

A Moravian Marionette

FOR a variety of reasons John Wesley found himself continually bidding good-bye to his early Methodist helpers. One of his saddest partings was with John Cennick, who had succumbed to an exaggerated idea of the necessity

In Wesley's Day

of "being still before God," believing that faith need not issue in works. After hovering on the brink of this heresy for some time, at the beginning of December two hundred years ago he finally made up his mind and threw in his lot with the Moravians, setting off on a visit to their German settlement. Wesley's *Journal* for December 8 records—

"I took my leave of poor J(ohn) C(ennick), just embarking for Germany. I admire the justice of God! He who would never long be advised by any who treated him as a reasonable creature, is at length fallen among those who will make him as passive a tool as ever moved upon wire.

Born at Reading in 1718 into a church-going family—though his grandparents had suffered imprisonment as Quakers—John Cennick as a young man came under the influence of George Whitefield's *Journals*. His imagination fired, he made a pilgrimage to Oxford, met the members of the "Holy Club," and was appointed by John Wesley to help at Kingswood, where a school for colliers' children had been started by the Methodists. He thus became, in 1739, Wesley's first lay preacher.

His influence over the Kingswood Methodists soon grew very strong—dangerously strong, in fact. At this early period Calvinists and Arminians in theology were able to worship amicably together in the Methodist fellowship.

Cennick's Calvinism speedily became violently bigoted, however, and, instead of working alongside the Wesleys in spite of his views, or frankly separating from them, he endeavoured to undermine their societies. Months of underhand sowing of bitterness were followed by a period of open controversy, during which Cennick accused the Wesleys of preaching "Popery"—by which he meant the doctrine of universal redemption! In the end John Wesley calmly read out a form of expulsion, which Cennick took as calmly. For the remaining few years before he became a Moravian, he lined up with George Whitefield, who had like himself become estranged from the Wesleys because of his Calvinist views.

In 1749 John Cennick was ordained a Moravian deacon; and at his death in 1755 was a valued member of that community. One is glad, however, to record the continuation of Wesley's personal friendship with Cennick, and even religious collaboration, for he smoothed the way for Cennick to secure a Moravian Chapel in Dublin, saying, "I could not be easy if I had two places to preach in and he none at all." Yet five years after his death Wesley could still bemoan the sad state of Kingswood Methodism, where Cennick had "confounded the poor people with strange doctrines," adding: "Oh, what mischief may be done by one that means well!"

To this day, however, Christians of all denominations are indebted to this Moravian whom Wesley prophesied would be "as passive a tool as ever moved upon wire." For all can sing his well-known hymns, "Thou great Redeemer, dying Lamb," "Children of the heavenly King," and the popular "Ere I sleep, for every favour." And while Charles Wesley's "Graces before Meat" and "Graces after Meat" are forgotten, hardly a chapel tea goes by without the strains of Cennick's "Be present at our table, Lord," and his "We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food."

F. B.

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