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Proceedings

OF THE

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THE STORY OF THE LEEDS "NON-CONS"

The Reasons for the Dispute

IT is possible still to observe, sometimes in militant survival, the motivations and practices of the three denominations which united in the Methodist Church of 1932, and in none more conspicuously than in the lineage of "Free Methodism". In its insistence on circuit independency and local autonomy, Free Methodism tended to produce a constricted semi-isolationism which dissipated much of its potentiality in a loose association of "little frees", and disrupted Wesleyan Methodism in what Dr. Benjamin Gregory called "three concatenated secessions" of 1827, 1835 and 1849.

The "concatenation" has been generally recognized, but the first secession, consequent upon the Leeds Organ controversy of 1827, though the smallest in the numbers involved, was the pioneer in methods of revolt and church-organization which were copied by the later secessionists, viz. constitutional local independence, lay-predominancy, with its corollary of ministerial subordination, and the withholding of service and supplies by deliberate resolution. It furnished the vocabulary of protesting Methodists: the self-styled "enslaved" who fought for their "freedom", the "bondage" and the "chains" of pastoral, priestly and Conference dictatorship from which they struggled for "liberation". If space permitted, it would be relevant to inquire whether the resultant systems were "free" or "Methodist". The Leeds case offers a large part of the answer.

The new Brunswick chapel, Leeds, was opened on Friday, 9th September 1825. Dr. Adam Clarke preached the opening sermon, and among other preachers was the Rev. Jabez Bunting. With accommodation variously estimated at from 2,000 to 3,000, with 1,000 of the sittings for the poor, it was claimed to be the largest chapel in the Connexion. Herein lay some part of the problem which gave rise to the ensuing dispute. Without adequate instrumental support, congregational singing was more of a task than a

pleasure, and it soon began to be whispered that certain of the trustees wished to install an organ. The consent of Conference would be necessary, but the vacillations of Conference itself on the question of organs had left the relevant laws in a state of extreme ambiguity.

In 1805 it was enacted: "Let no instrument of music be introduced into the singers' seat, except a bass viol, should the principal singer require it." This was a rather odd concession, in view of later developments, since it gave authority to determine a part of the service not to the superintendent minister, the officiating preacher, or the society officials, but to the principal singer.

The Conference of 1808 judged it expedient "to refuse, after this present year, their sanction or consent to the erection of any organ in our chapels". In 1815 the rule of 1805 was strictly re-enforced, but by 1820 important changes in the general attitude to public worship, and to organs in particular, had become manifest.

Methodism had attracted a body of worshippers distinguished as "members of the congregation", who were not always content with the current forms of worship. Although not "official" members of society, many of them contributed to pew rents, collections, and building funds. Methodist leadership had to accept its responsibility and ascertain its duty towards all members and friends of the congregation and their sons and daughters. Matthew Baxter wrote in 1865, criticizing the procedure of the 1827 Conference in granting permission for the erection of an organ in Brunswick chapel, but he was forced to the admission: "In the interval between 1820 and 1827, it [the organ] had risen into great favour with the rulers of the people." He could have put his initial date earlier than 1820, for in that year the Conference felt impelled to adopt a most important modifying law:

We think that in some of the larger chapels, where some instrumental music may be deemed expedient in order to guide the congregational singing, organs may be allowed by special consent of the Conference; but every application for such consent shall be first made at the District Meeting; and if it obtain their sanction, shall be then referred to a Committee at the Conference, who shall report their opinion as to the propriety of acceding to the request, and also as to the restrictions with which the permission to erect an organ ought, in that particular case, to be accompanied.

When the rumours of the trustees' intention to install an organ began to circulate, it was alleged that when subscriptions were solicited for the new chapel, the superintendent minister, the Rev. George Marsden, with the trustees, had given a pledge that neither an organ nor the Liturgy would be introduced into the public worship in the chapel. Mr. J. Barr, self-constituted apologist for the anti-organ party, in a *Statement of Facts* published in October 1827, said:

The Rev. Thomas Stanley [who had succeeded Mr. Marsden] told a

Leaders' Meeting that a few Trustees had contemplated an organ right from the beginning.

If the allegation were true, these trustees were not very intelligent. They not only exposed themselves to the charge of duplicity, but by opening the chapel before the organ was installed, they hazarded their right in the matter. When once the chapel had been opened, and a minister appointed by the Conference, "every part of the Public Worship of God" passed into the control of the superintendent or the officiating preacher for the time being.¹ The trustees denied the allegation. They raised a petition, with 76 signatures, requesting the installation of an organ. The anti-organists alleged that 45 of the signatories were non-members, and that some had signed reluctantly, others out of "private friendship". Later, in a memorial of protest to the Conference, they made the astonishing charge:

On the means used to obtain signatures in favour of the organ, in several cases they were not the most honourable, and we know that in some cases forgeries were committed.

This incident marks a constant tendency to give biased slants to facts and to lay obloquy on persons. Dr. Oliver A. Beckerlegge, in *The Story of the United Methodist Free Churches*, contends:

The telling of history demands a fearless recital of the facts as far as they can be discerned, an attempt to see things through the eyes of the people involved, and as honest an interpretation of them as human fallibility will allow.

He is convinced that "the Reformers were usually right". An equally fearless and honest interpretation may conclude that the Conference and the preachers were not always wrong: in any comparison some disparagement must be debited to both sides.

In 1826 the Leeds societies were divided into East and West circuits, each with its one Leaders' Meeting for the town societies. There were approximately 6,000 members in the Leeds societies, so the division was not unreasonable. Whether the Conference had directed the division on grounds of policy as well as of convenience, as alleged by Matthew Johnson in the *Wesleyan Association Magazine*, 1849, cannot be certainly known.

