

Every Man Has His Hero — MINE IS

I OWE more to two women than to anybody else. One was my mother. The other is my wife. They owe their genius for goodness to John Wesley. They were both nurtured in Methodism, though my wife's ancestors were Quakers and her grandmother wore the Quaker dress.

My wife is a descendant of Sir Isaac Newton, and she has his features.

I am, therefore, a lucky man. John Wesley has been my hero since my childhood. For me he is the greatest man in history. My mother as a girl worked a sampler which still hangs in our old home in Belfast.

It is the greatest of all hymns, "Jesu, lover of my soul." I can see my mother, a beautiful girl with a Madonna face, plying her needle, and spacing the words line by line.

The engraved portraits of John and Charles Wesley in our parlour filled me with awe and wonder. I was brought up among Wesleyan saints. These noble beings lived in the fragrance of holiness and faith.

My grandfather was a man after John Wesley's heart. The marrow of Methodism was in his soul. He used to take me to Salem, an old citadel of Methodism. His pew was as large as a loose-box.

He took up the collection in a long-handled vessel like a warming pan, which he thrust into the high-walled pews.

If John Knox made Scotland, John Wesley made England and the English-speaking peoples all over the world. He was born on June 17, 1703. He died on March 2, 1791, crying, "The best of all is, God is with us." He left behind him "nothing but a good library of books, a well-worn clergyman's gown, a much-abused reputation, and—the Methodist Church."

Lecky declares, that the humble meeting in Aldersgate-street, where John Wesley was converted, "forms an epoch in English history," and that the religious revolution he wrought is "of greater historic importance than all the splendid victories by land and sea won under Pitt."

"No other man," says Augustine Birrell, "did such a life's work for England." Ruckle ranks him as "the first of ecclesiastical statesmen." Macaulay says he had a genius for government not inferior to that of Richelieu.

Squith says he was the most



JOHN WESLEY.

influential man of the eighteenth century, "the man who will have produced the greatest effects, centuries or perhaps millenniums hence, if the present race of men should continue so long."

When Wesley died his "societies" in Great Britain numbered 76,000 members, with 300 preachers. Methodism has now in Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and Australasia 49,000 ministers and 30,000,000 members. It has built 88,000 churches.

In Canada there are nearly a million Methodists: about one in ten. In Australasia they are one in nine. The Methodist Church in the United States raised £4,000,000 as a centenary fund—the largest sum ever raised by a single Church in a single effort.

Green, the historian, says:—"The Methodists themselves were the least result of the Methodist revival. Its action on the Church broke the lethargy of the clergy; its noblest result is the steady attempt, which has never ceased from that day to this, to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, the social degradation of the profligate and the poor."

"The great revival reformed our prisons, abolished the slave trade, taught clemency to our penal laws, gave the first impulse to popular education."

John Wesley was greater than Napoleon, Marlborough; Nelson, Wellington, Burke, the two Pitts,

JOHN WESLEY

By
JAMES DOUGLAS

Wolfe, Clive, Swift, Addison, Johnson, Goldsmith, Pope, Gibbon, Byron, Burns, Coleridge, Shelley, Wordsworth, Newman, and George Washington.

He revived a dead religion. He created a new soul in the world. His name will be remembered when all the great names are forgotten. Every revival of religion will spring from the secret fire of John Wesley.

When Wesley was born, religion in England was dead. "There is no such thing as religion in England," wrote Montesquieu.

"Christianity," said Bishop Butler, in his "Analogy," "is not so much a subject of inquiry. It is now discovered to be fictitious. Nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject to mirth and ridicule."

"There was," says Green, "open revolt against religion. The poor were ignorant and brutal; the rich, to an almost utter disbelief of religion, linked a foulness of life now happily almost inconceivable."

Politics were corrupt. Judges swore on the Bench. The "not" was taken out of the Commandments and put in the creed. Wesley reversed the process.

He was the prince of itinerant preachers. Driven out of the churches, he preached in the open air for over half a century. He preached 42,000 sermons and travelled 250,000 miles.

His custom was to preach at five in the morning. He rose at four. No man ever slept less or worked harder. He sometimes rode ninety miles in one day. He read on horseback.

Gladstone was sixty-two when he spoke for two hours to 20,000 people at Gravesend. Wesley preached at the same age twice in one day to 40,000 people. His voice carried 140 yards. He

preached to 32,000 miners. He preached at the age of eighty-eight.

"I am a wonder to myself," he writes. "I am never tired, either with preaching, writing, or travelling."

"I hate to meet John Wesley," said Dr. Johnson. "The dog

enchants you with his conversation, and then breaks away to visit some old woman. I could talk with him all day and all night too."

Wesley was censured for preaching in the fields. "Will they throw a man into the dirt," he retorted, "and beat him because he is dirty?"

"Leisure and I," he said, "have taken leave of one another. Lord, let me not live to be useless!" In his eighty-sixth year he writes, "I now find I grow old." When they had to support him in the pulpit he quoted Anacreon, "Tis time to live, if I grow old."

On his monument in Westminster Abbey are his famous words: "I look upon all the world as my parish. God buries His workmen, but carries on His work."

Many of his sayings are now proverbs. For example, "Cleanliness is next to godliness."

Religion in our day needs another Wesley, and when he appears there will be another world-revival of religion. There are many who discern in Buchman the germ of a Wesleyan renaissance.

Dr. Frank Buchman does not preach or write. The "Oxford Group" movement is nevertheless Wesleyan in its spirit and in its method. It is based on conversion. Its converts meet in house-parties. They make other converts.

These little groups are spreading all over the world. They resemble the Wesleyan "societies." They are proliferating cells. They have no churches, no organisation. They are vitalising all the creeds and all the sects.

Nobody knows how many of these spiritual groups are in existence. There are no statistics. They "share" their spiritual experiences as Wesley's converts used to do in their "watch nights" and "love feasts." The only test is the conversion, the changed life, the surrender of self.

The process of permeation is going on under the surface of life. The Churches are aware of the silent religious revolution, which is being wrought. They are sympathetic. They are not throwing these young crusaders into the dirt and beating them because they are dirty.

"F. B." is a Wesley in his organising power. He keeps in the background. "I never speak," he tells me, "if I can help it." His disciples simply make more disciples. The snowball rolls on quietly and unobtrusively.

The movement is rooted in youth. The older men and women are stirred by its influence. But its energy is youthful energy.

The great revival of the human spirit for which the world is waiting is gathering force secretly and silently. It may before long put new life into the dying forms of religion. It may do for the twentieth century what Wesley did for the eighteenth century. Who knows?