

JOYFUL NEWS

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THREEPENCE

"WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT!"

BY REV. DR. FRANK BAKER.

A Word from the Bible—a word from Wesley—and a word for to-day

The year was 1744, the scene No. 13 Downing Street, London, England—now renumbered "12" and occupied by the Government Whips. The Earl of Huntingdon had recently taken over the house from the Archbishop of York, and was entertaining a group of six clergy and four lay preachers. These ten were enjoying a brief period of leisure from their labours in laying down the principles of doctrine and discipline, which should form the Methodist standards of reference for generations to come. For they had been called together to form the first Methodist Conference. The Methodist Societies had existed for a mere five years, yet already their leader, the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, was enthusiastic over their progress, though, at the same time he was wiser than to ascribe it to wise human leadership or courageous preaching. In that drawing room, in Downing Street, he addressed his select congregation from what became a favourite text, Numbers 23:23—"What hath God wrought?"

It is not a text over which Methodism can claim any proprietary rights, of course. A century later, in 1844, Samuel Morse tapped out these words as he sent the world's first telegraph message. Still another century later this fact was commemorated by a special postage stamp, issued by the U.S.A. Post Office. Early in the twentieth century a learned dignitary of the Church of England, the Rev. Richard Hobson, could imagine no more appropriate title for his autobiography. Nevertheless, the text has seemed, and still seems, peculiarly appropriate for the People called Methodists.

A Word from the Bible.

The words come from Balaam's second oracle proclaiming God's presence with His people Israel. They embody a complete reversal of the denunciation and doom expected and desired by the Moabite prince, Balak: "Behold, I received a command to bless: He has blessed, and I cannot revoke it . . . The Lord, their God, is with them and the shout of a king is among them . . . For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What has God wrought.'" (S.R.V.) How fitting this was for Wesley's followers, so reviled and persecuted, yet so wonderfully used by God, even their scornful nickname of "Methodist" (like that earlier nickname of "Christian") humbly accepted and transformed into a title of honour.

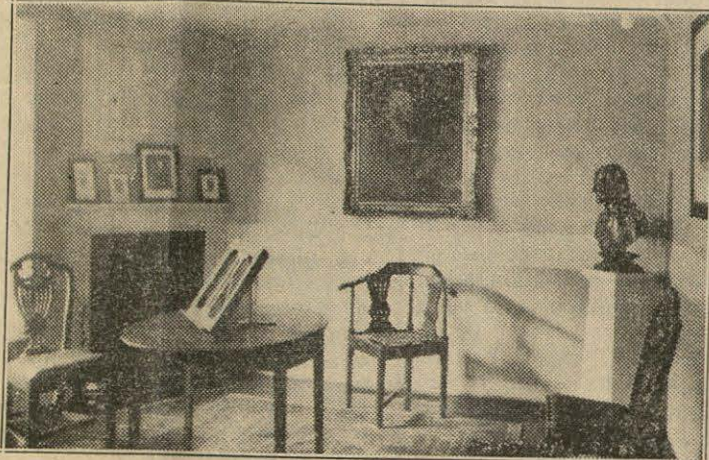
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John Wesley pointed out in his *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* that Balaam's

words were not simply retrospective, but were a confident proclamation of God's present purpose for his despised yet chosen people. "How wonderful and glorious are those works which God is now about to do for Israel! These things will be a matter of discourse and admiration to all ages." Wesley continued to maintain that God was working marvelously within and through Methodism. A letter, written to him, in 1782, by one of his most gifted preachers, Joseph Benson, recalled, with wonder, "that Divine Providence, which hath hitherto watched over this great work and strangely brought the most unlikely and blessed things to pass, so that you have often stood in admiration and call'd large congregations to behold, saying: 'What hath God wrought'."

As Wesley reached landmark after landmark in his rich half-century of evangelism, the certainty deepened. At Birstall, Yorkshire home of the famous stonemason preacher, John Nelson, and birthplace of Methodism in the north of England, Wesley exclaimed, in 1774: "Here, on the top of the hill, was the standard first set up four-and-thirty years ago. And, since that time, what hath God wrought." At Colne, in Lancashire, where he had been mobbed, together with the Rev. William Grimshaw, forerunner of the Rev. Patrick Bronte, at Haworth, he wrote, in 1776: "What has God wrought since Mr. Grimshaw and I were seized near this place by a furious mob and kept prisoners for some hours. The sons of him who headed that mob now gladly receive our sayings."