The Brunswick society was in the East circuit, and at a town Leaders' Meeting on 6th October 1826 the "organ-rumours" were mentioned. In the absence of the superintendent, Thomas Stanley, the second minister of the circuit, John Walmsley, was in the chair. He suggested the "propriety of the matter laying over until the following week, when Mr. Stanley would be present, and this, of course, was agreed to."

Thomas Stanley was described by Matthew Johnson as a "well-informed and excellent man". He was Chairman of the Leeds District, a man of experience and sound judgement, presumably familiar with Methodist law and usage. This opinion he confirmed

¹ *Minutes*, 1808.

at the next weekly Leaders' Meeting, on 13th October, when he ruled that a memorial protesting against the erection of an organ, signed by 60 local preachers, among them some belonging to the Leeds West circuit, should not be read. However, he compromised it by a ruling on the organ question itself that was to become famous or notorious, according to the point of view. When the question was asked, what course of procedure the rules of the Connexion enjoined in such a case, his reply was that "the concurrence of the Leaders' Meeting was necessary to success, and that without it the Conference would not listen to an application from any quarter whatever on the subject". Thereupon the Leaders' Meeting adopted, with practical unanimity, resolutions against the erection of an organ, and requested Mr. Stanley to lay them before the Trustees' Meeting.

The trustees met on 26th October to consider the petition that had been addressed to them by seat-holders and members. About two-thirds of the trustees were present. Despite the resolutions of the Leaders' Meeting, and the known opposition of the local preachers, eight trustees voted for proceeding with the organ scheme. Six were against, and one was neutral. In deference to the superintendent's ruling of 13th October, they presented a memorial to a Special Leaders' Meeting held in November, asking for approval of their scheme; but by a decisive vote of 60 against 1, the resolution was adopted.

That it was not desirable to place an organ in the chapel. It would deprive the Society of that simplicity of worship which had been so long and so signally owned of God.

Nevertheless in February 1827 the trustees began to solicit subscriptions for an organ. They were fortified in their determination by authoritative opinions which repudiated the ruling of the superintendent. One of the trustees, Mr. W. Smith, had been on a visit to London, and while there had taken the opportunity of consulting John Stephens, who was to become President of Conference that year. Another trustee, Mr. W. Scarth, wrote to Richard Watson, the 1826 President. It was the opinion of both Watson and Stephens that the Leaders' Meeting "had nothing to do with the matter".

The 1820 organ law, as interpreted by the anti-organists, and by later writers like Benjamin Gregory, made the sanction of the District Meeting "henceforward an indispensable prerequisite to the laying of the application before a Conference Committee". Thus the power of absolute veto was given to the District Meeting; but if the Leeds East superintendent was right, it lay in the power of the Leaders' Meeting.

In all the circumstances, the District Meeting was right and wise to receive and consider the application, but after careful scrutiny it was decided by 13 votes to 7 that "it was not desirable to grant the required permission to place an organ in Brunswick Chapel". This decision having been made, a higher wisdom would have left the

issue with a clear, unambiguous negative. Unhappily, by design or fortuity, to forestall embarrassments from higher quarters, or because of an understanding of the rights of appeal, the way was left open for the application to be referred to the Conference.

It is curious that most writers on the subject ignore this sanction of an appeal to the Conference. A "curiouser" reference is that of the Rev. Rupert E. Davies, that a Special District Meeting decided to ban the organ, but that Conference ruled that the District Meeting *had no jurisdiction in the matter*. The fact is that it was not a *Special* District Meeting. The 1820 organ law laid upon District Meetings the specific duty of receiving and adjudicating upon applications for permission to erect organs. The dissentients may have been wrong to credit the District Meeting with the power of veto; they were certainly right to recognize its competence to consider the case.

Benjamin Gregory said that after the Leaders' Meeting decision

... four of the Brunswick Trustees were not in the mood of "believers waiting", but determined to carry their point, despite the District Meeting, and the plain English of the Organ-Law.

They sent their application to the Conference. When it became known in Leeds that the Conference had agreed to consider the application, the people were said to be "stunned" and filled with "consternation". It was complained that "the Leaders' Meeting was kept in profound ignorance of the appeal to the Conference". A writer in 1885, J. Kirsop, alleged that the Conference had violated its own 1820 law at the instigation of "one or two rich men". It was at this point that the differences of opinion became the contentions of strife.

In an *Appeal to the Wesleyan Methodist Societies*, December 1827, the dissentients said:

The dispute in which we are now engaged, is not whether our simple mode of worship shall be altered by the introduction of organs, the liturgy &c, but whether the Conference shall possess supreme and absolute sway over our Methodist Societies.

This assessment of the situation has been widely approved, but it tends to obscure the fact that the initial and main opposition was to the use of an organ in public worship.

The responsibility for the dispute has been laid at the door of Dr. Jabez Bunting. Dr. Beckerlegge and the Rev. Cyril J. Davey, for example, both conclude that but for his influence and interference no serious loss would have been incurred, and the subsequent history of Methodism might have been different. They assess correctly the importance of the Leeds case in the history of Methodist secession, but it is indisputable that it was dislike of the organ that created and detonated the constitutional controversy. Had there been no objection to the organ, there would have been no controversy. If the constitutional aspect is given priority, then the question arises whether

distaste for the organ or its opportuneness as a pretext for an attack on the Conference and the connexional system was the primary motive.

The opposing leaders and local preachers had begun to meet in secret "combination" meetings, and were probably not surprised, as professed by some, when the trustees opened their organ fund in February. In May the superintendent, Thomas Stanley, informed the Leaders' Meeting that the trustees intended to apply to the forthcoming Leeds District Meeting for its sanction to an application to the Conference for permission to erect the organ. Perhaps the "combination" underestimated the determination and the influence of the trustees. Benjamin Gregory and other later writers have missed the point that if "two or three of the malcontents were very awkward men to handle—quick-witted, resolute, and self-confident"—of the "Yorkshire variety of the John Bull genus", so also were the trustees who wanted the organ; and, though by only a "slight majority", they carried the motion to send their application to the District Meeting.

