scanty fare and violent hostility in most places. A means of obviating one of these disagreeables --- a damp bed --- was provided for, at least in one of those towns in the circuit (namely, Stroud), by the investment of 15s 2½d. on a warming pan, at a very early period in Wesleyan history, as I find recorded in one of the Worcester books.

But now let us return to return to John Wesley. On the 14th of March, 1770, he states: I preached in the new room, which is just finished at Upton, and then rode on to Worcester, where I preached in a large, old, awkward place, to a crowded and much affected audience. Afterwards I met the society, of about a hundred members, all of one heart and mind, so lovingly and closely united [page 321] together that I have scarcely seen the like in the kingdom. On the 15th I met the select society. How swiftly has God deepened His work in these! I have seen very few, either in Bristol or London, who are more clear in their experience. The account that all whom I had time to examine gave was Scriptural and rational; and suppose they speak truly, they are witnesses of the perfection which I preach; yet that they may fall therefrom I know, but that they must I utterly deny.

The "large old, awkward place" mentioned above was probably a room in the Butts, which was one of the obscure and concealed situations at that time coveted by dissenters, as desirable to avoid the attacks of rude mobs; but at length, in the year 1772, a small chapel was erected on the east side of New Street, near the end of the Garden Market (opposite the narrow passage leading to the Shambles). This was opened by Mr Wesley on the 11th March in that year. His own account of that occurrence is as follows:

"In the evening I preached in the new chapel at Worcester; it was thoroughly filled. For a time the work of God was hindered here by a riotous mob, but the mayor cut them short, and ever since we have been in perfect peace."

The mayor alluded to was probably Mr William Davis. On the corporation records that [page 322] is attached to the year 1771, but the custom seems to have been to connect the names of the mayors with the year in which they were elected, consequently, if Mr Davis was elected in 1771, he would remain in office till the August of 1772, the month of August being the period when the old corporation elected their officers.

On his next spring visit to Worcester, John Wesley inquired concerning "the intelligence sent Mr Hill, from Worcester, of the shocking behaviour of some that professed to be perfect. It was supposed that intelligence came from Mr Skinner, --- a dear lover of me and all connected with me. The truth is, one of the society, after having left it, behaved extremely ill, but none who professed to love God with all their heart have done anything contrary to that profession".

On March 17th, 1774, he finds the society in Worcester "walking in love, and not moved by all the efforts of those who would fain teach them another Gospel. I was much comforted by their steadfastness and simplicity. Thus let them silence the ignorance of foolish men.."

At that time Wesley gave Worcester the character of "continuing to be one of the liveliest places in England", which I think may still be asserted of it as regards public entertainments, music and sight-seeing of all kinds. On the [page 323] 14th of March, 1775, Mr Wesley came from Tewkesbury to Worcester, to preach in the evening.

"Here also (he says)the flame is gradually increasing. While i was here there was a very extraordinary trial at the assizes: A boy being beaten by his master, and wandering about till he was half starved, was then allowed to lie in the hayloft of an inn. In the night he stole into a room where two gentlemen lay (probably not very sober), and without awakening them picked the money out of both their pockets, though their breeches lay under their heads. In the morning, having confessed the fact, he was committed to gaol. He made no defence, so one of the counsel rose up and said, 'My Lord, it may be this bad boy may make a good ma; and I humbly conceive it may be best to send him back to his master. I will give him a guinea towards his expenses'. 'And I will give him another', said the Judge, which he did, with a mild and serious reproof; so he was sent back full of good resolutions".

When Mr Wesley next visited Worcester, in March 1776, for his annual circuits were then pretty regularly assigned, on the 21st he says ---

"I was much refreshed among these loving people, especially by the select society, the far greater part of whom could still witness that God had saved them from inward as well as outward [page 324] sin. On the 23rd I preached in the Town hall, Evesham, to a congregation of a very different kind. Few of them, I doubt, came from any other motive than to gratify their curiosity; however, they were deeply attentive, so that some of them, I trust, went away at little wiser than they came."

