

## John Wesley the Methodist

### Chapter VI - To America and Back

The Missionary Spirit.--Oglethorpe's Philanthropic Colony.-- John Wesley, Missioner to Georgia.--The High Churchman at Savannah.-- Moravian Influences.--The First Methodist Hymnal-- An Unhappy Ending. LONG before the dawn of the great societies the missionary spirit was the heritage of the Wesley family. That sturdy Nonconformist, the first John Westley, had a burning desire to go to Surinam or Maryland. His son Samuel, the Epworth rector, had sympathies that overleaped all parochial boundaries. He devised a great mission for India, China, and Abyssinia, and a year before his death lamented that he was too infirm to go to Georgia. Now the imagination of his Methodist sons is fired with the idea of evangelizing the Indians, and the recently widowed "Mother of Methodism" utters her famous missionary saying.

A royal charter had been granted in 1732 for the establishment of a colony, named after the king, "in that part of Carolina which lies from the most northern part of the Savannah River all along the seacoast to the southward." The founder was General James Edward Oglethorpe, an energetic and humanitarian member of Parliament, who was intent upon reforming the condition of the debtors' prisons and providing a new home in a new world where the released prisoners might find a hopeful refuge.

The two Wesleys, father and son, and many of like mind, took deep interest in the plans for Georgia, which was to be not only an anti-slavery colony, but which was to be a center of missionary effort among the Indians. Oglethorpe took out his first expedition to Savannah early in 1733. Other distressed people, Salzburghers, German Protestants, and a company of Highland Scots, found settlement there. Certain Moravians, seeking "freedom to worship God," were the fourth to arrive. The Wesleys came with the fifth migration.

When the Georgian trustees were looking for a missionary, some one suggested the name of the zealous young fellow of Lincoln. Oglethorpe liked the idea, but John doubted whether his widowed mother could spare him. He finally went home to ask her. "Had I twenty sons," was her noble reply, "I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more." Charles decided to go as the general's secretary, and Ingham, of the Holy Club, and a young Londoner joined the mission, for such they considered it. Wesley's motives are best learned from his own candid words in a letter to a friend. The apparent selfishness of his first motive must be judged in the light of his frank confession of his need of the first qualification for his mission and the higher altruism of his second motive: "My chief motive," said he, "is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. They have no comments to construe away the text; no vain philosophy to corrupt it; no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths .... They have no party, no interest to serve, and are therefore fit to receive the Gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God."

"I then hope to know what it is to love my neighbor as myself, and to feel the powers of that second motive to visit the heathen, even the desire to impart to them what I have received-- a saving knowledge of the Gospel of Christ; but this I dare not think on yet. It is not for me, who have been a grievous sinner from my youth up, . . . to expect God should work so great things by my hands; but I am assured, if I be once converted myself, he will then employ me both to strengthen my brethren and to preach his name to the Gentiles."

The party of "missioners" embarked with Oglethorpe, October 18, 1735, on the *Simmonds*, a vessel of two hundred and twenty tons. Twenty-six Moravians, under their bishop, David Nitsehman, and eighty English colonists were fellow-passengers. Although they started from Gravesend in October, it was December before they left England, and many weeks were spent at Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, where they had to wait for the man-of-war that was to be their convoy. This gave time for the Methodists to plan their days as carefully as at Oxford. From four to five every morning was spent in private prayer; then for two hours they read the Bible together, comparing it with the Fathers. Breakfast and public prayers filled two hours more.

From nine to twelve Charles Wesley wrote sermons, John studied German, Delamotte read Greek, and Ingham taught the emigrants' children; and the remainder of the day was as carefully mapped out, all uniting with the Germans in their evening service.

One event of the eight weeks' voyage made a deep impression on John Wesley. On several occasions there were storms, and he felt restless, and afraid to die. He had made friends with the Moravians and was charmed by their sweet spirit and excellent discipline. He now found that they were brave as well as gentle. One evening a storm burst just as the Germans began to sing a psalm, and the sea broke, split the mainsail in shreds, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep were swallowing them up. The English began to scream with terror, but the Germans calmly sang on. Wesley asked one of them afterward:

"Were you not afraid?"

"I thank God, no," was the reply.

"But were not your women and children afraid?"

"No," he replied mildly, "our women and children are not afraid to die."

At the close of the day's Journal Wesley writes, "This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen."

