

METHODIST STUDY CENTRE

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METHODISM

OUR HISTORY AND HERITAGE

A reading list prepared by the

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While striving for closer co-operation with Christians of other denominations, Methodists should never forget their own worthy traditions. Indeed, some knowledge of the forces shaping our past is essential if we wish Methodism to play a worthy part either as a separate denomination or as an element within a greater united Church such as those in Canada or South India. For history offers not only antiquarian interest, and a clearer understanding of the present situation, but also helps us to visualize and even to modify the shape of things to come.

There is a great wealth of literature on the history of Methodism. The books recommended here are not necessarily the most exhaustive nor the most up-to-date, but are chosen for their reliability and their readability. The course of reading is designed to occupy a year, each month being devoted to a separate subject, beginning with a general outline, and ending with a summary. For those who feel compelled to limit themselves to one book only in each section, those printed in **Cloister Bold** type are recommended.

Books marked "O.P." (out of print) may usually be borrowed from local ministers or laymen, or from the M.S.C., but most of those suggested are on sale at the Methodist Book Room, and may be obtained through Methodist ministers in the usual way.

1. **Bird's Eye View.** It is very difficult to keep a true perspective when studying Methodism, especially in view of the thousands of leaders who helped to shape its history, of the many facets of its influence, and of its world-wide range. It is probably wisest to begin by getting a general view of the territory whose varied paths we shall later explore with keener interest, since we shall know at least something of what to look for. Perhaps the handiest book for this survey (if the author may be pardoned for saying so!) is Frank Baker's **A Charge to Keep** (Epworth Press, 1947, 8/6). Similar ground is covered from a different standpoint in W. B. Fitzgerald's *The Roots of Methodism* (Epworth Press, o.p.) though this volume deals almost solely with British Wesleyan Methodism. A very useful composite work, though rather bulky for general

reading, is the *New History of Methodism*, in two large volumes (Hodder & Stoughton, o.p., but may often be bought second-hand for between 5/- and 10/-).

2. **John Wesley.** Having gained a picture of Methodism as a whole, we must obviously return to the fountain-head, John Wesley. He is the Colossus who bestrides the Methodist world, and the more he is studied, the greater appears his stature. Here we are not troubled by the fewness of books but by their plenty. Probably more books have been written about John Wesley than about any other Englishman, even including Shakespeare. For the scholars we should recommend the five volumes by Dr. J. S. Simon (Epworth Press, 10/6 each), for the "outsider" the charming *John Wesley* of C. E. Vulliamy (Geoffrey Bles, o.p.) but for the Methodist beginner the book written for the bicentenary of Wesley's conversion by our own Book Editor, Dr. Leslie F. Church, **The Knight of the Burning Heart** (Epworth Press, 1938, 3/6). While young people will enjoy reading this because of its attractive presentation of a fascinating story (and it has some good illustrations!) older ones will find that it fires their imagination by making Wesley a living figure, carefully set against a background far different in many external features from our own. Dr. Church's book is mainly concerned with the events leading up to Wesley's conversion, and for the story of his life's work after May 24th, 1738, there can be no better authority than Wesley himself, in the *Journal* which has won for him an unassailable position in English literature. For many readers it will be best to read the abridged edition (Epworth Press, o.p.) or the complete *Journal* published in four volumes in Everyman's Library, but the scholar should get hold of the Standard Edition in eight volumes, edited by Nehemiah Curnock, which has an immense array of illuminating notes, scores of illustrations, and a very full index (Epworth Press, 1938, £2/10/0).

