



**HOW HONEST MUNCHIN SAVED THE METHODISTS.**

A century ago there stood in a retired spot, within a stone's throw of the High Bullen, at Wednesbury, an antiquated hostelry, known as the "Cockfighters' Arms"—a great resort of the "cocking" fraternity, for whose exploits Wednesbury was so famous in the days of auld lang syne. Here, after the excitement of the cock-pit, gamblers resorted to discuss the merits of their favourite birds, and to adjust the stakes they had severally lost and won. Here, too, were settled amid plentiful potatoes of spiced ale—programmes of future encounters.

The exterior of the house was dingy enough. The windows were dark and heavy; the low, old-fashioned porch was rapidly dissolving partnership with the main building; and the overhanging signboard—on which a brace of fighting birds in grievous art had long since melted into love, and become ethereal as to colour—creaked dismally in response to every gust of wind. Few sober-minded folk cared to cross the threshold of the "Arms"; for Nancy Neale, the hostess, was an Amazon whose salutation only the initiated had the courage to encounter.

On a dull autumn evening, about the middle of the last century, a group of toppers, well-known members of the "fraternity," sat around Nancy's broad oaken table, discussing the prospects of their favourite pastime.

"I'll tell thee what, lads," observed a corpulent, bull-necked fellow, pet-named the "Game Chicken," out of compliment to his prowess, "if we don't put a stop to these rantin' Methodys, as goes about preachin' and prayin', there'll be no sportsmen left us by-and-by."

"That's well said, Chicken," chimed in another inveterate cocker, "Hooney" by name, as he lifted a huge pewter pot to his lips.

"Why," resumed Chicken, "just look what they've done for Honest Munchin! Whoever could ha' thought it? As game a chap was Munchin as ever handled a bird, an' a pluckier cove to bet I never see."

"Aye, aye!" exclaimed the company, in a chorus of assent.

"But, la!" continued the first speaker, "jist behold him now, as tunky as a turtle dove, an' I b'lieve, if he wor to see a cork die, he'd want his pocket-handkercher to wipe his eyes."

A roar of laughter, which greeted this sarcastic hit, encouraged the speaker to proceed.

"Well, I was a-goin' to say, lads, as this John Wesley, as they calls him, is a-comin' to-morrow to preach agin Francis Ward's house, and we oughter show him what sort o' blood there is in Wednesbury. What say you, Mr. Moseley?"

The person thus appealed to, although of superior mental training to any of his pot companions, was an inveterate gamester, and his air of shabby gentility intimated a luckless career. He had, indeed, had such a run of misfortune, that a fine estate, which he had inherited on the borders on Wednesfield, was so hopelessly encumbered, and so stricken with poverty, as to be popularly known in the neighbourhood by the name of "Fighting Cock's Hall."

"Here," said the gamester, raising his fishy eyes, and leering like an ogre, "here is a crownpiece, the last I have left, to buy a basket of stale eggs. Chicken 'll know what to do with 'em."

"Aye, aye!" chimed in Nancy, who stood with folded arms against the door, "an' I'll give another, for these Methodys is for closing every tavern in Wedgebury, according to Munchin's talk; but we'll show 'um what stuff we're made on, won't we, Chicken?"

At this unexampled sacrifice for the cause of cocking and tipping, the applause became uproarious, and, by general consent, Mr. Wesley was to have such a reception on the morrow as would convince him that "Wedgebury

blood was game." So inspiring became this lively theme that the morning sky was flushed with the red streaks of dawn before the revellers brought their orgies to a close.

On the afternoon following, the alley leading to the "Arms" was filled by a crowd of roysterers, headed by the Chicken and his confederates of the night before. The enthusiasm of the mob in their denunciation of the Methodists was heightened by sundry jugs of ale, liberally dispensed by Nancy. The multitude was composed of the lowest class of labourers, not a few of them being armed with sticks and staves. As the starting-time drew near, such eggs of 'he required antiquity as had been procured, were distributed among the noisy multitude, the excitement rose yet higher, and at length vented itself in a song, common at that period, of which the refrain was—

"Mr. Wesley's come to town  
To try and pull the churches down."

The preliminaries being now all settled, the throng, at a given signal from the Game Chicken, who led them, started on their evil errand. Marching through the High Bullen, on which the gory evidence of a recent bull-bait was still visible, they approached the modest-looking homestead of Francis Ward. As they neared the spot, they found a vast assemblage of men, women and children gathered round a venerable-looking man, who was preaching to them in the open air. The preacher was John Wesley. His silver locks were waving in the breeze; his eyes glanced kindly on all around him; and his voice, distinct and clear, was pleading, as for dear life, firmly yet tenderly with the assembled crowd, not a few of whom were melted into tears.

