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**JOHN WESLEY'S SCHOOL AT KINGSWOOD**  
**By John Telford**

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Methodism owes more than it knows to the fact that its founder was a gentleman and a scholar. The rector of Epworth gloried in the knowledge that he had given his three sons "the best education which England could afford," yet he little dreamed that the training received by John and Charles Wesley at Charterhouse and Westminster schools and at Christ Church and Lincoln colleges in Oxford would become a lever for raising the whole tone of education throughout the English-speaking world. Charles Wesley's poetry was itself an education for the early Methodists. All his classical learning, all his reading, all his studies of the English poets were brought to bear on his work as the hymn writer of the evangelical revival. Doors were thus opened into literature, and a tincture of scholarship given to the colliers, weavers, tanners, and common folk who sang the Methodist hymns at Moorfields, Gwennap, Kingswood, Bolton, and Newcastle. John Wesley's influence was not less decisive. He had to deal with common people and early mastered the art of simplicity, but never forgot the words of John Richard Green in his exquisite volume of "Stray Studies", "I must confess that my own experience among the poor agrees pretty much with Edward Denison's, and that I believe 'high thinking' put into plain English to be more likely to tell on a dockyard laborer than all the 'simple Gospel sermons' in the world."

Wesley's zeal for education found notable expression in the founding of his famous school at Kingswood, which celebrated its third jubilee in June, 1898. It has long since left its first home in the colliers' village near Bristol for a splendid site near Bath, but the third jubilee carries us

back to the homely beginning of a scheme which might not unaptly be described, with all due regard to his wife, as Wesley's "thorn in the flesh." None of his schemes tried his faith and patience more than this institution at Kingswood. In the spring of 1739 George Whitefield had laid the foundation of a school for the colliers' children there. Wesley had to take over this unfinished work, and for months he begged subscriptions for it wherever he went. One of the first masters was John Cennick, author of the well-known hymn, "Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb." Afterward Cennick became a Calvinist.

The colliers' school was a happy success, and in 1746, when Wesley's plans for what would now be called secondary education had ripened, he selected a site in the same village for his new institution. It was a peaceful spot, remote from high-roads and with abundant room for large gardens. In a conversation at the Conference of 1748 Wesley said, "We design to train up children there, if God permit, in every branch of useful learning, from the very alphabet till they are fit as to all acquired qualifications for the work of the ministry." The great evangelist sketched his scheme before his friends and helpers. The time-table was so full that a natural objection was made that it left no opportunity for the boys to play. "No," rejoined Wesley, "he that plays when he is a child will play when he is a man." The master of logic was betrayed into a gross fallacy here, and it vitiated much of his work at Kingswood. But his heart was in his task. He contributed largely to the funds from the proceeds of his fellowship, and found a noble benefactor who sympathized with his desire to establish a school worthy of the apostolic age, and gave him first £500 and then £300 for his building.

The school was opened on June 24, 1748, by the Wesleys. John preached from the text, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." After the communion service the brother retired to draw up the rules for their new institution. Provision was made for receiving fifty children, and on the front of the building was inscribed its famous motto, "In Gloriam Dei Optimi Maximi, In Usus Ecclesiae et Reipublicae." Below was written, "Jehovah Jireh" in Hebrew characters. Wesley's rules for his model school were very strict. Parents handed over their boys to the entire control of the master with an agreement that they should observe all the rules of the house. No boy was to be taken "from school, no, not a day, till they take him for good and all." The children had to rise at four, both in winter and summer, and after an hour given to private reading and prayer they met for public worship. "From six," say the rules, "they work till breakfast; for as we have no play-days (the school being taught every day in the year but Sunday), so neither do we allow any time for play on any day. He that plays when he is a child will play when he is a man." This was a German proverb which Wesley fondly calls "wise, and to which he adds the question, "If not, why should he learn now what he must unlearn by and by?" But, if the boys were not allowed to play, they were encouraged to work in the garden, to chop wood, to draw water, and to engage in other useful exercise. Despite its hard rules Kingswood was not unpopular. Within a few months after it was opened there were twenty-eight pupils, each of whom paid fourteen pounds for board, teaching, and books. Wesley set his heart on securing masters "who were truly devoted to God, who sought nothing on earth, neither pleasure, nor ease, nor profit, nor the praise of men." These were high qualifications, but some of the masters possessed them in no small degree. One of them was William Spencer, of whom John Cennick wrote to Wesley on August 16, 1740, as follows:

