A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN WESLEY AS PRACTICAL THINKER AND REFORMER

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

William Ernest Sweetland

1955

This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

A Critical Study of John Wesley as
Practical Thinker and
Reformer

presented by

William Ernest Sweetland

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph. D. degree in Social Science

Lewis K. Zerbe
Major professor

Date May 12, 1955

O-169

A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN WESLEY AS PRACTICAL THINKER AND REFORMER

By

William Ernest Sweetland

AN ABSTRACT

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Michigan
State College of Agriculture and Applied Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Division of Social Science

Year 1955

Approved Lewis K Zerby

9-14-55
g

ABSTRACT

The major purpose of John Wesley's ministry was to promote a vital, practical, dynamic Christianity which would lead ultimately to salvation, and would in the meantime make life on earth a fuller, richer experience. The three basic doctrines advocated by him to carry out his purpose were justification by faith, the new birth, and Christian perfection. True freedom for man, the primary goal of the eighteenth century, would begin with his release from the bondage of sin, and the restoration of the soul to its original purity--its natural state--would be accomplished gradually through following the doctrine of Christian perfection. The person experiencing such a change would show his love for God and man by taking an active part in the religious, social, economic, and political life of his community.

Wesley's intense interest in practical considerations lead to a failure on his part to give adequate attention to the more theoretical aspects of Christianity, and made him impatient with theories of any kind. He was unable to appreciate the educational theories of Rousseau, the political theories of Priestley and Price, and the writings of Montesquieu and Voltaire, since they did not meet the standards of Scripture, reason, and experience which were applied by Wesley to every problem or activity.

For John Wesley individual character and intellect were the prime movers in human progress, with the desired character and intellect resulting from an adherence to Wesley's basic doctrines and the application of

his standards to every problem. He felt that involved theology was not necessary to a proper understanding of Christianity, and might prove to be a handicap to those attempting to follow his doctrines. The core of his teachings was his insistance upon a life of purposive activity in which the individual was the key to a better future both for himself and his community.

The Wesleyan emphasis upon personal experience had a strong appeal, as the rapid growth of the movement shows. Not so readily apparent, but equally important, are the inconsistencies in Wesley's thought. The most glaring inconsistency lay in his insistence upon the primary importance of individual thought and experience, while at the same time he was equally concerned with conformity to the demands of certain groups. The Church of England, for example, was considered by Wesley to have means of grace which were indispensable to salvation. The government of England was, he thought, the best then in existence, since it gave every individual civil and religious freedom. Under the Wesleyan concept, however, that freedom was restricted. The freedom desired by Wesley was not what the individual's reason and experience might lead him to expect, but rather freedom to do what he <u>should</u> want to do, and what they should want was freedom under the laws of England.

The greatest strength of Wesley's teachings was identical with their greatest weakness--his emphasis upon the practical aspects of Christianity. His doctrine of Christian perfection was admirably suited to the times, particularly to the people to whom Wesley preached. The decision made very early in his career that he was going to preach to the poor determined

the level and approach of his teachings. The level was dictated by the limited understanding of his followers; the approach by their needs. His greatest strength lay in his ability to satisfy those needs through an appeal the people could understand. His greatest weakness lay in his belief that actions or knowledge not based upon what he understood to be reason, experience, and Scripture were not worthy of attention.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN WESLEY AS PRACTICAL THINKER AND REFORMER

By

William Ernest Sweetland

A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Michigan
State College of Agriculture and Applied Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Division of Social Science

1955

PREFACE

The mature thought and practice of John Wesley resulted from the interplay of many influences. The first major influence was that of his mother, whose teachings served as the basis for much of his thinking in later life. Charterhouse, Oxford, á Kempis, Taylor, Law, the Holy Club, Georgia, and the Moravians all played a part in shaping the intellectual pattern that was to be typical of his mature thought. Wesley's experience at Aldersgate, in which his heart was "strangely warmed", marked the end of the formative period of his life, for after that time his major beliefs did not change. For that reason we shall treat the development of his beliefs chronologically from his childhood to 1738, then discuss his mature thought under the general headings of religion, social and economic teachings, and his attitude toward political life.

A critical study of John Wesley's major beliefs is long overdue. Those who have written about Wesley tend to fall into one of two groups: one is loud in its praise of the practical nature of John Wesley's teachings, which made possible the rebirth of deep religious feeling in an England that was desperately in need of such a renewal of spirit; the other group, while admitting the importance of Wesley's achievements as an organizer, administrator, and preacher, criticizes the intellectual sterility and other-worldly emphasis of his teachings. A re-examination of his major beliefs with the purpose of attempting to show their strengths and weaknesses is amply justified by the divergent opinions held regarding them. That is the purpose of this work.

W.E.S.

****

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING

John Wesley, the sixteenth child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, was born June 17, 1703, at Epworth, Lincolnshire, England. He lived at Epworth only ten and one-half years, yet the influence of his childhood training there was so strong that it remained with him until his death in 1791. The tremendous impressions made upon Wesley during his early childhood were largely the result of two factors; the isolation of Epworth, and the moral and intellectual strength of his parents.

Epworth was a town of about two thousand inhabitants when John Wesley was born. It was one of the principal villages on the Isle of Axholme, an island formed by three rivers; the Trent, the Don, and the Idle, and their connecting canals. Because of periodic floods the Isle was inaccessible from the outside world, except by boat, for most of the year. Travel, consequently, was very slow, difficult, and uncomfortable. Those who lived on the Isle, including the Wesleys, had little contact with the outside world. Except for the three trips made by Samuel Wesley to Convocation in London there is no record of any extensive travel by either of John Wesley's parents.

The geographic isolation of Epworth parish was in itself a serious handicap to the proper development of the numerous Wesley children,

but there was another and more serious problem. The Wesleys found themselves isolated socially as a result of the hostility of most of the local inhabitants.

The enmity of the Islanders had a long and interesting background. Most of them had for a long time made their living by hunting, fishing, and working the land that lay above the level of the periodic floods.[1] In 1626 Charles I signed an agreement with a Dutch engineer which threatened their whole way of life. Under the terms of the agreement the swamps were to be drained, with one-third of the reclaimed land going to the crown, one-third to the engineer and his friends, who were French and Dutch Protestants, and one-third to the local inhabitants.[2] To the natives it meant losing two-thirds of their land, their means of livelihood, and what seemed to them a very satisfactory way of life. They were convinced that no possible future benefits could replace their immediate losses, so they determined to fight the usurpation of their rights and privileges. Every effort made by the engineers to carry out the project met with fierce resistance. As soon as a dam was constructed it was destroyed, workers were killed, tools and equipment stolen or ruined, and ditches filled. Their efforts to sabotage the work were successful, as shown by the fact that the project was not completed until after the beginning of the eighteenth

---

[1] U. Lee, The Lord's Horsemen (New York: The Century Co., 1928), p. 3.

[2] M. Piette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), p. 214.

century. During most of the seventeenth century the inhabitants of the Isle were at war with the authorities, their hatred being broad enough to encompass all representatives of the kings who supported the proposal, as well as those of Cromwell. They fought the engineers, and the tax-collectors sent by the government officials.[1] They seem to have had an intense hatred for anyone connected with the government, even though that connection might involve nothing more active than support of existing governmental policies. In this category were such people as Tory politicians and churchmen.

Samuel Wesley was both a Tory and a churchman, so the people of Epworth showed their dislike for him and his family frequently and violently. Twice, in 1702 and 1709, the rectory was set on fire. On several occasions his crops were burned, and his three cows were killed while he was in prison for debt. The only person held in lower esteem by the people of the Island of Axholme was Nicholas Reading, the tax-collector, who was forced to fight thirty-one different battles with the native population, only to have his house burned down in spite of all his efforts.[2] In such an environment the Wesleys had no alternative but to make the family as completely self-sufficient as possible. If the people outside the rectory were to remain hostile it meant that

---

[1] Ibid., p. 215.

[2] Reading and his family were among the few friends the Wesleys had at Epworth, perhaps because Samuel Wesley may have indicated to most of his parishioners that they were not his social equals. See L. Tyerman, The Life and Times of Samuel Wesley (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1886), pp. 363-75.

the family would have to carry out all the functions now shared jointly by the home, church, and school. This placed a tremendous burden upon the parents, so we must look briefly at the backgrounds of the two people who were to exert so much influence on John Wesley.

The Wesleys and the Annesleys, the family of John Wesley's mother, had been in England since the time of William the Conqueror,[1] and both families were proud of their heritage. A great deal of that pride was shown in John Wesley's statement that if he were to write the story of his life he would begin it before he was born.[2] He had good reason to be proud of his ancestry, for, as Fitchett says, "His ancestors for three generations were gentlefolk by birth, scholars by training, clergymen by choice, and martyrs, in a sense, by roughness of fortune."[3] His great-grandfather, the Puritan Bartholomew Wesley, studied medicine and divinity at Oxford, was ordained, then ejected from his parish in 1662 for nonconformity and forced to make his living from the practice of medicine. Bartholomew's son, the first John Wesley, studied languages at Oxford, but, unlike his father, did not request ordination. He became the leader of a small group of Christians known as a "gathered church," and did much work among the fishermen at Weymouth. In 1658 Cromwell's Triers approved him as pastor of a larger church, and a

---

[1] J. H. Overton, John Wesley (New York: Houghton Miflin and Co., 1891), p. 1.

[2] G. E. Harrison, Son to Susanna (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938), p. 24.

[3] W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and His Century (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 13.

successful career seemed to be assured. In 1662, however, he was also ejected for nonconformity. From that time until his death in 1678 he was almost completely dependent upon his friends for support. Several times arrested, in hiding for long periods to escape persecution, unable to provide properly for his family, he died at the age of forty-two.[1]

Samuel Wesley, son of one John Wesley and father of another, was sixteen years old when his father died. His childhood had been spent under circumstances which should have made a confirmed dissenter of him. His grandparents on both sides had been Puritan leaders. He had been brought up in a dissenting home and had been educated in a dissenting academy. He had seen his father arrested and imprisoned for the sake of his religious principles. Along with strong religious convictions, however, his heritage also included a strong will. While a student at a Nonconformist academy in London, Samuel Wesley began to question his beliefs. The reasons for the period of indecision through which he went are not known. Southey says it was because he fell in with "bigotted and ferocious men," and saw the worst side of the dissenting character.[2] A different reason is given by Snell, who says that Wesley was chosen by the officials of the academy to answer some bitter attacks against the dissenters, and while writing his reply saw

---

[1] J. Telford, The Life of John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1924), pp. 3-6.

[2] R. Southey, Life of Wesley (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), I, p. 5.

the errors in his beliefs.[1] Whatever his reasons may have been, Wesley made up his mind that he preferred the Church of England. With the quick decision that was typical of him all his life he went to Oxford, enrolled at Exeter College as a poor scholar, and began his work there with only two pounds sixteen shillings, and with nothing but his own ability and ingenuity to count on for any future support.[2]

Samuel Wesley's must be one of the most unique university careers on record, since upon his graduation he left Oxford with more money than when he entered, and he had made all but five shillings of it himself. He must have had a stern sense of duty and an overpowering will to succeed. A lesser man could not have survived the work schedule by which he supported himself. In addition to taking care of his own academic requirements he wrote papers for other students, took care of his duties as a servitor, acted as a paid tutor for the less able and ambitious students, and wrote poetry which was published under the title "Maggotts, or Poems on several subjects never before handled."[3] In 1688 Samuel Wesley was graduated from Oxford and ordained in the Church of England.

Susanna Annesley became the bride of Samuel Wesley in 1689. The Annesleys, like the Wesleys, were prominent Nonconformists, and Susanna, like Samuel, renounced the religion of her father in favor of the

---

[1] F. J. Snell, Wesley and Methodism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 6.

[2] Southey, Life of Wesley, I, 6-7.

[3] Telford, John Wesley, pp. 7-8.

Established Church. She was the twenty-fourth child in a family that was near the center of the controversy between the Nonconformists and the Church of England. Her father, Dr. Annesley, had been a prominent man among the Puritans for some years, at one time holding an appointment to the board of commissioners whose responsibility was to approve and admit ministers. The return to power of the Stuarts and the passage of the Act of Uniformity resulted in his ejection from his parish on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1662. He then went to London, where he preached to a dissenting congregation. Susanna Annesley was born in London in a home where religious problems were discussed freely. She was reading religious literature and listening to religious arguments at a time when she might better have been playing, or at least reading something of a lighter nature. At the age of thirteen she very solemnly considered the merits of Nonconformity and those of the Church of England, and decided in favor of the latter.[1]

Samuel and Susanna Wesley were similar in many ways. As Overton points out, "Both were people of real piety and considerable abilities, which had been improved by culture; both felt keenly their responsibility in bringing up their numerous offspring in the fear and love of God; both had thought out the great problem of religion for themselves, and both had come over to the Church of England at an early age from a deliberate conviction that it was the more excellent way."[2] In 1697

---

[1] E. Clarke, Susanna Wesley (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886), pp. 16-22.

[2] Overton, John Wesley, pp. 1-2.

they came to the village of Epworth, where they were to remain until Samuel's death in 1735. It was here that John Wesley was born and reared, and the groundwork laid for the development of the future evangelist.

The greatest single influence on the life of John Wesley was without any doubt that of his mother. His letters to her continued from the time he left home to go to school until her death, and each of them shows very clearly his affection for her and the high regard he had for her opinions. This very remarkable woman bore nineteen children in twenty-one years, took care of the management of the household, kept the family and glebe accounts, and yet had time to devote six hours a day to the education of her children. The only conceivable manner in which her manifold duties could be carried out was through a strict scheduling of her time, and Susanne Wesley had a system which she followed very rigorously. The title, "Mother of Methodism" which has been given her by her admirers is well-deserved, as shown by the letter quoted below. The key phrase in the letter is "put into a regular method of living". The guiding principle in the operation of the Wesley household was method, and its importance is readily seen in our comparatively brief extract from a very extensive letter. It is one of the few documentary sources of information on Wesley's childhood, and certainly one of the most influential of all his mother's letters on the formation of his ideas.[1] Mrs. Wesley wrote:

---

[1] The major points of Wesley's sermon On Education are simply elaborations of the principles set forth by his mother in this letter. See J. Wesley, Works of the Rev. John Wesley (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1827), VIII, 122-32.

Dear Son:

According to your desires, I have collected the principal rules I observed in educating my family....

The children were always put into a regular method of living....from their birth; as in dressing, undressing, changing their linen, &c....

When turned a year old (and some before), they were taught to fear the rod, and to cry softly; by means of which they escaped an abundance of correction they might otherwise have had....

In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temper. To inform the understanding is a work of time, and must with children proceed with slow degree as they are able to bear it; but the subjecting a will is a thing that must be done at once, and the sooner the better....

I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind.[1]

The letter continues with a discussion of some of the methods used to educate her children.

The children of this family were taught, as soon as they could speak, the Lord's Prayer....to which, as they grew bigger, were added a short prayer for their parents, and some collects; a short catechism, and some portions of Scripture, as their memories could bear....

None of them were taught to read till they were five years old....The way of teaching was this: the day before a child began to learn, the house was set in order, every one's work appointed them, and a charge given that none should come into the room from nine till twelve, or from two to five; which, you know, were our school hours. One day was allowed the child wherein to learn its letters; and each of them did it in that time, he knew all the letters great and small, except Molly and Nancy, who were a day and a half before they knew them perfectly....

As soon as they knew the letters, they were first put to spell, and read one line, then a verse; never leaving till perfect in their lesson, were it shorter or longer....

---

[1] J. Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley, ed. N. Curnock (London: Epworth Press, 1938), III, 34-6.

> There was no such thing as loud talking or playing allowed of, but everyone was kept close to their business for the six hours of school; and it is almost incredible what a child may be taught in a quarter of a year, by a vigorous application, if it have but tolerable capacity and good health.[1]

The Wesley children, especially the three boys, John, Samuel, and Charles, must have had much more than tolerable capacity, since all three became very well-known men in England. If the effectiveness of an educational system is to be measured by the quality of its products it must be admitted that Susanna Wesley did a remarkable job. One might well disagree with the severity of her methods, but it must be kept in mind that the Wesleys were living under very adverse conditions. There were nineteen births in twenty-one years, poverty was always near, and the family was being reared in a hostile environment. Even had the conditions under which the family was being brought up been different Mrs. Wesley probably would have subjected her children to the same sort of training, since she had a firm conviction that any demonstration of softness or indulgence toward her children was actually an injustice to them. She believed that the greatest impediment to temporal and eternal happiness was self-will, and that the parent who attempted to master it in his children worked with God in "renewing and saving a soul."[2]

Susanna Wesley's letter to John indicates that she was not interested in the complete subjection of the will of the child to her own, but

---

[1] Ibid., 36-7.

[2] Ibid., 36.

rather in teaching them respect for authority, whether that authority be divine, political, or parental. It is true that there is no indication of love for her children in the ordinary sense of the term, but there is another sense in which we may look at her affection for her children. Being convinced that her obligation was to train her children not only for life, but also for life hereafter, she bent every effort toward making them "Christians, scholars, and gentlefolk."[1] To her life was real, and life was earnest, and she could best show her love for her family by preparing the children as well as possible for the trials that lay ahead. Their happiness would depend to a great extent upon whether or not they were able to discipline themselves, and her educational program was aimed at helping them learn how to do so.

John Wesley's childhood was dominated by two ideas concerning his future: the strong Puritan and Anglican tradition of his ancestors was thoroughly ingrained into his life and thought by his mother's system, never to be out of his thinking on any subject, and he was taught to regard himself as set apart for some divinely appointed task.[2] The second of these two ideas had its origin in an almost fatal fire.

Fire played an important part in Wesley's childhood. The year before his birth his parents had a bitter argument over the succession to the throne of England. As a result of the argument Samuel called down a curse upon his wife and children, and left the rectory swearing

---

[1] Fitchett, Wesley and His Century, p. 20.

[2] S. G. Dimond, The Psychology of the Methodist Revival (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 54.

that he would never return. For some unknown reason he returned for a few days, during which the rectory was set on fire, and about two-thirds of it burned. His curse had come too close to being realized, so a thoroughly chastened Samuel Wesley settled down to another thirty-three stormy years of married life. The first fruit of the reconciliation was John Wesley.[1] Had there been no fire it is possible that there would have been no John Wesley. On the night of February 9, 1709, Epworth rectory was burned down. The two previous attempts by fire had been only partially successful; this time the destruction was complete. The best description of what happened that night is given in a letter written by Susanna Wesley to her son Samuel:

> The fire broke out about eleven or twelve o'clock at night, we being all in bed, nor did we perceive it till the roof of the corn-chamber was burnt through, and the fire fell down on your sister Hetty's bed....
>
> We had no time to take our clothes, but ran out all naked. I called to Betty [a servant] to bring the children out of the nursery: she took up Patty and left Jacky to follow her, but he, going back to the door and seeing all on fire, ran back again....Your father carried sister Emily, Sukey, and Patty into the garden; then missing Jacky, he ran back into the house to see if he could save him....[he] attempted several times to get upstairs, but was beat back by the flames; then he thought him lost, and commended his soul to God....The child climbed up to a window and called out to them in the yard; they got up to the casement and pulled him out just as the roof fell into the chamber.[2]

This miraculous escape from death had a marked effect upon both the mother and the child. The mother wrote in her private meditations, "I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child,

---

[1] Manchester Guardian Weekly, July 23, 1953, p. 11.

[2] Clarke, Susanna Wesley, pp. 96-7.

that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have been, that I may do my endeavour to instill into his mind the principles of thy true religion and virtue."[1] John later referred to himself as the "brand plucked from the burning," and regarded his rescue as an indication that he was the object of a very special providence of God.[2] His firm conviction that he had been saved for some divine mission, a conviction strengthened by his mother, was strong enough to carry him through many stormy periods of his life, as we shall see.

As a child John Wesley seems to have been an unusually serious-minded individual. He would do nothing without having first given it serious consideration, many times arguing with those who had made some request of him. This habit of arguing so exasperated his father that on one occasion he said to John, "Child, you think to carry everything by dint of argument; but you will find how little is ever done in the world by close reasoning." In another moment of disgust with his son, Samuel, in a frequently-quoted statement to his wife, said, "I profess, sweetheart, I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature unless he could give a reason for it."[3]

John's father attempted to check what he considered to be excessive gravity and serious-mindedness in his son, but his mother encouraged it in every way. The burning of the rectory interrupted her plans by

---

[1] Telford, John Wesley, pp. 19-20.

[2] See Wesley, Journal, I, 328; and IV, 90.

[3] L. Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley (4th ed; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), I, 18.

making it necessary to place the children in different homes until it could be rebuilt. In their strange environments the children acquired language and habits which to the mother were totally undesirable. As soon as the new rectory was inhabitable she moved the children back home, and started an even more vigorous program of mental and spiritual education. Susanna wrote of the new features of the educational program:

> ....then was begun the custom of singing psalms at beginning and leaving school, morning and evening. Then also that of a general retirement at five o'clock was entered upon, when the oldest took the youngest that could speak, and the second the next, to whom they read the Psalms for the day, and a chapter in the New Testament; as, in the morning, they were directed to read the Psalms and a chapter in the Old; after which they went to their private prayers, before they got their breakfast or came into the family.[1]

Every child was taken individually for a talk with his mother each week, usually in the evening. The effect of these conferences on John was to encourage his deliberative nature. Many years later he wrote to his mother, "If you can spare me only that little part of Thursday evening which you formerly bestowed upon me in another manner. I doubt not but it would be as useful now for correcting my heart as it was then for forming my judgment."[2]

Any comment on what was discussed at the conferences must be based upon conjecture, since no records of the conversations exist. It seems logical to assume, however, that they were of a rather serious theological nature. Susanna Wesley had neither the time nor the inclination

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, III, 38.

[2] J. Wesley, The Letters of John Wesley, A. M., ed. J. Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), I, 119-20.

to indulge in idle conversation, and there is serious doubt as to whether John would have listened even had she felt differently about it. Some indication of the sort of thinking that took up much of her time was given in her private meditations, of which we do have a record. There we find such topics as these: the twofold and contradictory nature of man; the supreme reality of the unseen and spiritual world; and the mysterious nature and immeasurable happiness of Infinite Love.[1] It does not seem likely that one who dwelt upon such weighty matters as these in her private reflections would be any less serious in discussing religion with her children, particularly John. Both were conscious of the serious purpose of life, and both considered John to have been saved from death for some divine mission. Was he not, after all, a brand plucked from the burning? To fulfill her self-imposed obligation of training her children was Mrs. Wesley's only earthly ambition, and John was her favorite and most apt student.

There is little disagreement among those who have written on John Wesley as to the importance of his mother in shaping his thinking, but there is little or no agreement regarding the importance of his father. The lack of records of Wesley's early years makes the problem of evaluating the father's place in the development of the child extremely difficult. The available information is capable of widely varying interpretations. Tyerman, for example, gives a very sympathetic picture of Samuel Wesley, looking upon him as a great poet, a kind father, and

---

[1] Piette, John Wesley, p. 541.

a near-saint.[1] Harrison goes to the other extreme, characterizing him as a tyrant who ruined his daughters' lives; a father more concerned with developing his almost non-existent literary talents than with trying to help rear his family; a man ambitious for preferment, using friends only as a means to that end, and discarding them when they were no longer useful.[2]

The truth probably lies somewhere between these extreme views. The man who published Samuel Wesley's early work may have done him a disservice by encouraging him to continue his literary efforts in spite of his lack of skill, still Wesley became important enough among English writers to be mentioned by Swift and Pope.[3] Perhaps his major claim to fame as a poet lay in the quantity rather than in the quality of what he produced. He wrote on a great variety of topics; elegies to the queen and the archbishop, the story of the Old and New Testaments in verse, a Life of Our Lord, Marlborough and his victories at Blenheim, and his magnus opus, a work on Job. The last has been called a performance which would have supplied a new exercise in patience to that patriarch, had he been required to read it![4] An even more pointed

---

[1] Tyerman, Samuel Wesley, passim. Tyerman is still the standard biographer of both Samuel and John Wesley, in spite of the fact that his work is more than seventy-five years old.

[2] Harrison, Son to Susanna, passim.

[3] He was sufficiently a minor poet to be worthy of a fatal kick from Homer's horse in Swift's Battle of the Books. Later, Pope, writing to Swift, says, "I call him what he is, a learned man, and I engage you will approve his prose more than his poetry." W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, and G. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909) I, 167.

[4] Fitchett, Wesley and His Century, p. 15.

remark concerning the work was that of Bishop Warburton, who said, "Poor Job, it was always his lot to be punished by his friends."[1]

Along with his literary endeavors Samuel Wesley had a great deal of interest in his parish work, local and national politics, and the national interests of the Established Church. He was a confirmed High Churchman who refused to alter his views, even though to do so would have made his life at Epworth easier. Strict enforcement of canon law was typical of his parish work. Adulterers, for example, were punished by making them stand barefooted and wrapped in a white sheet in the churches of the parish.[2] He visited the homes of his parishioners and inquired into their private affairs.[3] He found that the people of his parish were neglecting the christening of their children until the infants had grown into "big lubberly boys", and attempted to correct the situation.[4] Although Wesley felt that he was doing only what any conscientious priest should do the villagers interpreted his interest in their spiritual welfare as unwarranted prying into their private affairs, and consequently their hatred of him became increasingly intense.

---

[1] Tyerman, Samuel Wesley, p. 380.

[2] U. Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 42.

[3] Lee, Lord's Horsemen, pp. 9-10.

[4] F. J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 14. Samuel Wesley's concept of parish work was the pattern for that held by John in Georgia. See p. 48.

Politically Samuel Wesley was a Tory, while most of his parishioners were Whigs. He did nothing to ease the inevitable tension caused by political differences, but rather worked diligently in behalf of his party. In the election of 1705 he played a prominent role in the campaign for the Tory candidate, though he knew that to do so was asking for retaliation of a violent sort from the people of Epworth. His enemies acted swiftly. They had him imprisoned for debt, and killed his three cows, after having already burned his flax crop the preceding winter. As though this were not enough, they serenaded the rectory with "ram's horns and yokel hilarity." Shouting, singing, profanity, drunkenness - all the aspects of a typical village celebration were there, but this was no celebration. The Wesleys were hated, and the villagers wanted them to know it. This unfortunate incident contributed to the death of the latest Wesley infant, thus bringing more grief to an already overburdened rectory.[1]

High Churchman, poet, active Tory politician, relentless and conscientious visitor of his parishioners, member of Convocation[2] - how could Samuel Wesley possibly have played an important part in the educational development of his children? The influence he exerted on his children was a natural outgrowth of the activities noted above. He made little effort to take any part in the somewhat formal educational

---

[1] Harrison, Son to Susanna, p. 39.

[2] The Church Convocation consisted of an Upper House, composed of the bishops, and a Lower House, to which Wesley was elected proctor by his fellow-clergymen in 1701, 1711, and again some time later. Lee, John Wesley, p. 40.

program of his wife, but rather concentrated on bringing up his children in his own principles and practices. His hope was that he had trained his children "to a steady opposition and confederacy against all such as are avowed and declared enemies to God and his clergy, and who deny or disbelieve any articles of natural or revealed religion.... so that he hopes they are all staunch High-Church, and for inviolable passive obedience."[1]

John Wesley acknowledged his debt to his father for his training in words that are strikingly similar to those of his father. He said that he was "an High Churchmen, the son of a High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance."[2] The religious training given to the children by the father was accomplished through influence rather than through any specific method, but it seems to have been very effective. The rector's High Church views, which he refused to compromise, were those of John Wesley, who also refused to alter his views, in Georgia. His Tory politics were those of John when he condemned the American revolutionists. His courage in the face of danger was passed on to his son, as fully shown by John's long and eventful ministry. The prodigious amount of writing done by John Wesley is ample evidence of the influence of the father in that respect.

---

[1] Tyerman, Samuel Wesley, p. 439.

[2] Wesley, Letters, VI, 156.

The letters written by the father and son to each other are notable for the mutual affection and respect they show.[1] There is no indication that John considered his father to be either a tyrant or an inordinately ambitious man.

John Wesley left Epworth when he was about ten and one-half years of age to attend Charterhouse, one of the public schools. His father had secured his nomination from the Duke of Buckingham, a long-time friend of the Wesley family. Before following his course there, however, it would be wise to see just what mental, moral, and religious equipment the little scholar took with him. What had living in an almost entirely self-sufficient family environment done for him?

The preparation for life given John Wesley by his parents was exceptionally good. From his father he inherited his love of writing; from his mother the clearness, directness, and force which characterized his writing for the rest of his life.[2] His mother taught him to live a systematic and methodical life in which there was a certain period alloted to each activity, and only the specified time was spent on it. John Wesley was a "methodist" in habit before he left Epworth. The home in which there was a highly educated mother, father, and elder brother gave Wesley an appreciation for education which never left him.

---

[1] See especially Letters, I, pp. 125-8, for a series of letters between father and son written while John was a student at Oxford. Samuel Wesley gave his son the encouragement he needed to continue his activities among prisoners, and the assurance that what he was doing was acceptable to him both as a father and as a priest of the Church of England.

[2] McConnell, John Wesley, 23-4.

He left Epworth with a deep and abiding respect for his parents and their principles. High Church religious views and Tory political views were impressed upon him by both his father and mother. The determination shown by Wesley's parents in their refusal to compromise either their religious or political views in order to ingratiate themselves with their parishioners was passed on to the son. The major ambitions of both parents for him - that of Susanna to instill in his mind the principles of true religion, and that of Samuel to make him a High Churchman - seemed to be realized.

But the isolation of Epworth parish left its mark on John Wesley in spite of the excellent training of his parents. Dominated by his mother during most of the formative years of his life, and brought up with only his sisters for company,[1] Wesley was more at ease with women than with men for the rest of his life. The almost incredible esteem in which Wesley held his mother made it impossible for any other women to gain a strong hold on him, so Wesley's emotional relationships with women were foredoomed to failure. As long as the attraction was intellectual, religious, or both, Wesley got along with them very well, but every time he felt drawn to one for any other reason trouble resulted.

Perhaps the best summary of the effects, both good and bad, of Epworth on the Wesley children is the following:

---

[1] His brother Samuel left home for school when John was about a year old. Charles was more than four years younger than John.

> A family so able, so thrown on its own resources, so out of contact with the world, of so imperious a spirit, was almost bound to develop on exceptional lines. Their virtues and their strength were as abnormal as their weakness, their singularly active minds were equally capable of the greatest deeds and the most surprising mistakes....John, the most gifted of all this gifted household, was able to transform England by his preaching; yet made the most astonishing blunders in the conduct of his private life, though showing a talent for administration worthy of his celebrated namesake, Arthur Wesley, or Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. In studying the movement [Methodism] we must always keep Epworth in the background.[1]

Little is known of John Wesley during his six years at Charterhouse. The only specific information of any importance on this period of his life comes from Wesley himself. Writing in 1738, after his conversion, he says:

> The next six or seven years were spent at school: where outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than ever before, even of outward duties, and almost continually guilty of outward sins, which I knew to be such, though they were not scandalous in the eyes of the world. However, I still read the Scriptures, and said my prayers morning and evening. And what I hoped now to be saved by, was (1) not being so bad as other people; (2) having still a kindness for religion; and (3) reading the Bible, going to Church, and saying my prayers.[2]

Tyerman, in an obvious attempt to highlight Wesley's conversion, interprets this statement as meaning that Wesley, the teen-age boy, was living in the deepest sin. "Terrible is the danger," he wrote, "when a child leaves a pious home for a public school. John Wesley entered the Charterhouse a saint, and left it a sinner."[3]

---

[1] F. J. Foakes-Jackson, Social Life in England, 1750-1850 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916), pp. 11-12.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 465-6.