On either side of the great evangelist stood Honest Munchin and Francis Ward. The former drew Wesley's attention to the advancing mob, and the preacher, suddenly raising his voice, and gazing earnestly at his assailants, said: "My good friends, why is it that you wish to raise a rout and a riot? If I have injured any man, tell me. If I have spoken ill of any, I am here to answer. I am come on an errand of peace, and not of warfare. Lay down your weapons. I am all unarmed. I want to tell you something worth the hearing. Will you listen?"

All eyes were turned to the Chicken, who, for a moment, seemed abashed, and heitated to give the word of command, but, urged on by the jeers of his comrades, he gave the signal, and in a moment the frantic mob sent a volley of unfragrant missiles at the preacher and his supporters; and breaking through the ranks of the worshippers, they rushed toward the temporary platform, overturned it, smashed the tables and chairs, hurling the fragments in all directions, and pursued Mr. Wesley—who had found refuge at Ward's house—with such violence as to endanger the safety of that domicile, and it was not until the preacher had quietly surrendered himself that they were in any degree restored to peace.

Making his appearance, with Ward and Munchin, at the door, Mr. Wesley asked what it was they wanted with him.

"You maun come along to the justice," roared the rabble in reply. And the echo was taken up again and again: "The justice! the justice!" Such few of Mr. Wesley's adherents as had the courage to stand by him in his peril, now flocked round him, and, after a short conference with Ward, the preacher expressed his readiness to accompany the mob.

The justice to whom it was decided to convey Mr. Wesley was the Squire of Bentley—Lane by name—and a descendant of the famous Colonel Lane, who concealed and otherwise befriended the luckless King Charles II. during his romantic game of "hide and seek" with the Roundheads. It was quite dusk when the evangelist and his persecutors left Wednesbury on this strange pilgrimage.

Munchin, Ward, and about a dozen other staunch Methodists, including three or four women in Quaker-like bonnets, were all the body-guard Mr. Wesley had against the menacing mob of ruffians, numbering three-score.

Resistance was perfectly useless, and Munchin's remonstrances with his former companions, though often urged, were received with scoffs and jeers. In this extremity, without consulting Mr. Wesley, and confiding his secret only to one or two confederates, Munchin devised a scheme to dampen the courage of the ringleaders of the fierce and insolent mob. During a short pause at Darlaston, ordered by Chicken, that he might quench his burning thirst for alcohol, Munchin was enabled to arrange the preliminaries of his ingenious device. After the lapse of a few minutes, the

Chicken, who had evidently made the most of his time, came staggering down the steps of the "White Lion," and the march was resumed. The night grew darker, a drizzling rain began to fall, and not a few of the mob—whose spirits had been damped—here turned back, but the rest quickened their pace toward Bentley.

In due time the pretty little village of Bentley was reached, and the crowd paced expectantly up the long avenue leading to the hall. Mr. Lane and his family, who kept good hours, had retired to rest, and were annoyed not a little at such an intrusion on their repose. Appearing at the window in undress, Mr. Lane shouted:

"What means all this—oh? Got about your business?"

"An' please, your worship," answered the Chicken, "we've got Mr. Wesley here, wot's been a-prayin' an' a psalm-singin' at Wedgebury yonder, an' makin' a disturbance on the king's highway, an' please your worship, what would you advise us to do?"

"To go home quietly," rejoined the justice, "an' get to bed." With which judicial advice he fastened the window, and put an end to the conference.

At this unexpected rebuff the crowd grew clamorous, and were only silenced by the voice of Chicken, which bade them proceed with Mr. Wesley to Walsall, where a justice of later hours might be found, adding that he and his lieutenants would be with them presently. The crowd on hearing this, began slowly to retrace their steps down the gravel path; while Chicken, with two or three confidential comrades sought to obtain another interview with the justice, thinking that when the mob had departed he might plead with his worship more successfully.

Munchin, who was an attentive witness to this arrangement, withdrew unseen from Mr. Wesley's side, and was soon lost amongst the shadows of the dark beeches which skirted the hall.

The Chicken tried in vain to rouse the somniferous justice a second time, and, after trying the strength of his lungs and his patience until the case was hopeless, he went cursing and muttering away. Arm in arm, he and his three companions pursued the path taken by their confederates on before, with as quick a step as their previous libations would allow. The night was dark and still. Only the distant murmur of the onward mob disturbed the prevailing calm, save a faint breeze from the westward, which bore the silvery chimes of a distant church tower.

"That's ten by Will'nall clock, Chicken," remarked one of the group.

Chicken made no answer, but was felt to be trembling from head to foot. At length he said, with a spasmodic effort, pointing to the beeches:

"Oh gracious heavens! What's that?"

The other three turned their eyes in a moment to the spot, and saw in the dark shadows of the trees a tall figure, clothed in white, slowly advancing toward them. The four men then fell instinctively on their knees, and probably for the first time in their lives stammered out a prayer.

"The Lord preserve us, sinners as we are!" gasped the Chicken, and the others repeated the cry.