3. **Charles Wesley.** John Wesley was the architect of Methodism, but his younger brother Charles was a worthy second-in-command whose biography and character well repay study. And—to continue the architect metaphor—it was he who provided the "Music while you work" to inspire the Methodist builders as they followed the improvised plans of their ecclesiastical architect. Suffering from the defects of the poetic temperament as well as its merits, Charles Wesley nevertheless left his mark upon Methodism. Probably the best introduction to him is F. Luke Wiseman's **Charles Wesley: Evangelist and Poet** (Epworth Press, 1932, 7/6), a sympathetic study begemmed with illustrations from Charles Wesley's poetry. A fuller, though more prosaic Life, is John Telford's *Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley* (o.p.), while *Charles Wesley as revealed by his letters*, by Frank Baker (Epworth Press, 1948, 5/-) is mainly

limited to the new light thrown on his character by his unpublished letters.

4. **The Methodist Hymn Book.** The Methodist Hymn Book "ranks in Christian Literature with the Psalms, the Book of Common Prayer, the Canon of the Mass. In its own way, it is perfect, unapproachable, elemental in its perfection." So wrote a great Congregational scholar, Bernard Manning, and any Methodist who is not able to appreciate our rich poetical heritage is advised to read his articles on the subject, collected in the volume *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (Epworth Press, 1942, 6/-), with their sparkling wit and their deep insight into spiritual essentials. Manning speaks, of course, of the original "Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists", which was substantially that in use throughout the 19th century, with the addition of supplements. From this our present Methodist Hymn Book has descended, preserving the cream of Charles Wesley's contribution, about a quarter of the total hymns included. It is this specific Methodist heritage which we should take pains to understand and appreciate. Two other books may be recommended for this purpose, Dr. Henry Bett's *The Hymns of Methodism* (Epworth Press, Third edition, 1945, 7/6), dealing mainly with their literary background, and Dr. J. E. Rattenbury's *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (Epworth Press, 1941, 12/6). As a general aid to the fullest use of our hymn book we may commend A. S. Gregory's *Praises with Understanding* (Epworth Press, 1949, 12/6).

5. **The Methodist Preacher.** For authentic thrills and heart-searching romance there is little to touch *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*. These are biographies (or rather autobiographies for the most part) of our valiant forefathers of the 18th century, penned by men untrained in the art of literature, but who instinctively (and by dint of John Wesley's insistence on "plain, sound English") knew the value of a simple direct style when relating their deepest spiritual experience and their most thrilling adventures. Although their value as material both for psychologists and literary students is well known, the present generation of Methodists is too unfamiliar with them. Issued in various editions last century (being culled from the pages of the *Arminian Magazine*) they were re-edited in seven volumes by John Telford under the title *Wesley's Veterans* (Epworth Press, 1/6 each volume). We would especially recommend the reading of *John Nelson's Journal*, which occupies the largest part of volume 3 of *Wesley's Veterans*, and may also be picked up as a separate publication. Although the valiant stone-mason of Birstal has achieved more fame than the rest of his comrades, his narrative may be taken as quite typical of the others.

The story of the Methodist lay preacher during the last hundred years is told in *A Goodly Fellowship*, by F. H. Buss and R. G. Burnett (Epworth Press, 1949, 8/6).

6. **Methodist Principles.** Understanding of and adherence to Methodist doctrinal principles have been urged on our preachers from the beginning, and it is well known that these principles are to be found in Wesley's *Sermons* and his *Notes on the New Testament*. We therefore assume (we hope not with undue optimism) an acquaintance with the *Sermons*, preferably with the useful guidance of John Lawson's *Notes on John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons* (Epworth Press 5/-).

The constitutional principles of Methodism are enshrined in *The Standing Orders of the Methodist Church* (Epworth Press, new edition in preparation), and a useful booklet for understanding the wide scope of modern Methodist activities is *The Methodist Church: its Connexional Activities and Finance* (Epworth Press, 1937, 2d.). Wesley F. Swift's *The Ministers' and Laymen's Handbook* (Epworth Press, 1949, 3/6) is mainly a practical guide to the conduct of "business in Methodist Circuit meetings," though it also contains valuable historical introductions to the various sections.

