

Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXVIII. No. 25

MONTREAL, JUNE 19, 1903.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid

The Strenuous Life of John Wesley.

(The Rev. John T. Faris, in the 'Well-spring'.)

'If men may be measured by the work they have accomplished, John Wesley can hardly fail to be recorded as the greatest figure that has appeared in the religious world since the days of the Reformation.'

Because this judgment of John Richard Green, the historian of the English people, has been so universally endorsed, there is widespread interest in the celebration, on June seventeenth, 1903, of the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the founder of Methodism.

Every biographer of this Christian hero dwells at length on the influence of his mother, Susannah Wesley, in shaping his life. She was a remarkable woman. The mother of nineteen children, she found time to train every member of her household to right living. In the midst of great poverty, her trust in God did not falter. The lessons learned from her, John Wesley never forgot.

When, at the age of eleven, John Wesley went to the famous Charterhouse School and found himself the butt of cheap jokes because he was a charity student, he was the better able to bear his trials because of the training of such a father and mother.

At Oxford, his circumstances were somewhat better, especially when, by hard study, he won a fellowship. The income from this was, at first, thirty pounds a year. Of this sum, he gave away two pounds. When, later, he received sixty pounds, he did not increase his expenditures, but gave away thirty-two pounds. One day, when he had no money to give a hungry beggar, he lamented his prodigal expenditures on himself, and resolved to be more careful! This early habit of generous giving he retained through life. When he was eighty-six years old, he wrote in his journal: 'I save all I can, to give all I can: that is, all I have.'

While at Oxford, he gathered a number of his fellows about him and formed a club for purposes of profit to themselves and help to others. The members read together, visited the sick and the prisoners, and prayed with condemned criminals. Those who did not understand their purpose, or who felt condemned by their example, ridiculed them. The name, 'The Holy Club,' was given to them by some; by others they were called 'Methodists.' Not satisfied with ridicule, many of their opponents persecuted the earnest young men. Wesley wrote his father of the persecution. In his answer, Samuel Wesley exhorted him to steadfastness, and added that since his son had been called the father of The Holy Club, he might be called the grandfather, and he would glory in the name.

After the death of his father, Wesley was urged to go as a missionary to Georgia, then a new settlement. He was

attracted by the call, but thought he ought not to leave his widowed mother. However, when she learned his desire, she bade him go, saying: 'Had I twenty sons, I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more.'

The visit to America turned the course of the young minister's life. He declared in his journal that he went to Georgia hoping to save his soul by works of self-denial and righteousness. But, on the voyage out from England, he met some Moravian missionaries, who opened his eyes to the fact that there was something lacking in his spiritual experience. When, after some years in America, he returned home, he realized that he needed to know more of salvation by faith. On the advice of Peter Böhler, a young Moravian, he determined to preach with all his might

he saw his duty clearly, and, with the sublime statement, 'All the world is my parish,' he began his laborious travels, which lasted forty years, to and fro throughout England, Ireland, and Scotland.

Augustine Birrell says: 'He made his journeys for the most part on horseback. He paid more turnpikes than any man who ever bestrode a beast. Eight thousand miles was his annual record for many a long year, during each of which he seldom preached less frequently than a thousand times. He visited again and again the most out-of-the-way districts, the remotest corners of England, places which to-day lie far from the reacher after the picturesque. None but the sturdiest of pedestrians, the most determined of cyclists, can retrace the steps of Wesley and his horse, and stand by the rocks



the gospel of faith, in the hope that the light would break into his own soul. His purpose was carried out, and, on May twenty-fourth, his hope was realized. He called that the date of his true conversion.

In the meantime, he had preached so earnestly and personally that the doors of many Established churches were closed to him. He was even refused admission to the old church at Epworth. Thereupon he stepped on his father's tomb and preached with such earnestness and power that many were converted.

Shut out of the Church of England, to which he had always been loyal, but determined to obey God's call to preach, he found his opportunities in the streets and in the fields. Out-of-door preaching was not easy for a man of his traditions and training. All his life he had been, as he said, 'so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order' that he was tempted to think 'the saving of souls almost a sin if not done in a church.' But

and the natural amphitheatres in Cornwall and Northumberland, in Lancashire and Berkshire, where he preached the gospel to the heathen.

During these years of toil, the life of the itinerant preacher was often threatened by mobs which had been inflamed against him.

One experience he described as follows: 'The rabble brought a bull they had been baiting, and strove to drive it among the people. But the bull was wiser than his drivers; it ran on either side of us, while we quietly sang praise to God and prayed. They drove the bull against the table. I put aside his head with my hand, that the blood might not drop upon my clothes.' On another occasion, 'they drove cows among the congregation, and threw stones, one of which struck me between the eyes. But I felt no pain at all, and, when I had wiped away the blood, went on testifying that God hath not given us the spirit of fear.'