On February 6, 1736, the Simmonds landed her passengers in Georgia. One of Wesley's first acquaintances was Spankenberg, a Moravian pastor, whose advice he sought. The German said:

"My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions: Have you the witness within yourself Does the Spirit of God witness with your spirit that you are a child of God" Wesley knew not what to answer. The preacher, seeing his hesitation, asked:

"Do you know Jesus Christ"

"I know," said Wesley, "he is the Saviour of the world."

"True," replied he, "but do you know he has saved you "

Wesley answered, " I hope he has died to save me."

Spangenberg only added, "Do you know yourself "

"I do," was the reply; but in his Journal he wrote, "I fear they were vain words." Such a spiritual probing Wesley had never before received. The conversation was worth the journey across the ocean. The flash of lightning left him in darkness. He asked Spangenberg many questions about the Moravians of Herrnhut.

Tomo-chi-chi, the chief, and other Indians called on him and expressed their friendly greeting, but the way of approach to these heathen was for the time so hedged up that Wesley could devote little attention to their needs.

John Wesley found Savannah, with forty houses, built on a bluff forty or fifty feet above the bend of the river, which here was about a thousand feet across. He began his ministry with a sermon on "Charity" (1 Cor. xiii), and described the deathbed of his father at Epworth. The courthouse, which served as church, was crowded, and the mission began with great promise. Ten days later a ball had to be given up, for the church was full for prayers and the ballroom empty! A lady told him when he landed that he would see as well-dressed a congregation on Sundays as most which he had seen in London. He found that she was right, and he preached on the subject of dress with such effect that gold and costly npparel disappeared, and the ladies came to church in plain linen or woollen. He established day schools, teaching one himself and placing Delamotte in the other. Some of Delamotte's boys who wore shoes and stockings thought themselves superior to the boys who went barefoot. To cure their pride Wesley changed schools with his friend and went to teach without shoes and stockings. The boys stared, but Wesley kept them to their work, and before the end of the week he had cured the lads of their vanity.

The Sunday appointments were many. He divided the public prayers, reading the morning service at five, having the sermon and Holy Communion at eleven, and the evening service at three. There was a meeting at his own house for reading, prayer, and praise. At six o'clock he attended the Moravian service. He catechised the children at two o'clock, and during the latter part of his stay he had service for the Itallans at nine and for the French at one. In two neighboring settlements he read prayers on Saturday in German and French, and he even studied Spanish in order to converse with some Spanish Jews.

All might have gone on well if, as Southey says, he could have taken the advice of Dr. Burton, to consider his parishioners as babes in their progress, and to feed them with milk. But "he drenched them with the physic of an intolerant discipline." His High Churchmanship manifested itself in all the irritating forms common to the sectarian bigots who domineer over timid villagers in some of the rural parishes of England to-day, except that he did not resort to the modern cruelty of depriving the poor and sick Dissenters of relief from public charities. He refused the Lord's Supper to all who had not been episcopally baptized; he re-baptized the children of Dissenters, and he refused to bury all who had not received Anglican baptism. He insisted also on baptism by immersion. He refused the Lord's Supper to one of the most devoted Christian men in the colony, Bolzius, the pastor of the Salzburghers, because he had not been baptized by a minister who had been episcopally ordained. Many years afterward he made this comment on his action: "Can anyone carry High Church zeal higher than this And how well have I been since beaten with mine own staff!"

No wonder was it that a plain speaker said to Wesley at this time: "The people say they are Protestants, but as for you they cannot tell what religion you are of; they never heard of such a religion before, and they do not know what to make of it."

At the same time, as Rigg has pointed out, Wesley was "inwardly melting, and the light of spiritual liberty was dawning on his soul." He attended a Presbyterian service at Darien, and, to his great astonishment, heard the minister offer a devout extempore prayer. He was impressed by the simple beauty of the life of the Moravians, and they sent him to the New Testament. He read Bishop Beveridge's

Pandectae Canonum Conciliorum, which sent him to the Scriptures again as a higher authority than tradition or councils. He thus expresses to Wogan his opinion as to the innermost nature of religion: "I entirely agree with you that religion is love and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; that, as it is the happiest, so it is the cheerfulest thing in the world; that it is utterly inconsistent with moroseness, sourness, and indeed with whatever is not according to the . . . gentleness of Christ Jesus."