[3] Tyerman, John Wesley, I, 22.

Wesley, the mature man, was writing, almost twenty years after he had left Charterhouse, about the boy Wesley who left home at the age of ten and one-half to go to Charterhouse. At the time he wrote he undoubtedly had a strong feeling of guilt over his transgressions, but how serious were they? There is no way of knowing, since Wesley's statement that he was "almost continually guilty of outward sins" during his experience at Charterhouse is the only evidence available. It seems likely that he went through a period of mild reaction against the very stern atmosphere under which he had been reared at Epworth. A teen-age boy, away from home for the first time, who still read his Bible, went to Church, and said his prayers could hardly be classified as a sinner to the degree that Tyerman implies.

While at Charterhouse Wesley studied "grammar, composition, the reading of Greek and Latin authors, and enough history and geography to understand what those authors wrote. Latin themes and Latin verses, Greek iambics, repetitions from Virgil, Horace, and the Greek grammar, declamations and speeches and map-drawing"[1] occupied much of his time. He seems to have done well academically, in spite of the bullying, drinking, and misconduct that were prevalent in the schools,[2] including Charterhouse, at that time. Upon completion of his preparatory work there he was elected a scholar to Christ Church College, Oxford, with a grant of about forty pounds a year.

---

[1] A. S. Turberville, ed., Johnson's England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), II, 220.

[2] Ibid., 219-20.

John Wesley's educational experience up to the time of his graduation from Charterhouse had been very similar to that of most other students who had the opportunity to go to an English public school. The strong emphasis upon classical education at Charterhouse was typical of the century, and its influence upon Wesley is clearly shown in the curriculum he devised for his own schools.[1] Aside from this interest in classical works Charterhouse seems not to have had any marked influence on Wesley.

As an undergraduate at Oxford Wesley was described by one of his contemporaries as a "very sensible and acute collegian, baffling every man by the subtleties of logic; a young fellow of the finest classical taste; gay and sprightly, with a turn for wit and humour".[2] Wesley wrote of his undergraduate days in an entirely different vein;

> I still said my prayers in public and in private, and read, with the Scriptures, several other books of religion....Yet I had not all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness; nay, went on habitually, and for the most part contentedly, in some or other known sin.[3]

Once again it must be noted that Wesley was writing after his conversion, and that he was certainly more conscious of his shortcomings in 1738 than he had been in 1724. He was actually a hard-working, scholarly student,[4] who planned his time with a thoroughness that would

---

[1] See Appendix B.

[2] Overton, John Wesley, pp. 11-12.

[3] Wesley, Journal, I, 446.

[4] C. E. Mallet, A History of the University of Oxford (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1927), III, 111.

have delighted his mother. There is no evidence of any spiritual growth during his stay at Charterhouse, or in his first years at Oxford, but it seems unreasonable to expect that such growth should have taken place. He had left Epworth with religious training far more intensive than should have been given such a youngster; that his training stood up as well as it did was a tribute to the intelligence and perseverance of his parents.

Although John Wesley felt that his early years at Oxford had not been profitably spent they marked the beginning of his development into one of the most important religious leaders of his century. The foundation for that development had been laid at Epworth, and Charterhouse had broadened its scope by bringing Wesley into contact with the finest classical writers. We must now turn to a study of the influences that were brought to bear upon him during his long career at Oxford.

CHAPTER II

A RELIGIOUS LEADER EMERGES

John Wesley's activities as an undergraduate at Oxford gave no indication that he was to become one of the outstanding religious leaders of eighteenth century England. Even though he did not fall victim to the vices that were prevalent in the universities of his day,[1] neither did he show unusual interest in religious affairs. Much of his time was spent in playing tennis, reading light literature, walking, acting, seeing his tutors, reading in the coffee-house, and other normal pursuits of a young university student.[2]

Wesley had not completely forgotten his home training, however. His first diary, which he began to keep with regularity in 1721, contains a strong reminder of the methodicity of his childhood. In it he drew up a strict plan by which his life was to be ordered. The subjects he wanted to study, a daily schedule of activities, and the order in which he planned to write to his relatives were included in his plan.[3]

Also included in the diary were "collections" of all the Odes, Epodes, Satires, and Epistles of Horace,[4] sufficient evidence of both

---

[1] See Mallet, Oxford, III, 22-32 and 47-9, and G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), pp. 362-8.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 20.

[3] Ibid., 45-6.

[4] Ibid., 47.

his love for scholarly work and the influence of Charterhouse upon him. Unfortunately, however, Wesley was never able to discipline himself, either at Oxford or in later life, to stick to one subject long enough to master it. His intelligence must therefore be measured in terms of breadth rather than depth. His diaries and journals tell of much reading in a wide variety of fields,[1] but nowhere is there any evidence of detailed study in a restricted area. He was content to read and "collect" books, which meant taking notes and extracts from them, and writing an analysis of each of them.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Wesley's training at Oxford was that there was no aim or purpose beyond that of graduation. His interest in the classics resulting from his experience at Charterhouse, and his methodical nature, interest in reading, and love for argumentation resulting from his training at home were interests that were intensified at Oxford, but which failed to give any direction to his life. The year following his graduation from Oxford, 1725, was the first in which any great change is evident in his attitudes or habits, and none of the factors involved in the change is traceable to either of the schools he had attended. In that year Wesley read á Kempis and Jeremy Taylor. In the following year he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. These three events mark the beginning of what might be called the period of Wesley's awakening, a period of thirteen years of inner conflict which was finally resolved by his experience at

---

[1] Ibid., 65-6.

Aldersgate in 1738. It is that period with which we are concerned in this chapter.

One might assume that, because of the home training he had received, John Wesley was interested in becoming a clergyman from his very early childhood, but there is no evidence to support such an assumption. As we have seen, his undergraduate days at Oxford were days of drifting along with no set purpose or goal. The idea of taking Holy Orders does not seem to have occurred to him until 1725, and, being a dutiful son, he wrote of his intentions to his parents. Samuel Wesley at first discouraged his son, fearing that he was looking for an easy life. He told John that his motive for entering the ministry must not be merely to gain a livelihood, but to "work for the glory of God and the good of man." In order to carry out these purposes it would be necessary for him to apply himself to the study of the Scripture in the original languages.[1]

A letter from his mother strongly endorsed John's choice of vocation, a choice she had already indicated in a letter to him five months earlier.[2] In response to his letter she wrote, "I approve the disposition of your mind, and think the sooner you are a deacon the better; because it may be an inducement to greater application in the study of practical divinity, which I humbly conceive is the best study

---

[1] Piette, John Wesley, p. 246.

[2] In her earlier letter she had written, "I heartily wish you were in orders, and could come and serve as one of your father's curates. Then I could see you often, and could be more helpful to you than it is possible to be at this distance," Tyerman, John Wesley, I, 27.

for candidates for orders".[1] Wesley followed his mother's advice, as usual, and concentrated on the study of practical divinity.

John Wesley was ordained deacon by Bishop Potter of Oxford in September, 1725, and three years later received his priestly orders, thus beginning an affiliation with the Church of England that was not to be broken until his death in 1791. Under his parents' influence, he was at this time a High Churchman, a position described by Hallam as being "distinguished by great pretensions to sacerdotal power, both temporal and spiritual, by a repugnance to toleration, and by a firm adherence to the Tory principle in the state."[2] His political High Churchmanship remained firm, with one brief exception, during his long preaching career;[3] his religious convictions were to go through a gradual transformation which had already started before he became a priest.

The primary reason for the first change in Wesley's religious thinking was his friendship with Betty Kirkham, the sister of one of his college friends. She introduced him to two authors whose works were to make a profound impression upon him. Wesley, writing in 1738, said of the first, Thomas á Kempis,

> When I was about twenty-two my father pressed me to enter into holy orders. At the same time, the providence of God directing me to Kempis's Christian Pattern, I began to see that

---

[1] Ibid., 32.

[2] Quoted by J. S. Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1921), p. 49.

[3] See pp. 154-7.

> true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions. I was, however, very angry at Kempis for being too strict....Yet I had frequently much sensible comfort in reading him, such as I was an utter stranger to before; and meeting likewise with a religious friend, which I never had till now, I began to alter the whole form of my conversation and to set in earnest upon a new life. I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness. So that now, doing so much, and living so good a life, I doubted not but I was a good Christian.[1]

This more serious attitude taken by Wesley resulted in a period of inner conflict. The young collegian found it difficult to accept á Kempis' teachings in regard to humility, and conversations with Miss Kirkham failed to resolve his problem. He finally wrote to his parents, stating his objections to á Kempis, and asking them to give him their opinions. In this case it was the father who made the sounder observation, saying, "Notwithstanding all his superstition and enthusiasm (Samuel Wesley was truly a High Churchman!), it is almost impossible to peruse him seriously, without admiring, and in some measure imitating, his heroic strains of humility and piety and devotion."[2] John must have accepted his father's evaluation, for in writing many years later of the religious influences that had shaped his thinking he gave á Kempis credit for having taught him "inward religion, simplicity of religion, and purity of affection."[3]

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, I, 466-7.

[2] Tyerman, John Wesley, I, 35.

[3] Wesley, Works, VI, 385.

The major points of difference between himself and á Kempis were described by Wesley in a letter to his mother:

> I can't think that when God sent us into the world He had irreversibly decreed that we should be perpetually miserable in it. If it be so, the very endeavour after happiness in this life is a sin; as it is acting in direct contradiction to the very design of our creation. What are become of all the innocent comforts and pleasures of life, if it is the intent of our Creator that we should never taste them?...
>
> Another of his tenets, which is indeed a natural consequence of this, is that all mirth is vain and useless, if not sinful. But why, then, does the Psalmist so often exhort us to rejoice in the Lord and tell us that it becomes the just to be joyful?[1]

Mrs. Wesley's reply reveals that she was also guilty of misinterpreting á Kempis. She wrote, "I have á Kempis by me; but have not read him lately. I cannot recollect the passages you mention; but, believing you do him justice, I do positively aver that he is extremely in the wrong in that impious...suggestion that God...has determined any man to be miserable, even in this world."[2] It may have been that both Wesley and his mother misunderstood what they read, but it is more likely that Mrs. Wesley was not sufficiently familiar with the work to make critical judgments, and that Wesley was reluctant to accept the full responsibilities of Christianity as outlined by á Kempis. For that reason he drew an unnecessarily harsh interpretation from his study. It should be remembered that John Wesley was a "young Oxford graduate, in love with life, adjusting his religious outlook, and reluctant to surrender his own belief that happiness was completely compatible with Christian

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, I, 16.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 16.

duty."[1] It should also be noted that this was the first major distraction Wesley's home training in religion had faced. There had been a relaxation in the rigidity with which he had carried out his mother's teachings, but there had not been, up to 1725, any major modification of the tone of his religious life. His piety had been what might be called child piety, a "purely imitative thing, impressed on the life from without by force of discipline, the result of domestic training, but without any vital and spiritual root."[2] Wesley's study of the Imitation was the first major step in the transition from his childhood religion to his mature theology.

Shortly after he had read the Imitation Wesley's attention was directed toward Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying. One immediate reaction produced by the work was Wesley's resolution to "take a more exact account than I had done before of the manner wherein I spent every hour."[3] In his Diary there are three sets of Rules and Resolutions, which are simply condensations of some of Taylor's rules.[4] Wesley's Twelve Rules of a Helper, drawn up for the guidance of his willing but ignorant converts in the early days of Methodism, and his Rules of the United Societies show very clearly the lasting influence of Taylor

---

[1] J. B. Green, John Wesley and William Law (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 27.

[2] Fitchett, Wesley and His Century, p. 54.

[3] Wesley, Journal, I, 42.

[4] Ibid., 47-50.

on Methodism.[1]

As was the case with á Kempis, however, there was one element of Taylor's teaching which Wesley could not accept. The letter in which he explained his reasons for not accepting Taylor's view of humility will be quoted at length, since it illustrates Wesley's Arminianism, a belief which made it impossible for him to follow Taylor in this case. His letter, written to his mother, said, in part,

> ....where he treats of humility, these, among others, he makes necessary parts of that virtue:
>
> Love to be little esteemed, and be content to be slighted or undervalued.
>
> Take no content in praise when it is offered thee....
>
> We must be sure in some sense or other to think ourselves the worst in every company where we come....
>
> A true penitent must all the days of his life pray for pardon and never think the work completed till he dies.
>
> Whether God has forgiven us or no we know not, therefore still be sorrowful for ever having sinned.
>
> I take the more notice of the last sentence, because it seems to contradict his own words....where he says, that by the Lord's Supper all members are united one to another, and to Christ the head: the Holy Ghost confers on us the graces we pray for....Now, surely these graces are not of so little force that we can't perceive whether we have them or not: <u>if we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, certainly we must be sensible of it.</u> If we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent not in joy but fear and trembling; and then undoubtedly in this life WE ARE of all men most miserable!
>
> Humility is undoubtedly necessary to salvation; and if all these things are necessary to humility, who can be humble, who can be saved?[2]

---

[1] <u>Ibid</u>., 51. For his <u>Rules of the United Societies</u> see <u>Works</u>, IV, 345-7, in which a society is defined as "a company of men, having the form, and seeking the power of godliness: united, in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation." The implication here, and one that is clear throughout Wesleyan theology, is that every man can be saved.

[2] Wesley, <u>Letters</u>, I, 19-20. Underlining mine.

As this letter indicates, Wesley was beginning to find his way toward his doctrine of justification, but as yet he had only a vague notion of the faith by which a sinner is justified. Wesley was sure, even at this early stage in his religious development, that man knows when he is justified - that man through experience is aware of being saved through faith in Christ - but the nature of the faith which made it possible was the problem that Wesley was attempting to solve from 1725 to 1738.

The correspondence between Wesley and his mother concerning Taylor is too lengthy to be quoted here, but its importance to the development of his mature theology cannot be overestimated.[1] Her views on humility and predestination, expressed during this time in opposition to the views of Taylor, were to be those of John Wesley during his entire career.

In 1726 Wesley was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, thus becoming free for the first time in his life from financial worries. The future looked bright to him at that time. He had plenty of leisure to do the reading he liked so well,[2] to indulge his inclinations toward religious meditation, and to mingle socially with the other Fellows, whom he had found to be "both well-natured and well-bred."[3]

---

[1] See Wesley, Letters, I, 18-23, Tyerman, John Wesley, I, 35-41, and Piette, John Wesley, pp. 253-61 for valuable information on this correspondence.

[2] In the six-month period following his ordination Wesley read incessantly. He read extensively from Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and French works, and works on theology, church history, and devotional literature. In secular fields he read from such authors as Locke, Horace, Virgil, Berkeley, and Milton. Wesley, Journal, I, 65-6.

[3] Wesley, Letters, I, 30.

The new Fellow was appointed Greek Lecturer and Moderator of the Classes. The primary purpose of the Greek lectures, given weekly, was to give religious instruction to the students. The only subject discussed was the Greek Testament, and the lectures were delivered in Greek. His duty as moderator was to preside over the disputations, which were held every day except Sunday. The disputations were designed to give the participants practice in the use of logic. A thesis was proposed, then arguments were made either supporting or attacking the thesis. The moderator was to listen to the arguments, choose the victor, and make a critical analysis of the disputation. Wesley's love for argumentation, encouraged by his mother, and sharpened at Charterhouse and Oxford, became even stronger as a result of his experience as a moderator.

The extensive reading done by Wesley in 1726 included the newly-published works of William Law, the third and last of the authors whose works were influential in shaping his theology. Wesley said of Law's influence,

> ....Mr. Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view....and by my continued endeavour to keep His whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of Him, and that I was even then in a state of salvation.[1]

Keeping the whole of God's law and trying to be a whole Christian were virtually synonymous terms for John Wesley in 1726. The works of

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, I, 467.

á Kempis, Taylor, and Law had convinced him that his earlier concept of a joyful religion was wrong. He set up a rigid program which included a certain amount of time for prayer and meditation, study periods, and some time for recreation. Under the influence of Taylor he was attempting to follow very rigid sets of rules and resolutions. Both á Kempis and Law had led him to examine his inner self. His introspection during this period verged upon mysticism. Every Saturday night he read his rules and resolutions, reviewed all the activities of the preceding week, and subjected himself to an almost merciless self-examination.[1] The only remedy he could find when he failed to carry out one of his rules was to make another.[2] Religion to John Wesley in the period from 1726 to 1729 was a fearful thing.

From 1727 to 1729 Wesley was his father's curate at Wroot, a living which had been given to Samuel Wesley in 1722. It was an unattractive place, Wesley's sister regarding the people as "dull as asses and impervious as stones",[3] but Wesley found leisure to do the things he liked. His work there was threefold: he preached, read prayers, and attended to the duties of the two parishes; he wrote new sermons for his father; he assisted his father in preparing his work on Job for publication.[4] His ministry during this period is well summarized by Piette:

---

[1] Ibid., 34-5.

[2] Ibid., 51.

[3] Mallet, Oxford, III, 113.

[4] Wesley, Journal, I, 70.

> He performed his duties with punctiliousness which distinguished him in all his pastoral charges; he preached a sermon twice every Sunday, said the prayers, visited the sick and buried the dead. He spared neither his parishioners or his own efforts. He faithfully followed the path which his father had trod for thirty years with unswerving zeal and with as constant a lack of success. To sum up: the center of John's religious life, up to the present, is much more himself than his neighbor. During these two solitary years in the marshy stretches of Lincolnshire, and in company with his favorite spiritual authors, his thoughts were more particularly and especially concentrated upon his own spiritual and inner life.[1]

Wesley's concern for his spiritual welfare was so intense that it seems likely he would have been content to remain in his isolated parish indefinitely, at least until he had thought his way through his religious problems. Some credit for turning him away from his excessive introspection must be given to a life-long friend of the family, Mr. Hoole, who told Wesley, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."[2] This is probably the first time John Wesley had heard of the idea of Christian fellowship as an essential part of religious experience. He makes no reference to it in listing the influence of the teachings of his mother, à Kempis, Taylor, or Law, and prior to this time had not considered its importance.[3]

---

[1] Piette, John Wesley, p. 271.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 469.

[3] He had, in fact, gone to the other extreme. He wrote in 1727 that he was "so little at present in love with even company....that unless they have a peculiar turn of thought I am much better pleased without them. I think 'tis the settled temper of my soul that I should prefer such a retirement as would seclude me from all the world." Wesley, Letters, I, 42.

In 1729 Wesley was recalled to Oxford. Upon his return he found that his brother Charles and several other students had formed a club which met for study and devotions. John joined the group, and because of his age, learning, and experience soon became its leader. The activities of the group were described by Wesley in a letter written in 1732:

> In November 1729, your son, my brother, myself, and one more agreed to spend three or four evenings in a week together. Our design was to read over the classics, which we had read before in private, on common nights, and on Sunday some book in divinity. In the summer following, Mr. Morgan told me he had called at the jail....and that from the talk he had with one of the debtors, he verily believed it would do much good if anyone would be at the pains of now and then speaking with them....on the 24th of August, 1730, my brother and I walked with him to the Castle. We were so well satisfied with our conversations there, that we decided to go thither once or twice a week; which we had not done long, before he desired me to go with him to see a poor woman in the town who was sick. In this employment we believed it would be worth while to spend an hour or two in the week....[1]

In spite of the opposition encountered by the club in its efforts to carry out its purposes the members

> ....still continued to sit together as usual; and to confirm one another, as well as we could, in our resolutions, to communicate as often as we had opportunity (which is here once a week); and do what service we could to our acquaintances, the prisoners, and two or three poor families in town.[2]

---

[1] This marks the actual beginning of Wesley's charitable and evangelistic work. Two influences brought it about: the friend who warned him against a solitary religion, and the example set by William Morgan. A letter from his father in September, 1730, encouraged him to continue the work of the Holy Club, for, "when I was an undergraduate at Oxford I visited those in the castle there, and reflect on it with great satisfaction to this day." This was several months after Morgan had started the Wesleys on this work. Ibid., 124-5.

[2] Ibid., 127-8.

In addition to the activities outlined above the club regularly observed the "fasts of the Church, the general neglect of which we can by no means apprehend to be a lawful excuse for neglecting them."[1]

Their methodical observance of the rituals and laws of the Church and the University made the members of the little group the objects of ridicule.[2] Their detractors called them the Holy Club, Godly Club, The Enthusiasts, The Reforming Club, The Sacramentarians,[3] and the name that rapidly became the most popular, the Methodists. Oxford in the early eighteenth century was no place to show unusual interest in anything of a serious nature!

Wesley and his friends decided to draw up a list of questions which they would ask their critics, in the belief that anyone thinking seriously about the questions would be led to see the good in what the group was trying to do. We shall quote from the questions at length, since they illustrate very clearly the influences which had been brought to bear on Wesley, and the line of thought that was later to bring about the formation of the Methodist Societies. Among the questions were these:

> Whether it does not concern all men of all conditions to imitate Him who went about doing good?

---

[1] Ibid., 132.

[2] Wesley wrote that the Methodists were at this time "all tenacious of order to the last degree, and observant, for conscience' sake, of every rule of the Church, and every statute, both of the university, and of their respective colleges. They were all orthodox at every point; firmly believing, not only the three creeds, but whatsoever they judged to be the doctrine of the Church of England, as contained in her Articles and Homilies." Wesley, Works, VI, 108.

[3] Wesley, Letters, I, 126-7.

> Whether we shall not be more happy hereafter, the more good we do now?
>
> Whether we can be happy at all hereafter, unless we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited those that are sick and in prison; and made all those actions subservient to a higher purpose, even the saving of souls from death?
>
> Whether we may not try to convince our acquaintances of the necessity of being Christians?...Scholars?
>
> Whether of the necessity of method and industry, in order to either learning or virtue?
>
> Whether if we know of any necessitous family, we may not give them a little food, clothes, or physic, as they want?
>
> Whether we may not enforce upon them more especially the necessity of private prayer and of frequenting the church and the sacrament?
>
> Whether we may not take care that they be taught their catechism and short prayers for morning and evening?[1]

Their work was given the approval of the Bishop of Oxford in 1730,[2] but student opposition to them was undiminished. A marked difference of opinion regarding the activities of the group is still in existence, one modern authority believing that

> The means they employed were what most ages would have called purely beneficient; never, one might have supposed, did any revival lay itself so little open to adverse criticism. There was no vulgarity, no sensational appeal to the emotions of large and excitable audiences - in Oxford, at any rate....They were diligent in religious observance; they fasted with the over-asceticism of a new enthusiasm; they started schools for the poor, they relieved the sick, they visited prisoners in jail. And they were consistently and uninterruptedly derided, abused, even punished. The mass of undergraduate opinion would have none of Methodism.... The hostility of Oxford to the Wesleyan movement, in its fully developed activity, is easy enough to understand. It is less easy at first sight to account for the intolerance of 1730; yet it was not out of keeping with the formalism and party bitterness of that rather inexcusable period.[3]

---

[1] Ibid., 128-9

[2] Ibid., 126.

[3] A. D. Godley, Oxford in the Eighteenth Century (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), pp. 366-9.

A radically different picture of the activities of the Oxford club, or Methodists, is given by another writer:

> In this club they practised austerities of outrageous proportions, which resulted in one member's death. They denied themselves food and sleep, and at night they prostrated themselves for hours in the winter frost. They spent their days in prisons and pest houses. This way of life attracted great notoriety, but it brought Wesley no sense of salvation.[1]

The most famous member of the group, next to the Wesleys, was George Whitefield, who joined them in 1733. In his Journal Whitefield records his actions shortly after having joined the Methodists as follows:

> Whole days and weeks have I spent lying prostrate on the ground and begging freedom from those proud hellish thoughts.... Having no one to show me a better way, I thought to get peace and purity by outward austerities....I began to leave off eating fruits and such like, and gave the money I usually spent in that way to the poor....I fasted twice a week. My apparel was mean. I thought it unbecoming for a penitent to have his hair powdered. I wore woollen gloves, a patched gown and dirty shoes, and therefore looked upon myself as very humble.[2]

Whitefield's excesses were not characteristic of the group as a whole, however. He seems to have lacked restraint, particularly at this time, and spent much of his time trying to attain personal salvation. Although the other members of the group fasted, gave much of their income to the poor, and spent much time visiting those who were sick

---

[1] J. H. Plumb, England in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 92. Plumb has reference to the death of William Morgan, one of the original members of the Holy Club. Wesley denied the charge that fasting brought on his death, since Morgan had "left off fasting about a year and an half since". Wesley, Letters, I, 123.

[2] Quoted by A. D. Belden, George Whitefield the Awakener (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 21.

and in prison,[1] there is no record of any member except Whitefield indulging in outrageous austerities. It would seem that the severe critic of the group had particular reference to Whitefield.

Although Wesley was busily trying to follow Taylor's rules, the High Church tendencies he had learned at Epworth, his mother's methodical life, á Kempis' and Law's concepts of holiness, and the Holy Club's charitable efforts, he was not happy. His major difficulty lay in the fact that he was trying to follow two paths to salvation - mysticism and ritualism - and from neither of them, or both, could he gain any assurance of salvation. Religion to him, in 1734, was "not the bare saying over so many prayers, morning and evening, in public or in private; not anything superadded now and then to a careless or worldly life; but a constant ruling habit of soul, a renewal of our minds in the image of God, a recovery of the divine likeness, a still-increasing conformity of heart and life to the pattern of our most holy Redeemer."[2]

The religion thus described by Wesley would lead to hate for the person following it by those who did not. "The hated are all that are not of this world, that are born again in the knowledge and love of God: the haters are all that are of this world, that know not God so as to love Him with all their strength." It was necessary that a man be hated, since "until he be thus contemned, no man is in a state of salvation." The contempt of the world would help the believer by cleansing him of

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, I, 129.

[2] Ibid., 152.

pride, serving as an antidote against vanity, healing the anger and impatience of spirit, and purifying his soul for heaven.[1] This reaction to the influences of á Kempis and Law was intensified by the contempt in which the Methodists were held by their fellow-students at Oxford, and it made Wesley's problem of arriving at a solution to his religious difficulties a very serious one. He was trying to live out of the world in that he felt all true Christians must be hated by the worldly majority, while at the same time he was trying to live in the world in that he was spending much of his time in charitable activities and in active participation in the affairs of the University and the Church. The tension brought on by these conflicts in his thinking needed to be released, and there was little chance that the opportunity to do so would come at Oxford. Fortunately, it was at this time that Oglethorpe invited Wesley to accompany him to Georgia, where Wesley was to minister to the colonists and the Indians in their immediate neighborhood.

Wesley joined the fifth company of colonists to settle in Georgia. The first settlers had been men imprisoned for debt whose release had been secured by Oglethorpe during his vigorous campaign for prison reform. He felt that they should have a chance for rehabilitation in a new setting, and that a colony established in Georgia in which the debtors would be subject to strong religious influences and strict discipline would help both England and the colonists. Financial support for the scheme came from Parliament and private sources, making it

---

[1] Ibid., 176-7.

possible to begin colonization in 1732, when about 120 people, mostly debtors, sailed for Georgia. In 1733 some refugee Protestants from Salzburg went to join them, to be followed a year later by more Salzburgers and a number of Scotch Presbyterian Highlanders. The spiritual care of the Germans and Scotsmen was in the hands of their own ministers, while that of the English colonists was undertaken by a clergyman who proved unequal to the task. Oglethorpe's invitation to Wesley was the result of the incapacity of this clergyman.[1]

Strong spiritual leadership was a vital necessity if the purposes for which Georgia had been settled were to be carried out, but why did John Wesley undertake to provide that leadership? Why should one who was by temperament and training not suited to the task choose to go to the frontier colony? Wesley provides the answer in a letter written in October, 1735:

> My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. They have no comments to construe away the text; no vain philosophy to corrupt it; no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths, to reconcile earthly-mindedness and faith, the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. They have no party, no interest to serve, and are therefore fit to receive the Gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God....By these, therefore, I hope to learn the purity of that faith which was once delivered to the saints.[2]

Oxford, which only ten months earlier had been so attractive to Wesley that he had turned down his father's plea that he succeed him

---

[1] Simon, Religious Societies, p. 109.

[2] Wesley, Letters, I, 188.

at Epworth, had lost its appeal.[1] He had evidently lost hope that he would be able to find salvation there, for he said, "I cannot hope to attain to the same degree of holiness here which I may find there (Georgia)."[2]

The prospect of going to Georgia became even more inviting when it seemed to offer an opportunity to keep at least part of the Methodists together. They could, perhaps, even found a truly primitive church in a new country far removed from their enemies.[3] The primary consideration in Wesley's decision to go to Georgia was his own salvation, however. He had tried many other methods of gaining salvation without success, and was now ready to try a completely new approach to his problem.

Wesley's trip to Georgia was under the sponsorship of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. The Society was chartered in 1701, largely as a result of a trip to America made by Thomas Bray, who had already played a major part in the formation of

---

[1] At Oxford Wesley had "the continual presence of useful and uninterrupted freedom from trifling acquaintance....freedom from care.... From all this I conclude that where I am most holy myself, there I could most promote holiness in others; and consequently that I could more promote it here than in any other place under heaven....Here is room for charity in all its forms....here are tender minds to be formed and strengthened, and babes in Christ to be instructed and perfected in all useful learning. Of these in particular we must observe that he who gains only one does thereby as much service to the world as he could do in a parish in a lifetime, for his name is legion; in him are contained all those who shall be converted by him." Ibid., 169-73.

[2] Ibid., 190.

[3] Six members of the group planned to go, and four, John and Charles Wesley, Ingham, and Delamotte, actually went. Wesley, Journal, I, 106.

the Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge. Bray found that there was an insufficient number of ministers in America, and that some colonies had been "in a manner abandoned to atheism." He urged the necessity "of sending out to America at least forty missionaries, good, experienced, active, and well-informed men." His report brought about the formation of the Society, which was supported by the gifts of private subscribers.[1]

Having been appointed a missionary by the trustees of the Society, Wesley was under the requirement of acting in accordance with the instructions given to its missionaries. These instructions help to explain his actions in Georgia, but they were such that they would be readily and whole-heartedly supported by him. Had Wesley written them he could not have come closer to putting in writing the manner in which he would have proceeded. They required, in part, that on shipboard the missionaries

> ....demean themselves not only inoffensively and prudently but so as to become remarkable examples of piety and virtue to the ships company. They were to prevail with the captain or commander to have morning and evening prayer said daily; as also preaching and catechizing every Lord's day, and to instruct, exhort, admonish, and reprove as they have occasion and opportunity, with such seriousness and prudence as may gain them reputation and authority....The Society directed them to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the doctrine of the Church of England, as contained in the articles and homilies; its worship and discipline, and rules for the behaviour of the clergy as contained in the liturgy and canons....The missionaries were expressly directed to duly consider the qualifications of those adult

---

[1] C. J. Abbey, The English Church and Its Bishops, 1700-1800 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1887) I, 84-5. Mr. Bray later helped in the education of the Georgia colonists by sending books for use in the schools there.

