

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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STORIES OF EARLY METHODISTS

JOHN WESLEY

JOHN WESLEY, the Founder of Methodism, was born June 17, 1703, at Epworth, a small town in Lincolnshire, England, of which his father, Samuel Wesley, was rector. We will now give some incidents in his life, which we hope all our young readers will carefully ponder.

NARROW ESCAPE FROM DEATH.

On the ninth of February, 1709, Hetty Wesley, one of John's sisters, was awakened in the night by pieces of burning wood falling in her bedroom. Before she had roused her father, the fire had been seen from the street, and the usual crowd and uproar ensued. As soon as Mr. Wesley had opened his bedroom door, he found the whole house in a blaze. Bidding his wife and two daughters to hasten down stairs, he rushed up to the nursery where the five little ones were sleeping. The nurse snatched up the baby and called the others to follow her. Three of them did so, but John slept soundly, and was not missed in the confusion until the others had all reached a place of safety. This was not an easy thing to do, for the doorway was in flames, and a strong north-east wind blew them inward fiercely. The children got out of the windows, but Mrs. Wesley, fearing to clamber out, made a desperate effort, "and waded through the fire."

As soon as John was missed, the rector ran back into the house, but found, to his dismay, that the stairs would not bear his weight; so, there being no fire escapes in those days, he gave his boy up for lost, and, kneeling down, commended his soul to God. The rest we will tell in John's own words:

"I remember all the circumstances as well as though it were but yesterday. Seeing the room was very light, I called to the maid to take me up. But none answering, I put my head out of the curtains and saw streaks of fire on the top of the room. I got up and ran to the door, but could get no further, all beyond it being in a blaze. I then climbed up on a chest which stood near a window. One in the yard saw me, and proposed running to fetch a ladder. Another answered, 'There will not be time; but I have thought of another expedient. Here, I will fix myself against the wall; lift a light man and set him upon my shoulders!' They did so and took me out of the window. Just then the whole roof fell in, but it

fell inward, or we had all been crushed at once. When they brought me into the house where my father was, he cried out, 'Come, neighbors, let us kneel down! Let us give thanks to God, he has given me all my eight children; let the house go, I am rich enough!'"

The frightened, half-clad women and children were taken in by different neighbors, who took care of them till

His mother felt a strong conviction that his life had been so wonderfully spared for some good purpose, and spoke even more earnestly and faithfully than before at their private Thursday-evening talks. And the Lord, who saw fit to prepare him early for his high and holy calling, graciously blessed these instructions, so that his father thought him fit to receive the Lord's Supper when only eight years old.

of taking their portion of meat from the younger ones, by the law of the strongest; and during a great part of the time that Wesley remained there, a small daily portion of bread was his only food. Those theoretical physicians who recommended spare diet for the human animal, might appeal with triumph to the length of days which he attained, and the elastic constitution which he enjoyed. He himself imputed this blessing in a great measure to the strict obedience with which he performed an injunction of his father's, that he should run around the Charter-house garden three times every morning. Here, for his quietness, regularity, and application, he became a favorite with the master, Dr. Walker, and through life he retained so great a predilection for the place that on his annual visit to London he made it a custom to walk through the scene of his boyhood. To most men every year would render a pilgrimage of this kind more painful than the last; but Wesley seems never to have looked back with melancholy upon the days that were gone; earthly regrets of this kind could find no room in one who was continually pressing onward to the goal. At the age of seventeen he was removed from the Charter-house to Christ Church, Oxford.

At college he continued his studies with all diligence, and was noted there for his attainments and especially for his skill in logic, by which he frequently put to silence those who contended with him in after life. No man, indeed, was ever more dexterous in the art of reasoning. A charge was once brought against him that he delighted to perplex his opponents by his expertness in sophistry; he repelled it with indignation:

"It has been my first care," said he, "to see that my cause was good, and never, either in jest or earnest, to defend the wrong side of a question; and shame on me if I cannot defend the right after so much practice, and after having been so early accustomed to separate truth from falsehood, how artfully soever they are twisted together."

JOHN WESLEY'S COMPANIONS.

"When it pleased God," says Mr. Wesley, "to give me a settled resolution to be, not a nominal, but a real Christian, (being then about twenty-two years of age,) my acquaintances were as ignorant of God as myself. But there was this difference: I knew my own ignorance; they did not know theirs. I faintly endeavored to help them, but in vain. Meantime, I found by sad experience, that even their harmless conversation, so called, damped all my good resolutions. But how to get



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JOHN WESLEY PREACHING ON HIS FATHER'S TOMB.

their house was fit to live in again. In a few months the family had once more settled down into that quiet order which had been so sadly interrupted.

Although John was only six years and a half old, his danger and deliverance made a deep impression on his mind. He often referred to it, and once had a seal engraved bearing the representation of a burning house, and the motto, "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?"

JOHN WESLEY AT SCHOOL.

John was sent to the Charter-house while quite young, for his education, and while there suffered much under the tyranny which the elder boys were permitted to exercise. This evil at one time existed very generally in English schools, through the culpable negligence of the masters; and perhaps may still continue to exist.

The boys of the higher forms of the Charter-house were then in the practice