At the District Meeting, with Thomas Stanley in the chair, and an approximate attendance of thirty ministers, there was an immediate contention by some of the older preachers that the trustees, as trustees, had no *locus standi*, and could not interfere with the worship in the chapels; therefore, said they, the application could not be received. It was an embarrassing crisis. The Meeting knew that the trustees had powerful support; that men like Matthew Johnson (businessman, meddlesome and tempestuous) and James Sigston (educationist and schoolmaster, domineering and self-reliant) were oppositionists who would not easily yield a point.

It is admissible that in terms of Methodist rule and usage, control of the order and form of public worship did not lie with the trustees. By the rule of 1808 "every part of the public worship of God" passed to the superintendent minister, or the officiating preacher for the time being. But the trustees held *all* the property in trust. They were responsible for building, repairs, alterations, enlargements, offices, conveniences, and appurtenances. The rights of the trustees were specifically safeguarded in the various deeds and declarations. When the Leeds trustees began to solicit subscriptions for the new chapel and then for the organ, no one seems to have questioned their right to do so—as trustees. The objection lay in the adverse effect it was believed an organ would have on the character of the public worship!

The *Wesleyan Protestant Magazine*, 1829, opined:

A large majority of the most pious Leeds members were averse to their introduction [i.e. organs], as naturally tending to cool their ardour, abate the zeal, and diminish the intensity of hallowed feeling.

Instrumental music to the extent of a bass and double bass had long been used to assist congregational singing in the Leeds chapels, but

the intrusive and over-powering tones of an organ would at once damp their spirit, and paralyse the energy of their minds; infusing a dull and lifeless formality.

John Wesley denounced the practice of "bands of music and theatrical singers" being introduced into Methodist chapels at charity sermons, but he had spoken favourably of organ-music in 1782 when celebrating Holy Communion in Macclesfield parish church; and he did not veto the erection of organs at Bath in 1777, Keighley (1777-8), or Newark (1788), when a word from him would have been sufficient to cause such schemes to be abandoned. The "Anglican savour" of organs was disliked by those who sought separation from the Church of England, but it is a curiosity of the Leeds case that there was a chapel at Flower Bank, Burley, near Leeds, privately built and owned by a certain James Dickinson.

By arrangement with Charles Atmore when superintendent of the Leeds circuit, this chapel was held and maintained by Mr. Dickinson "for the disinterested and gratuitous services of our local brethren". Many of the Leeds local preachers served on its plan, and continued to do so after the outbreak of the Leeds organ dispute—and Flower Bank chapel was furnished *with an organ!* Against the charge of inconsistency it was argued that Mr. Dickinson had never been a Methodist member of society, and that therefore neither he nor his organ came under the regulations of the Wesleyan Connexion; but the argument accorded ill with the oft-expressed opinion that "loud and wailing" organs are "sinister and satanic . . . instruments of the devil".

The 1820 organ law (see above) was ambiguous in several important respects. (1) It did not specify the local body authorized to make the application. (2) It did not define the *nature* of the application to the District Meeting, i.e. was it for permission to erect an organ or for its sanction to an application to the Conference? (3) Every application for the *special consent* of the Conference had *first* to obtain the sanction of the District Meeting, but the terms of the Leeds District Meeting's resolution imply that there was no intention of imposing a veto. The mere phrase "*It is not desirable to grant the required permission*" is neither affirmative nor negative as a legal injunction.

The law also contained no reference to the right and procedure of appeal. Isaac Keeling, a minister in the Leeds West circuit, in replying to J. Barr's *Statement of Facts* in 1828, stated the general usage on appeals. Conference had always received, heard, and decided on all kinds of appeals from decisions of the District Meetings. The minutes of the meetings and proceedings were recorded for submission to the Conference, which was thus constituted a final court of revision and appeal.

JOHN T. HUGHES.

(To be continued)

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JOHN WESLEY'S REVERSION TO TYPE

The Influence of his Nonconformist Ancestry

WITH a shrewd flash of insight, John Wesley once told Adam Clarke: "If I were to write my own life I should begin it before I was born." That was his typically realistic way of paying tribute to the past. Ancestry has its influence on personality, and we cannot easily set aside Wesley's family tree. His parents, of course, were of the established Church, but a generation further back on either side of the line brings us to Wesley's grandfathers, who were both numbered among the ejected nonconformists in 1662.

In the paternal precedence stands the first John Wesley, a protégé of John Owen, the Puritan divine who was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. In 1658 he was approved by Cromwell's Triers as minister of the parish church at Whitchurch in Dorset, although he was not episcopally ordained and is even said to have preached against episcopacy. He had previously joined an "associated" congregation, and seems to have been an itinerant evangelist. He married the daughter of John White, one of the two assessors at the Westminster Assembly, and a thorn in the flesh to Archbishop Laud because of his protest against Arminian doctrine and undue ceremonialism.

In the summer of 1661 this earlier John Wesley was thrust into prison for refusing to adhere to the Book of Common Prayer in his services, and in the following year he was ejected from his living.¹ At the same time his father, Bartholomew, was removed from another Dorset parish, and cast in his lot with the persecuted nonconformists.² John did the same, and led a hunted life under the harsh restrictions and penalties of the newly-introduced code. "Often disturbed, several times apprehended, four times imprisoned"—so he tells us in the diary entrusted after his death to Edward Calamy, but which unhappily has not survived.³ His grandson John, however, carefully preserved in his more famous *Journal* the transcript of a conversation he once had with his diocesan, Dr. Gilbert Ironside, Bishop of Bristol. "What mission had you?" inquired the prelate. "I had a mission from God and man." That might have been the reply of the seventeenth-century Wesley. And, equally, the retort of the bishop anticipates the future: "You must have it according to law, and the order of the Church of England."⁴

John Wesley's grandfather on his mother's side was an even more unyielding nonconformist. Dr. Samuel Annesley was ejected from St. Giles, Cripplegate, where Oliver Cromwell had been married to Elizabeth Bouchier, and by whose son Richard this "St. Paul of Nonconformity", as he was dubbed, had been presented.⁵ There-

¹ A. G. Matthews: *Calamy Revised*, p. 521.

