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The heart of Methodism

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SENIOR THESIS
THE HEART OF METHODISM.

by

Willis Hugh Germany.

1915-1916

Brookhaven

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* 1915
to used

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 O U T L I N E
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Whether material or immaterial every fact possesses some characteristic which distinguishes it from all other facts. The law of identity runs thru every strata of life. Whatever is, is; and everything outside this category is not.

This is true of men and movements alike. No leaf has ever found its exact counterpart. No person has been identically reproduced. Twins, supposed of all to be the most alike, are deficient at this point. Every person and movement is an entity per se, having physical, intellectual and moral qualities distinguishing each from all other of the earth's millions. Of movements, some apparently overlap, the lines of demarcation are indistinct, yet the point of cleavage is to be found. The inherent value of some movements may not argue their right to long existence, yet, tho a weakling, deformed and unworthy, its own heart palpitates within its breast. There are those colossal movements, pulsating with vigorous life, leaving no question of their identity. Of one such movement as this I write. Of a movement which, in 175 years, has covered the globe. We would inquire what is the dis-

distinct characteristic of this movement? What is the secret of her success? What is the Heart of Methodism?

It was staged in England in the 18th century. The most prominent figure in this movement was "A fire-brand plucked from the burning"- John Wesley. A man who followed the advice of his Mother and "made religion the business of his life". His first twenty-two were years of religious fluctuation, but in 1725 his religious impressions revived in their full intensity while he was anticipating ordination. He devoted exclusively to his religious aims and object "an energy of will and a power of intellect that, in worldly professions, might have raised him to the highest positions of honor and wealth". "He does not rank in the first line of great religious orators and reformers, and a large part of the work with which he is associated was accomplished by others; yet, it is no exaggeration to say that he has had a wider constructive influence in the sphere of practical religion than any other man who has appeared since the 16th century".

He was a member of the Church of England, and, despite his actions to the contrary, almost up to his death considered himself as sustaining that relation.

This as a reminder that it was not Wesley's purpose to organise a new church. It was not a happy wave of religious enthusiasm which seized him and made him a religious fanatic, with the desire to distinguish himself by contributing another to the numerous churches already in existence. Not thus did Methodism make her debut. If she had had no more worthy note of distinction, she would likely, like Rachel of old, have died in travail. The whole movement revolved around the life of one man, living at a time when over Europe and England was sweeping a revolt against the supernatural theory of Christianity. When a materialistic conception of man was being aggravated by unjust taxes and unnecessary wars. When rulers and priests were corrupt, and deep-seated discontent was felt in religious and political life. "All men agree that atheism and profaneness never got such a high ascendancy as at this day. A thick gloominess hath overspread our horizon, and our light looks like the evening of the world". Says Lady Mary Montague, "I am told that there is at this moment a bill cooking up at a hunting seat in Norfolk to have NOT taken out of the commandments and inserted in the creed!"

Men blushed at being suspected of purity. When young Wesley and his mates ventured out to church they entered a place which was a "convenient resort for whispering scandal, for displaying skill in the management of the fan, or exhibiting diamonds, toupees and laceheads, in short anything but a place for prayer or even for religious oratory!" And yet, despite such distressing conditions, men were soul hungry. John Wesley had planted within his soul seed which were beginning to burst forth with life.

"Every clod felt a stir of might,
An instinct within that reaches and towers
And grasping blindly for light".

Had he consented to submit to the ecclesiastical leaders of his day, he probably would never have been able to call his children legion. He had set out to make religion the business of his life, and from 1725 to 1738 he sought an experience upon which he could rely for time and eternity. He sought a satisfying religious certainty.

That was over 150 years ago. Today Methodism looms large on the horizon. Her children are numbered by the millions. Her contour touches every continent on the globe. Her magnitude compels attention and her

members respect. The tread of near 3,500,000 members of the Methodist Episcopal Church alone silently moves the world. The laughter and cheer of near 4,000,000 Sunday School scholars reverberate again and again around the globe on a Sabbath morn. In one year alone the Methodist Episcopal Church sent to the four winds of the earth over \$3,000,000 to propagate the work of her six great benevolent Boards. These were purely voluntary offerings. More money than the actual building of the Panama Canal cost the government of the United States of America. These facts and figures compel us. Yet, who could believe that Methodism's heart is concrete in her numerical and financial resources? There was a time when her strength was not what it is now. Everyone knows it would be next to impossible to rally such a multitude of people, of free and intelligent understanding, who would voluntarily consecrate such an amount of money to this work, - to say nothing of over \$17,000,000 paid out in pastoral support, with over \$216,000,000 invested alone in Church and Parsonage property- unless some trumpet call had sounded down the decades which found immediate response in the human soul. Of Methodism it may be said

With due proportional consideration, as Carlyle said said of Mahomet, "The word this man spake has been the life guidance now of 180,000,000 of men now these 1200 years. These 180,000,000 were made by God as well as we. A greater number of God's creatures believe in Mahomet's word at this hour than in any other word whatever. Are we to suppose that it was a piece of spiritual legerdemain, this which so many creatures have lived and died by?"

