

'Scarecrow of an House'

By FRANK BAKER

THE old grey border town of Alnwick is a tiny sleepy place according to modern city standards, though in Wesley's day it could be described as 'populous'. Its position as a market town situated on what Dr. Johnson described as the Scotsman's 'noblest prospect'—the highroad to England—undoubtedly gave it an importance much greater than was warranted by its size. For Methodists, too, its interest is out of all proportion to its population. In the very early days of the Methodist Revival, Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were preaching there, whilst John Wesley visited the place over thirty times, his preaching-centre alternating between the Town Hall, the Court House, and the Market Place, where his pulpit would be the Market Cross. From Alnwick went many valiant workers, including at least one President, in Jacob Stanley, and two notable renegades, in the persons of Robert Hindmarsh, the famous Methodist-Swedenborgian, and James Everett, the leader and first President of the United Methodist Free Churches. Another great reformer, Alexander Kilham, carried on his literary warfare against Methodist officialdom whilst Superintendent Minister of the Alnwick Circuit.

The first tiny Methodist Chapel built there in 1752, by

Everett's grandfather, was a plain brick structure, with no pretensions to architectural pre-eminence. A revival in 1786, however, led to plans for a new 'preaching-house', for which John Wesley laid the foundation-stone on 2nd June of that year, after which he apparently left the local Methodists to their own devices. In December 1784, Wesley had written to the Superintendent of the Newcastle Circuit, Jeremiah Brettell, giving some strict advice on chapel-building, probably in reference to the projected chapel at South Shields:

'Let them not build a scarecrow of an house like most of those in the North. Copy after that at Newcastle or Yarm, which is one of the prettiest in England. Look at the *Minutes* of the Conference with regard to the building of preaching-houses, and follow those advices.'

Jeremiah Brettell had now left the district, however, and those responsible for the Alnwick Chapel either neglected to read the *Minutes*, or felt that they could dispense with the advice therein. Neither the octagonal building at Yarm, nor the 'square' one at Newcastle, was used as a pattern.

The months went by. During the remainder of 1786 and 1787 Wesley managed to pay visits to Holland and Ireland, but in

England penetrated no farther north than Rochdale. When the new chapel was at last ready, in December, 1787, the opening ceremony was performed by that outstanding blind preacher from Sunderland, John Grundell, who was later to be one of the first Ministers of the Methodist New Connexion.

It was on 24th May 1788, the fiftieth anniversary of his conversion, that John Wesley finally arrived at Alnwick to see with his own eyes what progress had been made. He found what might have been a beautiful building spoiled by galleries perched much too high, whilst the tiny windows, set very near the ceiling, gave the place a gloomy, barn-like atmosphere. (Even this was not so bad as at Dumfries, however, where the chapel had no windows at all!) The language of Wesley's *Journal* is more restrained than might have been expected:

'I was a little surprised at the new preaching-house . . . Had they no eyes? Or had they never seen any English house? But the scarecrow must now stand without remedy.'

Two years later Wesley was again at Alnwick, though he does not record the fact in his *Journal*. The *Society Book*, however, tells of the 10s. 3d. which was spent in caring for the horses which had drawn his chaise from Newcastle in the small hours of Monday 10th May 1790. Arriving at 11.30 a.m., he had spent the next hour or so, according to his diary, 'on

business'. Then followed dinner, a short nap, a little writing, and the Society Meeting—combined, apparently, with a kind of Sunday-school parade. One of the scholars was young James Everett, on the verge of his sixth birthday. Everett's own diary gives a vivid picture of the occasion, his only personal recollection of the great leader who was to become his hero.

Many years later Everett was to acquire a precious memento of this visit, when Mrs. Richard Smith, the daughter of Adam Clarke, gave him an autograph relic of Wesley which is still treasured in the Everett Collection at Hartley-Victoria College, Manchester. This document helps to explain that phrase 'on business' which Wesley had inserted in his diary. It shows, also, that he was not prepared to let the Alnwick Chapel, scarecrow or not, remain a burden to the Society for want of encouragement. In tremulous hand, for he was nearly eighty-seven, he had written:

'Alnwick.
May 10th, 1790

We whose names are under writtⁿ design with God's help to subscribe as follows weekly towards lessening y^e Debt of y^e Preaching house
John Wesley 0—2—6
Jno Stamp 0—0—6'

John Stamp, a young Minister who had apparently come from Sunderland to supply during the illness of the Alnwick Superintendent, replacing him at the following Conference, this year

married as his first wife the granddaughter of Mrs. John Wesley, and was the ancestor of a line of valued Methodist ministers, one of whom became a President of the Wesleyan Conference. Below the original inscription, Alnwick Methodists who were ready to join in Wesley's debt-reduction scheme wrote their signatures and promises:

Ralph Annett	0—1—0
Luke Hindmarsh	0—0—6
John Pringle	0—0—3
Sam ^l . Purvis	0—2
James Gough	0—2
Geo. Wilson	0—6'

The Chapel debt was dealt with. So also, in course of time, was the Scarecrow Chapel itself, being altered a century later at a cost of over £2,000.

When You Forgive - Be Generous

By JAMES GAULD

'I WAS sitting in my study, which overlooks my orchard, last autumn,' said my friend, Mr. B—, 'when I became aware of a rustling noise. I looked out, and there I saw a young man busily occupied in pulling down my apples and stuffing them into his pockets. Opening the french window, I shouted at him and ran down the garden path, but he was too quick for me. Scrambling over the wall, he took to his heels and was out of sight before I got to it.'

'I walked round the house to see if anyone else was about and there, propped up against a wall, I found a rather shabby bicycle. With a smile I wheeled it into my tool-shed and locked the door. On returning inside I rang up my friend the police sergeant in the village and asked him to make a few judicious enquiries about the owner of the machine.'

'Three days later he called to

say he thought he had found the culprit. I got out my car, and together we went to a place where a gang of navvies was making a new road.

"That's your man, I think," said the sergeant, pointing out a young fellow.

"It certainly looks like him," I replied, so we went toward him and I asked him if he had ever seen me before.

"No," he replied.

"Were you in my orchard last Saturday afternoon?" I asked.

'He flushed slightly, then answered, "No".

"Have you lost a bicycle?"

'He hesitated, and then answered, "No".

'At this point I am afraid I rather lost my temper. In stern tones I told him I didn't like liars, and that unless he owned up I should put the matter into the hands of the police and have him prosecuted; on the other hand,