² *ibid.*

³ W. H. Fitchett: *Wesley and his Century*, p. 13. ⁴ *Journal*, v, p. 121.

⁵ Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

after he was able to license a meeting-house in Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, and to pursue his ministry. For more than thirty years "he ruled as a patriarch of Dissent in the capital", as Dr. Martin Schmidt puts it, and it was he who dared to undertake the first public ordination of nonconformist ministers since the Great Ejection.⁶

John Wesley's father, Samuel, was intended for the Dissenting ministry. He was educated at Dissenting academies in Stepney and Stoke Newington (the head of the latter was Charles Morton, later Vice-Principal of Harvard). He benefited from the preaching of Stephen Charnock, and once heard John Bunyan. He changed his views later, and became a High Churchman of the contemporary sort—that is to say, politically and ecclesiastically rather than doctrinally and sacerdotally. As Henry Moore makes plain, Samuel Wesley remained "a true friend to the Protestant cause".⁷ Susanna Wesley had formed her judgement in favour of the established Church at the ripe age of thirteen, although she did not forget her nonconformist background. According to Rupert Davies, the Dissenting principles she had ostensibly renounced "never ceased to flow in her blood".⁸

The roof of the Epworth rectory covered two strands of English Christian tradition. As Dr. A. W. Harrison expressed it, "the Epworth parsonage had a High Church atmosphere, yet it was essentially a Puritan home".⁹ Dr. V. H. H. Green and, more recently still, Dr. J. A. Newton have underlined this Puritan element in John Wesley's upbringing.¹⁰ The influence was largely unconscious, but after his conversion he began to recognize where it had come from. It was then that he read the Puritans avidly, and he eventually included generous selections in his "Christian Library". In May 1739 he was delving into Daniel Neal's four-volume *History of the Puritans*, completed only in the previous year, and in 1747 he "snatched a few hours" to look into it again.¹¹ He deplored "the execrable spirit of persecution which drove these venerable men out of the Church", whilst he regretted "the weakness of those holy confessors" in spending time disputing over inessentials.¹²

In a letter to "John Smith" (perhaps to be identified with Thomas Secker, then Bishop of Oxford), dated 25th March 1747, Wesley refers to Thomas Cartwright, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge until his deprivation:

I look upon him and the body of Puritans in that age . . . to have been both the most learned and most pious men that were then in the English nation. Nor did they separate from the Church, but were driven out, whether they would or no.¹³

⁶ Martin Schmidt: *John Wesley*, i, p. 43.

⁷ Henry Moore: *The Life of John Wesley*, i, p. 41.

⁸ Rupert E. Davies: *Methodism*, p. 44.

⁹ A. W. Harrison: *Arminianism*, p. 187.

¹⁰ V. H. H. Green: *The Young Mr. Wesley*, p. 42; J. A. Newton: *Methodism and the Puritans*, pp. 3-7.

¹¹ *Journal*, ii, p. 205; iii, p. 285.

¹² *ibid.*, iii, pp. 285-6.

¹³ *Letters*, ii, p. 94.

The last sentence is of particular significance, with Wesley's own position in mind.

This heritage goes some way to explain the strange inconsistency of Wesley in his attitude to the Church of England—an inconsistency which, as the Rev. A. B. Lawson points out, he regarded as being to the glory of God.¹⁴ Whilst it is evident that Wesley desired to remain within the fold, and endeavoured to stave off the departure of his followers, his actions at the critical pressure-points of decision nevertheless revealed a remarkable reversion to type and rendered it virtually inevitable that Methodism would develop independently of the Establishment. It was the nonconformist streak in Wesley which proved determinative in the long run, and which after his death led his people into separation.¹⁵

It must not be supposed, however, that this movement away from the Church of England was an afterthought, nor that only late in life did Wesley start to contemplate it. It culminated in the ordinations from 1784 onwards and the licensing of chapels and preachers in 1787 under the Toleration Act. But even at the first Conference in 1744 the pertinent question was put: "Do you not entail a schism on the Church?"¹⁶ The hope was somewhat ingenuously expressed that the majority of Methodists would remain in the Church, unless they were thrust out, and an undertaking was given that all would be done to prevent such an exodus. But the statement concludes in ringing tones which sum up Wesley's whole approach:

We cannot with a good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead.¹⁷

Wesley never swerved from those governing conclusions, as Dr. Harrison insists.¹⁸ Whilst he conscientiously strove to prevent needless division, the demands of the divine mission were recognized as an overriding factor. "Church or no Church, we must attend to the work of saving souls"—that was his regulative determination.¹⁹

By 1744 Wesley had already taken a series of steps which marked out the Methodists as dissentients within the Church, if not as dissenters without. It is not surprising that after Wesley's death Methodism took the course it did. It changed from a society into a church, and, as the Rev. Henry D. Rack is compelled to admit (with apparent regret), it was into a nonconformist church.²⁰ We may list the irregularities prior to 1744.

(1) From 1738 Wesley embarked on his unauthorized preaching

¹⁴ A. B. Lawson: *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry*, p. ix.

¹⁵ cf. my article "Methodists and 1662" in *The Christian Graduate*, xv. 3, pp. 105-9, which covers similar ground.

¹⁶ *Works*, viii, p. 281.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ A. W. Harrison: *The Evangelical Revival and Christian Reunion*, p. 168.

¹⁹ cf. A. W. Harrison: *The Separation of Methodism from the Church of England*, p. 13.