These same words furnished Wesley's text when he laid the foundation of the New Chapel in City Road, London—the "Cathedral of World Methodism"—in 1777. Outlining on that occasion the extensiveness, the swiftness, the depth, and the purity of the Methodist revival of religion, he urged: "But if these things are so, may we not well say: 'What hath God wrought'?" When, in 1779, he finally removed his London headquarters from the Foundry Chapel to City Road, he wrote in his *Journals* "This was the last night which I spent at the Foundry. What hath God wrought there in one-and-forty years." Perhaps even more moving is his note on the occasion of preaching a charity sermon, in 1790, in his 87th year, to a large congregation in the Anglican Church of Great St. Helens, London: "It is, I believe, fifty years since I preached there before. What has God wrought since that time." Yes, indeed! For on that earlier occasion (actually nearly fifty-two years earlier) he had been told: "Sir, you must preach here no more." Yet, now, he was the most



John Wesley's Study, New Room, Bristol.

revered figure in Great Britain, welcomed by all.

The Motto of Early Methodists

Wesley's followers echoed their leader's words. In 1782, Numbers 23:23 furnished the title-page motto for Thomas Oliver's *Defence of Methodism*. Christopher Hopper, the only preacher to take the chair of the Methodist Conference, during Wesley's lifetime, was addressing a Halifax congregation towards the end of the century, and recalled his pioneering days in that same area: "I had to ride sixteen miles

before I met with another Methodist, and he was in a cellar at Rochdale; then I rode eleven miles before I met with another, and he was in a garret at Manchester. But now, what hath God wrought."

So it has continued through the generations. A few samples will suffice. The Ebenezer Chapel at Dunster, in Somersetshire, was opened in 1811 to the singing of a specially composed hymn:

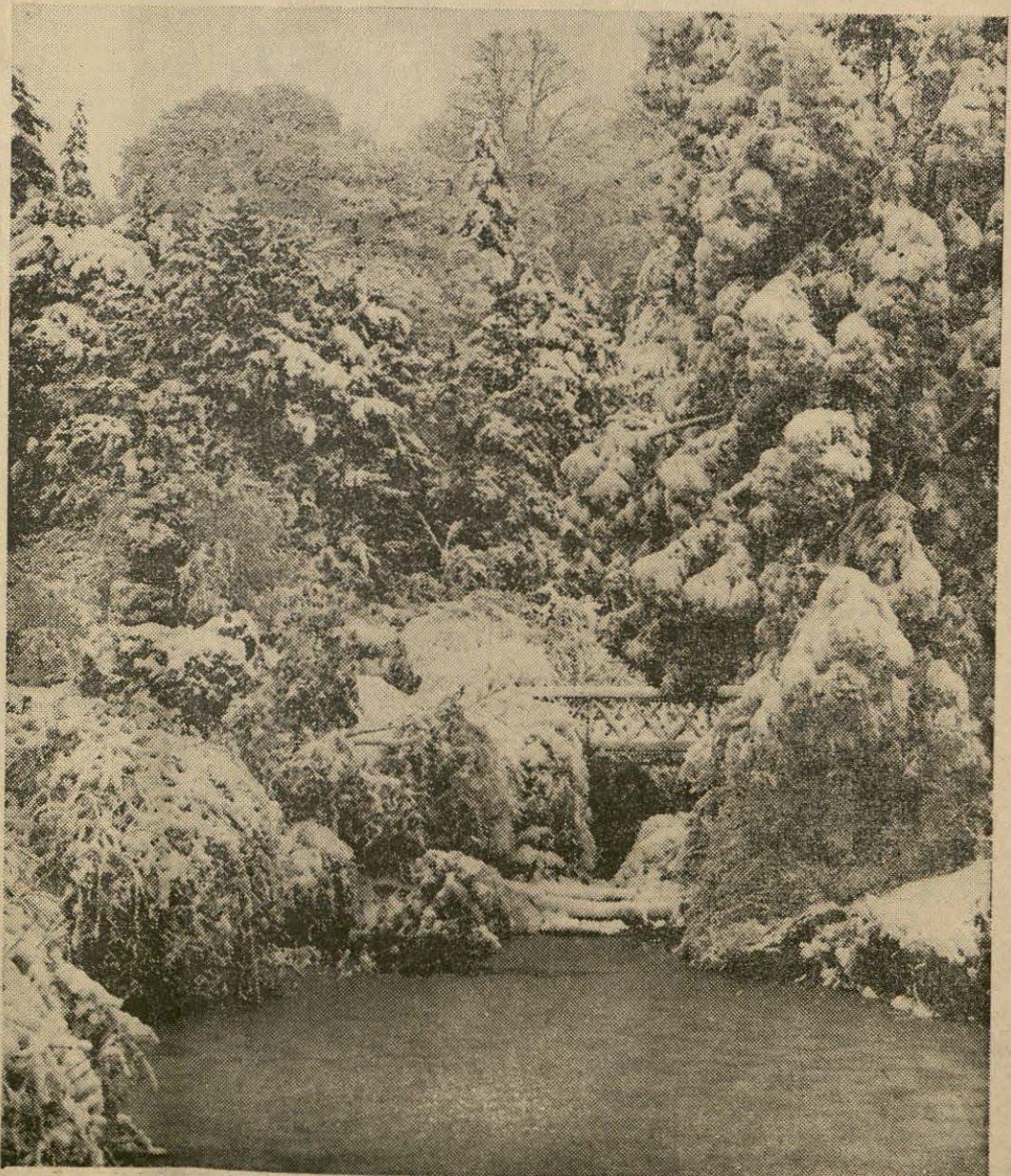
What hath God wrought, may Zion say,
To bring us here on this Lord's day
An Ebenezer for to raise,
And give our glorious Victor praise.

