

# A Leader Lost

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## In Wesley's Day

Methodist Crusade a plaintive fluting; its theme—"What might have been." The student cannot but marvel at the huge number of Wesley's helpers

and would-be helpers who were lost to him by death or disaffection. One such was John Bosworth.

The son of Joseph Bosworth of Woodfield, a tiny Worcestershire hamlet, John had entered Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1743, aged seventeen. Like one of his precursors at Pembroke, the already famous George Whitefield, the lowly born youth had set his heart on Holy Orders. His friends and relatives were ready to make the necessary sacrifices for what would undoubtedly bring enhanced social status for the family. Soon, however, the family hopes were dashed. John got himself mixed up with a set of religious fanatics called Methodists. Tainted by Methodist "enthusiasm" he could never hope for preferment—or so at least it seemed. The turning-point of John Bosworth's career was probably a personal interview with John Wesley in 1744, when Wesley preached his last sermon at St. Mary's, Oxford—*Scriptural Christianity*. Henceforward Bosworth was an avowed Methodist, and ready to pay the price for his faith.

On February 22, 1746, the cost of Bosworth's Methodism was finally revealed to Wesley in a pathetic letter—

"Dear Sir,—You may remember to have seen me at Oxford once. Since then, by walking somewhat different from the ways of the world, I have incurred the displeasure of the world; and I have gone through many trials.

My friends and nearest relations have done their utmost to separate me from God and his children; but, blessed be our dear Lord, all their attempts have hitherto been in vain."

Having failed to separate him from his Methodism, he continues with a wan smile. "Of late they have seemed resolved on other measures, namely, to separate me from themselves." He describes how the heavy stick has been used on him. Dragged away from Oxford and his dream of being "regularly sent forth as an ambassador of Christ," he is forced into commercial life, swallowing religious jibes with his daily bread—

"My uncle sees that nobody can do his business better, or perhaps so well, as myself; but he can't bear a Methodist in his house."

The letter ends on a note of appeal—

"Dear sir, you see my case. There is nothing I so much long for as to be employed in the Lord's vineyard, though utterly unworthy. I should be glad to be advised and directed by you what to do; I will do whatsoever you judge most proper toward the promoting our Saviour's interest."

Reading these lines, Wesley's mind must have gone back to that interview with the devout young Oxford undergraduate. And he must have wondered whether Bosworth's desire "to spend and be spent for the best of Masters" could yet be fulfilled, if not in Holy Orders, at least in the ranks of the Methodist lay-preachers. Surely this was a volunteer sent by Providence for the work of spreading Scriptural Holiness through the land! This youth might be another Thomas Walsh, another Silas Told, another John Downes. Whatever plans Wesley set on foot, however, were frustrated, for after quoting Bosworth's letter in his *Journal*, he adds—

"But there was no need for his taking thought for the morrow, for in a few weeks God took him to Himself."

F. B.

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Mingled with the trumpet-notes of triumphant evangelism, one hears constantly in the early history of the Methodist Crusade a plaintive fluting: its theme—”What might have been.” The student cannot but marvel at the huge number of Wesley’s helpers and would-be helpers who were lost to him by death or disaffection. One such was John Bosworth.

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