²⁰ H. D. Rack: *The Future of John Wesley's Methodism*, p. 63.

mission. He was fully aware that he was acting in a quite unorthodox manner. James Hervey inquired in 1739 how Wesley could justify his intrusion into other men's parishes on catholic principles. Wesley's reply is classic :

Permit me to speak plainly. If by catholic principles you mean any other than scriptural, they weigh nothing with me. I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures ; but on scriptural principles I do not think it hard to justify whatever I do. 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 I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom, then, shall I hear, God or man ? " If it be just to obey man rather than God, judge you. A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me ; and woe is me if I preach not the gospel." . . . I look upon all the world as my parish.²¹

(2) From 1739 Wesley organized a system of religious societies independent of the parochial clergy and of episcopal control. The rules contained no clause insisting on allegiance to the Church of England, and indeed dissenters were welcome to join. In this respect they differed from the older Religious Societies founded in the previous century, and constituted, as Mr. Rack puts it, " a kind of half-way house between a Religious Society and a Church ".²² In the view of Dr. W. B. Selbie, in his survey of Nonconformity, they

formed a Church within the Church and, whatever may have been Wesley's original intention, contained within them, from the first, the elements of Dissent. The Methodists were the new Puritans, and by the same combination of forces . . . at work in an earlier age were driven to become separatists.²³

(3) From 1740 Wesley built meeting-houses, settled on trustees for his own use.

(4) From the same year he began to administer the Lord's Supper outside a consecrated Anglican church, to members of his own societies.²⁴ By 1743 we read of " some hundreds of communicants " at West Street chapel in London.²⁵ Unconfirmed dissenters were not refused. Wesley's prompt but perhaps unconsidered reassurance given to the Bishop of Bristol in 1739, to the effect that he did not intend to administer the sacrament in his societies, soon went by the board.

(5) From 1741 Wesley allowed the ministry of lay preachers, who lacked any kind of ecclesiastical accreditation within the Church of England. Some of them subsequently were not even in communion with that Church. We employ the word " allowed " in deference to Denny-Urlin, who rightly claims that Wesley did not invent lay-preaching. He merely permitted it, under the pressure of circumstances.²⁶

²¹ *Letters*, i, pp. 285-6.

²² Rack, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²³ W. B. Selbie : *Nonconformity : its Origin and Progress*, p. 176.

²⁴ J. C. Bowmer : *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism*, p. 63.

²⁵ *Journal*, iii, p. 78.

²⁶ R. Denny-Urlin : *The Churchman's Life of Wesley*, pp. 137-8.

Thus, within three years of his conversion, Wesley had taken steps which placed himself and his followers in an irregular position with relation to the Church of England. He did so in the belief that order must be subservient to mission. He was called to evangelize the masses, and he could not allow ecclesiastical machinery to stand in his path.

The severance of Methodism from the Church of England was the consequence of an apostolate to the growing industrial population which was virtually untouched by Anglican ministrations,

declares G. R. Cragg.²⁷ Wesley was abundantly vindicated by the success of his soul-winning crusade, but obedience to the impulse of the Spirit inevitably carried the societies he founded beyond the confines of Anglicanism.

The evidence supplied above indicates at what an early stage Wesley's practical nonconformity asserted itself. Although it was not until after his reading of Lord Peter King's *Account of the Primitive Church* in 1746 that he arrived at an intellectual formulation of his conviction concerning church government, his actions before this date sufficiently reflect his views. He had shed his former High Churchmanship (largely in the line of the Non-jurors), and he began to respond to the contemporary ecclesiastical situation in a manner strikingly similar to that of his nonconformist grandfathers.

We must inquire in closing into the source of this transformation. It was undoubtedly his evangelical conversion, and the theological re-orientation which preceded it. The most conspicuous lacuna in the Rev. A. B. Lawson's *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry* is his incredible oversight in failing to recognize the determinative significance of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in re-shaping Wesley's outlook. For Wesley, as for Luther, justification came to be regarded as the article by which a church stands or falls. It was not simply one tenet amongst many, nor even the most important of all. It was the measuring-line for every other item of faith and practice. When Mr. Lawson asserts that Wesley's conversion involved no change of doctrine we can only blink in astonishment at such an imperipient statement.²⁸ We lament the paucity of recent works on Wesley's theology, but at least we have sufficient evidence from Dr. W. R. Cannon and the Rev. C. W. Williams to show how the apprehension of this truth of justification revolutionized Wesley's thought as well as his life. The opening chapter of Dr. Philip S. Watson's recently-published book *The Message of the Wesleys* redresses the balance.

Even before his conversion Wesley had reached a theological conviction concerning justification. But if the doctrine was to be translated into a burning message, personal experience was needed. This

²⁷ G. R. Cragg: *The Church and the Age of Reason*, p. 151.

²⁸ Lawson, op. cit., p. 21.

is the clue to 24th May 1738. It was the warmed heart that made Wesley an evangelist. It was the warmed heart that liberated him from his former ecclesiastical rigorism. It was the warmed heart that created Methodism. It was the warmed heart that gave Wesley his new message—and it was the message of salvation by faith. He was preaching it within eighteen days of his conversion, as he “blew the first trumpet call of the Evangelical Revival”.²⁹ Immediately on his return from Herrnhut, he records: “I began again to declare in my own country the glad tidings of salvation.”³⁰ This was now his “standing topic”.³¹ It was the secret of his evangelistic success. And it is the key to his ecclesiastical irregularity. What caused his nonconformist ancestry to reassert itself in his defiance of Anglican conventions was his experiential grasp of the Reformers’ *sola fide*. As his withdrawal from association with the Moravians was to show, he guarded it from excess: but it remained his guiding light to the end. We may transfer Wesley’s own words from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, and agree that “never was the maintaining this doctrine more seasonable than it is at this day”.³²

A. SKEVINGTON WOOD.

[The Rev. Dr. A. Skevington Wood, B.A., F.R.Hist.S. is a Methodist minister, permitted by Conference to serve with the Movement for World Evangelization. He is a member of the Ecclesiastical History Society, and the author of numerous publications, including *The Inextinguishable Blaze: Spiritual Renewal and Advance in the Eighteenth Century*.]