The verse may halt, but the sentiment is both admirable and characteristic. When the Primitive Methodist Conference assembled at Kingston upon Hull, in 1830, a membership of over 35,000 was reported, a gain of over 2,000 during the past year. This emphasized that the infant Connexion was, once more, making real progress after a period of distressing setbacks. William Clowes expressed the feelings of all as movingly he exclaimed: "What hath God wrought."

Methodist medallions usually enlarged on the same theme—when their designers felt able to forsake "The world is my parish." The first Wesleyan Conference, held in Birmingham in 1836, struck a commemorative medallion, which shows Wesley preaching; his text is blazoned below—"What hath God wrought." The same pattern was followed for at least one of the medallions struck in 1839 to commemorate the centenary of the first Wesleyan Society. Even on the Twentieth Century Fund medallion "What hath God wrought," divides the field with "The best of all is, God is with us."

Continued on page 2, Column 6

SNOW SCENE IN CHATSWORTH GARDENS, DERBYSHIRE



By the courtesy of The Derbyshire Times.

JOYFUL NEWS

The Joyful News of sins forgiven of hell subdued and peace with heaven.

Thursday, February 5, 1959

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EDITORIAL

THE PERFECT CHURCH (1).

Some time ago a minister friend of mine said his was a perfect Church. Of course, it wasn't, because there never has been such a thing. I did not argue with him, for on matters ecclesiastical we think differently and we might have found ourselves somewhat hotly engaged before we had finished. I knew what he meant and realised that many of his fellow-ministers would envy him. His people loved him and, because of this, supported him splendidly in all he did—and that is saying a good deal for he is a great and bold adventurer for Christ, and following him can never be easy.

But the phrase has remained with me. What is "a perfect Church"—even giving it a relative, rather than an absolute, connotation. I suppose a Church can be said to be perfect when it fulfils its tasks to the utmost extent of its capabilities, even though they be definitely limited ones. Two points of discussion arise. What is the fundamental task of the modern Church—and what are its most valuable characteristics.

As I have pointed out so many times, Jesus Christ, in the only direct reference He made to the Church, said that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. By the strongest possible inference we can see that He visualises His followers actually at the gates of hell—and attacking there. The Church must be actively engaged against evil, wherever it is most strongly entrenched and most indisputably reigning.

This, of course, obviously implies other things. An army must be trained: it must have the most effective equipment possible: within itself there must be an esprit-de-corps which will bind all its members into one strong and enthusiastic whole.

Methodism has all these things. Fine leaders, strong and keen departments, an efficient book room, a closely geared organisation, give all the direction and assistance that can possibly be needed for active service. Within our local Churches and Circuits there exists the finest religious fellowship in all the world, and its educational policy is as admirable as it is important.

But all this is pragmatic. It is for use, and if it is not used it is useless. Sometimes we are apt to forget this fact. For what purpose has it all been so effectively created?

The answer could be, "to make Christians." But who are Christians?—followers of Christ, we say. But if we are to follow Christ we must surely know where He walked, and more important still why He walketh that way. He Himself said He had come that men might have life. But what is that life for? It has to be used, to be exercised, in some way or other. He said He was the Way—and completed the wonderful revelation by saying that the way led to the Father.