[In order avoid repeated "sic" insertions in the following letter, I will state here that the mis-spellings are "sic" (spelling is correct) as mis-spelled by the writer in the various places seen. -- DVM]

"Dr. Brother -- I write now to ask your mind about letting William Spencer be a sort of Usher to ye school at Kingswood under me, so might fifteen or twenty Boys more be brought up, to ye Good of them, and to ye satisfying ye insensitive people, who are always asking for more Masters. You are perswaded I cannot always be there. Yet so often as I cou'd an Hour or more of a day perhap's I might, and in that I might show him what to do. He can write and cast account well, and wou'd be content with Food & Rayment. This, I believe, we (that is, our Society) cou'd afford. Yet, dear Sir, if it be not according to your will, speak and I have done. He is teas'd at Home, and to get from them looks to Jamaica. I think 'tis better to abide here."

Mr. Spencer did good service in the colliers' school and was transferred to the boarding school. The whole household shared the same temper. Mary Davey, the housekeeper wrote to Wesley:

"The spirit of this family is a resemblance of the household above. As far as I can discern they are given up to God, and pursue but the one great end. If any is afraid this school will eclipse and darken others, or that it will train up soldiers to proclaim open war against the god of this world, I believe it is not a groundless fear. For if God continue to bless us, "one of these little ones shall chase a thousand." I doubt not but there will arise ambassadors for the King of kings from this obscure spot, that shall spread His glory all abroad, and bring many souls unto the knowledge of the truth.

"At first things went well, but when Wesley visited Kingswood in July, 1749, he found that the rules had not been observed. The maids were divided into two parties, and the flames were studiously fanned by the constant whispering of a tale-bearing manservant. Mary Davey herself was found wanting. "The children were not properly attended, nor were things done with due care and exactness." All this might have been remedied, but the masters were not faithful. Richard Moss "was grave and weighty in his behavior, and did much good," Wesley says, until Walter Sellon "set the children against him, and, instead of restraining them from play, played with them himself." The following year Wesley was so troubled that he expressed surprise that he was withheld from dropping a design attended by such continual difficulty. Changes and expulsions cleared the atmosphere, and in June, 1751, Wesley writes of his diminished but purified establishment, "I believe all in the house are at length of one mind, and trust God will bless us in the latter end more than in the beginning." Two years later he has to speak again of his struggles. "Surely," he says, "the importance of this design is apparent, even from the difficulties that attend it. I have spent more money and time and care on this than almost any design I ever had, and still it exercises all the patience I have. But it is worth all the labor."

In 1756 the Conference in Bristol agreed that a short account of the design and present state of the school should be read in every society and annual subscriptions and collections made for its support. This raised it to the dignity of a connectional institution, though the financial results were modest. A few preachers' boys were admitted free, but Kingswood was still a boarding school for the sons of the laity. An old account book for 1764 to 1770, preserved at the school, shows that a

"sute of cloathes" cost about £2.6.0. The long coat was of broadcloth; there was a vest and a pair of knee breeches. Stockings were from eighteen-pence to two shillings and four-pence a pair. One boy indulges in a new wig at a cost of six shillings, a pair of gloves at ten-pence. His great coat is turned into a straight one, with new trimmings, for three shillings and sixpence. This same boy figures again in the records: "To pocket money for a year and a Hatt and A Bottle for his head 3s. 3d., to ye Doctor for sore head 10s; 6d., to doctor's bill for sore breast 16s. 6d." Of Willie Darney, a preacher's lad, there is this brief but touching record, "Physic 2s., to doctor's bill £1. 3s. 9d., to coffin, shroud, etc., 19s."