²⁹ *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, ed. E. H. Sugden, p. 36. Dr. Sugden's preface to Sermon I on “Salvation by Faith”.

³⁰ *Journal*, ii, p. 70.

³¹ *Works*, viii, p. 349.

³² *Sermons*, i, p. 50.

We acknowledge, with thanks, the receipt of the undermentioned publications, which have come to hand during the past quarter. We assure the various societies of our continued friendly interest in their concerns, and trust that they also may find our own pages not deficient in useful reading.

The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, October 1965.

The Baptist Quarterly, October 1965.

The Society of the Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, October 1965.

Methodist History, October 1965.

Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society, October 1965.

Journal and Proceedings of the Australasian Methodist Historical Society (Sydney), September 1965.

The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, November 1965.

We were also pleased to receive a copy of an article from the pen of Mr. John A. Vickers, our Manuscript Journal Secretary, entitled “Thomas Coke of Brecon (1747-1814)”, in the form of an off-print from *Brycheiniog* (the journal of The Brecknock Society), volume x, 1964.

THE ORIGINS OF THE METHODIST NEW CONNEXION

Unpublished Manuscripts

THERE has recently come to light a large collection of letters and circulars relating to the formation of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797. Before describing this material, however, we shall outline the history of the collection in the hope that it may serve as a cautionary tale.

Writing in November 1837, in the preface to his *Life of Kilham*, Blackwell mentions two collections of original documents which had come into his hands :

(i) . . . from the widow of the late Mr. James Harrop, of Ashton-under-Lyne the MSS. which he left as Secretary of a Corresponding Association formed by Methodists . . . around Manchester . . . during the years 1795-6 and 7.

(ii) . . . the most important materials have been the voluminous correspondence consisting of many hundreds of letters, which passed between himself [Kilham] and his contemporaries.

These letters had been preserved by Kilham's wife, and at her death sent to her daughter, who passed them on to Blackwell. A few of the letters appear in the *Life*, but these are only a tiny fraction of the whole.

The entire collection (i.e. both the Harrop and the Kilham MSS.) eventually passed to Mr. G. A. K. Hobill, who presented them, together with his books and pamphlets, to the MNC Conference in 1894. Before doing so, he meticulously listed every item in a black octavo notebook, which survives in the Hobill Library. This notebook shows that the full collection consisted of the following :

- 602 Letters
- 74 Manuscript Addresses
- 57 Printed Public Addresses
- 22 Manuscripts in Kilham's handwriting, "most of A.K.'s composition"
- 16 books of Kilham's Manuscript Sermons

The letters are indexed alphabetically by author, and where there is more than one by the same writer, chronologically. In each case Hobill gives the date, place, name of recipient, and a one-line summary of the contents. All but six were written between March 1795 and January 1799, i.e. they deal with the agitation leading up to the division of 1797 and the first eighteen months of the new community. Over three-quarters of the letters were written to Kilham by his principal supporters in the centres of agitation. Thirty-eight are by Kilham himself. Of the remainder, about eighty are either to or by James Harrop of Ashton-under-Lyne, mostly about events in the Manchester area. Only twenty-five out of the six hundred do not involve either Kilham or Harrop.

All this material was kept at Ranmoor College until about 1918. When Ranmoor was amalgamated with Victoria College, Manchester, the books and manuscripts remained in Sheffield at Nether Green Methodist chapel. It was during this period that the letters were mislaid. Writing in 1909, the Rev. George Eayrs refers to "the large numbers of his [Kilham's] unpublished sermons";¹ but by 1921 the whereabouts of these had been forgotten, since, in a note describing the Hobill collection,² Eayrs states: "The only known volume of sermons by the Rev. Alexander Kilham is in manuscript and is owned by Mr. T. P. Ridley (Gateshead), a descendant of Kilham."³ In fact, there were sixteen sermons with the other MSS. And of course, in this note, there is no mention at all of the letters.

It is no surprise, therefore, to learn that when the Hobill Library was transferred to Hartley Victoria College, just before the Second World War, this enormous collection, by now hidden in the basement of the chapel, remained behind. It seems to have been completely neglected until June 1965, when, with the help of the Revs. William Parkes and Peter Goadby, inquiries by the writer brought part of the collection to light again. According to Mr. Goadby, the present minister of Nether Green chapel (now re-named Hallam), a large number of decayed and damp papers were destroyed in 1939, so that only a fragment of the original collection has been recovered. Hobill's index enables us to see exactly what has been lost.

The surviving material falls naturally into three groups :

(i) **170 letters out of the original 602**

There are 161 items, since in one or two cases there are two letters on one sheet. All Kilham's 38 letters remain, but none of the 23 by William Thom. There is a complete set of 12 from Robert Hall of Basford to Kilham, and 29 out of 31 letters by Michael Longridge of Sunderland, mostly to Kilham. The remainder are from a wide variety of correspondents. They include the official resolution refusing Kilham admittance to the meeting of delegates in August 1797.

(ii) **All 57 of the printed addresses listed in Hobill's index**

These are printed circulars and addresses dealing with the disputes of 1790-8, arranged in approximately chronological order. We suspect that many of the items are unique. There is a copy of the famous Redruth Circular of 1791, and less well-known addresses from Leeds, Newark, Aberdeen, Chester, Manchester, Bristol, Liverpool, Launceston, Ashton-under-Lyne, Wycomb, Newcastle, London, Stockport, Salford, Alnwick, Sheffield, and Retford. The earlier ones deal mostly with the Bristol dispute, whilst some of the later ones give detailed information about the events of 1795-7 in such circuits as Manchester and Liverpool.

