

The Orphan House

AFTER years of haggling and delays, one of John Wesley's cherished projects had become so stabilised that he

In Wesley's Day

could hand it over to the trustees. He had an "Orphan House," just outside the Pilgrim Street Gate, Newcastle. It was his second building venture, modelled on the famous orphanage of August Hermann Francke at Halle, which Wesley had visited in the first flush of his warmed heart. The foundation-stone had been laid on December 20, 1742, and a kind of opening service conducted in the unfinished shell three months later.

Many obstacles were still to be overcome, however. John Stephenson was one of them. Although he had promised Wesley the plot of land—on which the Orphan House was already built—he dilly-dallied over its legal transfer until, in 1745, he received the following brief note:—

"Sir,—I am surprised. You give it under your hand that you will put me in possession of a piece of ground, specified in an article between us, in fifteen days' time. Three months are passed, and that article is not fulfilled. And now you say you can't conceive what I mean by troubling you. I mean to have that article fulfilled. I think my meaning is very plain.

"I am, sir,

"Your humble servant,

"JOHN WESLEY."

Wesley's curtness at its imperious best bore speedy fruit. The very next day he could record in his *Journal*:—

"Mr. Stephenson, of whom I bought the ground on which our House is built, came at length, after delaying it more than two years, and executed the Writings."

And now another legal document was being prepared. The Orphan House, planned, financed, built, and at last secured on Wesley's responsibility alone, could now be relinquished for others to administer. This document—the first "Model Deed" of Methodism—was dated March 5, 1745-6. The seven trustees agreed not only to make the Orphan House an evangelical headquarters for Methodist preachers, but an actual orphanage, where forty poor boys and girls should be cared for by the master and mistress appointed by Wesley. The boys were to be "instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic," while for the girls arithmetic was to be replaced by needlework.

Very soon, however, though the name has continued to the present day, "Orphan House" became a misnomer. The forty poor children had to go elsewhere. Even the building was nearly lost to Methodism, for the deed was not a model one, after all. In 1857, however, the Orphan House was secured by re-purchase, the old building taken down, and new Methodist schools built upon the site. Soon they were providing education for over five hundred scholars.

The Orphan House, in the formative years Methodism's northern headquarters, a home for preachers, a meeting-place for worshippers, though designed primarily as a training-ground for the young, had at last achieved in part its mission. Another twelve years were to pass, and in a London slum Wesley's dream was to be re-born—this time under the title "Children's Home," and in the mind of a namesake of the John Stephenson who had so hindered the earlier venture. In William Bowman Stephenson the Founder of Methodism was to have, not only a worthy successor to the Presidential chair, but an even greater champion in the cause of saving the children.

F. B.

“The Orphan House.” *Methodist Recorder* (February 21, 1946): 1

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