In April, 1768, when Joseph Benson and James Hindmarsh were masters at Kingswood, a great revival broke out. Hindmarsh wrote to tell Wesley the good news. "We have no need to exhort them to pray," he said, "for that spirit runs through the whole school; so that this house may well be called 'a house of prayer.'" Eight boys found peace whilst he was writing, and he opened his letter to report that two more were rejoicing in God, their Saviour. "This," he adds, "is the day we have wished for so long; the day you have had in view, which has made you go through so much opposition for the good of these poor children." Wesley's heart was gladdened in September when he visited Kingswood. "All behave in such a manner," he wrote, "that I have seen no other schoolboys like them." The numbers rose till there were nearly fifty boarders. The masters were now overburdened, and the exact order possible in a smaller school could not be maintained. "However," says Wesley, "this still comes nearer a Christian school than any I know in the kingdom." In 1770 there were thirteen days of spiritual tension which could not fail to be injurious to excitable boys. Wesley found next year that the effects of this upheaval had disappeared. "I spent an hour," he says, "among our children at Kingswood. It is strange. How long shall we be constrained to weave Penelope's web? What is become of the wonderful work of grace which 'God wrought in them last September? It is gone! It is lost! It is vanished away! There is scarce any trace of it remaining! Then we must begin again; and in due time we shall reap, if we faint not."

Ten years later Wesley again complains of the state of things: "I found some of the rules had not been observed at all, particularly that of rising in the morning. Surely Satan has a peculiar spite at this school! What trouble has it cost me for above these thirty years! I can plan; but who will execute? I know not; God help me!" Besides the boys Wesley made provision for the training of more advanced students. It was in this capacity that Adam Clarke made his unfortunate acquaintance with Kingswood in August, 1782. He was sent here by Wesley to prepare for the ministry, but Mr. Simpson, the head master, received him very coolly. He advised the Irish youth to go to Bristol and await Wesley's instructions. But this was idle talk for a man who had only three half-pence in his pocket. Clarke had to stay, but he was made as uncomfortable as possible. He was confined to his room, where the maid brought him his solitary meals. Mrs. Simpson, whom Clarke described as the "Bengal Tiger," suspected that he had the itch, and he was compelled to rub himself with Jackson's ointment, a ceremony which introduced him to the only fire he saw at Kingswood. A change of sheets was refused him, and for about ten days his box was left lying at the inn in Bristol, so that he had no change of clothes and was forced to bear about him by day and night the "infernal unguent." He had bread and milk for breakfast, for dinner, and for supper; he was left to make his own bed, sweep his own room, and perform all the other duties of a chambermaid. His durance lasted for three weeks. His fingers were benumbed with cold, but Mr. Simpson would not allow him to have a fire. He advised him to try some form of physical exertion from which, however, he was forced away by the redoubtable "Bengal Tiger," who never seemed

happy unless she was driving everything before her. Working in the garden here Clarke found half a guinea. No owner could be discovered, and Mr. Simpson refused to accept it for the school. It thus remained in Adam's hands. It enabled him to subscribe for a Hebrew grammar published by the second master. The foundations of his scholarship were thus laid in the uncongenial atmosphere of Kingswood. Wesley's return brought sunshine for Clarke. He was differently treated when it was found that he enjoyed the favor of the founder. He now discovered that Mrs. Simpson was the real head of the school. All stood in awe of this redoubtable woman, and Clarke says, "I feared her more than I feared Satan himself. The following indicates the disorganization of the school:

In several respects each did what was right in his own eyes. There was no efficient plan pursued; they mocked at religion, and trampled under foot all the laws. The little children of the preachers suffered great indignities; and, it is to be feared, their treatment there gave many of them a rooted enmity against religion for life. The parlor boarders had every kind of respect paid to them, and, the others were shamefully neglected. Scarcely any care was taken either of their bodies or souls.

Clarke's verdict probably influenced Wesley, who changed the masters and was able at last to rejoice that all the rules were observed and the children in good order. In 1786 he says: "I walked over to Kingswood school, now one of the pleasantest spots in England. I found all things just according to my desire, the rules being well observed, and the whole behavior of the children showing that they were now managed with the wisdom that cometh from above."