If the heart of Methodism is not found in her figures, is it found in her Articles of Religion? In her doctrinal standards? These articles and doctrines are not to be discounted. They are more deeply appreciated by the free and intelligent Protestant when it is known that "At the time of the Reformation under Luther it became necessary to show to the world valid reasons for separating from the Church of Rome. . . . If good reasons could not be shown for withdrawing from that Church, the Reformers must be branded as schismatics, guilty of rending asunder the Church of Christ, and hence be sinners in the sight of God. By such Articles they could enter a protest against errors in the Church from which they withdrew". The

first Article of this nature was drawn up by Melancthon in 1530, revised by Luther, and submitted to the Emperor Charles Fifth, at the Diet of Augsburg. Twenty years later the Council of Trent adopted the Thirty-Five Articles known as the Confessions of Wurtemberg. The English Reformers found themselves embarrassed in having no Articles by which they should be distinguished from their papal opponents. So in 1536 Parliament drew up five articles on doctrine, and five on ceremonies of the Church of England. The Forty-Two Articles of 1553 were drawn up by Cranmer. But all the advance made under Henry Eighth and Edward Sixth was irremediably frustrated under the reign of the papist Queen Mary. Under the righteous Queen Elizabeth the Thirty-Eight Articles of 1562 were formulated, but were not put into force because some of the clergy were pro-Roman. But in 1570 Queen Elizabeth was excommunicated, and immediately Parliament passed a law that all the present and future clergy should subscribe to these Thirty-Nine Articles of 1571.

The Wesleyan Movement met at the hands of the English clergy about the same consideration the Re-

formers had received at the hands of the Roman Church. Yet the English Methodists hesitated in making any formal breach with the English Church. They still subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles. But when the American Colonists became independent states, Wesley abridged the Thirty-Nine to the number of twenty-four and sent them over by Dr. Coke. The celebrated Christmas Conference of 1784, in Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, adopted these Twenty-Four and added another "Of the Rulers of the United States of America".

Can it be supposed these renowned Articles are the distinguishing characteristic of Methodism? They are not the mushroom of an overnight intellectualism. They are the earned increment of centuries of Christian thought. "They are monuments that mark the place of battle, and the principles contended for. They contain statements of truth that crystalized amid the fires of bitter persecution. Some of the men who gave utterance to them have won the crown of martyrdom, and the hand that wrote them perished in the flame". But none can scarcely say that such a concise statement of Protestant faith is the pulse of Methodism. The Church of England had these and a larger number.

Why didn't the marvel come to pass within their fold? Maybe they thought that orthodoxy would guarantee a proper spiritual life, while Methodism "has aimed more to ascertain and promote the spiritual life than the theological ideas of her people, believing that evangelical life will secure evangelical orthodoxy".

If Methodism's numerical and financial strength nor her Doctrines are the secret of her success, what shall be said of her Government? Some are attracted to Methodism because of her episcopal form of government, with her underlying itinerancy. The General Conference, our highest legislative tribunal, may have vast powers, but "is forever prohibited any legislation doing away episcopacy, or destroying the plan of our itinerant General Superintendency". We base the successful mechanism of our Church on this. Our motto is "Every Church a Pastor, and every Pastor a Church". Every faithful, conscientious preacher in Methodist Episcopal Church can look down the years with ever increasing hope and satisfaction. Birth nor blood make nor mar a preacher in the ranks of Methodism. A man has stepped from handling the trowel to wielding the gavel at General Conference. The worthi-

est are crowned with our highest honors, be they orphans or sons of Bishops. Except! And this exception is a stench in the nostrils of all true sons of God and Wesley. An exception which, please God, shall come to humiliating ruin to the embarrassment of its perpetrators. An exception suggested by the action of a body of ministers and laymen so contrary to the basic democracy of Methodism as to send an ultimatum to another District that "Unless this District enter this arrangement, it will not be represented on the General Conference delegation"! Is this what we are coming to? Our General Rules and Constitution are adapted to human life. Items of conduct are not arbitrarily dictated. "As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think". How beneficial and beautiful is this commingled association of pastor and people. It is like the fresh waters from an inexhaustible spring, far up in the mountain, winding playfully along, imparting inspiration and cheer. But who would make bold to assert Methodism's well-proven form of government as the basis of her unprecedented success?