> persons to whom they administer baptism, and of those likewise whom they admit to the Lord's Supper.[1]

Armed with his conviction that the trip to Georgia would help to solve his religious problems, and with the belief that the instructions of the Society were the only rules he needed to govern his relationships with his new parishioners, John Wesley left England December 10, 1735, and returned February 1, 1738. Probably no missionary ever set sail for foreign shores with a less realistic attitude toward the problems that lay ahead, and certainly few have returned from their chosen area of work more bitterly frustrated. Much of this frustration was due to his interference in the private affairs of those with whom he came into contact. One incident is especially illuminating:

> I endeavored to reconcile Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Lawley with Mrs. Hawkins, with whom they had had a sharp quarrel. I thought it was effected; but the next day showed the contrary, both Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Lawley, and their husbands being so angry at me, that they resolved....never to be at prayers more.[2]

He openly discussed one person's affairs with others, thus causing more dissension.[3] The heretofore sheltered Oxford don had a great deal to learn, and circumstances rapidly presented him the opportunity to learn through bitter experience.

Wesley's aims in Georgia, aside from that of attaining holiness, were to bring about a "spiritual awakening, to see persons open,

---

[1] Simon, Religious Societies, p. 114.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 33.

[3] Ibid., 135-6.

seriously affected, convinced, zealous concerning inward and outward holiness. He desired the orderly observance of worship, the continuous nurture of Christian life, and the practice of religion according to the example of the ancient Church and the rubrics of the Edw. VI Book of Common Prayer."[1] It was extremely unfortunate that Wesley had not learned that even the noblest of aims must be adjusted to the situation in which one is trying to achieve them. The rough colonists in Georgia were not prepared for the sort of religious guidance he brought them, and he was neither willing nor able to change his methods of religious instruction. His insistence upon observing the rubrics of the Edw. VI 1549 Book of Common Prayer, even to the triple immersion in baptism which had been omitted in the 1552 revision,[2] led him to refuse to perform any other kind of baptismal ceremony, and created much hostility against him.

The failure of his parishioners to react favorably to his ministry was a great disappointment to John Wesley, but an even greater blow was his experience with the Indians. He found that they were not the child-like searchers for Christianity he had thought them to be.

> They are likewise all, except perhaps the Choctaws, gluttons, drunkards, thieves, dissemblers, liars. They are implacable, unmerciful; murderers of their own children - it being a common thing for a son to shoot his father or mother because they are old and past labour, and for a women to procure abortion, or to throw her child in the next river....Indeed, husbands, strictly speaking,

---

[1] Ibid., 213n.

[2] For changes in baptism in the 1552 revision see W. K. Lowther Clarke, ed., Liturgy and Worship (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1950), pp. 422-4.

> they have none; for any man leaves his wife (so-called) at pleasure, who frequently, in return, cuts the throats of all the children she has had by him.[1]

In spite of all the adversities he encountered Wesley learned a great deal that was to be of practical value to him in his evangelistic career. For the first time he was closely associated with people of a different class, and he learned something of their likes and dislikes. He was no more successful than his father in his parish work, and for very nearly the same reasons, but at least he learned that, to be effective, a religious appeal to the poor must be based upon something more than intellect and method.[2] In an effort to overcome the sterility of his ministry Wesley resorted to methods which were reminiscent of his Epworth and Oxford days, and he unwittingly used Georgia as a proving-ground for much that was typical of early Methodism. Curnock, editor of Wesley's Journal, says of the Georgia experience,

> The crowning achievement was the slow moulding of the Methodist system. The circuit, the society, the itinerant ministry, the class-meeting, the band-meeting, the lovefeast; leaders and lay assistants; extempore preaching and prayer; and even the building of a meeting house, - all this, and much else in the form and spirit of early Methodism, came to John Wesley in Georgia.[3]

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, I, 407. Compare this description with that on pp.44-5, written before he left England.

[2] The reaction of one parishioner to Wesley's methods is interesting. He said, "We are Protestants; but as for you, we cannot tell what religion you are of. We never heard of such a religion before; we know not what to make of it." Overton, John Wesley, p. 51. As Overton points out, the people could have found "what religion he was of" by looking in their Prayer Books, but most of them seem not to have been interested in doing so.

[3] Wesley, Journal, I, 426.

For a time Wesley worked as secretary to Oglethorpe, and, in this capacity, had an opportunity to observe the methods of a man who was able to use the sound, common-sense approach to every-day problems which Wesley needed. As a result of watching Oglethorpe, a man of very high ideals, work with and for people of all economic and social levels Wesley gained a valuable insight into how a Christian could work in the world.

The theology of John Wesley was most influenced in Georgia by a group he had not expected to meet - the Moravians. A number of them were on the ship on which he left England, and the impression they made on him is shown by the number of times they appear in his Journal and Diaries. An entry dated January 25, 1736, is most significant, for it illustrates what Wesley from this time on considered to have been his greatest weakness up to the time of his conversion in 1738 - his lack of faith. On the day this entry was made the ship was in the midst of the third storm it had encountered in ten days. The Moravians were just beginning their service, when

> ....the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied mildly, "No, our women and children are not afraid to die."
>
> From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and found myself enabled to speak with them in boldness and to point out to them the difference in the hour of trial between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not....This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.[1]

---

[1] Ibid., 142-3. Curnock, editor of the Journal, believes that "the student who traces the sequence of events will see that the storm was one of the crucial facts in the history of early Methodism."

The contrast between the Moravians and the English convinced Wesley, who had been badly frightened by the storms,[1] that the Moravians had faith which he lacked. He was so attracted to them that he learned German in order to converse with them, and only four days after landing in America went to see Mr. Spangenburg, the leader of the Moravians. The conversation, though short, was disturbing to Wesley. He had gone to get some advice as to his own conduct, but Spangenburg told him that he could not give him any advice until he had asked him some questions. Spangenburg asked,

> "Do you know yourself? Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?"
>
> I was surprised and knew not what to answer. He observed it and asked,
>
> "Do you know Jesus Christ?"
>
> I paused and said, "I know He is the Savior of the world."
>
> "True," replied he, "but do you know He has saved you?"
>
> I answered, "I hope He has died to save me."
>
> He only added, "Do you know yourself?"
>
> I said, "I do." But I fear they were vain words.[2]

Both men were left in a state of confusion by this strange conversation, with Spangenburg wondering how deep the Christianity of Wesley was, and with Wesley trying to understand a doctrine which would not become clear to him until about two years later. Wesley's doctrine of assurance was in the making, although he was not yet aware of it.

One other incident involving the Moravians deserves attention. Wesley and his friends seem to have had the idea of founding a primitive

---

[1] Ibid., 138, 140, 141.

[2] Ibid., 151.

church in Georgia, a hope soon shattered by conditions in the colony, but the Moravians furnished them with an example of what Wesley thought such a church should be. Shortly after his arrival in Georgia he was invited to attend a service in which the Moravian church in Georgia was to be established officially through the election and ordination of a bishop. In the meeting the Moravians,

> After several hours spent in conference and prayer, proceeded to the election and ordination of a bishop. The great simplicity, as well as the solemnity, of the whole, almost made me forget the seventeen hundred years between, and imagine myself in one of those assemblies where form and state were not, but Paul the tent-maker or Peter the fisherman presided, yet with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.[1]

Wesley had now seen three "demonstrations of the spirit" by the Moravians, and from this time on the desire for an intimate personal relationship with God through Christ, a direct witness of the spirit, became almost an obsession with him.

Wesley's return to England, hastened by charges brought against him in Savannah as a result of his strict application of the instructions of the Society, was that of a frustrated man. Everything that he had set out to accomplish seemed to have ended in failure. The brightest spots during his two year trip had been his contacts with the Moravians, so it was natural that he should turn to them for aid and comfort as soon as he got to London.

On February 7, 1738, only six days after he landed in England, Wesley met Peter Bohler, a Moravian who was to exert the last major

---

[1] Ibid., 170.

influence upon him. Bohler was on his way to Georgia and Carolina, where he was to serve as a missionary. Wesley, still convinced that he lacked faith, and that the Moravians could help him find it, "did not willingly lose an opportunity of conversing with him."[1] Wesley's Journal records a very significant meeting at Oxford, when

> ....Peter Bohler, by whom (in the hand of the great God) I was, on Sunday the 5th, clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.[2]
>
> Immediately it struck my mind, "Lay off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?"
>
> I asked Bohler....He answered, "By no means....Preach faith till you have it; and then because you have it, you will preach faith."[3]

But Wesley was not yet ready to go all the way with Bohler's concept of faith. He needed proof - something more than Bohler's word. He agreed that the nature of faith was "a sure trust and confidence which man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven and he reconciled to the favor of God," and in the "happiness and holiness" that resulted from this faith.[4] The major point of difference between Wesley and Bohler was concerned with the instantaneous nature of conversion. Wesley could not accept the idea that a person could "at once be changed from darkness to light." His recourse was

---

[1] Ibid., 437.

[2] Wesley did not mean to imply here that he had not been aware of his lack of faith. He had expressed this lack many times before, no where more forcibly than in a review of his spiritual growth up to the time he returned from Georgia. See Ibid., 424.

[3] Ibid., 442.

[4] Ibid., 454.

to search the Bible, which to his "utter astonishment" showed that there were few evidences of any other kind of conversion than what might be called instantaneous. Still unwilling to accept Bohler's idea, Wesley claimed that times had changed, and that he had no way of knowing that God still worked in the same way. Bohler's answer was to bring four of his Moravian brethren to Wesley, and they convinced him that they had experienced such a change.[1] The effect of this revelation on Wesley was tremendous. He wrote that he was

> ....now thoroughly convinced; and I resolved to seek it [faith] unto the end, (1) By absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up; (2) by adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith.[2]

From this time on Wesley was free of the mysticism which had been encouraged by his study of á Kempis and Law.[3] The incompatibility of

---

[1] Wesley, Works, VIII, 181.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 472. Underlining mine.

[3] Mysticism is used here in the sense in which Wesley understood it. He wrote of a contemplative man who "in several conversations instructed me how to pursue inward holiness, or a union of the soul with God....I cannot but now observe (1) that he spoke so incautiously against trusting in outward works that he discouraged me from doing them at all; (2) that he recommended mental prayer, and the like exercises, as the most effectual means of purifying the soul and uniting it with God....

In this refined way of trusting to my own works and my own righteousness (so zealously inculcated by the Mystic writers), I dragged on heavily...." Wesley, Journal, I, 467-8.

The essence of mysticism for Wesley was a dependence upon a personal union with God which made unnecessary any means of grace beside faith. The emphasis of the mystic writers upon inward holiness at the expense of outward holiness seemed to him to leave out the necessity for the Church, and to rob Christianity of its vitality by denying the necessity for the love of man.

mystic beliefs and his attachment to the Church of England became apparent to him, and even though the mystics seemed to offer a way of attaining an intimate personal relationship with God they left out some of the essentials of religion. He criticized

> ....the Mystic writers, whose noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid. But in truth they made good works appear so too; yea, and faith itself, and what not? These gave me an entirely new view of religion....But alas, it was nothing like that religion which Christ and His apostles lived and taught.
>
> ....all the other enemies of Christianity are triflers; the mystics are the most dangerous of its enemies. They stab it in the vitals; and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them.[1]

All that remained to prepare Wesley for the role he was to play in eighteenth century English life was for him to experience the thing for which he had been seeking - the assurance that he was a son of God. On May 14, 1738, at Aldersgate in London,

> About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.[2]

We have attempted to trace the major influences on the thought of John Wesley up to the time his career as a religious leader may be said to have started. The product of the isolated parish at Epworth had become a mature individual with fixed beliefs which were the result of a thirteen year period of physical, intellectual, and emotional turmoil.

---

[1] Ibid., 420.

[2] Ibid., 475-6.

He had been exposed to influences which were in some cases diametrically opposed to each other, and had found it necessary to arrive at some sort of compromise between them. He had entered the period of stress in 1725 with a completely unrealistic idea of how religion should be taught, and had seen his idea changed by his experiences. At the end of the period, marked by his conversion in 1738, he had, through experience, arrived at a clear concept of what his fundamental religious beliefs should be, and he was ready to preach those beliefs.

CHAPTER III

WESLEY'S MATURE THEOLOGY

The theology of John Wesley was a reflection of all the major influences that had been brought to bear on him up to the time of his experience at Aldersgate in 1738. There were revisions of a minor character after that time, but Wesley consistently refused to alter what he considered to be his most basic beliefs. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss those basic beliefs, their sources, and the background in which they evolved.

John Wesley made no attempt to build a systematic theological structure, since he had no need to do so. Reared in an Anglican home, educated in Anglican schools, and ordained in the Anglican Church, he had available a system of theology which he greatly admired. As we shall see, his teachings were based upon his concept of what the Book of Common Prayer, the Articles, and the Homilies of the Church of England implied. The primary difference between his ministry and that current in the pulpits of the time was one of emphasis.

The major emphasis in Wesley's theology was the result of the need he saw for the revival of true religion in England, a need for a religion the people could live rather than one which was primarily concerned with the observance of ritual. The aim of his life was clearly stated in a letter to a friend, in which he said, "I have one

point in view - to promote, so far as I am able, vital, practical religion; and by the grace of God to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the souls of men."[1] But Wesley's conviction that it was necessary to salvation to remain in the Church of England never changed. In 1789, just two years before his death, he wrote, "Unless I see more reason for it than I ever yet saw, I will not leave the Church of England as by law established while the breath of God is still in my nostrils."[2] The vital, practical religion he sought to promote was to be attained within the framework of the Established Church - a clear indication that Wesley considered the clergy to be remiss in its duties to the Church and its members. This feeling of Wesley's was so strong that in 1733, five years before his so-called conversion, he preached a sermon at Oxford in which he characterized those who followed the prevailing type of orthodoxy as "almost Christians."[3]

Religious thought in England during the formative stages of John Wesley's career was dominated by the influence of John Locke, whose

> ....Reasonableness of Christianity was the starting point of two movements, the latitudinarianism that became for a while the prevalent tone of the Established Church, though not of

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, III, 192

[2] Ibid., VIII, 143.

[3] The almost Christians were guilty of leaving love of God, love of man, and faith out of their lives. It is very significant that in defining faith in this sermon Wesley quoted the Homily on the Salvation of Mankind. J. Wesley, The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, ed. E. H. Sugden (London: Epworth Press, 1951), I, 53-67.

Methodism; and the English Deistic movement, which all respectable people regarded askance.[1]

The Latitudinarian concept of religion is best illustrated by the attitude of Archbishop Tillotson, the dominant influence in the Anglican church of the eighteenth century, for whom Christianity was "the best and holiest, the wisest and most reasonable religion in the world; all the precepts of it are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties of us as are suitable to the light of nature, and do approve themselves to the best reason of mankind." His answer to the infidelity of the period was "to show the unreasonableness of atheism and scoffing at religion."[2] His preaching was "little more than a prudential morality, based rather on reason than on revelation, and appealing directly to sober common sense."[3] Archbishop Sharp, who became Archbishop of York in the year Tillotson died, echoed the attitude of his contemporary in his statement that "the Church of England is undoubtedly both as to doctrine and worship the purest church that is at this day in the world: the most orthodox in faith, the freest on the one hand from idolatry and superstition, and on the other hand from freakishness and enthusiasm, of any now extant."[4]

---

[1] Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 354.

[2] C. J. Abbey and J. H. Overton, The English Church in the Eighteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), pp. 118-9.

[3] Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 357.

[4] Turberville, Johnson's England, I, 15.

Rationalist orthodoxy, under the influence of Locke and Tillotson, was, in the first half of the eighteenth century, engaged in a struggle with English deism. Since deism also had its origins in the teachings of Locke it was almost inevitable that there should be some similarities in the beliefs of the opposing groups, and that the controversy should have "a line of demarcation which was shifting and uncertain."[1] There existed between them a kinship which was more significant than any differences. The hostility they felt for each other was not the result of disagreement over religious belief or ethical ideas, but the difference in their concepts of the place of the church organization and its authorities.[2]

English deism began, late in the seventeenth century, as an intellectual system, with the aim of removing all the supernatural aspects from religion. The early deists attempted to banish the mysteries, miracles, and secrets from religion by exposing Christianity to the "light of knowledge," but as they were succeeded by later deists there was a definite change in the attitudes and aims of the group. The intellectual approach was replaced by one emphasizing the use of practical reason, with its corollary emphasis upon finding answers to existing moral problems.[3] The deists, whether of the earlier or later

---

[1] L. Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), I, 89.

[2] A. C. M'Giffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 229.

[3] E. Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 171-4.

type, were severely handicapped in their struggle with rational orthodoxy in that they were opposed by the strongest intellects in England, while they had little effective support for their own views.[1]

The English deists, faced by an orthodoxy in which there was a strong admixture of rationalism, found that their opposition was much more formidable than the persecution by church and state faced by deists on the continent. In England the rational Protestant - rational orthodoxy - could meet the deist halfway, "and, forced to defend themselves by reason, the orthodox party won a triumph in argument as conclusive as might be expected from their learning and ability."[2]

The triumph of rational orthodoxy over the deists was followed by a new danger, represented by the sceptics, of whom Hume was the most important figure. Hume's attack on the concept of human nature held by the deists - that there is a human nature which is everywhere the same - was successful in driving deism from its remaining hold on English thought, but at the same time it broke down, to a considerable extent, the authority of the entire rational school, including rational orthodoxy. The vitality of religious life in the last half of the eighteenth century was the result of the activity of an entirely different group, the evangelicals.[3]

---

[1] Stephen includes among the champions of orthodoxy such varied intellects as Locke, Berkeley, Clarke, Butler, Warburton, Law, Addison, and Swift, while deism gained support from only a few lesser lights such as Collins, Toland, and Tindal. Stephen, English Thought, I, 86-7.

[2] Ibid., 89-90.

[3] M'Giffert, Protestant Thought, pp. 231-2.

Wesley had little use for rational orthodoxy, deism, or the sceptics. His attitude toward rational orthodoxy is well illustrated in his plea to the deists to "Go on, gentlemen, and prosper. Shame these nominal Christians out of that poor superstition which they call Christianity. Reason, rally, laugh them out of their dead empty forms, void of spirit, of faith, of love. Convince them that such mean pageantry is absolutely unworthy...."[1] But the deists were equally guilty of leaving something vital out of religion. Their natural religion was not enough, since it offered man no means of escape from sin. Such beliefs as Tindal's, that "religious duties neither need nor can receive any stronger proof than what they have already from the evidence of right reason," and that "miracles and prophecies, and all particular religious rites and beliefs are mere superstitions," were enough to make him feel that the deists were "assured heirs of damnation."[2] Hume, the most outstanding of the sceptics, was dismissed as the "most insolent despiser of truth and virtue that ever appeared in the world."[3]

The religious beliefs of John Wesley matured against this background of rationalism, both deistic and orthodox, in religion, and it was against the rationalism in the Church of England that he spent much of his time preaching. The origins of his dissatisfaction with the prevailing religious tone of the period are somewhat difficult to

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, II, 386.

[2] Wesley, Journal, I, 356.

[3] Ibid., V, 458.

trace. The religious training he received at Epworth was notable for the emphasis placed upon reason, and Wesley seems to have been a boy who was unusually concerned about thinking things through before taking any action. His father's interest in research and writing encouraged him to work along the same lines. His conviction that reason without a strong personal belief in the Atonement was not enough does not appear until after he had come into contact with the writings of à Kempis, Law, and Taylor. They convinced him that religion must be a vital, personal thing which must be experienced by each believer. This belief was joined by Wesley to his strong affection for the Church of England and her rites and sacraments, and remained the basis for his thinking for the rest of his career.

There was as yet, however, nothing unique in the beliefs or teachings of John Wesley. Other Anglican clergymen who believed as he did were able to remain within the Church, take care of their parish duties, and help to bring about the spread of the evangelical movement by their example and writings.

John Wesley differed from the Anglican Evangelicals primarily in his concept of the scope of his work. While they were content to work within the boundaries of a parish he found it necessary to take the whole world for his parish. There were several reasons for his attitude toward parochial work, the most significant of which was the unfortunate example set by his father. Wesley wrote somewhat bitterly of his father's lack of success, illustrating his account with a story of a parishioner at Epworth:

> My father, visiting one of his parishioners, who had never missed going to church for forty years, then lying on his deathbed, asked him, "Thomas, where do you think your soul will go?" "Soul, Soul," said Thomas. "Yes, do you not know where your soul is?" "Aye, surely," said he: "Why, it is a little bone in the back, that lives longer than the rest of his body." So much Thomas had learned by constantly hearing sermons, yea, and exceedingly good sermons, for forty years.[1]

By far the most important reasons for Wesley's attitude toward the restrictions of parish work were the reaction to his preaching by the orthodox clergy and laity, and the failure of the Established Church to readjust to the rapidly changing social and economic conditions of the eighteenth century. Before discussing these very significant reasons for the character of Wesley's ministry we must examine the major emphases of his teachings.

The central theme of Wesley's teachings was salvation, which he considered to be the only valid goal for man. The three primary doctrines he advocated to enable man to attain this salvation were justification by faith, the new birth, and Christian perfection. Each was an essential step in the path to salvation, and all were directed toward carrying out his aim of promoting a vital, practical religion.

Wesley's doctrine of justification by faith was the result of a fusion of the High Church Arminianism of Epworth rectory and the influence of the Moravians. Samuel Wesley believed that no man could perform an "action properly and perfectly acceptable to God by his own natural abilities, abstracted from the assistance of God's spirit, but by His common assistance he may pray, abstain from sin, and practice duty;

---

[1] Wesley, Works, IV, 370.

and, if he continues in these good actions, he will have still more aid, and go on to perfection."[1] Every man had within him the prevenient grace which made it possible for him to go on and gain more grace, if only he would take advantage of all the means of attaining that additional grace. This, for Samuel and John Wesley, meant that the believer must take a full part in the rites and sacraments of the Church of England.

Susanna Wesley's views on justification appear in a letter written in response to a request by John for her advice. She wrote,

> Since I find you have some scruples concerning our article, Of Predestination, I will tell you my thoughts of the matter.
>
> The doctrine of predestination, as held by the rigid Calvinists, is very shocking, and ought to be abhorred, because it directly charges the most high God with being the author of sin.... It is certainly inconsistent with the justice and goodness of God to lay any man under either a physical or moral necessity of committing sin, and then to punish him for doing it.
>
> I firmly believe that God, from eternity, has elected some to eternal life; but then I humbly conceive that this election is founded on his foreknowledge....He justifies them, absolves them from the guilt of all their sins, and acknowledged them as just and righteous persons, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.[2]

The contribution of the Moravians to Wesley's doctrine of justification by faith was to convince him of the necessity for each believer actually to experience justification, that is, for each believer to be intensely conscious of Christ's saving power working within him.

---

[1] Lee, John Wesley, pp. 126-7. Samuel Wesley's statement is taken from the article Of Freewill, which states that "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will." E. C. S. Gibson, The Thirty-Nine Articles (London: Methuen and Co., 1897), p. 378.

[2] Tyerman, John Wesley, I, 40.

One other influence on the formation of the Wesleyan concept of justification should be noted. Wesley wrote that

> The book which, next to the Holy Scripture, was of the greatest use to them [the Methodists], in settling their judgment as to the grand point of justification by faith, was the book of Homilies. They were never clearly convinced, that we are justified by faith alone, till they carefully consulted these, and compared them with the Sacred Writings...particularly Romans.[1]

The Homily to which Wesley referred was probably the Homily of Salvation, since there is a great similarity between it and the Wesleyan doctrine of justification.

> Faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified; but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying. So that, although they be all present together in him that is justified, yet they justify not all together. Nor that faith also doth not shut out the justice of our good works, necessarily to be done afterward of duty towards God (for we are most bounded to serve God in doing good deeds commanded by him in his holy Scripture all the days of our life); but it excludeth them so that we may not do them to this intent, to be made good by doing of them. For all the good works that we can do be imperfect, and therefore not able to deserve our justification; but our justification doth come freely, by the mere mercy of God....[2]

The inability of man to merit justification by his own actions was the basis of Anglican articles concerning justification, and, consequently, the basis for Wesley's belief.

The Wesleyan doctrine of justification was dependent upon the acceptance of a belief in original sin, and it was at this point that

---

[1] Wesley, Works, VII, 216.

[2] Gibson, Thirty-Nine Articles, p. 407. Underlining mine. It was the lack of emphasis on good works by the Moravians that led to Wesley's break with them. One of the strongest features of Wesley's societies was their interest in good works of all kinds.

Wesley went well beyond the articles of the Church. The article Of Original or Birth Sin holds that original sin

> ....is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit, and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.[1]

The article speaks of original righteousness, but there is no attempt to define it. Wesley, however, gave a detailed description of man in his original state. He was

> ....after the likeness of his Creator, endued with understanding,[2] a capacity of apprehending whatever objects were brought before it, and of judging concerning them. He was endued with a will, exerting itself in various affections and passions: and lastly, with liberty, or freedom of choice, without which endowment all the rest would have been in vain.
>
> His understanding was perfect in its kind: capable of apprehending all things clearly, and judging concerning them according to truth, without any mixture of error. His will had no wrong bias of any sort, but all his passions and affections were regular, being steadily and uniformly guided by the dictates of his unerring understanding....His liberty likewise was guided wholly by his understanding: he chose or refused, according to its direction. Above all....he was a creature capable of God; capable of knowing, loving, and obeying his Creator....This was the supreme perfection of man....From this right state, and right use of all his faculties, his happiness naturally flowed.[3]

From this perfect state man fell, but Wesley, in keeping with the wording of the article, said, "That all men are liable to these penalties for Adam's sin alone I do not assert; but they are so, for their own

---

[1] Ibid., p. 357.

[2] Wesley used the terms reason and understanding synonymously. At one time he advised his readers to "Set aside that ambiguous term (reason): exchange it for the plain word understanding." Wesley, Works, VI, 254.

[3] Ibid., 253.

outward and inward sins, which, through their own fault, spring from the infection of their nature."[1] Once again, however, Wesley went beyond the spirit of the article. In its statement that man is "inclined to evil" the article follows a moderate course, but Wesley went to the extreme in picturing the depravity of man. In a sermon on original sin Wesley said that

> ....all men are conceived in sin and shapen in wickedness - that hence there is in every man a carnal mind, which is enmity against God; which is not, cannot be, subject to His law; and which so infects the whole soul, that there dwelleth in him, in his flesh, in his natural state, no good thing; but every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil, only evil, and that continually.[2]

This Calvinistic concept of the evil nature of man seems to have been used by Wesley primarily as a means of awakening men to their hopeless condition regarding salvation, since it always serves as an introduction to the possibility of salvation for all men through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. In his Short History of Methodism Wesley emphasized the fact that justification by faith always implies three things: that men are all, by nature, dead in sin, and consequently, children of wrath; that they are justified by faith alone; and that faith produces inward and outward holiness.[3]

---

[1] Wesley, Sermons, I, 114.

[2] Ibid., II, 222-3. Wesley is guilty of the same overemphasis upon the evil nature of man in one of his sermons, where, after having quoted the article Of Original or Birth Sin, he goes on to speak of man's will as "no longer the will of God, but is utterly perverted and distorted, averse from all good, from all which God loves, and prone to all evil, to every abomination which God hateth....so there is no soundeness in his soul." Ibid., I, 155-6.

[3] Wesley, Works, IV, 414.

In a sermon on justification by faith Wesley described the meaning of justification in these words:

> The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of His Son, He showeth forth His righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of sins that are past....To him that is justified....his sins, all his past sins, in thought, word and deed, are blotted out, shall not be remembered or mentioned against him, any more than if they had not been.[1]

The positive effects of justification were stated even more explicitly by Wesley as

> ....a present deliverance from sin; a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. Therefore holiness is not only a condition of a present salvation from sin; it is the thing itself. Faith is the only condition.[2]

The faith which was the only condition of salvation was, in general, "a divine, supernatural....evidence or conviction, 'of things not seen,' nor discoverable by our bodily senses, as being either past, future, or spiritual. Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,' but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for <u>my</u> sins, that He loved <u>me</u>, and gave Himself for <u>me</u>."[3]

The nature of the faith that justifies was found by Wesley in the Homilies on the Passion and on the Sacrement, which he quoted as follows:

---

[1] Wesley, <u>Sermons</u>, I, 120-1.

[2] Wesley, <u>Works</u>, VIII, 264.

[3] Wesley, <u>Sermons</u>, I, 125.

> I cannot describe the nature of this faith better than in the words of our own Church: 'The only instrument of salvation' (whereof justification is one branch) 'is faith; that is, a sure trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins, that He hath accepted us again into His favour, for the merits of Christ's death and passion....
>
> Therefore, have a sure and constant faith, not only that the death of Christ is available for all the world, but that He hath made a full and sufficient sacrifice for thee, a perfect cleansing of thy sins, so that thou mayest say with the Apostle, He loved thee, and gave Himself for thee. For this is to make Christ thine own, and to apply His merits unto thyself.[1]

A believer justified through the faith Wesley thus described experienced what is normally called a conversion, but which Wesley preferred to call a "new birth."[2] Its importance to Wesleyan teachings was indicated in a sermon on the new birth, in which he said,

> If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may properly be termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two, - the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature. In order of time, neither of these is before the other; in the moment we are justified by the grace of God....we are also born of the Spirit.[3]

Wesley continued by showing the similarity between a natural birth and this spiritual birth. In each case the child has ears, but he does not hear, and he has eyes, but he does not see. All his senses are "locked up; he is in the same condition as if he had them not."[4] But with the new birth, and the faith which made it possible,

---

[1] Ibid., 125-6.

[2] Wesley preferred not to use the term conversion, since it "rarely appears in the New Testament." Wesley, Letters, III, 266.

[3] Wesley, Sermons, II, 226-7.

[4] Ibid., 233.

> ....you have a new class of senses opened in your soul, not depending on organs of flesh and blood, to be the evidence of things not seen....And till you have these internal senses you can have no proper apprehension of divine things. Nor consequently till then can you either judge truly, or reason justly concerning them; seeing your reason has no ground whereon to stand, no materials to work upon.[1]

When one experiences the new birth, and is able to reason justly concerning divine things, there comes "that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life....when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind."[2]

There were those among Wesley's listeners who felt that they had no need of the new birth, since they had been baptized. His advice to them was to "say not then in your heart, 'I was once baptized, therefore I am now a child of God.' Alas, that consequence will by no means hold. How many are the baptized gluttons and drunkards, the baptized liars and common swearers, the baptized railers and evil-speakers, the baptized whoremongers, thieves, extortioners?"[3] Had Wesley merely pointed out what his Anglican background made it logical for him to indicate, that his listeners had need to take advantage of every means of grace, and to warn them against their manner of living, he would have been on sound footing. Unfortunately, however, in his intense desire to convince his

---

[1] Wesley, Works, VIII, 195.

[2] Wesley, Sermons, II, 233.

