

**HONEST MUNCHIN; AND OTHER
SKETCHES OF EARLY METHODISM
IN THE BLACK COUNTRY, WITH
THE ROMANTIC STORY OF THE
LEEK-SEED CHAPEL**

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Honest Munchin; and other sketches of early Methodism in the Black country, with the romantic story of the leek-seed chapel by J. C. T.

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J. C. T.

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PREFACE.

THESE little sketches, based for the most part on real incidents, appeared originally in the columns of the *Methodist Recorder*. They are intended as simple illustrations of the trials and triumphs of early Methodism in the district now familiarly known as the "Black Country." In those days the latter term had a moral as well as a physical significance, but, thanks to the wholesome influence of the religious crusade, brighter days have dawned upon this busy hive of industry. The heroism of our forerunners ought to inspire us with a brave valour in support of the glorious truths for which they willingly endured so much persecution.

J. C. T.

February, 1871.

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HOW HONEST MUNCHIN SAVED THE METHODISTS.

A CENTURY ago there stood in a retired spot, within a stone's-throw of the High Bullen, at Wednesbury, an antiquated hostelry, known as the "Cockfighters' Arms," a great resort of the "cocking"

fraternity, for whose exploits Wednesbury was so famous in the days of auld lang syne. Here, after the excitement of the cock-pit, gamesters resorted to discuss the merits of their favourite birds, and to adjust the stakes they had severally lost or won. Here, too, were settled, amidst plentiful potations of spiced ale, programmes of future chanticleerian encounters. The exterior of the house was dingy enough. The windows were dark and heavy, the low old-fashioned porch was rapidly dissolving partnership with the main building, and the overhanging signboard—on which a brace of fighting birds in grievous art had long since melted into love, and become ethereal as to colour—creaked dismally in response to every gust of wind. Few sober-minded folk cared to cross the threshold of the "Arms"; for Nancy Neale, the hostess, was an Amazon whose salutation only the initiated had the courage to encounter.

On a dull autumn evening, about the middle of the last century, a group of toppers, well-known members of the "fraternity," sat around Nancy's broad oaken table, discussing the prospects of their favourite pastime.

"I'll tell thee what, lads," observed a corpulent bull-necked fellow, pet-named the 'Game Chicken,' out of compliment to his prowess, "if we don't put a stop to these ranting Methodys, as goes about preachin' and prayin,' there'll be no sportsmen left us by-and-by."

"That's well said, Chicken," chimed in another inveterate cocker, "Hosey" by name, as he lifted a huge pewter pot to his lips.

"Why," resumed Chicken, "just look what they've done for Honest Munchin! Whoever could ha' thought it? As gain a chap was Munchin as ever handled a bird, an' a pluckier cove to bet I never see."

"Aye, aye!" exclaimed the company, in a chorus of assent.

"But, la!" continued the first speaker, "jist behold him now, as funky as a turtle-dove, an' I b'lieve if he wor to see a cock die he'd want his pocket-handkercher to wipe his eyes."

A roar of laughter, which greeted this sarcastic hit, encouraged the speaker to proceed.

"Well, I was agoin to say, lads, as this John Wesley, as they calls him, is a-comin' to-morrow to preach agin Francis Ward's house, and we

oughter show him what sort o' blood there is in Wednesbury. What say you, Mr. Moseley?"

The person thus appealed to, although of superior mental training to any of his pot companions, was an inveterate gamester, and his air of shabby gentility intimated a luckless career. He had indeed had such a run of misfortune that a fine estate, which he had inherited on the borders of Wednesfield, was so hopelessly encumbered, and so stricken with poverty, as to be popularly known in the neighbourhood by the name of "Fighting Cock's Hall."

"Here," said the gamester, raising his fishy eyes and leering like an ogre, "here is a crown-piece, the last I have left, to buy a basket of stale eggs. Chicken 'll know what to do with 'em."

"Aye, aye!" chimed in Nancy, who stood with folded arms against the door, "an' I'll give another, for these Methodys is for closing every tavern in Wedgebury, according to Munchin's talk; but we'll show um what stuff we're made on, won't we, Chicken?"

At this unexampled sacrifice for the cause of cocking and tipping the applause became

uproarious, and by general consent Mr. Wesley was to have such a reception on the morrow as would convince him that "Wedgebury blood was game." So inspiring became this lively theme that the morning sky was flushed with the red streaks of dawn before the revellers brought their orgies to a close.

On the afternoon following, the alley leading to the "Arms" was filled by a crowd of roysterers, headed by the Chicken and his *confrères* of the night before. The enthusiasm of the mob in their denunciation of the Methodists was heightened by sundry jugs of ale, liberally dispensed by Nancy. The multitude was composed of the lowest class of labourers, not a few of them being armed with sticks and staves. As the starting-time drew near, such eggs of the required antiquity as had been procured were distributed among the noisy multitude, the excitement rose yet higher, and at length vented itself in a song, common at that period, of which the refrain was—

"Mr. Wesley's come to town
To try and pull the churches down."

The preliminaries being now all settled, the throng, at a given signal from the Game