



FIRST METHODIST "CLASS-MEETING" CALLED BY THAT NAME.

His own account of this important event is as follows : " In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, and desired that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come ; this was the rise of the United Society." This is recorded as the epoch of Methodism from which its corporate organization dates.

The "irregularities" of the new apostles soon caused the closure of many churches against them. Charles Wesley was ejected from his curacy and threatened with excommunication by the Archbishop of Canterbury. When driven from the churches, these zealous evangelists went everywhere preaching the Word—in the market-places, on the hillsides, on the broad commons, wherever men would listen, and often where they would not.

Nor was this new apostolate without confessors unto blood and martyrs unto death. They were stoned, they were beaten with cudgels, they were dragged through kennels, and some died of their wounds. They were everywhere spoken against. Even bishops, like Warburton and Lavington, assailed them with the coarsest and most scurrilous invective.

John Wesley was soon called to sanction a new departure, namely, that of lay preaching. Thomas Maxfield, one of his gifted helpers, during Wesley's absence from the Foundry in London, occupied the pulpit—to the great benefit of the large congregations. Wesley, hearing of this new irregularity, and strong in his sentiments of churchly order, hastened to London to put a stop to the innovation. His wise mother, however, read the signs of the times with a profounder sagacity than her learned son.