[3] Ibid., I, 295.

listeners that they must experience a new birth, or conversion, he tried to show that baptism does not always involve a new birth, "they do not constantly go together." This was not true of infant baptism, since "it is certain our Church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again; and it is allowed that the whole Office for the Baptism of Infants proceeds upon this supposition.... But whatever be the case with infants, it is sure all of riper years who are baptized are not at the same time born again."[1]

There is nothing in the articles to substantiate Wesley's interpretation of the efficacy of adult baptism. The article Of Baptism states, in part, that "Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference,...but is also a sign of regeneration or new birth...."[2] In considering what is implied here

> ....it must be remembered that sacraments have been already defined in Article XXV as "effectual signs of grace," and therefore, since "Regeneration" is the word which the Church has ever used to describe the grace of baptism, and to sum up the blessings conveyed in it, we must interpret sign in this clause as an effectual sign; and thus the whole expression will mean that in baptism the blessings of regeneration are not only represented, but are also conveyed to the recipient.[3]

It is strange that one who placed as much emphasis on the sacraments as John Wesley should have failed to understand the sacramental character of baptism. After having defined a sacrament as it is defined in the Church Catechism, as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and

---

[1] Ibid., II, 238.

[2] Gibson, Thirty-Nine Articles, p. 620.

[3] Ibid., p. 623.

spiritual grace," he goes on to make an arbitrary distinction:

> For what can be more plain, than that the one is an external, the other an internal work; that the one is a visible, the other an invisible thing, and therefore wholly different from each other? - the one being an act of man, purifying the body; the other a change wrought by God in the soul.[1]

Wesley's attempts to show that baptism and the new birth were, or could be, entirely different things, led him into inconsistencies which it is not possible to resolve. It is significant that the problems he encountered in trying to arrive at some consistent answer to the problem of the relationship of baptism and the new birth were one of his legacies to Methodism, and that the solution finally arrived at was to leave out any references to rebirth in the baptismal service, although the minister might assume that it took place if he cared to do so.[2] In fairness to Wesley it must be said that his reason for trying to prove that they were not the same was that there were many who had been baptized, and yet had shown no evidence of the great change which should come with their being born again. This, for him, could mean only that the new birth had not occurred, or, as in his own case, the grace received at baptism had been washed away through constant sinning. In either case it was necessary that the sinner go through the process of being reborn, or converted.

The justification and new birth of the believer was followed by sanctification, or Christian perfection, a belief which Wesley thought to be the most distinctively Methodist element in his teachings. "This

---

[1] Wesley, Sermons, II, 238.

[2] Ibid., I, 282n.

doctrine," he wrote in 1790, "is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up."[1]

The student of Wesleyan theology has a comparatively easy time when he undertakes his research on Wesley's concept of Christian perfection. In 1766 Wesley published a pamphlet with the very descriptive title, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as believed and taught by the Rev. John Wesley from the year 1725 to the year 1765. Later editions extended the work to the year 1777. In this work he traced the development of the doctrine from its origins, which he found to be in the teachings of Jeremy Taylor, Thomas á Kempis, and William Law.[2]

Wesley made a clear distinction between justification and sanctification, and was caustically critical of those who did not. "Who has written more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone? And who has been more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conception of it?...The whole body of (Romish) divines at the Council of Trent....totally confounded sanctification and justification together."[3]

For Wesley justification was "another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins; and, what is necessarily implied therein,

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, VIII, 238.

[2] Wesley, Works, VIII, 5-66. It is interesting to note the backgrounds of these three individuals; Taylor was a rich bishop, á Kempis a monk, and Law an English Nonjuror and later a mystic.

[3] Ibid., VII, 217.

our acceptance with God....And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit....we are inwardly renewed by God."[1]

This distinction between justification and sanctification follows the teaching of Luther, according to whom justification was the "initial blessing, when God receives the repentant sinner, pardons, and accepts him." Justification was the work of "the Son of God for us," while sanctification was the work of "the Holy Spirit within us." This view was held in opposition to the decree of the Council of Trent that justification was "not merely the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inner man."[2]

The first sermon in which Wesley discussed perfection was first preached in 1733 and repeated many times. He wrote in 1765 that this sermon contained "all that I now teach concerning salvation from all sin, and loving God with an undivided heart."[3] There were, however, substantial changes in his thinking between 1733 and 1740 on the subject of sanctification. In his earlier sermon he taught that man was freed from sin upon his conversion,[4] and that it was possible for a man to attain perfection by his own efforts, that is, by keeping all the laws

---

[1] Wesley, Sermons, II, 445-6.

[2] Gibson, Thirty-Nine Articles, pp. 394-6.

[3] Wesley, Letters, IV, 299.

[4] Wesley, Sermons, II, 148n.

of God,[1] while the latter emphasized man's complete dependence upon the grace of God, and the gradual nature of his sanctification. He also came very slowly to the realization that perfection is an ideal which the believer may never attain, but that it is valuable as a goal toward which he may work.[2] It was in the latter sense that Wesley spoke of perfection during most of his career.

Wesley defined his concept of Christian perfection in a number of ways, but in all of them love was the most important element. For example, perfection was

> ....that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit....
>
> It implies humility, faith, hope, and charity....add love which is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one....In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.'
>
> Not that this forbids us to love anything beside God: it implies that we love our brother also.[3]

Every follower of John Wesley could aspire to this ideal, with the firm conviction that divine grace was available to help him, if only he had faith. But could he attain a sinless state? Wesley was not consistent in his answers to this question. He did not claim to have attained perfection himself, but he hesitated to rule out the

---

[1] Ibid., I, 277.

[2] Ibid., II, 150.

[3] Ibid., I, 267-73.

possibility of success for someone else. Generally, however, he was extremely cautious about accepting the word of any of his followers when they claimed perfection in their religious lives. Their claims sounded "enthusiastic" to him, and he was fearful that they would forget that perfection implied certain responsibilities toward one's fellow-man. Wesley's desire to have his followers remain conscious of all the demands made upon them by his doctrine of Christian perfection led him to describe his concept of the perfect Christian. Certainly the person who could live up to the ideal he portrayed was rare, but the importance of the ideal in giving some direction to the somewhat unstable religious sentiments of the early Methodist converts cannot be overestimated. The perfect Christian

> Loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul....
>
> He 'in everything giveth thanks,' as knowing this (whatsoever it is) is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning him....
>
> He prays without ceasing....His heart is lifted up to God at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord....
>
> And loving God, he 'loves his neighbour as himself;' he loves every man as his own soul. He loves his enemies, yea, and the enemies of God....
>
> For he is pure in heart. Love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper....
>
> For, as he loves God, so he 'keeps his commandments'....Whatever God has forbidden, he avoids; whatever God has enjoined, he does....
>
> By consequence, 'whatsoever he doeth, it is all to the glory of God.' In all his employments of every kind, he not only aims at this,...his business and his refreshments, as well as his prayers, all serve to this great and....whether he put on his apparel, or labour, or eat and drink, or divert himself from too wasting labour, it all tends to advance the glory of God, by peace and good will among men....

> Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder him 'running the race which is set before him.' He cannot therefore 'lay up treasures on earth'....He cannot speak evil of his neighbour.... He cannot utter an unkind word of anyone....He cannot speak idle words....But 'whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are justly of good report,' he thinks, speaks, and acts, 'adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.'
>
> Lastly, as he has time, he does good unto all men.[1]

If a believer lived according to the complete inward and outward holiness Wesley described he would not only attain Christian perfection, but would at the same time become a valuable member of society. The positive, experiential nature of Wesley's teachings did not allow a solitary religion. The Christian must live in a world of sin, where he would demonstrate his faith by word and deed.

The doctrines of justification by faith, the new birth, and Christian perfection were the principal themes in Wesley's long ministry, and they represented his attempt to carry out his aim of a vital, practical religion. Late in life Wesley wrote that

> Near fifty years ago, a great and good man, Dr. Potter,[2] gave me an advice, for which I have ever since had occasion to bless God: "If you desire to be extensively useful, do not spend your time and strength, in contending for or against things of a disputable nature; but in testifying against open, notorious vice, and in promoting real, essential holiness."[3]

In the preface to his Standard Sermons Wesley explained his purpose in writing them:

---

[1] Wesley, Works, IV, 408.

[2] Bishop of Oxford during Wesley's student days, and the man who ordained Wesley deacon and priest.

[3] Wesley, Works, VII, 201.

> I design plain truth for plain people: therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasonings....
>
> I have accordingly set down in the following sermons what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven; with a view to distinguish this way of God from all those which are the inventions of men. I have endeavoured to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion.[1]

He hoped that his thoughts were agreeable to "Scripture, reason, and Christian antiquity,"[2] and that they would lead the way to the real, essential holiness advised by Bishop Potter at Oxford. He attempted to steer a middle course between enthusiasm and rationalism, pointing out the dangers of each to his followers.

The charge of enthusiasm was brought against the Methodists many times, and Wesley spoke very strongly against allowing it to grow among them. He was in sympathy with the attitude of the educated men of the eighteenth century toward it, and attempted to combat it as being contrary to reason.

> Among them that despise and vilify reason, you may always expect to find those enthusiasts, who suppose the dreams of their own imaginations to be revelations from God. We cannot expect, that, men of this turn will pay much regard to reason. Having an infallible guide, they are very little moved by the reasonings of fallible men.[3]

Certain of the practices of the followers of Wesley were such as to justify the charge of enthusiasm, and it became necessary for him to warn them against dangerous excesses.

---

[1] Wesley, Sermons, I, 30-2.

[2] Ibid., 31n.

[3] Wesley, Works, VI, 340.

> Beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm. Oh keep at the utmost distance from it. Give no place to a heated imagination. Do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, or revelations to be from God. They may be from Him. They may be from nature. They may be from the devil. You are in danger of enthusiasm if you despise or lightly esteem reason, knowledge or human learning; every one of which is an excellent gift from God, and may serve the noblest purposes. I advise you never to use the words wisdom, reason or knowledge by way of reproach. On the contrary pray that you may abound in them more and more.[1]

The dangers to the true believer from enthusiasm were great, but equally precarious was the position of those who placed too much emphasis upon reason.[2]

> We are surrounded with persons who lay it down as an undoubted principle, that reason is the highest gift of God....They are fond of expatiating in its praise; they make it little less than divine. They are wont to describe it, as very near, if not quite infallible. They look upon it as the all-sufficient director of all the children of men; able, by its native light, to guide them into all truth, and lead them into all virtue.[3]

Wesley expressed his belief in the prominent place reason must have in any sound religious belief on many occasions, usually in connection with the equally important place which must be given to Scripture and experience. Reason by itself was not enough, since human knowledge is, by virtue of the fact that it is human, imperfect. In a sermon on the

---

[1] Ibid., VIII, 16. Underlining mine.

[2] Wesley defined reason as "much the same with understanding: it means a faculty of the human soul: that faculty which exerts itself in three ways, by simple apprehension, by judgment, and by discourse. Simple apprehension is barely conceiving a thing in the mind; the first and most simple act of the understanding. Judgment is the determining that the things before conceived either agree with, or differ from each other. Discourse, strictly speaking, is the motion or progress of the mind, from one judgment to another." Ibid., VI, 342.

[3] Ibid., 341.

imperfection of human knowledge Wesley discussed its limitations, saying, "We know just as much as is conducive to our living comfortably in this world. But of innumerable things above, below, and round about us, we know little more than that they exist." To illustrate his point he mentioned such fields as animal life, insects, electricity, the earth, of which only the surface was known, and the attributes of God.[1] Since reason was limited by human capacity it was not a sufficient guide for religious life, and anyone placing his whole reliance on it to the exclusion of Scripture and experience was missing what for Wesley was the essence of religion. He was aware of the fact that his emphasis upon the witness of the Spirit would be unpopular: "he who now preaches the most essential duties of Christianity runs the hazard of being esteemed, by a great part of his hearers, 'a setter forth of new doctrines.' Most men have so lived away the substance of that religion, the profession whereof they still retain"[2] that such teachings as justification by faith, the new birth, and Christian perfection were as strange things to their ears.

Wesley's basic doctrines put him in an untenable position regarding his status in the Church of England. On the one hand he had a tremendous

---

[1] Ibid., 329. Leslie Stephen believes that Wesley carried his distrust of human knowledge so far that he left no connection between Methodism and the speculative movement of the century, and condemned Methodism to barrenness. "The want of a sound foundation in philosophy prevented the growth of an elevated theology....Wesleyanism in the eighteenth century represents heat without light - a blind protest of the masses, and a vague feeling after some satisfaction to the instinct which ends only in a recrudescence of obsolete ideas." Stephen, English Thought, II, 424.

[2] Wesley, Sermons, I, 266.

love for the Church, while on the other hand he felt that he had a divine mission to preach his doctrines. He knew that what he preached would lead to exclusion from opportunities to preach again, even though he was convinced that what he was saying was provided for in the Articles and Homilies. The problem was never completely solved during his career, even though relations with the Church were considerably improved before his death.

Since Wesley's primary purpose was to promote a vital, practical religion, with more emphasis upon practice than upon creed,[1] yet one that would encourage its followers to take advantage of every means of grace, it was necessary that something be added to the regular ministry of the Anglican Church. The solution was found in the organization of religious societies. The story of the development of the Methodist societies and their relationship is beyond the scope of this discussion,[2] but it should be noted that they were the principal means through which the teachings of John Wesley were spread throughout England.

---

[1] This attitude was well expressed by Wesley in a sermon. "I believe the merciful God regards the lives and tempers of men more than their ideas. I believe He respects the goodness of the heart rather than the clearness of the head; and that if the heart of a man be filled with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire because his ideas are not clear or because his conceptions are confused." Wesley, Sermons, I, 22.

Wesley's works show that he was familiar with the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Shaftesbury, Hartley, and Butler, and it seems logical to assume that their primary interest in the conduct of the individual was influential in the formation of his ideas. It is certain that Locke's Essay, with its emphasis upon restricting the efforts of human understanding to questions it is qualified to answer discouraged metaphysical speculation in England, and that it helped to promote the growing preference for moralization over speculation, and further, that Wesleyan teachings followed the spirit of this preference.

[2] The best source is J. S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1922).

It was perhaps inevitable that the sermons Wesley preached should have sounded enthusiastic to a church which considered it fashionable to preach religion "as morality, with a little dogma apologetically attached," and in which the "parson was more often a typical Englishman, kindly, sensible, mildly pious."[1] Early in the eighteenth century "sermons had very generally become mere moral essays, characterized chiefly by a cold good sense, and appealing almost exclusively to prudential motives."[2] Many writers have treated the reception given to Wesley's teachings by the Anglican clergy, and there has been general agreement that it was about what should have been expected of a rationalist clergy, but the rationalism of the clergy is not in itself sufficient to explain their attitude. While it is true that there were many bishops and priests who felt, with Bishop Warburton, that "all forms of enthusiasm were a viperous brood, which a champion of sober reason should feel bound at once to crush," there were also many who would have agreed with him when he said that "since the middle of the preceding century a reaction which rested religion too entirely on bare reason had thrown into the background some of the most distinctive doctrines of Christianity."[3] But enthusiasm was not the answer to the problem of extreme rationalism, since it was itself a dangerous extreme. Warburton was closer to the Wesleyan brand of enthusiasm than he realized, however.

---

[1] Trevelyan, English Social History, pp. 357-8.

[2] W. E. H. Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1882), I, 84.

[3] Abbey, English Church and Its Bishops, I, 393.

> It is remarkable that Warburton fully grants that a work far transcending what mere reason could do was effected in the first conversions to Christianity by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. 'When, therefore,' he concludes, 'we see the deepest impressions of evil custom, and the darkest stains of corrupted nature thus suddenly wiped out and effaced, to what must we ascribe such a total reform but to the all-powerful operations of grace.'[1]

Recent scholarship has shown that the earlier view of the eighteenth as a century of barren rationalism with little or no deep religious feeling was wrong, and that there were many clergymen, both priests and bishops, who were as concerned as was Wesley with the spiritual welfare of their parishioners.[2] It seems logical to assume, therefore, that John Wesley's efforts to bring about a more vital religion might have met with a more friendly reception from his fellow clergymen had he been content to proceed somewhat more slowly than was his desire. But once Wesley had "consented to be more vile," and to "proclaim in the highways the glad tidings of salvation,"[3] there was little chance that there would be any cooperation between the bulk of the clergy and the Methodists. Wesley went even further, flatly declaring that he did not recognize parish boundaries.

> God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish: that is, in effect, to do it at all; seeing now I have no parish of my own, nor probably

---

[1] Ibid., 393-4.

[2] See J. W. Legg, English Church Life from the Restoration to the Tractarian Movement (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), pp. 1-280; W. K. Lowther Clarke, Eighteenth Century Piety (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944), pp. 1-29; and R. N. Stromberg, Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

[3] Wesley, Journal, II, 172.

> ever shall....A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me; and woe is me if I preach not the gospel....
>
> ...I look upon the whole world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.[1]

The virtually complete disregard shown by Wesley and his followers for the prerogatives of the parish priests could lead only to resentment, particularly when the sermons preached by them tended to arouse religious feelings whose effects were felt after long after Wesley had departed. Severe emotional disturbances were experienced by many of Wesley's hearers - results which to Wesley meant that the person was going through an inner struggle between good and evil, but which to the parish priests were proof of enthusiasm, which could serve no desirable end.[2] Small wonder that there are numerous references in Wesley's Journal to unpleasant encounters with parish priests!

Another charge made against the Methodists was that they refused to be classified as dissenters, in spite of such activities as their field-preaching. The movement, "pretending to be of the Church, disdains to shelter itself under the peaceable shade of a legal toleration."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., 217-8.

[2] In 1742 Wesley, having been refused the privilege of preaching in the church at Epworth, preached for a week from his father's tombstone in the churchyard. The curate had warned the parishioners of the dangers of enthusiasm in a sermon delivered after he had turned down Wesley's request, but a huge crowd turned out to hear Wesley in spite of his warnings. During Wesley's sermons there "great indeed was the shaking among them: lamentation and great mourning were heard....on every side, as with one accord, they lift up their voice and wept aloud." Some of his hearers "dropped down as dead, and among the rest such a cry was heard of sinners groaning for the righteousness of faith as almost drowned my voice." Ibid., III, 18-23.

[3] Abbey, English Church and Its Bishops, I, 393.

Wesley refused to abide by parochial or episcopal rules, and yet claimed to be loyal to the Church. Few clergymen could believe that he was sincere in his stated desire to have his societies serve only as a means for increasing the depth of religious feeling within the Church of England.

The reaction of the clergy to Wesley's teachings, his exclusion from their churches, and his decision to carry his message to the people through field-preaching were circumstances that by unconscious design made it possible for Wesley to reach those who were most in need of, and most receptive to, his preaching - the miners, workers, and people of the lower middle class.[1] The Church of England had failed to take steps to keep up with the rapid changes in population brought on by the enclosures and the Industrial Revolution, and it was in the areas where there had been the greatest increases of population that Wesley was most successful. As Skyes has said,

> The cumbrous machinery of the Church of England was no more able to adapt itself to the changes of the Industrial Revolution than the antiquated unreformed parliamentary system, and the creation of new parishes lagged as far behind the needs of the times as the formation of new parliamentary constituencies. The ultimate severance of the Methodist societies from the formal communion of the Church was the natural consequence of Wesley's discharge of the apostolate of the mining and industrial classes who had scarcely come within the ambit of Anglican ministrations.[2]

In London "in 1711 a House of Commons Committee reported that English Dissenters and French Huguenots together made up a fifth of the

---

[1] See L. F. Church, The Early Methodist People (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 1-8, and 27-88 for an excellent account of the vocations of the people who were among Wesley's earliest followers.

[2] In Turberville, Johnson's England, I, 36.

half-million inhabitants of the London suburbs, exclusive of the City, and that they had built themselves 88 chapels; the remaining 400,000 potential Churchmen of the suburbs had only 28 parish churches among them."[1] An Act of Parliament was passed in the same year providing for building fifty churches in the suburbs to take care of these "several hundred thousand persons unprovided for by the Established Church,"[2] but only eleven of them were actually built.[3]

The situation in the north was just as bad.

> Formerly but half the province of York had been inhabited; now great centres of industry were being rapidly multiplied. But it still counted only six bishops as against twenty in the province of Canterbury, and 2,000 parishes for 10,000 in the Southern Province. Bath, Chichester, Ely and Hereford possessed their bishops; Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, and Liverpool had none. The total church accommodation in Liverpool amounted to but 21,000 seats. The population was 94,000. In Manchester there was accommodation for 11,000 of the 79,000 inhabitants.[4]

The great mass of unchurched poor was the main target of Wesley's ministry, which had its real origins in his first sermon at Kingswood. The people of Kingswood, just outside Bristol, were for the most part colliers - men whose level of existence was only slightly above the animal level. A few years before this time (1739) Kingswood had been a royal preserve, with no need for a church. However, after it had been given

---

[1] G. M. Trevelyan, The England of Queen Anne (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), p. 120.

[2] Ibid., p. 126.

[3] M. D. George, London Life in the 18th Century (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 411.

[4] E. Halévy, A History of the English People in 1815 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1924), p. 350.

up by the crown, and opened for settlement, the Church had failed to create a parish there. As a result the miners were without any sort of spiritual guidance. It was to fill that void that Whitefield started his field-preaching there. Feeling that he must move on to other fields Whitefield invited Wesley to succeed him at Kingswood, Wesley finally deciding to do so after much inner torment.[1] For the next few years London and Bristol, including Kingswood, were the centers of Wesley's major activities, with much of his attention being given to the organization of societies in and around those cities.[2]

It has frequently been noted that Wesley was an extremely able organizer and administrator, but considerably less attention has been given to his ability to speak to the poor in language they could understand. Without this aptitude there would have been nothing to organize, and there is reason to believe that had Wesley been without it he would not have lived beyond the first year or two of his itinerant career.[3] His desire for "plain truth for plain people," and his set purpose of abstaining from "all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasonings"[4] made it possible for him to appeal to

---

[1] He delayed his decision for about a month because he "could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields. ...having been all my life so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." Wesley, Journal, II, 167.

[2] Ibid., 172-498.

[3] Ibid., III, 98-100, has a striking example of his ability to handle people even when they were part of mobs formed for the express purpose of disposing of him.

[4] See p. 79.

the poor in a way that the great majority of the clergy found to be impossible. Even so stout an Anglican as Johnson admitted this defect in the Anglican ministry. He observed that in England

> The established clergy in general did not preach plain enough; and that polished periods and glittering sentences flew over the heads of the common people, without any impression on their hearts. Something might be necessary to excite the affections of the common people, who were sunk in languor and lethargy, and therefore he supposed that the new concomitants of Methodism might probably produce so desirable an effect.[1]

The success of the Methodists, following Wesley's advice to use plain words, in getting their simple messages of justification, new birth, and Christian perfection across to their hearers was shown not only by the large numbers of people who attended their meetings but also by the stated preference of those who heard them for the simple sermon. One of Bishop Hurd's members, a man who had been at church regularly and attentively, was no longer there. Upon being asked why he replied, "I went the other day to hear the Methodists, and I understand their plain words so much better, that I have gone there ever since."[2] It was with this type of preaching that Wesley appealed to those who were not being reached by the Church, including both those who attended services and could not understand the sermons and those who lived in areas which had not been provided with sufficient churches. The tremendous reaction to Wesley's preaching continued to draw the charge that he was not following the doctrines of the Church of England, and it was necessary for him to reiterate constantly his devotion to the Church and her beliefs. One of

---

[1] Turberville, Johnson's England, I, 35.

[2] Abbey, English Church and Its Bishops, I, 392.

the clearest statements made by Wesley in his attempts to convince others that he was preaching the true Anglican beliefs was the result of a question from a clergyman whom he greatly admired.

> A serious clergyman desired to know in what points we differed from the Church of England. I answered, 'To the best of my knowledge, in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the Church, clearly laid down, both in her Prayers, Articles, and Homilies.'
>
> He asked, 'In what points, then, do you differ from the other clergy of the Church of England?' I answered, 'In none from that part of the clergy who adhere to the doctrines of the Church....'[1]

Wesley's attitude toward deism and rational orthodoxy was consistent, as was also his attitude toward the dissenting groups. He had no love for those who deliberately forsook the Church of England, and said some rather harsh things about them. The objects of his attacks were the Baptists, whom he consistently called the Anabaptists, the Presbyterians, and the Independents. His hostility toward them was obvious, and they returned his dislike with interest.

> Most of the Dissenters of the old type were somewhat suspicious of Wesley, and he of them....they had become infected with the spirit of the age and shared the general mistrust of enthusiasm. Wesley was an Anglican clergyman, and to the very end repudiated connections with the Dissenters as such. He was an Arminian; most of them were Calvinists of one sort or another. He was a Tory; most of them were Whigs....Occasionally, a Nonconformist minister would open his meeting-house for Wesley to preach in, but it did not happen often, and in the main the term "Methodist" was one of abuse on the lips of the Dissenters.[2]

The differences between Wesley's teachings and those of the Dissenters were emphasized in his Reasons Against a Separation from the Church

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, II, 274-5.

[2] E. A. Payne, The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1951), p. 96.

of England, in which he warned his preachers against them in very outspoken language:

> Either the Teachers are "new light" men, denying the Lord that brought them, and overturning his Gospel from the foundations; or they are Predestinarians, and so preach predestination and final perserverance, more or less....repeated experience shows it is not wholesome food; rather it has the effect of a deadly poison.[1]

Both John and Charles Wesley make reference in their writings to attacks incited by the dissenters, and of rumors started by them which were intended to embarrass the Methodists.[2]

The disapproval of Wesley's teachings by the dissenters meant that every major religious group in England was opposed to him, and, with the exception of the Church of England, he was opposed to them. It seems likely that had Convocation not been suspended and the Church had been able to take some common action against him some sort of disciplinary action would have been taken. In spite of the fact that Wesley felt that his teachings were provided for in the Articles, Homilies, and Prayers of the Church they were such that they were sure to arouse resentment among the great majority of the clergy, particularly when he declared that he would not recognize parish boundaries. The only solution found by the priests and bishops acting individually was to exclude the enthusiast from their churches, with the result that he was

---

[1] Wesley, Works, X, 92. The predestinarianism of Calvinism was rejected by Wesley because it made God "a monster of injustice and led most obviously to Anti-nomianism; for if the elect must be saved, do what they will, it is clear that good works are quite unnecessary, and self-denial an absurdity." Wesley, Sermons, II, 285.

[2] D. Coomer, English Dissent Under the Early Hanoverians (London: Epworth Press, 1946), p. 117, and Wesley, Journal, II, 487; III, 70.

virtually driven into the highways to preach. The opportunity thus presented him to take his plain message of justification, new birth, and Christian perfection to a much wider audience than that of a parish priest, though taken with some hesitation by Wesley, ultimately led to a transformation in the lives of many in the lower classes in England.

The doctrine of Christian perfection, which Wesley thought to be the most important of his teachings, was the major reason for the changes which were apparent to Wesley in the lives of those to whom he preached. It was actually attainable in some degree by everyone, and Wesley never tired of telling his congregations what it was possible for them to accomplish with the grace of God. They were, he told them repeatedly, unspeakably bad, and could do nothing without the gift of grace, which was entirely the gift of God, but if they were justified through faith and reborn they would have the grace necessary to live as a Christian should. They would then be able, by basing their actions on Scripture, reason, and experience, and by taking an active part in the observances of the Church, to <u>live</u> a religion which was a real moral and practical force. Perfection, or the attempt to attain it, was not a restrictive doctrine, since it did not exclude those who were educationally or physically deficient. Those, for example, who were afflicted with "weakness or slowness of understanding, dullness or confusedness of apprehension, incoherence of thought, want of a ready or retentive memory"[1] were just as able to live a holy life as those who were more alert mentally.

---

[1] Wesley, <u>Sermons</u>, II, 155.

The test of whether or not a person was in the process of attaining perfection was his attitude toward others. He must show his love for God by following His laws, and by demonstrating his love for his fellow-man. The doctrine of Christian perfection made mandatory a strong social consciousness on the part of the Methodists which was constantly emphasized in the social and economic teachings of John Wesley - teachings which were designed to make his concept of Christian perfection a force for social good.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

The practical, experiential nature of Wesley's theology is clearly evident when one examines its social and economic implications. Salvation was, of course, the ultimate goal of every Methodist, but this did not obviate the necessity for living in full Christian love for God and man while on this earth. This love implied, for Wesley, a never-ceasing effort to aid one's fellow man. The story of Wesley and his followers in the eighteenth century is a record of vigorous action taken to make his Christian imperative a vital force among the poor.

Many of the social and economic problems of the poor were known to Wesley from his childhood. There had seldom been enough money in Epworth rectory, the shortage being so acute at one time that his father was thrown into prison for debt.[1] It seems likely that much of his later concern for the welfare of the poor had its origin in the economic difficulties encountered by his parents. There is no indication, however, of any active consideration for the less fortunate until after his graduation from Oxford, and his warning from an old friend of the family that Christianity was a social religion.[2]

---

[1] See p. 18.

[2] See p. 37.

The social consciousness of John Wesley had its beginnings in the activities of the Holy Club at Oxford. As we have seen,[1] he was at that time more concerned with personal salvation and fulfillment of the whole law of God than with the well-being of his fellow-man, but he was conscientiously seeking the answers to his religious problems. Those answers were to involve a deep sense of responsibility toward all men. At this time, however, he had only a vague feeling that something should be done for them. Considerable religious and social growth was evident only four years later in his sermon on the Circumcision of the Heart, which was so highly regarded by him that in a letter written in 1765 he said that it "contains all that I now teach concerning salvation from all sin and loving God with an undivided heart."[2] The most striking thing about the sermon was that it emphasized humility, which was given more importance than faith, hope, and love,[3] but there were indications that Wesley was gradually becoming aware of the social implications of religion. He spoke of the necessity for loving one's fellow-man,[4] yet there can be no doubt that he was as yet unprepared to take active steps to put his theology fully into practice. Wesley did not realize just what the social and economic implications of his doctrine of Christian

---

[1] See note, p. 37 and pp. 44-5.

[2] Wesley, Letters, IV, 229.

[3] Wesley, Sermons, I, 265. The influence of Jeremy Taylor and William Law was particularly strong from 1726 to 1738. This sermon was first preached in 1733.

[4] Ibid., 273.

perfection were until 1741, when it had reached its completed form. From that time on he was a powerful force in the improvement of social conditions which took place in the latter half of the eighteenth, and the early part of the nineteenth centuries.

John Wesley's efforts in behalf of the common man were based almost exclusively upon the idea of changing the individual. This does not mean to imply that he had no confidence in any sort of group action, for we find that he placed great reliance upon the Church of England as a force for good. He also had a great deal of confidence in the ability of the schools and prisons to serve as mediums through which desirable reforms might be accomplished. The major emphasis was placed upon changing the individual, however, and comparatively little was given to group action. The idea of using the authority of the government to initiate social reforms seems to have occurred to him only once, when he made an appeal for laws to relieve social and economic distress, but even then he seems to have had little hope that any action would be forthcoming.[1] He believed that England was too irreligious to expect any improvement until there was a religious revival - a revival that would "spread from heart to heart, from house to house, from town to town, from one kingdom to another."[2] As this religious feeling spread it would carry with it the perfect love for God and man - Christian perfection - which Wesley believed to be "the medicine of life, the never-failing remedy, for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries

---

[1] See p. 161.

[2] Wesley, Works, VI, 286.

and vices of man."[1] The responsibility for carrying out the Wesleyan ideal lay with the individual Methodist, who must not only impose a disciplined inner and outer life upon himself, but must also do his part in helping to create a Christian society.