As commanding as is magnitude, such is not the

secret of Methodism's success. As worthy as are the doctrines of Methodism, they do not constitute the heart of the situation. The government is necessary, and harmonious in its working, yet the evolutionary grind of this episcopal engineering does not impress us as being capable of bringing such wonders to pass as are predicated of Methodism. We must search deeper to find the heart. In the nature of the case, magnitude and government and doctrine are results and not causes. Then, what is there at the center? What is the seed, at first small as mustard, but has grown to world-wide proportions?

Let us go back to the beginning of things. Back to England during the days of John Wesley. Let us dig around into his life and experience if there we may find evidence suggesting the heart of the present world-wide Methodism. John Wesley was soul hungry. "His heart and his flesh cried out for the living God". He yearned for "A sure trust and confidence in God that thru the merits of Christ his sins were forgiven and he reconciled to the favor of God". He desired "that faith which none can have without knowing he hath it". From 1725 to 1738 he sought it. The sal-

utary influence of Bohler helped to clear the atmosphere, and Wesley was brought to see that justification was by faith. The nature of this first staggered Wesley, but Bohler urged him to "Preach faith till you have it, and then because you have it you will preach it". In such a condition of soul hunger, with an overpowering desire for such a faith, the years pass on till May of 1738. His own subjective spiritual consciousness indicated that sometime the rest of faith should be his. May 24th dawns. The devotions of the day were as usual. "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that we should be partakers of the divine nature", read he. Further events of that day Wesley thus records,

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart thru faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death".

The principle thing about this humble unpreten-

tious testimony is the emphasis it gives to the inwardness of christian experience. It is a matter of the heart. An emotional experience. The realization of a faith which is not mere intellectual assent, but an experience. The experience of that hour was an assurance that he had the faith which was a healthy, settled confidence in God. John Wesley that day received an experience of heart-felt religion. He experienced that day the faith which no one can have without knowing he hath it. The emphasis in that testimony is upon felt, not believe. "Felt his heart strangely warmed". Even says, "I felt I did trust in Christ". It was an experience touching the emotions, the Rationalist to the contrary notwithstanding. Methodism stands out in history as an invincible argument for the priority of the soul over the intellect. She stands as a worldwide testimony that the soul, not the intellect, is the final court of authority. Methodism sounds the message afar that man's best welfare depends upon his heeding the voice of his soul in preference to that of his intellect, when it comes to a question between the two. The intellect is not to be depreciated, she has her rightful place in human

life. But Methodism stands to rebuke those who reject the momentous facts of human existence because the intellect cannot give satisfactory account of them. Before the mysteries of Christianity man's intellect stands paralyzed. And Methodism does not propose that all the mysteries of the God-Head and Redemption, and the eternities shall be bowed off the stage because man's puny intellect cannot give logical and axiomatic account of them. The Rationalist is presumptuous enough to tell us that we must even afford logical evidence that the soul has a voice! That I do not know that my soul speaks until I have brought the matter before the tribunal of my intellect. Just as well establish a legal court before which every young man and woman shall come from the holy sweetness of the trysting-place to have the judge pronounce whether or not they love each other! Methodism proposes to say that man's soul can sound a message that will make his intellect tremble like an aspen leaf in the gale. There are many locks the key of reason will not fit, and these great stores of satisfaction and pleasure, and contentment and peace will ever remain locked to him whose only key is reason.

But the negative is not the only aspect of Methodism. From that evening in May to the present, in ever enlarging number, Methodism has stood for a "Warm Heart". O You Colliers of Kingswood, what meaneth that furrowing of your faces with avalanches of tears! Whitefield, why do your eyes become rivers of water as your musical voice reverberates back and forth over the hills at Moorsfield! Charles Wesley, answer up, what has been the secret of your unnumbered songs, sung around the world to this day! It is just as Sheridan, in the days of Rowland Hill, said, "I go to hear him because his ideas come red-hot from from the heart". And dignified Dr. Milner came running to Hill exclaiming, "Mr. Hill, Mr. Hill, I felt today!" There are mornings in the winter when ice is everywhere, but with the rising of the sun drop by drop the blades of ice melt away. Yonder in England the wintry night of a spiritual decline had passed. The morning awoke, and streaming hither and thither over that land, jumping across the Atlantic to America, the Gospel of Jesus Christ was warming the well-nigh apathetic soul of the people. The discontented, distressed soul of collier and mechanic was melted