The preachers' sons were now beginning to push out the lay boarders. The Conference of 1788 resolved to raise the number of the first to forty and to reduce the boarders to ten. About six years later Kingswood became exclusively a school for preachers' sons. Joseph Bradford, Wesley's former traveling companion -- who had nursed the old evangelist with filial tenderness, and repeated the words, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and this heir of glory shall come in," as the founder of Methodism escaped to the skies -- was governor of Kingswood from 1795 to 1802. An "old boy" used to describe how the tall and gaunt governor stalked into the dormitory in the early mornings and with one stroke of his oaken staff on the floor roused the youthful sleepers. Then, watch in hand, he marked off three minutes, at the end of which all the boys were expected to be sufficiently dressed to kneel down for their devotions. They washed in a long, low gallery open to the raw air, so that the old prayer was not offered in vain,

Train up thy hardy soldiers, Lord,  
In all their Captain's steps to tread!

Pocket money, one finds from the accounts, was given to the little fellows, and when he left the school each boy had six new shirts, six new pairs of stockings, two pairs of shoes, two hats, pocket-handkerchiefs, and other articles.

Kingswood sometimes furnished a welcome shelter for a broken-down preacher such as William Stevens, who was appointed writing and English master in 1802. A small dirty cottage was all that could be provided for him at short notice, and here he had to begin life again without a spoon or a single article of furniture. Besides his scholastic duties he opened a druggist and

stationery shop and did duty as a medical practitioner in the district. He afterward started a boarding and day school in Kingswood, toward which the Conference gave him a grant from the Preachers' Merciful Fund.

The first prize list that has been preserved -- that for January, 1819 -- contains the name of James Moulton, who received Homer's Iliad as his prize. His father was a Wesleyan minister, and he himself entered the ranks in 1828, and left four sons -- William Fiddian, who became head master of the Leys; James Fiddian, President of New South Wales Conference in 1893; John Fletcher, the distinguished Q. C., who was senior wrangler in 1868; and Richard Green, professor at Chicago University. Another prize winner was William Maclardie Bunting, son of the famous Dr. Bunting, who became one of the most accomplished men in the Methodist ministry.

The Rev. John Lomas became a junior assistant at Kingswood in 1813, with a salary of sixteen guineas. Three years later it was resolved by the committee that he should be examined by Dr. Clarke, Joseph Benson, and McHorner, with a view to testing his fitness for the post of classical master. Another was preferred before him, but in 1819 he was appointed. He was a "universal favorite, an admirable scholar, and, if not a strict disciplinarian, one who allowed no liberties to be taken with his authority." When he left Kingswood the chapel choir sang an anthem in which the refrain "Farewell, Lomas," occurred again and again. To stand in the pulpit facing the boys during this performance must have been one of the trying passages of John Lomas' life. Another worthy of a different stamp was the Rev. Robert Smith, governor from 1820 to 1843. Dame Smith was a wonderful housekeeper, of whom one old scholar wrote:

Her horror at any misbehavior of the boys in regard to the property of the school was one of the features of the place. The lads often tried for fun, from the bedroom windows overlooking the garden, how far their nightcaps would be blown -- everyone wore nightcaps in those days. When recovered from the trees and cabbages of the garden Dame's invariable exclamation came dolefully ringing out, "O, those wicked lads! they'll ruin the institution!"

With the Rev. Jonathan Crowther, appointed head master in 1823, "came the rod of iron, fear, indignation, and finally rebellion." He seems to have acted like a tyrant. One boy whose red and swollen face caused some merriment among his schoolfellows was flogged there and then for making a disturbance. He was found to be suffering from erysipelas, and "when the nurse and Mrs. Smith and her daughters heard" of the lad's punishment they all wept. On a later occasion the same boy stumbled in his Caesar, and was goaded into rudeness by Mr. Crowther's taunts. He was put across a desk and beaten so severely that for several days he could hardly walk or sit. Some years later, when the boy became a minister, Mr. Crowther remarked, "Ah! I gave that young gentleman as fine a flogging as any boy at school ever received, and one that I have no doubt he will remember to the very end of his days." Yet even under this rule of terror the preachers' boys were not cowed. One merry lad was challenged to defy the head master. "Charlie, I'll give you a penny if you'll go up to his desk and offer to fight him." The offer was promptly accepted, and of course secured a sound thrashing.