A few days after this he preached at Dudley, "in the midst of Antinomians and backsliders". Mr Wesley, in the following year, sent his chaise from Tewkesbury to Worcester, while he himself took horse to Bengeworth, where the church was tolerably filled. On the 6th he rode to Worcester , and on the 9th he says ---

"I went through a delightful vale to Malvern hill, lying on the side of a high mountain, and commanding one of the finest prospects in the world --- the whole vale of Evesham. Hitherto the roads were remarkably good, but they grew worse and worse till we came to Monmouth".

His next entry is as follows:

March 17, 1779. Preached at Tewkesbury about noon, and at Worcester in the evening. Upon inquiry I found there had been no morning preaching since the conference, so the people were of course weak and faint. At noon I preached in Bewdley, in an open space at the head of the town, to a very numerous and quiet congregation. Here Mrs C--- informed me 'This day twelve month I found peace with [page 325] God, and the same day my son, till then utterly thoughtless, was convinced of sin. Some time after he died, rejoicing in God and praising Him with this latest breath".

At Wesley's next visit to Bewdley, while preaching there, a man came beating a drum, but a gentleman of the town soon silenced him. In March, 1780, he "preached to a very serious congregation at Worcester"; and in the following year he says ---

"I preached at Worcester and Bewdley, and on the 23rd at Bengeworth church, and had some conversation with that humble man, Mr B---".

In April of the same year he was going to Ireland, but a storm prevented it, and thinking it was not the will of God he should go, he determined to proceed to Wales by way of Worcester and Shrewsbury:

"on Saturday, the 21st, I was at Worcester, and found one of our preachers, Joseph Cole, there, but unable to preach through his ague, so that I could not have come more opportunely. On the 22nd I preached at seven in our own room. At three the service began at St Andrew's. As no notice had been given of my preaching there, only as we walked along the street, it was supposed the congregation would be small, but it was far otherwise: high and low, rich and poor, flocked together from all parts of [page 326] the city; and truly God spake in His word, so that I believe most of them were almost persuaded to be Christians. Were it only for this hour alone the pains of coming to Worcester would have been well bestowed."

On May 15th, of the same year, he was again at Worcester, after passing through miserable roads, and on the 16th preached to a large meeting at Kidderminster. In that town he sometimes spent an hour with "that good man, Mr Fawcett". In the following entry for the year 1782 is another indication of John Wesley's bias for the supernatural:

"March 20. From Tewkesbury to Worcester. On the 22nd, about two in the morning, we had such a storm as I never remember. Before it began our chamber door clattered to and fro exceedingly --- so it sounded to us, although in fact it did not move at all! I then distinctly heard the door open; and having a light, rose and went to it, but it was fast shut; meanwhile that window was wide open; I shut it and went to sleep again. So deep a snow fell in the night that we were afraid the roads would be impassable; however we set out in the afternoon and made shift to get to Kidderminster".

In March, 1783, he was taken with a fever, and sent on a Mr Collins to supply his place at Worcester, but on the 21st he says --- [page 327] "I took chaise and overtook him at Worcester, who had supplied all my appointments, and with a remarkable blessing to the people; but being much exhausted, I found rest was sweet. On the 22nd, in the morning, I gave a short exhortation, and then went on to Birmingham".

Mr Wesley, 1 August of the same year, went from Gloucester again to Worcester, "where many young people are just setting out in the ways of God. I joined fifteen of them, this afternoon, to the society, all of them, I believe, athirst for salvation".

The incumbent of St Andrew's church in this city (the Rev. W. Wormington) seems to have been highly favourable to the Wesleyan movement, the founder of which frequently preached in that church; he did so twice in the year 1784, there being on the first occasion a crowded congregation; "the vicar read prayers, and afterwards told me I should be welcome to the use of his church whenever I came to Worcester;" and in the following August, when he preached from St Andrew's pulpit, he "was agreeably surprised to find the congregation deeply attentive while he applied the story of Dives and Lazarus". Many of the dissenters likewise received him gladly and without jealousy, for I find that on the occasion of his visit here in March, 1785, he "breakfasted at Mrs Prices, a Quaker who keeps a boarding [p328] school. I was much pleased with her children, so elegantly plain in their behaviour as well as apparel. I was led -- - I know not how --- to speak to them largely, then to pray, and we were all much comforted. The society is in great peace, and striving together for the hope of the Gospel. I have not seen greater earnestness and simplicity in any society since we left London."