The ministry of the eighteenth century Methodists was consciously directed toward the poor people of England. In spite of the fact that there were a few of the rich and noble for whom Wesley had some religious appeal it was his personal preference to preach to the poor,[2] since "in most genteel religious people there is so strange a mixture that I seldom have much confidence in them. I love the poor; in many of them I find pure, genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly, and affectation."[3]

In choosing to preach to the poor Wesley assumed a tremendous task. Many writers have described the social, economic, and religious conditions of the eighteenth century, and all agree that too little attention was being given to the poor, especially those in the rapidly-growing cities.[4] Wesley's work among the urban proletariat was intensive and effective; Wearmouth, among others, showing that the greatest growth in Methodism occurred in the areas where there was the greatest increase

---

[1] Ibid., VIII, 187.

[2] Wesley, Journal, IV, 358.

[3] Wesley, Letters, III, 229.

[4] See Trevelyan, English Social History, Chaps. XI-XII; Halévy, English People in 1815, pp. 341-423; and J. L. and B. Hammond, The Town Labourer, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925). The last gives an especially dark view of the state of the poor. For extracts from contemporary accounts of conditions see M. D. George, England in Johnson's Day (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928).

in population, and the most intensive industrial activity.[1]

The failure of the Church of England to keep pace with the growing population, and particularly its failure to build new churches in the industrial areas,[2] made the growth of Methodism possible. John Wesley's realization of the spiritual and material needs of the poor, aided by his administrative genius, enabled Methodism to take advantage of the failure of the Church to fulfill its responsibilities.

Wesley's major interest was in saving souls, but it was by no means an all-consuming interest. His awareness of the problems of his time is shown in his written works, in which there are references to the problems of population, growth of urban areas, unemployment, agricultural problems, fisheries, taxation, unequal representation, the national debt, speculation, distribution of wealth, intemperance, luxury, production of useless articles, smuggling, monetary policy, and similar problems.

Awareness of these problems implied the necessity of working toward their solution. The attempts of Wesley and his followers to alleviate the social ills and economic distress of the common people fall rather naturally into three classifications; their humanitarian efforts, their attempts to broaden the opportunities for education, and their economic beliefs and practices.

---

[1] Particularly in such cities as Birmingham, Sheffield, and Liverpool. R. F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century (London: Epworth Press, 1945), pp. 181-3.

[2] Halévy, English People in 1815, pp. 349-50.

The first humanitarian effort of the early Methodists was that of prison visitation. At the insistence of William Morgan, a member of the Holy Club at Oxford, John and Charles Wesley accompanied him on a visit to a prison, a practice which was continued as a regular activity of the group.[1] During the trip to Georgia Wesley was under the influence of Oglethorpe, whose Parliamentary Committee had revealed the terrible conditions in the prisons, and had thereby secured some amelioration of the prisoners' distress. Upon his return to England Wesley resumed his work with prisoners, his efforts being concentrated upon visitation, making public the conditions of the prisons, and working with various prison reform movements.

The importance Wesley placed upon visitation was shown in the rule of the Societies which made "visiting and helping them that are in prison one of the conditions of membership."[2] He personally preached many times in the prisons, a number of his visits being made to condemned prisoners. This practice inspired a poem deriding their activities, which said, in part,

> Next round the gaols they hovering fly,
> To plague the wretches e'er they die,
> And while the children lisp their praise,
> "Bless 'em each good woman says.[3]

Wesley was so shocked by conditions in the prisons that no amount of criticism could have stopped his work there. In his Journal he

---

[1] See p. 38.

[2] Wesley, Works, IV, 346.

[3] M. Edwards, John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1933), p. 150.

recorded his impressions of Marshalsea in London.

> I visited one in the Marshalsea Prison - a nursery of all manner of wickedness. Oh shame to man that there should be such a place, such a picture of hell upon earth....
>
> I found some in their cells under ground, others in their garrets, half starved both with cold and hunger, added to weakness and pain. But I found not one of them unemployed who was able to crawl about the room. So wickedly devilishly false is that common objection, "They are poor only because they are idle."[1]

This view of prison conditions is substantially in agreement with that of most writers on the subject, a modern writer observing, for example, that the lot of the prisoners was so bad that most of them "suffered in dumb misery; only those who were brutish and hardened offenders, or exceptionally stalwart in spirit, could bear up against the prison system of those days."[2]

In a letter to the London Chronicle Wesley made a strong plea for public support of prison reform by showing what one man had accomplished.

> Of all the seats of woe on this side of hell, few, I suppose, exceed or even equal Newgate (in London). If any region of horror could exceed it a few years ago, Newgate in Bristol did; so great was the filth, the stench, the misery, and wickedness, which shocked all who had a spark of humanity left. How was I surprised, then, when I was there a few weeks ago....Will no one follow his [the gaoler's] example?[3]

The gaoler whose example Wesley wanted others to follow was Dagge. He had been converted by Whitefield in 1737, and during the next twenty years completely changed the prison. Wesley preached in the prison chapel with some regularity, giving him an excellent opportunity to

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, IV, 52.

[2] R. D. Mitchell and M. D. R. Leys, A History of the English People (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), p. 563.

[3] Wesley, Journal, IV, 427-8.

observe the changes that were taking place. He found that every part of it was "as clean and sweet as a gentleman's house," there was "no fighting and brawling, no drunkenness or whoredom." The inmates were "provided with tools and materials, partly by the keeper, who gives them credit at a moderate profit, partly by the alms occasionally given." There was no work on Sunday, and all attended "the public service in the chapel," from which "no one might be excused unless sick, in which case he is provided both with proper medicines and advice."[1] The accomplishment of a "reborn" prison-keeper seemed to Wesley to be rather convincing proof of his belief that the way to change society was to change individuals.

Perhaps the most important contribution made by Wesley to the cause of prison reform was his support of John Howard, who is known as the first prison reformer. They first met in 1787, just four years before Wesley's death, with the meeting having a marked effect upon both men. Howard wrote, "I was encouraged by him to go on vigorously with my own designs. I saw in him how much a single man might achieve by zeal and perserverance; and I determined I would pursue my work with more alacrity than ever."[2]

Wesley thought that Howard was "one of the greatest men in Europe,"[3] and gave him his unqualified support, which was reflected wherever the Methodist societies might be found.

---

[1] Ibid., 416.

[2] Tyerman, John Wesley, III, 495.

[3] Wesley, Journal, VII, 295.

The work of such leaders as Howard, Bentham, Romilly, and Wilberforce was to bring about the needed reforms in the prison system. The strict public morality through which the Evangelicals hoped to make criminal law unnecessary was an unattainable dream, but their efforts on behalf of the prisoners helped to pave the way for the later and more successful reformers.[1]

In addition to their work with prisoners Wesley and his followers took direct measures to aid the poor. In this they were in accord with their century, which was "strong in men of character and genius, and weak in institutions and machinery. In such a society it would be natural to expect abuses and suffering, and to expect also a demand for remedies, and efforts to awaken public indignation."[2] The weakness in machinery was shown by the inability of the parishes, of which there were about 15,000, to cope with the problems of their poor, sick, children, old people, vagrants, and idlers, responsibilities which had formerly been borne by the central government. This decentralized administration led to wide variation in practice, and many abuses. The lack of qualified personnel was an especially serious handicap. The breakdown at the parish level brought about demands for reform in which Wesley and his followers took an active part.[3]

John Wesley, in spite of his recognized genius for organization, failed to set up any group for the specific purpose of taking care of

---

[1] Halévy, English People in 1815, p. 397.

[2] Turberville, Johnson's England, I, 328.

[3] Ibid., 301-2.

the sick and poor.[1] He believed that it should be an individual effort, with only those who felt compelled to do so taking part. The motivating spirit and methods Wesley thought desirable he indicated in his Journal:

> I reminded the United Society that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business; many sick and ready to perish; that I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick; but was not, alone sufficient for these things, and therefore desired all whose hearts were as my heart:
>
> 1. To bring what clothes each could spare, to be distributed among those that wanted most.
>
> 2. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick.[2]

These measures were well-adapted to bring temporary relief, but something more was needed if any permanent improvement were to be brought about. The only specific remedy of a permanent sort proposed by Wesley was his plan "to employ all the women who are out of business, and desire it, in knitting. To these we will first give the common price for what work they do; and then add, according as they need. Twelve persons are appointed to inspect these, and to visit and provide things needful for the sick."[3] The failure of this plan seems to have convinced Wesley

---

[1] Actually all members of the United Societies were to do anything they could to relieve distress. Wesley advised the Methodists to "see that your heart be filled at all times and on all occasions with real, undissembled benevolence, not to those only who love you, but to every soul of man....And let all men know, that you desire both their temporal and eternal happiness as sincerely as you do your own." Wesley, Works, VII, 168.

[2] Wesley, Journal, II, 453-4. Underlining mine.

[3] Ibid., 454.

that until such time as there were more real Christians in England the solution to economic distress was to meet it by temporary expedients of one sort or another, and it was this method that he followed for the rest of his life.

In 1740 he took up three collections for the poor in Bristol, "by which we were enabled to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty a day."[1] Wesley met a severe economic crisis among the poor of London in 1772 by "writing vigorously to the public press, calling his people to prayer, and by encouraging them to organize schemes of visitation and relief."[2]

In 1785 Wesley gave his approval and enthusiastic support to the Stranger's Friend Society, a small group organized by Methodist laymen to help the poor, sick, friendless strangers in London. The group spread rapidly, and the reaction to it was very favorable, one contemporary writer observing that

> The principles upon which it rests are liberal in the extreme, and reflect the greatest honour on the sect. It includes the wretched of every religious persuasion except their own, who are relieved from another fund. The only recommendation is distress.[3]

Shortly after his active ministry began Wesley started what he called a lending-stock, which was a small sum of money raised by popular subscription to be used for making loans to the poor. Any person could borrow from one to five pounds upon the recommendation of a class leader,

---

[1] Ibid., 333.

[2] Ibid., V, 495n.

[3] Edwards, John Wesley, pp. 153-4. This society is still in existence. Townsend, et al., Methodism, I, 310.

the principal to be repaid within three months. Loans were made to over two hundred and fifty persons in one year.[1] About eighteen months later another collection was made, to which even a Deist contributed![2]

One of the most far-reaching and permanent of Wesley's humanitarian efforts was his aid to the sick. Many hospitals had been built in the early eighteenth century, in keeping with the philanthropic spirit of the time, but they were not effective in aiding those who were most in need of their services.

> All hospitals were free at first to any applicant who was ill, provided that he had obtained a letter of recommendation from a Governor or subscriber....In process of time a vexatious system of red-tape and fees grew up which made it almost impossible for a really poor applicant to gain admission....If he had no letter (which was next to impossible to get) he had to deposit a sum for burial fees, returnable, of course, were he fortunate enough to recover.[3]

Wesley and his followers, thoroughly familiar with the conditions under which the sick poor were living, made systematic efforts to relieve their distress. In addition to the collections taken up in the societies personal visits were made to those in need. The visitors were to see every sick person within their districts three times a week; to ask about the state of their souls; to ask about their illnesses and to get medicine and advice for them; to do anything else they could do for them.

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, III, 246.

[2] Ibid., 329.

[3] Turberville, Johnson's England, II, 283. "These (hospitals) were not municipal undertakings - municipal life was then at its lowest ebb; they were the outcome of individual initiative and of coordinated voluntary effort and subscription." Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 345.

There were four rules to be followed by the visitors in their dealings with the sick: "1. Be plain and open in dealing with souls. 2. Be mild, tender, patient. 3. Be cleanly in all you do for the sick. 4. Be not nice (fastidious)."[1]

The visitors were further instructed to teach the people "decency and cleanliness, tell them cleanliness is next to godliness."[2] The radical nature of this teaching in the eighteenth century is readily apparent when it is noted that personal cleanliness was virtually unknown among the poor, and that not even the hospitals were properly equipped to keep the patients clean.

In 1746 Wesley started a free dispensary for the poor in London which is thought to have been the first established in the city.[3] With the professional aid of a surgeon and an apothecary medicines and advice were given to the poor, with more than five hundred people receiving treatment in its first five months of operation.[4] It soon became apparent that the dispensary was not able to meet the problem of helping all those who were in need, however, so in 1747 Wesley wrote and published the Primitive Physick; or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases. The intentions of Wesley in writing the book were highly commendable; the wisdom was questionable. One doctor took eighty-three pages to tell

---

[1] Wesley, Works, IV, 340.

[2] Ibid., 382.

[3] Simon, Methodist Societies, p. 336.

[4] Wesley, Works, IV, 341.

what was wrong with it, depicting Wesley as a dangerous quack. Wesley, whose interest in medicine had been one of his diversions since his Oxford days, felt that he was doing a real service for the people. His answer to his critic was brief:

> My bookseller informs me that since you published your remarks on the Primitive Physick....there has been a greater demand for it than ever. If, therefore, you would please to publish a few farther remarks, you would confer a farther favour upon your humble servant.[1]

Looking at the book now one is convinced that Wesley must indeed have been held in high regard by his followers, since the remedies he proposed could not in themselves have brought about the cures he claimed for them. Pounded garlic applied to the soles of the feet was the perfect remedy for hoarseness and loss of voice, for example.[2] The major significance of the work does not lie in the specific remedies suggested, however, but rather in its emphasis upon healthful living. Wesley believed in "fresh air and plain food, in eight hours rest, and in daily exercise," and strongly emphasized the importance of a "contented spirit" to good health.[3] The Primitive Physick was in its twenty-third edition at the time of his death.

As a result of reading Benjamin Franklin's Experiments and Observations on Electricity Wesley's interest in electricity and its possibilities

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, VI, 225-6.

[2] J. Wesley, Primitive Physick (Boston: Cyrus Stone, 1858), p. 81.

[3] Ibid., pp. VI-VII.

was increased,[1] and he became convinced that it could be used to advantage in helping the sick.[2] He then

> ....procured an (electrical) apparatus on purpose, and ordered several persons to be electrified, who were ill of various disorders; some of whom found an immediate, some a gradual, cure.... and to this day, while hundreds, perhaps thousands, have received unspeakable good,[3] I have not known one man, woman, or child, who has received any hurt thereby.[4]

The cure worked, and it hurt no one. For Wesley that was enough. Those who opposed its use were guilty of a "great want either of sense or honesty."[5] It is interesting to note that the same test was applied to all answers to problems with which Wesley came in contact - does it work? Does experience prove what you say or believe to be true? If so, use it. If not, readjust your thinking.

Abolition of slavery was another of the reform movements in which John Wesley took great interest. His first experience with slaves came during the trip to Georgia, and his first reaction was not one of dismay at their status and condition, but of interest in finding some way to convert them.[6] There was no change in his attitude toward the problem

---

[1] He had seen a demonstration six years earlier. Wesley, Journal, III, 320. Wesley's reaction to Franklin's discovery was, "What an amazing scene is here opened for after-ages to improve upon." In the year after its publication he read Priestley's work on electricity. Ibid., V, 247.

[2] Ibid., IV, 53-4.

[3] Wesley claimed cures for such assorted ailments as angina pectoris, paralysis, and epilepsy through the use of electricity. Ibid., 51; V, 83; VI, 16.

[4] Ibid., IV, 190-1.

[5] Ibid.

[6] One of the purposes for which the colonizing group had been organized was that of converting the Negro slaves in the area. Ibid., I, 352.

until 1772, when he read a book written by Anthony Benezet, an "honest Quaker, on that execrable sum of all villanies, commonly called the Slave-trade." Wesley had "read of nothing like it in the heathen world, whether ancient or modern,"[1] and resolved to do what he could to remove it from a Christian nation.

The first step in Wesley's campaign against slavery was the publication of his pamphlet, Thoughts Upon Slavery, in which he attacked it upon religious, moral, and economic grounds. It was a plea to those engaged in the slave trade - captains, traders, and planters - to stop their traffic in human lives. The approach was characteristic of Wesley in that it was an attempt to change individuals, and thus to bring about a desired change in society.

Wesley hoped to gain sympathy for the slaves by painting an idyllic picture of their natural condition. They lived in a

> ....perfect image of pure nature; an agreeable solitude, bounded on every side by a charming landscape; the rural situation of cottages in the midst of trees; the ease and quietness of the Negroes, reclined under the shade of the spreading foliage, with the simplicity of their dress and manner....These Negroes were a reasonable, peaceable people, civil and courteous, practicing justice, mercy, and truth.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., V, 445-6. This was the year in which Lord Mansfield ruled that a slave setting foot on English soil became a free man, "and it marked a definite step toward the abolition of slavery," even though there were at the time more than 14,000 Negroes in England whose position was somewhat anomalous. Blackstone pointed out in his Commentaries that even though a slave became a freeman in that he fell under the protection of the law as soon as he landed in England, "the master's right to his service may possibly still continue." Their status was not clarified until well after Wesley's death. Mitchell and Leys, English People, pp. 525-6.

[2] Wesley, Works, X, 492. Wesley's lack of accurate information concerning the life of the Negro in Africa was as great as that concerning the American Indian.

From this paradise the slaves were taken by force, transported under almost unspeakable conditions to slave markets, and sold to inhumane masters who treated them with great cruelty. There was no justification for this treatment of any human being, since

> Liberty is the right of every human creature as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature. If, therefore, you have any regard to justice (to say nothing of mercy, nor the revealed law of God), render unto all their due. Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature.[1]

Wesley had little sympathy for those who argued in favor of slavery on the basis that it was indispensable to the cultivation of land in hot areas. He believed that white men were perfectly capable of working there, provided they were temperate in both food and drink, and that they took time to become acclimated before attempting hard work. From his experience in Georgia he had learned that not only could white men do hard work under very unfavorable conditions, but that those who worked were in better condition to ward off disease than those who did not.[2]

Having committed himself to do battle with slavery Wesley used every means at his command. He sent the Thoughts Upon Slavery to every Methodist Society in England, preached sermons against it, wrote articles for magazines, sent letters to editors, and encouraged those who were similarly engaged. Wilberforce was so impressed with the zeal of the Methodists that he enlisted their active support by sending anti-slavery

---

[1] Ibid., 504.

[2] Ibid., 500.

literature to all their preachers.[1]

The relationship of Wesley's efforts in behalf of abolition to the eventual success of the movement is impossible to show. There is no doubt that the Methodists played an important part, individually and collectively, in rousing public opinion to active opposition to slavery. In 1791 they secured 229,426 signatures to an anti-slavery petition, while the other nonconforming groups secured only 122,978.[2] The pressure of public opinion became so great that Castlereagh wrote in 1814, "The nation is bent upon this object. I believe there is hardly a village that has not met and petitioned upon it: both Houses of Parliament are pledged to press it: and the ministers must make it the basis of their policy."[3]

This public opinion, a new power in English life, was the result of the total humanitarian activity of the century. Evangelicals, Dissenters, Wesleyans, free-thinkers, Unitarians - all worked together to bring the reform about. The spirit of the movement is shown in Bentham's remark, "If to be an anti-slavist is to be a Saint [Anglican Evangelical], saintship for me."[4] Wesley's major role was that of educator of the poor, a field in which he had no rival.

---

[1] W. J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 243.

[2] E. D. Bebb, Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life, 1660-1800 (London: Epworth Press, 1935), p. 160.

[3] Halévy, English People in 1815, pp. 400-1.

[4] Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 495.

An English historian has rightly said that, "The Methodists themselves were the least result of the Methodist revival. The noblest result was the steady attempt to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, the social degradation of the profligate and poor."[1] Wesley's failure to set up an organization of some kind to carry out his aims of relieving the distress of the sick and poor made any permanent achievement impossible. The major result of what Green calls their "steady attempt" to carry out Wesley's social teachings was that they played an important part in the total effort of the eighteenth century to bring about social reforms.

As we have seen, Wesley was convinced that every man had the right to liberty, but that basic right could not be fully realized unless man was made aware of its implications. Liberty meant something more than freedom from slavery. It meant also freedom from servitude to any human weakness, and as complete freedom as possible from poverty or illness. His primary purpose of saving souls could not be realized among the poor unless he improved the conditions under which they were living. The humanitarian activities of Wesley and his followers were an outgrowth of his doctrine of Christian perfection - his belief in the possibility in the ultimate perfectibility of all men - but this perfection was impossible as long as men were subject to <u>any</u> human weakness. Man's thoughts must be turned toward God, and kept there by constant attention to the things of God, such as attending the services of the Church of

---

[1] J. R. Green, <u>A Short History of the English People</u> (New York: American Book Co., 1916), p. 740.

England and the meetings of the Methodist Societies, helping the poor and sick, visiting the prisons, and other humanitarian activities. But even though the Christian did all these things he was not safe from temptation. Wesley was fearful that some of his newly-converted Christians might backslide unless some new avenues of interest were opened to them. He wrote in regard to those who had given up their former vices and were trying to follow his concept of a religious life, "If you take away the rattles from a child, he will be angry. But give him something better first, and he will throw away the rattles of himself."[1] The something better Wesley offered his followers was not only knowledge of God, but knowledge of all kinds, secular as well as sacred. His attempts to impart this knowledge we have chosen to discuss under the general topic of education.

Education was a broad term for John Wesley, embracing not only his efforts to assure children a proper formal education by founding schools, but also his somewhat informal attempts to influence people through his publications. Some appreciation of the prodigious amount of time spent by Wesley in his attempts to educate his followers through his writings may be gained by looking at some statistics.

> John Wesley was personally responsible for three hundred and seventy-one separate publications. When it is recalled that one of these, The Christian Library, filled fifty volumes, that another, The Arminian Magazine, went through more than one hundred and fifty numbers while he was editor, and that it was a common occurrence for his separate books to run into upwards of a dozen editions each,

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, VIII, 12.

one begins to realize what an enormous amount of printed matter he caused to be disseminated among English-speaking peoples.[1]

In all his writing Wesley was careful to see that he did not get above the mental level of his prospective readers. His remarks on the style of writing he used, - a style which drew the praise of as severe a critic as Leslie Stephen[2] - are valuable in that they give his reasons for writing as he did.

> What is it that constitutes a good style? Perspecuity, purity, propriety, strength, and easiness joined togather....Clearness, in particular, is necessary for you and me, because we are to instruct people of the lowest understanding. We should constantly use the most common, little, easy words which our language affords. When I had been a member of the University about ten years, I wrote and talked much as you do not. But when I talked to plain people in the castle or town I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style, and adopt the language of those I spoke to.[3]

In his self-appointed task of educating the poor Wesley spent much of his time, as would be expected, writing and editing religious works. He knew that the effects of his sermons would soon be lost if steps were not taken to keep them alive. The two principal means to this end were the organization of societies, and the encouragement of continual reading. The major problem in regard to the reading was how to get the books to the people at a price they could afford to pay. One of Wesley's solutions

---

[1] T. W. Herbert, John Wesley as Editor and Author (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 121.

[2] "He shows remarkable literary power; but we feel that his writings are means to a direct practical end, rather than valuable in themselves. ...He goes straight to the mark without one superfluous flourish. The compression gives emphasis and never causes confusion." Stephen, English Thought, II, 409. Wesley's writings were a means to a direct practical end, the education of people of the lower classes.

[3] Overton, John Wesley, p. 178.

was to publish cheap abridgements of what he considered to be the best books on practical divinity. The Christian Library, his major effort to carry out this plan, was an attempt "to extract such a collection of divinity as was all true; all agreeable to the oracles of God; all practical, unmixed with controversy; and all intelligble to plain men."[1] Written primarily for his preachers, who were expected to pass on the knowledge to their listeners, the work proved to be a financial failure.

To support his belief that the "Author of our nature designed that we should not destroy but regulate our desire for knowledge,"[2] Wesley made available books in many fields of knowledge beside divinity. He had, from his Oxford days, made a habit of reading whenever the opportunity presented itself. The works he published were the result of this extensive reading. Included were such varied works as novels, grammars, a natural philosophy text, an anthology of poetry, a religious history, commentaries on the Bible, a dictionary, books on medicine, a book on logic, histories of England, and political pamphlets.[3]

The most important medium through which Wesley influenced his people was the Arminian Magazine. Although its primary emphasis was upon religion, with much attention being given to sermons, accounts of religious experiences of his followers as told in their letters to him, articles on predestination, and religious poetry, there were other features of

---

[1] Wesley, Works, VII, 525.

[2] Wesley, Letters, VII, 81.

[3] A complete list of Wesley's publications is given in R. Green, The Works of John and Charles Wesley (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1906).

a somewhat more secular nature. Among these were articles on leading writers of the period, such as Butler, Montesquieu, Buffon, and Priestley.[1]

We have seen that Wesley was more interested in breadth of knowledge than in its depth while at Oxford, and this variety of interests served him well in his attempts to educate the ignorant. Through his work many people were given at least a speaking acquaintance with authors they would not otherwise have known. Even a cursory inspection of a representative list of authors whose works were abridged by Wesley is enough to convince one of his cosmopolitan taste.[2]

The problems which confront most authors, that is, those that plague them after their books are written, were non-existent for Wesley. He was his own publisher, and he had a ready-made market for his books, once he had created the desire for reading. In order to make sure that his books were effectively distributed he sent them with his preachers, whose saddle-bags always were to be filled with books and pamphlets for sale.[3]

Each society was expected to have a complete library of Wesley's works. The Conference of 1763 noted that "the societies are not half supplied with books; not even with Kempis, Instructions for Children, and Primitive Physick, which ought to be in every house." The societies had not even supplied the Christian Library, "for want of which some

---

[1] J. Wesley, The Arminian Magazine, Vol. IV, 1781.

[2] See Appendix A for a list of representative works, with the sources from which they were drawn.

[3] Wesley, Works, IV, 382.

still read trash."[1] The preachers were to "beg money of the rich to buy books for the poor," and collections were to be made through popular subscription to buy books for general use.[2] The success of these efforts in creating a demand for what Wesley thought to be the right kind of reading was so marked that Lackington[3] reported, "there are thousands in this society (Methodist) who will never read anything besides the Bible, and the books published by Mr. Wesley."[4] The editor of the Journal seems justified in calling Wesley "the best gatherer and scatterer of useful knowledge that Georgian England knew."[5]

When we turn to Wesley's attempts to change individuals through his formal system of education we find the same primary emphasis upon salvation, with a large admixture of secular knowledge. Until the end of his life John Wesley believed in, and insisted upon following the religious emphasis and methodology of education that his mother had utilized so successfully in training her children.[6] There were some

---

[1] The trash referred to was a flood of cheap paper-backed books which appeared in the latter half of the eighteenth century. J. R. Whiteley, Wesley's England (London: Epworth Press, 1938), pp. 283-5.

[2] Wesley, Works, IV, 382.

[3] A famous bookseller in London who got his business started through a loan from a fund established by Wesley.

[4] Warner, Wesleyan Movement, pp. 231-2.

[5] Wesley, Journal, I, 21.

[6] See pp. 9-10. Perhaps the absence of speculative philosophy in John Wesley's thought is partially explained by his mother's belief that "The speculations of philosophy are barren compared with the experimental knowledge of God through faith, yet reason is not to be denied its proper place in religion, for the understanding is the highest and most noble

modifications of his mother's ideas, but they were due very largely to the added complexities of trying to teach children of varying backgrounds in rather large groups. Wesley was not dealing with unusually gifted children in an isolated rectory, but with children of the lowest economic level, who were well acquainted with most of the devices of the devil. His problem was to lead them to salvation, and to give them a useful education.

John Wesley made no original contribution to educational theory.[1] In education, as in theology, he took what was useful from the ideas and practices of others and adapted them to his own purposes.[2] He read from such authors as Comenius, Locke, Milton, and Rousseau, made visits to educational institutions to see how different systems of education worked out in actual practice, and talked with those responsible for their operation. As a result of his reading, observation, and discussion Wesley hoped to devise an educational program which would suit his particular needs.

The Holy Club at Oxford led Wesley to take his first interest in education, just as it had been responsible for his interest in other

---

power or faculty of the human soul." Wesley's experience had confirmed this necessity for both faith and reason. J. W. Prince, Wesley on Religious Education, (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1936), p. 106.

[1] Wesley had the same impatience with theory as Johnson, who said, "Sir, while you are considering which of two things you should teach your child first, another boy has learnt them both." Turberville, Johnson's England, II, 209.

[2] One writer claims for him three contributions to educational theory, but then shows an amazing similarity to Comenius in two of them. Townsend, et al., Methodism, I, 218.

social problems. During the period from 1729 to 1734 he established a school, "paid the mistress, and clothed some, if not all the children."[1] In addition to the work of the school the Wesleys and other Holy Club members, when they went to see a poor family, "inquired how each child behaved, saw their work, heard them read, heard them their prayers or their catechism, and explained part of it. In the same manner they taught the children in the workhouse, and read to the old people as they did to the prisoners."[2]

The trip to Georgia gave Wesley and his friends an opportunity to continue their work with children in a place that had even more need for their services than Oxford. They were equal to the occasion, Wesley describing their efforts in a letter to Dr. Bray, who had helped them by sending some books.

> Our general method is this: A young gentleman, who came with me, teaches between thirty and forty children to read, write, and cast accounts. Before school in the morning, and after school in the afternoon, he catechizes the lower class,...In the evening he instructs the larger children. On Saturday, in the afternoon, I catechize them all. The same I do on Sunday before the evening service.[3]

Perhaps the greatest influence on Wesley's educational thinking, aside from that of his mother, was that of the Moravians. His Journal records in considerable detail the courses of study and the daily schedule followed in the Moravian school at Herrnhut. We shall quote from it at length because of its great importance to Wesley's educational planning.

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, VIII, 267.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Wesley, Letters, I, 214.

> In Herrnhut is taught reading, writing, arithmetic, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, English, History, and Geography....
>
> In the Orphan House the larger children rise at five. (The smaller between five and six.) After a little private prayer they work till seven. Then they are at school till eight, the hour of prayer; at nine, those who are capable of it learn Latin; at ten, French; at eleven, they all walk; at twelve, they dine all together, and walk till one; at one, they work or learn writing; at three, arithmetic; at four, history; at five, they work; at six, sup and work; at seven, after a time spent in prayer, walk; at eight the smaller children go to bed, the larger to the public service. When this is ended, they work again till at ten they go to bed.[1]

It seems incredible that there would have been no word of protest from Wesley against this strict regimentation of the young, but instead we find the same emphasis upon keeping the children busy from very early morning until very late in the evening in Wesley's schools. This was true of the school started by Wesley in London, even though it was just a day school with no provision for boarders.

The London school was established by Wesley with a view toward correcting some of the worst abuses of the contemporary schools. The trouble with those who went to English elementary schools, regardless of whether they were charity schools, public schools, or private schools, was that they "learned at least to read and write," but at the same time they "learned all kinds of vice; so that it had been better for them to have been without this knowledge, than to have bought it at so dear a price."[2] Very rigid rules were drawn up by Wesley in an effort to counteract the evil influences to which the children were normally subjected.

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, II, 50-1.

[2] Wesley, Works, IV, 342.

His pupils were to gain admission to the school only if the parents were willing to subscribe to these rules:

1. No child admitted under six years of age.
2. All the children are to be present at the morning sermon.
3. They are at school from six to twelve, and from one to five.
4. They have no playdays.
5. No child is to speak in school, but to the masters.
6. The child who misses two days in one week without leave, is excluded the school.[1]

This plan of Wesley's was very similar in both purpose and concept to the Charity School movement which was so strong in England in the early eighteenth century. Henry Newman, Secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, wrote in 1713 that "Tho' the method of Charity Schools has been of but about 15 or 16 years standing it has pleased God so wonderfully to prosper the design that above 1000 schools have been erected in that time at which above 20 thousand poor children are now instructed."[2] The Society published accounts of the Charity Schools, in which their purposes and plans were clearly set forth. The schools were to instruct children in the Christian religion, to keep them from vagrancy, and to prepare them for some sort of work.[3] The qualifications needed by a teacher, as listed by the Society, were patriotism, virtue, and learning, it being "highly reasonable, that those who have such frequent opportunities of instilling what principles they think fit into the minds of young people, should give all possible security to the publick, that they do not entertain any which are contrary to, or

---

[1] Ibid., 343.