Charles Wesley, who had accompanied Oglethorpe to Frederica, a new settlement, one hundred miles to the southward, had no better success in winning the sympathy of those to whom he preached. His faithful preaching at the sins of his parishioners gained him enemies, who lied about him, and even attempted his life, until at a funeral service he "envied the corpse his quiet grave." In 1736 he was sent home to England with dispatches from the governor, and saw no more of Georgia.

While he was in Georgia, John Wesley published his first collection of Psalms and Hymns. It was printed "at Charles-Town" (Charleston, S.C.), and the title-page is dated 1737. In a preface to a reprint of this volume Osborne says: "It has been supposed that this Collection of Psalms and Hymns was the first published in our language, so that in this provision for the improvement of public worship . . . Wesley led the way." His father's hymn rescued from the Epworth fire, Addison's hymns, and some of his own noble translations from the German are included in the collection.

The incident which terminated John Wesley's usefulness as a missionary has a somewhat romantic interest. He fell deeply in love with Miss Sophia Hopkey, the attractive niece of the chief magistrate of Savannah. On the advice of his Moravian friends he suddenly decided not to marry her, and she soon married another. The attachment must have been very strong, for in his old age he wrote of the disappointment: "I was pierced through as with a sword."

But the matter did not end here. Later Wesley felt it his duty to rebuke the lady for inconsistency of life and to refuse her the Communion. He was prosecuted by her husband for so doing, but, as a High Churchman, refused to recognize the authority of a civil court. Then the storm burst. The colonists found many grievances against their rigid clergyman, and to end the matter, on the advice of his friends, he decided to leave Georgia.

So with a heavy heart, on December 5, 1737, Wesley took boat with three friends for Carolina, on his way to England. After a trying journey of ten days they reached Charleston, and went on board the Samuel. After a stormy voyage Wesley rejoiced to see "English land once more; which, about noon, appeared to be the Lizard Point," and the next day they landed at Deal, only a day after Whitefield had sailed out. Whitefield afterward declared: "The good, Mr. John Wesley has done in America is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people; and he has laid a foundation that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake. O that I may follow him as he has followed Christ!"

On his voyage home, and just after he landed, Wesley poured out his soul in language which in after years he modified in some of its expressions. He wrote in his Journal: "I went to America to convert the Indians, but, O! who shall convert me who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil 'heart of unbelief I have a fair summer religion; I can talk well, nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, to die is gain . . . I show my faith by my works, by staking my all upon it. I would do so again and again a thousand times, if the choice were still to make. Whoever sees me sees I would be a Christian .... But in a storm I think, What if the Gospel be not true . . . O who will deliver me from this fear of death . . . Where shall I fly from it"

The day that he landed in England, February 1, 1738, there was another gloomy entry in his Journal, but he ends it with his face toward the light: "This, then, have I learned in the ends of the earth, that I 'am fallen short of the glory of God;' that my whole heart is 'altogether corrupt and abominable;' . . . that my own works, my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God, that the most specious of them need an atonement themselves; . . . that, 'having the sentence of death' in my heart, . . . I have no hope . . . but that if I seek, I shall find Christ, and 'be found in him, not having my own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'" "I want . . . that faith which enables every one that hath it to cry out, 'I live not; . . . but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' I want that faith which none can have without knowing he hath it; [when] 'the Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit that he is a child of God.'"

Many years later when republishing his Journals he added four short notes: On the original statement, "I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted," he remarks, "I am not sure of this." "I am a child of wrath," was his early record; "I believe not," was his later note. And in another note he says: "I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son"--a distinction upon which he dwells in one of his sermons. In a touching passage in a letter to Bishop Lavington, written in 1752, he says that the passages in the Journal were written "in the anguish of my heart, to which I gave vent between God and my own soul."

But the anguish was soon to pass away, and he was to know the full joy of sonship in the family of God.

The mission to Georgia never fulfilled the ideal of the ardent young ritualists and mystics who were its apostles. It was diverted from its noble and romantic purpose of founding a primitive and perfect Church in a new world and among unsophisticated Indians. But it was

not an utter failure. It brought the missionaries themselves priceless lessons, which they had the grace and manliness to learn. It developed the Moses-like meekness which was blended with strength in the character of the coming leader. It drew Whitefield across the Atlantic to preach a Gospel greater than his later Calvinistic creed. It did much to mold the men who were to be the founders of a catholic missionary Church. It gave to the hymnology of the great Revival "the wafture of a world-wide wing." It prepared the way for a theology radiant with the light of a new spiritual experience, and broad as the charity of God.