There was a famine of love at Kingswood, and the small fellow who had left mother and sisters often felt himself utterly desolate. Says one of the former boys: True there was Dame Smith; but she seemed centuries off, and never spoke to us unless, in true shopkeeper fashion; she sold us

sweets once a week. There was Miss Smith, too, but her duties did not lie our way. I remember how we little boys yearned for a look from her, and if she ever smiled on one of us the favored one ran off with raptures to boast of it to the rest.

The rule forbidding play had been rescinded after Wesley's death, but a strange incapacity for understanding a boy's nature still lingered. One lad was publicly expelled because he had twice visited his widowed mother without leave. She lived close by in Bristol, so that the offense was not heinous, yet the chairman of the school committee in pronouncing sentence angrily addressed the culprit as "you dastardly coward."

Wesley's school had been enlarged in 1828, at a cost of ú2,194, so as to take one hundred boys. But the laymen of Methodism felt that it was pitifully inadequate for a great connection, and in June, 1850, the foundation stone of New Kingswood was laid by Mr. James Heald, M. P., at Bath. It was hard to leave a spot that was laden with associations. It was found, however, that it would cost six or eight thousand pounds to patch up the old place, and even then the long-standing difficulty of the water supply would have to be faced. It was a wise decision to spend £16,000 on a new school, and Kingswood has enjoyed rare success in its present splendid position on Lansdown Hill. Generous benefactors, like John Cannington, of Liverpool, have added many a happy finishing touch. Mr. Cannington's right foot, hand, and eye had been touched by paralysis, and he was for forty years a crippled man, but he was never more at home than among the Kingswood boys, and became their most popular visitor. He always left a ten-pound note to provide them with bacon for breakfast; he gave £1,000 to provide a ten-acre playing field, and £420 to build another story over the kitchen for the better housing of the servants. "He liked no part of his visits better than the daily prayers in the hall; his favorite tunes were sung, and all sang their best. As the boys passed out their names were whispered to him. 'It is like reading the stations,' he would say," the preachers he had long known through the list of appointments being represented in their sons.

The Rev. Theophilus Woolmer, who became governor in 1857, is gratefully remembered for many gracious measures which tempered the old regime. He distributed apples from his own garden, and opened that enchanted realm on Sunday afternoons to the boys. He allowed unlimited supplies of bread, and substituted hash for the Saturday dinner of bread and cheese. To this last reform he devoted his entire salary of one hundred pounds a year, and it was found impossible to revert to the bread and cheese after his departure. The fame of Mr. T. G. Osborn as head master has become part of the glories of Kingswood. He was tenth wrangler and a fellow of Trinity Hall. Mr. Fawcett, the postmaster general, once said of him to Sir Henry Fowler, "You Methodist people have an enormous advantage in having such a man to train your ministers' sons."

Dr. Jowett, the great master of Balliol, once expressed his pleasure at receiving Kingswood boys at his college in Oxford, because "they were not all cut to one pattern." Dr. Rigg was here as boy and master. Dr. Moulton was trained at Woodhouse Grove, as also was Sir Henry Fowler, but his three brothers, one of whom was a brilliant senior wrangler, were all Kingswood boys. The present head master, W. W. W. Workman, was second wrangler and Smith's prizeman; the three sons of the present governor, the Rev. Wesley Brunyale, were ornaments of Kingswood, and one of them was second wrangler in 1888. One of the most successful scholars ever turned out by Kingswood was Alfred Cardew Dixon, who in 1878, at the age of thirteen, took the first place

in the first class at the Junior Oxford Local; next year he held the same position in the Senior Oxford, and the following year in the Senior Cambridge. In January, 1882, he headed the London matriculation list, securing in other examinations there the mathematical exhibition, the scholarship and the gold medal in the mathematical branch of the M.A. examination. In 1883 he won the first open scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge, and in 1886 was senior wrangler. He is now professor of mathematics in Galway.

This brief survey will show that John Wesley's zeal for education has been nobly rewarded. Kingswood school had to face many a storm, but it has weathered them all, and was never more solidly prosperous or more full of promise than it is today, when it has just celebrated its third jubilee. "Three Old Boys" have just written the history of their school, and from it are drawn the facts here given.

-- John Telford

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THE END