But why was there a Cross between Him and the goal. Because there was sin, because mankind was devil-dominated. There was a battle of Calvary, the greatest battle of history. Jesus went to where sin was—challenged it, opposed it, conquered it. And the perfect Church does exactly this in its own generation.

WHICH IS BEST?

We have been asked which is the best of

The Westminster Pamphlets

We do not know.

No.

- 1 Sells most
- 2 Engages most Church Meetings
- 3 Inspires most Evangelism
- 4 Puts most people to Work
- 5 Raises most money for God's work
- 6 Causes most argument
- 7 Was most publicised in the Press
- 8 Was most used as a Year-end Gift
- 9 Is most popular in Schools and Colleges
- 10 Begets most prayer-meetings.

Which do you think is best?

(6d. each. 8d. with postage. 5s. the set. 5s. 6d. with postage)

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WINDOW ON THE STREET

American tour.

Readers of this column must not expect me to give an up-to-date comment on public affairs since I am on a flying visit to America, in which I have the great opportunity not only to lecture to hundreds of Ministers and students, at Emory University, but to conduct evangelistic and teaching conferences under the Methodist Board of Evangelism in Florida, Mississippi, Wisconsin, Ohio and Georgia. It is a mark of this age in which we live that so much can be done in one short month. Consider, for example, the fact that I could leave London at midnight on a Saturday, and be preaching in Englewood, New Jersey, at 11 a.m. on the following day. Once again I am astonished at the phenomenal growth of our American Methodist Church, both in numbers and influence. Now the sights are set for the ten million mark in membership and it is the strongest of the American Protestant Churches. More remarkable still, perhaps, is the glowing vitality and confidence of the Church.

Things to learn.

If I had to pick out distinctive features, I would want to underline the stress on visitation evangelism, whereby those on the periphery are brought into the centre of Church life. Then there is that remarkable budgeting of a Church's finances, whereby every member knows what the Church is going to spend the following year and what is expected from him, proportionate to his income.

This means that members have a sense of responsibility in giving and Church affairs become more intimately their own. It is a local application of our Lord's words that where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Because they have a real financial investment in the Church it leads to greater interest and devotion. We have always said that if you reach a man's heart, you will touch his pocket: here is an interesting obverse side of that saying. If you touch a man's pocket, you may reach his heart. Certainly, in America, generous giving has freed members from a disheartening concern over debts and the paying of one's way, and set them positive goals of new Churches and School premises and manses. I recall in one of Dr. Sangster's tremendous Westminster pamphlets, with the arresting title, "You too can be a millionaire," a plea for the Biblical custom of tithing and all the difference it would make to us as well as our Church and the Connexion at large. More than ever I now endorse the wisdom of that eloquent plea. Material giving is spiritual investment.

The teaching Church.

Another aspect of American Methodism, which has come home with fresh force, is the morning school, which begins each Sunday morning in every Church at 9-30 and goes on for an hour, giving mothers with young children the chance to go home and others a short respite before they go into morning worship at 11 a.m. The School is most carefully

equipped and fully graded. It caters for grandparents as well as grandchildren, and it means that the Church, as a family, is receiving instruction in the Faith in various classes appropriate to the age-grouping. Those who criticise American Methodism because largely speaking there is no evening Service, forget that most ministers have been on the Church premises from 9-30 until past mid-day each Sunday.

The mid-week Bible Class.

I wish I had space to record my liking for responsive prayers and the recital of the Creed, in their public worship, but I must give the remainder of my space to praise of the mid-week Bible Class. Quite commonly this is preceded by a supper, which members greatly enjoy, coming as they do, straight from work. There is no hard and fast line drawn about the nature of instruction but it is usually based on the Bible and at the close can lead to discussion. Perhaps because there are not so many other meetings in the week, large numbers come to the mid-week service and it is a generous cross-section of the Church's life. Here is cleverly combined social fellowship and Biblical instruction within the framework of the worshipping Church. Once more I realise the privilege of belonging to the people called Methodists, one of the greatest world Churches and with its own distinctive gifts to bring into the common treasury.

MALDWIN EDWARDS.

Stories of Conversion (3)

For Fear of a Brother

BY A. E. CLUCAS MOORE.

For months a small group of us had been planning to hold special services in a little Chapel in the North of England. It had been borne in upon us all that the seed that had been sown over a number of years was ripe for harvesting. There were a number of lads and girls in the teens who had never taken a stand for Jesus. They attended the services but if something was not done soon they might lose interest and drop off from services which could not mean to them all that gatherings of Christians do mean to committed followers of the Lord.