¹ *New History of Methodism*, i, p. 497 n.

² *Catalogue of Wesleyana*, by J. Alfred Sharp, p. 216.

³ This volume is now in the Wesley Historical Society Library. See *Proceedings*, xxxiv, p. 8.—EDITOR.

(iii) **All 16 manuscript sermons by Alexander Kilham**

Each sermon consists of about twenty-four closely-written pages, 8 by 6 in., sewn together, with a strong paper cover upon which the text is written. All these sermons are in a remarkably good state of preservation.

Thus, all Kilham's personal manuscripts, the MS. addresses and almost four hundred letters have perished. For these we are left with Hobill's tantalizing summaries, of which the following are good examples:

Jos. Clark, Newcastle, to A.K. 7/11/1796. A.K.'s pamphlets and "Monitor"—Rev. Suter's arbitrary conduct in Circuit. Whoever mentions A.K.'s name in house fined 3d.

T. Hannam, Leeds, to J. Harrop, 15/9/1797. Mode of celebrating Sacrament in M.N.C.—Opening in London.

From Kilham's only Cornish correspondent, Richard Drew of Col-lory, 26th July 1797, comes the unfamiliar "Cornish reformers hesitate to declare themselves."

Nevertheless, although so much has been lost, there remains enough to throw much light on the origins of the Methodist New Connexion in many places. This material is now at Hartley Victoria College, where we trust it will not suffer further depletion. We conclude with the transcript of a letter chosen almost at random, which gives us a glimpse of the difficulties of the early New Connexion bookroom.

THOMAS HANNAM TO ALEXANDER KILHAM

Dr. Brother,

I rec^d yours this morning—I am sorry that your Mag. did not get off sooner, but I really had misunderstood you—I shall endeavour to send you off the Dec^r Mag. [and] No. 9 sermons next week not to fail—shall inclose the account in the parcel. Friend Drivers has engaged to come out & was unanimously approved—The Huddersfield piece I have heard no more of, but I wished them to let you see it & I told them I would send it you any time. The paper you mention I believe will be found cheaper considerably, but we have a good many Bundles just come in, as it is not well to be made. After this time shall order no more. But I think we should do as we did with the printers, as you have this proposal we might get in others & the cheapest according to quality ought to have it.

Murgatroyd has done badly—he has returned 17 Jan & Feb, & 23 of the rest, so that he only compleats 2 sets & has broke five—What shall be said to him? I wish our preachers would now exert themselves. Friend Hewett is here, he sets off for Sheffield tomorrow morning—we are happy to hear your pleasing accounts. The bills must be circulated with the next Mag. The parcels will be sent to Hull with tomorrow's Waggon.

I am, with love to your whole self, Yours etc.,

T. HANNAM.

P.S. I have just been reading the account of Professor Frank's Building &c, but think it had better be in the Jan. Mag., as more will be printed

—only if it will fill for length I have told them to set it. We shall see when the Contents &c are up.

Mr. Kilham
Methodist Chapel
Woolpack Lane
Nottingham.

This letter is not dated, but it appears on the same sheet as a letter by John Kidson dated "Leeds Nov. 8 1798".

Thomas Hannam was a Leeds printer and bookseller who was MNC Book Steward until 1803. This is the only one of his eighteen recorded letters to have survived. "Friend Drivers" was William Driver, who later became three times President of the MNC Conference. The identity of "Murgatroyd", however, is uncertain. There is no itinerant of this name in the *Minutes*. Perhaps he was a leading local preacher in the Leeds circuit. E. A. ROSE.

[Mr. E. A. Rose teaches History and Science at a secondary school near Manchester. He is secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire Branch of the Wesley Historical Society, and is gathering material for a history of the Methodist New Connexion.]

Lists of newly-published local histories of Methodism appearing in the *Proceedings* from time to time provide evidence of commendable work still being done in this field. Two more of these booklets have reached us during the past quarter. Both refer to village churches, and are excellently produced. Our Society must ever be grateful to those who are endeavouring to preserve the records of rural Methodism, and these two well-written accounts may well serve as models on how the work should be done:

Centenary Brochure—Sowerby Methodist church in the Thirsk circuit, price 2s. 6d. from the Rev. Eglon Sercombe, 1, Wesley Villas, Thirsk, Yorks.

1815 and All That—The story of Top Chapel, Heighington, 1815-1965, price 5s. from Mr. John Quincey, 14, High Street, Heighington, Lincoln.

NOTES AND QUERIES

1142. INFORMATION WANTED ABOUT THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS.

Dr. John C. English, P.O. Box 537, Baldwin, Kansas, 66006, USA, is undertaking a study of the relationship between John Wesley and the Cambridge Platonists, and would be glad to correspond with anyone who is also interested in this subject. Any information on such personalities as Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, John Smith, Benjamin Whichcote, John Norris, and Nathanael Culverwel, would be greatly appreciated.

Dr. English would also be grateful to know if anyone can tell him of the whereabouts of a first edition of Norris's *Christian Prudence* as abridged by Wesley (Green's *Wesley Bibliography*, No. 2). EDITOR.

BOOK NOTICES

The Bible Christians, 1815-1907, by Thomas Shaw. The Wesley Historical Society Lecture, No. 31. (Epworth Press, pp. 120, 15s.)

The General Secretary of our Society has put us all in his debt with his attractive little history of the Bible Christians. His recent article (*Proceedings*, xxxv, pp. 39-41) led us, of course, to expect thorough knowledge of his subject; but what is so helpful is the way in which he has thoroughly digested the material and presented it in so attractive and readable a form. The scheme of the book—an account of the founder, the history of the church, and, finally, a denominational portrait—is a most happy one, and the ease with which the tale is told deceptively masks the scholarship.