Certain principles of personal conduct are also characteristic of Methodism, however, of which our generation has not been so frequently reminded. We suggest a careful reading of a little book published many years ago, but still of real value—Henry Carter's *The Methodist* (Epworth Press, o.p.). At the end is a reprint of the "Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists" issued by John and Charles Wesley in 1743, and forming the basis of Methodist conduct until the present century. The book itself is a commentary on these rules—"A Study in Discipleship," as the sub-title says. Along with this we would recommend the reading of one of John Wesley's own outlines of Methodist principles, preferably that classic of religious *apologiae*, *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, or the much shorter *The Character of a Methodist*. These will both be found in volume 8 of his collected *Works* (o.p.).

An attractive introduction to Methodist principles written primarily for young people, and with the historical background very lightly sketched in, is Dr. Stanley B. Frost's *The Pattern of Methodism* (Methodist Youth Department, 1948, 4/6).

7. **Methodism's Social Witness.** Of late years scholars have been paying increasing attention to the important part played by Methodism in both inspiring and directing the forces of the working-class revolt in Britain, as well as to the important philanthropic contribution which it has made to our social life. Although Wesley was primarily a preacher of the Gospel, that Gospel also led him into

the paths of social reform and even of politics. This is well revealed in **John Wesley—Christian Citizen. Selections from his Social Teaching**, by E. C. Urwin and Douglas Wollen (Epworth Press, 1937, 1/-). As a commentary upon this basic material there are many volumes, of which we may name two by Dr. Maldwyn Edwards—*John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century* (Allen & Unwin, o.p.) and *After Wesley* (Epworth Press, 1935, 5/-)—and Dr. R. F. Wearmouth's *Methodism and the Working-class Movements of England, 1800-1850* (Epworth Press, 1937, 8/6). The social principles of modern Methodism are best seen in the *Declarations of the Methodist Church* (Temperance and Social Welfare Department, 1/6).

8. American Methodism. If it is difficult for a British Methodist to gain a complete mental picture of his own brand of Methodism, it is practically impossible for him to grasp the varied immensity of American Methodism, ten times larger than his own. Some of the developments in the United States, such as Methodist Bishops, the different connexional machinery, and the almost negligible use of Local Preachers, seem totally foreign to us. Yet by history, doctrine, hymnology, and the general "spirit of Methodism," we are closely linked with them, and it is good that we should try to understand something of our great Daughter Church. The best single volume for this purpose is probably *Methodism in American History*, by Dr. W. W. Sweet (Methodist Publishing House, 1933, 3 dollars). As this may be difficult to obtain, however, an excellent substitute would be Richard Pyke's **The Dawn of American Methodism** (Epworth Press, 1933, 3/6). Both these volumes tell the story of American Methodism in bold outline, without seeking to give a picture of the modern scene, especially since Methodist Union, which in America took place in 1939. To supply this defect probably the most valuable book is *Methodism*, a composite volume setting out to be "a summary of basic information concerning the Methodist Church," edited by William A. Anderson (Methodist Publishing House, 1947, 2 dollars).

9. The World Parish. While Methodist missionaries to America founded the most spectacular of our daughter churches, they have continued to go out into all parts of the world, so that a Methodist of today can use Wesley's famous saying "The world is my parish" with much more force than could Wesley himself. The man to whom this missionary enthusiasm is mainly due is undoubtedly the indomitable little Dr. Thomas Coke, whose life-story has been vividly re-told by Cyril J. Davey under the title **The Man who wanted the World** (Cargate Press, 1947, 3/6).

So vast is Methodism now that it is very difficult for its

12 million members and 30 million adherents in about seventy countries to realize that they are all members one of another. The story of British Wesleyan missions has been well told by G. G. Findlay, in *Wesley's World Parish* (o.p.), or better still in the five-volume *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* by G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth (o.p.). Even so it is only a part of the story, for other branches of British Methodism also had their romantic stories of missionary venture to tell, while American missionary enterprise has been outstanding. One new publication which may help Methodists throughout the world to realize their oneness is the quarterly news bulletin issued by the International Methodist Historical Society under the title *World Parish*. (Subscriptions of 5/- per year may be paid to the Rev. Frank Baker at the address in the Minutes of Conference).