[2] Lowther Clarke, Eighteenth Century Piety, p. 77.

[3] George, London Life, p. 221.

inconsistent with the present Establishment in Church and State."[1] Learning was restricted to reading, writing, and arithmetic, and even these were to be secondary to the major purpose of making the youngsters somewhat better than savages through the inculcation of moral virtues.[2] Wesley's plan to place major emphasis upon religious instruction in his London school was in keeping with the spirit of the Charity School movement.

The most ambitious and successful of the schools founded by Wesley was Kingswood, near Bristol. The school is still in operation, though with a greatly modified curriculum and a more desirable location at Bath. Its rules represent Wesley's mature educational concepts, since they were based not only upon his reading, observation, and discussion, but also upon the results of his own educational experiences. He intended that Kingswood should eliminate what he found to be bad in the schools of his day, including his own school in London. His Plain Account of Kingswood School deals in detail with the deficiencies of the schools of the time, listing them as follows:

> 1. The very most of them were placed in a great town....The children, whenever they went abroad, had too many things to engage their thoughts, which ought to be diverted as little as possible, from the objects of their learning. And they had too many other children round about them, some of whom they were liable to meet every day; whose example would neither forward them in learning, nor Religion....(which) they are not likely either to have, or retain, if they converse promiscuously with the children in a great town.

---

[1] Lowther Clarke, Eighteenth Century Piety, p. 73.

[2] George, London Life, pp. 221-2.

> 2. The promiscuous admission of all sorts of children into a great School, was another circumstance I did not greatly admire
>
> 3. A third inconvenience in many schools is, the Masters have no more Religion than the Scholars. And if they have little or no Religion themselves, we may be well assured, they will give themselves little trouble about the Religion of the children.
>
> 4. They are likewise defective with regard to learning; and that in several respects. In some, the children are taught little or no arithmetic; in others, little care is taken even of their writing....they learn scarce the elements of Geography, and as little of Chronology....
>
> Again. In most Schools little judgment is shown, in the order of the books that are read. Some very difficult ones are read in the lower Classes....And some very easy ones are read long after, in utter defiance of common sense.[1]

The neglect of the basic essentials of education in order to allow more time for the study of classical authors was wrong, for Wesley, and the contemporary schools made matters worse by using the wrong authors. They put into their students' hands books which were not only poor examples linguistically, but which were full of "obscenity and profaneness."[2]

Wesley's severe indictment of the schools led directly to a decision to found his own. Since he could find no "School free from these palpable blemishes, at last a thought came into my mind, of setting up a school myself." Once the decision had been made he went to work on plans for one that would "answer the design of Christian Education, by forming their minds, through the help of God, to wisdom and holiness; by instilling the principles of true Religion, speculative and practical, and

---

[1] Arminian Magazine, Vol. IV, 1781, pp. 382-4.

[2] Ibid., p. 432.

training them up in the ancient way, that they might be rational, scriptural Christians."[1]

The location chosen for the school by Wesley was "quite private, remote from all high roads," thus removing the students from the vices of the city. Applicants for admission were to be carefully screened in order that none would be allowed who might corrupt the others. The number of students was kept small, since children are so apt, "when many of them are together, to hinder and corrupt one another." The advantages gained by having the school in a remote location with a select group of students were not to be lost by having the students leave it for the corrupt world. The parents could not take the child from school, "no, not for a day, till they take him for good and all. The reasonableness of this uncommon rule, is shewn by constant experience. For Children may unlearn as much in one week, as they have learned in several."[2]

The program to be followed by masters and pupils was drawn up in great detail. Provision was made for what was to be done during each hour of the day, from four in the morning until eight at night, at which time all retired.[3] The very early hour at which the day's activities began was

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 432-4.

[2] Ibid., p. 434.

[3] The daily program, except for Sunday, was as follows:

4 A. M.	Rise, reading, singing, meditation, prayer.	11-1	Walk, work, dinner.
		1-5	School
5	All together with their master; till seven they breakfast, walk, work.	5	Prayer
		6	Walk, work, supper.
		8	Bed, youngest first.
7-11	School		

Wesley, Works, VII, 326.

the result of Wesley's belief, gained "by constant observation, and by long experience," that early rising was "of admirable use, either for preserving a good, or improving a bad constitution."[1] Observation of the good health of the Moravians had helped to convince him of the soundness of his belief.[2] Wesley justified the rigorous schedule under which the school operated by quoting an old German proverb, "He that plays when he is a boy, will play when he is a man."[3] He seems to have been so intent upon saving the children's souls that he could not help treating them as little adults. His own experience, as an adult, had shown him that early rising and a spartan diet were conducive to good health, so he made them an important part of his educational program. No time was allowed for play, since sufficient physical exercise could be gained from working in the gardens, chopping wood, or some other worth-while use of leisure time which would produce tangible results.

The curriculum included "Reading, Writing, Arithmetic; English, French; Latin, Greek, Hebrew: History, Geography, Chronology: Rhetoric, Logic, Ethics: Geometry, Algebra, Natural Philosophy, and Metaphysics."[4] Having considerably broadened the scope of education, Wesley had the problem of finding qualified men to serve as masters. They must be men who were "truly devoted to God," and who had "learning sufficient for their several

---

[1] Arminian Magazine, p. 434.

[2] See p. 120.

[3] Arminian Magazine, p. 435.

[4] Ibid., p. 486.

departments."[1] The problem was solved by searching for them on his travels throughout England.

The location of the school, method of selecting students, the rules under which the school would be operated, the curriculum, and the basis for appointment of masters had all been decided. The two major problems remaining for Wesley were those with which most administrators have been concerned: what books are best for teaching what we want our students to know; and what are the best methods to use in teaching?

Wesley solved the problem of what books to use in a very characteristic manner. He wrote those for courses in which no suitable text was available, and edited the works of authors whose writings contained anything objectionable.[2] Many of the books written by Wesley contain suggested methods of instruction for use in that particular course, with the methods being based upon his own observation and experience.

The training of children was for Wesley, under the influence of his mother, to be achieved through both discipline and teaching, with the discipline coming first. "Scripture, reason, and experience jointly testify that, inasmuch as the corruption of nature is earlier than our instructions can be, we should take all pains and care to counteract this corruption as early as possible."[3] The strong discipline upon which

---

[1] Ibid., p. 433.

[2] Among the books written by Wesley were English, French, Latin, and Greek Grammars. For a complete list of the books he made available to the students at Kingswood see Minutes of the Methodist Conferences (London: Conference Office, 1812), I, 63.

[3] Wesley, Works, X, 152. The age bracket for children entering Kingswood was six to twelve. If they were over twelve it was too late to try to change them.

Wesley insisted at Kingswood was his method of counteracting the native corruption of children. In some cases, however, Wesley gave some indication of a deeper understanding of children than his insistence upon a strong discipline might seem to allow. He once advised that disciplinary problems be handled with "mildness, softness, gentleness, advice, persuasion" where possible, and that severe measures should be taken only "after the trial and failure of all other methods." He sounds almost modern in his further advice that when administering punishment one must "take the utmost care to avoid the very appearance of passion, for otherwise your own spirit will suffer loss, and the child will reap little advantage. All punishment must be meted out with kind severity."[1]

When the "native corruption" of the child had been counteracted through discipline his education could begin. The greatest virtue in teaching, next to holiness, was patience, and Wesley never tired of telling his schoolmasters and preachers of its great importance. He had fond memories of his mother's methods of teaching, writing on one occasion that he had heard his father ask his mother, "How could you have the patience to tell that blockhead the same thing, twenty times over?" She answered, "Why, if I had told him but nineteen times I should have lost all my labour."[2] Wesley insisted that the students have a complete understanding of every line they read, telling his teachers to "try them over and over; stop them short, almost in every sentence, and ask them, 'What do you

---

[1] Ibid., VII, 117.

[2] Ibid., IV, 380.

mean by that?' Read it again."[1] The purpose in exercising the patience was not simply to make it possible for the children to repeat what they read, but rather to help them understand it. The teachers were to "beware of that common, but accursed way of making children parrots, instead of Christians. Regard not how much, but how well, or to how good purpose, they read."[2]

The teachers had a further responsibility in their attempts to aid the students' understanding, that of carefully observing "the few ideas which they have already, and endeavour to graft what you say upon them."[3]

Milton, in his Treatise on Education, suggests that every student should begin and end his education at the same place. In the Plain Account of Kingswood School Wesley tells of how he agreed with Milton that it was "absurd and irrational to break education off in the middle,"[4] and to force the student to begin again in a different place under a different method, and that he believed that the best preparation for life would result from the courses and methods in use at Kingswood. His love for Oxford was so strong, however, that he felt that no one should finish his education without spending some time there. The expulsion of six students from Oxford because they were Methodists led him to see that he could not

---

[1] Ibid., VII, 118. His mother's influence may be seen here. The Wesley children were kept in school, "never leaving till perfect in their lessons, were it shorter or longer." Wesley, Journal, III, 37.

[2] Ibid., X, 155.

[3] Ibid., VII, 119.

[4] Arminian Magazine, Vol. IV, 1781, p. 487.

"expect any favour or justice there,"[1] so he determined to take Milton's advice and set up a university program at Kingswood. If Methodists were to be refused the opportunity to gain a university education at established schools he had no alternative but to make some provision for them. The curriculum was comprehensive, and Wesley proudly claimed that those who completed it would have received better training than that available at the old universities.[2]

The bright hopes Wesley had for the future of Kingswood were soon blasted. There are constant references to difficulties at the school in the Journal, and the Conferences were always faced with problems of one sort or another in connection with it. Wesley was almost completely disillusioned about it as late as 1783, forty years after its establishment. The Minutes for that year include a statement by Wesley on conditions at school, in which he said, "The children are not religious: they have not the power, and hardly the form of religion. Neither do they improve in learning better than at other schools: no, nor yet so well." The only reason Wesley could find for the failure of the school to do the things he had expected it to do - to turn out graduates who were both religious and well educated - was that the rules were not being observed. The children were even fighting with the collier's children, with whom they were not supposed to associate, and playing in school. The only solution he proposed was that the school "must be mended or ended: for no school

---

[1] Ibid., p. 488.

[2] Ibid., pp. 488-93. See Appendix B.

is better than the present school."[1] Mending meant, of course, that the school should enforce its original rules.

The Wesleyan concept of formal education was too narrow, too restricted by Wesley's insistence upon salvation for those who were too young to understand or appreciate what he was trying to do. That it would fail to achieve its aims was almost a certainty. That Wesley would fail to understand why it could not succeed was also to be expected. His habit of relying upon experience and observation had led him to place too much dependence upon his own educational background, dominated by the influence of his mother and the example of the Moravians, and to disregard almost completely the philosophies of education which might have helped him. His grasp of the manner in which he must write and speak in order to get his message across to his adult followers was exceptional: his knowledge of the behavior and attitudes of normal children was virtually nonexistent. The success of his mother's system of education, as shown in his own experience, had led him to the conclusion that her methods were the only sure guide for the children he took it upon himself to educate. One of the great tragedies of Wesley's career was that he never learned that the way in which his mother taught some exceptionally gifted children in an isolated rectory in Epworth was not suited to much larger groups of less gifted students.

In his views on economic affairs Wesley reflected much of the attitude of the Church of England, which failed to furnish guidance during the period of economic readjustment because it had none to offer. The Church,

---

[1] Minutes, I, 166.

as such, made no systematic effort to better the lot of the poor. There were many within the Church who played important roles in the various societies organized to help educate and preach to the poor, but the Church failed to furnish the leadership so desperately needed. Faced with a large mass of uneducated men and women who had little beauty in their lives, both the Methodists and the Church failed to provide even the proper religious environment for them. Added to the religious failure was the lack of any attempt to attack the problems of the poor head on. The Church was content to provide for those who were most sorely in need and to disregard the problem of finding a long-range solution. Perhaps the primary reason for the Church's failure was that it had come to be looked upon as "a great system of patronage and property at the disposition of the richer classes," for whom "the sense of possession was stronger than the sense of duty."[1] "The rich," Wesley wrote, "in general have so little sympathy for the poor because they so seldom visit them."[2]

The major difference between Wesley and most of the rest of the clergymen of the Church of England lay in his belief that religion not only could, but must be used to better the lot of the poor. His sermons and writings on economic affairs are actually attempts to put this belief into practice.

The best single source for Wesley's teachings on economic virtues is his sermon The Use of Money, which was first preached in 1744. The

---

[1] J. L. and B. Hammond, The Bleak Age (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), p. 72.

[2] Wesley, Works, VII, 149.

sermon is actually an economic code of ethics reduced to three plain rules, "by the exact observance whereof we may approve ourselves faithful stewards."[1]

> 1. Gain all you can. But....we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor....health.
>
> We are to gain all we can without hurting our mind....we must preserve, at all events, the spirit of an healthful mind. Therefore, we may not engage or continue in any sinful trade; any that is contrary to the law of God, or of our country. Such are all that necessarily imply our robbing or defrauding the king of his lawful customs.[2]
>
> ....to gain all we can without hurting our neighbor....we cannot devour the increase of his lands, and perhaps the lands and houses themselves, by gaining by overgrown bills (whether on account of law, physic, or anything else)....We cannot sell our goods below the market price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbors trade, in order to advance our own.
>
> Neither may we gain by hurting our neighbor in his body. Therefore we cannot sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is, eminently, all that liquid fire, commonly called drams, or spirituous liquors....all who sell them in the common way, to any that will buy, are poisoners general.[3]
>
> And are not partakers of the same guilt....surgeons, apothecaries, or physicians, who play with the lives or health of men, to enlarge their own gain?....
>
> Gain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence....Lose no time....Never leave anthing till tomorrow, which you can do today....
>
> Gain all you can by common sense....you should be continually learning, from the experience of others, or from your own experience,

---

[1] Wesley, Sermons, II, 314.

[2] Wesley fought a long battle against smuggling. No Methodist could remain in the society if he took part in it.

[3] At the time Wesley preached this sermon one-eighth of the deaths of London adults were due to excessive gin-drinking, and in 1740-2, the height of the gin era, burials in London were twice as numerous as baptisms. Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 343.

> reading, and reflection, to do everything you have to do better today than you did yesterday....
>
> 2. Save all you can....Do not throw it away in idle expenses, which is just the same as throwing it into the sea. Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.

Wesley continues by listing those things that one should deny himself, among them being "delicacy and variety in foods, expensive apparel, needless ornaments, costly pictures, elegant gardens, and excessive generosity to children." Gaining and saving are only means to the end, however, which is

> 3. Give all you can. If you desire to be a faithful and wise steward....first, provide things needful for yourself....secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If there be an overplus left, then do good to them of the household of faith. If there be an overplus still, as you have opportunity, do good unto all men.[1]

This sermon is perhaps the best answer to such critics of Wesley as the Hammonds, who say that Wesley was not sufficiently concerned with everyday problems.[2] They overlook the fact that Wesley's primary doctrine of Christian perfection was centered around perfect love for God and man, and that it implied helping your fellow man in every possible way. Wesley stated very clearly his feelings concerning the relative importance of present and future when he said, "Above all, do not make the care of

---

[1] Wesley, Sermons, II, 314-24.

[2] J. L. and B. Hammond, Town Labourer, p. 282. On another occasion Wesley stated even more strongly his desire that the Methodists should be primarily concerned with each day's problems. "Live thou to-day. Be it thy earnest care to improve the present hour. This is your own; and it is your all. The past is as nothing, as though it had never been. The future is nothing to you: It is not yours; perhaps it never will be....Therefore, live to-day." Wesley, Works, V, 392.

future things a pretence for neglecting present duty."[1] Wesley's sermon was an attempt to acquaint his people with their present duty to others. It contains no protest against the existing economic order, child labor, living conditions of the workers, or any institutional weakness. Wesley accepted what existed, and made his appeal to individuals, through whose development desirable changes might be brought about.

Kingswood seemed to Wesley to furnish a perfect example of what might be accomplished through appeals to the individual conscience. Undeniable proof of the power of Christianity to transform the whole environment through individual action was, for him, furnished by the experience of the miners there, who had formerly been "a people famous for neither fearing God nor regarding man; so ignorant of the things of God that they seemed but one remove from the beasts that perish."[2] After the ministry of Whitefield and Wesley, which had lasted only about one year,

> The scene is already changed. Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkeness and uncleanness, and the idle diversions that naturally lead thereto. It is no longer full of wars and fightings, of clamour and bitterness, of wrath and envying. Peace and love are there.[3]

Within seven months from the beginning of his field ministry John Wesley saw what could be accomplished in a region known for its evil ways. From 1739 to the time of his death he never doubted the close relationship

---

[1] Wesley, Works, V, 390.

[2] Wesley, Journal, II, 322.

[3] Ibid., 322-3.

between religion and economic and social well-being, and he was one with his century in declaring that economic success demanded work.[1]

One of the reasons for the success of the miners at Kingswood was that they had turned from their idle diversions to something worth-while, which to Wesley meant either the things of God or work, although there was no clear line of demarcation between these two. A good man and a busy man were one and the same. "Every man that has any pretence to be a Christian will not fail to school himself rigorously to the business of his calling, seeing it is impossible that an idle man can be a good man, - sloth being inconsistent with religion."[2] Wesley's insistence upon work was even more clearly and forcefully expressed in his answer to a critic who had written that Methodist "enthusiasm" would make the poor even lazier.

> So far am I from either causing or encouraging idleness, that an idle person, known to be such, is not suffered to remain in any of our societies; we drive him out, as we would, a thief or a murderer. To show all possible diligence....is one of our standing rules; and one, concerning the observance of which we continually make the strictest inquiry.[3]

It is of considerable importance to a proper understanding of Wesley to note that the same man who would remove a man from a society for idleness had only one rule for admission to the society, "a desire to flee

---

[1] This statement might be made even stronger. The eighteenth century was one in which "self-respect and poverty seemed incompatible." Hammond, Bleak Age, p. 68. The economic teachings of Wesley, with their emphasis upon work and wise use of money, encouraged the feeling among Methodists that no self-respecting member of the Society could remain complacently poor.

[2] Wesley, Works, VII, 76.

[3] Ibid., 78.

from the wrath to come, (and) to be saved from their sins."[1] Comparatively little emphasis was placed upon what a man believed, but a great deal upon evidence of the effects of his faith. Wesley did not believe that a man could be truly saved and not demonstrate it in his every day activities. The General Rules of the United Societies, like the sermon on The Use of Money, are concerned with the evils of drunkenness, buying or selling uncustomed goods, usury, idleness, costly apparel, laying up treasures upon earth, and the like. Indulgence in these vices was sufficient evidence that the individual was not a "good steward," was therefore not truly saved, and consequently should be ejected from the society.

What Wesley seemingly failed to foresee was that the Methodists, if they were good stewards who practiced diligence and frugality, would become more prosperous if they failed to give all they could. It was one thing to preach salvation and a new way of life to the poor of England, and another to keep them from falling victim to one or more of the worldly vices which might tempt them once they had started to save money. The imperative to "give all you can" might very easily be overshadowed by those to "gain all you can," and to "save all you can." This possible secularization of religious drives had actually taken place before Wesley's death, as his Thoughts Upon Methodism clearly shows.

> For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently, they increase in goods. Hence they proportionably increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life....

---

[1] Ibid., IV, 346.

> Is there no way to prevent this? We ought not to forbid people to be diligent and frugal: We must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich![1]

The Methodists grew rich because they omitted what to Wesley was the most important of his three simple rules, his advice to "give all you can." In their refusal to meet this obligation they were destroying the social principle which had been such a powerful motivating force in early Methodism. They were also proving themselves to be unworthy stewards, and Wesley's feeling toward them was strong.

> Having gained and saved all you can, give all you can; else your money will eat your flesh as fire, and will sink you to the nethermost hell! O beware of laying up treasures on earth! Is it not treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath? Lord, I have warned them....I can only give them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations.[2]

The Wesleyan economic ideal was that of a Christian community in which everything beyond what was needed for one's household was to be given to the poor, thus bringing about, through individual effort, some sort of economic equality. The ideal was impossible to attain unless every true Christian retained the moral intensity which Wesley envisioned. If love for one's fellow man was not kept firmly in mind, the approved pursuit of material gain could easily overshadow the equally important teaching regarding the disposition of the wealth gained.

The rather precarious balance between gaining all you can and giving all you can was being lost in favor of the former before Wesley's death.

---

[1] Wesley, Works, X, 150.

[2] Ibid., VI, 327.

Even though he could not see it, his plain rules for guiding the economic activity of his followers had within themselves the tendency to subvert the primary purpose for which they were intended.

The social and economic teachings of John Wesley were not the result of a carefully thought-out plan for the rehabilitation of the poor, nor were they aided by the creation of an organization set up specifically for that purpose. They were, rather, the result of careful observation of what was wrong followed by suggested remedies. In each case the evils resulted from mans' failure through ignorance. The remedy he found for any particular malfunction of society was to educate the individuals within that society - to let them know what their individual obligations to their fellow man were according to the doctrine of Christian perfection.

The importance of John Wesley to the eighteenth century is not to be found in the solutions he proposed for its social and economic problems. The remedies he suggested, based upon his own observation and experience, were designed to correct a specific problem, with little or no thought being given to what was needed to effect long range improvements. The major significance of his teachings lies in the fact that he recognized the existence of the problems, and, unlike most of the clergymen of the Church of England, taught that a steady attempt to bring relief to the less fortunate was an important duty of anyone claiming to be a Christian. "The Methodist movement did for eighteenth century England what Christianity did for the ancient world, giving to men of conscience and compassion a cause for which to live, and blending the

idea of the brotherhood of man with the most sublime of the mysteries of religion."[1]

The awakening of the conscience of England, to which the Methodists made a significant contribution, made possible the reforms of the early nineteenth century. Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection made every Methodist conscious of the necessity for taking care of his fellow man, and, at the same time, made him conscious of his own individual importance. The Methodist was under the obligation of learning to control himself, after which he might begin to play an important part in the work of the society as a band or class leader, a visitor of the sick, an official of the chapel, or some other official capacity. The self-reliance thus gained was to have considerable political import, in addition to the religious, social, and economic implications already discussed.

---

[1] Hammond, Bleak Age, p. 60.

CHAPTER V

JOHN WESLEY AND POLITICAL LIFE

John Wesley made no original contribution to political theory, and showed no interest in it. In politics, as in social and economic theory, he was content to state what should be done by a Christian in a particular situation. The primary consideration in his political thinking was always whether or not the individual within the state had the freedom he needed to fulfill his Christian obligations, as Wesley saw them. This involved a necessity for order, and there is nothing more consistent in Wesley's written political views than his plea to his readers, of whatever status they might be, from the king to the lowliest man in England, to show due respect for law and order. Aside from this emphasis on order there is nothing in the nature of a logical presentation of political ideas to be found in Wesley's writings. They were written whenever it seemed necessary for him to state his views, and always with his Christian ethic firmly in mind. The close relationship he saw between religion and politics was, to a great extent, the result of the influence of his father.

Politics were taken very seriously at Epworth. One of the arguments between Samuel and Susanna Wesley was so bitter that Samuel left home for a brief period. When he observed that his wife did not join him in his prayers for William III he said, "Sukie, if we are to have two kings,

we must have two beds."[1] She made no attempt to stop him as he rode away. The political High Churchmanship of the rector of Epworth was well-known to his Whig and non-party parishioners, and caused constant friction between them.[2] His political activities in behalf of the Tory candidate in the election of 1705 were so vigorous that one of his Whig parishioners to whom he owed some money had him thrown in prison for non-payment of the debt.[3] In 1710 Samuel Wesley wrote the speech which Sacheverell[4] delivered in his own defense before Parliament. The High Churchmen of Lincolnshire showed their appreciation of Wesley's efforts by electing him to Convocation for seven consecutive years,[5] further alienating him from his religious charges. Firmly convinced of the validity of his position, Samuel Wesley retained his Tory views until the end of his life in spite of the attacks of his people upon him, and tried to train his children in "the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance."[6]

---

[1] Fitchett, Wesley and His Century, p. 17.

[2] See pp. 18-9.

[3] Simon, Religious Societies, p. 53.

[4] A High Churchman who preached a sermon before the Lord Mayor of London, "the subject of which was Perils among False Brethren, and its drift a vigorous declamation on the absolute duty of non-resistance to the supreme power, and a bitter tirade upon the Whig and Low Church principles which came in with the Revolution." The Whigs brought him to trial, and lost not only the trial but their supremacy in government for a short while. Abbey, English Church, I, 9-11.

[5] Simon, Religious Societies, p. 54.

[6] Wesley, Letters, VI, 156.

Although John Wesley did not follow his father's religious High Churchmanship in that he failed to show the proper regard for ecclesiastical authority, he retained the Tory principles he had learned at Epworth. This put him into the seemingly untenable position of advocating both a religious belief in which the individual was virtually all-important and a political system in which most citizens of England had no chance to participate. There was no contradiction in these beliefs for Wesley, however. His firm and unwavering conviction was that the people of England could enjoy the freedom necessary for practicing their religious beliefs only by submitting to the laws passed by Parliament and enforced by the king. John Wesley, like his father, had a deep affection for the king, but even the king must obey the laws. "The King of England is a sovereign Prince: yet he has not the power to bid me to do the least thing, unless the law of the land require me so to do; for he has no power but to execute the law. The will of the King is no law to the subject."[1]

One of the most striking experiences of John Wesley's life was his narrow escape from the rectory fire when he was six years old.[2] The Wesley family believed that the fire was started by their enemies, whom they considered to have no fear of God or man. Wesley always believed that he was saved from the fire by divine providence, and he had an equally strong belief that men who did not fear God would not honor human

---

[1] Wesley, Works, VII, 134.

[2] See p. 12.

authority. For that reason he had a life-long distrust of "the beasts of the people," including so-called gentlemen.[1] They were easily swayed by unscrupulous men, as the fire at Epworth and his experiences with mobs in his early ministry clearly showed.[2] Wesley's concept of the depravity of man was not the result of abstract reasoning, but a conclusion based upon reading the Bible and substantiated by observing the mode of life all over England. When he wrote of the beasts of the people he was writing of those who had treated him as one would expect beasts to treat him. It was inconceivable to him that they should have any voice in the political affair of the country.

The consequences of a lack of strong civil government were pointed out by Wesley during his trip to Georgia. The American Indians had "no civil government at all; no laws, no magistrates, but every man does what is right in his own eyes: therefore, they are decreasing daily."[3] On the other hand the English colonists in Savannah were fortunate in that "we have an advantage here which is not frequent in other places - that is, a Magistracy not only regular in their own conduct, but desirous and watchful to suppress as far as in them lies whatever is openly ill in the conduct of others."[4]

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, V, 341.

[2] There are frequent references in the Journal to attacks by mobs. Wesley complained very bitterly about the lack of protection against such attacks, his contention being that the Methodists were loyal subjects, and therefore entitled to all the rights of any other law-abiding group.

[3] Wesley, Works, V, 336.

[4] Wesley, Letters, I, 223.

The ideal government for Wesley was one governed by laws which had been passed by men who were reasonable, wise, and good. This excluded the vast bulk of the people, since even though most of them might be "converted" and acquire the necessary respect for both divine and human authority they were not qualified to know what was best for the country. Wesley felt that he knew a great deal about the England of his day, and yet he said,

> I am no politician; politics lie quite out of my province. Neither have I any acquaintance, at least no intimacy, with any that bear that character. And it is no easy matter to form any judgment concerning things of so complicated a nature. It is the more difficult, because in order to form our judgment, such a multitude of facts should be known, few of which can be known with tolerable exactness by any but those who are eye-witnesses of them.[1]

The difficulties involved in keeping informed were tremendous; well beyond the capabilities of the common man. Their lack of knowledge did not prevent the people of England from expressing themselves on political affairs, however. Wesley wrote of their penchant for posing as experts in an extremely sarcastic vein:

> Perhaps you will say, "Nay, every Englishman is a politician; we suck in politics with our mother's milk. It is as natural for us to talk politics as to breathe: we can instruct both the king and his council. We can in a trice reform the state, point out every blunder of this or that minister, and tell every step they ought to take to be arbiters of all Europe."
>
> I grant, every cobbler, tinker, porter, and hackney-coachman, can do this. But I am not so deep-learned: while they are sure of everything, I am sure of nothing.[2]

---

[1] Wesley, Works, X, 100.

[2] Ibid., 101.

No good could come of this constant complaining about the way the government was being run, and it was actually a tendency toward rebellion which involved a plea for liberty, a plea which to Wesley, "if practised, would overturn all government and bring in universal anarchy."[1] The liberty desired by the "bawling mob" was of four kinds: "the liberty of knocking on the head, of cutting the throats, of those we are out of conceit with; the liberty of taking, when we see best, the goods and chattels of our neighbours; the liberty of taking our neighbour's wives and daughters; that of removing a disobedient king." No reasonable man would want this kind of liberty, but "what is that liberty, properly so-called, which every wise and good man desires?"[2] It is significant that Wesley, when speaking of liberty, excluded all those who were not both wise and good. No man could be truly wise or good unless he knew God, that is, unless he was reborn. For that reason Wesley directed his Thoughts Upon Liberty to the reasonable, wise, and good men of England.

The liberty desired by every reasonable man was either religious or civil. Religious liberty was that "liberty to choose our own religion, to worship God according to our own conscience," to which "every man living, as man, has a right as he is a rational creature." In times past this liberty had been abridged, particularly by Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, King James I, and King Charles II. Their actions had been taken in spite of the fact that it seemed to Wesley incredible "that the most sensible men in the world should say to their fellow creatures, 'Either

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, VI, 100.

[2] Wesley, Works, X, 118.

be of my religion, or I will take away your food, and you and your wife and children shall starve: if that will not convince you, I will fetter your hands and feet, and throw you into a dungeon; and if you will still not see as I see, I will burn you alive'." But this was no longer true in Wesley's day. Neither George II nor George III had allowed any man to be "persecuted for conscience' sake." There was no nation in Europe "which enjoys such liberty of conscience as the English." They had "full liberty to choose any religion, yea, or no religion at all."[1]

Civil liberty was defined by Wesley as the "liberty to enjoy our lives and fortunes in our own way; to use our property, whatever is legally our own, according to our choice." If individual civil liberties were to be invaded, it would not be by the "king, or his parliament, or army, but by the good patriots." It was the king and parliament who kept his life, person, and property safe, and his question was, "Are you not as free as I am? That many-headed beast, the people," wanted liberty which was actually licentiousness, but a "reasonable man, a man of real honour," could not possibly desire a liberty beyond that which he already enjoyed.[2]

The scope of governmental functions, as envisaged by Wesley in the Thoughts Upon Liberty, was very narrow. The concept of broad governmental participation in the lives of its citizens was not to become popular until long after his death. Wesley's pamphlet on Liberty was written four years before Bentham's Fragment, but it is extremely doubtful that

---

[1] Ibid., 118-20.