The meeting took place at which final plans were laid. There was to be a meeting on the Saturday and then the Sunday services and then a meeting each night of the week. Well, some were not so certain. Perhaps, Friday night would be a bad night and we ought to miss that night. I felt the same as the others but, for some reason unknown to me at the time, I found myself suggesting that we should have a meeting on the Friday night and offering to take it as an "extra" above my own share of the work. The others present agreed but thought I was just being awkward and I wasn't sure myself.

The mission began. The case for commitment was put with great faithfulness to good companies night after night, but, while everyone said they were enjoying the services, nothing was happening. On Thursday night, one young fellow responded to the appeal. Our hearts were gladdened but this was not what we had expected. Eight meetings, including a special service for the elder scholars of the Sunday School, on Sunday afternoon, and one convert.

So Friday night came and I made my appeal. I didn't know what was happening and only learnt the facts later but, in one of the pews, there was a young man feeling the call of our Lord. But we had a hard battle to fight. It was his brother, his elder brother, who had responded on the Thursday night. The Devil was busy that night. If he came out in answer to the appeal, wouldn't everyone say that he was just following his brother's example? Suppose he was? Suppose it was a proof that he hadn't a mind of his own?

Suppose the voice that spoke in his heart was only a response to follow his brother? What would his brother think? The battle raged as we brought the meeting towards its close, with all heads bowed, and the congregation singing a well-loved hymn. We had nearly reached the last verse and I had begun to feel that that strange impulse that led me to suggest a Friday meeting was only my own obstinacy when others older and more experienced than I had counselled giving the people a rest on Friday night.

And then there was a movement and, to my surprise and joy, a lad left his seat and came and knelt at the Communion Rail. In the Enquiry Room he told his story. He had felt the call of God to be a missionary. He wanted to train as a teacher and go out to the foreign field so that he might have the chance of telling others about the Lord Whom he had found there that night. How wrong can one be? I said nothing to discourage him but I had a "sinking" sensation in my heart for I felt that he had not the educational advantages that would enable him to carry through his new ambition.

Our ways have parted long since but, each year, I look in the list of Ministers in the Minutes of Conference and remember that Friday night and the lad who gave his heart to God.

BOOK NOTES.

Epworth Press sends TREASURES FOR THE KING by Wilfred Chalonier. The Nativity scene in mime, tableau and dialogue, 9d., also THE METHODIST DIARY, 4/11d.—as good as ever—just right for the waistcoat pocket.

Zondervain Publishing House send MY THREE YEARS INSIDE RUSSIA by Comrade X. What is it really like behind the Iron Curtain. This book tells you (Price 2 dollars). Told from the Christian point of view. THIS WAY TO HAPPINESS—"Psychology for living," by C. M. Harramore, Ed.D. (2.95 dollars)—discussed from the Biblical point of view. HOW TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX by the same author (2 dollars). HOBBY FUN by E. Doan (1 dollar)—how to choose hobbies—a book for young people.

"What Hath God Wrought!"

Continued from page 1

Modern Methodism's Confident Assertion.

The Twentieth Century! Yes, Wesley's beloved phrase is still legal tender among the people called Methodists. You will find it on the memorial to Gipsy Smith in Epping Forest. You will find it, if you travel so far, on a cairn at Kaeo, in New Zealand, a cairn erected by Maoris to commemorate the establishment, in 1823, of a Methodist mission to the natives of New Zealand. Indeed, it should be deeply inscribed on the heart of every one of the fifteen million modern followers of John Wesley in every land, as we remember both the growth and the growing together of our church.

We remember the unification of the major divisions of Methodism in Great Britain in 1932, and in the United States of America in 1939. We remember (for have not our fathers told us?) the hesitant decennial experiment of a Methodist Ecumenical Conference which began in 1881, and the increasing realisation during the last two decades that indeed "The Methodists are one people in all the world." We remember the adventures of amalgamation with other Christian denominations, and our own Methodist share in (for example) the formation of the United Church of Canada, in 1925, and of the Church of South India in 1947. We see the great achievements and the greater promise of the World Council of Churches. Let us, indeed, rejoice in our great heritage, let us give God the glory, and let us be confident in the Living Presence still with us. What hath God wrought.

“What Hath God Wrought!” *Joyful News* (Feb. 5, 1959), 1–2.

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