

# Poor John Webb

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for he preached on the words of God to Abraham: "I am the Almighty God: walk before Me, and be thou perfect," which continue "and I will make my covenant between me and thee." Midday found him accepting the invitation of an old friend and fellow-labourer, who had undergone a sad transformation—

"We dined with poor John Webb, now thoroughly poisoned by Robert Barclay's Apology, which he was sure would do him no hurt, till all his love to his brethren was swallowed up in dotage about questions and strife of words."

Poor John Webb! He had been so valiant in days gone by, and had taken part in other strife than that of words. Nearly two years previously he had been touring the Methodist battlefield as the batman of that great warrior, Charles Wesley. Charles records in his *Journal* for Monday, January 30, 1744—"I set out with our brother Webb for Newcastle, commended to the grace of God by all the brethren." To-day a journey from London to Newcastle might easily pass without incident. But not in Wesley's day, especially during that early period when the hands of most men, whether nobles, clergy, or commoners, were against the Methodists. It was only a month or two since Charles Wesley had been mobbed; and John Wesley narrowly escaped with his life, in the Midlands, and more trouble was reported in the air.

On Wednesday, February 2, they had

arrived at Birmingham, Charles Wesley reflecting—

"A great door is opened in this country, but there are many adversaries. At Dudley, our Preacher was cruelly abused by a mob of Papists and Dissenters; the latter stirred up by Mr. Whitting, their Minister. Probably he would have been murdered, but for an honest Quaker, who helped him to escape, disguised with his broad hat and coat. Staffordshire, at present, seems the seat of war."

On the Thursday, says Charles, "I set out with Brother Webb for Wednesbury, the field of battle," where he found time to walk "through the blessings and curses of the people," to visit the widow of the Vicar—the instigator of the earlier riots. After a preaching-tour around the danger-spots, they set out for Nottingham, and there, too, they found rioting in the wind, with once more "an honest Quaker" trying to preserve the peace. The next day, which was to mark the climax of the Wednesbury riots, Wesley and Webb were pelted with stones and dirt by a holiday crowd in part-jovial, part-malicious mood, while the Mayor, who had promised them protection, "passed by us laughing." Once again they found shelter at "our friendly Quaker's."

It seems sad that these same Quakers who from genuine sympathy gave sanctuary to the persecuted Methodists should also have sown seeds of dissension in their minds. John Wesley had feared this, however. In May, 1745, he and his brother Charles were at great pains to go methodically through that great Quaker manifesto, Barclay's Apology for the True Christian Divinity, with some of the London Methodists "who were hugely in love with that solemn trifle," and in 1748 he was to publish a detailed condemnation of it. But the damage had been done as far as one Methodist was concerned. By this time John Webb had turned out-and-out Calvinist, and had been firmly shown the door at Charles Wesley's Leeds Conference in 1751. Poor John Webb!

F. B.

“Poor John Webb.” *Methodist Recorder* (January 3, 1946): 1

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<sup>1</sup>*OED*: “A man in charge of a bat-horse and its load; a military servant of a cavalry officer. Now generally, an officer’s servant.”

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