[2] Ibid., 121-2.

he would have written differently even though he had known Bentham's work. The only valid function of the state was to guarantee its citizens liberty - religious liberty to worship as they liked, and civil liberty to enjoy their property as they wished. The English citizen enjoyed that liberty,[1] and as a result was able to live a truly Christian life practicing Methodist social and economic virtues.

One of Wesley's self-imposed obligations in his political efforts was to refute the writings of those who believed that each individual had the right to take part in government. This seemed to Wesley to be an effort to put England under the control of immoral individuals from whom no good could be expected to come, and who were intellectually incapable of knowing what was best for England. The works of two authors drew his particular attention; Priestley's Treatise on Civil Government, and Price's Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty. Priestley, accepting Rousseau's line of argument, contended that government was a bargain under the terms of which every man gave up part of his civil liberty, his freedom to do as he wished, in return for political liberty, or influence upon the government of the country.[2] His belief that "the good and happiness of the members, that is the majority of the members of any state, is the standard by which everything relating to that state

---

[1] In a letter to a public official Wesley made a plea for protection for the Methodists, saying, "We are men; we are Englishmen. As such we have a natural and a legal right to liberty of conscience." Wesley, Letters, VII, 151-2. His concepts of the natural rights of man were simple, involving only the right to freedom of religion, person and property.

[2] Stephen, English Thought, II, 254.

must finally be determined," and further, that "this one general idea, properly understood, throws the greatest light upon the whole system of policy, morals, and, I may add, theology too,"[1] seemed to Wesley to be an attack on the entire institutional structure of England, both religious and political. His reaction to Priestley's work was to publish a refutation in 1772, only four years after Priestley's Treatise had appeared. Wesley's pamphlet, Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power, was an attempt to show that the contract theory could not be supported by fact. The starting-point of his argument was, as usual, the Bible; "there is no power but from God," even though it had been argued that

> All men living upon earth are naturally equal; none is above another; and all are naturally free, masters of their own actions. It manifestly follows, no man can have any power over another, unless by his own consent. The power, therefore, which the governors in any nation enjoy, must be originally derived from the people, and presupposes an original compact between them and their first governors.[2]

Much of the remainder of the pamphlet is a reductio ad absurdum of this argument. A few extracts will be sufficient to show the nature of Wesley's logic.

> Who are the people? Are they every man, woman, and child? Why not?....By what argument do you prove that women are not naturally as free as men? And, if they are, why have they not as good a right as we have to choose their own governors?
>
> ....what pretence have we for excluding men like ourselves barely because they have not lived one-and-twenty years, 'Why, they have not the wisdom or experience to judge concerning the qualifications necessary for governors.' I answer, who has? But wisdom

---

[1] Ibid., 254-5.

[2] J. Wesley, Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power (Bristol: W. Pine, 1772), p. 5.

> and experience are nothing to the purpose. Are they men? Then they have a right to choose their governors; an indefeasible right; a right inherent, inseparable from human nature.
>
> ....after depriving half the human species of their natural right for want of a beard; after depriving myriads more for want of a stiff beard, for not having lived one-and-twenty years; you rob others of their birthright for want of money. But here is an Englishman who has money enough to buy the estates of fifty freeholders, and yet he must not be numbered among the people because he has not two or three acres of land.[1]

Believing that he had refuted the argument that government is derived from the people by showing that its proponents could not logically exclude any of the people,[2] Wesley went on to show that as a matter of historical fact the English people had never chosen their rulers. It might be argued that even though the people had not given Charles I his power they had certainly taken it away, but

> I deny it utterly. The people of England no more took away his power, than they cut off his head. (A small percentage of the house of commons did it) But suppose they had been the whole house of commons, yea, or the whole parliament; by what rule of logic will you prove that seven or eight hundred persons are the people of England? (They are not the chosen delegates of the people, since they are chosen) not by one half, not by a quarter, not by a tenth part, of them.[3]

Not even the royal power gained by William III as a result of the Revolution could be used as an example of power granted by the people, since

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 6-8.

[2] He had made what Feiling calls the "perennial Tory point," that if the people were allowed a voice in government, it must be all the people. Since all the people were not qualified there was no logical basis for changing the government. K. G. Feiling, A History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714 (London: Oxford University Press, 1932).

[3] Wesley, Origin of Power, pp. 9-10.

> ....certain it is, that he did not receive it by any act or deed of the people. Their consent was neither obtained nor asked; they were never consulted in the matter. It was not therefore the people that gave him the power; no, nor even the parliament. It was the convention, and none else....They were a few hundred lords and gentlemen.[1]

Since the people were not then, and had never been, the source of power, Wesley sought its origin in the only authority who had the power of life and death over man - the Creator.

> It is allowed, no man can dispose of another's life by his own consent. I add, No, nor with his consent; for no man has a right to dispose of his own life. The Creator of man has the sole right to take the life which he gave. Now it is an indisputable truth, none gives what he has not. It plainly follows, that no man can give to another a right which he never had himself....it must descend from God alone.
>
> The supposition, then, that the people are the origin of power, is every way indefensible....So common sense brings us back to the grand truth, 'There is no power but of God.'[2]

Priestley's fellow revolutionist, Price, was much more pessimistic about England's future, but equally emphatic in his support of the contract theory. "Civil government, as far as it can be demonstrated free," he said, is the creature of the people. It originates with them, they have the power to model it as they please."[3] The implications of this statement were very broad, Price's inference being that "the people are absolute; that they never divest themselves of their undefeasible rights; and that Parliament, their creature, cannot rightfully oppose their will. Such a theory is the only security against oppression, because a people

---

[1] Ibid., p. 10.

[2] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[3] R. Price, Observations on Civil Liberty (London: T. Cadell, 1776), p. 6.

will never oppress itself, and cannot safely trust anybody else."[1]

Even though Wesley had already written an answer to the arguments of the proponents of the contract theory he felt that he must refute the arguments set forth in Price's Observations. In 1776 Wesley wrote his reply in a pamphlet, Some Observations on Liberty, in which he stated his position on the contract theory in more emphatic terms. He first attacked the pessimism shown by Price regarding England's future. According to Price both population and trade were declining, but Wesley's travels had shown him that population was actually increasing and that trade was expanding very rapidly throughout the kingdom.[2] Then, going on to the political aspects of Price's work, Wesley denied that "liberty is more or less complete, according as the people have more or less share in government." Wesley believed that "the greater share the people have in the government the less liberty, either civil or religious, does the nation in general enjoy. Accordingly, there is most liberty of all, civil and religious, under a limited monarchy; there is usually less under an aristocracy, and least of all under a democracy."[3]

This statement of Wesley's has led one observer to conclude that its logic compelled Wesley "to say that the greatest liberty is under a despot," and that although Wesley "refused to admit this, nevertheless unconsciously he believed it."[4] This conclusion is wide of the mark in

---

[1] Stephen, English Thought, II, 258.

[2] J. Wesley, The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.. (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, n.d.), VI, 300-1. Hereinafter cited as Works (2).

[3] Ibid., 304.

[4] Edwards, John Wesley, p. 31.

that it disregards the basis upon which all Wesley's political observations were made - his high regard for law. The reason for the high esteem in which Wesley held the English government was that it had a system of laws which provided freedom for the individual citizen - freedom which no other nation had. "We have certainly enjoyed more complete liberty since the Revolution, than England ever enjoyed before; and the English government, unequal as the representation is, has been admired by all impartial foreigners."[1] His trips through America, Europe, Ireland, Scotland, and England had convinced him that there was more freedom under the English constitution than any other nation enjoyed. His inherent love for the limited monarchy did not blind him to its shortcomings, however, and it did not lead him to state, either expressly or implicitly, that the government should be more highly centralized.

Wesley had a very caustic answer to Price's statement that "to be guided by one's own will is freedom; to be guided by the will of another is slavery." To Wesley this was "the very quintessence of republicanism," and "if this be true, how free are all the devils in hell, seeing they are all guided by their own will! And what slaves are all the angels in heaven, since they are guided by the will of another."[2]

---

[1] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 306. Civil liberty was defined by Wesley in this pamphlet as the "liberty to dispose of our lives, persons, and fortunes according to our own choice, and the laws of the country. I add, according to the laws of our country: for, although, if we violate these, we are liable to fines, imprisonment, or death; yet if, in other cases we enjoy our life, liberty, and goods, undisturbed, we are free, to all reasonable intents and purposes." Ibid., 302.

[2] Ibid., 311.

On a somewhat higher plane, Wesley objected to Price's belief in self-willed individuals on the grounds that it was a person's duty to obey those in power.

> ....Whoever is born in any civilized country, is, so long as he continues therein, whether he chooses it or no, subject to the laws and the supreme governors of that country. Whoever is born in England, France, or Holland, is subject to their respective governors; and "must needs be subject to the power, as to the ordinance of God, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake." He has no right at all to be independent, or governed only by himself; but is in duty bound to be governed by the powers that be, according to the laws of the country.[1]

The man "that is thus governed, not by himself, but the laws, is in the general sense of mankind, a free man." The laws by which he is governed may in certain cases, "deprive him of his goods; in others, of his personal freedom, or even of his life." But "all this time he enjoys such a measure of liberty, as the condition of civilized nations allows; but no independency; that chimera is not to be found; no, not in the wilds of Africa or America.[2]

Priestley and Price were to Wesley political theorists whose "subtle metaphysical pleas for universal independency appear beautiful in speculation, yet it never was, neither can be reduced to practice."[3] The theorists were impractical in their views, and were almost totally ignorant of the real state men were in. Wesley felt that the real answer

---

[1] Ibid., 305.

[2] Ibid., 306. Wesley had found that the idyllic freedom of the African natives had been destroyed by the slave hunters (See pp. 109-10), and that the American Indians were almost completely corrupt (See p. 48).

[3] Ibid., 305.

to the problems of the time was not to dabble in metaphysics, but to get the people to fear God. His Observations on Liberty closed with an appeal to his fellow Englishmen to work toward this end.

> Let us who are real lovers of their country use every lawful means to put out, or, at least, prevent the increase of, that flame which, otherwise, may consume our people and nation. Let us earnestly exhort all our countrymen to improve the innumerable blessings they enjoy; in particular, that invaluable blessing of liberty, civil as well as religious, which we now enjoy in a far more ample measure than any of our forefathers did. Let us labour to improve our religious liberty, by practising pure religion and undefiled; by worshipping God in spirit and in truth; and taking His "word for a latern to our feet, and a light in all our paths." Let us improve our civil liberty, the full freedom we enjoy, both as to our lives, goods, and persons, by devoting all we have, and all we are, to His honourable service.[1]

The Calm Address to Our American Colonies, Wesley's major attempt to keep the colonies within the empire, is the last of his political pamphlets we shall examine. It is the most significant of his political writings insofar as popular reaction, both pro and con, is concerned, and the unusually bitter attacks made upon Wesley after the publication of the pamphlet were due, at least in part, to the fact that he changed his mind on what the government should do about the colonies. His attitude prior to the time he wrote the Calm Address is best illustrated by almost identical letters written in June, 1775, to two men whom he considered to be among the most valuable men in England - Lords Dartmouth and North.[2] The letters began with a plea for fairness toward the Americans, in

---

[1] Ibid., 320.

[2] In writing of Dartmouth and North Wesley said, "Perhaps no prince in Europe, besides King George, is served by two of the honestest and two of the most sensible men in his kingdom." Wesley, Journal, VI, 179-80.

spite of Wesley's inherent prejudice against those who demonstrated disloyalty to the king.

> All my prejudices are against the Americans; for I am an High Churchman, the son of an High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance. And yet, in spite of all my long-rooted prejudices, I cannot avoid thinking, if I think at all, these, an oppressed people, asked for nothing more than their legal rights, and that in the most modest and inoffensive manner that the nature of the thing would allow.
>
> But waiving this, waiving all considerations of right and wrong, I ask, Is it common sense to use force toward the Americans?[1]

He thought it was not sensible to use force against the Americans, since "these men will not be frightened. They will probably dispute every inch of ground, and, if they die, die sword in hand." The arguments that the Americans had no combat experience, no discipline, and no strong feeling of unity were not valid. Few of the English troops were experienced, and discipline could be learned as rapidly by the Americans as by the English. The people in the northern colonies were so strongly united "that to speak a word in favour of the present English measures would almost endanger a man's life." The Americans were fighting for "their wives, children, liberty," giving them a tremendous advantage "over men who fight only for pay, none of whom care a straw for the cause wherein they are engaged, most of whom strongly disapprove of it." The Americans were also favored in that "their supplies are at hand: ours are three thousand miles off."[2]

In addition to the advantages held by the Americans, which made the outcome of a struggle with them extremely dubious, there was another,

---

[1] Wesley, Letters, VI, 156.

[2] Ibid., 157-8.

and greater danger facing England. Her enemies on the continent could take advantage of the absence of the regular army, and even "if they find means to land but ten thousand men" who is to oppose them? Wesley had no confidence in the militia.[1] The "huge majority of the people are exasperated almost to madness," just as they were in 1640. Two other factors were present which had helped to bring on the earlier revolt; a general decay of trade, and scarcity of provisions. "So that even now there are multitudes of people that, having nothing to do and nothing to eat, are ready for the first bidder."[2] The weakness of her defenses, the antipathy of the masses toward the government, and the economic unbalance apparent in England all combined to make her an attractive target for her enemies. Wesley's conclusion was that war with the colonies was not justified, and could not be won, so he urged Dartmouth and North to do what they could to calm the situation.

At about the same time as he wrote the letters to Dartmouth and North Wesley wrote a circular letter to his preachers in America, advising them to be very careful in their actions. "You were never in your lives in so critical a situation as you are at this time. It is your part to be peacemakers; to be loving and tender to all; but to addict yourselves to no party. In spite of all solicitations, of rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side."[3]

---

[1] On one occasion a large body of militia had thrown down their arms and fled, completely unnerved by the discharge of a fowling-piece by a boy who was hunting nearby. Ibid., 158.

[2] Ibid., 159.

[3] Ibid., 142.

This conciliatory attitude continued until the Fall of 1775, Wesley continuing until that time to believe that peace was possible between England and the colonies, but doubts began to appear. The publication of Johnson's Taxation no Tyranny brought those doubts to a head, and changed Wesley's mind as to the proper policy toward the Americans.

> I was of a different judgment on this head, till I read a tract, entitled Taxation no Tyranny. But as soon as I received more light myself, I judged it my duty to impart it to others. I therefore extracted the chief arguments from that treatise, and added an application to those whom it most concerns. I was well aware of the treatment this would bring upon myself; but let it be, so I may in any degree serve my king and country.[1]

The reaction to the Calm Address was about what Wesley had anticipated, even though the pamphlet did not reach the Americans. "The ports being just then shut up by the Americans, I could not sent it abroad as I designed. However, it was not lost; within a few months, fifty, or perhaps a hundred thousand copies, in newspapers and otherwise, were dispersed throughout Great Britain and Ireland. The effect exceeded my most sanguine hopes."[2] One effect of the pamphlet was to provoke very bitter attacks upon him. For several years he "was exposed to hailstorms of wild calumny, and unsavoury abuse. He was furiously denounced as a wolf in sheep's clothing; a Jesuit and Jacobite unmasked; a chaplain in furies to Bellona, the Goddess of War."[3]

---

[1] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 293. Johnson later wrote a letter to Wesley thanking him for his support of the position taken in Taxation no Tyranny, and telling him "to have gained such a mind as yours may justly confirm me in my own opinions." Wesley, Journal, VI, 67.

[2] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 328.

[3] Herbert, Wesley as Editor and Author, p. 107.

The unrest in England and the desire for freedom in America Wesley considered to be the result of a diabolical plot. There were "a few men in England, who are determined enemies of monarchy." For many years they had been "undermining it with all diligence, in hopes of erecting their grand idol, their dear commonwealth, upon its ruins." These men were steadily pursuing their desired end, "as by various other means, so in particular by inflammatory papers, which are industriously and continuously dispersed." This had raised thousands of people "to the pitch of madness" in both England and America. The end result would be, "although the Americans, in general, love the English, and the English, in general, love the Americans," that the colonies would leave England. Then, those who hated the king would be able to discredit the king and "overturn the government: especially while the main of both the English and Irish troops are at so convenient a distance [in America]."[1]

The imputation of improper motives to all those who differed with the government on its American policies was enough to make Wesley disliked by a great many people, yet he felt that he was only doing his duty to his king and country.

The major problem with which Wesley dealt in the Calm Address was that of representation. He believed in virtual representation, which meant that members of Parliament represented not only their own constituents but Englishmen at large. The argument that the colonists could be taxed only with their consent was inadmissable, since "whatever holds

---

[1] Wesley, Works, X, 133-4.

with regard to taxation, holds with regard to other laws. Therefore, he who denies the English Parliament the power of taxation, denies it the right of making any laws at all." The colonists had never objected to the right of Parliament to make laws, but now they argued that "every man is governed by laws to which he has consented." Quite the contrary, only a very small percentage of the people were actually concerned with making laws, and they had been chosen for the purpose by a restricted part of the population. The rest consented to the laws passively. "As all men are born, passively, as it were, consenting to the laws of that state."[1]

Patrick Henry argued that the colonists had "brought with them, and transmitten to their posterity....all the liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed and possessed by the people of Great Britain," including self-taxation.[2] To such arguments Wesley answered, "If your ancestors were subjects, they acknowledged a Sovereign; if they had a right to English privileges, they were accountable to English laws, and had ceded to the King and Parliament the power of disposing, without their consent, of both their lives, liberties, and properties." What their ancestors had left them was "not a vote in making laws, nor in choosing legislators; but the happiness of being protected by laws [which, under the principle of virtual representation, their representatives had made for them], and the duty of obeying them."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., 131.

[2] F. J. C. Hearnshaw, ed., Social and Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Revolutionary Era (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1950), p. 17.

[3] Wesley, Works, X, 132.

The real source of the difficulties between the colonies and the mother country was not political, however, but moral. "Let us put away our sins; the real ground of all our calamities; which never will or can be thoroughly removed, till we fear God and honour the King."[1]

The most characteristic element of Wesley's political thought was his high regard for law. He could accept the American belief in a "government of laws, and not of men" wholeheartedly, and he would have agreed with John Adams that it was "a settled opinion that the liberty, the unalienable, and indefeasible rights of men, the honor and dignity of human nature, the grandeur and glory of the public, and the universal happiness of individuals, were never so skilfully and successfully consulted as in that most excellent monument of human art, the Common Law of England."[2] But when the revolutionary leaders claimed the right to government by their own chosen representatives and the right to consider loyalty to the king the only bond between the colonies and England[3] they were going too far. The independence they claimed was actually nothing but mob rule. Wesley's personal experience with mobs was extensive, and his followers had been subjected to almost inhuman treatment by unruly groups of citizens. In his Journal Wesley recorded attacks in which preachers were subjected to being stoned, blinded, thrown into the water in mid-winter, and even killed. Their homes were entered illegally,

---

[1] Ibid., 135.

[2] Hearnshaw, Revolutionary Era, pp. 12-16.

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

ransacked, and sometimes burned.[1] Mob rule, to John Wesley was evidence of the immorality of the people, and it was inconceivable to him that immoral men could make moral laws, or exercise effective restraint upon their fellow men. His judgment seemed to be confirmed by what had happened to American loyalists, so in 1777 he wrote of conditions in America:

> There is no civil liberty. No man hath any security, either for his goods or for his person; but is daily liable to have his goods spoiled or taken away, without either law or form of law, and to suffer the most cruel outrage against his person, such as many would account worse than death....Do you observe, wherever these bawlers for liberty govern, there is the vilest slavery? No man there can say that his goods are his own. They are absolutely at the disposal of the mob, or the Congress....Those who have the disposal of his liberty, have the disposal of his life also, and of this they have given recent proof.[2]

John Wesley was consistent in his political thought throughout his entire career, except for the brief period during which he was sympathetic toward American demands. Even during that time, however, his feelings seemed to be determined more by England's probable inability to wage war successfully than by sympathy for the American cause. The major points of Wesley's political beliefs may be summarized as follows:

(1) "There is no power but of God."[3] Every man born in a civilized country was subject to the lawful power of the state in

---

[1] These attacks were much more frequent in the early days of Methodism, and they tended to taper off sharply after 1765. For examples of the severity with which the Methodists were treated by the mobs see Wesley, Journal, III, 290-1; 442; IV, 36; V, 48-9; 183-4.

[2] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 329.

[3] Wesley, Origin of Power, p. 12.

the same way that he was subject to the ordinances of God.[1] In England the citizens duty was to "fear God and honour the King," the two duties being inseparable. Properly to fear God implied following the Bible, reason, and experience, while honoring the King implied obeying the laws.

(2) The man that was governed, "not by himself, but the laws, is in the general sense of mankind, a free man."[2] The idea that political society should be based upon the consent of the governed meant to Wesley simply saying that it should be based upon the collective self-interest of immoral persons. Since government was considered by him to be good only insofar as it fulfilled its moral purpose of providing religious and civil liberty, and in England the government was fulfilling that purpose, there was no reason for change, particularly to a political society under the control of self-interested men. The only true liberty, for Wesley, existed in a society controlled by laws, not men.[3]

(3) Most of the people of England were totally incapable of knowing what was best for England, and should leave the responsibility

---

[1] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 305.

[2] Ibid., 306.

[3] Ibid. The true liberty Wesley desired included civil and religious liberty, but it went further than that. He wanted liberty in which men were able to act as completely free moral agents. "Liberty necessitated, or over-ruled is really no liberty at all. It is the same as unfree freedom: that is, downright nonsense. It may be further observed, (and it is an important observation,) that where there is no liberty, there can be no moral good or evil, no virtue or vice....There is no virtue, but where an intelligent being knows, loves, and chooses the good: nor is there any vice, but where such a being knows, loves, and chooses what is evil." Wesley, Works, VI, 276.

for her future in the hands of those who did know what they were doing. The wise and good legislator was the instrument through which any change should be brought about.[1]

(4) No "reasonable man, a man of real honour," could possibly "desire a liberty beyond that which he already enjoyed," and which Englishmen had enjoyed since the Revolution.[2]

(5) The only possible way for an individual to improve his condition on earth, for Wesley, was to remove sin from his life.[3] The revitalization of England's religious life, through individual conversion, would lead to virtually perfect conditions on earth.

Much of the difficulty faced by Wesley and his followers in trying to spread his political teachings was caused by his identification of "what is" with what "ought to be." His experiences in England and America had convinced him that when men either had no laws or disregarded those they had chaos followed, but that when they feared God, honored the King, and obeyed the laws all was well with them and the country. This led him to the belief that political power could not be associated with what men wanted, since what they wanted was not liberty but license to do as they pleased.[4] What men should desire was freedom under the laws of England, and it was Wesley's constant attempt to convince them of the desirability of that sort of freedom. He seems to have been unaware of

---

[1] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 373.

[2] Wesley, Works, X, 122.

[3] Ibid., 135.

[4] Ibid., 121.

the fact that by giving divine sanction to existing government he was, for all practical purposes, making it impossible for any citizen, no matter how morally and intellectually capable he might be, to pass any adverse judgment on it. In his eagerness to disprove the contract theory, and to uphold a modified Toryism, Wesley adopted a position which might be interpreted as implying as strong a centralization of authority as Hobbes' Leviathan. When it was pointed out to Wesley that the king and parliament could take away English liberties, his answer was that they had not done so, and until they did Englishmen were free.[1] The state, as an evidence of divine providence, fulfilled its moral purpose when it provided the law and order under which free men could enjoy their religious and civil liberty. The responsibility of the citizen was equally simple, involving only passive obedience to laws to which he had consented merely by being born into the civil society.

Passive obedience to the laws of the land did not imply acceptance of existing religious, social, and economic conditions, however. Along with his moral obligation to obey the laws of the state went a moral obligation for the converted Christian to fulfill his responsibilities to his fellow man. Wesley's ambition was to create a soceity of Christians who would, at the same time, be good citizens. This would seem to make his utopia subject to the criticism of such societies by Rousseau, who wrote

> We are told that a people of true Christians would form the most perfect society imaginable. I see in this supposition only

---

[1] Ibid., 115.

> one great difficulty: that a society of true Christians would not be a society of men....
>
> Everyone would do his duty: the people would be law-abiding, the rulers just and temperate; the magistrates upright and incorruptible; the soldiers would scorn death; there would be neither vanity nor luxury. So far, so good; but let us hear more.
>
> Christianity as a religion is entirely spiritual, occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christian is not of this world. He does his duty, indeed, but does it with profound indifference to the good or ill success of his cares.[1]

This was the sort of thing Wesley expected from those "who are too wise to read their Bibles," and whose books are "grounded neither upon reason nor experience."[2] He considered them to be too wise in the use of fine words - of "advices which are trite and common"[3] - and too ignorant as to the true nature of Christianity. Their "subtle metaphysical pleas for universal independency"[4] were not based upon reason and experience, and failed completely to take into consideration the evil nature of man. The true Christian - the Christian who had been justified, reborn, and was in the state of Christian perfection - was not concerned solely with heavenly things, as Rousseau had written, but was concerned solely with showing his love for God and man, and he could not regard with indifference the success or failure of his earthly responsibilities. He could not, if he claimed to be a follower of John Wesley, regard with indifference the performance of his duty to God, the king, or his fellow man, since to do so would be a denial of his moral obligations. Wesley's

---

[1] J. J. Rousseau, Social Contract, in W. Y. Elliot and N. A. McDonald, Western Political Heritage (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 665.

[2] Wesley, Journal, V, 353.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Wesley, Works (2), 305.

unwavering belief in the impracticability of the schemes of the philosophers for remaking society was based upon their disregard for Scripture, reason, and experience, without which no one could arrive at truth.

Kingswood seemed to Wesley to offer proof of the workability of his method for reforming society through individual conversion. He cited the revolution which had taken place among the colliers there as evidence that a Christian society was not only possible, but had been achieved. Before the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley "they lived like utter savages, absolutely cut off, not merely from the middle class, but also from other sections of the labouring class."[1] They were "a people famous for neither fearing God nor regarding man; so ignorant of the things of God that they seemed but one remove from beasts."[2] Within a few months an almost complete transformation had taken place. "Kingswood does not now resound with cursing and blasphemy....with drunkenness and uncleanness....is no longer full of wars and fightings, of clamour and bitterness....Peace and love are there....the people are mild, gentle, and easy to be entreated."[3] These Christians performed their duty to their political society by practicing Christian love, and honored the king by obeying the laws.

If the total population of England should ever decide to live a Christian life there was no doubt in John Wesley's mind that a perfect

---

[1] Halévy, English People in 1815, p. 231.

[2] Wesley, Journal, II, 322.

[3] Ibid., 322-3; Wesley, Letters, I, 339.

political society would follow. His aim was well-stated by one of his apologists.

> The Wesleyans believe that as spiritual liberty extends, civil liberty will likewise be extended....They believe that the possession of this so invigorates, so ennobles the man, that, when it is extensively enjoyed in any country, despotism cannot exist: they believe, therefore, that the surest way to promote both civil and religious liberty is to promote an enlightened, active, scriptural piety. To this their efforts are largely directed....It is thus that, at length, the difficult problem will be solved for reducing the interference of the government and law to the lowest quantity consistent with the security of the governed.[1]

The Wesleyan concept of morally responsible citizens living in a state in which there was the least possible interference with their liberties was still in the future, as an acute observer as Wesley was quick to see. Moral man, in the form of the true Christian, was still living in an immoral society, and should take steps to change the conditions under which he was living, but the change should be evolutionary in nature. The first requirement for improving society was, of course, to make individuals aware of their moral obligations to God, the king, and their fellow man. Wesley attempted to carry out this aim for all the people of England and America through the publication of pamphlets, but for the Methodists it was made part of the daily requirements. There are frequent references in the Journal, Letters, and Minutes of the Conferences to the proper political behaviour of a Methodist.

The seventy-two thousand members of the Methodist Societies at the time of Wesley's death were a small minority in England, but they were a loyal, dutiful group for whom law, order, and religion were virtually

---

[1] Quoted in Warner, Wesleyan Movement, pp. 121-2.

synonymous terms. One of the requirements of the preachers was that they speak no ill of the king. The Conference of 1779 took up the matter of those who were expressing their disloyalty, and decided that it would "suffer none that speak evil of those in authority, or that prophesy evil to the nation, to preach with us."[1] Such activities as smuggling[2] and illegal distilling[3] were condemned, not primarily upon moral grounds, but rather on the basis that they took rightful revenue from the king.[4]

A Word to a Freeholder, written in 1747, and distributed through the Methodist Societies, is typical of Wesley's efforts to create citizens who not only knew their political obligations, but fulfilled them. An interesting sidelight on the pamphlet is that it was written while Wesley waited for his clothes to dry following a rainstorm. His amazing productivity was due in part to his ability to take advantage of every opportunity to impart his teachings.[5] The Word was written on the eve of an election, and began with a plea to the electors not to submit to bribery. To receive a "gift or reward, directly or indirectly, or any

---

[1] Minutes, I, 140-1.

[2] Smuggling was "that wickedness for which Cornwall stinks in the nostrils of all those who fear God or love King George." Wesley, Letters, III, 143.

[3] Distilling also used grains that were needed for food, particularly during the acute shortage in 1772-3. Ibid., V, 351.

[4] Wesley wrote a Letter to Pitt in 1784 protesting the imposition of new taxes as long as the collection of the old ones was not enforced. He wrote that "in Cornwall alone the King is defrauded of half a million yearly in customs," and that the distillers "do not pay a fortieth part of what they distill." He pointed out that in addition to the loss of revenue in taxes there must also be taken into consideration the grain used that might have been used for export. Ibid., VII, 234-5.

[5] Wesley, Journal, III, 303.

promise of any, on account of your vote," was evidence of failure on the part of the voter to fulfill his moral obligations. He had the responsibility for assuming that the "whole election depended on your vote, and as if the whole Parliament depended on that single person whom you choose to be a member of it."[1]

Wesley continues by giving his concept of the ideal legislator - the kind of man for whom the conscientious freeholder should cast his vote.

> ....for whom shall you vote? For the man that loves God. He must love his country, and that from a steady, invariable principle. And by his fruits shall you know him. He is careful to abstain from all appearance of evil. He is zealous of good works, as he has opportunity, doing good to all men. He uses all the ordinances of God, and that both constantly and carefully. And he does this, not barely as something he must do, or what he would willingly be excused from; no, he rejoices in this his reasonable service, as a blessed privilege of the children of God.[2]

The love for his country which Wesley demanded of his ideal member of Parliament would imply love for the king, for "is not the interest of the King of England, and of the country of England one and the same?"[3] The voters should beware of the "man who talks of loving the Church, and does not love the King. If he does not love the King, he cannot love God. And if he does not love God, he cannot love the Church."[4] That a man was a Churchman was not enough for Wesley, and to those who said, "I am for

---

[1] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 273.

[2] Ibid. This characterization of the perfect legislator is simply an abbreviated statement of his concept of the perfect Christian. See pp. 77-8.

[3] Ibid., 274.

[4] Ibid.

the Church, therefore I vote for -----; he is a true Churchman, a lover of the Church," Wesley replied that the candidate's actions must prove him to be a true Churchman.