On his annual spring visit to Worcester, in 1786, he had to push through the snow to this city, and then on to Bewdley, concerning which town he says:

"Prejudice is here now vanished away. The life of Mr Clark turned the tide, and much more his glorious death. I preached about noon, and at Worcester in the evening, where we had an uncommon blessing while I was enforcing 'Thou shalt have not other Gods before me!'"

in this year John Wesley invited, among others, John Edmondson of Keighley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, to be an itinerant preacher when at the age of only nineteen; he accepted the invitation and afterwards became the pastor of the Wesleyans at Worcester, and about the year 1815 was made secretary to the Foreign Missions of the society. He was the author of *A Concise System of Self-government in the Great Affairs of Life and Godliness*.

Wesley, it is evident from his diary, was partial [page 329] to Worcester, and entertained a most affectionate regard for his society her. In the evening of the 22nd of March 1787, he came on from Tewkesbury to what he calls "our lovely and loving people of Worcester --- plain old genuine Methodists; from thence next day to Stourport, a small, new-built village", where he speaks of Mr Heath, "a middle-aged clergyman, and his wife and two daughters, whose tempers and manners, so winning soft, so amiably mild, will do him honour wherever they come". Next year Mr Wesley complains of the chapel at Worcester as being much too full for the increasing congregation. "The Methodists her (says he) have by well-doing utterly put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, so that they are now abundantly more in danger by honour than by dishonour".

I find by the Worcester Wesleyans' books that Wesley must have had some ground for his complaint of want of room, as in that some year (1788) the number of members alone in this city amounted to 209 (exactly the same number as 1860!), besides large numbers of casual attendants. As this is the earliest list of members given, and as many of their descendants may yet be living who would feel an interest in the perpetuation of their names, they are here appended. In the book, marks are set against [page 330] the names, indicating those who were "believers", or "seekers", or "doubtful", married or otherwise:

Mary	Clarke	Tybridge
Miriam	Baldwin	Mount
Sarah	Lee	Rosemare
Hannah	Hyde	Trinity
Mary	Day	Broad Street
Elizabeth	Smith	Broad Street
Rebecca	Willmot	Friar's Alley
Sof.	Edwards	Friar's Alley
Susan	Lewis	Sidbury
Hannah	Wharton	Church Street
Elizabeth	Tyler	Friar Street
Ann	Chillingworth	Friar Street
Esther	Day	Broad Street
Ann	Dalby	Foregate
Mary	Bennet	Melchisedec
Susan	Knapp	Rosemare
Mary	Day	Broad Street
Mary	Scott	Corn Market
Charlotte	George	Broad Street
Mary	Holdbrook	Leech Street
E.	Langdon	Cooken Street
Martha	Smith	Friar Street
Elizabeth	Dark	Cooken Street
Mary	Wilkins	Rosemare
Elizabeth	Giles	Rosemare
Catherine	Hayes	Fish Street
Elizabeth	Hayes	
Em.	Bryan	Friar Street
Phebe	Nourse	Friar Street
Ann	Bibb	Cooken Street
Pen.	Slade	Church Street
Mary	May	Silver Street
Mart.	Edwards	Rosemare
Mary	Garner	Leech Street
Ann	Mills	Goose lane
Susan	Morton	Rosemare
Ann	Carlton	Corn Market
Ann	Hill	Broad Street
Bridgt.	Crisp	Cooken Street
Ann	Lewis	Sidbury
Mary	Maccland	Church Street
Sus.	Spence	Cooken Street

