



MARKET CROSS, EPWORTH, WHERE
WESLEY OFTEN PREACHED.

"Take care what you do to that young man," she said; "he is as surely called of God to preach as you are," and she counselled him to hear and judge for himself.

"It is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth to Him good," the staunch churchman remarked, and another of his old prejudices was swept away. He at once recognized Maxwell as a son in the Gospel. Lady Huntingdon wrote of the eloquent preacher, "God has raised from the stones one to sit among the princes of His people." Thus was begun that great army of lay helpers who have done so much in the Old World and the New to carry on the triumphs of Methodism.

A no less important institution was soon originated in Bristol, namely, the Methodist class-meeting. The organizing genius of Wesley, no less, says Macaulay, than that of the great Cardinal Richelieu, began to form his adherents into little groups for mutual edification and prayer, and for receiving systematic and regular contributions for the growing expenses of the Methodist societies. "This," writes Mr. Wesley, "was the origin of our classes, for which

I can never sufficiently praise God. The unspeakable usefulness of the institution has ever since been more and more manifest."

Excluded from the Epworth Church, where his own father had so long been rector, John Wesley took his stand upon his father's tombstone, and day after day preached with such power and pathos that many of his hearers "lifted up their voices and wept," and several dropped down as if dead.

Shut out almost entirely from the pulpits of the Church established by law, and Methodist classes and societies springing up in all directions, John Wesley framed the General Rules of the United Societies, which have become a part of the constitution of the Methodist churches throughout the world. This is one of the most simple and catholic formulæ of faith recorded in the annals of Christendom. As John Wesley remarks in his Journal, "Oh, that we may never make anything more or less the term of union with us, but the having the mind that was in Christ, and the walking as He walked."

Travelling preachers and lay helpers rapidly multiplied, and chapels were, in course of time, erected in the chief centres of population. But while many heard the Word gladly, others were moved to intensest hostility. The persecutions of the early Methodists were akin to those of the primitive Christians. "At Sheffield," John Wesley writes, "hell from beneath was moved to oppose us." Stones and other missiles were thrown into the church. To save the building and the people he gave notice that he would preach out of doors and look the enemy in the face. A military officer rushed at the elder Wesley and presented his sword at the preacher's breast. Wesley, undaunted, threw open his vest and calmly said, "I fear God and