

DANIEL DEFOE AND THE PALATINES

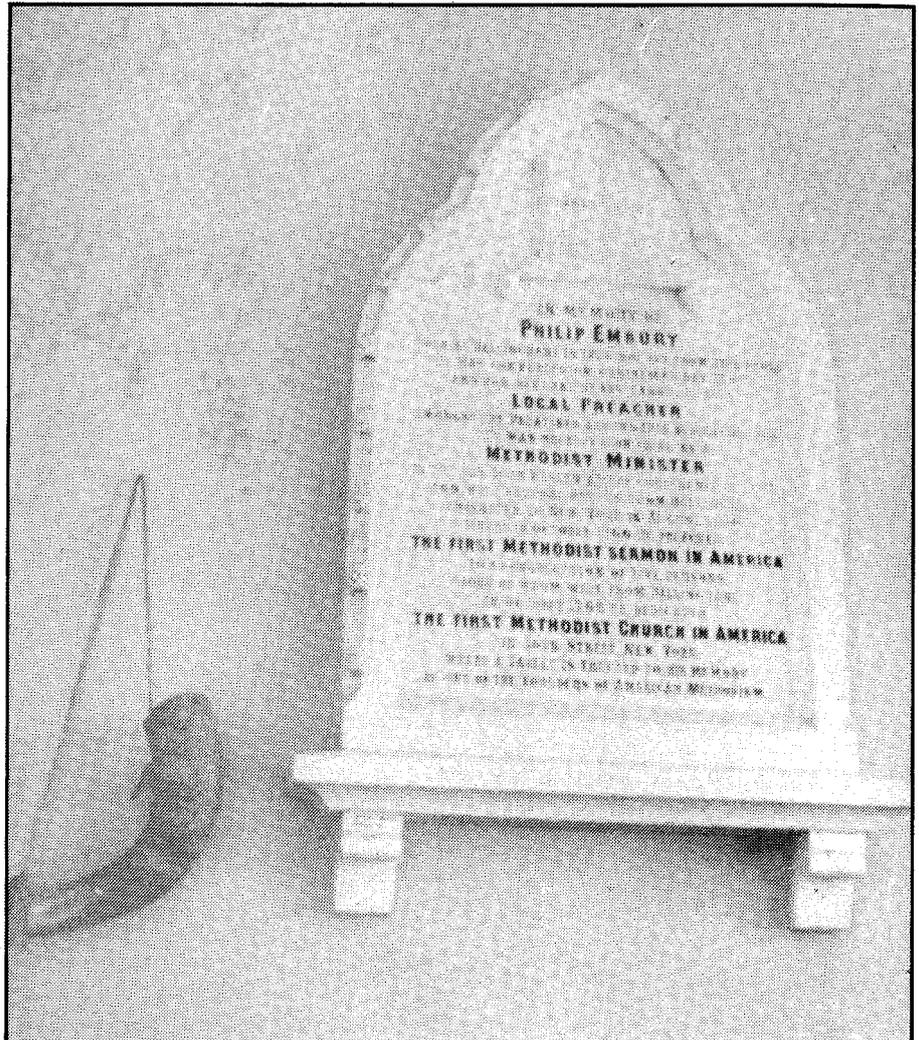
Barbara Heck was dismayed by the conduct of her companions, lately arrived from Ballingrane, Co. Limerick. She determined to do something about it, but when she confronted her friend, Philip Embury, at his lodging-house in New York and challenged him to lay aside what he was doing to 'Preach to us or we shall go to Hell and God will require our blood at your hands! this formidable woman could scarcely have imagined that, just one century later, her friend's followers would number over eight million and Embury himself would be the acknowledged founder of American Methodism.

He was a carpenter and lived on Lord Southwell's estate in County Limerick. On Christmas Day, 1752, he had a religious experience, and a short time afterwards began to preach for the Methodists in Limerick. Despite his local success as a preacher, he was obliged, with his wife, Mary Switzer, to emigrate. They left Ballingrane for the Custom House Quay in Limerick in the early summer of 1760, to sail on the *Perry*, which was bound for New York, at a time when emigration from Ireland was not the problem it is today. On the same voyage were John and Barbara Heck.

The reason all of them had for leaving Ireland and the Southwell estate was simple. A rental increase was too much for them, from five shillings per acre for eight acres per man, woman and child paid to Lord Southwell by the original settlers on the estate.

Barbara Heck's pre-marriage name was Ruckle, and the Ruckles, the Hecks, the Switzers and the Emburys were descendants of German refugees from the area around Heidelberg. This region of about seven thousand square miles of the Lower Palatinate, a sector of Germany, had suffered political persecution from the French, religious persecution from within and, finally, a devastating year of famine.

Daniel Defoe, who, a decade later, was to write *Robinson Crusoe*, summed up the plight of those displaced persons in a pamphlet penned in 1709, the same year that thousands of Palatines fled the Rhineland and settled in Ireland, England and colonial America. German princes had denied in a public declaration that the Palatines had been subjected to religious persecution. Defoe's counter-denial stated:



Memorial to Philip Embury in Ballingrane and the hunting horn used in the eighteenth century to call worshippers to service.

BY PETER HUTCHINSON

But if these poor people have not left their country because of oppression in religion, the declaration leaves us free to believe that they have left it because they were oppressed with impositions of another kind, for certainly the last thing men would ever do is to leave their own sweet native soil. And, at this time of the world, so great a number of families cannot be supposed to do it out of wantonness.

He called his pamphlet *A brief History of the Poor Palatine Refugees*, and poor they certainly were; destitute, even, and with no knowledge of the English language;

but there is plenty of evidence that in a short time, through extensive tillage and every other form of husbandry, they were better fed and better clothed than most of their neighbours. Defoe's reasoned summing up of the Palatines' mass-migration could be applied many generations later to, among others, Ireland in the Famine years, to the Hungarians who came to Limerick's Knocklisheen in the aftermath of the 1956 Rising, to the Vietnamese boatpeople, and even today, to some of the people of East Germany who have followed their early eighteenth century countrymen on the road to the West.

'The last thing men would ever do is to leave their own sweet native soil . . . out of wantonness'.