Mary	Thacker	High Street	
Thomas	Evans	Silver Street	
Jos.	Bowen	Doldey	
George	Smallman	Sidbury	
ann	Eaton	Cain Street	
Elizabeth	Renolds	Sidbury	
William	Day	Broad Street	Leader
Thomas	Tyler	Sidbury	
Jane	Smallman	Sidbury	
Mary	Lamb		
Mrs	Smallman	Mount	
James	Stone	Mount	
Elizabeth	Stone		
Sarah	Lewis	Clap Gate	
Sarah	Nash		
Ann	Newton		
Edmund	Lewtyn	Fish Street	
John	Lee	Rosemear	Leader
Cath.	Mathews	Birdport	
Lucia	Bowers	Broad Street	
Jane	Bowen	Bowk Lane	
Ann	Phillips	Sidbury	
Jos.	Chillingworth	Friar's Street	
Ann	Evans	Newport Street	
Ann	Young	Silver Street	
Ann	Miller	Loesmear	
M.	Lawrence	Birdport	
John	Corns	Friar's Street	
Ann	Clark		
Sar.	Davis	Doldey	
Ann	Horn	Shambles	
Hannnah	Hassall	Loesmear	
Mary	Spooner	Leech Street	
Susan	Perkins	Loesmear	
John	Knap	Loesmear	Leader
Ann	Knap		
Mary	Bell	Cross	
William	Locker		
Jos.	Giles	Loesmear	
Susan	Holmes		
Thomas	Davis	St Johns	
Sar.	Davis		
Mary	Southorn		
Elizabeth	Pew	Loesmear	
Elizabeth	Lovekin		
William	Corns		
Phe.	Bullock	Loesmear	
Elizabeth	Knapp	Loesmear	
James	Evans	Newport Street	
Jos.	Jones	St Clements	
Dinah	Lamb	Silver Street	
Sarah	Bradley	Friar's Street	
Sarah	Netherwood	Bank Street	
Sarah	Jacox	Quay Street	
Joseph	Jacox	Quay	
Henry	Whitmay	Sidbury	

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John	Wheeler	High Street	
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Robert	Brown	Shambles	
Jas.	Evans	Newport Street	
Esther	Chillingworth	Friar's Street	
Elizabeth	Mantle	Friar's Street	
Marg.	Price	Sidbury	
John	Baylis	Sidbury	
John	Yates	Friar's Alley	
Elizabeth	Jones	Turkey Street	
Sarah	Atkins	Friar's Street	
Mary	Francis	Cooken Street	
William	Read	Cross	
William	Brutt	Silver Street	
John	Lee	Crump's Buildings	
Thomas	Mill	Goose Lane	
Ann	Adley	Town Ditch	
George	Lee	Pump Street	
Thomas	Williams	Powick	
Sarah	Williams		
Thomas	Bourn	Friar's Street	
Thomas	Smith	Silver Street	
John	Wells	Silver Street	
John	Hughes	Rosemear	Leader
Jane	Busby	Bank Street	
Ann	Fell	Goose Lane	
William	Drinkwater	College Yard	
William	Day	Broad Street	
Fran.	Haswell	Rosemear	
Thomas	Adams	Rosemear	
Mary	Adams	Rosemear	
Mary	Badger	Shambles	
William	Hayward		
Margt.	Perrins	St Peters	
Margt.	Severn	All Saints	
William	Hobb	Clap Gate	
William	Giles	Silver Street	
A.	Edmunds	Loesmear	
Elizabeth	Davis	Loesmear	
William	Barton		
Harriet	Harper	Bank Street	
John	McCloud		Drum Major
William	Foxwell	College Yard	
Ann	Brown	All Saints	
William	Gardiner		
Ann	Poppleton		
Elizabeth	Fuller		
Elizabeth	Holdridge		
Ann	Holt		
John	James		
Han.	Barnsley		
Matthew	Wilkins		

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The majority of these members were engaged in the glove trade (then flourishing in Worcester), others were servants, cordwainers, milk sellers, water carriers, bricklayers, hatters, coopers, dyers, patten makers, smiths, watermen, one or two china workers, a milliner or two, and two or three of the females are described as "gents". (!) The preacher's house rent at that times amounted to nine guineas per annum, and rates and taxes about two guineas more.