> What kind of a Churchman is he: a whoring Churchman, a gaming Churchman, a drunken Churchman, a lying Churchman, a cursing and swearing Churchman? or a red-hot persecuting Churchman, that would send all Dissenters to the devil at a clap? He is a lover of the Church who is a lover of God, and consequently of all mankind. Whoever else talks of loving the Church, is a cheat.[1]

The member of Parliament, once elected, had the obligation of protecting the inhabitants of England from the suppression of their lawful civil and religious liberties. Wesley was insistent in his demands that the citizen fear God and honor the king, but he was equally insistent that government officials carry out their proper functions under the law.

The man who most nearly approached Wesley's concept of the ideal statesman was Lord Dartmouth, whom he described as one of the "honestest and most sensible men in the kingdom."[2] The high regard Wesley had for Dartmouth was no doubt influenced by the fact that Dartmouth was an Evangelical who "did good service to the cause by advocating its interests both among the nobility and at court,"[3] and led him to write to Dartmouth concerning the American colonies. Unfortunately, however, not all of the Lords were of equal calibre. "I spent two or three hours in the House of Lords. I had frequently heard that this was the most venerable assembly in England, but I was disappointed! What is a Lord but a sinner, doomed

---

[1] Ibid., 273-4.

[2] Wesley, Journal, VI, 180.

[3] Abbey and Overton, English Church, p. 389.

to die!"[1] Perhaps it was for this reason that Wesley despaired of achieving social and economic reforms through political action. After having made a plea for some alleviation of economic distress in 1773 he wrote, "But will this ever be done? I fear not; at least we have no reason to hope for it shortly in such a nation as this; where there is such a deep avowed, thorough contempt of all religion as I never saw, never heard or read of, in any other nation."[2] There were too few Dartmouths.

The most consistent political effort made by John Wesley was that to gain protection for the Methodists - protection to which they were legally entitled. A typical example is recorded in his Journal:

> We rode to Stalbridge, long the seat of war, by a senseless, insolent mob, encouraged by their betters, so called, to outrage their quiet neighbours. For what? Why, they were mad; they were Methodists. So, to bring them to their senses, they would beat their brains out. They broke their windows, leaving not one whole pane of glass, spoiled their goods, and assaulted their persons with dirt and rotten eggs and stones whenever they appeared in the street. But no magistrate, though they applied to several, would show them either mercy or justice. At length they wrote to me. I ordered a lawyer to write to the rioters. He did so, but they set him at nought. We then moved to the Court of the King's Bench. By various artifices they got the trial put off from one assizes to the other for eighteen months. But it fell so much heavier on themselves when they were found guilty; and from that time, finding there is law for Methodists, they have suffered them to be at peace.[3]

The law for which Wesley had so much respect was effective only when public officials were prepared to enforce it, and he constantly brought that fact to the attention of those officials who failed to carry

---

[1] Wesley, Journal, VII, 46.

[2] Wesley, Works (2), VI, 342.

[3] Wesley, Journal, V, 183-4.

out their responsibilities. He wrote of an occasion on which a mob had been "stirred up by a bad man who told them, 'There is no law for Methodists.' Hence continual riots followed; till, after a while, an upright magistrate took the cause in hand, and so managed both the rioters and him who set them at work, that they have been quiet as lambs ever since."[1] On another occasion, following a riotous day, Wesley wrote to the mayor of the town in the spirit which was typical of his requests for fair treatment, "I fear God and honour the king. I earnestly desire to be at peace with all men. I have not willingly given offence either to the magistrates, the clergy or any of the inhabitants....neither do I desire anything of them but to be treated (I will not say as a clergyman, a gentleman, or a Christian, but) with such justice and humanity as are due to a Jew, a Turk, or a Pagan."[2] The justice and humanity he requested were provided for under the laws of England. Wesley felt that the only thing needed was proper enforcement of those laws.

The never-ending efforts of John Wesley to inculcate veneration for law and order upon the Methodists - to get them, as well as all the inhabitants of England, to fear God and honor the king - whether they be poor unenfranchised citizens or lords, would seem to make him an anachronism in the eighteenth century. Upon closer inspection, however, we find a definite relationship between Wesley and the radicals. Both were interested in the freedom of the individual, but what the radicals hoped to bring about through changes in the structure of the state Wesley

---

[1] Ibid., 56.

[2] Ibid., III, 473-4.

thought could be accomplished only through the development of individual character in a society in which there was due regard for law and order.[1] There is a great similarity in the insistence of both Wesley and the radicals on respect for law,[2] tolerance, humanitarianism, and the belief that a state must fulfill the moral purpose of providing the "good life" for its citizens.

The greatest difference between Wesley and the radicals, and it is a very significant difference, lay in their concepts of the origin of civil power. Wesley believed that the radicals were wrong when they said it came from the people, since Scripture, reason, and experience all showed that such was not the case. The people, that is, all of the people, were obviously unfitted to take part in the government until they were reborn, and put their Christian beliefs into practice, as at Kingswood. Wesley seems to have been almost completely unaware of the political significance of the social and economic changes that were taking place in his century - changes that made his appeal to the individual conscience as the mainspring of desirable political action impossible to realize. The radicals proved to be closer to a satisfactory solution of the political problems of the eighteenth century, but the Wesleyan insistence upon the strong moral character of the individual citizen played an important part in preparing the citizens of England for their responsibilities.

---

[1] Warner, Wesleyan Movement, p. 122.

[2] The Wesleyan concept of law was based upon Blackstone rather than Bentham.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN WESLEY AS PRACTICAL THINKER AND REFORMER

A SUMMARY

The mature thought of John Wesley was, as we have seen, the result of the interaction of many influences upon him. Epworth rectory, where the mother's influence was dominant, was responsible for the methodicity, austerity, and practicality that were typical of his teaching and preaching. Charterhouse and Oxford brought him into contact with a different kind of intellectual climate, and with the world of reality. His mother had given him an excellent background upon which further intellectual growth could be based, but the ability to get along with people and to cope with the problems encountered outside an isolated rectory came to Wesley very slowly through bitter experience. The writings of á Kempis, Law, and Taylor, read by Wesley while a student at Oxford, caused him to take a more serious attitude toward religion, and marked the beginning of a long period of doubt and indecision.

The formation of the Holy Club injected a new element into Wesley's thinking, and started him toward his career as an evangelist. The social aspects of Christianity began to take on tremendous significance for him, even though it was to take ten years to turn the High Church legalist into a man of such broad sympathies that he would "break with no man for his beliefs." During this crucial period of indecision and doubt Wesley

drew freely upon the religious experiences of others, especially the Moravians. It may be recalled that Wesley accepted their belief in instantaneous conversion when several of them convinced him that they had experienced such a conversion. This proof, added to his observation of their Christian conduct even in times of great stress, seemed to him to furnish incontrovertible evidence of the power of Christianity, and led directly to his own conversion, or new birth.

Wesley's conviction that he had a special mission to perform in preaching to the poor about the saving power of Christ, which the individual believer could experience through the new birth, led to bitter attacks upon him. Pulpits were closed to him and his followers; they were the victims of attacks by mobs; they were accused of infidelity to Church and State; and they were considered to be enthusiasts by other religious groups. Before his death, however, he had become a widely-respected leader of a society which had done much for the betterment of England. To what may we attribute this amazing reversal of opinion? The tireless energy with which Wesley pursued his stated objective of promoting a vital religion, and the administrative abilities he displayed in setting up and maintaining his society were no doubt important factors in his success, but they must be ranked as less significant than the nature of Wesley's teachings.

The major campaigns waged by Wesley were directed toward sin, ignorance, and the prevailing religious tone, which is best illustrated by the statement, "be not righteous overmuch." The principal weapon used in the battle against these evils was the appeal to experience - the

appeal to the people of England to live their religious beliefs. Wesley's ministry was not concerned with the promulgation of new beliefs, but rather with a changed emphasis upon those which were already in existence. He hoped to revive deep religious feeling in England by emphasizing the importance of individual belief and practice in the battle against what he considered to be the irreligious aspects of English life.

The values Wesley repeated over and over to his followers were values which, if practiced, would produce reliant, sober, industrious, God-fearing, useful citizens. He told them that Christianity was a vital, dynamic faith that would lead ultimately to salvation, and would in the meantime make life on earth a fuller, richer experience. True freedom for man, the primary goal of the eighteenth century, would begin with his release from the bondage of sin, and the restoration of the soul to its original purity - its natural state[1] - would be accomplished gradually. The person experiencing such a change would show his love for God and man by taking an active part in the social, economic, and political life of his community, thus becoming more valuable in the sight of God and man. The sermons preached by Wesley were simple, phrased in language the people had no difficulty in understanding, and primarily concerned with a few basic elements of Christianity.

The people presumably most interested in Wesley's message were "those in whom a strong moral sense, and a keen eye for the facts of life, were most strongly developed." Those whose "intellectual instincts were

---

[1] See p. 67.

predominant became sceptical with Hume," while "men of warmer temperament and greater imaginative power might take shelter in Law's theosophical refuge."[1] This criticism of Wesley misinterprets the whole aim of the evangelical movement in that it presupposes the existence of a strong moral sense among those who followed Wesley. The appeal of John Wesley for thousands of Englishmen was not due to the fact that they had a strong moral sense, but rather that his sermons helped them to see the desirability of developing such a moral sense. The keen eye for the facts of life did not lead men to Wesley, but followed as a result of Wesley's insistence upon an active concern for human affairs. The sceptics who followed Hume and the men who found shelter in Law's mysticism were equally guilty, in Wesley's eyes, of removing from their consideration the real problems of England - the sin and ignorance of the poor. The proper sphere of activity for truly religious people was not the realm of the abstract, but concern with problems faced by people here and now, and Wesley's constant aim was to make his followers conscious of their responsibilities in that sphere.

For John Wesley individual character and intellect were the prime movers in human progress. The standards by which he judged all activities and attitudes were Scripture, reason, and experience, with the first serving as the source of Christian belief, and the last two furnishing proof of its truth. "The strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity," Wesley once said, was that he "experienced it in my breast."[2] Any

---

[1] Stephen, English Thought, II, 415.

[2] Welch, Selections, p. 245.

individual could experience the power of Christianity if only he followed Wesley's primary doctrines of justification by faith, the new birth, and Christian perfection. Individuals living those beliefs would lead the way in the improvement of the social, political, and economic evils of the time. Involved theology would not help an individual to become better, but might prove to be a handicap. The core of Wesley's teachings lay in his insistence upon a life of purposive activity in which the individual, as an individual, was the key to a better future both for himself and his community.

The Wesleyan emphasis upon a life of active Christian service in which individual effort was the all-important factor, and in which social and economic status made no difference, had a strong appeal for those who found themselves without adequate religious guidance, without education, and, in many cases, without adequate provision for their social and economic welfare. The strength of that appeal may be readily seen in the rapidity with which the movement spread.

The inconsistencies and weaknesses in Wesley's teachings and methods are not so apparent, and deserve some attention. Perhaps the most glaring inconsistency in Wesley's thought was his insistence upon the primary importance of individual action, while at the same time he was equally insistent that certain group action was mandatory. The Church of England, for example, was considered by Wesley to have means of grace which were indispensable to salvation, and it was necessary that his followers participate in the rites and sacraments of the Church. The difficulty raised for Wesley and his followers by the article concerning baptism,

which came into conflict with Wesley's doctrine of the new birth, was not enough to cause him to drop his teaching, but led to an unsuccessful attempt to show that his doctrine was not contrary to the article.[1] The government of England was, he thought, the best then in existence, since it gave every individual civil and religious freedom. Under the Wesleyan concept, however, that freedom was restricted. No preacher or member could speak against the King or the Parliament if he wanted to remain in good standing in the Methodist Societies. The freedom desired by Wesley for the individual citizens of England was freedom to do what they should want to do, and what they should want was freedom under the laws of England. Wesley's schools, which were designed primarily to help children toward salvation, and secondarily to give them some secular education, serve as another example of his dependence upon group action to bring about desirable changes.[2]

It may, of course, be argued that these groups were recognized by Wesley as means through which the desired end of individual experience might be attained, and it is true that his major justification for the type of government England had was that it gave its citizens civil and religious freedom. This does not, however, resolve the difficulty created for the Methodists in their attempts to follow his doctrine of experience, which certainly implied more individual freedom than his insistence upon strict allegiance to Church and State would allow. Wesley seems never to

---

[1] See pp. 71-3.

[2] See pp. 118-30.

have realized that his appeal to experience would almost inevitably lead to demands on the part of his followers for more freedom than he was willing to grant them.

The Wesleyan standards of Scripture, reason, and experience were emphasized at every opportunity, but during his lifetime those standards were applied exclusively by John Wesley. The eighteenth century emphasis on order was part of his temperament, and he felt that maintaining order among the Methodists was one of his responsibilities. Even the Methodist Conferences which met to set the policies, doctrines, and methods of the Societies were called to meet at his pleasure, and then to serve only in an advisory capacity.[1] The desired individual character and intellect was to result from the application of Wesley's standards, and would lead the way to better things only if it were developed along the lines he established. If things did not proceed as he expected, as at Kingswood school,[2] the fault lay with the individuals who were not doing as they should. Wesley's own observation, experience, and reason had convinced him of the practicability of what he taught. This virtual despotism, benevolent though it is generally considered to have been, left little room for the exercise of individual initiative.

The greatest strength of Wesley's teachings was identical with their greatest weakness - his emphasis upon the practical aspects of Christianity. Many factors combined to bring about the primary interest

---

[1] See pp. 133-4.

[2] See pp. 129-30.

shown by Wesley in practical religion, not the least of which was his mother's belief that speculation was by its very nature an idle pursuit.[1] The most important influence, however, was the proof given him by the Moravians of the power of the Christian faith, experienced by each believer, to work in the world. They convinced him that outward Christianity was only the visible evidence of the saving grace of Christ working within an individual who had faith that Christ had died for his sins. From that point on Wesley looked upon Christianity not as an ideal to be attained through philosophical speculation or a mystical devotion to God, but as a practical method for relieving the problems of a disordered world. What the people of England to whom he chose to preach - the poor - needed to hear was not an involved or elaborate theology, but rather a simple, straightforward message of hope for all mankind. The opportunity to preach that simple message came to him as a result of his exclusion from Anglican pulpits, and his initial success as a field-preacher determined his future course.

Speculation as to whether or not Wesley was intellectually capable of making any major contribution to Christian thought is interesting, but fruitless. He did not. He was too busy preaching and writing in an effort to correct what was wrong in England - to find immediate solutions for her problems. The only long-range solution he proposed was the spread of a "vital, practical religion" which would, over a long period of time, bring an end to the evils of a disordered world. Most of the

writing done by Wesley in his attempts to bring about reforms is of academic interest now because of its extremely limited application.

Wesley's intense interest in practical problems not only made it impossible for him to take into consideration the more theoretical aspects of Christianity, but also made him too impatient with theories of any kind. He was unable to appreciate the educational theories of Rousseau,[1] the political theories of Priestley and Price,[2] the writings of Montesquieu and Voltaire, and the demands of the Americans for independence,[3] because in each case they failed to meet his standards of Scripture, reason, and experience.

The frequently-expressed dislike of John Wesley for philosophers has led his critics to believe that the whole movement was intellectually sterile, but the term must be used in a restricted sense if the criticism is to be accepted. Wesley was not opposed to learning, but took many opportunities to encourage wide reading by his preachers and followers.[4] He read and disseminated useful literature of all types throughout his long career.[5] Much of it was edited by him in order to make it more

---

[1] After reading Emile Wesley wrote that it was "whimsical to the last degree, grounded upon neither reason nor experience." Wesley, Journal, V, 353.

[2] See pp. 147-54.

[3] See pp. 157-60.

[4] Wesley believed that "reading Christians will be knowing Christians." He wrote to one of his preachers, "What has exceedingly hurt you in times past, nay, and I fear to this day, is want of reading. ...Hence your talent in preaching does not increase. It is lively, but not deep; there is little variety; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this." Wesley, Letters, IV, 103.

[5] See Appendix A for a representative list of Wesley's works.

intelligible to his uneducated readers, and to make sure it contained nothing objectionable. In spite of the unfortunate editing Wesley did on some works, notably Milton's, the effect was to encourage reading by those who had not previously been exposed to good literature. He was aware of the intellectual currents of the time, even though he could not sympathize with them in many cases. His primary doctrines of justification by faith, the new birth, and Christian perfection needed no philosophical justification, but could make use of all sorts of useful knowledge in making this world a better place to live. The Christian who was to attain perfection through showing perfect love for God and man could not do so in the introspection of mysticism or in the withdrawal from worldly problems Wesley felt to be typical of philosophy, but he had need of information on medicine, physical exercise, governmental problems, social problems, economic maladjustments and similar problems if he were to carry out his responsibilities. In learning, as in the practice of Christianity, Wesley placed primary emphasis upon what was useful in that it led to the desired end - Christian perfection.

John Wesley solved one of the major problems of Christianity, that of keeping its appeal alive and fresh in an ever-changing world, in a way that was well-suited to the needs of most of the people of England. The decision, made very early in his career, that he was going to direct his ministry toward the poor determined the level and approach of his teachings. The level was dictated by the limited understanding of his followers; the approach by their needs. His strength lay in his ability to satisfy those needs through an appeal they could understand.

His greatest weakness lay in his belief that actions or knowledge not based upon what he understood to be reason, experience, and Scripture were not worthy of attention, thus making it impossible for Methodism to go beyond concern for the immediate. The legacy of John Wesley to the Methodist Church, which he hoped would never come into being, was his emphasis upon practical religion. Nineteenth and twentieth-century Methodism has inherited the vitality as well as the pragmatic character of that emphasis, but it has lost the theological basis upon which it was built - the theology of the Church of England - without which Methodism to John Wesley was unthinkable.

APPENDIX A

In keeping with his belief that reading Christians would be knowing Christians Wesley wrote or edited works in almost every field. Most of them were religious in character, but there were also many which were written on secular topics with the specific purpose of making Methodists as well-informed as possible. The following list is indicative of Wesley's tremendous breadth of interest, and of the importance he placed upon providing his followers with literature of all types.

A Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation, or a Compendium of Natural Philosophy, 5 Vols.

Contained whatever was known with regard to the earth or heavens, and written in the plainest language possible, particularly free from all jargon of mathematics, which is mere heathen Greek to common readers. It attempted to set down what appears in nature, not the cause of these appearances.

It was taken from the writings of Buddaeus, Professor of Philosophy at Jena, Oliver Goldsmith's History of the Earth and Animated Nature, and Bonnet's Contemplation of Nature,

An Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost.

An attempt to make "the main of this excellent poem clear and intelligible to any uneducated person of a tolerable good understanding."

The Christian Pattern: or a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ.

Wesley was dissatisfied with Dean Stanhope's translation, and determined to give a full view of the self-denying purity of his favorite guide.

This was written in 1735, before Wesley's conversion, and was always his favorite devotional source, next to the Bible.

A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection.

An extract of Law's work of the same title.

A Serious Call to a Holy Life.

Wesley considered this treatise of Law to be outstanding in "its beauty of expression, justness, and depth of thought." Kempis and Law exerted more influence on him than any other writers.

The Pilgrim's Progress.

The abridgement destroyed the merit of the work, as is so frequently the case. Wesley's zeal to educate led him to attempt such things as this, though he must have known it was by its very nature impossible.

A Collection of Receits for the Use of the Poor.

"From a vast number, I have selected those, which are not only cheap, but safe: very few of them, if they do no good, being likely to do much harm."

A Word to a Drunkard.

Typical of brief pamphlets directed against the most prevalent vices of his day.

A Word to a Freeholder.

Written in 1747 just before an election. An attack on acceptance of bribes, and a plea that the Methodists vote for the man "who loved his God, his King, and his country."

A Compendium of Logick.

Taken from a work written by Dean Aldrich of Christ Church, Oxford, with the practical applications of logic illustrated by Wesley's victories over his opponents.

Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Colloquia Selecta

A life of Erasmus, plus twelve of his colloquies. Typical of the books prepared by Wesley for use at Kingswood School.

A Short French Grammar.

One of the grammars written for use at Kingswood. Wesley thought his students should know French in spite of his very low opinion of the language, which was the "poorest, meanest language in Europe; it is no more comparable to the German or Spanish than a bagpipe is to an organ; it is as impossible to write a fine poem in French as to make fine music on a Jew's harp."

The Complete English Dictionary.

Published not "to get money, but to assist persons of common sense and no learning to understand the best English authors."

The second edition included "some hundreds of words from Mr. (Samuel) Johnson's Dictionary." Plagiarism was obviously not a horrid word at that time.

Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament.

The Desideratum; or, Electricity Made Plain and Useful.

"In the following tract I have endeavoured to comprize the sum of what has been hitherto published on this curious and important subject by Mr. Franklin, Dr. Hoadly, Mr. Wilson, Watson, Lovett, Freke, Martin, Watkins, and in the monthly Magazines. But I am chiefly indebted to Mr. Franklin for the speculative part, and to Mr. Lovett for the practical."

Advices with Respect to Health.

An extract from a book by a Dr. Tissot, whom Wesley considered to be "a person of strong understanding, extensive knowledge, and deep experience." His descriptions of diseases were "truly admirable, and so clearly stated that even common people of tolerable sense may readily distinguish them."

Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs.
Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power.

Two of Wesley's major attempts to defend his political views. See Chapter V. Written in answer to the political ideas of Price and Priestley.

A Short Roman History.

Taken from Hook's Roman History. For use in his schools.

The Arminian Magazine.

A monthly publication, started in 1778, still being published as the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine.

A portion of the magazine was always devoted to poetry, which "was the language of the emotions," and "the sublimest poetry that which treats religious topics."

Such writers as Dryden, Pope, Shakespeare, Gray, Chaucer, Cowper, and Samuel Johnson appeared with some regularity, along with articles on Montesquien, Buffon, Locke, and Priestley.

One of Wesley's most effective "instruments of religious and cultural enlightenment," its annual circulation had reached 7,000 copies at the time of his death.

(Material for the above list drawn from Green, The Works of John and Charles Wesley, and Herbert, John Wesley as Editor and Author.)

APPENDIX B

DETAILS OF

'COURSE OF ACADEMICAL LEARNING' (UNIVERSITY COURSE) AT

KINGSWOOD SCHOOL

First Year

Read Lowth's English Grammar; Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French Grammars; Cornelius Nepos; Sallust; Caesar; Tully's Offices; Terence; Phaedrus; Aeneid; Dilworth; Randal; Bengel; Vossius; Aldrich and Wallis's Logic; Langbaine's Ethics; Hutchinson on the Passions; Spanheim's 'Introduction to Ecclesiastical History'; Puffendorf's 'Introduction to the History of Europe'; 'Moral and Sacred Poems'; Hebrew Pentateuch, with the notes; Greek Testament - Mathew to the Acts, with the notes; Xenophon's Cyrus; Homer's Illiad; Bishop Pearson on the Creed; ten volumes of the 'Christian Library'; Telemaque.

Second Year

Look over the Grammars; read Velleius Paterculus; Tusculan Questions; Excerpta; Vidae Opera; Lusus Westmonasterienses; Chronological Tables; Euclid's Elements; Nell's Tracts; Newton's Principia; Mosheim's 'Introduction to Church History'; Spenser's 'Fairie Queene'; Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible; Greek Testament ad finem; Kurou Anabasis; Homer's Odyssey; twelve volumes of the 'Christian Library'; Ramsay's Cyrus; Racine.

Third Year

Look over the Grammars; Livy; Suetonius; Tully, 'De Finibus'; Musae Anglicanae; Dr. Burton's Poemata; Lord Forbes's Tracts; Abridgement of Hutchinson's Works; 'Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation'; Rollin's 'Ancient History'; Hume's 'History of England'; Neal's 'History of the Puritans'; Milton's Poetical Works; Hebrew Bible - Job to the Canticles; Greek Testament; Plato's Dialogues; Greek Epigrams; twelve volumes of the 'Christian Library'; Pascal; Corneille.

Fourth Year

Look over the Grammars; Tacitus; Grotil Historia Belgica; Tully, 'De Natura Deorum'; Praedium Rusticum; Carmina Quadragesimalia; 'Philosophical Transactions,' abridged; Watt's Astronomy &c.; Compendium Metaphysicae; Watt's Ontology; Locke's Essay; Malebranche; Clarendon's History; Neal's 'History of New England'; Antonio Solis's 'History of Mexico'; Shakespeare; rest of the Hebrew Bible; Greek Testament; Epictetus; Marcus Antonius; Poetae Minores; end of the 'Christian Library'; 'La Faussete de les Vertues Humaines'; Quesnel sur les Evangiles.

"Whoever carefully goes through this course will be a better scholar than nine in ten graduates at Oxford or Cambridge." Wesley, Works (2), VIII, 335-6.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Arminian Magazine. Vol. IV, 1781.

Minutes of the Methodist Conferences. 2 vols. London: Conference Office, 1812.

Wesley, John. Primitive Physick. Boston: Cyrus Stone, 1858.

Wesley, John. The Journal of John Wesley. Standard Edition. Edited by Nehemiah Curnock. 8 vols. London: Epworth Press, 1938.

Wesley, John. The Letters of John Wesley, A. M. Standard Edition. Edited by John Telford. 8 vols. London: Epworth Press, 1931.

Wesley, John. The Standard Sermons of John Wesley. Edited by E. H. Sugden. 2 vols. London: Epworth Press, 1951.

Wesley, John. The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M. 7 vols. New York: Carlton and Lanahan, n.d.

Wesley, John. Thoughts Concerning the Origins of Power. Bristol: W. Pine, 1772.

Wesley, John. Works of the Rev. John Wesley. 10 vols. New York: J. and J. Harper, 1827.

Secondary Sources

Abbey, C. J. The English Church and Its Bishops, 1700-1800. 2 vols. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1887.

Abbey, C. J. and Overton, J. H. The English Church in the Eighteenth Century. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907.

Bebb, E. D. Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life, 1660-1800. London: Epworth Press, 1935.

Belden, A. D. George Whitefield the Awakener. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953.

Body, A. H. John Wesley and Education. London: Epworth Press, 1936.

Burtner, Robt. W. and Chiles, Robt. E. A Compend of Wesley's Theology. New York: Abingdon Press, 1946.

Cannon, W. R. The Theology of John Wesley. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946.

Carre, Meyrick H. Phases of Thought in England. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949.

Cassirer, E. The Philosophy of the Enlightenment. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

Cell, G. C. The Rediscovery of John Wesley. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1935.

Church, Leslie F. The Early Methodist People. New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.

Clarke, Eliza. Susanna Wesley. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886.

Coomer, Duncan. English Dissent Under the Early Hanoverians. London: The Epworth Press, 1946.

Dimond, S. G. The Psychology of the Methodist Revival. London: Oxford University Press, 1926.

Downs, Norton (ed.). Essays in Honor of Conyers Read. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Edwards, M. After Wesley. London: Epworth Press, 1948.

Edwards, M. John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century. London: Geo. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1933.

Elliot, W. Y. and McDonald, N. A. Western Political Heritage. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950.

Elliott-Binns, L. E. The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study. Greenwich: Seabury Press, 1953.

Feiling, K. G. A History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714. London: Oxford University Press, 1932.

Fitchett, W. H. Wesley and His Century. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908.

Foakes-Jackson, F. J. Social Life in England, 1750-1850. New York: Macmillan Co., 1916.

George, M. D. England in Johnson's Day. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928.

George, M. D. London Life in the 18th Century. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

Gibson, E. C. S. The Thirty-Nine Articles. London: Methuen and Co., 1897.

Gill, F. C. The Romantic Movement and Methodism. London: Epworth Press, 1937.

Godley, A. D. Oxford in the Eighteenth Century. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908.

Green, J. B. John Wesley and William Law. London: Epworth Press, 1945.

Green, J. R. A Short History of the English People. New York: American Book Co., 1916.

Green, R. The Works of John and Charles Wesley. London: Methodist Publishing House, 1906.

Halévy, E. A History of the English People in 1815. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1924.

Halévy, E. The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928.

Hammond, J. L. and B. The Bleak Age. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934.

Hammond, J. L. and B. The Town Labourer. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925.

Harrison, G. Elsie. Son to Susanna. Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938.

Hearnshaw, F. J. C. (ed.). The Social and Political Ideas of Some English Thinkers of the Augustan Age - A. D. - 1650-1750. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1923.

Hearnshaw, F. J. C. (ed.). Social and Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Revolutionary Era. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1950.

Herbert, Thomas W. John Wesley as Editor and Author. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940.

Lecky, W. E. H. A History of England in the Eighteenth Century. New York: D. Appleton Company, 1882.

Lee, Umphrey. John Wesley and Modern Religion. Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936.

Lee, Umphrey. The Lord's Horsemen. New York: The Century Co., 1928.

Legg, J. W. English Church Life from the Restoration to the Tractarian Movement. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914.

Lowther Clarke, W. K. Eighteenth Century Piety. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944.

Lowther Clarke, W. K. (ed.). Liturgy and Worship. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1950.

Mac Arthur, K. W. The Economic Ethics of John Wesley. New York: Abingdon Press, 1936.

Mallet, C. E. A History of the University of Oxford. 3 vols. London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1927.

McConnell, F. J. John Wesley. New York: The Abingdon Press, 1939.

M'Giffert, A. C. Protestant Thought Before Kant. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1942.

Mitchell, R. D. and Leys, M. D. R. A History of the English People. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950.

Overton, J. H. John Wesley. New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1891.

Overton, J. H. The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century. New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., n.d.

Overton, J. H. and Relton, F. The History of the English Church 1714-1800. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1924.

Payne, Ernest A. The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England. 3rd. edition. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1951.

Piette, M. John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937.

Plumb, J. H. England in the Eighteenth Century. Harmondsworth-Middlesex: Penguin, 1950.

Price, R. Observations on Civil Liberty. London: T. Cadell, 1776.

Prince, J. W. Wesley on Religious Education. New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1926.

Rattenbury, J. E. Wesley's Legacy to the World. London: Epworth Press, 1938.

Rigg, James H. The Churchmanship of John Wesley. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room, 1886.

Simon, J. S. John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism. London: Epworth Press, 1925.

Simon, J. S. John Wesley and the Methodist Societies. London: Epworth Press, 1923.

Simon, J. S. John Wesley and the Religious Societies. London: Epworth Press, 1921.

Simon, J. S. John Wesley The Last Phase. London: Epworth Press, 1934.

Simon, J. S. John Wesley The Master Builder. London: Epworth Press, 1927.

Snell, F. J. Wesley and Methodism. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900.

Southey, Robert. Life of Wesley. London: Oxford University Press, 1925.

Stephen, L. English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century. London: Duckworth, 1903.

Stephen, L. History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. 3rd. edition. New York: Peter Smith, 1949.

Stromburg, R. N. Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954.

Tawney, R. H. Religion and the Rise of Capitalism. New York: New American Library, 1926.

Telford, John. The Life of John Wesley. London: Epworth Press, 1924.

Thompson, D. D. John Wesley as a Social Reformer. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1898.

Townsend, W. J., Workman, H. B., and Eayrs, G. A New History of Methodism. 2 vols. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909.

Trevelyan, G. M. English Social History. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942.

Trevelyan, G. M. The England of Queen Anne. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934.

Turberville, A. S. (ed.). Johnson's England. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

Tyerman, L. Life and Times of John Wesley. 4th edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878.

Tyerman, L. The Life and Times of Samuel Wesley. London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1866.

Warner, W. J. The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930.

Wearmouth, Robert. Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century. London: Epworth Press, 1945.

Wearmouth, Robert. Methodism and the Working-Class Movement of England, 1800-1850. London: Epworth Press, 1946.