10. Divisions and Reunion. A generation is growing up in Great Britain that is able to think of Methodism rather than of Wesleyan Methodism or Primitive Methodism or United Methodism or—to go a little farther back, but still easily within living memory—of the Methodist New Connexion, the United Methodist Free Churches, and the Bible Christians. It is good that this should be so. But it is also good to know something about the issues which divided our Methodist forefathers, in order that we may learn from their mistakes. For into Methodist Union each body brought something which it had learned through the bitter experience of separation, so that the final result is an enrichment of our Methodist heritage. In order to see the different branches of Methodism through the eyes of their own representatives at the time of Methodist Union in 1932, the best single volume is undoubtedly **The Methodist Church: its Origin, Divisions, and Reunion** (Epworth Press, 1932, 1/6) edited by Dr. A. W. Harrison, the other contributors being B. Aquila Barber, G. G. Hornby, and E. Tegla Davies.

11. The Last Hundred Years. Students of Methodist history naturally find most interest in the life and times of Wesley, and in the early years of the 19th century when the first offshoots of Wesleyan Methodism came into being—and this is the field of study of the *Wesley Historical Society*, which issues to its members quarterly *Proceedings* dealing with various aspects of that history. (Subscriptions of 5/- a year may be paid to Rev. Frank Baker). Yet it is a mistake to think that Methodist history consists only of the events occurring over a hundred years ago. Our history is still in the making, and it is valuable for us to see in perspective what has been happening during the last century of our existence. There have undoubtedly been great changes in Methodism, and trends reveal themselves which would probably have surprised John Wesley. The best picture of this period is Dr. Maldwyn

Edwards's *Methodism and England* (Epworth Press, 1943, 12/6). Although the sub-title describes this book as "a study of Methodism in its social and political aspects during the period 1850-1932", it is actually more than that, and the spiritual and constitutional history of Methodism is not lost sight of, even though the main emphasis is on her contribution in the realms of political action and social amelioration.

12. **The Spirit of Methodism.** In such a course of reading as we have followed we have wandered over very wide fields of human endeavour, and it is desirable to have someone who can help us gather our thoughts together, so that we can understand the meaning of this many-sided phenomenon called Methodism whose birth and growth we have witnessed. For this purpose no better book can be recommended than one from the scholarly pen of Dr. Henry Bett—**The Spirit of Methodism** (Epworth Press, 1937, 8/6). After examining the spiritual genius of Methodism, Dr. Bett evaluates her contribution both to religious life, theology, literature, and social conditions, concluding with meditations on the future of Methodism. And Dr. Bett emphasizes the undoubted fact that the future of Methodism depends more than we realize upon our appreciation of her past:—

"There is no great future for Methodism if it becomes characterless and colourless, and practically indistinguishable from the other evangelical communities. But there is a great future for it if it will be faithful to its own peculiar genius I am deeply convinced that what Methodism needs today more than anything else is to be recalled to itself. We need to realize afresh our own heritage, our own tradition, our own mission. If we can recover the sense of wonder and joy which so marvellously characterized the early Methodists, and which sprang, like their evangelism and their fellowship, out of the deep certainty of a real experience of the redeeming love of God in Christ, then there is still a great future of service and of blessedness for 'the People called Methodists'."

It was with this purpose in mind that the Methodist Conference of 1943 appointed a strong committee 'to reconsider and re-state the Message and Mission of Methodism in modern society.' The official report should certainly be studied by every Methodist who seeks to relate his understanding of the past to the problems of the present. Its title is, of course, *The Message and Mission of Methodism* (Epworth Press, 1946, 1/-).