On the 20th of March 1788, Wesley went to Stourport, where

"Twenty years ago (says he) there was but one house; now there are two or three streets; and as the trade swiftly increases it will probably grow into a considerable town. A few years since, Mr Cowell largely contributed to the building of a preaching house here, in which both Calvinists and Arminians might preach; but when it was finished the Arminian preachers were totally excluded. Rather than go to law, Mr Cowell built another house, both larger and more convenient. I preached there, at noon, to a large congregation, but to a much larger in the evening. Several clergymen were present, and were as attentive as any of the people. Probably there will be a deep work of God at this place. On the 22nd breakfasted at Mr Lister's, in Kidderminster, with a few very serious and pious friends".

[page 335] In the following year he reiterates his complaint of want of room at Worcester, and in 1790 he says:

"March 17, went to Worcester in the afternoon, and found much comfort among a well established people. They have no jars now, but all hold the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

In that year I find the first list of class leaders, whose names were --- Sister Clarke, Brothers Kingston, Evans, Lewis, Lee, Day, King, Hughes, and the preacher also had a class, making nine classes in all. On the 18th of March, 1790, Wesley went to Stourport, "which (he says) was twice as large as two years ago. They seemed to be serious and attentive while I was speaking, but the moment I ceased, fourscore or a hundred of them began talking at once. I do not remember ever to have been present at such a scene before. This must be amended, otherwise (if I should live) I will see Stourport no more".

There was something prophetic in his remark with regard to Stourport, for he saw that town no more. His work was now drawing to a close; his long, active, and beneficial life had been spent in the service of his Maker, to who he was now about to resign it. Wesley's habits of life and [page 336] happy disposition had tended greatly to lengthen his days. When in his seventy-second year he congratulated himself on his strength being the same as it was thirty years previously, his sight considerably better, and his nerves firmer. He had none of the infirmities of old age, and had lost several from which he had suffered in his youth. The chief cause of this was temperance and early rising. For fifty years he rose at four in the morning and preached about five o'clock; nor did he travel less than 4,500 miles a year. His diary ceases in October, 1790, and he died in March of the following year, at the age of nearly eighty-eight. He had been sixty-five years in the ministry, and had lived to see the enlistment into his ranks of 300 itinerant and 1000 local preachers, with 80,000 members in his societies. His description of Methodism was as follows:

"There is no other religious society under heaven which requires nothing of men in order to their admission into it but a desire to save their souls. Look all around you! You cannot be admitted into the Church or society of the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, or any others, unless you hold the same opinions with them, and adhere to the same mode of worship. The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion, but they think and let think. neither do they impose any particular mode of worship, but you may continue to worship in [page 337] your former manner, be it what may. Now I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed, or has been allowed since the age of the apostles. Here is our glorying, and a glorying peculiar to us. What society shares it with us?"

When Lord Lyttleton published his *Dialogues of the Dead*, in which his lordship says --- "Martin has spawned a strange brood of fellows, called Methodists, Moravians, Hutchinsonians, who are madder than Jack was in his worst days", Wesley remarks --- "His lordship can know nothing of Methodism, and has taken no pains to ascertain. Since the writing of this, Lord Lyttleton is no more; he is mingled with common dust; but as his book survives, there still needs an answer to the unjust reflections contained therein". Both peer and preacher are now gone to their long account, and the *Dialogues of the Dead* is only seen in antique catalogues. So passeth away all things human!

John Wesley did not live to see his wishes carried into effect with regard to his favourite city of Worcester --- namely, by the enlargement of the chapel; but in about four years after his death, the congregation having still continued to increase, they purchased, in 1795, the old chapel belonging to a branch of the Independents (see p.22) [page 338] in Pump Street. This building was taken down and a new one erected in 1796; but the society still increasing in numbers, more ground was obtained, and the present spacious chapel was opened on the 8th of August, 1813. This building cost the immense sum of £6,560. The newspaper account of that opening, by the celebrated Dr Adam Clarke, is as follows:

"The new Methodist chapel in this city was opened for divine service on Sunday, the 8th in the following manner. The minister appointed to officiate entered the chapel at half-past ten o'clock, when a hymn of praise and benediction was sung by the choir. The sixth chapter of II Corinthians was then read, and the consecration hymn being sung by the congregation, the dedicatory prayer for the Divine blessing was offered up by the Rev. James Byron, minister of the chapel. The Rev. Dr. Adam Clarke preached in the morning and afternoon, and gave a clear and masterly statement of the doctrines as taught and believed by the people called Methodists. The Rev. John Stevens, from London, preached in the evening, and the whole collections amounted to £412 1s 4d, being the largest sum ever produced by a similar occasion".