under the power of a Gospel of personal assurance. Where one day he may pour bitter invective upon the head of his superior, next day he may be instantaneously born anew, tears flooding down his face, black with honorably accumulated dust. Where one day wealth would lounge in selfish luxury, mayhap tomorrow the light that never shone on land nor sea would warm his soul and send him forth a conductor of the heart-warming current.

Those were the days when Methodism was weak in resources and few in friends. And when one thinks for a moment, the marvel of Methodism is amazing. We have had, and do now have, great evangelists. Our Smith and Sunday converts have been numbered by the thousands, but no Church has resulted from those vast meetings. We go further and acknowledge that the majestic sweep of these men of God is accounted for in the fact of their heart-warming message. That Methodism came into existence and evolved into such a world structure is accounted for in view of her background. Not in those days did the Smiths and Sundays sway the multitudes with heart glowing fervor. It was an age of cold intellectualism and growing commer-

cialism. A day of priestly rule and churchly ritual. And, after all, in view of these, the rise and phenomenal growth of Methodism was the most natural thing in the world, in view of her background. This being true, it seems certain that when Methodism fails to preach an experimental gospel which will warm the soul, then, and not till then will Providence make provision for the unshepherded thousands. Taking all things into consideration, wherever a Methodist Church is found, there is an invincible argument to the power of God to impart a conscious experience of grace.

One of the outstanding Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a clear thinker, who has contributed worthily to the realm of Philosophy and Religion, a man almost unrivalled in intellectual keenness and balance of judgment, was asked, "What is the heart of Methodism?" In reply he wrote, "The heart of Methodism has always been its emphasis upon the primacy of personal religious experience, showing itself in actual life. This emphasis on vital experience is more distinctive than stress on doctrine or church government". This is the *summa bonum*. It is not mere emphasis upon the primacy of personal religious

experience alone. Such is first cousin to fanaticism. Nor is it mere external adherence to ritualistic observance. Methodism's glory consists in having at center an experience of grace which one cannot have without knowing he hath it, but this personal experience must verify itself in practical Christianity. Has this been done? The oft repeated story of the Methodist preacher on the "cow-catcher" is typical of movement first lighted by "a firebrand plucked from the burning". How account for the vast missionary propaganda of Methodism on any other basis? How else account for the fact that the followers of Wesley aggregate the largest Protestant Church on the face of the globe? First the warming of the heart, then the simultaneous imbuing with the missionary spirit to be harbingers of the Gospel of Christ afar and near.

And then, when the frame has become weak, when the mind has grown tired, when the wheels of being are slow, what then? When the twilight gathers, and the outlook on this life becomes hazy, is there support and comfort then to be found in this experience? Life is indeed a serious undertaking. A man who can look back over his life and say, "I have fought a

good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith", is, of all victors and conquerors, the most renowned. But I submit that every man receives the supreme test in the struggle with the last dread monarch, and however beautiful he may be pictured by preachers and philosophers, when his cold fingers lay hold of our heart strings, it is an altogether different matter. Is the inspiration, which has been the heritage of Methodism's religious experience, sufficient to bear up a man's soul in the hour and article of death? Theorists may philosophize, but in this realm theory is superfluous. We want evidence from men and women, learned and illiterate, who know whereof they speak, and speak with such certainty as to leave us in no doubt. We would tarry beside some departing soul, which has throbbed and thrilled with its experience of grace, and catch the parting message. And in such illustrious examples Methodist history is replete. Time would fail to enumerate the death-bed triumphs of such men and women as Howell Harris, John Nelson, Robert Wilkinson, Thomas Payne, Lady Huntington, and an innumerable host from then to now who have died in the triumph of the faith. The lowliest hovels

together with the coal-pits were made resplendent with divine glory as those precious saints of God swept into celestial glory. No other than Wesley himself, who had seen hundreds of his followers depart this life, said, "The Methodists die well!"

