

fly upward." This was literally true of the rectory family on the night of February 9, 1709, when the sparks not only flew upward but flew in all directions, and fire completely destroyed the house. Some authorities, including John Wesley himself, believed the fire to have been of incendiary origin—the fenmen had been guilty of similar depredations before. However, this is hardly a fair accusation. A thatched house of lathes and plaster, candles for light, plus the rector's absentmindedness, may easily have added up to a fire.

The story of the fire, pieced together from accounts written by both Susanna and Samuel, is a dramatic one. Susanna, who was within a short time of what proved to be her last *accouchement*, had retired for the night; so had the rest of the family. Hetty who occupied a little room up under the eaves, was awakened by fire falling on her bed. She gave the alarm which was taken up by passersby on the street. Samuel was aroused by the cry of "fire" from outside and with but little on besides his nightshirt led the way downstairs, the two older girls arousing the rest of the children. Susanna would have tarried to bring out the little money they had upstairs, but Samuel bade her "fly for her life." When they reached the front door he remembered he had left the door key upstairs. So holding his breeches over his head he dashed back to recover it, the stairs by that time being already ablaze. No one had time to put on any clothes.

With the opening of the street door the northeast wind drove in the flames, making all return to the upper floor impossible. Meanwhile some of the children had gotten out through the windows, the rest through a door into the garden. Susanna was in no condition to climb out the window nor could she get to the garden door. Finally, she waded through the flames at the front door and collapsed outside in the garden. The maid, aroused by Susanna, brought out the baby in her arms, telling John and the other children sleeping with her in the nursery to follow.

ly true of the rectory family on 9, when the sparks not only flew ns, and fire completely destroyed including John Wesley himself, of incendiary origin—the fenmen predations before. However, this A thatched house of lathes and s the rector's absentmindedness, fire.

l together from accounts written is a dramatic one. Susanna, who at proved to be her last *accouche-* nt; so had the rest of the family. room up under the eaves, was er bed. She gave the alarm which n the street. Samuel was aroused side and with but little on besides downstairs, the two older girls ren. Susanna would have tarried y they had upstairs, but Samuel hen they reached the front door ne door key upstairs. So holding e dashed back to recover it, the eady ablaze. No one had time to

street door the northeast wind g all return to the upper floor of the children had gotten out t through a door into the garden. n to climb out the window nor door. Finally, she waded through d collapsed outside in the garden. ana, brought out the baby in her other children sleeping with her

By this time the fire had reached such proportions that all was in the wildest confusion. No one knew whether other members of the family had escaped until Samuel finally could assemble his little brood about him in the garden—all safe except John whose cries could be heard from the upper floor. Several times Samuel tried to mount the stairs to fetch him out, but the whole stairway was ablaze. Thinking the boy lost, Samuel fell on his knees in the yard and commended his soul to God. Apparently the little fellow had not awakened at the maid's call. When he did and tried to go through the door the flames prevented him. But the crowd outside caught a glimpse of the tiny figure at the window, for he had climbed up on a chest beside it.

"Fetch a ladder!" shouted one man—but there was no time for that. Then a big practical villager ("who liked me," Samuel later narrated) braced himself against the wall while a smaller man climbed up on his shoulders. The first time the slighter man fell; the second try was successful, and strong arms lifted the little fellow out of the window. It was in the nick of time, for just then the whole roof fell in.

"Come, neighbors," cried Samuel, as the Wesley family shivered beside the charred ruins of their home, "let us kneel down; let us give thanks to God . . . ; let the house go. I am rich enough."

Yes, Susanna and Samuel were abundantly wealthy in the courage and fortitude necessary to rise above calamity, but this catastrophe robbed them of every material thing they owned: their home, their furnishings, the books, Dr. Annesley's precious papers, and their own writings.

Ever afterward John Wesley referred to himself as "the brand plucked from the burning." Perhaps his miraculous escape deepened in him a sense of his calling. Certainly Susanna believed he was saved for some great purpose, for she later wrote: "I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child, that Thou has so mercifully provided for."