The old chapel in New Street was afterwards used for some years as a residence for the ministers of Pump Street chapel, but the house is now divided in two, has undergone other alterations, and is now occupied as shops.

[page 339] A small chapel was erected in Lowesmoor in the year 1823, by the Wesleyans, chiefly for the use of the boatmen on the canal and the men employed in the wharf. The late Miss Knapp (previously mentioned) was a great promoter of that undertaking, but it did not succeed, and when the late Mr Lake retired from Birdport (Countess of Huntingdon's) chapel and formed a second congregation of Huntingdonians, the latter purchased the Lowesmoor chapel, which was then abandoned by the Wesleyans; that was in the year 1836; it is still occupied by the congregation who separated from Birdport.

The history of the Worcester Wesleyans beyond what has already been stated contains but little that is noteworthy. Their minutes and accounts are of the merest routine character, and their proceedings seem to have been unchequered except by the occasional secession of members from their ranks to form other congregations, and by the yearly or biennial change of their ministers. Among the poor their labours have been attended with great results, while their efforts in training up the young have been worthy of any body of Christians. The resident ministers for 1860-1 are Revs. J. McOwan and E.F. Hardwick. There are about two hundred children in their (Worcester) schools. The debt on their chapel is still large, amounting to £1200, for the liquidation of which a special effort is being made. [page 340]

There is a branch congregation of Wesleyans who have a chapel in Boughton Fields, St John's; it is served, I believe, by the ministers of Pump Street. Moreover there are several parties of seceders from the parent congregation, including the Primitive Methodists, or Ranters, who hold their meetings in South Street, Blockhouse; the Association Methodists in Park Street, who had their new Zion chapel erected in 1845; and --- the last secession from the prolific parent stock of Methodism --- a small congregation of Methodist Reformers, meeting at a house in Bull Entry.

From the proceedings of the 117th conference, held in London, July, 1860, I find that the numbers of members in the Worcester circuit was 320. This includes Worcester (in which there were 209 members), St John's, Droitwich, Norton, Smithen's Green (Leigh), Kempsey, and Crowle. The total number of members in Great Britain was 310,311; on trial, 30,892; members in Ireland, 22,860; on trial, 1,826. Ministers in Great Britain, 965; on trial, 212; ditto in Ireland, 88; on trial, 25. Superintendents in Great Britain, 179; in Ireland, 27. Increase of members during the year --- in Great Britain, 17,516; in Ireland, 3,129. The statistics of the body in foreign parts and their missions are equally flourishing. The ministers in England are assisted in their work by about 14,000 local or lay preachers, who, by pursuing their secular

calling [page 341] calling during the week, preach in the smaller chapels on the Sabbath. There are in England upwards of 5,000 chapel, which have been erected at a cost of more than six millions of money.

In conclusion it may be stated that there is now a considerable variety of denominations who collectively are called Methodists; 1, the Wesleyan Methodists; 2, the Methodists of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion; 3, the Methodists of the New Connexion; 4, the Primitive Methodists; 5, the Bible Christians; 6, Protestant Methodists; 7, Association Methodists; 8, the Inghamites; 9, a body of Reforming Methodists, who separated in consequence of what they considered the absolutism of the Conference; and I believe one or two more denominations, including a large and rapidly increasing body, chiefly in Wales calling themselves Calvinist Methodists, who are not included in what is called Lady Huntingdon's Connexion. The great founder of Methodism, when he established his hierarchy of the Conference, and declared there was no religion under heaven which gave so large a latitude for private opinion as his, scarcely contemplated the possibility of these minute sub-divisions in the ranks of his followers, or, if he had, he would have agreed with the judicious Hooker, that "those who would over reform all things are like to the man who would never cease to whet his knife till there was no steel left to make it useful.