Though these died in triumph, none had a more glorious end of a more glorious life than John Wesley himself. "The man who, a century since, was the best abused man in the British Isles, was now hardly ever mentioned but with affectionate respect". The man around whose life the whole movement revolved, who experienced and preached the saving grace, was now coming into the jaws of death. The time of dissolution had come. The final test, the crowning struggle. Like the venerable Dr. Varnum A. Cooper, of our own day, Wesley prayed, "O God, give us a peaceful hour in which to exchange worlds". It was exactly 125 years ago. He had reached the ripe old age of eighty-eight, closing one of the most active, remarkable careers in human history.

The day was far spent. The setting sun cast long shadows over the harbor. Black smoke was curling into the heavens from the deep caverns of the majes-

tic liner soon to unmoor for another journey. On the wharf was huddled a little company, with one strong man as the center of interest. Feeling ran too deep for speech. One was there, robed in black, wrinkled and gray. Her eyes were red. She leaned hard upon the strong arm of her son, soon to board the liner for another continent. A maiden of tender years, for a pretense arranges his tie, but not till she had folded that strong, rugged face in her warm, tender hand. The voice of the Captain sounds out, and with a last tender, lingering kiss still warm upon his lips, he steps aboard. The frame of the Mother trembles with grief. The maiden who before had not known sorrow, feels its sting now. There is a sound of bells and flush of water, and she heads for the open sea. Long they stand a lonely group, huddled closer in the common grief, gazing upon the vessel moment by moment growing smaller. Their arms have become weary in the constant wave to the departing one. Night folds them in with their sorrow. But upon the face of the pilgrim upon the deep is no trace of sadness. His eyes have not become red nor swollen with weeping. Beyond the natural sadness of parting from the Mother of his

life, he experiences no overwhelming grief. Rather, his face seems to reflect an inward joy. And well it might, for just across the wave, tempestuous or placid, awaits him a little woman fairer than all the world to him. A woman whom he loves and longs for. The charm of his life. In her presence only will his restless soul be content.

And such was the putting out to sea of John Wesley. His loved contemporaries around his bedside were wrapped in shadows the most sombre, their grief was the deepest. But upon the brow of the grand old man was an expression of joy, unakin to such as the world giveth. "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus", falls from the feeble lips. "Tell me what you wish to say", says Miss Ritchie. "Nothing", replies the conqueror, "but that God is with us!" "Pray and praise", says he, whereupon the company fall upon their knees and pour out their soul to God. He grasps the hand of each, and says, "Farewell! Farewell!" With one mighty summons of fast ebbing strength, the "Grand Old Christian Gladiator" exclaims, "The best of all is, God is with us". Fearing the full significance might not be gotten by

those around him, he lifts that emaciated arm, and waves it in glorious triumph, saying again, "The best of all is, God is with us!" It was a few minutes before ten on Wednesday, the second day of March, 1791, eleven persons were kneeling around his bed. Joseph Bradford was praying. "Farewell", cried Wesley. Bradford prayed on, and as he said, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye left up, ye everlasting doors; and this heir of glory shall come in", without a sigh or a groan, John Wesley entered.

This it is that makes man courageous in death. The experience which had held him when the angry mob railed upon him, did not fail him at last. The experience of life was his stay in death. John Wesley verified his own summary, and "died well".

That was a century ago. Methodism has grown, but not out of her primitive heritage. Her distinct characteristic remains the same to this day. People are finding God today via the experimental route. The experience by which thousands have lived and died, remains to this day The Heart of Methodism.

To the state of Colorado went one of Methodism's ministers, who knew that sooner or later he must

succumb to that dread disease tuberculosis. The weary days passed and, instead of relief, he was gradually compelled to acknowledge that his moments were numbered. On January 9, 1915 Rev. Howard L. Goldie penned this soliloquy,

"Against all efforts to the contrary, regardless of all clamorings to be stronger, despite all dreams of getting well, the poor bodily record is to the contrary.... The whole nature cries like an infant for rest, and rest cannot come.

How well my soul is in all this conflict. Pain does not reach it; weariness lays no hand on its exultant life; care clutches all my earthly longings, but for soul and eternity --- not the weight of a snowflake falls on my confident faith. I am standing often where the loosening of the silver chord would be so easy, so near the border do I go! And without struggle I would fare forth in heavenly company to meet and greet my King.

Dear Hearts that stay, what loss these tired days have meant; How little companionship I have had to offer, just clinging to life. How wearisome the long, long days of ministering to me when I ought to have done the ministering. Tragedy, all of it..... God knows, God knows. It will be better in the morning".

Two days later this man of God, perfected thru suffering, passed into the shadows, and the Morning of

his eternal day broke forth upon him.

Willis Hugh Germany, 1916.

March.

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