Still the figure slowly advanced, and their terror increased a thousandfold. They grew speechless and motionless. When within a few yards of them, the spectre paused, and lifting an arm be-

"The idea of going to the 'justice' was a very natural one to the mob, since several summonses had already been issued against Mr. Wesley in various parts of the country, and divers rewards were offered to anyone who could procure his conviction. The following is the text of one of the 'Justices' papers," issued about this period:

"Staffordshire."

"To all high constables, petty constables, and others of his Majesty's peace officers within the said county.

"Whereas we, his Majesty's Justices of the peace for the said county of Stafford, have received information that several disorderly persons, styling themselves Methodist preachers, go about raising routs and riots, to the great damage of his Majesty's liege people, and against the peace of our lord the king:

"These are in his Majesty's name to command you, and every one of you, within your respective districts, to make diligent search after the said Methodist preachers, and to bring him or them before some of us, his Majesty's Justices of the peace, to be examined according to their unlawful doings.

"Given under our hands and seals, this 12th day of October, 1743.

(Signed) J. LANE.  
W. PERHOUSE."

neath its snow-white shroud, it said, in a voice sepulchral, calling the Chicken by his real name:

"Dan Richards, is that you who art become a persecutor of God's saints?"

"The Lord preserve us, sinners as we are!" again groaned the Chicken, with a violent effort, and fell back in a swoon.

"Amen!" gasped his three terrified comrades, in convulsive chorus.

The vision slowly disappeared, without further parley, and the three men managed as well as they were able to restore their helpless leader. When he was at length able to walk, the four started as quickly as their trembling limbs would allow in the direction of Wednesbury, resolved on leaving the mob to fare as best they may.

"What a fearsome sight we've seen!" groaned the Chicken, at intervals. "It will haunt me to my dying day."

"Cheer up, comrade—doant turn coward," urged his companions, who, in truth, were as fearful as their leader, starting at every object that they met along their dark and silent way.

Meanwhile the mob had conveyed Mr. Wesley to Walsall, and as they were just ascending the hill leading into the town, Honest Munchin, to the glad surprise of his friends, who had not seen him since they left Bentley, again joined them. But Munchin kept the ghost affair a secret, save to the two or three already initiated; and carried the white sheet unperceived under his arm, rejoicing that his knowledge of their superstitious fear of the Chicken and his companions had supplied him with an effectual means of victory over them.

On arriving at Walsall, no justice was to be found at home, and the mob, worn out by fatigue and disappointment, seemed half-resolved to let their captive free; but urged on by a bolsterous company just emerging from the cock-pit, who came flocking round, they commenced an uproar—a picture of which shall be given in Mr. Wesley's own words:

"Many endeavoured to throw me down, well judging that, if once on the ground, I should hardly rise any more, but I made no stumble at all, nor the least slip, until I was entirely out of their hands. Although many strove to lay hold on my collar or clothes to pull me down, they could not fasten at all, only one got fast hold of the flap of my waistcoat, which was soon left in his hand. The other flap, in the pocket of which was a bank-note, was but half torn off. A lusty man struck at me several times with a large oaken stick, with which one blow at the back of my head would have saved him all further trouble. But every time the blow was turned aside, I know not how. Another raised his hand to strike, but let it drop, only stroking my head, exclaiming: 'What soft hair he has!' A poor woman, of Darlaston, who had sworn that none should touch me, was knocked down and beaten, and would have been further ill-treated, had not a man called to them: 'Hold, Tom, hold!' 'Who's there?' asked Tom. 'What! Honest Munchin? Nay, then, let her go!'"

The crowd now grew more furious, and stones and sticks were brought into such plentiful use that Wesley and his few brave followers were in the utmost peril, when suddenly the Chicken and his three companions, who had retraced their steps, being conscience-stricken, appeared upon the scene once more.

"Hold! I say," roared the Chicken.

"No more o' this! Hold there!"

The voice was at once recognized, and produced an instant truce to battle.

Advancing to Mr. Wesley's side, the Chicken, who was deadly pale, shouted to his bewildered followers: "Now, lads, look ye here! The first as lays a finger on this gen'leman an' his friends, shall feel the weight o' this staff, I promise yer! We've all been a-doin' the devil's work this day." Then, turning to Mr. Wesley, he shook hands with him and begged his forgiveness; and also grasped Munchin's fist, with all the ardour of by-gone years—little dreaming, however, that he was thus paying court to the veritable ghost he had seen at Bentley.

**"ME ALL FACE"**

The Marquis of Lorne, when Governor-General o' Canada, was present at some sports held on the ice of the St. Lawrence River. Though wrapped in furs, he felt the cold acutely, and was astonished to see an ancient Indian meandering around barefooted, enveloped only in a blanket. He asked the savage how he managed to bear such a temperature when he had so little on.

"Why you no cover face?" inquired the Indian. The Marquis replied that no one ever did so, and that he was accustomed to having his face naked from birth. "G od," rejoined the prairie king; "me all face," and walked away.