

# Only a Rumour

JOHN WESLEY believed in scotching a rumour before it could spread too far.

## In Wesley's Day

On November 8, 1745, travelling south from Newcastle to London by a rather roundabout westerly route, he found himself in north-east Cheshire, and

preached near Macclesfield for the first time. While here, his *Journal* records—

"Understanding that a neighbouring gentleman, Dr. C. had affirmed to many that Mr. Wesley was now with the Pretender, near Edinburgh, I wrote him a few lines. It may be he will have a little more regard to truth, or shame, for the time to come!"

One would like to see these "few lines," barbed with sarcasm as they would certainly be. Most probably, however, "Dr. C." would destroy such a mortifying document.

The question naturally arises, Who was this too-credulous "Dr. C."? He was the Nonconformist minister of Chapel-en-le-Frith, his name James Clegg. Born at Shawfield near Rochdale in 1679, in 1703, the year of Wesley's birth, he had accepted a call to Malcalf, in succession to the celebrated William Bagshaw, the "Apostle of the Peak." Like Wesley he was a freelance medico—the "Dr." being assumed by virtue of a diploma from Aberdeen University issued, not on the basis of any examination, but in answer to the testimonials of three similarly-qualified "Doctors."

Actually Clegg was a good evangelical, and had shown himself friendly to the Methodists. As early as 1741 he had welcomed David Taylor, the Earl of Huntingdon's Methodist servant, who preached in Chapel-en-le-Frith amidst the din of the church bells, which had been set ringing in opposition. He spoke of Taylor as "a pious, zealous, well-meaning man, of great assurance, but little learning or

knowledge." The Methodist services increased Clegg's congregations; but interviewing Taylor, Clegg found his teaching strongly Antinomian—

"He tells his hearers that they are all lost in Adam's sin, that they can do nothing at all towards their recovery, nor need to do anything, Christ having done all. He makes no manner of account of repentance, or holiness or obedience."

Clegg promptly warned Taylor of the dangerous tendencies of such exaggerated views, and revised his friendly attitude to the Methodists. (Actually Taylor's Calvinism was soon to separate him from the Wesleys). In 1740 he had spoken of Whitefield as having "the true spirit of the Evangelists, only too full of himself and too enthusiastic." Now his criticism hardens—

"I find he is running into ye Height of Antinomianism, and that is ye tendency of all the doctrine of ye Methodists. May a stop be put to the spreading of those dangerous errors and delusions."

His path naturally crossed that of David Taylor's convert, John Bennet of Chinley, who was now carving out his well-known Methodist "Round" in Lancashire and Cheshire, though in 1754 it was Clegg who eased Bennet's entry into the Nonconformist ministry.

Clegg knew, however, that he must not class Wesley with the extremists who bore the name Methodist. Only three or four months before he was making his wild accusations he had—

"read several things of Mr. Wesley's and was glad to find him so thoroughly convinced of the falsehood and bad tendency of Antinomianism that prevails so much among ye Methodists."

His son James it was, studying at the Nonconformist academy in Kendal, who kept him informed of the progress of the Jacobite Rebellion, and him we must blame for the rumour about Wesley and the Pretender.

F. B.

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