The portrait of William O'Bryan, an awkward customer (!), is well done, "warts and all". Reference to Quaker and other connections reminds us that someone some day must write a really detailed history of the relations between all the Free Churches and the sects: perhaps it can only be done on a geographical basis. The story of the Bible Christians between 1815 and 1907 is finely compressed, with, of course, due reference to James Thorne and others, and tells us all we want to know. The main features of this story are well covered, and the main questions likely to arise about the development of the movement are naturally and automatically dealt with. And so to the denominational portrait of "a folk church and a country church" (p. 101), of people who "never thought of themselves as being any other than Methodists generically" (p. 103), but who were heirs of Wesley's "evangelicalism, pietism and puritanism more completely than they were of his churchmanship" (p. 104).

So expert a work does not require much comment, but there is one section in which we might perhaps have had a little more detail—that on Worship and Fellowship. On page 94, for instance, we are told that the Bible Christians took over the Watchnight and Covenant Services from Wesleyan Methodism. But what evidence is there that the latter, in particular, was widely used? Recent research suggests some doubt about this. It might have illuminated the ethos of the Bible Christians a little more if we could have had some more detail of their actual practices. But perhaps this is asking for too much in a book of this compass, and we remain grateful to Mr. Shaw for having given us so well-balanced an account and so fascinating a story.

H. MORLEY RATTENBURY.

John Wesley's Concept of Perfection, by Leo George Cox. (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Mo., USA, no price stated.)

In this book Dr. Cox gives an exposition of Wesley's teaching which is in general faithful to the claim of his denomination, the American Wesleyan Methodist Church, that entire sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the Christian is cleansed from all inbred sin through faith in Jesus Christ. He is well aware of the criticisms which have been levelled against such a claim—most of them revolving around the definition of sin, the equivocal position of man in modern society, and the pretension of any acknowledgement of perfection. Nevertheless he believes that Wesley's teaching can be expounded in a way which stands up to such attacks, both from those within the Reformed tradition and from modern Methodism.

Wesley's teaching is set out along familiar lines: salvation is gradual from the earliest dawn of grace to its consummation in glory. Within this

there are two major crises, both preceded and succeeded by the continuous work of grace. The first is justification, which includes regeneration, initial sanctification and adoption; the second is when the believer experiences a deeper act of God in the entire sanctification of the heart. Dr. Cox holds that Wesley is within the honourable mystical tradition of those whose testimony is to an invasion of the soul by God which effects the transformation of their ground of being. Whatever it is that happens to such folk, Wesley called one element in it Christian perfection, and saw it as a second blessing, an experience which nevertheless might subsequently be lost or regained. Moreover, unlike most sectarian holiness teaching, Wesley did not confine the gift of the Holy Spirit to a pentecostal experience, since he saw the Spirit at work all through the process of salvation. Yet there is an instantaneous gift from God and the completion of the cleansing process.

The highest praise of this book is that, in spite of some shortcomings, it left the reviewer with the conviction that there is more to be said for Wesley's teaching than many modern critics allow—even friendly ones like Dr. Flew and Dr. Sangster. It is easy to become impatient with Wesley's constant qualifications about perfection, until one appreciates that he was trying to do justice to observed facts rather than force them into prescribed moulds. Can it be doubted that the strength of Methodism at its best has been its ability to kindle in the lives of otherwise rather ordinary people a genuine love of—and desire for—goodness, and a strong belief that this can be realized through Christ? What this holiness involves may be larger than Wesley and many Methodists have thought, yet Wesley's view of freedom from sin as freedom from the opponents of love in the heart is an essential Christian aim, and its possession need not necessarily be denied because of the limitations of an earthly corrupted existence or of a hostile environment.

At the same time the author leans too heavily upon a limited number of secondary authorities, especially for his judgements about the Reformers; the treatment of criticisms of Wesley's teaching is often too brief; and although it was published as recently as 1964 there is curiously no reference to Colin W. Williams's *John Wesley's Theology Today*, with much of which it is in agreement, especially in its exposition of the earlier phases of Wesley's view of salvation; nor is there more than a passing look at Lindström's basic study. Moreover there is no discussion of the relation between justification and baptism, and very little about modern psychological investigations of the human personality—all of which a present-day study surely demands. Nevertheless the overall impression remains that a religious faith and a church life without something very like John Wesley's conception of holiness is a very inadequate version of what can justifiably claim to be Christian.

NORMAN P. GOLDHAWK.

The Message of the Wesleys: a Reader of Instruction and Devotion, compiled and with an Introduction by Philip S. Watson. (Epworth Press, pp. 264, 18s.)

This book is a most useful anthology of the writings of the Wesleys based, in the first section, on their basic doctrinal convictions, and in the second, upon the practical outworkings of the doctrines. One wonders why such a compilation has not been attempted before; certainly none has been designed so effectively as this one. Biographies of John Wesley are legion, but the published assessments of his theology are few; this source-book helps to fill the gap at this point. No two Wesley scholars would

make anything like the same selection of passages even if they were filling up Dr. Watson's outline, but probably none would seriously question the balance of his selections.

In the Preface the author exposes such fallacies as "John Wesley was no theologian" and that his claim that the Methodists "think and let think" was an advocacy of doctrinal indifferntism. The 65-page Introduction is entitled "Anatomy of a Conversion", and contains an outline of Wesley's developing spiritual experience leading to Aldersgate Street. Dr. Watson endorses the traditional view of the experience of the Wesleys in May 1738 as "the decisive turning point in their lives", and regards it as being "entirely proper" to see that month's events as the real starting-point of the Methodist Revival. The present reviewer prefers the broader-based accounts given by Wesley himself (in the 1765 *Minutes* and in his *Short History of Methodism*, 1781), in which he confidently dates the beginnings of Methodism to November 1729, April 1732, and 1st May 1738. We may well ask—did Wesley *really* overlook the 24th May?

THOMAS SHAW.

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(Continued from page 76)

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(To be concluded)